FEBRUARY 2021
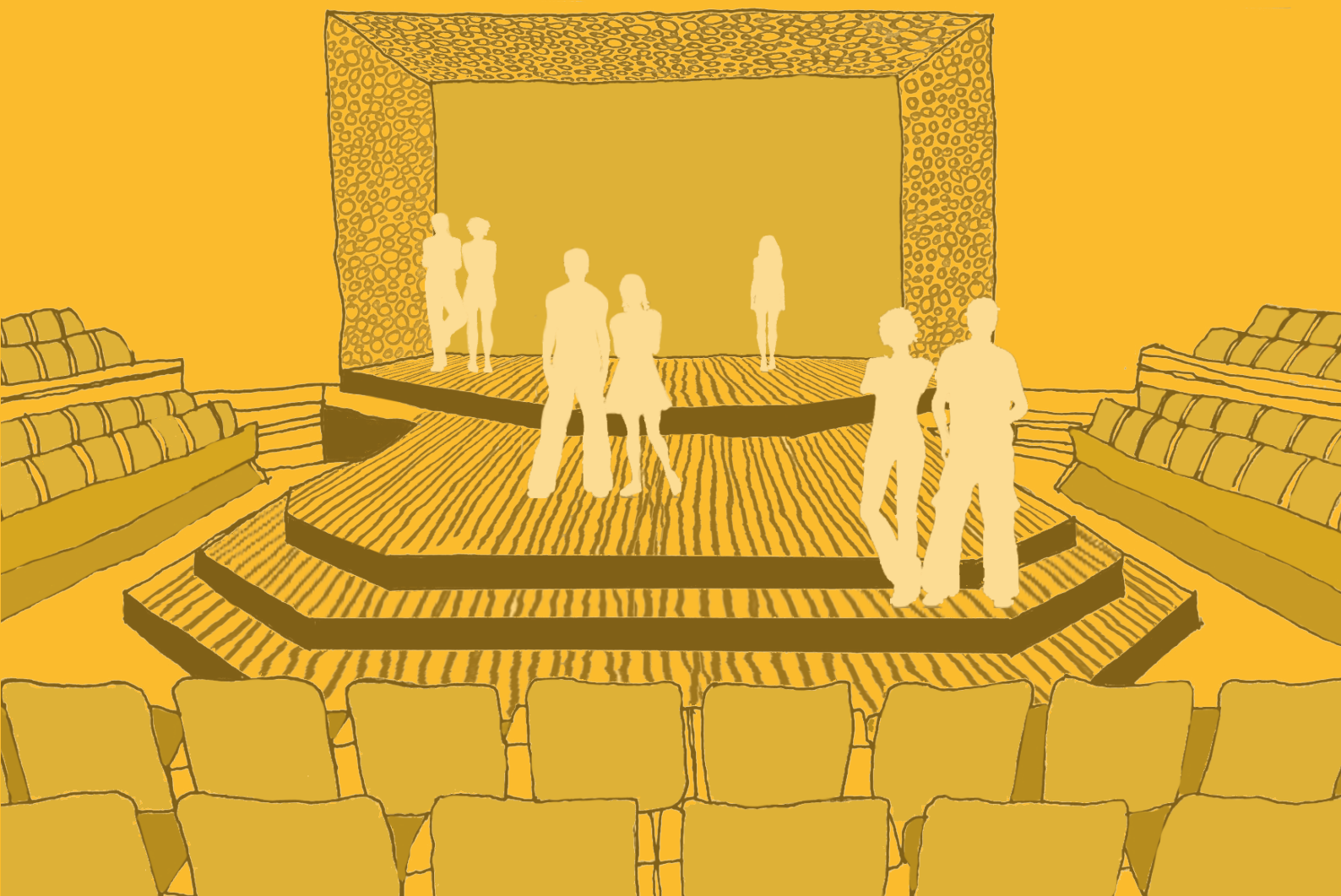**THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND'S**

THE EMMERGENCE
OF IMMERSION
BY MARTHA TITCOMBE

HOW DOES EGALITARIAN THEATRE DESIGN ENHANCE ACTOR AND AUDIENCE COHESION AND IMMERSION?

A STUDY OF THE GUTHRIE THEATRE IN MINNESOTA

ABSTRACT

This dissertation endeavours to explore the design processes and possibilities of modern-day theatre in regard to the egalitarian ideology, and its effect on actor and audience cohesion and immersion. Egalitarianism promotes the idea of equality; this text addresses this equality on both a spatial and experiential level.

To explore the spatial properties of egalitarian theatre design, an analysis of the Guthrie Theatre is used to introduce the thrust stage, a protruding stage that allows an audience to surround it and sit in a close proximity to the actors. Other aspects of the Guthrie Theatre's auditorium are also analysed on their abilities to enhance immersion for an audience, including: vomitorium's, sightlines, seating and even the façade.

Actor and audience cohesion and immersion can also be enhanced experientially. This is illustrated through the effects of movement on an audience, as well as the link between participation, atmosphere and illusion and its influence upon the auditoria.

This analysis of egalitarian design is then used in conjunction with present day theatre and the changes being made as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The conclusion states that the pre-existing egalitarian design possibilities are no longer viable, and the immersive realms of theatre have been suspended in place of virtual alternatives.

STATEMENT OF OWN WORK

This study was completed as part of the BA(Hons) Interior Architecture at the University of the West of England. The work is my own. Where the work of others is used or drawn on, it is attributed to the relevant source.

Signed By: Martha Titcombe
Date: 01/02/2021

Word Count: 5491

Supervisor: Karina Silverio

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THE PROLOGUE

INTRODUCTION

Theatre provides a prospective audience with the opportunity to escape and participate in something both ephemeral but also everlasting. Egalitarian theatre design aids this process. Egalitarianism promotes the belief of equality; within theatre this acts in regard to both the spectators and the performers, with the intention of creating clear cohesion between both the actor and audience. This augments the immersive capabilities of the theatre experience. This dissertation will analyse the ways in which egalitarian design enhances these immersive theatre possibilities.

METHODOLOGY

Following an analytical approach, this dissertation will use a specific case study and apply it in conjunction with contemporary immersive strategies used within 20th-century regional theatre. The Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota is the case study in question and was selected due to its renowned significance within the wider discussion of immersive theatre. It is considered the most influential and successful precedent of the thrust stage, and its application of revolutionary egalitarian design ideas ensures an equal experience for all involved (Strong, 2010).

This text will be formatted to represent the typical 'three act structure' used within traditional playwriting. Each section will discuss the different opportunities in which design has the ability to improve the immersive qualities of performance spaces. The First Act, titled 'Stages and Landscapes' will examine the physical characteristics of the stage and auditorium within the Guthrie Theatre and analyse its egalitarian design strategies. The Second Act, 'Immersion and Experience' will look at the experiential potential of the interior, applying the design tropes from Act One and analysing them in relation to movement, participation and atmosphere. The Third Act will look forward towards 'Changing Theatre' and the impact COVID-19 has had on the physical and technical elements of theatre and the immersive experiences within these creative spaces.

The literature review will run through the entirety of the text, using the selected sources to investigate and deliberate the different themes within. Throughout the first act and where applicable within the next two acts, relevant literature will be used in affiliation with the case study, in order to illustrate the spatial design strategies of egalitarian theatre. Each of the three acts will be supported with small sections written in the first person. These will summarise the academic views in a more human and personal manner, portraying the immersive experience from the perspective of a live audience member. The Denouement will then conclude the text and cast academic judgements regarding the discussion of theatrical immersion.

THE REGIONAL THEATRE MOVEMENT

The emergence of the immersive theatrical narrative originated in the United States, during the American regional theatre movement in the 20th-Century. In an effort to differentiate the evolutionary stages of the movement, Joseph Ziegler (1973) used three analogical descriptions: Acorn, Sapling and Oak Tree.

The 'Acorn' not-for-profit organisations originated in the 1940s and with distaff power paved the way for regional theatrical change. A dynamic female lead is important in any theatrical setting, Margo Jones took the concept of a united regional consciousness and used it to display contemporary ideas in small scale venues, whilst decentralising theatre and deconstructing the notion of who could attend and enjoy the theatre (Ziegler, 1973). This has led to Tomoko Aono (2010) to argue that regional theatre perpetuates the concept of community contribution.

The 'Sapling' embodies similar principles, only at a slightly larger scale. Jon Jury and Harlan Kleiman, founders of The Long Wharf Theatre, advocated the idea of "always using people to reach people" (Ziegler, 1973, p.90). The people required to reach these audiences were accumulated from a variety of social, economic and ethnic groups. Using such a dynamic team could ensure delivery of compelling theatrical narratives, especially in regional parts of America that have considerable social and historical significance.

Ziegler's final phase, the 'Oak Tree' prevails sizable, professional and widely accepted examples of regional theatre. It is best represented by the work of Tyrone Guthrie, who formed one of America's most influential theatres, The Guthrie Theatre. Guthrie's intention was coherent with his regional predecessors; to create accessible and immersive theatre outside of New York. However, unlike his precursors, Guthrie did not have to wait for recognition, financial aid or experience to nurture his idea, his theatrical revelation emerged already fully grown, "Guthrie gave the movement weight, size, authority, national credibility and momentum" (O'Donnell, 2012, p.129). This was due to his already noble status within his profession, for Guthrie dominated the artistic scene as an internationally acclaimed director.

The Guthrie Theatre has many embellishments, each credible for their contributions to the narrative of greater theatrical immersion within 20th-century theatre. This dissertation will endeavour to analyse them in association with egalitarian objectives and devices.

CAST LIST

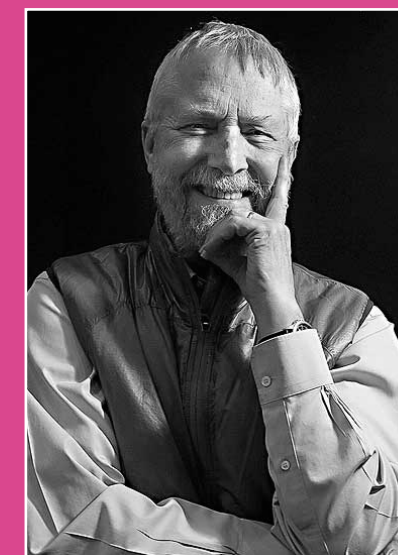Fig. 1. MARGO JONES: THE ACORN

Fig. 2. JON JURY: THE SAPLING

Fig. 3. TYRONE GUTHRIE: THE OAK TREE

STAGES AND LANDSCAPES

ACT ONE

"THE AUDIENCE SAW THE CAST AS BELONGING TO *THEM*, RATHER THAN TO THE *US* OF THE ESTABLISHED THEATRE."
(Goode, 2015)

INTRODUCTION

The very notion of theatre emanates from the people in which it captivates. Chris Goode's 'The Forest and the Field' illustrates successful theatre stemming purely from what *you* -the audience member- want to gain from the experience. The theatre knowingly facilitates this desire through dramatic captivation, "every theatre experience is a guided dream for our audience" (Porter, 2014).

    Theatres use egalitarian design to convey narratives to immersed audiences. Egalitarian theatre promotes the idea of experiential and spatial equality. Judith Strong (2010) associates this concept with tailored democratic layouts, stemming from shifts in societal opinions. Stages and Landscapes is a discussion of the recognition of egalitarian design in regional theatre, demonstrating actor and audience cohesion through the use of the stage and interior. This will be discussed through the 'symbiotic stage' a conversation about changing stage types and the new possibilities in which they bring. The 'extended stage' redefines the set parameters of the stage and what is possible beyond the conventional boundaries. The final part, 'theatrical landscapes' will analyse the auditorium somatically and semantically. Each section will look at a specific part of the theatre interior in conjunction with the ideals of egalitarian design and in aid of enhancing actor and audience cohesion.

THE SYMBIOTIC STAGE

Egalitarian theatre design encourages experiential equality between all who are involved, everyone within the auditorium, as well as those on-stage in sharing the enrapturing event. The Symbiotic Stage is a discussion regarding changes to stage design within the 20th-century and how these changes benefit and encourage the symbiosis, or the rapport between the actors and the audience. This discussion will analyse only two stage types, the proscenium stage and the thrust stage, examining the clear contrast between their design objectives.

The proscenium stage dominated theatre design from its inception during the Italian Renaissance, it housed the many operas and plays of the period. This highly decorative staging strategy persisted until the mid-20th-century. The proscenium stage formally separates audience from actor, a clear segregation between spectator and performer, as shown in fig.4, 5 and 6 (Holloway, 2014). This distinction is literal; the stage is physically framed, an 'elaborate picture frame' (Strong, 2010). Yet this stage type is also pragmatic, there are intuitive boundaries used to maintain this sense of division. Leitermann (2017), illustrates this framed opening as a 'fourth wall' to the stage further enclosing itself from the audience, steering away from theatre's immersive realms. This idea of separation is also discussed by Holger Syme (2014), Syme does not disagree with the physicality of the stage creating distance, he instead disagrees with the ideas of this physical distance inhibiting audience immersion. Syme believes immersion is curated by the people involved in the experience, as opposed to spatial connections between the audience and the stage.
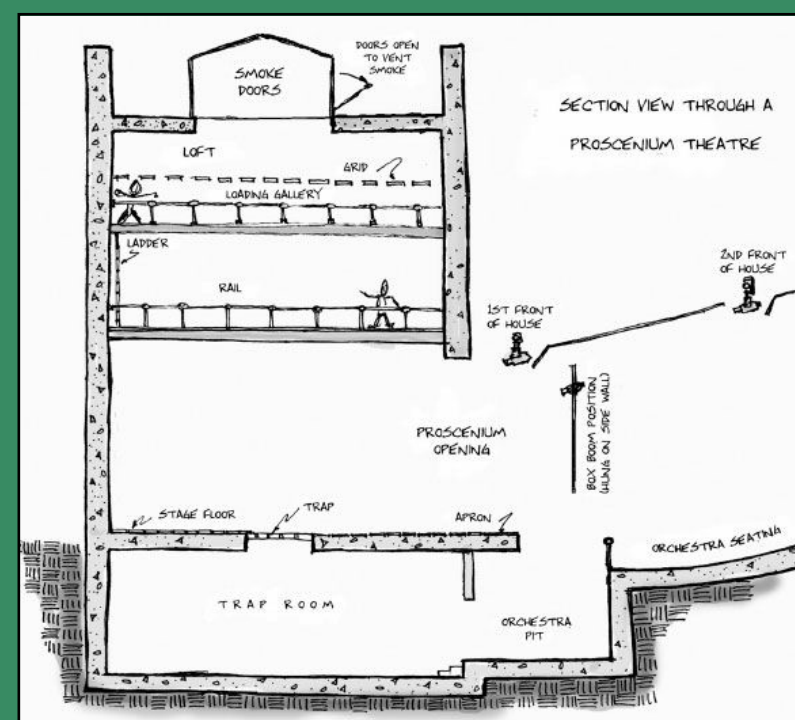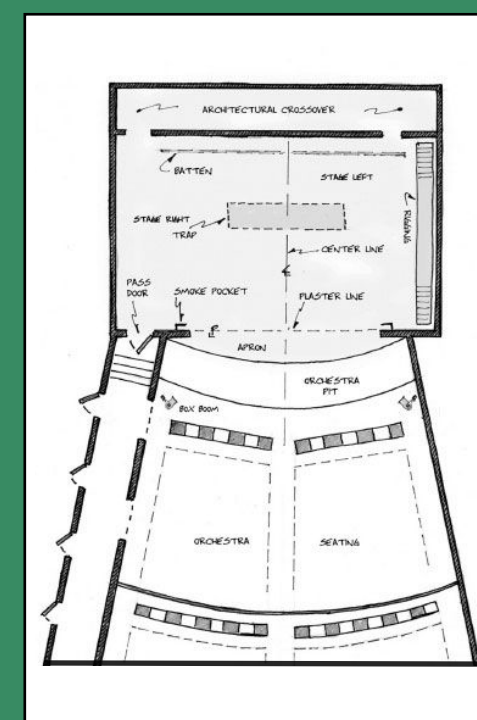

Fig. 4. PROSCENIUM STAGE: SECTION

Fig. 5. PROSCENIUM STAGE: PLAN

Fig. 6. PROSCENIUM STAGE: PERSPECTIVE OF ALEXANDRA PALACE

With this idea in mind, the proscenium stage gave way to the new developments of the 20th- Century, a period of time with a strong desire to reconfigure relationships between both theatre and audience (Freshwater, 2009). These included Walter Gropius' 1927 'Total Theatre', shown in fig.7 (Cupers, 2015) which held a focus on changing perspective by using a revolving auditorium (Cole, 1963), and Peter Moro's adaptable and flexible auditorium design, shown in fig.8 (Fair, 2016). Tyrone Guthrie (1963) believed in people orientated experience, but he used interior spatial design to obtain it. Maximising the audience's connection to the space would result in greater inter-personal connection between both the audience and the actors, Guthrie placed this concept at the forefront of his theatre design.
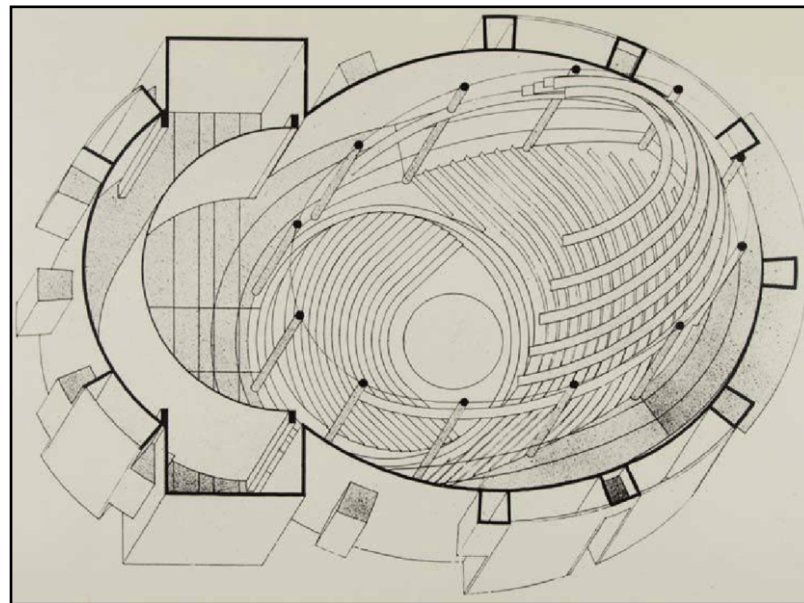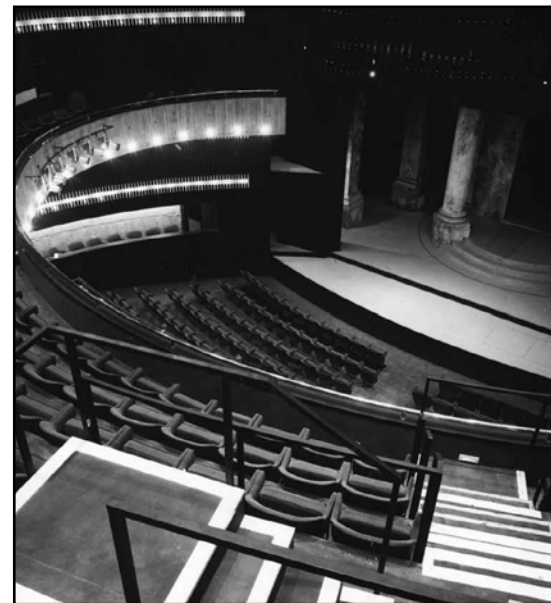

Fig. 7. WALTER GROPIUS 'TOTAL' THEATRE

FIG. 8. PETER MORO: NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE AUDITORIUM

The Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota, designed by Ralph Rapson, considered to be a 'ground-breaking' theatre model was accredited so because of its thrust stage. Thrust stages protrude into the auditorium, conventionally allowing seating to surround the stage on three sides, a 270-degree envelopment, as shown in fig.9 and fig.10 (Guthrie, 1963). There are numerous theatrical ramifications to acquiring this stage type, within his personal publication, Guthrie personally addresses his fixation on the thrust stage and the reasoning behind its use within his theatre. Primarily, the ability to have the entirety of the audience within a close proximity to the centre of the stage enhances immersion on a spatial level. Within the Guthrie Theatre, no seat is further than eighteen meters from the stage. Guthrie believed this helped "create a ritual to hold the attention of an adult audience", as opposed to the proscenium stage, a thrust stage is able to do this because it is multi-dimensional (Guthrie, 1963, p.11). In conjunction to this, John Holloway (2014) also describes the immersive characteristics of the thrust stage, specifically in association with the Guthrie Theatre. The tropes of the thrust stage within the theatre environment portray actor and audience cohesion on different scales. Holloway construes these from the very discreet, "the audience can hear small intonations in the actor's voices" to the bold portrayal of, "emotional realism on stage".
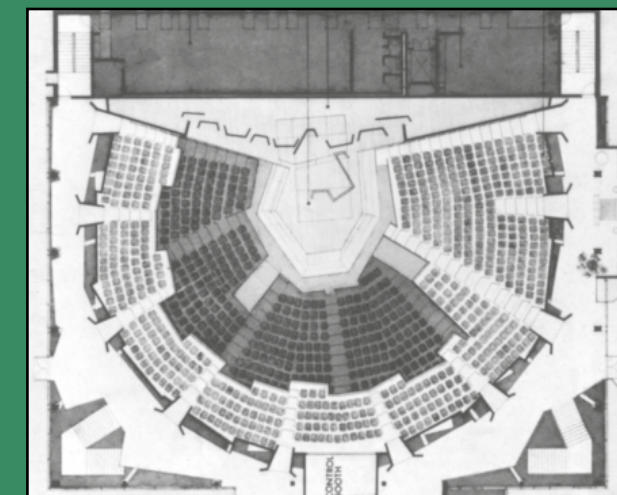

FIG. 9. GUTHRIE THEATRE THRUST STAGE

FIG. 10. GUTHRIE THEATRE THRUST STAGE PLAN

This staging model inspired regional theatre design throughout America, and in the late 1960s, the thrust stage spread to the UK. The Crucible theatre in Sheffield, is considered to be the most successful interpretation of the Guthrie Theatre's thrust stage, partly due to its close association with Guthrie's designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch, who worked closely with Guthrie throughout the development of the Guthrie Theatre (Strong, 2010).

　　　Responses to the new thrust scheme in Sheffield were mixed, an international staging intervention opposing the convention, inevitably took some criticism, "acting is a frontal business" (Thornber, 1971) and "an actor can't act unless holding every member of the audience with his eyes" (Pendennis, 1969) represent some of the critical opinions of the new stage circulating at the time. John Holloway (2014) communicates a contradiction to these, the ideology behind the thrust stage "is to celebrate the connection between actor and audience rather than serving as a facility for spectacle" which the proscenium served as for so long. As a result of the Guthrie Theatre's influence, the thrust stage, shown in fig.11 and fig.12 (Strong, 2010) did gain acceptance and fast became the UKs leading stage model. Holloway deemed the thrust stage a more versatile staging technique for the accommodation of modern script writing, fitting for the liberal societal shift of the late 20th century.
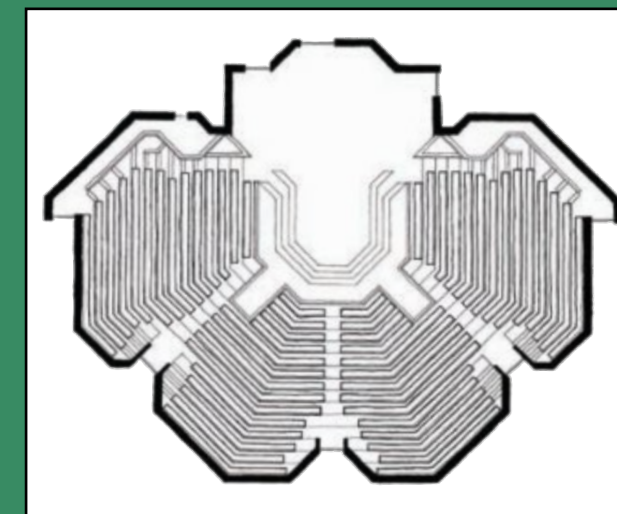

FIG. 11. CRUCIBLE THEATRE THRUST STAGE PERSPECTIVE

FIG. 12. CRUCIBLE THEATRE STAGE PLAN

THE EXTENDED STAGE

Within theatre, there are clear perimeters as to who is allowed where, and who is not. There are defined territories, each with their own name within the theatre lexicon. Backstage, the wings and green room are just some of the spaces that represent the areas of enclosed private space. The stage acts as a middle ground, visible but with restricted access, and then the auditorium is public. The unwritten constraints surrounding these private spaces may subconsciously inhibit the idea of full actor-audience cohesion, regardless of whether the stage is framed or if it thrusts into the auditorium, "movement of people is exactly constrained" (Goode, 2015, p.89).

A sense of shared space may accentuate the possible levels of immersion. When this shared experience takes place, it often occupies the theatres vomitorium's. The Vomitorium is a connection between spaces, whether it be below the stage, or throughout the auditorium. Holloway (2014) describes the use of vomitorium's, "having an actor enter beside you within a performance, is an exciting and unexpected part of the performance", illustrated in fig.13 (Holloway, 2014). The audience and actors being physically on the same plane creates a sense of shared experience, which intensifies excitement.

The extended stage may encompass other public realms of the theatre. Gene Leitermann (2017) discusses audience immersion commencing upon arrival, with the theatre forming a 'streetscape' and its façade presenting a curated "two-dimensional screen for propaganda" . The Guthrie façade portrays this by using "bold shapes and unorthodox rhythms to convey the internal excitement of theatre" as shown in fig.14 (Guthrie, 1963, p.9). The immersivity of the audience member's experience is toyed with before they even take their seat. The foyer, a place to gather in a play's interval, also often exhibits immersive qualities, whether this be through live music, costumed workers or decorative elements.
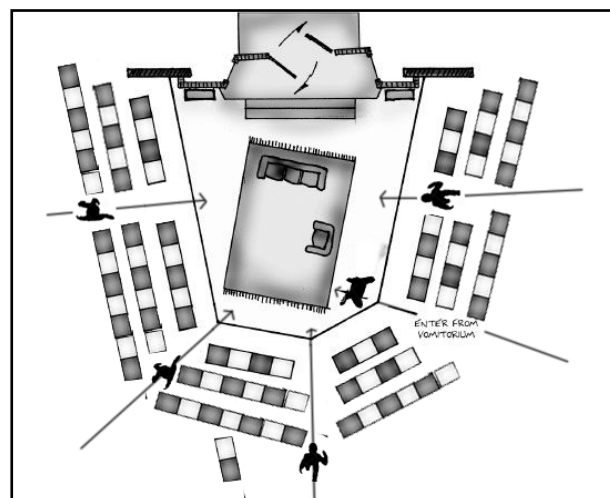
THEATRICAL LANDSCAPES

The landscape of the contemporary auditoria portrays equitable design. It is an accumulation of the auditorium seating, the stage and technical components. Societal shifts in the late 20th century encouraged positive changes throughout all parts of the community, including theatre. As Chris Goode (2015) stated, successful theatre stems from what the audience member wants. Theatres mirror these transitions to continue facilitating the audience's underlying wishes, in a manner that accommodates common social change.

The landscape of the Guthrie Theatre demonstrates this coeval egalitarian concept. For centuries before this point, theatre had classist connotations, with literal depictions of wealth based purely on where in the auditoria one was sat. The lower classes commonly seated near the orchestra pits and the wealthy in the side boxes. The Guthrie Theatre tried to eliminate this pretence by "fusing the orchestra and balcony into one unbroken slope" (Guthrie, 1963, p.13). Guthrie (1963) conveyed further design ideas behind the seating. The seats were formulated in balanced, 'dynamic' sections, in aid of creating a 'varied and dynamic structure' within the interior landscape (fig.15). These strategical design objectives helped to communicate the egalitarian ideology and its encompassment of societal change through its lack of uniformity and regularity. The Guthrie Theatre auditoria was incomparable to those of the past. Judith Strong (2010, p.232) also comments on this concept of idiosyncrasy within the Guthrie Theatre, depicting the irregularity of Rapson's design to be a response to the flaws of pre-existing thrust stages, "Rapson decided to create an asymmetrical thrust stage surrounded by an irregular arrangement of rows". Within present day theatre, the economic divisions still remain, James Graham (2020) ascertains that ticket prices still vary according to seat location, but the classist connotations are less severe. However, a contemporary addition to egalitarian theatre design is the implementation of greater sensory environments and accessible interiors, catering for both abled and disabled members of society (Strong, 2010).

Fig. 13 THRUST STAGE VOMITORIUM

Fig. 14 THE GUTHRIE THEATRE FACADE

Fig. 15. GUTHRIE THEATRE DYNAMIC BALCONIES
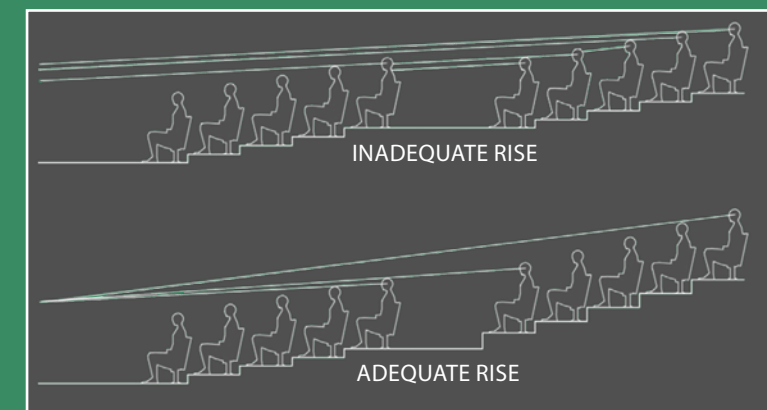

INADEQUATE RISE

ADEQUATE RISE

Fig. 16. GOOD AND BAD SIGHTLINES

The nature of the thrust stage is to have a close proximity between the audience and the stage, "a two-way transference of energy" (Strong, 2010, p.73). The thrust stage denotes intimacy (Holloway, 2014). This results in longer, but fewer rows, and taller rakes. Judith Strong (2010, p.66), personifies the sloped rake to be a "wall of people", each entranced by the dominant stage. Strong continues to examine how the slope of the rake effects the sightline of the audience member, ensuring every person has sufficient visibility is crucial in maintaining their attention and creating intimacy between them and the stage, (fig.16). However, Gene Leitermann (2017) introduces a contradiction to perfect sightlines, they are not essential for achieving a true sense of community, or for the appreciation of live performance within the space. Leitermann exhibits theatre designer Ian Macintosh's concept of functional fallacy, of which a focus on sight alone is not sufficient, the other senses require stimulation too to truly allow audience immersion with the actors on stage. This idea was also addressed by Josephine Machon (2009), her characterisation of 'synaesthetics' explores sensational ideas within theatre design and how these ideas influence what people perceive to be sensory, real and imagined. Shearing (2015, p.31) conveys how designers achieve 'synaesthesia' within theatre, "a fusion of scenographic materials, such as light and sound, can form both a somatic and semantic experience".

The integral assets of the interior landscape can be analysed on a smaller scale, as their own individual architectural element, such as the seating. The ideology of cohesion is maintained in all aspects of theatre seating design. The spacing between seats is determined in such a way as to maintain a sense of community; far enough apart to provide sufficient comfort (although not too comfortable, to keep people focused) but close enough to ensure an undisrupted cohesive state (Strong, 2010). The seating in the Guthrie Theatre was designed specifically for the space by its architect Ralph Rapson. The seats had cast iron arms and plywood backs, each upholstered in one of ten possible colours, shown in fig.17 (Guthrie, 1963). Rapson believed the 'confetti' like finish allowed for further excitement for the audience members, another dynamic to captivate them within the interior landscape (Claass Haus, 2018).

Fig. 17. THE GUTHRIE THEATRE SEATING

"I was sat to the left of the auditorium, two rows from the front. I could hear every word they spoke and every tremble in their voices; I was completely enraptured by the performance. There was an eruption of laughter from the audience, I couldn't help but laugh too. It wasn't that the actor's monologue was overly amusing, it was more down to the contagiousness of the crowded auditorium, I didn't want to break this chain of mirth."

IMMERSION AND EXPERIENCE

ACT TWO

> "THE THEATRE
> CANNOT EXIST
> WITHOUT
> TWO THINGS;
> THE ACTOR
> AND
> THE SPECTATOR."
> (Grotowski, 1968)

INTRODUCTION

Cohesion between the actor and the audience can be curated spatially, however, egalitarian design also promotes equal experience within its ideology. Rose Biggin (2017) discusses a differentiation between immersive theatre and immersive experience. Biggin communicates the difference stemming from a misconception of the term 'immersive theatre', which leads people to believe that all theatre can be immersive. Instead, Biggin believes we should use 'immersive experience' which implies the occurrence of an "emotional phenomenon" within the participatory audience members. Helen Freshwater (2009) conveys the understanding of immersive experience stemming from the individual, each experience will provoke different emotional responses between audience members depending on their interpretations, past experiences and personal beliefs. Jerzy Grotowski (1968, p.37) supports Freshwater's idea, he states, "we try to escape the truth about ourselves, whereas, in the theatre, we are invited to stop and take a closer look." This second act, 'Immersion and Experience' will explore the experiential impact of egalitarian theatre design and the influence it plays over immersive strategies within theatre. This act will dissect immersive experience in two halves: kinaesthetic experience and audience immersion. Both parts will endeavour to analyse the experiential capabilities of theatre design and the extent they contribute to actor and audience cohesion.

KINAESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Movement within theatre is considered one of the primary sensory stimulants that creates a sense of experiential immersion for an audience. Egalitarian design aids kinaesthetic opportunity in the quest for immersive connections between the actor and audience. Stanton Garner (2018) addressed the term 'kinaesthetic empathy' which describes a participant's personal experience of another's movement. Garner uses it in conjunction with the idea of phenomenology, which, combined with the notion of virtual movements within language, concludes Garner to believe that "a focus on sensorimotor perception opens up additional layers in the actor-spectatorship relationship" (2018, p.15). Peter Brook (1968, p.7) provides supporting views, Brook conveys "A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged." The act of movement ignites the experience, and the performance begins.

The magnitude of the cohesive, visceral relationship between the audience and the performer determines the severity of the immersive experience. This relationship can be identified at different scales. The larger scale can be evidenced through the use of the protruding thrust stage which presents a physical platform to exhibit movement and choreography. However, this relationship can also be portrayed through smaller scale liaisons, such as Rudolf Laban's (1966) concept of the human 'kinesphere'. This describes the central gravitational point within the body aligning with the centre of the kinesphere, from this point all extensions in all directions are equidistant, creating a boundary surrounding the human form, "all points of the 'kinesphere' can be reached by simple movements: bending, stretching, and twisting" (fig.18 and 19). This concept primarily addresses the curated choreography and interaction between the actors on stage, their movement capturing the attention of the spectators.
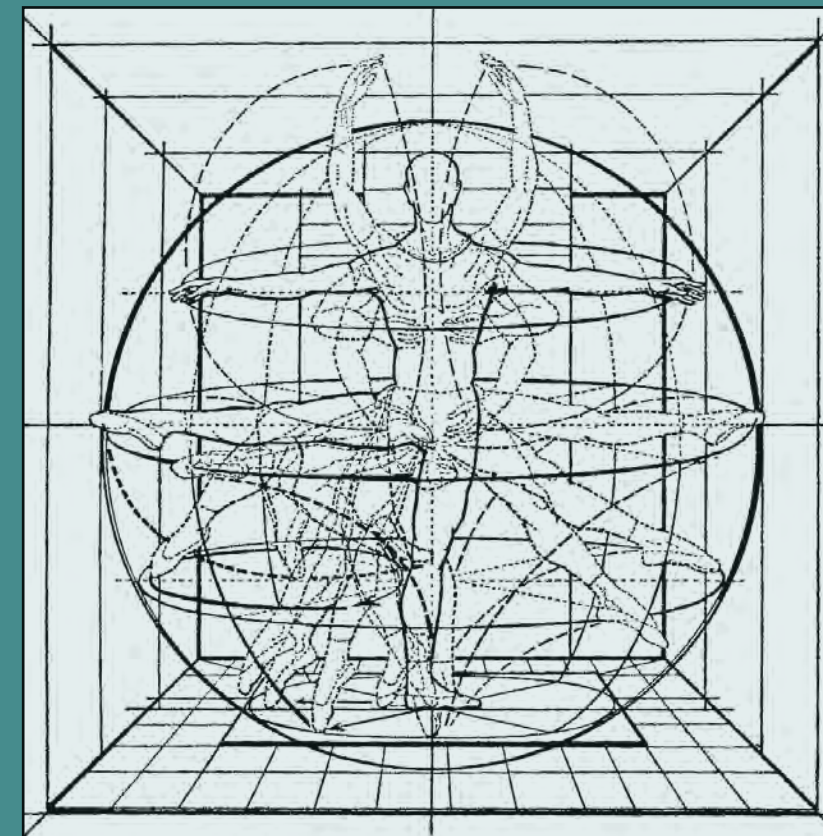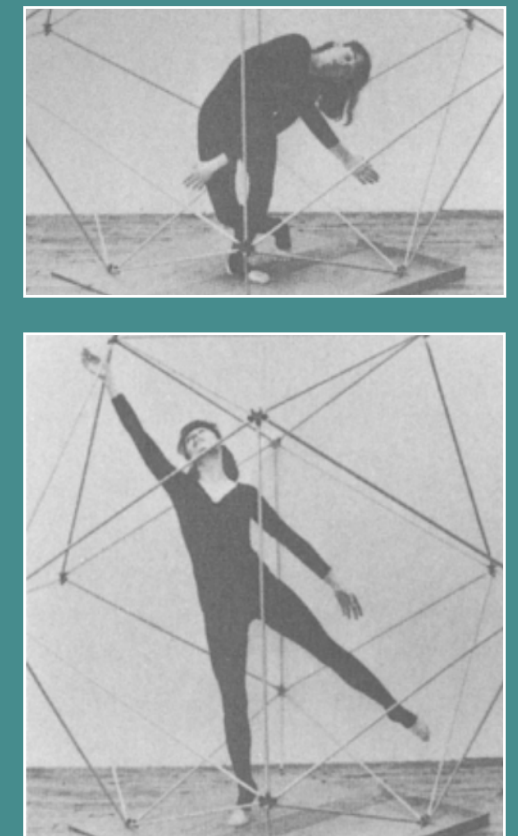

Fig. 18. DIAGRAM: LABAN'S KINESPHERE   *Fig. 19. PHOTOGRAPH: LABAN'S KINESPHERE*

James Frieze (2017, p.7) also addresses the idea of anthropomorphic perimeters; however, Frieze contradicts Laban's ideas, stating "participants have a hitherto unfulfilled desire to extend beyond familiar body boundaries." Meaning a participatory audience wishes to augment their boundaries and connect with their environment and those they are sharing it with, instead of remaining confined to their personal kinesphere. An effective way in which this desire can be achieved within a static, seated audience is through the use of binaural recordings and sound. The result of which strives to create a sense of disorientation within the audience due to a lack of obvious visual cues and kinaesthetic stimulation. Frieze here by offers alternative immersive strategies for a contemporary audience.

This development is arguably a greater immersive strategy for audience members than Laban's Kinesphere, the narrative of immersive theatre progression presents a clear correlation between deconstructing and invading spatial and metaphorical boundaries, as opposed to maintaining segregated space.

AUDIENCE IMMERSION

Juliet Dusinberre (2006, p.67) examines the role the audience plays within their own immersive theatre experience, "physical participation doesn't necessarily create imaginative participation." This provokes the question, who holds responsibility for ensuring an audience's immersive experience?

Freshwater (2009) implies that the audience will each experience something different, and that the assemblage is not a collective but instead a group of individuals. Theatre designers therefore have to ensure cohesion is curated between not only the audience and the actors, but also between the audience members themselves. This resonates back to Chris Goode's (2015) recurring comment- the theatre facilitates what the audience wants to experience. Yet, if the audience members will each experience something different, how does egalitarian theatre design achieve this?

Martin Welton (2020) states that designers have the ability to create different theatrical, interior based atmospheres. These atmospheres may be perceived differently to each member of the audience depending on the emotions in which they internally provoke (Freshwater, 2009). There are several ways in which atmosphere is created within the theatre. Weldon specifically recalls strategies that do not directly correspond to the activity on the stage, "distraction, discomfort, fidgeting, etiquette, proximity or house-lighting play in shaping the experience of atmospheres." Rose Biggin (2017) also refers to the use of atmosphere in facilitating audience immersion. Biggin emphasises the importance of each participant experiencing atmosphere differently, by making a comparison between live theatre and recorded theatre or television. Recorded media will present its audience with an impressionistic interpretation of the atmosphere that was present within the interior space, however live theatre will provide its audience with different atmospheric characteristics -light, sound, volume or visuals- which allow each person to be immersed in their own allusive way. For those participating, theatrical atmospheres may also result in a sense of artificial realism and illusion.

Realism is not expected in theatre. Tyrone Guthrie (1963) accepts the idea that theatre will never accurately imitate something from reality: "it's this recreation that animates the arts and makes it unique" (Eyre, 2000, p.11). However, Guthrie suggests that providing a truthful illusion of reality will enable an audience to perceive and interpret things in correspondence to their past. Biggin (2017) uses the term 'embodied realism' to describe this, people's past experiences dictate how they see the world. Both Biggin and Freshwater emphasise the impact that personal experiences have over the influence of the immersive capabilities within theatre.

This leads to an answer to the question, who holds responsibility for ensuring the audience's immersive experiences? A combination of both the audience and the design team is necessary. The audience knowingly participate in the performance, as a spectator. However, they unknowingly allow their embodied realism and past perceptions to be utilised by the designers in conjunction with their techniques for creating atmosphere and realism. This three-step causation chain, -participation, atmosphere and illusion- creates burgeoning potential for immersive spectacle amongst the audience. Each stage aims to ensure immersive experiences between each individual member of the audience. If this is done successfully, it can ensure a state of immersion amongst the assemblage as a whole. "You go to the theatre an individual and you emerge an audience" (Eyre, 2000, p.11).

"I returned to my seat just before the lights dimmed and the second half commenced. From the corner of my eye, I watched a man stride down the right-side aisle to join a woman on the protruding stage. This was followed by a loud, triumphant sound that surrounded the auditorium, causing a universal gasp. It evoked a feeling within me, I felt as though I had been transported back to a past time of protest and accomplishment."

CHANGING THEATRE

ACT THREE

> "THEATRE IS NOW.
> IT IS OF NOW
> AND THEREFORE,
> INEVITABLY
> ABOUT NOW.
> THAT IS THE MOST
> ABIDING
> CHARACTERISTIC
> OF THE FORM."
> (Upton, 2012)

INTRODUCTION

The term 'humanness' is used by Richard Eyre (2000) to describe the human qualities of theatre and how they're presented. These can include the presentation of human proportions, the sound of the human voice and the human desire to portray narratives. The concept of humanness maintains that theatre remains focused on the people involved, which allows theatre to remain timely in regard to changes in human behaviour and society. This plays upon Peter Brook's (1968, p.115) belief that "theatre can speak directly" in regard to culture, politics and beliefs.

The late 20th and early 21st century presented various new egalitarian design strategies, each striving for greater audience immersion and in suite of attainable cohesion between the actors and the audience. This has so far been primarily discussed through spatial and experiential design influences. This final act, 'Changing Theatre' will analyse the current climate theatre is facing and assess whether it is continuing to increase levels of immersion for its audiences. This will be done through analysis of contemporary technological developments, brought about by momentous societal changes. With a focus on the discussion of the repercussions of the COVID-19 outbreak within 'physical theatre' and the 'virtual landscape'. These two topics will be deliberated in conjunction with the pre-discussed objectives: space, in 'Stages and Landscapes' and experience, in 'Immersion and Experience'.

PHYSICAL THEATRE

The most significant way in which modern day theatre has been altered, is through the emergence and spread of the COVID-19 virus. The nature of the virus means it spreads easily through human interaction, thereby hindering the main immersive strategies used within theatre. Most theatres and performance spaces have had to disengage with the fundamental design tropes traditionally used to spatially and experientially stimulate an audience, including the proximity between audience members. This results in the destruction of Strong's (2010) notion of curated cohesion, deriving from seating design and spacing. Laban's (1966) theory of the human 'kinesphere' is also affected, the actors on stage have to extend the preconceived spatial boundary that was once allowed. Guthrie's (1966) dogma of the thrust stage also becomes less viable, the desire to have intimacy and a close proximity between the actors and audience becomes problematic.

How can the notion of immersion in theatre be ascertained when the physical sense of immersion is no longer available? A literal separation between actor and audience may be a step backwards from Guthrie's idea of inclusivity and egalitarianism but may be one step towards the resuscitation of modern-day theatre.

The designers of Hampstead Theatre (2020) -a theatre presenting a contemporary example of the thrust stage- address the changes they're having to make to safely accommodate an audience and counteract the challenges of the newly impractical auditorium design. These include: reduced audience capacity through the removal of seats and rows, contactless ticket scanning and payments, exemplary ventilation systems and hand sanitisation (fig.20, 21 and 22).

The infiltration of a such a disease has occurred previously within history. Charlotte Canning (2020) illustrates the impact the 1918 outbreak of Spanish Flu had on theatre. The majority of theatres in the affected countries had to close their playhouses and wait until it was safe to reopen. This example presents promise for the revival of traditional theatre, however, the current social situation has greater alternative means to be able to present theatre narratives than previous outbreaks. This has been done through physical alterations to space, but primarily by using technology.

Fig. 20. HAMPSTEAD THEATRE PHYSICAL PRECAUTIONS

Fig. 21. NATIONAL THEATRE PROPOSED AUDITORIUM RENDER

Fig. 22. SALISBURY PLAYHOUSE PHYSICAL SEPARATIONS

THE VIRTUAL LANDSCAPE

The use of video and audio has occurred in theatre since the 1990s and has been in gentle succession ever since (Shaw, 2012), but the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic has acutely stimulated the growing influx of technological advances within the world of theatre. Gordon Cox (2020) lists the new digital realms theatre has ventured into since the physical and habitual sense of theatre has disappeared. The 'virtual landscape' as it has been called, has seen theatre condensed to consist in the form of video streaming, audio and podcasts and even virtual gaming (fig.23). Cox argues that broadening the potential platforms that can present theatre is a positive transition, with it providing more affordable and accessible entertainment. Brandon Lorimer (2020) insists that this new approach remains a novelty as it continues to grant people a temporary distraction. Lorimer conveys that the 'virtual landscape' is not a permanent replacement, but a temporary means to fulfil the human desire to tell stories.
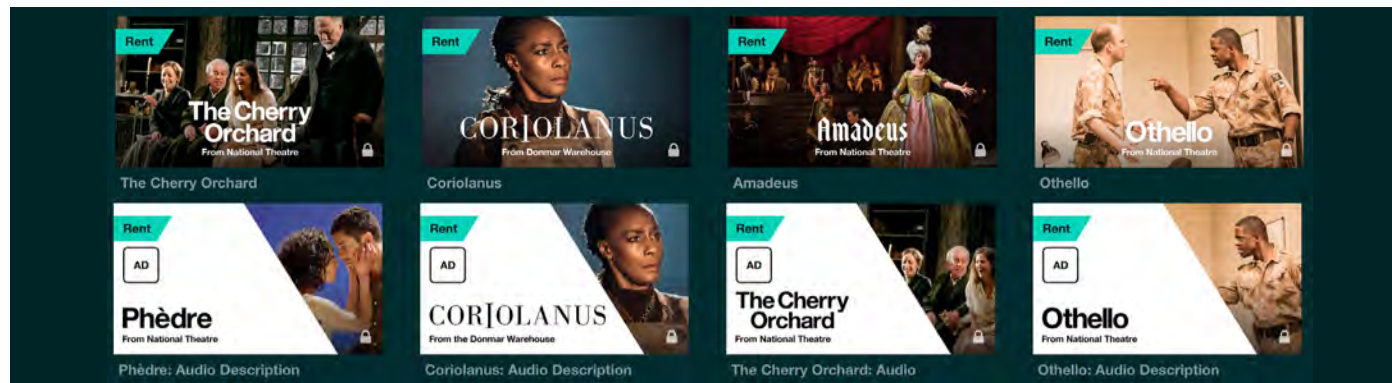

Fig. 23. NATIONAL THEATRE VIRTUAL ALTERNATIVES: VIDEO AND AUDIO

The comparison between theatre and virtual entertainment has been heavily discussed throughout the past few decades, with the general consensus swaying towards an incompatibility between the two forms. Richard Eyre (2000, p.10) claims that "what is human cannot be digitised", insinuating soulless outputs from virtual platforms. Lyn Gardner (2008) asserts that technology use within theatre can lead to a feeling of alienation. Gardner states that the use of modern technology, ironically, resulted in "an old-fashioned theatre experience." However, as technology has improved and society has changed, the prevailing opinion regarding an increase in virtual media usage has also altered. Daniel Fine (2018) recounts the use of projection and video within performances and describes them as providing opportunity to experiment and reappraise the stringent boundaries of theatre. Fine believes that this new technology will remain in use and increase in popularity.

Virtual theatre does not align with the motives of egalitarian design. Television and computer screens more closely resemble the frame like composition of the proscenium stage. The intention of egalitarian design is to dynamically use space and experience to shape theatre in such a way that it increases engagement and immersion amongst its audiences. However, to be able to maintain any audience interaction during such a fortuitous situation provides sufficient grounding for its long-awaited revival. The artistic director of the Guthrie Theatre, Joseph Haj (2020) states, "I long to see our stages and spaces bustling again soon."

Theatres are combating COVID-19 by minimising the physicality of the theatre, using a combination of contactless tickets, spaced seating and emptier auditoriums, but this in turn has led to a reduction in spatial and experiential immersivity. Theatres have also turned to virtual platforms: video streaming services, podcasts and games to share their content, but this too lacks the same sense of human engagement and immersion as the physical theatre. However, these physical and technical replacements have temporarily allowed theatres to continue to portray narratives, and they will suffice until a theatrical revival, but they will never allow for the same immersive possibilities as traditional theatre.

"I definitely felt safe within the space, but I also couldn't help but feel slightly alone. The dispersion of the audience was necessary but created an unwanted sense of separation, there were clear echoes within the auditorium. Even upon entering, I was greeted by a ticket machine and I ordered my drink on my phone. The human experience that I once loved about theatre has gone."

THE DENOUEMENT

Egalitarian theatre design encompasses two main strategies in its pursuit of enhancing actor and audience cohesion and immersion: space and experience. The emergence of this immersive theatre style was instigated by the acclaimed director Tyrone Guthrie, who founded the Guthrie Theatre during the final phase of the American regional theatre movement. The Guthrie Theatre used numerous spatial design strategies to immerse its audiences, including the thrust stage, a protruding stage that allows for closer proximity between the actors and audience, as well as seating and the facade. Egalitarian design also encompasses experiential elements which stimulate the human senses, including kinaesthetic experiences, binaural sound and visual cues. The ephemeral nature of theatre allows it to adjust to changes in society and technology and incorporate them into a human focused design.

Compelling narratives can be portrayed within the most minimal and unsuspecting environments. Egalitarian theatre design does not guarantee an immersive experience; however, it does have the ability to enhance it. Chris Goode's (2015) belief that successful theatre stems purely from what the audience member wants, defines the intention and purpose behind the egalitarian design ideology. Tyrone Guthrie (1968) imparts his views on his willingness to enhance the immersive potential within theatre for everyone involved, by creating spatial equality. Freshwater (2009) speculates that theatres immersive capabilities are maximised when it is understood that each member of the audience will have a different experience, dependent on their personal views and previous encounters. The theatre can facilitate these experiences using atmosphere, illusion and sensory stimulation. These strategies will help to unite the audience and create cohesion between them and the actors. When unforeseen situations occur, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, innovation is required to keep performances running and to try to maintain the pre-existing extensive developments of immersion in theatre. Lorimer (2020) refers to the new realms in which theatre is discovering as an essential but transitory introduction to the use of the virtual landscapes and physical obstructions.

The theatre has seen many changes within the past fifty years and will undoubtedly see more in the future. Using new and old techniques the theatre will continue to maximise its immersive possibilities, utilising technology and the desires of society to facilitate spatial and experiential theatre, that provides the audience with what they want.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

ACORN The preliminary stage of the American regional theatre movement

EGALITARIAN The belief in theatrical equality

FUNCTIONALIST FALLACY Confusing the criteria of what makes a good theatre through emphasizing the seeing and hearing by the spectator of the per former to the exclusion of everything else, especially the sense of community and of involvement

GREENROOM Waiting room/ lounge for performers

HUMANNESS The qualities of being human

KINAESTHETIC EMPATHY Experience and empathise when observing another's movement

KINESPHERE Rudolph Laban's central gravitational point within the body where all extensions in all directions are equidistant creating a human boundary

OAK TREE The final stage of the American regional theatre movement

PHENOMENOLOGY Study of the structures of experience and consciousness

PROSCENIUM STAGE Vertical plane of space separating stage and audience

RAKE Auditorium seating that slopes upwards to improve sight and sound for audience members

SAPLING The intermediate stage of the American regional theatre movement

SCENOGRAPHIC The representation of objects in perspective within theatre scenery

SENSORIMOTER Sensory and motor functions or pathways

SIGHTLINE A straight line extending from a viewer's eye to the object viewed

SYMBIOTIC STAGE The rapport between two entities using the stage, the actor and audience

SYNTHESTHESIA The merging of senses that aren't normally connected

THRUST STAGE Interjecting stage that seats an audience around it

VOMITORIUM Entrance and exit ways within the auditorium leading to and from the stage

VIRTUAL LANDCSAPE The new virtual platforms being used by theatre

WINGS Out of sight stage area used for entering and exiting

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