

Attempts on Margarita (multiple drafts): A cognitive dramaturgy generated by voice and space

Christina (Xristina) Penna¹

Abstract. In the dynamic contemporary theatre and performance landscape of 'immersive', hybrid and interactive production where the boundaries between public and private, performance space and audience space intertwine, alternate or even disappear, scenography is referred to as a process. [1] [2]

The above observation poses a series of questions regarding the critical frameworks that could be used in order to analyse scenography as process and the methods that might be employed to contribute to the creation of dynamic scenographic landscapes where the audience becomes an active co-author of the work.

Through my practice-led research at the University of Leeds I am suggesting a method of staging dynamic scenographic systems using current cognitive theories of consciousness (Baars, Dennett, Edelman and Tononi). These performance-systems engage with the concepts of process, integration of information and complexity inviting the participants to interact in a dynamic bottom-up way with the work.

In the piece 'Work Space I- a scenographic workshop on consciousness' I appropriated Baars' diagram of consciousness known as the Global Workspace [3] to create a workshop-installation in which the participants are invited to share the experience of a performance-game and contribute to the hands-on creation of a multi-authorial artwork.

By reflecting on the above work, which draws and explores the notion of embodiment and the 'socially collaborative, culturally and materially grounded nature of the human mind' [4] I focused on the 'dialogue through making' that occurred during the time of the workshop.

In another practice-led investigation 'Work Space II - Attempts on Margarita (multiple drafts)' I am drawing from Martin Crimps' *postdramatic* work 'Attempts on her Life' and the cognitive theories of consciousness by Dennett, Edelman and Tononi in order to create a multi-layered cognitive dramaturgy in the form of an installation space. A current view on the hard problem of consciousness, largely initiated by neuroscientist/psychiatrist Giulio Tononi, is that 'wherever there's information processing, there's consciousness' [5] In the piece 'Attempts on Margarita (multiple drafts)' aim is to generate a *collective consciousness* in the form of a durational, sound installation by mixing information such as pre-recorded and live - stream voices generated by three types of participants:

- P1: a) Friends/colleagues/acquaintances of mine and b) random passers-by in the university campus who answer the same set of questions regarding 'Margarita'.
- P2: Participants-audience who attended the installation.

- P3: A group of artists working with sound, devising and objects in the main installation space.

In this paper I will focus on the post-show discussion with the participant artists (P3) on their experience of the installation. I will refer to their comments of their experience as 'a reflective space' and of the 'ethics that can be established by a space'. Using as critical framework enactive cognitive science and the ideas of an ecologically extended and socially engaged mind I will then try and analyse this multi-layered process scenography.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Aronson, *Looking Into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- [2] J. McKinney, *The nature of communication between scenography and its audiences*. Ph.D dissertation, The University of Leeds, 2008.
- [3] B. J. Baars & S. Franklin, 'An architectural model of conscious and unconscious brain functions: Global Workspace Theory and IDA', *Neural Networks*, **20**, 955-961, (2007).
- [4] C. Sinha, 'Blending out of the background: Play, Props and Staging in the Material World', *Journal of Pragmatics*, **37**, 1537-1554, (2005).
- [5] G. Tononi, 'An Information Integration Theory of Consciousness', *BMC Neuroscience*, **5**, 42 (2004).
<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2202/5/42> accessed 14/11/14.

¹ School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds, UK. Email: pccp@leeds.ac.uk.