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Citation: Henry, Susannah (2022). Autoscenography: The intersection of a scenographer's story with her practice. (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Guildhall School of Music and Drama)

This is the accepted version of the paper.

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A close-up photograph of several stacked cardboard boxes. The focus is on the edges and corners of the boxes, which are made of brown, textured cardboard. One box in the foreground has a visible tear or hole in its edge. The lighting is soft, creating subtle shadows and highlights on the cardboard's surface.

PART 1

Moving House: An autoscenographic practice review

Susannah Henry
Oct 2020 – Dec 2021

The purpose of this practice review is to frame the territory around the emergent practice of *autoscenography* rather than to make a case for original contribution – this section can be found in the Conclusion at the end of the thesis.

Practice Review Methodology - Form

The form of this practice review is determined by a life event that occurred in parallel with its development - in early 2021, I moved to a new house. Within a project that considers *autoscenography* as the intersection of the scenographer's story with their practice, the process of packing and moving house offered an analogue for the activity of creating a practice review. Like a house move, a practice or literature review offers the potential of moving the writer (and reader) from one conceptual space to another, or to identify a 'home' or series of 'homes' within which a project resides.

Initially, the process of sorting and packing the books and other references in this review was done with a view to understanding which were essential to framing a research project on *autoscenography*, and which were not. This approach was helpful in terms of establishing a fundamental level of organisation, but the situated-ness of the review - among boxes and personal objects, in the room(s) where I work - is also an expression of *autoscenography*. The space a researcher inhabits is not an irrelevance in a practice that fuses scenography and life-writing, as Dee Heddon points out in her chapter of *Autobiography and Performance* focused on the significance of place: 'lives do actually and necessarily take place; they happen somewhere.' (2008: 88).

This practice review is designed and performed by a scenographer, and thus the space in which this activity occurs, the materials used, and the scenography that is made from and in them are all of relevance within the methodology of the Practice Review. Efforts are made, within my commentary, to reflect on and record the ongoing creation of a scenography that is particular to the circumstances of this practice review. The effect of this dimension of the process has been to create an additional way of looking at the activity of 'literature review' from a practice research perspective. While this has added another layer of complexity to an already challenging process it represents an effort to embody the practice of *autoscenography* while writing about it.

Thus, the 'moving house' form of this practice review is a *designed* decision, to take an *autoscenographic* approach - in time and space, as per my home practice of scenography - to *doing* what could otherwise remain a mainly cerebral process. To think through doing is a methodological motif of this PhD, and this practice review is no exception.

Scholar and researcher Maarit Anna Makela proposes that 'an object made by an artist-researcher during the process of research [can] be seen as a method of collecting and preserving information and understanding' (2007: 2). Choosing to pack, unpack and write in parallel was an attempt to create - not for the first time within the overall project - the conditions for 'knowing making' or knowing-doing, as expressed by Robin Nelson in his discussion of the epistemology of practice-as-research (2013). The part-practical approach to this practice review allowed me to think *through* the activity of sorting, packing, and unpacking, through the making of images documenting it and through the writing that happened in parallel to the action. It also created the digital 'artefact' you are looking at now.

Know Techn Pol (2007) 20:157-163
DOI 10.1007/s12130-007-9028-2

ORIGINAL PAPER

Knowing Through Making: The Role of the Artefact in Practice-led Research

Maarit Mäkelä

Received: 15 December 2006 / Accepted: 20 March 2007 / Published online: 11 September 2007
© Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2007

Abstract During the last decade, research in art and design in Finland has begun to explore new dimensions. Artists and designers have taken an active role

pass on their knowledge, which is relevant in the research context. Thus, the crucial task to the researcher is to give a voice to the artefact. This means

While the approach to this practice review is an experiment in creating the conditions for knowing through doing (Nelson 2013) it is also proposed as an act of *autoscenography*. This means understanding the practice review – and the other practical projects contained within the thesis portfolio, alongside *Autoscenography She Wrote* – as operating not just as a process of ‘thinking through’ represented as imagery, but as scenography, which operates, unfolds or ‘happens’ in time and space.

The temporal and spatial qualities of scenography are recognised within the field of ‘expanded scenography’, which is a territory included within Part 2 of this Practice Review. Space and time as components of scenography are foregrounded throughout this thesis, placed periodically alongside other related elements of performance which connect to scenography, such as narrative or action. Therefore, when I cite the spatial or temporal operations of my *autoscenographic* Practice Review or any other project, I am drawing on a thread of discourse about what scenography is and how it performs, which is strong theme in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century writing about scenography.

Theatre historian Arnold Aronson, for example, positions the theatre stage as a ‘container’, ‘within which all time and space exists equally’ (2013) and recently reflected on the phenomenon of the recorded Zoom presentation as an example of the way in which that particular kind of ‘scenography’ can interfere with the audience’s perception of time and space (2021, referred to in Project 4: Book Marks). Likewise, space is given a chapter within Pamela Howard’s *What is Scenography?* (2002) and its temporal quality drawn out through the statement that ‘A space is a living personality with a past, present and future.’ (2002: 2). Within the field of stage design practice, the introduction to the Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD) 1999 exhibition (itself entitled *Time and Space*) describes those properties more practically as ‘fundamental aspects of the artistic and technical production process’ (Burnett and Ruthven Hall, 1999:6) as well as highlighting their potential for exploration through the design of performance.

This is a long-term and involved discussion across all strands of reflection in contemporary scenography, and I highlight it here as a key underpinning to the scenographic approach taken across this Practice Review and beyond – that these endeavours will unfold in space and time as scenography, as well as through the words written during that process.

FRAGILE

HANDLE WITH CARE

Discussion of the space-time unfolding of scenography recently evolved into a theory of scenography as 'place orientation' which was constructed in *Beyond Scenography* by Rachel Hann (2019). This is pertinent to the design of this Practice Review, since the *autoscenographic* act of moving house can be framed as a scenography of 'place orientation' or – in moving from one workspace to another – place re-orientation. Hann articulates this process thus:

Scenography as place orientation is an act of composing [...] stimuli, or being intentionally aware of their affects, with a distinct focus on how a constellation of these methods becomes manifest as an affective atmosphere. (2019: 37)

This defines the work of scenography as the crafting of 'affective atmospheres' and recognises the act of creating and orienting place through scenography as 'an ongoing experiential process (rather than a set object) that recognizes how our bodies acclimatize to, and literally make sense of, an environment.' (Hann 2019: 121) As with Howard's assertion that space has a past, present and a future (2002), so Hann acknowledges the time-based phenomenon of experience as a part of the way a location – or place – reveals itself.

Moving house mirrors the processes at work when we enact 'place orientation' as scenographers – it initiates an experiential process that I 'acclimatize to and make sense of' (pace Hann), as I move from one environment to another. As an act of *autoscenography* there is the personal narrative dimension of moving house, but there is also the act of framing myself as the recipient of place (re) orientation and the affective atmosphere this engenders, as well as being the scenographer who crafts it. Moving house as an approach to the practice review and as an act of *autoscenography* creates space for the possibility that the conditions within which both experiential processes happen might create an 'affective atmosphere', whether manifest as an enriched 'place' of practice review or an exploration of one's lived experience as a crafting of scenography through place orientation.

Practice Review Methodology - Content

The use of the term Practice Review in place of Literature Review is a choice which stems from the approach to literature review offered by Nelson in *Practice as Research in the Arts* (2013), which also provides support to for methodological form for this practice review offered above:

In my approach, ideas emerging from the programme of reading resonate with the material thinking in practice. Though abstract ideas may be more readily disseminated in words, reading and writing are not the singular vehicles for articulating ideas. (2013: 103).

Recognising that the form of this practice review might benefit from a multi-modal approach of the kind Nelson proposes, this also has a bearing on the kinds of citation and reference found within this practice review. Nelson proposes that syncretism - or casting one's reference net widely - is an approach that is suited and particular to the 'literature review' supporting a practice research enquiry. (2013: 34) This suggests that a field of references drawn from diverse sources, not just those found in academia, might inform the process of literature review.

Unlike adopting the credits for a television programme within *Autoscenography* She Wrote, there is nothing included in this review that could be described as 'low theory' (Halberstam 2011: 2, adapted from Stuart Hall), but there is a proportion of the review referencing fiction, life writing and arts and performance practice. This is deliberate broadening of 'typical' academic references, recognizing the multiple modes of 'doing' within which knowledge may be found and expressed (2013). It is also reflective of the diverse references 'resonating' within the scenographer's practice and the spectrum of places from which these may be drawn.

Practice as Research in the Arts

Principles, Protocols,
Pedagogies, Resistances

Written and edited by Robin Nelson

Director of Research, Royal Central School of



YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Practice as Research in
Pedagogies, Resistances
by Robin Nelson

Free Kindle instant preview: <http://amzn.e>

28 Highlights

about love

NEW VISIONS

bell hooks

Living
a Feminist
Life

SARA AHMED

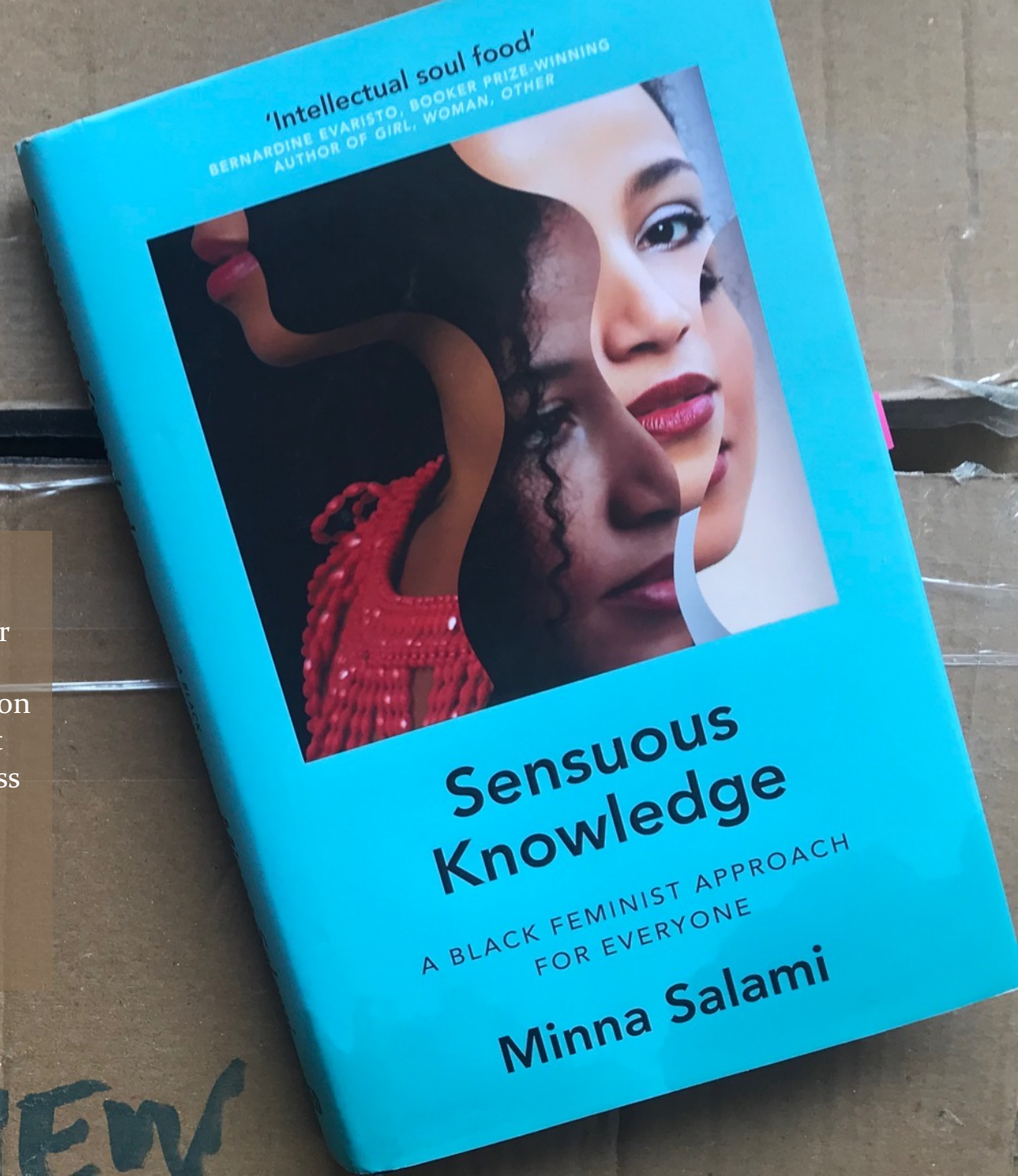
To acknowledge and celebrate a diversity of citation and reference is to reflect the feminist underpinning of the practice of *autoscenography*. In preparing to embark on this Practice Review I sought guidance from feminist writers whose values I admired, and who had tackled to varying degrees the established systems of academia, such as Sarah Ahmed and bell hooks. There will be more of Ahmed shortly, but hooks offers seemingly the perfect rationale for a feminist scenographer to undertake a practice review:

To live consciously we have to engage in critical reflection about the world we live in and know most intimately. (2001: 56)

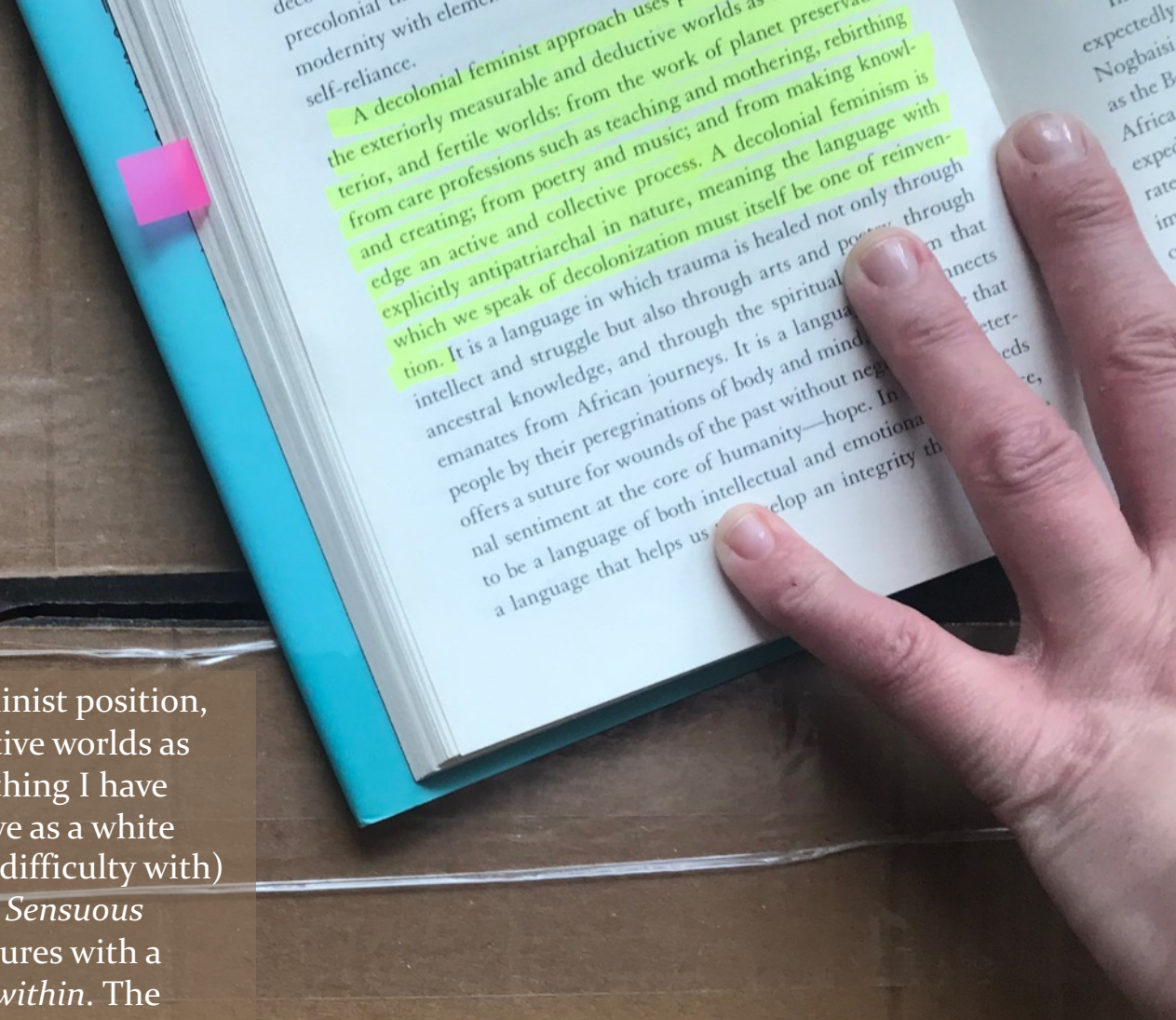
It is part of the practice of *autoscenography* to 'live consciously'. I understand the task of this practice review as being to critically reflect on the worlds of scenography and autobiographical practice that I have 'lived in' and come to know intimately, through the arc of this project.

It is not by accident that feminist theory is making an appearance in the methodology of this Practice Review. Strands of feminist theory pertaining to the creation of space have been used to develop the foundation of *autoscenography* and will be explored more fully in Part 2 of this Practice Review.

A significant piece of feminist scaffold supporting the methodology of the Practice Review is provided by Minna Salami. In proposing 'sensuous knowledge' (2020) Salami argues an approach to knowing that runs counter to the orthodoxies of europatriarchal scholarship, which might (to pick a salient example) limit the scope of what might be expected by way of citation in a literature review. Instead, Salami advertises 'paradigms of thought that are enlivening' (2020: 4) and 'pursuing knowledge for elevation and progress rather than out of an appetite for power.' (2020: 15). I interpret this as meaning that a quest for sensuous knowledge is not power-centred, and therefore that a diverse, non-hierarchical range of sources for knowing and understanding might be purposefully invoked within a feminist project.



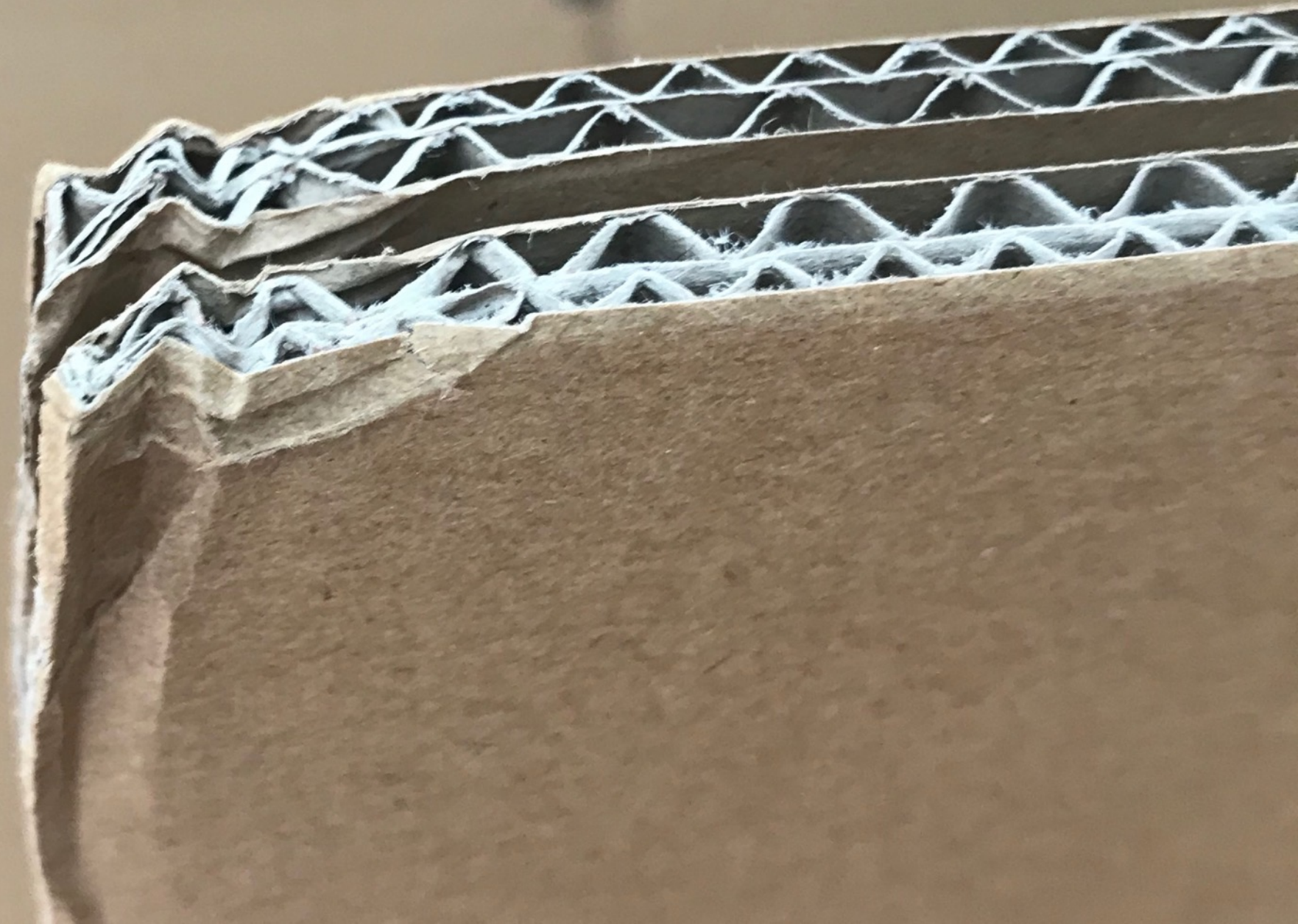
Salami's vision for sensuous knowledge stems from a decolonial feminist position, using 'principles derived from the exteriorly measurable and deductive worlds as well as the interior, fertile worlds.' (2020: 72) This approach is something I have drawn strength from, within my – admittedly privileged – perspective as a white woman artist who has practiced within (and occasionally had some difficulty with) the traditions of the British Theatre and Higher Education systems. *Sensuous Knowledge* comes at the process of dismantling europatriarchal cultures with a 'kaleidoscope' of tools: 'sensuous knowledge is kaleidoscopic, with/within. The mind exists with and within the body, reason with and within emotion'. (2020: 21) A kaleidoscopic image is multi-dimensional, fractal and rich – this is the kind of spectrum of references I have aimed to include within this practice review. The citations I have included stem from sources that embody reason and emotion in varying combination – reflecting the composition of lived experience – and belong to a kaleidoscope of artists, writers, and theorists of different kinds.

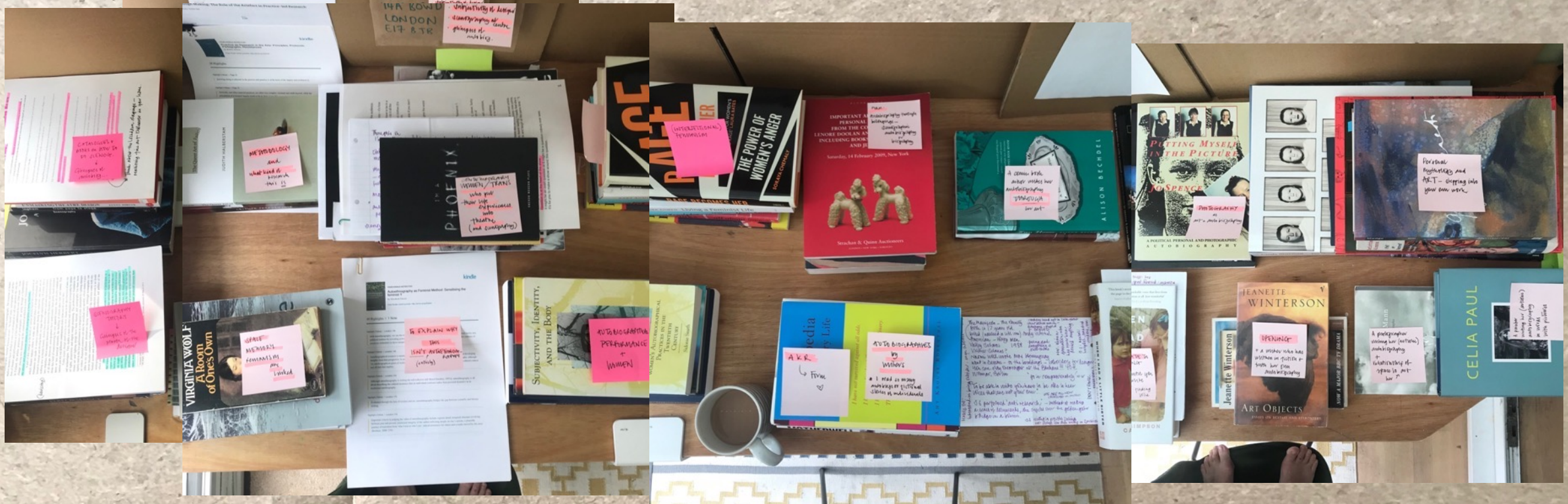


Thus, this practice review will contain the following kinds of reference:

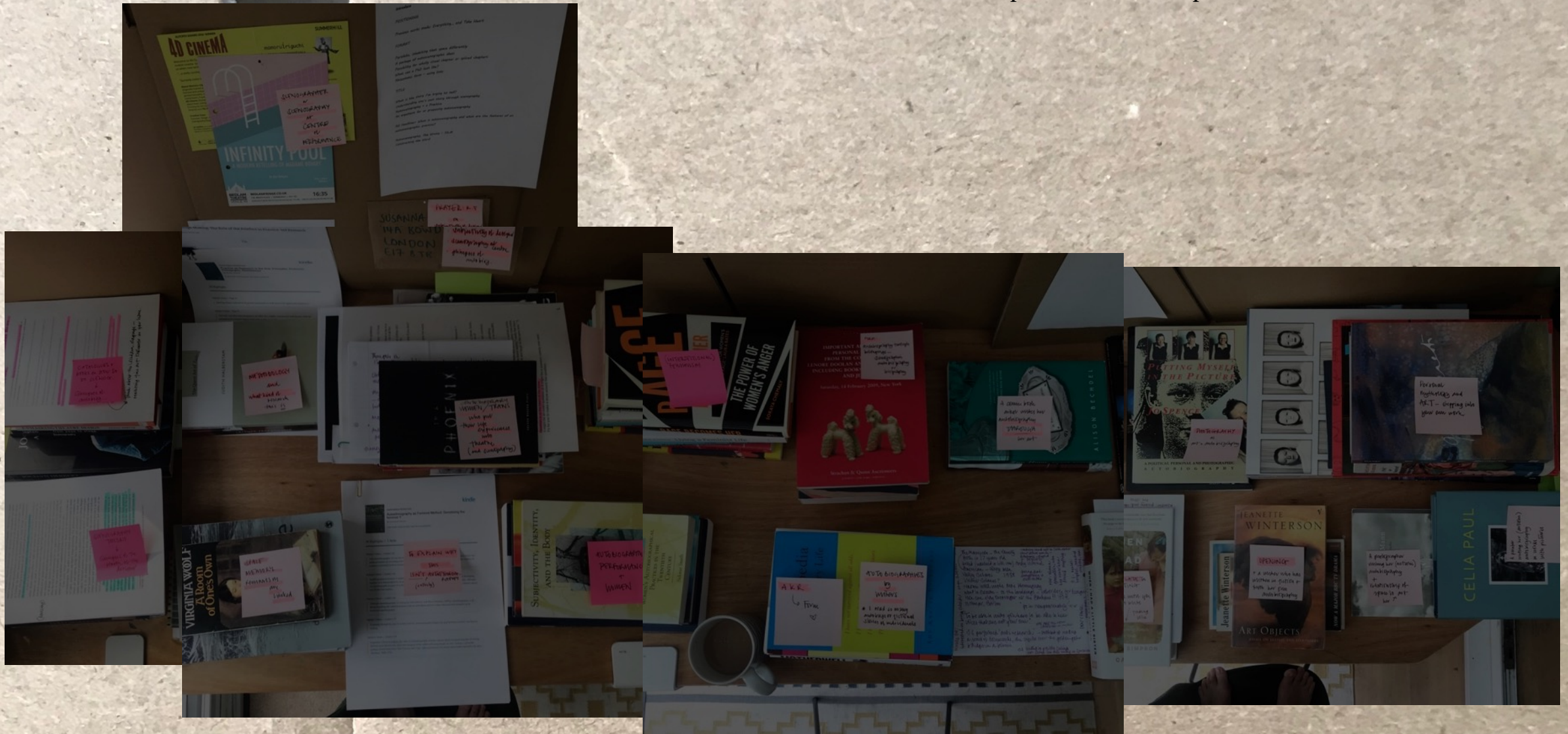
- Images of specific artworks
- First-hand reflection of live encounters with artists' work
- Books - where something appears as a hard-copy book it may refer to the text in question, but it might also be a wider signifier for the work of an artist.
- Academic Texts: articles, books, journals
- Works of fiction
- Articles in newspapers or magazines
- Screenshots from films, programmes, exhibition catalogues and flyers

Now you have an outline of what is driving the design and content of this practice review, let me show you what the process of doing it looked like.



[illegible]

As I piled the books up, I divided them into territories.



I assigned each territory pile with a title. This should give you a sense of the areas of practice and theory that *autoscenography* sits within. There is no hierarchy or status assigned between territories and the shape of the arrangement is dictated by the length of my workbench and its surface area.

Theatre with the scenographer or scenography at its centre

An example of a scenographer making work that acknowledges her subjectivity

Scenography manuals or books about how to be a scenographer with acknowledgement of designer as a person

Practice Research

Contemporary autobiographical theatre makers or specific works

Feminist Writing

Photography projects depicting autobiography

Graphic novel + autobiography

Photography+ Autobiography

Fine art + Autobiography

Scenography scholarship with acknowledgement of designer as a person with a story

Writing on scenography and space – the space of the artist

Autoethnography

Autobiographical Performance

Designed forms of life-writing

Life-writing and emancipation

Autobiography written by writers in fiction and non-fiction

Autobiography or artistic autobiography written by artists

Here, those smaller territories have started to coalesce into bigger themes. These were sustained throughout the practice review.



Table Thinking and Linearity

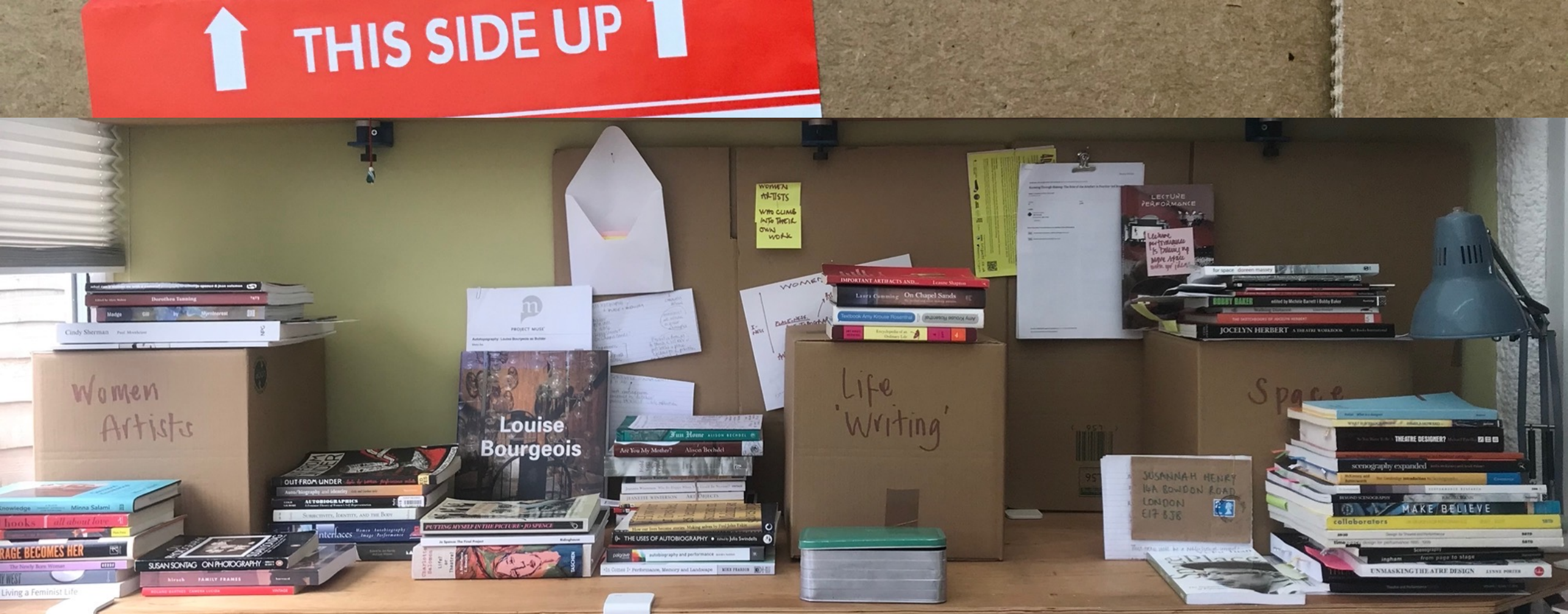
Despite my desire to be open to a 'willful' (Ahmed 2017: 65-66) feminist approach to this practice review, which proposes freedom and openness, a sense of linearity crept in via the the environment and materials of my *autoscenographic* moving house project. Linear arrangements unfolded through the rectangular limitations of the workbench space I occupy with these rectangular book objects, which lend themselves so readily to being stacked neatly in piles or boxes. As a scenographer I cannot fail to notice these linear material properties and the - perhaps misleading - orderly nature of the scenography they engender. I am suspicious of this early 'doing' inadvertently crafting a linear form of knowing.

My scenographic orientation of this practice review towards my workbench recalls Ahmed's queer-phenomenological analysis of the table as a site of emergence and orientation within the writer or philosopher's practice (2010). Ahmed proposes the writing surface as an active component in the 'doing' of ideas:

Orientations affect how subjects and objects materialize or come to take shape in the way that they do. The writer writes, and the labour of writing shapes the surface of the writer's body. The objects used for writing are shaped by the intention to write; they are assembled around the support they give. Orientations are about how matter surfaces by being directed one way or another. (2010: 248)

Taken together with Hann's evocation of scenography as place orientation, and this being an experiential process, Ahmed's reading of the contribution of the writer's table affirms my resolve to work with the objects and immediate environment of my packing to move house. I will continue to approach this as a process through which 'matter' (read: knowledge, a framing of *autoscenography*, also what 'matters'/is significant) can 'surface'.

Taking courage from the idea that my orientation towards my workbench, books and the act of packing might yet produce an 'affective atmosphere' (Hann 2019: 37) of Practice Review, I choose to explore multiple ways of organising my references to guard against an unthinking embrace of linearity.



On 10th November 2020, I experimented with sorting my references into three new areas, exploring the idea that my project sat between the three territories of women artists, life writing and space. Again, my workbench forced particular kinds of relationship - there are some references which span all three areas and there are some which bridge women artists and space, which I could not illustrate through this sorting exercise. The constraints being battled here highlight the way in which scenography is often dictated by a pre-defined space, like a theatre. I wanted to resist this in the next experiment, in a way that embraces the power of scenographics to operate as 'irritants' to pre-existing 'power geometries'. (Hann 2019).

I abandoned the workbench and the boxes for the floor.





Woman
artist
who climbs into
her work
(space!)

Life
'writing'
+ woman artist

Woman
Artist

Space +
Life writing +
Woman artist

Space
+ woman artist

Space

Space

Life
Writing

A non-linear arrangement.

reference
Cindy
But when
order is
through a
I can't see
Sherman
I re-appro

But whether in packing to move house or in sorting through references for a Practice Review, a sense of order is necessary, for calm and to encourage a moving through the process. Here, I am stepping through and over my references and feeling they have taken on a willfulness (Ahmed 2017) of their own. I can't see them clearly in this muddle. There is no cohesiveness or 'design' here.

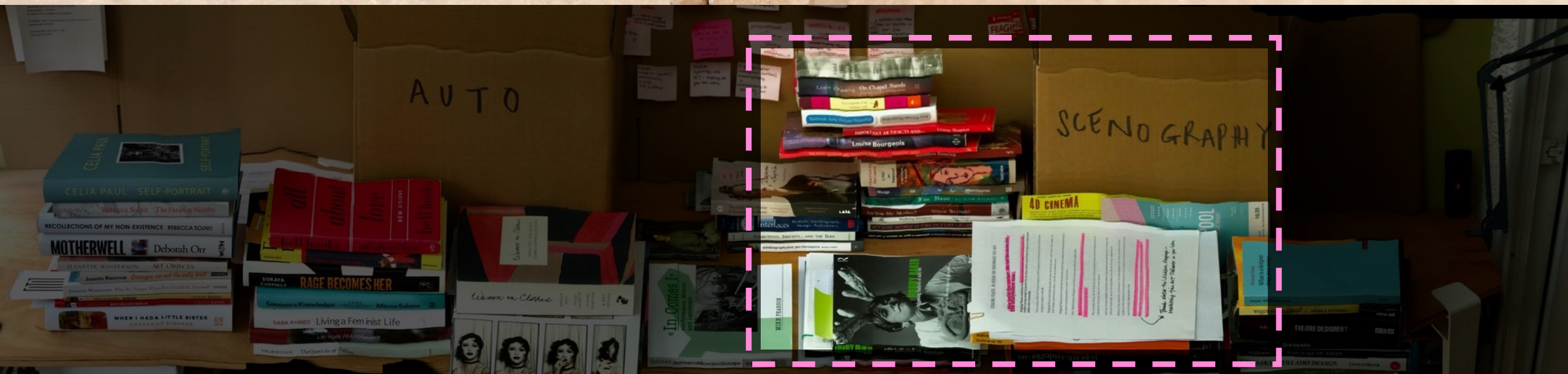
I re-approach the workbench.





This rather wobbly panorama shows a new arrangement, spread between two boxes labelled 'auto' and 'scenography' with a view to understanding how far the mixture of references I had embraced sat between or across these two dimensions of the emergent practice of *autoscenography*.

The space between the two boxes contained many references that bridged the two disciplines.



This space between the boxes contained other artistic disciplines besides scenography, but they all felt as though they 'sat close' to scenography in some way, whether this meant having a visual dimension or operating as a time-based experience.

The fact that there are more references on the scenography side of the spectrum highlights the fact that this is the root practice and perspective from which the project stems.



This 'root' end of the project contains a mixture of references that combine reflection on the artistic practice of the author alongside autobiographical content. This means the practitioner or artist is working at the intersection of their story with their practice, which is precisely where *autoscenography* is situated. Demonstrating a similar reflective model is one way in which practices that come close to *autoscenography* reveal themselves.

SCENOGRAPHY

AUTOPSY AWARD 2016 WINNER
4D CINEMA

Welcome to 4D Cinema. Sporting a projector and a screen around mobile cinema to explore what is live and what is recorded and us when new technology blurs actual and virtual realities.

Praise For 'And Then Came the Nightmares'
★★★★★
"Intensely funny"
Telegraph
★★★★★
"a right little cracker"
Guardian
★★★★★
The Stage

COOL
AME BOVARY

Oliver Roberts
#Radio-Pol

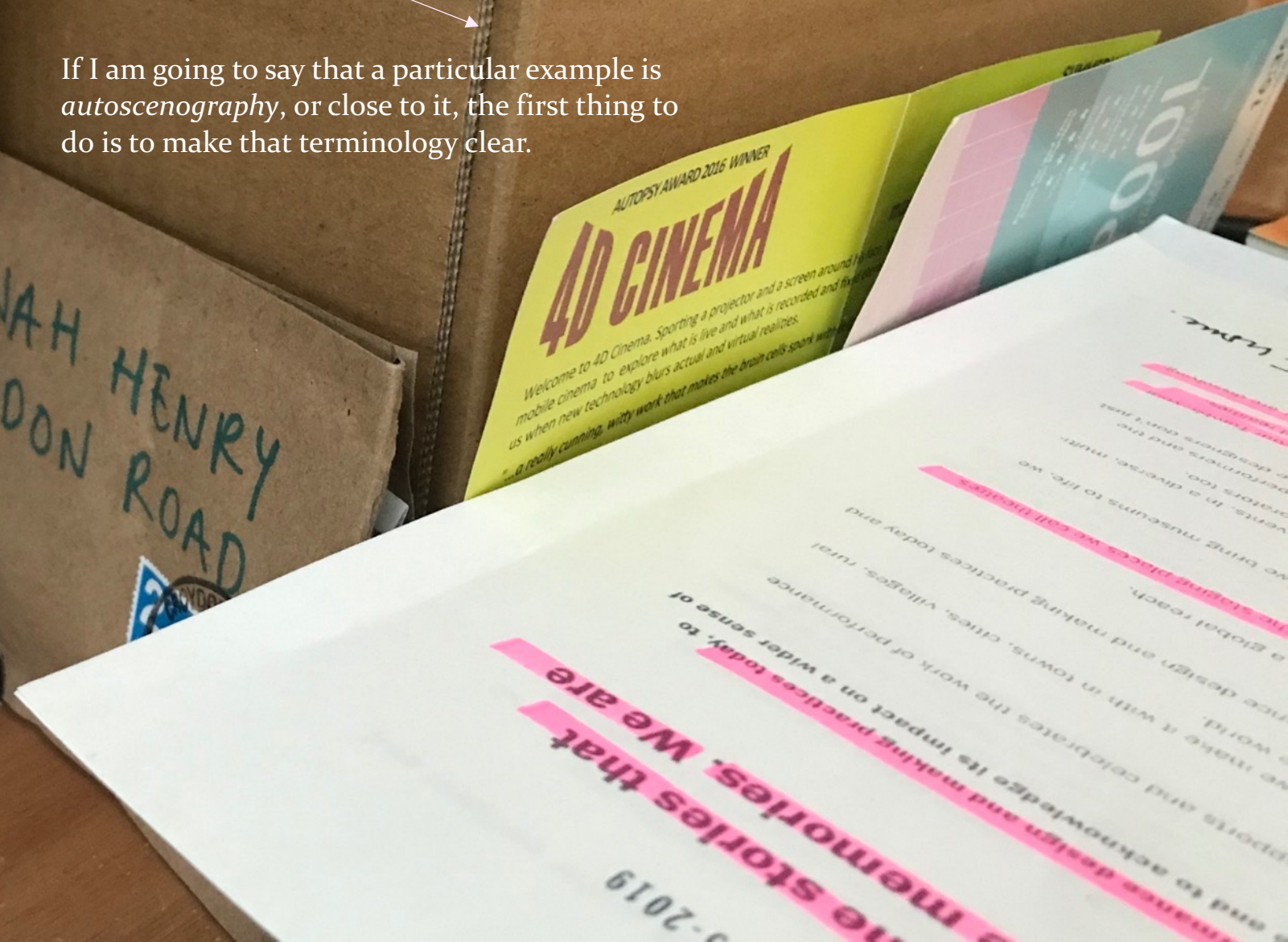
16:35

17/18 | 20/21 | 22/23 | 24/25 | 26/27 | 28



I imagine the corner of this box is the space where clear examples of *autoscenography* would be, and where my project sits.

If I am going to say that a particular example is *autoscenography*, or close to it, the first thing to do is to make that terminology clear.



A Scenographer Practicing Scenography

The embrace of the term scenography (and the defining of myself as a scenographer) is significant within this project. In my former professional life, I was trained as a 'theatre designer' and usually credited as such for the work I did. Occasionally I would take ownership of the design of the performance space or the design of costume as individual endeavours and would usually be credited as 'set designer' or 'costume designer' when this occurred. For the purposes of professional employment, these terms are clear and make the creation of contracts straightforward.

As I became immersed in this project, it became clear that I needed a different term for what I was doing which reflected the multidimensional material emerging from my exploration. As elements beyond 'set' and 'costume' were revealed - story, time, 'embodied experience, landscape and memory, to give some examples - I felt that the term *scenography*, and to identify as a *scenographer*, was more representative of my practice.

While the exact meaning of the term scenography is 'a contested subject' (Aronson 2017: 1) with essays, chapters and whole books (Howard 2002) having been devoted to discussing this unfixed definition, it is the flexibility and multi-dimensional nature of scenography which makes it ripe for interrogation. If scenography 'can be applied to a full range of phenomenological circumstances from grand opera to making a meal at home in your kitchen' (Pavelka 2015: 4) this points to a range of possibilities for the practice to evolve and travel, beyond conventional theatres and stages. The unsettled identity of scenography naturally engages a 'theatre designer' looking to expand their practice and speaks to contemporary readings of scenography as 'always multiple and, in this border of flux [resistant to] straightforward definitions of authorship and genre.' (Hann 2021).

Thus, to make *scenography*, to be a *scenographer*, represents a shift from working within a narrow professional silo to somewhere more expansive, with greater latitude in terms of the elements that might be at play. Within this territory, the felt, embodied and environmental dimensions of my work were a natural part of the picture.

With the embrace of the capacious term, scenography, it is important to highlight that the elements foregrounded within *my* practice are not found within *every* scenographic practice. Artists working to a greater degree than I do with elements like light or sound (to give two examples) might equally describe themselves as scenographers. An artist whose work does not foreground engagement with the environmental might likewise identify their work within the term. Scenography refracts plural practices, to be found in different combinations from practitioner to practitioner. The plurality, possibility and generosity of the term is what makes it appealing and appropriate to this project and others different from it.

A roll of white paper, possibly a continuous roll of paper or a large sheet of paper, is unrolled and lies on a brown cardboard surface. A black marker is placed on the paper, pointing towards the left. The paper is slightly wavy and has a few small creases. The background is a plain, textured brown cardboard.

RECOGNISING
AUTOSCENOGRAPHY /
AUTOSCENOGRAPHIC/
AUTOSCENOGRAPHICS

A model for recognising *autoscenography* and *autoscenographics*

This practice review contains examples that may be defined as *autoscenography* or as bearing *autoscenographic* qualities. There are examples drawn from theatre and other disciplines which sit close to *autoscenography*, without being an outright example of the practice. These are included to frame and draw the boundaries of where *autoscenography* sits, and might fall into a blended category of *autoscenographics*. These terms reference a model developed by Hann (2019) in her discussion of scenography and scenographics – the latter being plural phenomena across a range of staging practices, beyond scenography. This is distinct from scenographic: being of scenography. Hann breaks down the distinctions between terms in relation to scenography:

Scenography

Hann frames this as the ‘institutional’, ‘orthodox’ or ‘peculiar’ (particular) practice of the craft of scenography. (Hann 2019: 29) This is work which emerges through an intentional crafting of scenography, positioned in contexts where a form of staging can be recognised.

Scenographic

That which operates as adjunct to scenography or that which has a trait or traits of scenography in its form or function - ‘an ideological proxy to scenography’ (Hann 2019: 32). This term moves us from the craft of scenography towards a critical perspective on how scenography unfolds:

The term ‘scenographic’ isolates and affords a particular perspective, or critical framework, that identifies the potentiality of stage architectures. (Hann 2019: 28)

Scenographics

Hann frames scenographics as traits or ‘utterances’ (Hann 2019: 29) which orientate operationally as scenography, without being scenography in the institutional sense. This enables us to highlight scenographics across - or at - the borders of artistic disciplines, beyond the practiced craft of scenography, wherever acts of staging or assemblage are observed:

A scenographic trait enacts a perceptual provocation that calls attention to the broader thresholds of worldly encounter (Hann 2019: 28)

Scenographics may be present within a diverse spectrum of practices or phenomena which have a relationship to the act of staging, for example, photography, choreography, installation art or architecture. In contrast to the particularity of the craft we identify as scenography, ‘scenographics are commonplace’ (Hann 2019: 29) which allows them to be identified in a variety of contexts, thereby not limited to a singular interpretation – hence, Hann argues, the use of the plural. One is tempted to read that as a feminist position – allowing for multiple, non-dualistic readings or encounters of ‘besideness’ (Sedgwick 2003: 8), beyond the positivist position of scenography as a singular craft.

Taking Hann’s model as my starting point, I am going to map the definitions above across to a practice of *autoscenography* and related traits, to show how I intend to apply the terms as I encounter different examples of practice in Parts 2 and 3 of this Practice Review.

Terminology	Meaning	Modelled on
Autoscenography	The craft of scenography enacted in dialogue with the story of the scenographer	Scenography - the institution
Autoscenographic	An ‘ideological proxy’ to <i>autoscenography</i> – of that practice	Scenographic – of the institutional practice
Autoscenographics	Traits or ‘utterances’ that refract orientations of an artist’s story to their practice, in relationship to staging, assemblage and life-writing	Scenographics – ‘commonplace’ traits of place orientation discernible across a range of practices and disciplines



31 31

End of Part 1

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31