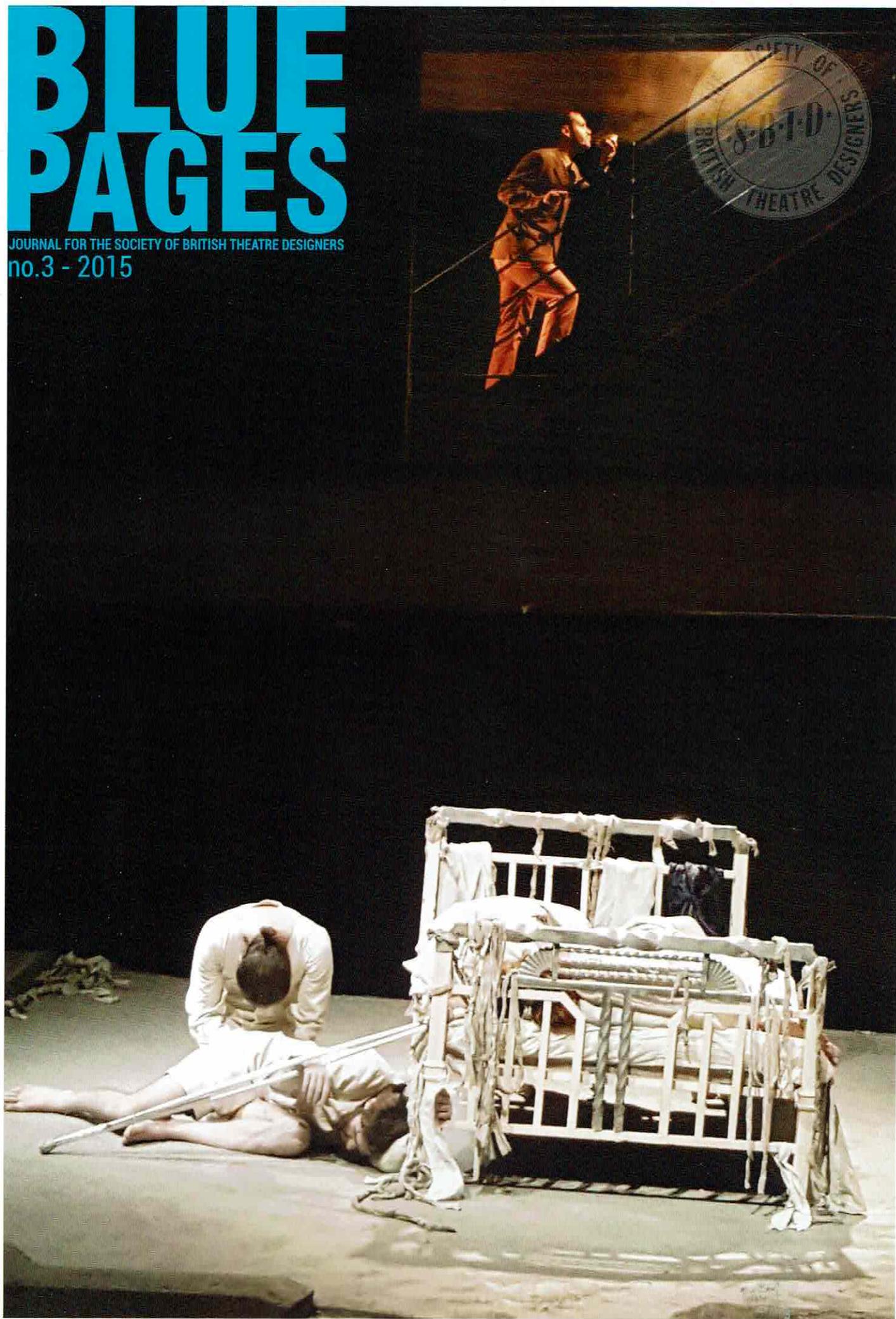


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JOURNAL FOR THE SOCIETY OF BRITISH THEATRE DESIGNERS

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Cover Image: '...from the "pre-Wheelchair" version rehearsals', from *Electra: The Last Blood [and ...The Closed Banks]* by Andreas Skourtis & Meera Osborne, photograph by Andreas Skourtis. Top Image: from *Brave New Worlds* by Kate Lane [pgs 6-7], photograph by Camilla Greenwell/Barbican Open Labs. Top Middle Image: 'Getting Set. Designer and the door entrance from/exit to the outer urban "scenography"' from *Electra: The Last Blood [and ...The Closed Banks]* by Andreas Skourtis & Meera Osborne, photograph by Elena Georgiou. Bottom Middle Image: from *Warnscale: A Land Mark Walk Reflecting On In/Fertility And Childlessness* by Louise Ann Wilson, photograph by Lizzie Coombes. Bottom Image: from *Rainham Hall, London* by Greer Crawley, photograph by Sophia Schorr-Kon/ National Trust.

CONTENT

3
EDITORIAL
GREER CRAWLEY

4
MEET THE TEAM
PATRICIA (TRISH) GRASHAM & BRAD CALEB LEE

5
GREEK THEATRE DESIGNERS ASSOCIATION
MARIA CHANIOTAKI- KAFOUSIA
&
RESPONSE TO *NO GATEKEEPERS*, ARTICLE BY PAUL BURGESS [BLUE PAGES NO. 2, 2015]
MICHAEL SPENCER

6
BRAVE NEW WORLDS
KATE LANE

8
WARNSCALE: A LAND MARK WALK REFLECTING ON IN/FERTILITY AND CHILDLESSNESS
LOUISE ANN WILSON

10
ELECTRA: THE LAST BLOOD [AND ...THE CLOSED BANKS]
ANDREAS SKOURTIS & MEERA OSBORNE

12
ARTISTS AS SCHOLARS: SERIOUSLY?
EFROSINI PROTOPAPA

13
FLOATING CITIES LECTURE
GIA WOLFF

14
THE RAKE AS SCENOGRAPHY
PETER RUTHVEN HALL

18
PERFORMANCE AND CURATION IN SOUTH AFRICA:
TWO PERSPECTIVES
MARIA BRUDER

20
ON BEING FERAL...
DERECK HARRIS & MICHAEL SPENCER

22
RAINHAM HALL, LONDON
GREER CRAWLEY

24
PQ 2015: THE LIVE EXPERIENCE
THE VIEW FROM HERE

28
WAVE, WEEPING WINDOW & DRESSED BY ANGELS
EXHIBITIONS

30
GREAT SHAKESPEAREAN ACTORS: BURBAGE TO BRANAGH
BOOK REVIEW BY HARRIET DEVINE

31
WORLD SCENOGRAPHY: 1990-2005
BOOK REVIEW BY ELIZABETH WRIGHT

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EDITORIAL BY GREER CRAWLEY

THE SCENOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE

This summer at the Hampton Court Flower show, I was amused and bemused by the numerous references to theatre, staging and narrative in the displays. There has been a long tradition of perceiving landscape as theatre and it is evident that the relationship between theatre and landscape still has a powerful hold on the artistic imagination.

Mark Davy, the founding director of Futurecity; a culture and placemaking consultancy writing in the summer edition of The Theatres Trust's Theatres Magazine describes the 'New landscapes of opportunity' and the need for 'theatricalising places'. Davy is not, however, suggesting the naïve borrowing of theatrical references as seen at Hampton Court but is speaking of the animation of a place, through an understanding of 'live'.

This sense of the 'live' as the 'lived' inhabitation of a real and metaphorical landscape is evident in many of the articles in this issue of Blue Pages.



There is the raked stage, which like landscape shapes the performers' movement and relationships; the metaphorical landscape of forms invented by Kate Lane and her collaborators; and the 'landscape of people' who created with their personal items and stories The View From Here: the Live experience the UK student exhibit at PQ.

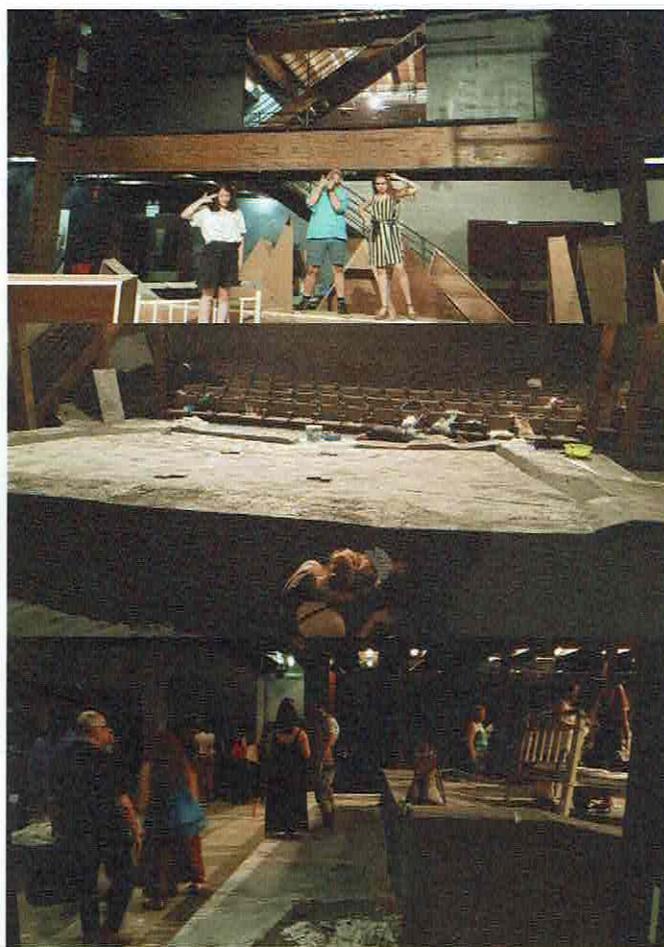
For the participants in Louise Ann Wilson's walking performance Warnscale, landscape became a place for reflection and transition. Through their walking maps, words, images, and different scales of looking, they explored how the physical landscape could provide metaphors for the experience of childlessness.

In the scenographic landscape, performance, communication and engagement come together to create community. Both the Feral Space student residency and Andreas Skourtis and Meera Osborne's experience at the Technis Theatre Frynichou in Athens are examples of the creation of a sense of community through lived experience. Further evidence of the value of theatre in creating a communal landscape is provided by Maria Bruder's report on Performance and Curation in South Africa. She describes how projects like the Infecting the City Public Art Festival, an annual festival in Cape Town are activating public places and providing a public forum for debate while projects such as Right Inside by Tebogo Munyai are examining the curator's role in opening up channels for dialogue and collaboration in the community.

This was the curatorial position adopted at Rainham Hall in the London Borough of Havering. Creative producer Sam Willis, the National Trust, Studio Weave and students from Central Saint Martins worked in collaboration with the local community to invest the hall and its landscape with old and new stories of inhabitation.

All these projects illustrate Davy's contention that in his 'new landscapes of opportunity', theatre can play a critical role in helping people to 'breathe life and spirit' into the process of forging their community.





ELECTRA: THE LAST BLOOD [AND ...THE CLOSED BANKS]

BY ANDREAS SKOURTIS & MEERA OSBORNE

Electra: The Last Blood, based on Sophocles' *Electra*, adapted and directed by Konstantinos Ntellas, was commissioned and produced by the Athens and Epidaurus Festival 2015. It was staged in Technis Theatre Fryni-chou, in Athens Historic Center. Andreas (Set and Costume Designer) and Meera (Assistant Designer) met in London, almost a month after, to discuss and reflect on what proved to be an exceptional experience: Two weeks before the opening, the Greek economy almost collapsed; two days before the opening night one of the actors badly injured her knee. Here are some fragments of thoughts together with some imagery of the scenographic landscape they have created.

CHAOS AND PRODUCTION

A: Everybody wanted it to happen no matter what. After the country fell apart we lost 80% of our budget and support, it wasn't until two hours before the performance, when Fanny, one of the leading actors, arrived back from hospital that we knew the production would go ahead. She had to commute to and from the hospital daily and perform in a wheelchair – that of course had to be added last minute to the set. Huge preparation. A long period of research that lasted 3 months, then 3 months of final designing, and full time rehearsals. There was already an overwhelming feeling about the budget not being large enough. When we thought we had surpassed all the problems and were ready for the final two production weeks, the government made the announcements that they would hold a referendum and the banks closed. We then had to continue the production with one fifth of the budget, not knowing how it would work. Immediate changes we had to make were: working 24/7 and asking everybody to work without getting paid. Finally at what we thought was the end, an actress slipped and fell off the stage and then we had to deal with that factor as well.

M: Although unusual in some respects, this was not a wholly unfamiliar process of chaos and working too hard, not knowing if the show will happen.

M: The difference was in the context that this was happening to the whole country. There was so much chaos outside the theatre; we created a bubble to work in, which of course kept bursting. This felt like a reverse to the stress that often follows a production. There was no respite in the work at hand, which was partly because of the budget and disorganisation. But also because the reasons for these issues were not isolated to the production, but were country wide, so when we did leave the theatre, the same monetary and disorganisation persisted constantly.

WORKING ETHICALLY

M: The conditions that we worked under in *Electra*, in a way make sense. The sense wasn't necessarily rational, but the conditions felt very much shared between everyone on the team.

A: The production acted as a shelter, physically and psychologically throughout July in Athens. Did we need the show to get through that time? I don't think I would be prepared to say let's not go for it. Even if the project was in a more extreme scenario. The production was wanted – it never felt irrelevant. The actual context of the play has a lot to do with it, *Electra* is about power and justice, and it is current in a metaphorical way to what is happening now. Not only was the show sold out. But not one ticket was cancelled. When you suddenly have a limit of £47 that you can withdraw daily, knowing your €20 ticket could be refunded and the fact that no one did, played a role in clarifying the importance of putting the show on. Three things; a respect for the audience; a belief in the work; a passion for the process. At times it didn't feel like we had a choice about whether the show would happen. This wasn't just happening to us, it was happening to all the shows in the festival, national and international. It was the same for all the productions; some 10% of the festival's productions were cancelled. We had every reason to say we were not doing it. Despite the fact that we knew we weren't getting paid, every member of the core team still had the motivation to put the show on. During the production no one was forced to do the show – does this make it okay? It's not only the artistic team, it was the festival and the managers, they all could have said no, but no one did. It was a total yes. It was almost surreal; the production of *Electra* felt like it was beyond any red line. Someone sets a limit. Where does a designer set a limit? It's a flexible line, it has to do with collaboration and love, and it has to do with so many things. This is immensely problematic when trying to figure out a fair working practice and personal methodology.

SCENOGRAPHY AND COMPROMISE

A: The hardest thing was not the long hours, but for the designer, the hardest is to feel that the design is not a compromise. This forced an instinctual approach to the decisions that were based on the original design, but without some of the material elements that were first conceived. Learning from having to adjust, to cheaper solutions, within a very small time frame. I ended up liking the set even more, without some of the elements that were included in the initial design.

M: The relationship of designer and director. Scenography is invisible and not always read as Scenography.

A: This was a challenging project for both director and designer. If the collaboration between us had not been so good, there is no way that the production would have happened.

M: The rhythm of the performance, and the interaction between all the elements created a dance that carried the rehearsals through, even when everyone was feeling terrible, once we did a run, it was almost hypnotic, the rhythm created a togetherness that was vital for the show. The materiality of the performance was complex and not just physical.

A: It was one of the initial concepts to create a world that was about all different materials and objects, becoming one texture. We were hoping to create this through the use of soil and volcanic earth, without the budget this wasn't possible, but this one texture still happened, even without this specific material. The light and the sound were central. The sound wasn't affected by the budget, however the lighting was heavily compromised. Nonetheless Melina Mascha, the lighting designer, was able to adjust to what we had available, based on what we had talked about for months and months. She went in and implemented the same concept without the time or the right amount of lights.

A: I admired Melina's ability never to think she wasn't going to do it, that wasn't an option. I felt more stressed than her as there was no budget left for masking. When she showed me what she had prepared, I realised that we didn't need the masking, and that she had understood the constraints of the production, from many levels.

WHY DO WE MAKE THEATRE?

A: It can be a very frightening question, in terms of professionalism. I can't imagine any designer not asking this question at some point –or all the time. What do you think would happen to the UK theatre if one day the banks closed? You know, 99% of Greeks thought this was impossible in Greece. *Electra* was a choice. We decided/we needed to do it. Did we need to protect ourselves from the outer architecture, what was happening in Greece, the architecture of the city? The theatre acted as a shell within which we were able to express ourselves and explore less immediate events, like the referendum. Was this necessary? Is it possible to make theatre that responds immediately to cataclysmic events that happen just outside the building, or do we need space to breathe and think in order to create a production? The actual Scenography of the production wasn't the set and costume, but was the fact that we decided to live in that building, rather than getting immersed within the city.

M: The space that is created is in relation to the whole act of doing a production, from how we felt waking up in the morning, to staying up all night in order to finish scenographic elements.

A: I am very happy that it happened. I would have expected myself not to be, but quite simply I really liked the project. I don't think it was just a feeling that it would have been a defeat if it hadn't happened; it was actually a really fulfilling project and a great learning experience. At the same time, I don't think it was such an important theatre production that it is going to change the whole world, I am talking from the perspective of an artist on a particular team. However hundreds of people chose to pay and attend our theatre show, rather than sitting at home watching the news while worrying about the political turbulence, so world changing it might not have been, but a break from the everyday it definitely provided.

M: Joy and escapism: poetry of any form is vital, especially in time of crisis and turmoil.

ELECTRA: THE LAST BLOOD

ATHENS AND EPIDAUROS FESTIVAL 2015,
TECHNIS THEATRE FRYNICHOU, ATHENS
13-16 JULY 2015

Director and Adaptation: Konstantinos Ntellas

Assistant Director: Elena Georgiou

Translation in Modern Greek: Giorgos Cheimonas

Scenography: Andreas Skourtis

Assistant Designers: Meera Osborne, Nefeli Sotiraki, Konstantina Mardiki

Lighting Design: Melina Mascha

Original Music/Soundscape: Yiannis Angellakos, Cotti K

Dramaturgy: Anna Mavroleon

Andreas Skourtis is an Architect and Scenographer, Lecturer in Scenography at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Meera Osborne is a Scenographer, 2015 graduate of BA Theatre Practice – Design for the Stage, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Left Page: Top-Bottom: 'Getting In, Designer and Assistant Designers stressed' [Photograph by Elena Georgiou] 'Texturing: the Director and the Choreographer on duty as scenic artists, 03:00 am.' & '...just after the opening show, audience stays in the inner scenographic bubble' [Photography by Andreas Skourtis]. This Page: Top-Bottom: '...from the "pre-Wheelchair" version rehearsals' [Photography by Andreas Skourtis].

