

I am hamlet

This is a design proposal for a devised piece taking place at the Vaults under Waterloo. The piece is based on Shakespeare's Tragedy of Hamlet in which the audience experience themselves as Hamlet. In this document I will describe the outlines of the performance, inspiration and design ideas.

Director: Geoff Church

Designer: Eva Björg Harðardóttir

The Concept

Hamlet - hero and coward - homicidal and suicidal – forced by circumstance to take action - paralysed into inaction by conscience and confusion.

During this immersive installation/performance, the audience should see the world through Hamlet's eyes, and see themselves through the eyes of Hamlet.

During the piece the audience will both explore the space on their own, as well as witness performances that are based on specific scenes from the play. The experience should be a continuous journey from beginning to end. The installations and performances take place in several different spaces at the Vaults and will be connected with corridors.

Themes and watchwords for the design

1) The theatre is both a confined space and a space of infinite possibilities but it is haunted with 'bad dreams' – the nightmare that Hamlet lives through.

HAMLET: O God, I could be bounded in a nut-shell and count myself a king of infinite space - were it not that I have bad dreams.

2) The audience is inside the 'mind's eye' of Hamlet

HAMLET: My father!--methinks I see my father.

HORATIO: Where, my lord?

HAMLET: In my mind's eye, Horatio.

The experience

The experience is divided into an installation based preshow where the audience can explore and wander around the space. Then two main parts where a performance takes place, with an interval in between, and at last an epilogue.

The Venue

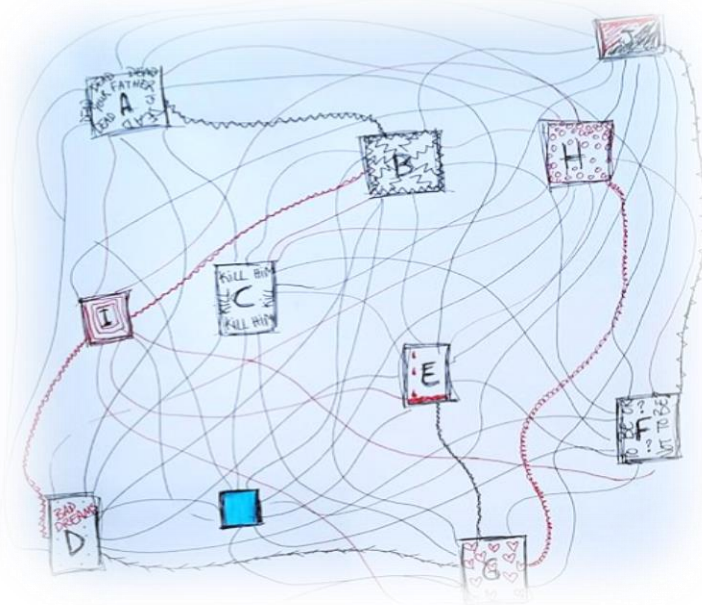
The performance is set at the Vaults, a maze-like multi-disciplinary arts space located in London in the underground world of Waterloo station.



The Design

The idea behind the design is to create a mapped out journey through the Vaults that should make the audience feel like they are inside Hamlet's mind. They witness incidents, hear his thoughts and feel his confusion throughout the storyline of the play, from the death of his father to his own death. The atmosphere is most of the time dark and chaotic, and at times it should intimate the feeling of being on a ride through a house of terror. The experience should be individual, but at the same time people should feel safe so therefore the audience will never be alone, but sometimes be divided into smaller groups.

But what does the inside of a mind look like? I imagine the mind being like endless boxes filled with thoughts, and each box is then connected to all the other boxes. Some of the boxes can be pleasant to be in, while others are terribly uncomfortable.



What does the inside of a mind look like? What is happening in each box? How are the boxes connected?

I imagine the installations and actions take place in different spaces within the Vaults and being connected with corridors which should give the feeling of being inside Hamlet's mind. A main theme throughout the whole design is to leave as much as possible of the actual space just as it is, and add things to it, rather than building sets and walls that cover the space. In my mind you have to be extremely careful when designing and making an immersive performance. When the actors are just beside you and you actually can touch the set, look behind it and see that it is not "real", the "theatre magic" can easily be lost. In my opinion less can certainly be more when it comes to designing an immersive performance. Choosing convenient space, using dramatic lighting and what is already in the space rather than building massive sets and covering up the space is something that I think makes it more believable and "real".

Corridors between spaces

There are few corridors at the Vaults that can be used for the performance, but it would also be needed to build a few more to connect the spaces. The idea behind the corridors is that they should represent Hamlet's thoughts and confusion. In the corridors, the audience are not supposed to know exactly what is happening. The experience should be dark, chaotic, and become more uncomfortable and confusing as they go through more corridors. The scenes and installations in the spaces between the corridors should feel much brighter, clearer and more memorable.

Mirror / sound corridors

The first corridor the audience walk through, is completely straight and covered with big square mirrors from floor to ceiling. They are all unbroken. As the audience walk down the corridor they barely hear a monologue by Hamlet through speakers, placed in different places in the corridor.

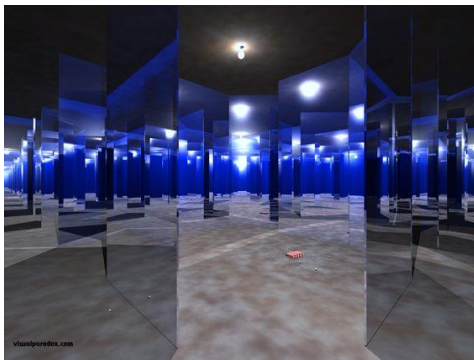
In the next corridor, few of the mirrors are cracked and others are bent or twisted. The corridor is not perfectly straight, there is less light, and you can hear a monologue by Hamlet very loudly through speakers placed in different places in the corridor.

The third mirror corridor is completely chaotic and maze-like. The corridor is crooked, mirrors are bent or broken, noise is mixed to Hamlet's monologues and there is a limited amount of light.

The mirror corridors should immerse the audience in Hamlet's speeches and give them no opportunity not to see themselves all over the space.



Experimentations and first ideas of mirror corridors.



Inspiring images for mirror corridors.

Corridors using live feed cameras / sound recordings / projections

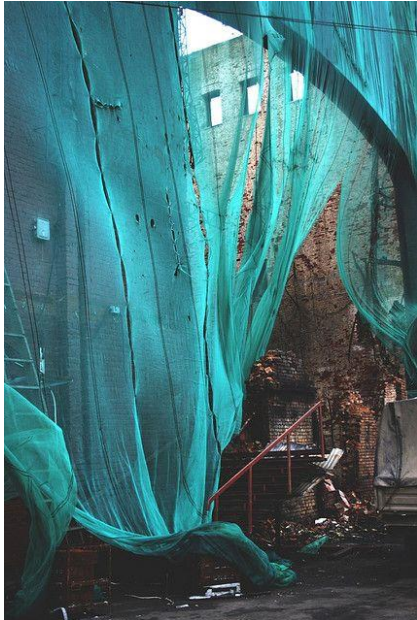
Another idea for corridors is to use live feed camera, and place it behind the audience and project onto the back wall of a dark corridor so that when the audience walk the corridor they see someone walking in front of them, but don't realize until they come closer that they are seeing themselves. Recording of footsteps would be played in speakers placed in different locations.



A modelbox that represents a corridor where recordings from a live feed camera placed behind the audience, are projected onto the back wall of the corridor.

"Haunted" Corridors

Corridors where thin, flickering curtains hang from the ceiling, shadows and sounds are used to give the expression that someone is there, but when you look back, no one is there.



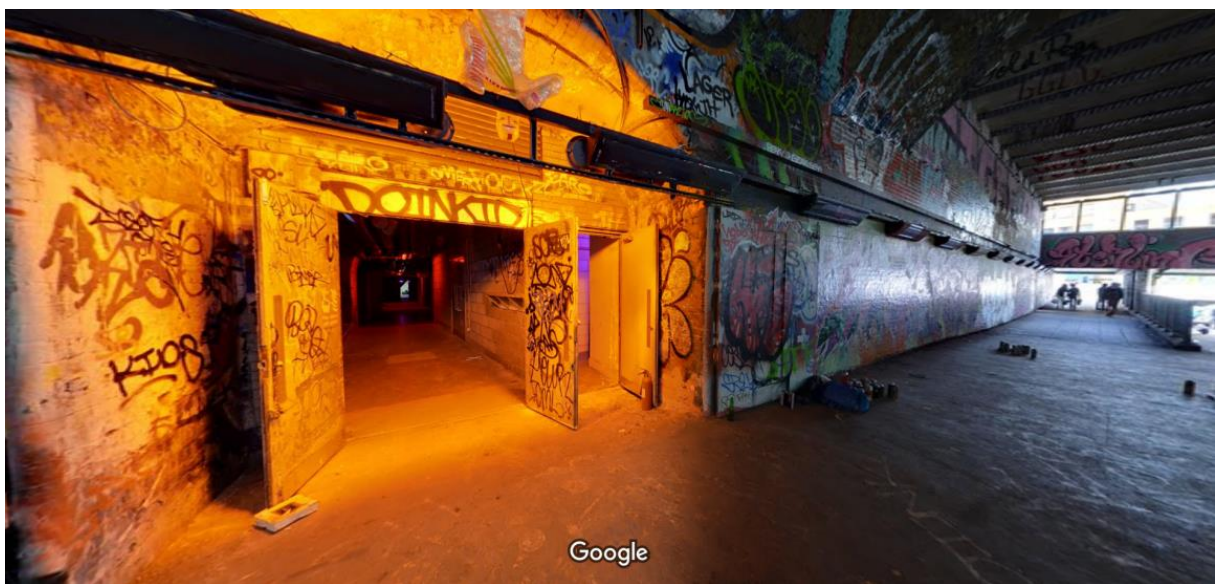
Inspiring images.

Storyline

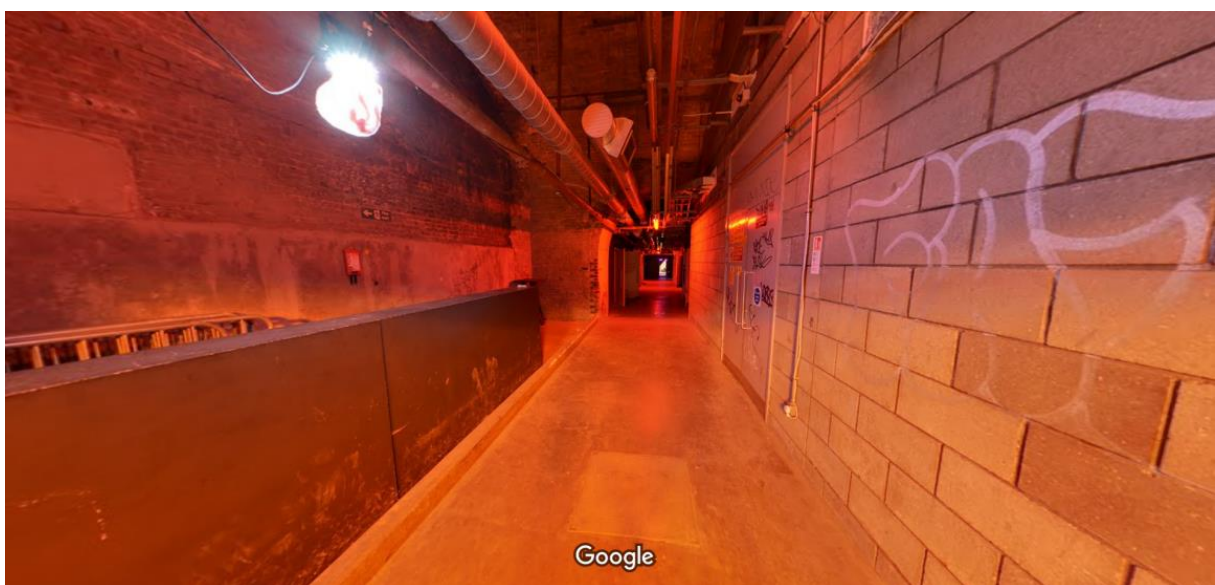
Arrival

The audience enter the space through the **Vaults main entrance on Leake Street** and come into the **foyer 1** which should be very dark, and thin curtains or fabric hanging down from the ceiling. The audience is lead into the **Vaults Kitchen 2** where they wait for the performance to start and can buy drinks at the bar. The space is empty apart from the bar made of weathered wood and a few high tables around the room. Rather cheerful music is playing, not to loud though.

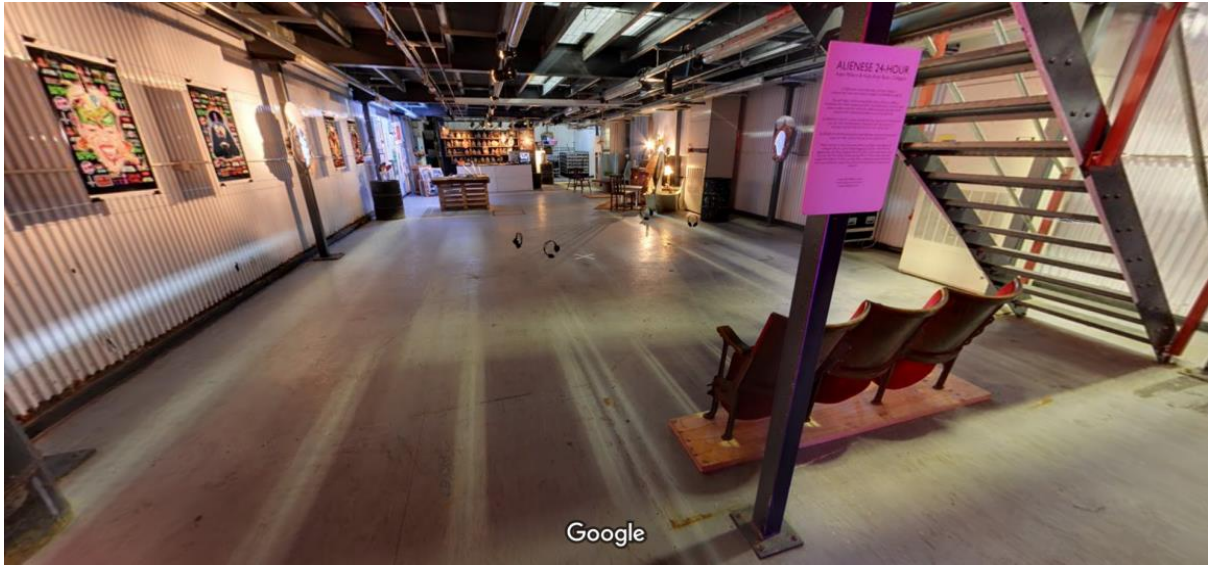
Everyone gets a crown / piece of costume???



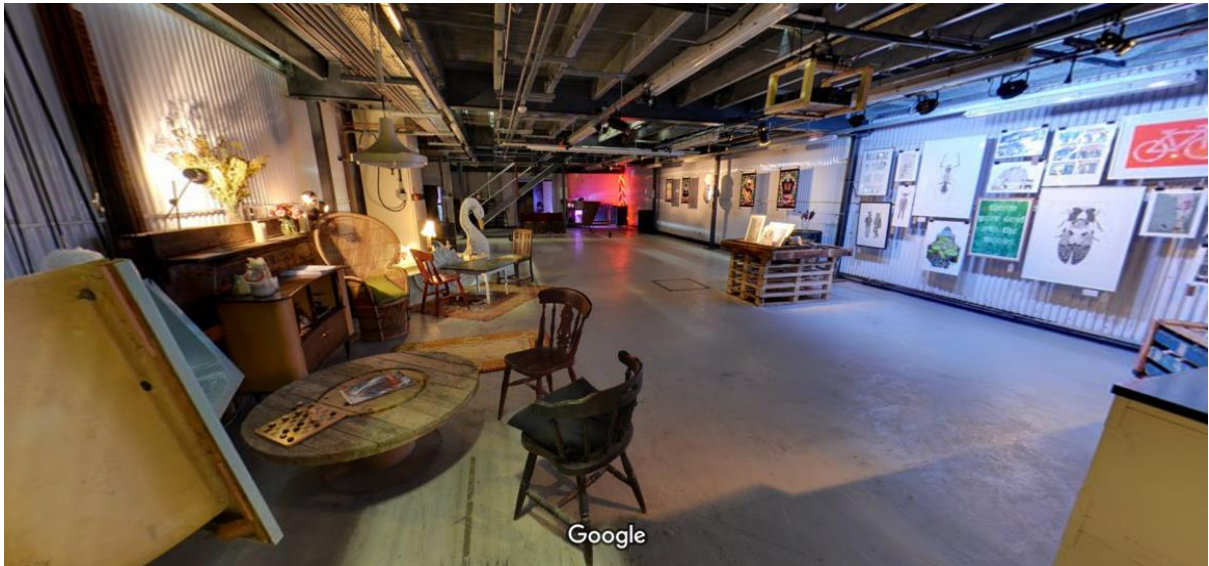
The Vaults main entrance on Leake Street.



The foyer as it is now.



Google



Google

The Vaults kitchen as it is now.



Examples of how the bar and tables could look like.

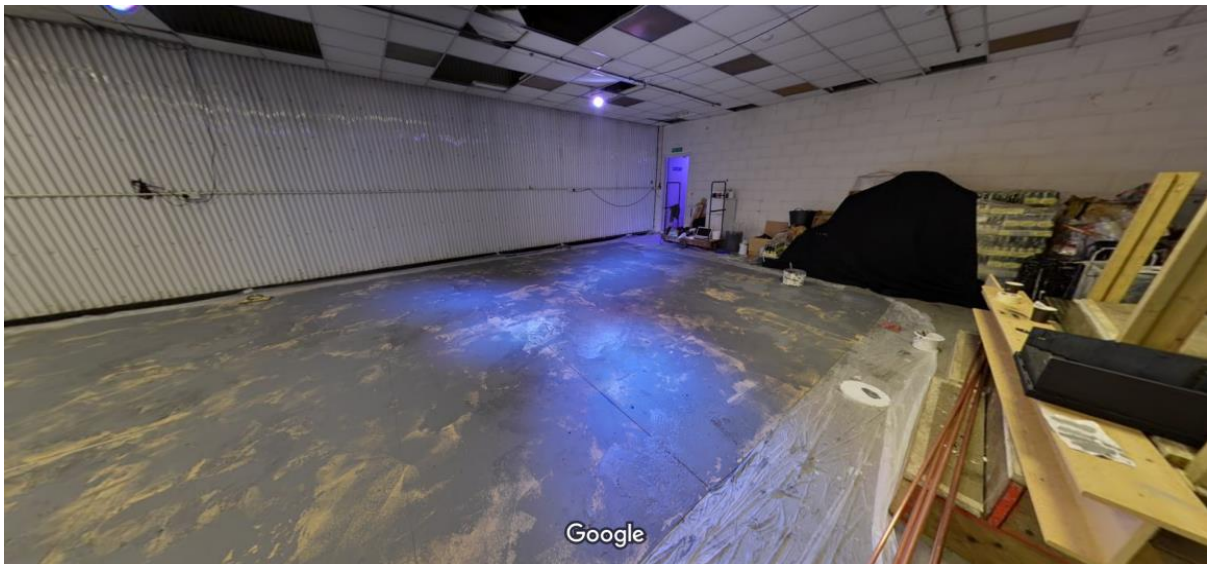
PROLOGUE / CAROUSEL

At a certain point of time, the music slowly changes, becomes darker. A guide, dressed in black suit, enters and leads people, few at a time, out of the room, through **an empty corridor** that gradually becomes darker, and into a **dark space**. There the guide tells the audience: "Your father is dead."

Now the audience is allowed to explore a carousel of few different immersive installation-based experiences which set the scene of the play. No actual performance happens but the audience witness incidents that are referred to in the play. The installations are connected with corridors that immerse the audience with Hamlet's speeches and thoughts, as described earlier.

Experience 1 - My mother weds my uncle days after my father's death

A dark room, **the Gallery**. **3** A single candle lit. In the middle of the floor stands an open casket. The body is shown. There is fog in the room and dim lighting. In a distance, a wedding is taking place. Gradually the light comes up and the audience can see the couple. Then the light dims again.



The Gallery as it is now.

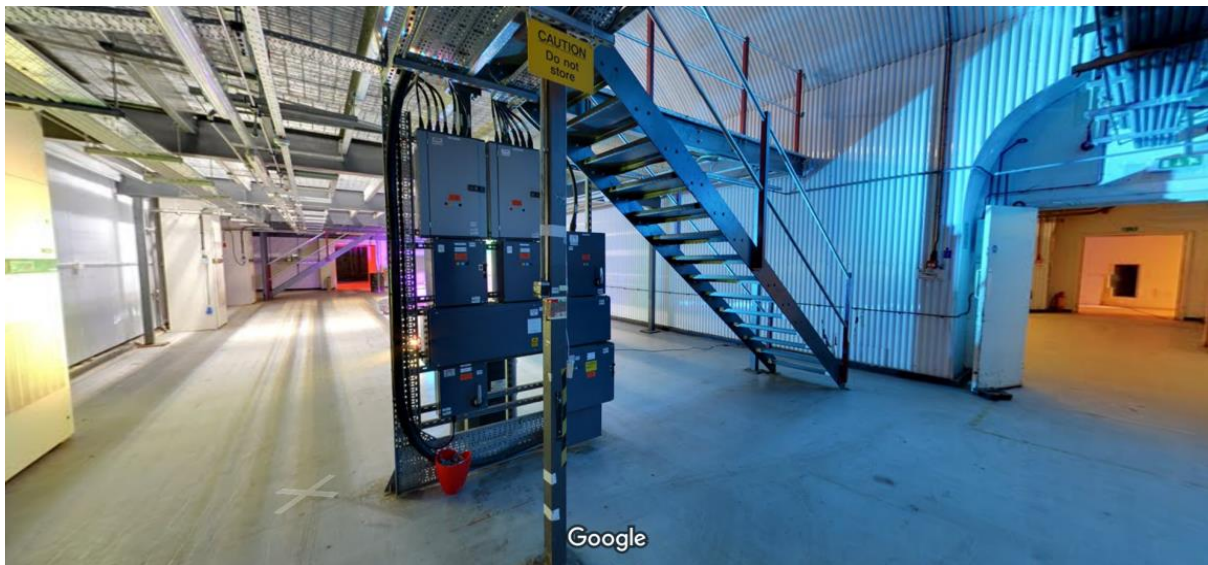


Inspiring images.

Corridor 1

Experience 2 - The Gost of my Father

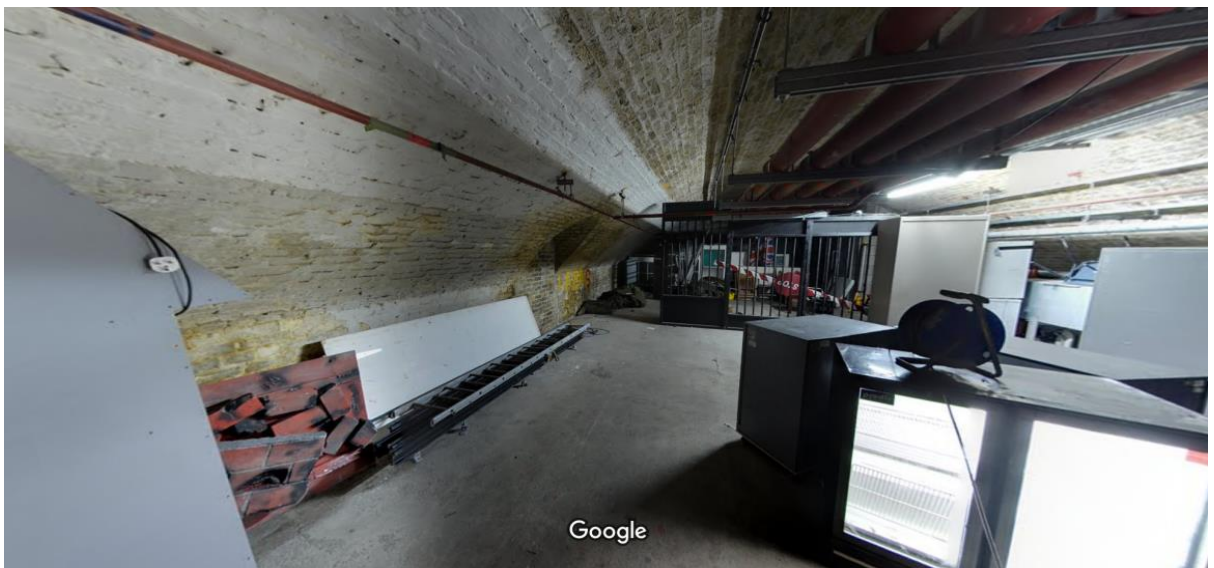
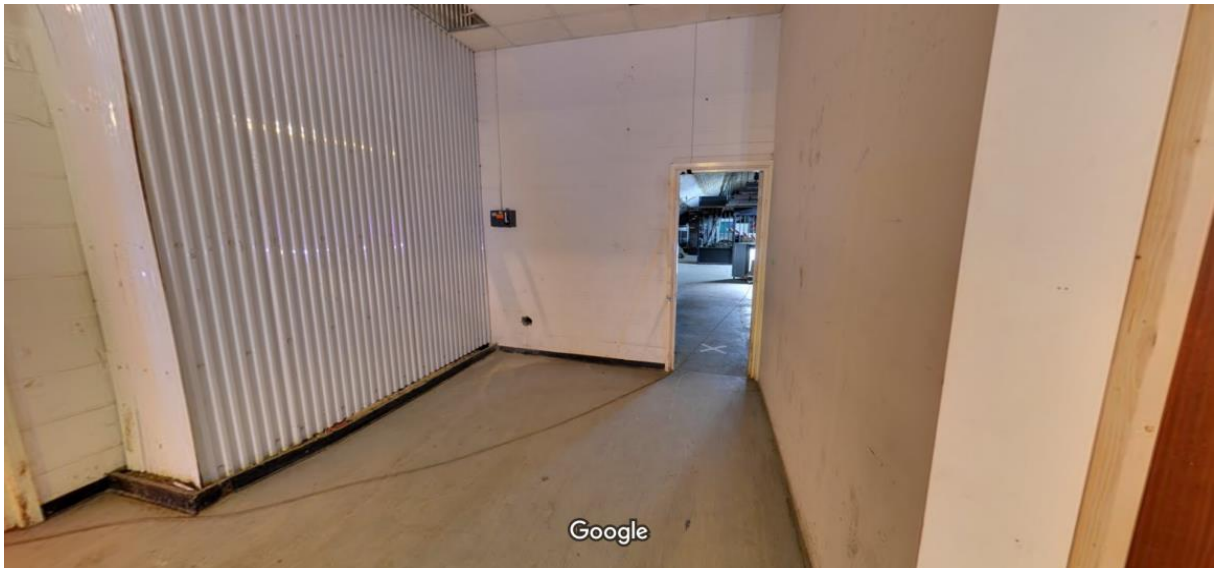
A dark room, **the Big Mezziane 4**. Smoke. Old Hamlet's ghost appears and tells the audience that they need to revenge his death. This should be scary.



Corridor 2

Experience 3 - Courting Ophelia

The audience sees Ophelia in her room, **Lucy's Room 5**. She is in love, and is reading Hamlet's love letters out loud. The floor and bed is covered with flowers.



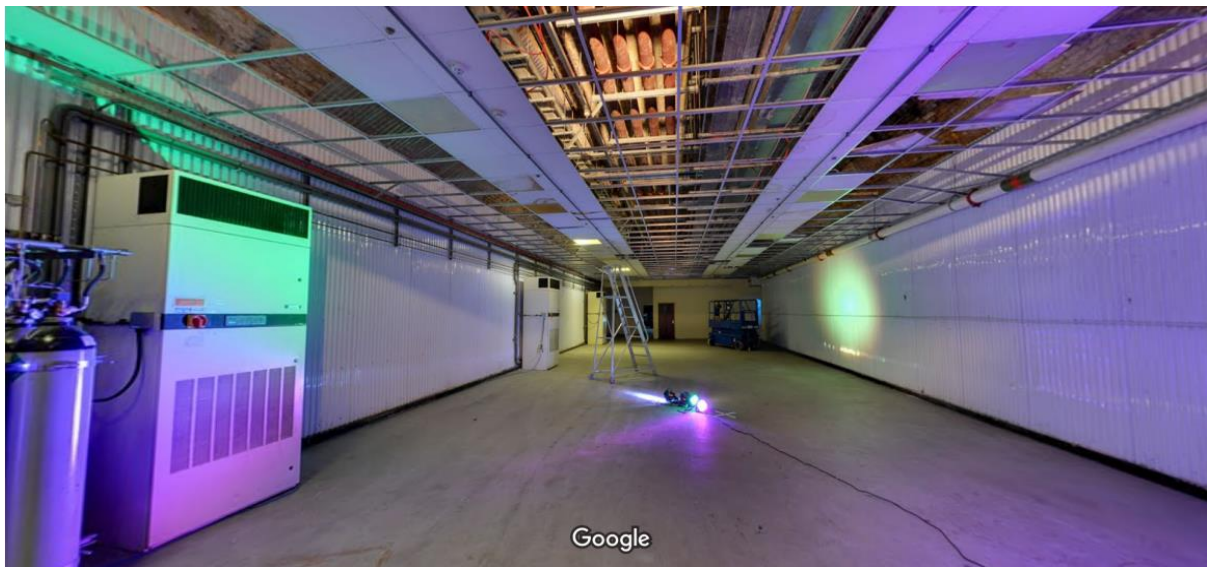
The space as it is now and inspiring images.

Corridor 3

Experience 4 - In the mind's eye

The Gas Bottle Room. 6 A small space, a chair, a large grey sheet of glass. Above you, a light swings back and forth. When the light is on your side, all you see in the pane of glass is your own face, when it swings away you see on the other side a person facing you. They stare ahead looking into your eyes. Appearing and disappearing as your own face is overlaid on to theirs. Again and again, they utter Hamlet's most famous words: "To be or not to be, that is the question." Again and again the audience see their own face and that of the other, as the words echo in your ears.

OR USE THE NEW VERSION WITH MANY ACTORS?



The Gas Bottle Room as it is now.



A sketch and a model box representing the room.

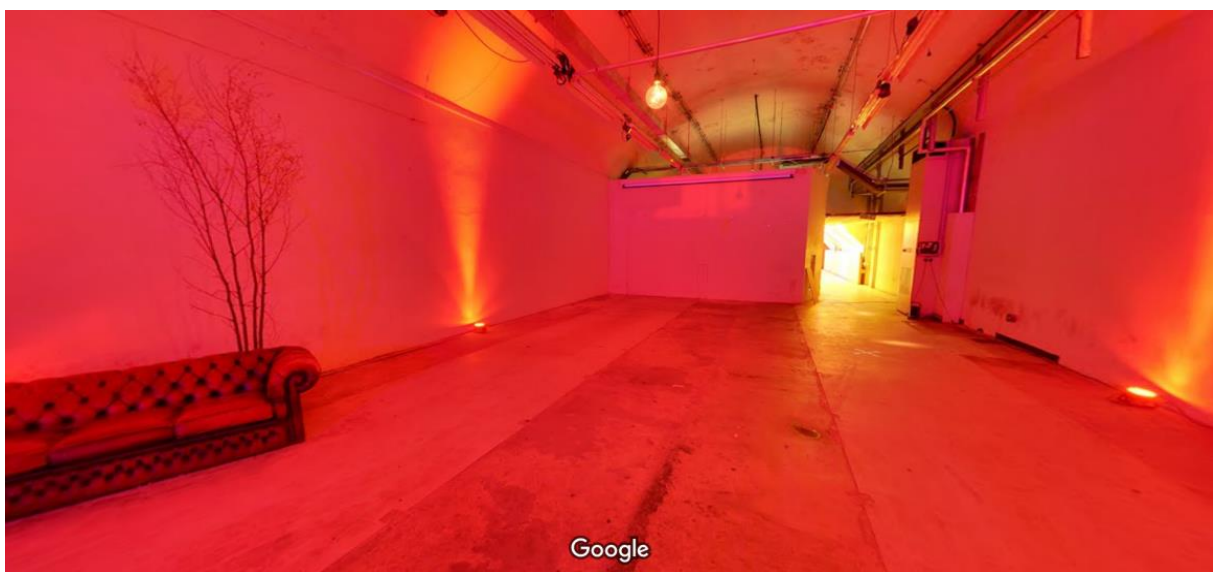
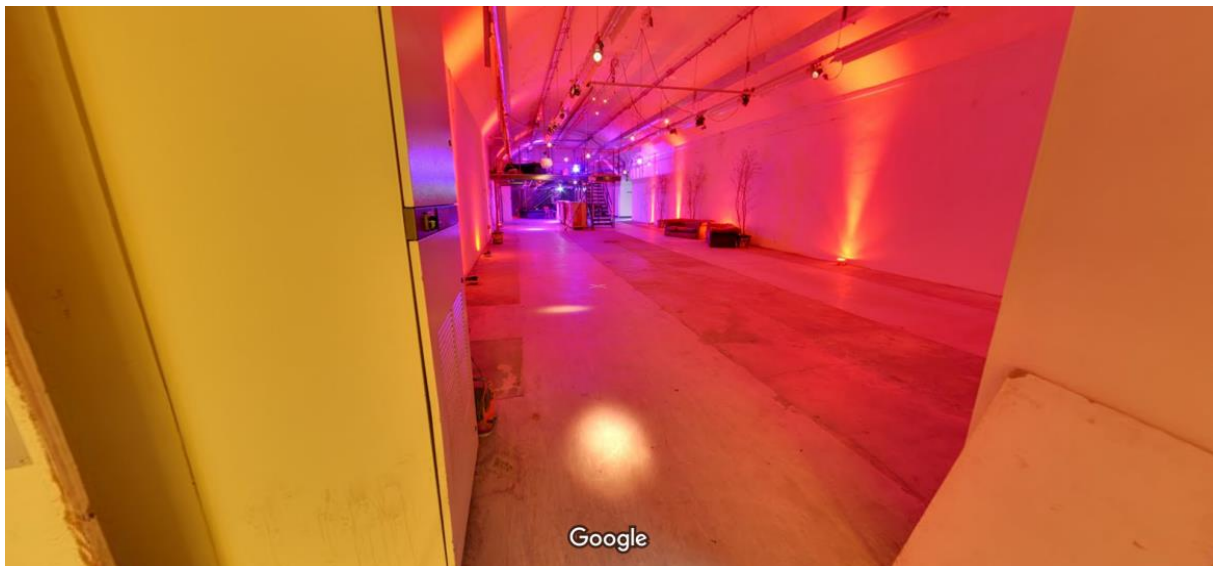
PART ONE – “BAD DREAMS”

The audience come through the fourth corridor and enter into **the Arch, 7** a space where there is a kind of an outdoor atmosphere a small stage and a red carpet.

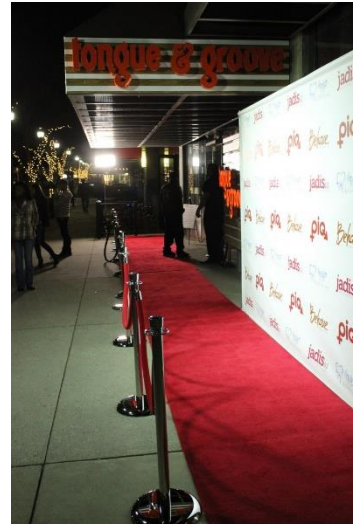
The curators of this section – the witnesses who host the experience and let us into Hamlet’s mind - are **Rosencrantz** and **Guildenstern**. Now a performance happens, the audience is involved and talked to. Scenes which will form the basis of the storyline:

- Rosencranz and Guildenstern’s arrival - Ref: Act 2 sc 2
- The actors’ arrival – Ref: Act 2 Sc 2
- The play within the play Ref: Act 3 Sc 2
- The closet scene/ murder of Polonius Ref: Act 3 sc 4
- Exile to England Ref: Act 4 sc 2

A BIT UNCLEAR HERE – SHOULD THIS ALL HAPPEN AS ONE SCENE IN ONE ROOM? I THINK THAT WOULD WORK WELL.



The Arch as the space is now.



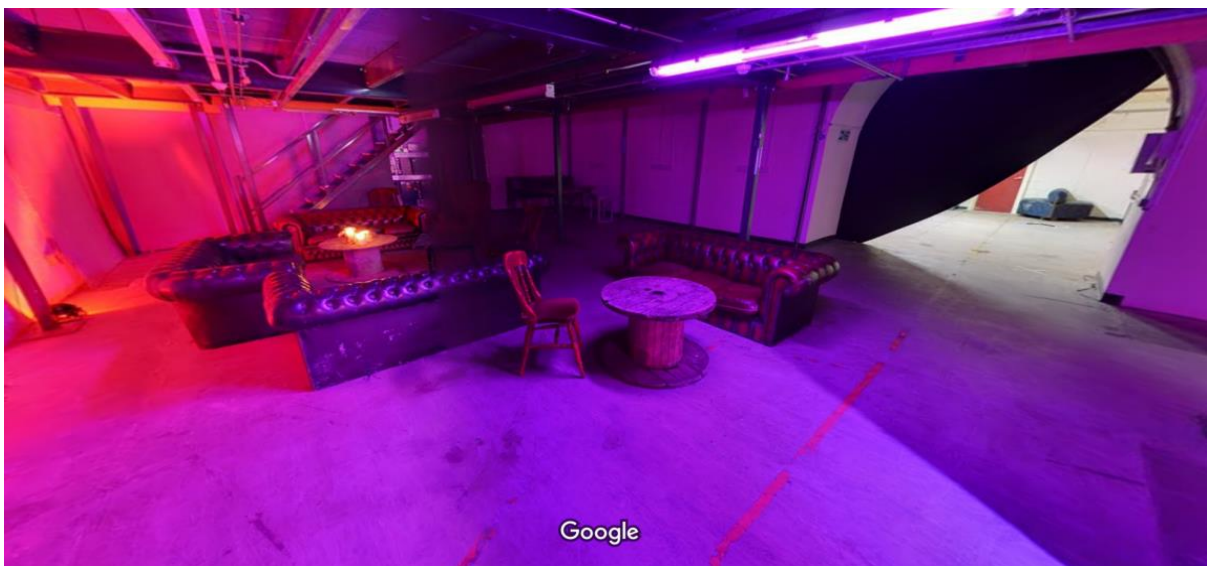
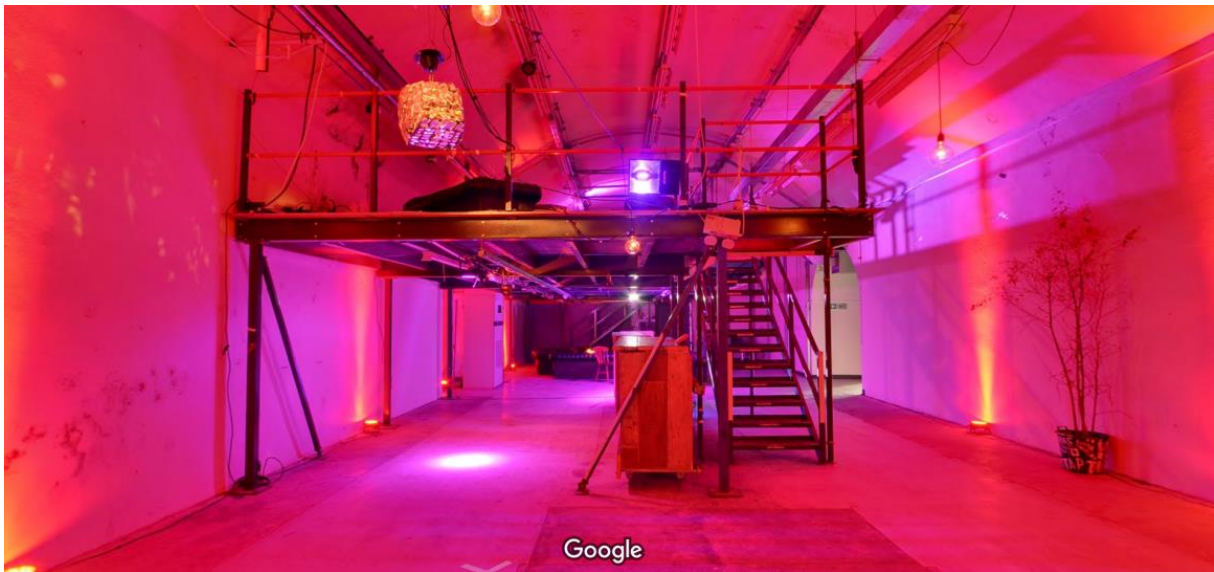
Inspiration for the group of actors.



Inspiring photos for Part One.

INTERVAL

The interval should feel like a part of the whole experience. During the interval, the audience is lead further into the **Arch** and the **Oublette, 8** which now should give the feeling of entering a medieval market, but still modern looking. There should be stalls where you can buy food, drinks and souvenirs, you should smell different spices, a music band would perform live music and dancers dance around the audience. On the upper floor should be rough wooden tables and benches to sit on. Fairy lights should hang from the ceiling.



The Arch and the Oublette as the space is now.



A music band would play cheerful music. Design by EBH.



Examples of the atmosphere I would like to bring to the interval.



Example of wooden tables and benches.

PART TWO – “THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY”

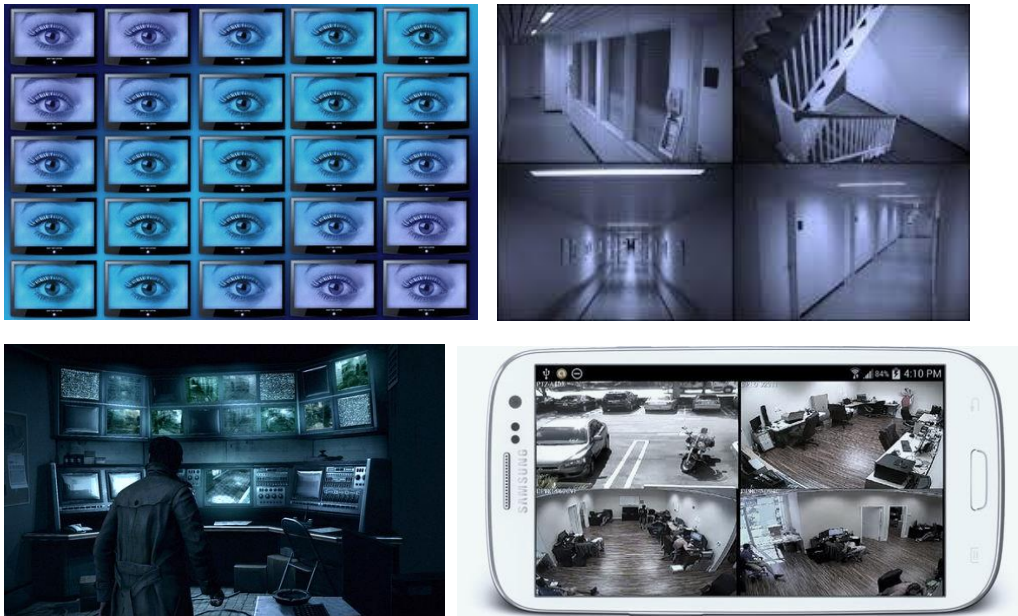
The second half of the performance is much darker than the first half. The corridors between spaces become much more intense and chaotic. A few installations and a main performance.

I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THE ORDER OF SCENES HERE...

Corridor 5

Spy Room

After the Interval the audience is lead through Corridor 5 and into the installation-based “spy room” in the **Gas Bottle room 9**. The room is filled with surveillance camera monitors, where the audience would see recordings of themselves from earlier parts of the performance.



Inspiring images.

Corridor 6

Claudius praying

In the **Big Mezziane 10**, the audience is given an opportunity to kill Claudius. A man kneels in front of you praying. Several other figures, dressed in grey stand by whispering...“Now might you do it pat, now whilst he is praying. Do it now and so he goes to heaven; and so you are revenged.”

One of them offers you a hand-gun.



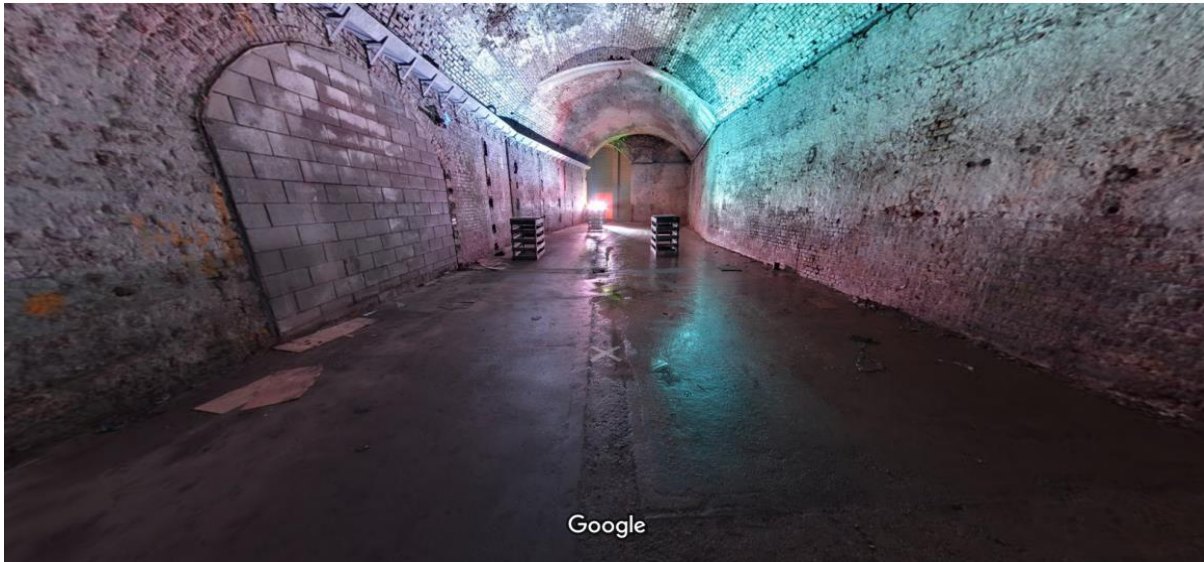
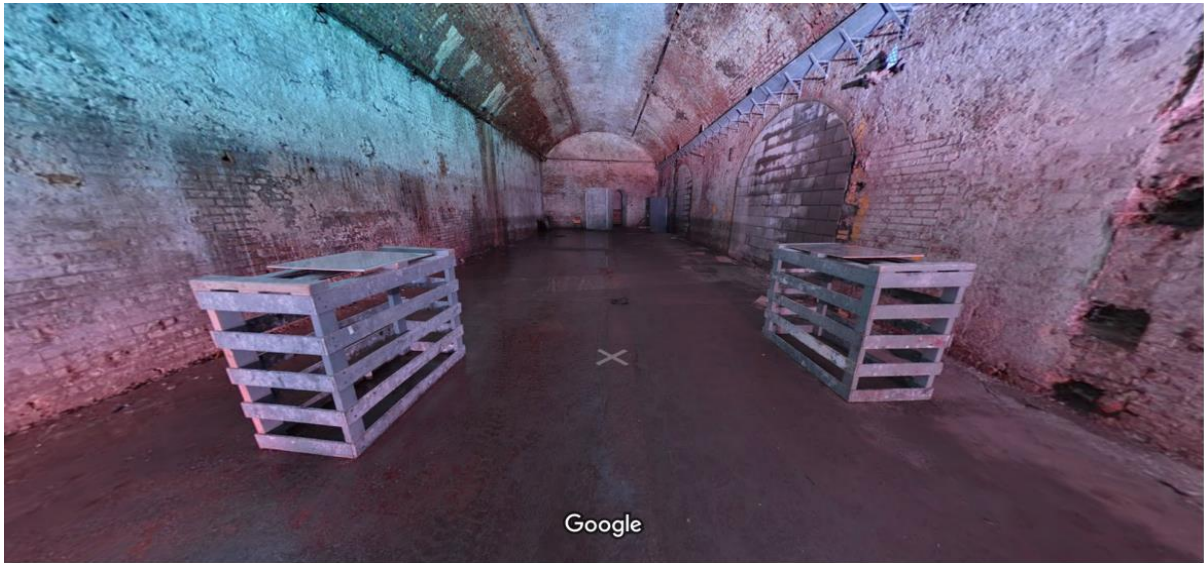
Corridor 7

Inside the grave

This section takes place inside a grave in the **Long Dry One** space **11**. This is the main performance of Part Two. The curator of this section – the witnesses who host the experience and let us into Hamlet’s mind – are the **Gravedigger** and **Horatio**. They talk to the audience; the gravedigger is a philosopher. Scenes which will form the basis of this section:

- GRAVEDIGGER – Ref: Act 5 sc 1
- Murder in Exile – Ref: ACT 5 SC 2
- CLAUDIUS O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven; + HAMLET ‘Now might I do it, pat...’ – Ref: ACT 3 SC 3
- HAMLET: ‘How all occasions do inform against me...’ ACT 4 sc4
- To be or not to be – speech – Ref: ACT
- Brief symbolic version of the mass murder in Act 5 Sc 2





Photos of the Long dry one as the space is now.



Corridor 8

Ophelia's Death

In the **Short Wet One** room **12**, the audience sees Ophelia drowned in a bathtub.



EPILOGUE – THE REST IS SILENCE

Corridor 9

The last corridor (9) that the audience walk through are will be created on the **upper floor above the Vaults kitchen 13**. This will be the last mirror corridor. Very confusing, symbolic version of the mass murder, blood on the floor, broken mirrors, noise, Hamlet's voice coming from speakers all over the space.

HAMLET (from Act 5 Sc 3)

There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow.
If it be now,
'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be
now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the
readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he
leaves, what is't to leave betimes?

HAMLET

O, I die, Horatio;
The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit:
I cannot live to hear the news from England;
But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice;
So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.

Dies

HORATIO

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince:
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!



At the end, the corridor leads the audience into the same room as where the performance started. The final scene should be a mirrored image of the opening scene. A dark room, **the Gallery 14**. A single candle lit. In the middle of the floor stands an open casket. There is fog in the room and dim lighting so you have to come closer to see what is in the casket. When you look into the casket, you see your own face in a mirror. In a distance, there is an open door leading to a corridor. Gradually the light brightens in the corridor, the audience walk into the light. The corridor leads out to the street where the performance started **15**.

