*Turfed* – Hackney Downs Studios – 9 June 2014

What do a homeless child and a football pitch have in common? They are both *Turfed*. Drawing analogies between football and homelessness director Renato Rocha tries to draw attention to both.

The audience walks into a warehouse. The football theme is obvious: nets full of footballs are strewn around, locker-room benches are lit by 'Home' and 'Away' signs. The homelessness theme emerges: a girl curled next to a suitcase. We wander around, familiarise ourselves, then someone speaks.

Installations and choreographed routines are punctured by spoken word. One of the performers, kicked out by his dad, says “I’m not learning to appreciate home; I’m learning simply not to need it.” The analogy, that both being in a football team and being out on the streets require training, features throughout.

The two themes are explored in different ways: the tangible (suitcases, footballs), the emotional (reflections on loneliness) and the symbolic (a girl draws a chalk outline of a woman on the floor and curls up foetally in its embrace). But the links between football and homelessness are never quite forged fully, they sit uncomfortably side by side – as do the 20 million homeless in Brazil and the 11 billion dollars spent on hosting the World Cup.

At any given moment the room looks beautiful. The cast’s varied use of the space forces the audience into its own configurations. It is absorbing, but not stirring until the last 10 minutes. The audience is invited to lie down, stars appear on the hangar roof. Silence. Then 'what do you think of when you look at the stars?’ The young performers respond. Their thoughts are trite and sentimental. But these are children speaking, revealing genuine responses to something they have experienced. Cynicism has to yield to empathy. We are inside, warm, safe; millions of children are outside, cold, in danger, alone and frightened.