

A Journey Back Home

Through a Mask for the 21st century:

The Legacy of Commedia dell'Arte in Postdramatic Theatre with particular focus on the centrality of the actor in Devised Performance

A Practice-as-Research PhD based on three years of research, culminating in this thesis, an ensemble devised performance *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015/16) and a solo piece *Home/Finding Home* (2017/18)

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to everyone in search of home.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to cast new light on our understanding, interpretation and practical explorations of Commedia dell'Arte's legacy and continuing relevance to contemporary performance. An original contribution to contemporary studies on the Commedia dell'Arte, this research highlights the striking similarities between Commedia's core principles and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre. Rather than a reinterpretation or re-contextualisation, my work can be described as a *reinvention* of Commedia Masks through a *rediscovery* of Commedia dell'Arte's principles, as discussed by Flaminio Scala in his prologue to *Il Finto Marito* (1619); first and foremost, the notion of 'Actor as Creator' that is foundational to my practice.

Utilising the ensemble devised piece, *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, and the solo-piece *Home* as case studies, this thesis discusses and analyses my work as a tutor, a director and a performer. It explores the efficacy of my physical approach to characterisation; more specifically my use of autobiographical material and Commedia dell'Arte techniques to develop a new Mask for the 21st century: the 'Experiential Mask'. Moving beyond the traditional notion of Mask as fixed-type or stock character, this alive, malleable and adaptable Mask is created by the actors in response to their reality, their world and their culture. In answering the research question: *How to develop a devising methodology drawing from Commedia dell'Arte's techniques and principles without necessarily utilising the traditional types, masks and aesthetic?* This thesis evaluates my approach to devising discussing three main areas of practice: my ethos (Chapter 3.1: Artisan Theatre), my dramaturgical approach (Chapter 3.2: Accidental Narratives) and my theatrical language (Chapter 3.3: Stage Resonances). Each chapter provides a contextualisation within postdramatic (devised) theatre, a description and evaluation of practical methodologies and an analysis of my findings. The Conclusions draw on my reflections, emphasising the similarities and differences with existing practices in the field and the originality of my work.

The [PhD Thesis Discussion video](#) complements the text in this volume as an integral part of the thesis. All videos, pictures, and an e-copy of the thesis are also available on the USB provided.

**A Journey back Home through a Mask for the 21st century:
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particular focus on the centrality of the actor in Devised
Performance**

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to discover and define the legacy of Commedia dell'Arte in post-dramatic theatre. Improvisation, comic gags (*lazzi*), slapstick comedy and the use of masks are undoubtedly fundamental aspects of Commedia but there is something far more valuable and exciting that we inherited from this ancient form of theatre: its stage principles and in particular I would suggest, the notion of 'Actor as Creator'. Through the practical exploration of Commedia principles and techniques, this research aims to demonstrate how performers, directors and theatre practitioners can use Commedia dell'Arte as a fertile ground to create devised performances today. Rather than a reinterpretation, re-contextualisation or adaptation, I prefer to describe my approach to Commedia as a *rediscovery* of its principles through a *reinvention* of its Masks¹.

This document provides a description and a critical analysis of a practice-based PhD research project undertaken at the Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture & Design, London Metropolitan University between November 2014 and January 2018. This work offered me the opportunity to reflect on my 20 years of artistic practice. I would describe my experience of writing this PhD as a 'mapping' process. It helped me to 'locate' my work within the context of contemporary theatre and teaching practices and position my work within a wider historical context: the tradition of 'Actors-Authors'. The central importance of the actor-author is indeed a distinctive feature of Italian theatre. 'While the theatrical traditions of other European countries are author-centred, the theatre of Italy has been, through much of its development, actor-centred: from Ruzante and the Commedia dell'Arte to Dario Fo, De Filippo and Carmelo Bene' (Farell, J. and Pippa, P, 2006).

This practical research led me to the definition of a specific terminology for my practice. 'Artisan Theatre' refers to my ethos: my practice's strong

¹ Masks are Commedia dell'Arte characters or types. I will use the term 'Mask' with capital to refer to the characters and 'mask' without capital to refer to the leather mask, the object.

connection with the tradition of popular theatre. The 'Experiential Mask' refers to the work on characters: malleable types that stemmed from the actors' creativity through the application of Commedia dell'Arte principles. 'Accidental Narrative' describes my dramaturgical approach: a character-led rather than situation-led narrative. Finally, I labelled 'Stage Resonances' the complex web of communicative processes taking place between actors and spectators; a 'performance language' that privileges actions and gestures over words.

Thesis Components: Practice, Data collected during the practical research and Written Analysis

Throughout my research, I have worked as a teacher and a director with professional actors and students. I have written, directed and performed a one-woman show: *Home/Finding Home* (2017/18) and directed *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015 and 2016); an ensemble piece devised by a group of students from the BA in Theatre and Performance Practice at London Metropolitan University. I have designed and delivered modules on Popular Theatre, Italian Theatre, Physical Theatre and Commedia dell'Arte; run workshops and lectures at symposia and theatre festivals. I directed students' productions at undergraduate level including Pirandello's *The Mountain Giants* (Rose Bruford College, 2016), *Commedia Extravaganza*, *Commedia dell'Shakespeare* (East15 Acting School, 2016 and 2017) and Goldoni's *The Holiday Trilogy* (Rose Bruford College, 2015). I have worked with Commedia dell'Arte traditional scenarios and characters (e.g. workshops at RADA, Portsmouth University, Dulwich College) and experimented with Commedia masks techniques in devising theatre and text-based work including classic texts such as Shakespeare, Moliere and Lope de Vega (e.g. various productions at East15 Acting School, Canterbury Christ Church University and Rose Bruford College) ². I have interviewed leading Commedia dell'Arte practitioners and scholars in Italy and the UK on the role of Commedia in their practice and more broadly its legacy in contemporary performance³.

The written analysis and evaluation of this work – i.e. my practice as a researcher, a theatre maker and a teacher - integrates videos, photos, rehearsal notes, interviews and theatre scripts. These are the data collected in the last

² See Appendix 5. Teaching: Commedia dell'Arte and Devising.

³ See Appendix 2: Interviews' transcripts and audio links.

three years of practice-as-research. This material is an integral part of my research and a fundamental component of this thesis. It provides not only a documentation of my practice – i.e. background research, rehearsal process, training and performances - but also an insight into my methodology. The *PhD Thesis Discussion* video complementing this document is designed to guide the reader through a visual and aural experience. This material can be accessed online following the links and time codes provided. Alternatively, a USB is available in appendix to watch this footage off-line. Table 1 shows the video's chapters and related time codes.

PhD Thesis Discussion Video: https://vimeo.com/247935181 Password: Thesis	
Video 6.1: Training with Commedia dell'Arte Masks.	[Time code: 00:26]
Video 6.2: The Experiential Mask: Nonna Ida.	[Time code: 02:47]
Video 6.3: Breaking the Boundaries between Performers and Spectators.	[Time code: 04:29]
Video 6.4: Multilingualism.	[Time code: 06:11]
Video 6.5: 'Scattered Objects' Devising Exercise.	[Time code: 08:09]
Video 6.6: Finding the Experiential Masks.	[Time code: 09:22]
Video 6.7: The Actress' Evolution.	[Time code: 15:21]
Video 6.8: Cardinal Borromeo's Evolution.	[Time code: 17:42]
Video 6.9: Choral Scenes.	[Time code: 19:12]
Video 6.10: Gino, the Conman: 'The Saints' Relics Speech'	[Time code: 20:46]
Video 6.11: Nonna Ida's Evolution.	[Time code: 22:21]
Video 6.12: The Fireflies, Mary Magdalene's Carnival and Mary Magdalene's Waltz.	[Time code: 23:19]
Video 6.13: Audience Feedback.	[Time code: 25:00]
Video 6.14: The Researcher's Prologue.	[Time code: 28:33]
Video 6.15: 'Unnatural Postures': Commedia dell'Arte Masks.	[Time code: 32:19]
Video 6.16: Finding Cardinal Borromeo's Mask.	[Time code: 35:42]
Video 6.17: Germino: the Zanni-Soldier.	[Time code: 36:50]
Video 6.18: Itsaso, the Fisherman's Wife: Audience Interaction.	[Time code: 38:18]
Video 6.19: The Researcher: Audience Interaction.	[Time code: 38:39]
Video 6.20: Gino, the Conman: Audience Interaction.	[Time code: 39:45]

Table 1: list of chapters and time code of the '*PhD Thesis Discussion*' video.

Images, photos and scripts are incorporated within the main body of the written analysis. Photos and images have captions providing location, date and content of the image. My scripts and the prologue to Flaminio Scala's play *Il Finto Marito* (1619) are presented in separate sections to clearly distinguish creative writings (plays, *canovacci*, scripts) from the analysis (thesis). They are located in Table 2: *Il Finto Marito* prologue by Flaminio Scala, p.20; Table 3: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015) p.177; Table 4: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2016), p.185; and Table 5: *Home* (2017), p. 204. In addition, visual, audio and textual material is available in appendix to provide further documentation of my research, rehearsal process and teaching. This includes audio recordings and transcripts of interviews, workshops' plans, rehearsal notes, excerpts of other authors' plays and scripts, photo galleries and videos.

One of the fundamental principles underpinning my work is the belief that knowledge occurs through experience and the stimulation of the senses. I therefore integrated pictures, videos and audio material with the written analysis aiming to make this PhD thesis as 'experiential' as possible. The live performance is a fundamental component of this journey. It offers the reader the opportunity to experience the 'Artisan Theatre', the 'Accidental Narratives' and 'Stage Resonances'. Furthermore, the live show is a fundamental component of my Practice as Research methodology and serves to refine my research findings.

Thesis Structure:

This thesis is organised in five sections: Introduction, Chapter1: Contextual Review, Chapter 2: Methodology, Chapter 3: Projects & Results and Conclusion. The Introduction offers an overview of my experience as a theatre-maker. It presents my research questions, aims, practical outcomes and the timeline of events.

The first part of the Contextual Review chapter will provide an historical contextualisation and an overview of contemporary studies and practical explorations of Commedia dell'Arte. The second part will describe and evaluate Lehmann's definition of Post-dramatic theatre underlining its strengths and limitations in relation to my own practice and research. I will offer practical examples from my rehearsal and performance integrating relevant photos, videos and testimonials from actors and audience members.

In Chapter 2 (Methodology), I will look at the definition of Practice-as-Research (PaR) and identify the perspective that best describes my approach

explaining how my work fits within the broader context of Practice-as-Research. I will explain how I developed my methodology providing relevant examples. Each section of Chapter 3 (Projects and Results) will explore a particular aspect of my work and relate it to specific principles of Commedia dell'Arte as well as aspects of the Postdramatic.

- Chapter 3.1: 'Artisan Theatre' and the 'Experiential Mask' - Work Ethos. In this section, I will discuss the notion of theatre as craft (*Arte* in Commedia) and actor as craftsman/maker. My theatre is rooted in the reality of the every-day and utilises the Grotesque and the Surreal to transform the mundane into material for the stage - within the lineage of popular theatre, Ruzante and Commedia dell'Arte. In discussing the 'accessibility' of Commedia Masks I will demonstrate how it is fundamental for the actor to work with personal references and material that is familiar to them. This implies the celebration of their uniqueness including their culture and language: I will evaluate my experience of working with actors from different countries and my own investigation of languages, dialects and accents. This practical exploration led to the definition of a new Mask that I labelled 'Experiential Mask'.
- Chapter 3.2: Accidental Narratives – Dramaturgy. Drawing from both Scala's teaching and Lehmann's notion of 'visual narrative' this section will describe and evaluate the role of the actor: Actor as Creator. Through improvisation and devising, the actors develop a dramaturgy that stems from a collaborative experience beyond the written text of a single author. This section will demonstrate how actors and their interactions with space and objects lead to the construction of a narrative. This dramaturgy 'truly and in essence consists in *actions* and in narrations merely by accident'⁴ (Scala, 1619). I labelled this character-led performance dramaturgy 'Accidental Narrative'.
- Chapter 3.3: 'Stage Resonances' – Performance Language. This section will evaluate the Pre-eminence of gestures and actions in my

⁴ Original text in Italian: "[...], e le commedie nell'azzioni consistono propriamente et in sustanzia, e nelle narrazioni per accidente" (Scala, 1619).

work looking at how theatre can appeal to the senses by establishing a communion between the *actors' gestures* and the *spectators' sensing body* (Tessari, 1881, p.53). This is a visceral theatre and it speaks first to the senses then to the intellect. This section will focus specifically on the actors' performative language and the techniques utilised to develop this language.

Each section will provide a contextualisation within the wide realm of postdramatic theatre, a description and evaluation of my practical methodology and an analysis of my findings. I will underline similarities and differences with existing practices in the field; and I will provide examples from my experience as a director (*A Floating Caravan under the Moon*, 2015/2016), an actor-director (*Home/Finding Home*, 2017/18) and a teacher. Each case study will be presented in the main body of text with supporting material available in appendix.

My research focusses primarily on the actor's creative processes. Rather than focussing on the final 'product' (the production), this thesis will look at the performers' experience in rehearsal and performance. Even though the actor-spectator relationship is paramount, in this thesis my analysis will always be centred on the actor's experience and their interpretation of the relationships established with their spectators. Some of the audience's feedback have been included in this document purely to support the actors' statements. An in-depth analysis of the role and experience of the audience in devising theatre is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Finally, in the Conclusion I will draw on my findings showing how I answered my research questions, what new knowledge has been contributed to the field and how this can be used by other researchers and practitioners. The conclusive chapter will also offer me an opportunity to reflect on the limitations of my practice and possible ways to improve my work in future.

A glossary has been added at the end of my thesis to clarify my understanding of concepts, theatrical terms or expressions whose meaning might be complex or not univocally accepted within the academic and artistic community. The analysis of some of these terms would require the development of a thesis on its own (e.g. site specific, immersive theatre). To avoid digressing from my research aims, I will provide only a concise overview rather than an in-depth analysis.

Research Questions and Aims

Through the analysis of my practice, I aim to demonstrate the efficacy of my approach to devising in the attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How to develop a contemporary Mask rooted in the actors' own experience embracing the notion of Actor as Creator in devised performance.
2. How to develop a devising methodology drawing from Commedia dell'Arte's techniques and principles without necessarily utilising the traditional types, masks and aesthetic.

My teaching and artistic output (productions) informed, complemented and influenced each other throughout the whole process and led to the following outcomes:

- the reinvention of Commedia dell'Arte Masks interpreted as 'malleable' types – rather than fixed-types. These Masks are the 'decedents' of traditional Commedia Masks but are also rooted in the reality of our times.
- the definition of a devising methodology based on a series of exercises and activities informed by the principles shared by Commedia dell'Arte and post-dramatic theatre;
- the dissemination of this devising methodology and physical approach to character through teaching and training;
- the application of this methodology to devise an ensemble piece *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015-16) and a solo-show *Home* (R&D, 2017)/*Finding Home* (2018).

I have utilised the expression Practice-as-Research to describe an approach in which the professional and creative practice – rehearsals, teaching, workshops and productions – play an instrumental part in the inquiry. This specific practice is both the fundamental activity employed and the 'result' of my research⁵.

⁵ For an analysis and evaluation of PaR as mode of enquiry in my research refer to Chapter 2: Methodology.

Framed within the context of contemporary studies on the Commedia dell'Arte (Henke, 2002, 2007; Tessari, 2013, 1981) and post-dramatic (Lehmann, 2006) - more specifically devising (Callery, 2001; Govan et al. 2007; Heddon and Milling, 2015; Oddey, 1994) - this research aims to cast a new light on the understanding, interpretation and practical exploration of the vast theatrical phenomenon known as the Commedia dell'Arte in contemporary theatre. Flaminio Scala's prologue to *Il Finto Marito* (1619) offered me the tools to re-discover and investigate Commedia dell'Arte's core principles. Flaminio Scala (1552 - 1624) was a sixteenth-century Italian Commedia dell'Arte stage actor, writer, playwright, director, producer and manager. Considered one of the most important figures in Renaissance theatre, Scala is remembered today as the author of the first published collection of Commedia scenarios and *canovacci*, *Il Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative* (1611) that served as inspiration to some of the most influential playwrights of the time including Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Ben Jonson and Moliere.

The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte by Judith Chafee and Olly Crick (2015) has been a fundamental resource to place my work within the context of contemporary studies on the Commedia dell'Arte. Particularly relevant to my research is Scott McGehee's article on the pre-eminence of the actor in renaissance context and Davis Robinson and Katrien Van Beurden's papers on the contemporary use of Commedia in devising theatre.

My research highlights the striking similarities between Commedia dell'Arte core principles – defined by Flaminio Scala in his prologue to *Il Finto Marito* – and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre. However, it is important to acknowledge that their perspectives stemmed from very different experiences. Scala is a theatre practitioner; an actor, a writer and an impresario in 16th century Italy. While Lehmann is a scholar in 20th century Germany. His analysis stemmed from academic research not practice. As a practitioner *and* a researcher, I found it stimulating to identify the similarities between the two, exploring through practice concepts and ideas coming from different experiences, historical periods and cultures. Furthermore, my simultaneous role as a researcher and an actor-author allows me to integrate the scholarly knowledge and the practical experience inherited from Scala and Lehmann in the development of my practice.

Timeline of events

This PhD is also a journey back home; a rediscovery of my personal and cultural heritage. Indeed, I could not find a better title for my final production than *Home* (2017) – then developed with the final title *Finding Home* (2018). It was not my intention at the beginning of the process to explore the theme 'home': it happened organically and somehow unexpectedly. Initially I wanted to utilise Commedia dell'Arte as a tool to work on physical approaches to characterisation looking at travelling and journeys in fairy-tales. 'Extraordinary journeys' became the theme of a first series of practical workshops open to a small group of students from the BA in Theatre and Performance Practice at London Metropolitan University.⁶ The approaches explored were grotesque characterisation, physical storytelling and devising with objects, text and images. The students utilised different vocal and physical techniques for devising, primarily inspired by the tradition of popular theatre and more specifically Dario Fo's 'epic theatre' and Commedia dell'Arte.

The students' responses to this theme, my own personal experience and interests combined with global events and current affairs, diverted my focus onto another theme much more relevant to the ensemble, our surroundings and our times: 'Home' and 'Homeland'.⁷ The referendum result in June 2016⁸ and the increasing number of involuntary forced migrants – refugees, stateless people, and trafficked people, those displaced in their own countries by disasters and conflicts, environmentally displaced people – confirmed the relevance of this topic not only on a personal level but also on a global scale. I felt that one of the most alarming phenomena of the new millennium was 'demanding' my attention.

My practical exploration began in spring 2015, four years after the beginning of the Syrian civil war. At that point, it was impossible not to be affected by such a devastating humanitarian crisis. Although this thesis and my work does

⁶ See Appendix 5: Teaching Commedia dell'Arte and Devising. *Extraordinary Journeys: Real, Surreal or Unreal?* Devising theatre workshops at London Metropolitan University, Spring 2015.

⁷ See Chapter 3.4 and Appendices 3 & 4: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home*.

⁸ Brexit might have significant consequences on the lives of almost all the people involved in my project. Indeed, many theatre makers and researchers in the UK are trying to figure out what impact Brexit will have on the relationship and development of projects between artists within and outside the UK.

not directly refer to this topic, it is important for me to acknowledge that the theme 'home' was chosen for not only my personal experience as an Italian immigrant in London, but also in response to global events: the world I (we) live in. Oddey defines devised theatre as 'a contemporary reflection of culture and society'. This resonates with my approach to theatre making. However, unlike Oddey, I believe that this is not exclusively a defining feature of devised theatre. I believe it is the essence of any form of theatre, both written and devised, and certainly a defining feature of Commedia dell'Arte as I will explain in Chapter 1. Both written and devised theatre might challenge their culture and society or they might reinforce the values of the dominant culture independently of style and genre - i.e. devised or text-based.

Oddey states that devised theatre 'is about the relationship of a group of people to their culture, the socio-political, artistic and economic climate, as well as issues or events surrounding them.' (p23) I would argue that this *could* be the case for any form of theatre not only devised. Indeed, 'there is nothing implicitly more radical in being a deviser'. One can 'find the same love of theatre, the same excitement at the possibilities of theatre' (Field, 2008), the same engagement with our culture and society in text-based theatre. For example, a company involved in the contemporary adaptation of a classic text or the mise-en-scene of a new play might take a strong political stand on a specific issue relevant to the current socio-political and economic climate.

In relation to the role of the actors in text-based theatre, I believe that even when the director or playwright's vision is the driving force of the creative process, each member of the company can still contribute in developing and shaping that vision. There are many different ways and degrees of collaboration and in some cases, the director might have the role of 'supporting' the actors in developing *their* vision on issues that are relevant to all the people involved – actors and director. This is the case for my ensemble piece *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*⁹ (London Metropolitan University, 2015).

This project began with a question: What is home? When do we feel at home? And Why? What tastes, smells, sounds, actions, places make us feel at

⁹ In the title *Caravan* explicitly refers to both Commedia dell'Arte nomadic troupes and my work as 'emigrant actor': although I have never travelled in a caravan, it seemed an evocative image. '*Floating Under the Moon*' refers to recurrent motifs that emerged in rehearsal: the sea, the Moon and the nocturnal atmospheres of many stories developed by the actors.

home? After over a decade in London, I have realised that both London and my hometown do not feel like home. Neither of these two places is *fully* home. In London, I still feel like an outsider. I feel the city is an open and dynamic place where there will be always space for me. However, it does not feel like home. I then discovered that many people in London experience the same feeling including many international actors and students involved in my project.

As the work progressed, the research led me back to where everything started a long time ago: back to my origins. This work – both my thesis and the final production *Home/Findng Home* – is a journey back home on many levels: personal, artistic and historical.

- Personal - a journey back to my homeland, my family stories and my ancestors: the poor peasants from the Po' Valley - in other words – the descendants of the servants of Commedia, the *Zanni*.
- Artistic - a journey back to the Masks of Commedia dell'Arte where my theatre practice began, and where European contemporary devised physical theatre is rooted.
- Cultural - a journey back to my culture and my roots in Northern Italy.

I discovered Commedia dell'Arte 20 years ago in 1997 in a little run-down Baroque chapel in a little town called Moncalieri thanks to Claudia Contin, an extraordinary female performer, director, author and *Arlecchino*¹⁰. She presented her show *Gli Abitanti di Arlecchinia*: a performance-presentation on the masks of Commedia dell'Arte. I had never experienced anything so powerful. I was hooked. I booked and enrolled on Claudia's Commedia dell'Arte workshop the following summer. The same year, on the day of my birthday, Dario Fo – who I consider one of the most influential artists in my practice - received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Since then I have never stopped studying *Mistero Buffo*, his masterpiece.

After 20 years of theatre experience as apprentice, actor, teacher, researcher and director, I have realised that my connection with Commedia dell'Arte might be deeper than what I had originally thought. I am a *Zanni*'s

¹⁰ *Arlecchino* is one of the most popular Commedia Masks. He is a Servant, one of the many *Zanni* like *Brighella*, *Pulcinella*, *Coviello* and many others. The English translation is Harlequin.

descendant. My mother was born from a poor peasant family in the Po valley (*Pianura Padana*). She was born in a tiny village in the Venice province just a few kilometres from Padua, Ruzzante¹¹'s hometown, considered the father of Commedia dell'Arte, and Isabella Andreini¹²'s birthplace, one of the most famous and revered Commedia female artists.

In 16th century Italy, the poor peasants of the Pò Valley moved east to Venice to survive famine and ended up being exploited by the emerging middle-classes: the rich merchants and bankers. In the 1960s, the poor peasants from the Pò Valley moved west to Turin in search of a stable job and ended up being exploited by the booming car industry. That was my mother's destiny. My destiny was to come to London. I belong to another generation of immigrants living in very different conditions yet I still feel uncertain about my place in this city that might or might not be my 'home': even more after Brexit.

My practical exploration of the theme 'home' developed in six stages:

- April 2015: first series of workshops to test my devising methodologies inspired by Commedia dell'Arte principles;
- Sep-Oct 2015: workshops to re-define my devising methodologies and themes; rehearsals to develop *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* - a 30mins piece performed at London Metropolitan University (Fig. 1);
- Apr-May 2016: second series of workshops to expand the ensemble and keep re-defining my methodology.
- Jun-July 2016: intensive rehearsal week to develop *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* - CrisisArt Festival in Arezzo, Italy (Fig. 2);
- Spring-Summer 2017: Writing, devising and rehearsing material for *Home*; a one-woman show and performance-presentation performed at the CrisisArt Festival in Arezzo, Italy (Fig. 3)

¹¹ Angelo Beolco (1502–1542), better known by the nickname Il Ruzzante, was an actor and playwright. He is known by his comedies in the Pavan language of *Padova*, featuring a peasant called "Ruzzante". Dario Fo considers Ruzzante at the same level as Moliere, claiming that he is the true father of Commedia dell'Arte and the most significant influence on his own work.

¹² Isabella Andreini (1562-1604) was a member of the Gelosi Troupe, one of the most famous and prolific touring companies active during Commedia dell'Arte 'Golden Era'. It performed for the most influential families and courts in both Italy and France. Flaminio Scala, Francesco Andreini and Vittoria Piisimi are other illustrious company members. The role of Isabella (*l'Innamorata*) in Commedia dell'Arte, was named after her.

- Spring 2018: Development of the solo piece for the final presentation at London University; from *Home* (2017) to *Finding Home* (2018).



Figure 1: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, devised ensemble piece, London Metropolitan University, 2015



Figure 2: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* devised ensemble promenade performance, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2016.



Figure 3: *Home* one-woman show, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2017.

In the series of workshops and rehearsals between autumn 2015 and December 2016, the ‘accessibility’ of the Masks and the ‘contemporaneity’ of Commedia dell’Arte became the most pressing issues. For me it is fundamental to understand how actors today can connect to characters that emerged from a very different society and culture: 16th century Italy. My aim is to discover how actors can ‘access’ those Masks and utilise them to connect with their audience.

I use the term ‘accessible’ to refer to a work of art that interests, intrigues and ultimately touches its audience on an emotional level. It does not necessarily mean intellectually understandable or intelligible. The audience can connect with the actors and their stories even when they do not understand what is said on stage. This connection between actors and spectators goes beyond verbal communication. I called ‘Stage Resonances’ the ‘network’ of relationships established between performers and members of the audience during the performance. In Chapter 3.3 I will expand on this topic focussing on the actors and their experience. I will utilise as case studies *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*¹³ and *Home*.¹⁴ The topic of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ was relevant to both actors and spectators but how could we translate our personal stories and autobiographical material into a stage performance? How could we make our work easily ‘accessible’ and entertaining for our audience utilising Commedia dell’Arte principles?

Troupes of actors in Late-Renaissance Italy developed the Masks of Commedia dell’Arte to tell *their* stories to audiences across all Europe. What are the characters and techniques that we need today to tell *our* stories? Can Commedia dell’Arte help us?

Flaminio Scala’s prologue to the comedy *Il Finto Marito (The Fake Husband, 1619)* allowed me to answer these questions. This document stands as a testament of an entire generation of theatre makers: the Commedia dell’Arte Actors-Authors of the 16th and 17th century. As an aged man with years of experience as actor, writer and *capocomico* (impresario), Scala felt the need to put in writing his working principles so that they could be preserved offering future generations of ‘Actors as Creators’ an ideological framework to clarify and legitimise their theatre: an autonomous art form independent from written drama.

¹³ See Chapter 3.4.1 and Appendix 3.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3.4.2 and Appendix 4.

Flaminio Scala's prologue to *Il Finto Marito* (1619)

Scala's prologue is written as a fictional dialogue between an Actor (*il Comico*) and a Foreigner (*il Forestiero*). They exemplify, respectively, the world of theatre and the world of *high* culture and academia. Since the start, the Foreigner – a learned man - expresses his contempt for Commedia dell'Arte for its lack of written texts. Below (Table 2) is an English translation of Scala's document. The Italian version is available in Appendix 1. The highlighted passages are particularly relevant to my practice and my research; they are the foundations of my analysis in Chapter 3.

**Flaminio Scala (1619), *The Fake Husband* prologue, Venice.
English Translation by Chiara D'Anna**

Actor:	Hey, Sir, where are you going? You cannot go that way!
Foreigner:	Oh, where?
Actor:	Over here, of course!
Foreigner:	Wait: Isn't <i>this</i> the stage, the set, and the place where the performance will be?
Actor:	And <i>that</i> is where the audience will be, not here. And you cannot enter this area.
Foreigner:	Oh, well. We will go elsewhere; but what is this <i>zannata</i> ¹⁵ that is about to be performed?
Actor:	Oh, this man is irritating: this is <i>Il Finto Marito</i> by Flaminio Scala.
Foreigner:	By whom?

¹⁵ In Italian *suggetti* meant masked performances in Commedia dell'Arte style.

Actor:	By Scala, of course, who has written many scenarios ¹⁶ in the past. What? Are you turning your nose up at him? Are you surprised?
Foreigner:	Yes, of course I am surprised. Because there is a big difference between devising a scenario for an improvisation; and writing a comedy that is fully scripted, with proper dialogues and well-written sentences – instead of those random words typical of the <i>Commedianti</i> ¹⁷ like: 'give him the bed-warmer', 'the <i>lazzi</i> ', 'at which', remain' or exit. And I don't want to get shoved about amongst the vulgar crowd I can see over there. Let it be as God wishes, and like I already said, it's just going to be a <i>zannata</i> .
Actor:	Hey! Wait a minute! Scala has always had great creativity and imagination, and at the end of the day, that is the soul of comedy – it is everything!
Foreigner:	I have seen some of his plays that did not impress me at all!
Actor:	Well! It is a hell of a task to impress someone like you; someone who seems to know so much, or - at the very least – thinks he knows so much about plays. Perhaps, this is because you fancy the idea of writing for the stage yourself. However, you are the only one to criticize someone whose work has been universally acclaimed in print. You cannot deny that Scala has always had great success, wherever he has taken his scenarios.
Foreigner:	It is true, but why? Because he strove to bring the <i>scenarios</i> to life through <i>actions</i> ; and good acting troupes are those that ennoble the scenarios through their great acting skills: the quality of their performance. Nonetheless a composition remains cold and easily fails if it is not embellished by the art of

¹⁶ Themes/basic plots of Commedia dell'Arte scenarios and improvised comedy.

¹⁷ Commedia dell'Arte actors; members of a Commedia troupe.

	fine writing, because it's just a sketch - a note on a piece of paper.
Actor:	Well this one, that we are going to perform today, will please you then, because it has characters and dialogues.
Foreigner:	Very well. As the dialogues have been memorised, it will not be staged in vain...but only if it is really well turned ¹⁸ and the language is appropriate. ¹⁹
Actor:	This might be true when one wants to celebrate someone with noble praises, or narrate a real event. But in comedy it is enough a good imitation and resemblance of reality; and a language neither too vulgar nor crude. In fact, a familiar language, without too much artifice, is most appropriate because comedies deal with mundane actions and everyday events, not being concerned with men of high status; hence, sophistication is inappropriate.
Foreigner:	That is fine in most cases. However, if one has to introduce many characters from different regions, then one needs to be very knowledgeable; because one cannot just entertain variations of the Bergamasco, Venetian or Bolognese accents; it is necessary to imitate each expression and their quality very well, otherwise you will distort the dialect. In addition, to do so one needs great skill. Therefore, I must say once again that I am not looking forward to seeing this performance: everyone has his own strengths, and should stick to his own art ²⁰ .

¹⁸ It's precise, detailed and literal.

¹⁹ Noble vocabulary.

²⁰ Again the Foreigner believes that the play is going to be bad because – surely - an actor (Scala) does not have the skill (art) to write comedy. Skills possessed only by learned educated men: poets and orators.

Actor:	I believe that the real art of making good plays well belongs to those who can perform them well, because if experience is the teacher of all things, then she can teach to whoever has the ability to create and perform the actable scenario, how to lay them out too – provided they were not born in Voltolina, or were they say 'I' for 'me'. But tell me, then, in what does such art consist?
Foreigner:	In observing the rules and imitating life as much and accurately as possible ²¹ .
Actor:	But who better than the actors themselves can know the rules of this art (the stage)? Every day they put them into practice by performing ²² and thus they learn the art by doing. Who knows the art of imitation better than them? They imitate emotions, gestures and actions. And by integrating different dialects into their performances they have to learn how to imitate in their own dialect, and in other vernaculars too. Of course, there would be nothing remarkable about that if a Venetian had no problem speaking in Florentine, nor a Florentine in Bergamask.
Foreigner:	But the rules must be learnt from those fine writes who have dealt with the art of poetics ²³ , because there is little value in imitating a dialect if there is not a sense of joy and sorrow, happiness and pain, fear and boldness, in the intonation of those words. Such things are taught by philosophers and orators, not by actors! ²⁴

²¹ Aristotelian view.

²² *Esercitando l'Arte* = exercising their craft.

²³ *Poetiche* = poetry or poetics.

²⁴ The well-educated Foreigner clearly sees the world of written drama and poetry as superior to any other form of expression. So much so that only philosophers and orators can teach the world about emotions – not actors!

Actor:	Indeed, all rules and precepts are desirable, but the essence of every art - and science – lies in putting things into practice ²⁵ .
Foreigner:	You make a good point; but rules must precede practice; that can only derive from principles.
Actor:	Experience and practice produce Art ²⁶ , because a rule is made by the repetition of actions, and if it is possible to deduct some principles from this rule, then it means that it is possible to form a methodology from those actions; so much so that the actor (=player) may give rules to the playwright, but not the latter to the former ²⁷ .
Foreigner:	Since when have you started to syllogize? ²⁸
Actor:	Mine is natural logic, rooted purely in reason.
Foreigner:	Then I will use logic to refute you. An artist cannot perfect his art without the necessary material and instruments (=tools), nor if he has no goal to aim for.
Actor:	I grant you that.
Foreigner:	Now the material in our art is oration - or better locution. ²⁹ The instruments are ideas, concepts and imagination; and the goal is to imitate reality and entertain (delight), from which utility will follow as a result.

²⁵ We learn through practice by experimenting, testing ideas and trying out new things.

²⁶ *L'Arte* = the Art: the actor refers to the Art of the stage: theatre.

²⁷ The Actor put forward a 'revolutionary' concept alien to the world of literature – and performance – of the time: actors can teach authors because they know better than anyone else the rules of the stage.

²⁸ Sarcastic tone of the well-read, educated literate vs the presumably ignorant 'actor' – surely intellectually inferior!

²⁹ *Locuzione* could be translated in English as locution or expression.

Actor: Fine!

Foreigner: So, in order to achieve the goal - imitating and entertaining with further useful benefits - it is necessary to explore imagination, appropriate ideas, that express and signify what we wish to imitate, and well-structured and expressive sentences, capable of illustrating what we wish to imitate, so that from it, both pleasure and learning will follow.³⁰

Actor: Nobody doubts that!

Foreigner: For this reason, it has been proven that valid precepts, derived from those who best know how to give them, establish rightful concepts that appropriately express what one wishes to imitate. Such rules provide also ideas, because in distinguishing between a rule to be followed and one to be avoided, we are able to identify what is good and what is bad. Oration in performance and its expressive words, well linked, worthy of being delivered for imitative purposes, cannot be used or learned without relying on rules and precepts. One does not get to know those rules without the appropriate documents that are the true foundation.

Actor: You scholastic reasoning is ingenious, but I think you sophistication will be defeated by my simplicity.

Foreigner: Bring it on!

Actor: What you propose would be sound if writers had provided valid precepts concerning oratory, locution and dramatic speech, as well as concepts and inventions used in dramatic poetry. But remember, for you must have read it somewhere, that your Aristotle gave rules only for tragedy. He never talked of comedy; neither Horace ever said anything relevant about this topic. As

³⁰ Art must be 'useful' - have moral value – by teaching through entertainment.

far as comedy goes, there is not any rule or precept other than good practice and talented dramatists, from which we got the performances that we enjoy nowadays. Thus, **being true that rules are always taken from usage, and not usage from rules.**

And this is why many literates, including some of the finest, have written plays in an elegant style, full of profound concepts, gracious speeches and noble inventions; but what they lack is experience of the stage. Therefore, when these plays are performed, they flop, they prove lifeless – they lack the imitation proper of comedies are unbearably dull and insipid; and at times they are unbelievable, not to say preposterous. For this reason, they fail to entertain the audience and even less to teach something useful. Because audiences do not pay much attention to them, they are forgotten. Thus, valid concepts are made known through the impact they have on others, and not from rules; for as those who know such things say: people with no feeling must be made to feel, by getting physical with the stick and make then laugh.

For this very reason, oration, or even locution, and **words alone have little to do with imitation (=art of the stage), because even the smallest gesture at the right moment, and made with feeling, will have a greater impact than all the philosophy of Aristotle, or the rhetoric of Demosthenes and Cicero. And it's true that feelings are aroused more easily by gestures than words.**

Everyone that has intellect, and even brute beast, will pay more attention to and obey those who raise a stick than those who raise their voice; for, as the Bergamask says, '*There's a great gulf between asking and doing*'³¹. And this happens in any situation when we use common sense. Bear in mind that it was the power of stones not words that drove the man to descend from the fig tree - for **actions are more similar to actions than**

³¹ Italian idiomatic expression that means "There is many a slip between cup and lip".

narrations³², and plays truly and in essence consist in actions, and in narrations merely by accident. Thus, in comedy (=comic genre) whoever wishes to imitate actions will achieve more with actions than with words. This is to be seen in lovers, for example, who are more moved and attracted by the beloved's tear, or glance, or kiss, or suchlike, not to mention anything more daring – than by the persuasions of any great moral philosopher or poet, who with well composed writing, sublime concepts, perfect locution and exquisite words, and the subtlest arguments, urges the lovers to be virtuous and reject sensuality. You see, the senses from the senses³³ are more easily moved than abstract concepts, just as like is drawn to like.

Foreigner: You argued well and almost convinced me. I could say something in response, but for the moment, I am satisfied to accept what you have said...

Table 2: *Il Finto Marito* prologue (1619) by Flaminio Scala. English translation by Chiara D'Anna. See Appendix 1 for the original text in Italian.

Flaminio Scala's prologue stands as a manifesto in defence of Commedia dell'Arte performers - and more broadly of any theatre maker - as artists on their own right not inferior to literates, poets or scholars. Scala believes that:

the art of making good comedies belongs to those who can perform them well; because experience is the teacher of all things, then she can teach to whoever has the ability to create and perform the actable scenario, how to lay them out too (Scala, 1619, my translation).³⁴

³² "for with regard to actions, they are more imitative than narrations, and plays properly and in essence consist in actions, and only incidentally in narration' (Richards and Richards, 1990, p. 200).

³³ The literal translation for the Italian word *sensi* is senses. However, this passage could be translated as: 'feelings from feelings are more easily moved'. Richards and Richards' translated this sentence using the word 'senses': 'The senses are more easily moved by the senses than by anything in the abstract, just as like is drawn to like' (Richards and Richards, 1990, p. 200).

³⁴ Text in Italian: 'L'arte vera del ben far le commedie credo io che sia di chi ben le rappresenta, perché se l'esperienza è maestra delle cose, ella può insegnare, a chi ha spirito di ben formare e meglio rappresentare i soggetti recitabili, il ben distenderli ancora.' See Appendix 1 for full original text. Table B for the full text in English.

Scala's words seem relevant to the current debate on devised and ensemble theatre. Still today, theatre institutions and sectors of the public might not fully recognise the equal dignity and artistic value of devised and text-based work. Scala argues that nobody can know the 'rules' of the stage better than the actors 'because they put them in practice every day by performing [...]: they 'learn' the art of the stage by doing'³⁵ (ibid.). Dario Fo is a contemporary example of an actor who learnt how to write good plays through practice and performance. By winning the most prestigious of all literature awards - the Nobel Prize for Literature – Dario Fo realised Scala's quest in legitimating the dignity of Actors-Authors and their art.

The recognition, above all, of the authority of the playwright within the hierarchical structure common in 'conventional approaches' to theatre making, seems to have had a very strong impact on the development of performing arts. In particular in the UK, productions are often 'neatly boxed in either drama or devised performance'; somehow implying that drama is 'proper' theatre (Jameson, 2007), in other words *the norm*. Evidence that Scala's words are still relevant today, 400 years after his prologue to *Il Finto Marito*.

I have utilised the expression 'conventional approaches' to theatre making to identify a wide range of performances typically characterised by the staging of plays (written drama), often with a three acts structure, on a stage clearly separated from the audience in the auditorium by a proscenium. This serves as the frame through which the audience observes the events taking place upon the stage. Characters and situations are believable and the audience is prepared to suspend their disbelief for the duration of the performance. The fictional world created on stage is realistic and often the set consists of a faithful reconstruction of the 'real' world. The actors on stage do not break the fourth wall. Usually this type of work recognises the authority of the playwright and the director within a hierarchical structure. The 'collective' voice of all the people involved in the production - actors and production team - is usually less prominent than in other approaches to theatre making that might put more emphasis on the ensemble rather than the individual perspective of the playwright. Historically 'the written text, literature, took on the rarely contested leading role of the cultural hierarchy' (Lehmann, 2006, p.46); and 'the concept of drama has survived as the latent

³⁵ Text in Italian: 'Chi può sapere meglio i precetti dell'arte che i comici stessi? Che ogni giorno gli mettono in pratica esercitandola?' See Appendix 1 for full original text.

normative idea of theatre, despite all radical transformations of theatre. As Lehmann pointed out almost two decades ago, the equation of *theatre* with *staged drama* ‘perpetuates the no longer accurate assumption of virtual identity of both, turning it into a norm. To take this stance marginalises crucial realities of theatre’ not only in contemporary performance but also important experiences rooted in the past (pp.33-34), especially popular theatre like storytelling and Commedia dell’Arte. In Chapter 1, I will discuss and challenge the position of some academics who utilised literature’s parameters to evaluate Commedia’s strengths and limitations rather than recognising it as an art form of its own right.

I would argue that this distinction between written drama (the norm) vs. not-written theatre (the alternative) is far too simplistic and ultimately inadequate to develop any analysis of both written and devised theatre. First, it does not acknowledge the plurality of voices and great range of different theatrical experiences within both categories. Second, it does not seem to recognise forms of theatre that mix genres and styles. This is a common practice amongst Renaissance *commedianti* as well as contemporary theatre makers.

Like Commedia dell’Arte performances, my work integrates written text, devised material and improvisation within the same performance. Embracing the notion of ‘reconciliation of opposites’ – i.e. the integration of written and improvised theatre; high culture and popular culture; masked and unmasked characters – Commedia dell’Arte did not negate the ‘word’ as such or the value of literates and written texts. Commedia simply challenged the ranking of written and improvised comedy.

Scala – a playwright himself – does not reject ‘the *mise-en-scene* of a written text through the form of stage monologues and dialogues’ (Lehmann, 2006, p.48). He recognises the value of written drama but he does not recognise its superiority. Instead, the fictional character of the Foreigner in the prologue to *Il Finto Marito* believes that non-written comedy ‘easily fails if it is not embellished by the art of fine writing’ (Scala, 1619). This rigid position places written comedy and improvised comedy in a hierarchical relationship with one another. Scala affirms that actors and playwrights can contribute with their set of skills and experiences in very different ways; they fulfil different roles. Furthermore, through his extensive experience as an actor *and* a playwright, Scala knows that in some

instances actors *may* give rules to the playwrights (Scala, 1619, my translation).³⁶ In defence of his art, Scala argues that the knowledge built by the actors on stage make them masters of their art; ultimately, they can create their own material for the stage without *necessarily* relying on a written text.

Like Scala, the notion of 'Actor as Creator' is the foundation of my practice. Feedback received by students and actors seem to confirm that they felt totally involved in the creation of the piece through their organic development of characters and situations. An actor wrote that she felt 'her character really came from her rather than being 'given' to her'. This was confirmed by another member of the ensemble who said that under my guidance there was a great sense of freedom, and added: 'Chiara embraces and takes into account actors' offers and ideas for the piece's best.' (Actors' feedback forms on *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, London Metropolitan University, October 2015).

All my work is underpinned by the principles discussed by Scala in his prologue to *Il Finto Marito*.³⁷ This document is the backbone of my research and practice; it offered me the key to analyse my work within the context of postdramatic theatre and identify fundamental principles of the stage not necessarily limited to the use of Commedia masks, style and scenarios. These principles are the most valuable inheritance of Commedia dell'Arte today.

Scala asserts that 'experience is the teacher of all things; [...], being true that rules are always taken from usage, and not usage from rules'³⁸ (Scala, 1619). The only way to establish - or rather discover - these 'rules' is through experience. Actors' deep knowledge of the stage makes them masters in their art (ibid.). Scala's lesson seems to support not only my artistic practice but also my methodological choices as a researcher. The only way to analyse the validity of my argument is through experience that in academic terms translates into 'Practice as Research'.

³⁶ Text in Italian: "...sì che il comico può dar regola a' compositori di commedie, ma non già quegli a questi." See Appendix 1 for full original text.

³⁷ See Scala's prologue translation in Table B and a documentation of my projects in in Chapter 3.4 and the appendices 3, 4 and 5.

³⁸ Original text in Italian: 'L'esperienza e' maestra delle cose. [...] che le regole furon sempre cavate dall'uso, e non l'uso da quelle.'

My practice within the wider context of Commedia dell'Arte in contemporary performance practices

Many scholars focused on the study of written or visual accounts (books on Commedia dell'Arte, *scenari*, drawings and paintings) to attempt a reconstruction of Commedia through an 'archaeological study'; while others put great emphasis on improvisation skills, slapstick and the comic features of the genre. I recognise the validity of both approaches; however, I am interested in exploring Commedia from another perspective. My work focuses on two principles at the heart of this practice and its contemporaneity: the notion of 'Actor as Creator' hence the celebration of the actor's individuality; and 'the autonomy of the theatre' as an art form in its own right not subordinated to literature. Theatre has its own visual, non-verbal, symbolic or metaphorical languages different from everyday verbal communication. These are distinctive features of both the Commedia dell'Arte and postdramatic theatre.

Both Church censorship and the so-called Late-Renaissance 'high culture'³⁹ acted as a 'filter' between the vast and complex artistic expressions of the time and contemporary scholars. Fortunately, some 'unconventional sources' – personal diaries, letters, travellers' accounts, artists' notes - escaped censorship and provide invaluable insights on Commedia dell'Arte and its popular roots. Paradoxically the outraged invectives of the clergy offer a fundamental contribution to the understanding of the Commedia, its revolutionary nature and its impact on the audiences of that time - although their original intent was to send Commedia to oblivion.

Both written and pictorial documentation are not enough to determine with absolute certainty neither its origins nor its style and techniques. Indeed, Commedia dell'Arte has been growing and transforming throughout the centuries through another 'channel': orality. The ancient non-written tradition of jesters, storytellers, mimes, acrobats, clowns and mountebanks – 'the *Carnivalised* culture' of the marketplace in Bakhtin's terms (Bakhtin, 1984) - flourished throughout all Europe since antiquity throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Baroque period. In Italy, scholar Roberto Tessari and practitioner Dario Fo amongst others have been at the forefront of the debate on Commedia's popular origins. They both recognise the importance of the dramatic

³⁹ 'High culture' is a term that refers to written culture produced in the courts or academia. It includes Late-Renaissance literates under the patronage of the aristocracy and religious scholars.

tradition - since ancient Greek comedy onwards - but they also emphasise the massive role that popular culture had in the development of Commedia dell'Arte.

This inheritance is widely acknowledged however, English studies on Commedia dell'Arte seem to focus mainly on the established companies working under the patronage of the aristocracy - 'institutionalised Commedia' - and their written texts - traditional *scenari* - placing it de-facto within the 'dominant' tradition of 'dramatic theatre' with the exception of Tim Fitzpatrick and Robert Henke⁴⁰. This might explain why although the Masks – both the characters and the leather objects associated with them - have been utilised extensively both as a pedagogical and creative tool, scholars and practitioners focussed mainly on its historical aspects (academic approach) or slapstick rather than the revolutionary concept of Actor as Creator that in itself is an expression of the subversive qualities of the Commedia dell'Arte. Dario Fo believes that Commedia can be distinguished from all other forms of theatre not by the use of the masks or the fixed types but 'by a genuinely revolutionary approach of making theatre, and the unique role assumed by the actors' (Fo, 1991, p13). I suspect that Pantomime and other forms of popular entertainments might have altered the way people in the UK interpret Commedia putting, perhaps, too much emphasis on its comic gags (*lazzi*).

Across Europe and in the UK there are many examples of companies and practitioners who try to keep alive the heritage of Commedia dell'Arte by performing traditional scenarios and working with the traditional leather masks often re-contextualising the themes and situations to appeal to a contemporary audience (e.g. Antonio Fava, Carlo Boso, Claudia Contin and many others). Other practitioners focused mainly on the physical approach to characterisation, ensemble work and improvisation. This is the case for some of the most influential practitioners of the twentieth century, who developed their training and practice integrating Commedia masks in their work. Amongst others Copeau, Lecoq and Meyerhold left a strong legacy. Other pivotal practitioners are Dario Fo, Ariane Mnouchine, Eugenio Barba, Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and Phillip Gaulier; and in the UK companies such as Told by an Idiot, Complicite, Ophaboom and Rude Mechanicals. The physical approach to characterisation, slapstick routines, acrobatics, ensemble work and improvisation are the legacy

⁴⁰ Tim Fitzpatrick's *The Relationship of Oral and Literate Performance Processes in the Commedia dell'Arte: Beyond the Improvisation / Memorization* (1995) and Robert Henke's 'Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte' (2002).

of Commedia recognisable in physical theatre, clownery and 'traditional' circus arts and also in 'new mime' and 'new circus', James Thierry being one of the most successful examples. Literature on this specific approach to Commedia is widely available.

Embracing these fundamental aspects of ensemble performance and physical theatre, my research will explore how Commedia dell'Arte's principles can be utilised to develop a methodology for devising. In this respect, my productions have very little in common with the traditional Commedia dell'Arte scenarios and much more to share with the aesthetic and episodic narrative of Tadeusz Kantor and Heiner Muller's theatre; and the ethos and experimental approach of Carlo Mazzone-Clementi's Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre:

Dell'Arte's fundamental pedagogical principles are its rejection of realism as interference to the actor's creative potential, its adherence to principles of ensemble and stylistic eclecticism, the deployment of Commedia not as historical style, but as a source of inspiration in the creation of new characters for contemporary times (Canavan, 2012, p.49).

Indeed, Commedia dell'Arte has always been an evolving, organic and 'alive' phenomenon that developed throughout Europe for at least 300 years (mid 16th until mid-18th century) through a constant process of transformation and adaptation in response to the changes of the society and culture that it stemmed from. Therefore, it must be understood as an umbrella of forms of theatres, styles and 'experiences' - not as a 'monolithic entity'. In the same way as we interpret and understand the 'Post-dramatic' as an umbrella of/for many different 'categories' and sub-categories of theatre forms and styles of performance.

Both Commedia dell'Arte and postdramatic theatre refer to a number of different theatre practices: a wide range of live performances developed throughout many years in different countries. In order to analyse the connections and similarities between the two, it is necessary to identify which specific aspects of both Commedia and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre are relevant to my research and practice. I will focus on some of the fundamental principles and defining features of both postdramatic theatre and Commedia dell'Arte:

- The notion of 'Actor as Creator'. This is Scala's first teaching and the most relevant concept in Lehmann's analysis of postdramatic theatre; a theatre where the actor is not only an *interpreter* of a written text but also a *creator*. In Lehmann's words, this is a theatre 'beyond' drama: performers

create a text through improvisation and devising – it is a collaborative experience beyond the written text of a single author. I label this type of work 'Artisan Theatre' because rooted in practice and experience: like the artisans' 'know how' (Chapter 3.1).

- Experimentation and Stylistic promiscuity: both Commedia dell'Arte and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre integrate a variety of approaches, styles and genres. They develop a theatre language that goes beyond realism and a slavish imitation of reality. They both explore the Grotesque, the Surreal and the Absurd. This implies a mixing of codes and genres, parody and humour; use of dialects, vernaculars and multilingualism. This is linked with the notion of 'Artisan Theatre' and will be discussed in Chapter 3.1.
- Beyond the Linear-Narrative of a single Author: as Scala eloquently put it: 'plays truly and in essence consist in actions and in narrations merely *by accident*' (Scala, 1619). The narrative – or plot - is not a fundamental aspect of this type of theatre. Refined words and complex stories might work very well on the written page but not necessarily on stage because *literature* is not *theatre*. Scala states that actors know the rules of the stage better than anyone else does – including a playwright. Through experience, actors know that tempo-rhythm, pace, composition, sounds, images and everything that takes place on stage is as important as the written text. This is one of the defining features of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre: 'drama' is characterised by narrative, while what Lehmann's call 'postdramatic theatre' occurs when the progression of a story is not relevant. Both Commedia dell'Arte and postdramatic theatre are based on a 'performance text' rather than on the mise-en-scene of a 'written text'. In Chapter 3.2 I will discuss this introducing the concept of 'Accidental Narratives' (see also Glossary).
- The Importance of the body and the visceral connection between Performer and Spectator: This is another fundamental principle shared by Commedia dell'Arte and postdramatic theatre. Scala recognises a special type of connection between performers' and spectators that goes beyond a verbal communication and intellectual understanding because 'the senses from the senses are more easily moved than abstract concepts' (Scala, 1619). Lehmann describes it as 'a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving.' In line with Scala's views on the

relationship between actors and spectators, he affirms that the performance 'turns the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a *joint text*, a text even if there is not spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and audience.' Lehmann labels it *total text* (2006, p.17). In Chapter 3.3, I will focus on this concept analysing what I labelled: 'Stage Resonances'.

My methodology and findings as documented in this thesis may be of value to performance practitioners and students interested in creating devised ensemble theatre through improvisation, grotesque characterisation and the use of autobiographical material. Through the re-discovery and re-invention of Commedia dell'Arte Masks, actors will have at their disposal a new tool that I labelled 'the Experiential Mask'⁴¹: an alive, malleable and adaptable type created by actors in response to their reality, their world and their cultural inheritance moving beyond the traditional notion of Mask as fixed-type or stock character.

⁴¹ See Chapter 3.1: Artisan Theatre and the Experiential Mask and glossary.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

1.1 COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Commedia dell'Arte is a complex and heterogeneous theatrical phenomenon that originated in Italy in the mid-16th century. Commedia was born in the streets and the marketplace where it was easier to attract an audience and make a profit. Indeed, Commedia dell'Arte means comedy performed by professionals, those who are recognised as artists and make a living out of it, to distinguish it from the courtly amateurs. The word *Arte* (Art in Italian) meant craft. According to Rudlin it 'should be translated both "tradesmanship" and "artistic know-how"' (Rudlin, 1994, p.14). For Fo '*arte* implied the incorporation of the dramatic arts; and brought together those who were authorised to perform' meaning above all the 'association of professionals' like a guild or union⁴² (Fo, 1991, p.12).

The name Commedia dell'Arte was never utilised during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It is a late invention attributed to Carlo Goldoni who employed it to distinguish 'the masked and improvised drama from the scripted comedy.' The most frequent terms used to define Commedia during its 'Golden Age' are: *Commedia degli Zanni*, *a soggetto*, *all' Improvvisa*, *delle maschere* and *mercenaria*. Descriptive terms indicating its main characters (the *Zanni*), its style (improvised and masked) and its function: a mercenary art because performed by actors who made a living out of it. The term *Commedia dell'Arte* is however the most accurate term according to many scholars and practitioners 'because it identifies perhaps the most historically significant aspect of the 'invention': professionalism.' (Fava, 2007, p.25). Fava argues that 'at its birth Commedia was above all a practical idea: a theatrical spectacle fashioned to be sold to make a profit capable of sustaining the artist and financing further artistic project' (Fava, 2007; Introduction, p. xvi).

According to some scholars and historians its origins can be traced back to ancient Rome and the pagan rituals of Saturnalia out of which grew the tradition of the Carnival.

In Carnival, we find the masks, the language, the triviality, the satire, the mimicry, the acrobatics, in one word all the elements which have passed into the tradition of improvisation together with the nomadism which has

⁴² '*Arti e Mestieri*' is indeed the name given to guilds of professional at that time. Where *Arte* stands for craft/knowledge and *Mestiere* for profession.

constituted one of its immutable characteristics (Mango and Lombardi cited in Rudlin, 1994, p.31).

This is in line with Bakhtin's theory on the Carnival origins of Commedia dell'Arte however many scholars and practitioners nowadays reject a direct connection with the Carnival.⁴³ They recognise its *carnavalesque* philosophy and the presence of some elements that belonged to ancient pagan festivals (Fava, 2007) but identify its origins in the popular tradition of jesters, mime and street *ciarlatani*.⁴⁴ Henke argues that Venetian buffoons were proto-Commedia dell'Arte actor-writers whose work informed that of the late sixteenth-century *zanni*. In his review of Daniele Vianello's *L'arte del buffone: Maschere e spettacolo tra Italia e Bavaria nel XVI secolo*, he states:

Buffoni such as Domenico Taiacalze (d. 1513) and Zuan Polo Liompardi (d. 1541) performed regularly in Venetian piazzas, banquet halls, and state venues. Like the later Italian professional actors - who emerged, tentatively in the 1540s and 1550s and then extensively from 1567 on - these Venetian entertainers practiced verbal improvisation, performed before a wide social range of audience members, provided an extensive variety of entertainment, and presented themselves not as occasional actors but as entertainers with a distinct occupational identity (Henke, 2007, p. 516).

Nicoll rejects this view for the lack of historical evidence arguing for Commedia direct connection with literature in Ancient Rome and more specifically the Dorian mime, Menander's comedy, the *Fabula Atellana*, and the comedy of Plautus and Terence (Nicoll, 1987; Rozic, 2011). The limitation of

⁴³ The misconception and superficial association of Commedia dell'Arte masks and Carnival masks or Commedia performances with Carnival parades comes from the custom of that time of performing Commedia *all'improvviso* during the Carnival period of the year. The rules dictated by the Church banned comedies -and in particular 'blaspheme' masked performances - in any other period of the year but the carnival season. This was still in vogue during Goldoni's time and throughout the whole eighteenth century.

⁴⁴ *Ciarlatani* (charlatans in Italian) also known at that time as *ciurmadori* or *cerretani*, were populating piazzas and streets throughout the Renaissance and the Baroque time until the nineteenth century. 'The charlatan has antecedents: he is a shaman, an astrologer, almost a magus whose incantation put the audience into a kind of trance from which only the waving of money can release them. [...] All these types wandered from country fairs to carnivals setting up wherever they could draw a crowd that might escape the attention of civil or ecclesiastical officers'. The charlatans were more tolerated in Venice than other Italian cities: in Milan in 1565 the governor prohibited all 'Masters and players of comedies, herb-sellers, charlatans, buffoons, Zanni and mountebanks to play on church feast days or in Lent or on stages near the Church except after service on pain of whipping.' (Fava, p.22)

Nicoll's view, as Rudlin pointed out, is 'that the evidence of recorded history is usually that sanctioned by people who could read and write [...] and during the Renaissance no ink seems to have been wasted on documenting the traditional popular calendrical manifestation of Carnival' (Rudlin, 1994, p.28). A consideration supported by the work of many scholars including Bakhtin, Tessari, Marotti and many others.

Commedia is the result of a *meeting* between oral culture and literature, folk traditions and ancient drama, improvisation and structured scenarios, linear and episodic narrative, masked and unmasked characters, sublime poetry and obscenity. It is the result of the fruitful encounter between popular and *high* culture; between the medieval folk cultures of the marketplace with its jesters, clowns, buffoons, fools, storytellers, charlatans and acrobats *and* the written culture of Courts and academia (Ancient Greek comedy, Plautus and Terence, Renaissance plays). This is amply supported by Henke's study on the relationship between orality and literature in Commedia dell'Arte (Henke, 2002).

Indeed, Commedia dell'Arte had a massive impact in the development of the written drama of the time. Some of the most illustrious testaments of its legacy are Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Moliere, Shakespeare and obviously Goldoni.

The whole corpus of dramatic literature until the nineteenth century is haunted by [Commedia dell'Arte]: Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Moliere, Marivaux, Beaumarchais, Goldoni...Wherever there are witty servants and domineering masters, young wives and old husbands, pompous pedants, thwarted lovers, or bragging soldiers, the Commedia is there in spirit and also very often in form (Callow in Fava, 2007, Foreword, p.vii).

Tessari, Marotti and, for the first time in English, Henke's work provides an insightful analysis of the mutual influences of high and low culture during the Baroque time (Henke, 2002; Tessari, 1969; 1981; Marotti, 1991) and the 'contamination' 'between literary and verbally transmitted materials' (Jaffe-Berg, 2004).

In this light, Commedia dell'Arte represents a fertile and exciting moment of 'reconciliation' between these opposite cultures. Henke observes that one of the dynamic elements of the Commedia was the creative tension between the tendencies of the virtuosic actor originating in the *buffone* and *zanni* performers and the 'well-made plots' based on literary models (Henke, 2002, p.2). And indeed:

The conundrum in understanding Commedia dell'Arte is identifying the context from which one is approaching it. Look for the beautiful and the

grotesque and you will find them. Look for masked actors and you will find them, or not. Look for street theatre or opera and you might find both. Look for improvisation or scripted text and you will find both. These apparently conflicting complexities coexist...(Crick, 2015, Introduction, p.2).

This exciting and revolutionary aspect of Commedia makes it extremely relevant to any contemporary practitioners within the context of postdramatic theatre. In relation to my practice, this means a theatre that integrates written text and improvisation, tragedy and comedy, linear and episodic narrative. In the work that I have been developing with my company over the last seven years the notion of 'reconciliation of opposites' refers to both stylistic choices and content. I am particularly interested in exploring the relationship between fantasy and reality, dreams and tangible world: in other words, the 'magical realm where the imaginary *meets* the mundane' (Panta Rei Theatre, 2011).

My most recent theatre projects, *Home/Finding Home* (2017/18), *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015/2016) and *The Mountain Giants* (2016), are the result of a combination of different approaches: texts and devised material; improvisation and choreographed sequences; different languages, and a mix of styles and genres. On a thematic level the 'reconciliation of opposites' consists in the use of everyday life events, mundane actions and memories interwoven with myths, religious parables and literature sources. In these productions the 'concrete' world of our daily life merges with the world of memories, fantasies and dreams generating something that can be best expressed by using theatre's own 'autonomous language' outside the rules of everyday living. Chapter 3 provides an analysis of my practice and description of my productions supported by written, photographic and video documentation.

Academic studies tend to focus mainly on the historical aspects of Commedia from its genealogy (Nicoll, Croce, Marotti, Henke) to its political significance (e.g. Tessari, Taviani, Ferrone); from its aesthetic (e.g. Miklasevskij, Katritzky, Richards and Richards, Pandolfi, Castagno) to its religious-philosophical context (Cawson). All these studies agree in recognising the revolutionary and subversive qualities of this phenomenon.

However, this is not universally accepted. Some practitioners and scholars today argue that Commedia dell'Arte could not afford to be political or subversive: troupes needed to make a living off their art therefore they had to be

very careful to maintain a good relationship with both secular and religious powers of the time (Cavallin, 2015; full interview in Appendix 2, p. 259). According to Olly Crick 'originally Commedia dell'Arte actors were political not because they were meant to be political; but simply because they wanted to make a living out of acting and that was opposed by the Church.' If they had tried to be overtly political 'they would have been chopped down pretty quickly' by their patrons and protectors: the aristocrats. However, with their performances, Commedia companies were 'spreading humanistic ideals under the protections of the secular dukes.' Although they were not trying to be political, they were 'promoting humanism just by their existence' (Crick, 2015; full interview in Appendix 2, p. 242).

Indeed, Robert Henke states that actors [of Commedia] were 'the full bearers of humanist culture' (Henke, 2002, p.109); and Scott McGehee believes that:

if we are to appreciate fully the "revolutionary" quality of the Commedia and its lessons for contemporary theatre, it is important for it to be understood historically as a part of the wider cultural complex of the Renaissance from which it was both an offspring and a cultural force in itself. [...] Among the principle characteristics of Renaissance thought, at its most radical, was the humanist concept of self-creation (McGehee in Chafee and Crick, 2015, pp. 9 -11).

The notion of man as the self-creator is 'the stronger link between the Commedia dell'Arte and the social imagery of the Renaissance' and one of the most significant aspect of Commedia for theatre practitioners today (ibid., p. 11) and postdramatic theatre too. It is not necessarily the direct political content that makes Commedia dell'Arte political. The subversive and revolutionary aspect of Commedia is its 'theatrical language', independently of the message or theme of each performance.

Scott McGehee argues that the real genius of the *commedianti* was their ability to 'expose the mechanisms of power in contemporary society in ways that people could recognise in their daily lives' (2016; full interview in Appendix 2, p.266). For example, the *batocchio* (the slapstick), that became the symbol of Commedia and even gave a name to a specific genre, was something more than simply a comic device. The classic chasing comic routine with a slapstick was highly successful – and still is. On a deeper level, however, the comic routines between Master and Servant – or Servant and Servant – were a theatricalisation

of a tragic truth: violence, prevarication and abuse of power experienced by the lower classes on a daily basis. People in that situation would have recognised it, laughed about it – a liberating or cathartic laughter – and thought about it. They would have reflected on their conditions. Commedia dell'Arte's ability to comment and reflect on the injustice of society is one of the reasons of its success. Commedia dell'Arte exposed and ridiculed human beings' weaknesses, vices and faults – e.g. avarice, stupidity, lust, cowardice, vanity etc...These are universal themes: they do not relate to a specific place or historical period. This is why traditional scenarios and Commedia Masks still resonates with us. However, the way 16th century Commedia troupes explored those themes was specific to their times. They would even adapt their scenarios and scripts to relate to the specific audiences they met in each city and village. That is why a contemporary audience might resonate more to an 'updated' Commedia whose Masks were rooted in the reality of our times.

This is what Dario Fo did in his farces and monologues – in particular *Mistero Buffo*. He talked about the past and the injustice and class inequality in the Middle Ages constantly connecting those events with the present. This 'activated' his audiences: stimulated their 'hearts' and brains. Fo utilises characters and stories from the distant past to reveal the injustice and inequality of today. Just a hint to current events can have a massive impact on the way an audience interprets those stories. This is what my piece *Home* aims to achieve. In my solo piece, I talk about the clash of values between the Commedia dell'Arte and the Roman Inquisition. I focus on the revolutionary aspect of women on stage, their pivotal role in the success of Commedia across Europe and the Catholic Church's hostility towards them. I created a fictional event imagining how an Inquisitor's attack against a Commedia actress accused to be a witch, led to her trial and execution. The actress epitomises the opposite of female Christian virtue: Holy Mary, the Mother; she is indeed the sinner par excellence: Mary-Magdalene, the Whore.

Taking into consideration the complexity of Commedia dell'Arte as a cultural phenomenon, it is possible that different 'types' of Commedia – *political* and *non-political* Commedia - co-existed throughout the centuries: from the 'institutionalised Commedia' to the 'subversive Commedia'. The latter were companies that did not have the protection of the nobility and maintained a stronger connection with the Carnival, the marketplace and the popular culture of streets and piazzas. This might have been particularly evident during the initial

stages of development of Commedia; a period when street performers such as mountebanks, acrobats, clowns, mimes and jesters started to develop a new 'genre' and organised themselves in travelling troupes in response to the artistic, financial and social changes of the time.

Geoff Beale believes that Commedia dell'Arte was political and subversive in particular in the early stages of developments. 'Obviously having women on stage was revolutionary' and although there aren't many, 'we do have some documents, of them [Commedia actors] attacking the church. There are records of letters where it seems that where they felt safe, they would attack the church' (Beale, 2015; full interview in Appendix 2, p. 227). This statement seems to contradict Paola Cavallin's and Oliver Crick's 'cautious' position, placing Commedia dell'Arte within the lineage of the nomadic jesters of the Middle Ages – i.e. the popular theatre tradition followed by Dario Fo.

It is certainly significant that both the Church and the dominant (written) culture were hostile to this 'new theatre'. Commedia was seen as the negation or antithesis of Christian values and classic poetry (Aristotelian canon), therefore a potential threat to the status quo. These hostile voices were aware of the 'cultural revolution' that was taking place and tried to silence Commedia through censorship. The Church and the cultural 'elites' of the Renaissance felt threatened by the powerful impact that Commedia dell'Arte had on its audiences. The innovative aspects of Commedia at the root of its success and expansion across all Europe are: its celebration of the body (corporeality), its irrational playfulness, its inversion of social order and hierarchy (the upside down world of the Carnival), the irruption of the popular culture on stage and the revelation of lower classes' misery and tragedies, the irreverent satire against the dominant powers, the use of masks with their diabolic connotations and the presence of women on stage.

Church condemnation of carnival festivities indicates a growing awareness – and concern - about the powerful draw of marketplace entertainments. During the Counter Reformation, the Catholic Church 'devoted itself to enforcing a new repressive orthodoxy over its parishioners in an effort to reclaim control over their moral, spiritual, and intellectual lives. (Procacci, 1991, cited in Kerr, 2008, p.183). Indeed, Cawson interprets Commedia's emphasis on the corporeal - and the celebration of the body - as a cultural response to the Catholic ideology. He argues that 'the transgression of boundaries that the mask (and the grotesque in general) embodies inherently defies the dichotomous

approach of body-mind separation in favour of a continual synthesis of becoming' (2013, p.31). In this light, Commedia does not reject the soul *per se*, but the dichotomy. Commedia celebrates the corporeal and the physical rejecting the anti-corporeal; it responds to the repression and stigmatisation of the body and its needs by putting them 'centre stage' - not only in style (physical performance) but also in content (themes).

Cawson unfolds an interesting argument on the possible parallelism between the Inquisition and Commedia. He asserts that in terms of body-mind (and body-soul) dualism we could interpret the Inquisition as 'the face of human spirituality' and its ferocious hostility against the body and Commedia dell'Arte as 'the grotesque face of human corporeality and desire' in direct response to this oppression. Cawson recognises an inherent theatricality in both:

the *autos-da-fé* of the Inquisition were deliberately theatrical, drawing enormous crowds and exhibiting strikingly carnivalesque attributes. The carnival aspect of the Commedia offer tantalising glimpses of the potential common ancestry of both the Commedia and the *auto-da-fé*: a bifurcation that led in two contrary ideological directions, namely the celebration and the condemnation/destruction of the body (2013, p.37).

The visceral language of these events is the product of a culture very different from ours. Sixteenth and seventeenth century audiences were much more responsive to images than words largely because of illiteracy. They were accustomed to a 'visual translation' of the sacred texts. They learnt them through theatrical enactments and images - the frescos, paintings and stained glass windows adorning churches and cathedral - rather than sermons in Latin; a language that they could not understand.

The lack of dominance of written texts is also related to the limited availability of publications: just a century had passed since Gutenberg's print. To complicate things even further Italy's political and linguistic fragmentation delayed the development of a common oral and written language. The debate around the definition of the (written) Italian language started with Dante and Petrarca in the fourteenth century and carried on throughout all the Baroque time and beyond⁴⁵. Furthermore, the Catholic Church was against the diffusion of

⁴⁵ The debate on the definition of the Italian language came to some sort of resolution only at the end of the 19th century with the publication of Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (1827). The 'Florentine school' won over the 'Venetian School' and Florentine became the official written Italian language.

books and in 1558 established the Index of Forbidden Books (*Index Librorum Prohibitorum*). Publications of all kinds - except sacred texts written in Latin - were considered potential instruments of the Devil to seduce and corrupt the human soul like any other form of art and in particular Commedia dell'Arte. Carlo Borromeo⁴⁶'s words clearly express the Church concerns on the matter:

What use The Council of Trent's decrees? When, taking strict measures against the obscenity of books, we command they should be burnt and extirpated from human kind's memory; and whoever reads them should be punished with serious charges and pain, when what the eyes can see penetrates much deeper into the soul than that which they can read in those kinds of books! (Tessari, 1981, p.24, my translation)

Borromeo continues arguing that performers' speeches – 'live voices' - can scar adolescents' minds even more deeply 'than the dead voices in printed books!' This statement seems to reveal a serious preoccupation amongst the religious authorities of the time that saw theatre as a threat to their absolute control over the masses. This seems in line with Bakhtin and Fo's belief in the subversive 'power of laughter' and the notion of theatre as an instrument of social and political intervention.

And indeed Commedia was a dangerous democratic tool in the hands of artists who could reach a really wide audience, in particularly those 'uneducated' masses traditionally excluded from culture and education due to their financial, social and cultural status. Commedia was cheap hence affordable for everyone; it did not need a designated venue like a theatre, a palace (indoor performances and civil ceremonies) or a Church (religious ceremonies); it could travel very easily from town to town; it could be understood by everyone including the illiterate and could escape censorship because it was not written. Finally, it was unpredictable: the actors could improvise on the spot make it impossible to control its outcomes. It does not surprise that Cardinal Borromeo labelled it '*perniciossissima zizzania*' (pernicious darnel): a fast growing phenomenon that couldn't be controlled, couldn't be easily censored and could be understood and accessed by everyone (Tessari, 2013).

The Church saw this theatre as a serious danger that had two vicious weapons at its disposal: women and masks. The female presence on stage instigates lustful desires in men and contaminates girls' minds (P.H. de Mendoza

⁴⁶ Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584) was a Cardinal and Archbishop of Milan and one of the leading figures of the Counter-Reformation.

in Taviani, pp. 88-89) showing an alternative to the Christian female model of purity and chastity: Holy Mary. Commedia scenarios challenge the tradition of arranged marriages showing young couples succeeding in their rebellion against their fathers. This goes well beyond an artistic device ('happy end'): it represents a serious threat to the social stability of a patriarchal society founded on the values of the family. It suggests that men - and women - can take position against their 'fathers' will and law's order' undermining the status quo (Carlo Borromeo cited in Tessari, 1981, p.23).

Tommaso Garzoni⁴⁷ expresses his concerns on the mysterious power of Commedia and its unprecedented success amongst men and women of any age and social background. Garzoni could find only one reason behind this 'uncontrollable frenzy': the Devil. Incontrovertible evidence of his theory was the use of masks. The physical and transformative aspects of the mask were indeed a source of concern for many during the time of the Inquisition. 'The *Malleus Maleficarum*⁴⁸ expressly forbids masks on the grounds that any agent of transformation is the agent of Satan' (Tessari, 1981, p.207). Garzoni claimed that the 'first mask ever worn was, without doubt, that of the serpent's face worn by the Dark Angel to persuade Eve to commit the first sin' (cited in Cawson, p.34).

Carlo Borromeo and Tommaso Garzoni's invectives and the *Malleus Maleficarum* became source material for my final piece *Home*. The theory studied at the beginning of my research influenced my practice not only in re-defining my methodology but also in providing a source of inspiration for my final performance.⁴⁹ Cawson's theory on the parallelism between the Inquisition and the Commedia dell'Arte provided the basic structure of my one-woman show⁵⁰. I utilised the historical figure of Cardinal Borromeo (Fig.4) as an inspiration to symbolise the Inquisition and its repressive attitude against heretics and women.

⁴⁷ Tommaso Garzoni (1549-1589) was a writer and priest (*Lateranensi* Order). He is one of the most important commentators of the day.

⁴⁸ The *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*), the most famous treatise on witchcraft, was written by the Catholic clergyman Heinrich Kramer and published in 1487.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 4 – *Home*. Carlo Borromeo's monologues pp. 275-280; and Video 6.8: *Cardinal Borromeo's Evolution* [Time code: 17'42"].

⁵⁰ See Chapter 3.4.2 – *Home*.



Figure 4: Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584)

In my piece, Carlo Borromeo looks like a puppet: he is just a mask (his face) with skinny hands and a crucifix. This wooden shrinking creature (Fig.5) appears without a body to symbolise the negation of physical and corporeal needs. He accuses Commedia dell'Arte's actresses of being the *organum diaboli* (the Devil's instrument): they corrupt the purity of innocent Christian souls. Following the wide spread accepted belief that the female body is indeed the ultimate symbol of corruption and sin; it is not so difficult to point at actresses on stage as the instigators of lust and sinful thoughts.



Figure 5: The negation of corporeal needs: Cardianl Borromeo in *Home*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2017.

I utilized a Commedia dell'Arte actress, Vittoria Piisini (Fig.6), as an inspiration to symbolise the exuberance of Commedia dell'Arte. Vittoria Piisimi was a famous and successful artist who capitalised on her beauty, femininity and physical dexterity to build an extraordinary career (Fig.7).



Figure 6: Vittoria Piisimi (fl.1595) the 'dancing actress'



Figure 7: The celebration of the body: The Dancing-Actress in *Home*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2017.

Tessari believes that Catholic Church and literates worked for over three centuries in discrediting popular traditions and glorifying the written culture by disseminating the belief of a dualism between Poetry as Words on one side, and Obscenity as Obscene Mime (i.e. the negation of words) on the other side, mirroring another dualism: Divine presence/the Church and the Diabolic presence/Masked Theatre (Tessari, 1981, p.28 my translation).

Commedia's visceral language and the use of masks had a very strong impact on their audiences. Its success however is not rooted in the diabolic influences of the underworld but its deep connection with the reality of the time (content) and the extraordinary abilities of its performers (form); their improvisational skills, their comic timing, their outstanding vocal and physical skills including acrobatics, dance and singing. In other words, their ability to speak through the powerful *language of theatre*. One of the most important aspects of Commedia is the pivotal role of the actor on stage. As Zorzi put it: 'Commedia was an *actors' theatre* rather than a *literates' theatre*. Indeed, in his prologue to *Il Finto Marito*,

Scala argues for the primacy of the actor in the theatre as the one who, by virtue of his practical experience, has established those rules which should govern the composition of plays. Dramatists, in Scala's opinion, learnt how to fashion plays by following the rules established by actors (Richards and Richards, 1990, p.197).

Scala is affirming the dignity and autonomy of his art and its independence from literature rejecting the hierarchy that divided *l'arte minore del recitare*⁵¹ from the noble art of poetry and literature. Scala asserts that the poet's creation and the actor's creation must be considered equal. Therefore, Commedia dell'Arte must be interpreted as a theatre form *per-se* not subordinated to literature; it is neither an 'aberration' from drama (Croce) nor a wonderfully executed theatrical expression of written texts (Nicoll)⁵². The unique feature of Commedia is to show 'the immense possibility of making theatre without limiting it to mere physical 'transposition' of a written text' developing an

⁵¹ The "lower art" of acting.

⁵² Croce considered Commedia a sort of aberration from 'real' theatre due to its lack of written texts. Nicoll admired Commedia for the outstanding craft of their performers able to translate written drama into action so much to inspire great playwrights such as Shakespeare, Moliere and Goldoni. Both evaluate Commedia *only* in relation to literature rather than considering it an autonomous art form.

autonomous and effective language 'that speaks directly to the heart and senses of the spectators' (Tessari, 1981, p. 53).

This revolutionary concept was rediscovered and explored by some of the most influential theatre practitioners of the twentieth century - Copeau, Meyerhold, Barba, Brook, Grotowski, Lecoq, Mnouchine, Fo to quote a few. It is the foundation of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre and the premise of any form of ensemble and devised theatre including my own practice. Almost four hundred years have passed since Scala's publication of *Il Finto Marito* yet theatre makers still need to re-affirm the autonomy and independence of their art that is neither an 'illustration' of Nature nor a 'physicalisation' of literature.

We might never discover what Commedia language exactly was; but we can benefit from its underpinning principles and put them into practice today. In this light, the lack of written documentation should not discourage any contemporary practitioners to fully embrace and integrate Commedia in their work. Fava argues that the impossibility of recovering texts of a particular genre is not relevant to a theatre maker because what really matters is to make something of that genre in performance for the audience:

People who make theatre do it neither in homage to the past nor for future beatification: they do it (at least they should) for the audience present at that moment. Whatever it is about and however it is done, theatre takes place in the now, in movement, wherever speech and silence, action and stillness, reveal a present moment under way. More than any other, the Commedia dell'Arte is the genre of theatre that expresses *the present* as it moves (Fava, 2007, Introduction, p. xiii).

The incredible success earned by Commedia dell'arte resulted in the proliferation of many theatre companies not always equally skilled or knowledgeable of the new 'art'. Some commentators of the time lamented an increased number of charlatans and performers of dubious quality populating the streets and town squares ruining the reputation of accomplished artists and professional companies. It is certainly true that some performances might have been poorer than others, however this commentary suggests something else. It shows how the 'high' culture – conscious of the immense success and widespread proliferation of Commedia across Europe - progressively shifted from a total rejection to a 're-appropriation' of Commedia dell'Arte. By discrediting all types of performances outside the patronage of the aristocracy, they widen the gap between 'institutionalised Commedia' and 'subversive Commedia' declaring the legitimacy and superiority of the former against the latter. As a result, we have

much more information about an art form that developed 'to please' the taste of the courts and the literates of the time rather than the Commedia rooted in the tradition of the marketplace.

In reality the situation was quite complex. From street performers to organised troupes under the patronage of aristocrats, Commedia was performed both indoor and outdoor; it was improvised but also written; it was obscene, wild and subversive...or not at all – according to audiences, venues, specific times, political climate, the Church and its censorship. Commedia is also the product of a politically and culturally fragmented nation without a common language. This fragmentation had a massive impact on the development of Commedia and its major features: the emphasis on the body as a medium of expression rather than words, the absence of playwrights, the importance of the actors and the prominent role of music, songs, dance and acrobatics. The creation of an invented language - made of gestures, sounds, mixed dialects and idioms - was a necessity not a choice; travelling troupes needed to be understood in every town in order to make a living.

It is fascinating that many aspects of Commedia dell'Arte are visible in contemporary theatre practices all over the world. This is possible because 'elements from the past of Commedia have been chosen, adapted, even ultimately rejected in the practice of the last twenty-five years or so, not as theories to be debated in research papers, but in performance' (Rudlin and Crick, 2001, p.52). While discussing my practice I will contextualise my research identifying the qualities of different approaches to mask work and how they relate to my practice.

Archaeological, Recontextualised and Experimental Commedia

Many practitioners and scholars have been debating about the way Commedia was (or should be) performed aiming to maintain alive the ancient form and the traditional scenarios with a style as close as possible to what they believe Commedia might have been in its Golden Age. These practitioners rely on 'conventional' written sources to reconstruct the traditional three acts scenarios utilising period costumes and set. Leather masks are faithfully reconstructed utilising original artefacts as a reference. Characters' posture, physicality and language are reconstructed utilising historical documents, paintings and drawings of the time (Fig. 8). Each Mask (e.g. *Arlecchino*, *Zanni* or *Pantalone*) has a specific code of postures and gestures and the actor has to

conform to this codified language. However, this is a purely arbitrary choice because we do not have enough documentation to support such a dogmatic position: 'the Commedia, unlike Asian theatre, was never codified' (McGehee, 2016, full interview in Appendix 2, p.266). This is why there are many different 'schools': practitioners do not agree with one another in recognising a univocal 'codified language'. I labelled this approach 'Archaeological Commedia'. I have used it for many years as a Commedia dell'Arte tutor:⁵³ it is the way I have been trained in this art. I have learnt through imitation and emulation of my teachers. Through repetition, I have refined my skills until I could fully embody each Mask according to a specific and precise set of postures and gestures. Actors inevitably develop their own version of each Mask because each human being is unique: our body shape, energy and voice affect the character. Yet each Mask is immediately recognisable from the moment an actor steps on stage. Some practitioners believe that Commedia dell'Arte Masks are already part of our DNA: all these characters already exist within each of us. They are human archetypes therefore we do not *create* them: we simply *access* them. The training is a way to discover them.



Figure 8: Jacques Callot, *Capitan Babbeo e Cucuba* (1622).

⁵³ See Appendix 5: Teaching Commedia dell'Arte and Devising. Examples: *Commedia Extravaganza* (2016/17) and *Commedia dell'Shakespeare* (2016).

This type of approach to Commedia is undoubtedly an excellent training for actors. Traditional Masks gestures and movements are quite challenging. They force the actor to push their bodies beyond their 'comfort zone'. The warming-up exercises are tailored to build stamina, flexibility and control. It is comparable to ballet in the way it works against instinctive and spontaneous patterns to re-shape the actor's body according to specific fixed-forms (Fig.9).

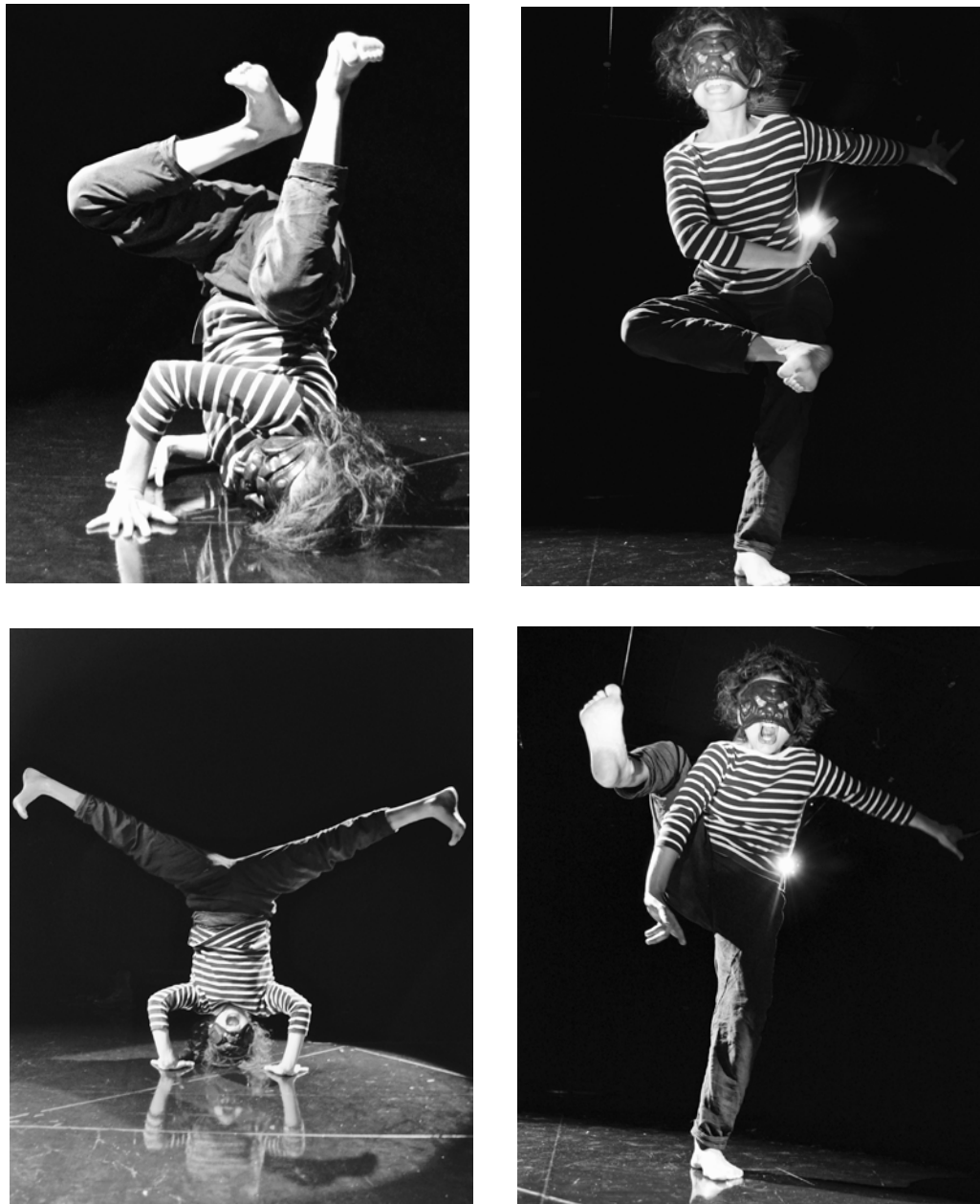


Figure 9: Training with *Arlecchino*.

This training develops the actors' ability to work with extreme precision on each part of their body: from the core to the extremities. From the top of the

head to the tip of the toes. The Mask demands clarity: precise sharp movements and clear intentions. It demands simplicity in both movement and text. Tempo-rhythm and pace are far more important than the originality of the text or the complexity of the actions. Improvising with Commedia dell'Arte Masks demands openness and playfulness.

This training teaches actors to be alert, present and available: constantly aware of other actors on stage and most importantly the audience. In fact, it is impossible to work with Masks without at least one spectator. The first couple of months of training and rehearsal for my piece *Home* led me to extreme levels of frustration: it took me a while to realise that a video camera cannot substitute a human being. The relationship Mask-audience is vital to the existence of the Mask. See *Video 6.1: Training with Masks* [Time code: 00:26].

This approach has many qualities and its pedagogical value is undeniable. It had a strong influence on my practice and, more than any other theatre training,⁵⁴ it allowed me to develop a deep awareness of my body and the space; connection and complicity with an audience; ensemble playing; giving and receiving; listening and responding; expressiveness, inventiveness and confidence in improvising.

However, we must also remember that Commedia dell'Arte was an innovative form of theatre not a re-enactment of ancient theatre traditions:

the Commedia, to my knowledge, rarely played anachronistic theatre – they dressed in contemporary costumes [...] they dressed up in daily costumes – the same stuff you saw in the streets, just exaggerated. So when we do Commedia, we dress up in period costumes - we're specifically not doing what they were doing. They did contemporary theatre (McGehee, 2016, full interview in Appendix 2, p.266).

Indeed, other practitioners maintain the traditional style and dramaturgical structure but integrate freely contemporary situations, characters and texts. This 'Recontextualised Commedia' - utilises the traditional *canovacci*⁵⁵ and characters in a contemporary setting. Set and costumes can vary according to the needs of each production and the leather masks are not necessarily strict

⁵⁴ Besides studying Commedia, I have worked both as a student and a professional actress with practitioners that introduced me to other types of training including Grotowski (Domenico Castaldo; *Song of the Goat*; Gardzienice Theatre) and Meyerhold (Andrei Droznin).

⁵⁵ A *canovaccio* is the loose plot or structure of the piece. A *canovaccio* provides clear indications of entrances and exits, the situation and the type of interactions between characters, asides and the list of *lazzi* (=comic gags).

reproductions of ancient models. Mask-makers are given more freedom to express their own creativity. The performance can be adapted to both indoor and outdoor venues.

Both in Italy and in the UK there are many practitioners who re-contextualised traditional scenarios for a contemporary audience including Claudia Contin, Antonio Fava, Carlo Boso, Eugenio Allegri, Didi Hopkins, Geoff Beale and Olly Crick. Boso believes that 'the traditional masks within their social context and exact level of emotional development are able to talk directly to members of their own class in the audience' today. In his view, 'Zanni embodies all refugee-immigrants, Pantalone all bourgeoisie-financiers [...] and the conflict between these *living symbols* creates an ideal framework for contemporary Commedia' (Boso in Rudlin and Crick, 2001, pp. 71-72). This approach has great potentials however, if we embark on a process of re-contextualisation of traditional Masks, we must consider that 'the social structure that gave birth to them' is no longer our social structure (McGehee, 2016, full interview in Appendix 2, p.266).

To bring these *living symbols* to life is necessary to understand where and how the Masks came to existence. People in flesh and bones - characters that they could observe in their everyday life - inspired actors triggering their creativity. The *Commedianti* took inspiration from their surroundings and gave it back a transformed image of that reality: a grotesque and surreal version of their world. *Zanni's* specific rhythm, physicality and gestures are rooted in the specific culture he comes from, the Po' Valley in the sixteenth century; hence he speaks Bergamask-dialect. An actor playing *Zanni* with a Welsh or Yorkshire accent in a contemporary British setting will not be totally believable unless his walk, gestures, physicality and expressions are affected by his environment and history. This 'new *Zanni*' has to find his own *raison d'être* rooted in his culture.

For instance, if we wanted to explore the theme of exploitations of the lower classes (the 'Servants' of Commedia) or inequality in society, first we should look around us and clarify how that topic relate to our life and experience. Once we have real people and situations to connect with then we can start working on the Masks borrowing from Commedia dell'Arte principles and techniques. This is the process I have utilised to create the characters for *Home* and *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*⁵⁶. Although I recognise the value of the

⁵⁶ See Chapter 3.1: Artisan Theatre and the 'Experiential Mask'.

'Recontextualised Commedia' both as a pedagogical tool and in performance⁵⁷, I propose a different approach.

I labelled 'Experimental Commedia' a methodology that utilises Commedia techniques and principles in rehearsal to develop both devising and text-based theatre, leaving more freedom to the actors to develop their own characters. This approach includes an umbrella of theatre expressions with different styles and intents: from a purely 'stylistic' approach (e.g. Lecoq's lineage including Complicite in the UK) to what I would label a 'political approach' (e.g. Dario Fo, Marco Paolini). Dario Fo utilises Commedia characters, style and techniques to reflect and comment on contemporary society. Fo's theatre challenges the status quo and provides an alternative to mainstream information and mass media. This approach retains the political and subversive quality of a very specific type of *Commedianti dell'Arte*, unwelcomed by the aristocrats and forgotten by history. These artists maintained a much stronger connection with the carnivalised culture of the market space and the oral tradition of popular theatre.

As discussed earlier, Commedia dell'Arte's political dimension cannot be ignored. Commedia was not only a beautifully crafted entertainment performed by highly skilled actors. First of all, it was – and ought to be - a powerful tool to comment on our society and our weaknesses, limitations and tragedies. Technique is fundamental; however, pure technicality might lead to performances without depth. I agree with Fo in considering technical skills and physical dexterity tools to serve a purpose. The aim of my work – as with Commedia dell'Arte at its origins - is to comment on our society and deliver a message that is relevant to the actors and their audiences, utilising autobiographical material as well as current affairs and common cultural references.

Commedia actors observed the world around them. They developed characters tailored to their own specific experience, abilities and physicality to tell stories that mattered to *them*. There was a strong connection between the Masks, the actors and their cultural contexts. There were no schools to teach them how to perform the perfect *Zanni* or *Pantalone*: they *created* them. This understanding constitutes the foundation of my research on the 'accessibility' of Commedia dell'Arte for actors today. I believe that we should think about our

⁵⁷ See projects and positive feedback from students in Appendix 5: Teaching Commedia dell'Arte and Devising.

reality and life experience with the purpose of *creating* Masks that resonate with a contemporary audience - even when we integrate the traditional Masks in our work. The differences between 16th century Italy and London in the 21st century must be fully acknowledged throughout the creative process.

For example, Dario Fo created his *Zanni* and his *Arlecchino* utilising his personal experience: he integrated his childhood memories, he observed people around him and utilised the dialects spoken in his region. He transformed this material creatively and gave birth to a 'new' Mask: very specific to him and his times⁵⁸. For my piece, *Home*, I looked at my family's story of emigration, poverty and exploitation. I looked at the real '*Zanni*' in my life: my peasant granny and my parents, both factory workers. I started from the 'familiar': material that I could easily access and feel strongly connected to. Then I looked at Commedia dell'Arte, its characters, style and techniques and shaped my material using those ancient Masks.

Moreover, Commedia actors were constantly responding to their environment: being it a village square or a court. Fo develops his work – and his plays – following the same principle. He constantly reconsidered and developed his material according to the specific events taking place around him. He connected with the essence of the Masks making them accessible to his audience. He maintained the connection with the popular theatre tradition while commenting on his society and the present. He looked not only at Commedia. For instance, in *Mistero Buffo* Fo utilises Biblical themes drawn from the apocryphal Gospels and Medieval popular tales of Christ, to talk about abuse of power and inequality; themes that were particularly relevant to him and his audience, especially in the Italian political climate of the early 1970s.

Like Fo I took inspiration from real historical characters and events to talk about the present. In my piece *Home* I utilised two leading figures in the persecution of heretics, Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584) and The Inquisitor Domenico Buelli da Arona (1570-1602), to explore a theme that is still extremely relevant today: propaganda and culture of fear (see Fig.10).

⁵⁸ Fo utilised Commedia's techniques and principles (e.g. prologues, asides, the *grummelot*) to re-invent his own Masks without necessarily limiting his work to traditional Masks and scenarios.



Figure 10: Cardinal Carlo Borromeo as The Inquisitor during his sermon in *Home*, CrisisArt Festival. Arezzo, 2017.

The characters in my solo piece emerged from my improvisations utilising autobiographical material, historical texts and the media. Modelled on Fo's *Mistero Buffo* the piece utilises real historical characters to talk about the present, my times. The script and background of the piece are available in Chapter 3.4.2.; Appendix 4 provides information on the source material and the genesis of the piece with links to galleries and videos.

I utilised Commedia's principles and techniques as a vehicle to express my ideology because, like Fo, I believe 'technique cannot be separated from its ideological, moral and theatrical context' (1991, p.148). Fo firmly criticised Lecoq for teaching 'his actors to walk, stand, use their hands, impersonate, hold their breath and deliver jokes, to talk endlessly but to say nothing.' Theatre makers, in Fo's terms 'need to be aware of how performance determines content, to refuse to be bewitched by notions of pure art or pure professionalism, and to be in touch with their own times' (Farrell and Scuderi, 2000, p.207). This provides the foundation for my argument on the necessity of creating new contemporary Masks rooted in the reality of our culture beyond an 'archaeological' approach to Commedia that attempts to resurrect the traditional Masks. It is therefore difficult for me to embrace the idea of a dogmatic approach to Commedia dell'Arte.

Throughout the centuries, Commedia Masks changed, constantly influenced by historical changes, different cultures and languages and the fundamental role of the actors and their personal interpretation. Nobody can state with absolute certainty how a *Pantalone*, a *Zanni* or an *Arlecchino* should be

performed. We can make choices based on what the Masks represent for us. It is not the Masks' physicality on its own, as a form, that really matters, but the Masks' power in commenting on our society and criticising its inequality and injustice⁵⁹. In other words:

The challenge for the theatre of today is to find a relevant application for the Commedia dell'arte that can appeal to contemporary audiences in precisely the visceral way that the flagship *vecchi*, *Pantalone* and *Dottore*, went to the heart of social tensions engendered by elders – but not necessarily betters – who held sway over the young, the undereducated and the impecunious (Jordan, 2015, in Chafee and Crick, p.64).

In this light, my re-invention of Commedia Masks is a 'point of arrival' rather than a 'point of departure'. The actors do not start their creative process relying on 'fixed' types and codified forms; instead, they create 'their' own types through devising. It is a process of discovery where the result is unknown. Outcomes can be very different: from solo shows to ensemble pieces, from visual and highly physical spectacles to storytelling. 'Experimental Commedia' has great potential because the work stems directly from the actors' experience, their culture and society.

Scott McGehee argues that the idea of fixed-types and stock characters - characters that will never change in any condition or circumstance – ignores the strong connection between Commedia dell'Arte and its cultural and philosophical roots: the Renaissance. The humanistic belief of 'man as self-maker, as the architect of his own being' clashes with the notion of archetype: 'a sort of eternal human typology' that has no real historicity and is present in all cultures.

All attempts to depict the Commedia as a comic form that is eternal and immutable, a form that captures the essential archetypes of humanity, and a form that reveals man's eternal essence, runs counter to the spirit of the age. In Renaissance laughter, the fixed and essential nature of the world crumbles to become ambiguous, ever mutating, ever changing, and ever inverting to reveal a world of endless possibilities. This was the spirit of the age and the Commedia was its comic expression (McGehee, 2015, p.12).

In this light, an 'archaeological' approach to Commedia can be aesthetically pleasing and highly entertaining but it can have its limitations too. By devoting too much attention to style and form, actors risk losing contact with

⁵⁹ See Chapter 3.4.2: *Home* (2017). Propaganda, abuse of power and 'culture of fear'.

the reality of their times. On the other hand, a re-contextualisation that integrates traditional Masks and scenarios (i.e. 'Recontextualised Commedia'), without working on the creation of new Masks developed by the performers, might overlook the fundamental role that Commedia actors had in creating their Masks. I propose to explore an 'experimental approach' to Commedia Masks as a way to unleash the full potential of Commedia dell'Arte today. This is what I aim to demonstrate with my research.

In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* some Experiential Masks were immediately detectable as contemporary counterpart of the traditional Masks, like Itsaso, the Old Fisherman Wife, whose physical traits remind us of a female version of Pantalone (Fig.11).



Figure 11. Itsaso, The Fisherman's Wife Mask in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2016.

In other cases, the connection with traditional Commedia dell'Arte Masks was much subtler, for example the exhibitionism and flamboyant attitude of Salvador Dalí retains some qualities of the Captain's bravado (Fig.12); and Professor B.'s pedantry and pompous language reminds us of Doctor Balanzzone (Fig.13). Pantalone, the Captain and the Doctor are three Masks of Commedia dell'Arte.



Figure 12: Salvador Dalí Mask in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2016.



Figure 13: Professor B. Mask in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, London Metropolitan University, 2015.

Sometimes our Masks were completely new. Commedia dell'Arte provided the principles to build *our* new Masks like, for instance, the Snow Queen or Hedda, the Toirtoise Lady. Although the connection with Commedia might not be recognisable to the audience, these characters still retained some qualities of the traditional Masks. The Snow Queen's physicality is similar to the Lovers; and Hedda has the energy and staccato quality of *Arlecchino*.

The transformation from culturally specific *individual types* to *social types* is an 'inevitable' outcome of my approach to devising. Commedia dell'Arte Masks offer the tools for this 'transition' to occur. I will expand on this topic in Chapter 3. As an example, I will mention just one character from my production *Home* (2017), an old peasant lady from Vicenza (Veneto, Italy) inspired by my grandmother. As a starting point to build the character *Nonna Ida* I utilised my grandmother's gait, her postures and gestures; her accent, voice and mannerisms. As the process progressed, I utilised the traditional Mask of *Pantalone* to develop my character's physicality. At this point the 'realistic' autobiographical character was transformed into a Grotesque Type or Mask (see Fig. 14). See *Video 6.2: The Experiential Mask: Nonna Ida* [Time code: 02:47].

This Grotesque 'Experiential Mask' transcends the individual dimension and becomes a 'Social Type' when the audience can read in that specific situation something that goes beyond the actor's personal story. Current affairs and past events merge to remind us of the cyclical nature of human history. In my piece this was achieved by intentionally placing my characters in a timeless dimension, through the mix of costumes, props and texts borrowed from 16th century Italy, post WW2 and present times (e.g. utilising historical documents, tabloids, YouTube videos, newspapers articles and social media as source material).



Figure 14: ‘The Experiential Mask’: *Nonna Ida* in *Home*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2017.

With *Home/Finding Home*, *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and the work I have been developing with my students in recent years, I want to demonstrate that ‘the vitality and spontaneity of Commedia dell’Arte as an acting style has applications to many contemporary theatre forms far beyond the traditional scenarios of Commedia’ (Robinson, 2015, in Chafee and Crick, p.475) from text-based work to devising all linked by one common feature: the centrality of the actor.

As Professor Gordon-Bland correctly pointed out to fully understand why we teach and practice Commedia dell’Arte, we must know ‘what Commedia dell’Arte is to us in contemporary terms: Are we interested in resurrection, renovation, reconstruction, rediscovery, or reinvention?’ I consider Commedia dell’Arte an art form that continues to evolve today allowing actors and ‘students to participate as active creative agents’ (Gordon-Bland, 2014, cited in Chafee and Crick, 2015, p.3). My aim is to explore Commedia’s principles in different theatrical contexts maintaining this tradition alive by *reinventing* its Masks for contemporary audiences.

1.1 POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

Lehmann’s postdramatic discourse can be described as a comprehensive study of the relationship between drama and the ‘no-longer-dramatic’ forms of theatre that have emerged since the late ‘60s. Despite their diversity, this plethora

of experiences – e.g. site-specific promenade performances, multimedia and immersive shows; happenings, live art, durational performances, devised theatre - have one essential quality in common: they no longer focus primarily on the dramatic text. In Lehmann's vision postdramatic theatre occurs 'when the progression of a story with its internal logic' is no longer the medium that leads theatre. It is important to clarify that this does not imply to reject or look away from traditional drama. 'The adjective "postdramatic" denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time 'after' the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre' (Lehmann, 2006, p.27) but not 'against' it.

My analysis will focus specifically on a subset of the Postdramatic; Devised Theatre. Indeed, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the actor's creative processes in rehearsal through the evaluation and analysis of two devised pieces *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and the solo-piece *Home*. The aim of my practical exploration is to develop a devising methodology drawing on Commedia dell'Arte principles; firstly, the notion of Actor-as-Creator. This is particularly relevant to Lehmann's study. Indeed, postdramatic theatre recognises the centrality of the actor throughout the creative process and his role as a creator not subordinated to the authority of the playwright.

The notion of 'postdramatic' does not imply that theatre no longer uses texts or that writing plays would no longer be relevant, it only implies that the other components of the *mise-en-scene* are no longer subservient to the text but equally contribute to the creation of the piece. From this perspective 'the theatre is no longer a fixed entity that conveys meaning but a constantly evolving site that seeks to push the boundaries of text and the other "tools" used in production'. (Cawson, 2015, p.577). In both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home*, these 'boundaries' have been 'pushed' through the exploration of different languages and sonorities; and through the use of a 'visual dramaturgy' where the audience's interpretation of signs – i.e. images, action, symbols, sounds - contributed to the construction of meaning. See Video 6.4 *Multilingualism* [Time Code: 06:11] and Video 6.7: *The Actress Evolution* [Time Code: 15:21]. Manson interprets the wide range of artistic expressions under the umbrella term 'postdramatic theatre' as 'an inventive response to the emergence of a historical shift from a text-based culture to a new media age of image and sound' (2011).

I would argue that this is not *only* a contemporary phenomenon, a 'new media age'. Since antiquity, drama has co-existed with a wide range of other forms of theatre, dominated by images, symbols, sounds and music; the tradition

of Popular Theatre. Lehmann's chronological distinction (post/pre '60s) seems therefore an arbitrary choice not necessarily accurate. Nonetheless, twenty years after its publication, Lehmann's book still provides a useful framework for my analysis. Its relevance to my work lies in its ideological perspective rather than his 'categorisation' of theatre forms. Lehmann himself invites us to go beyond a simplistic distinction - Dramatic vs Postdramatic - emphasising the complexity and immense range of theatre experiences existing within both approaches to theatre making (Lehmann, 2018). However, the binary nature of his position emerges throughout his analysis leading at times to a simplistic and inaccurate dichotomy between 'dramatic' and 'non-dramatic' theatres. Throughout my analysis I will challenge this position re-emphasising the 'fluidity' of my work that embraces a spectrum of practices in line with the Commedia dell'Arte's notion of 'reconciliation of opposites'.

Lehmann's main purpose was to identify a wide range of theatre forms that did not fit into the definition of 'written drama' and give them a context to understand them better (Lehmann, 2018). This attempt to 'understand them better' requires appropriate evaluative criteria. Post-dramatic theatre cannot be fully appreciated and understood through the parameters of written drama. This observation resonates with Scala, and his defence of Commedia dell'Arte as an independent art form that cannot be understood and evaluated through the parameters of literature. Indeed, Commedia would miserably fail in fulfilling the requirements of Aristotle's *Poetics* as my devised pieces would fail if evaluated according to the 'rules' of written drama.

Often spectators and critics identify *drama* with *theatre*; they may say 'that they like the *play* when they possibly mean the *performance*' (ibid, p.46). Indeed, some reviewers referred to my solo piece as 'the play' even though it is a devised piece. One of the reviewers lamented 'a chunkiness' to the performance 'as D'Anna shifts to and from one of the characters to herself addressing the audience.' At the same time, she recognised that 'as disjointed as this makes the flow of the story, D'Anna's talks in between still feel crucial' (Cole, P. 2018). This is an interesting remark because it reveals that the ancient tradition of storytelling – where a storyteller shifts between narrative voice and characters – seemed to be a limitation in itself, as a stylistic choice that interferes with the smooth 'flow of events' – the linear narrative.

I suspect that reviewers acquainted to 'conventional approaches' to theatre making (see p28 and glossary), might feel somehow a sense of 'loss' in

performances where the linear progression of a narrative is not fulfilled. This might stem from the discrepancy between their expectations of how a story 'should' unfold and a theatrical language that is not familiar to them. Indeed, physical storytelling disrupts linearity and purposely declares the artificiality of the world created on stage. Perhaps, 'the idea of theatre as primarily a visual realisation of a pre-existing written text' is still the dominant culture within the theatre community (Cawson, 2015 p.577). This does not mean the academic world. Academia recognises and celebrates the complexity of the theatre as an art form in constant evolution. Many books and articles have been written for decades and many new graduate and postgraduate courses have been created to reflect this diversity – e.g. Devised Theatre, Physical Theatre, Collaborative Theatre and more. I must therefore clarify that my comment takes into account not only academia but also the industry as a whole; including theatre institutions, critics and audiences.

I will utilise Lehmann's study as a tool to evaluate my work from a perspective that echoes Scala's defence of Commedia dell'Arte. Both authors demanded to honour *all* theatre experiences challenging a hierarchical perspective that considers text-based theatre as the norm. Both Scala and Lehmann emphasise the autonomy of theatre as an art form not subordinated to literature. This does not mean to establish a new hierarchy where devised theatre is 'better' than text-based theatre. On the contrary, it is a way to challenge the limitedness of any hierarchical view. This is strongly connected with the 'reconciliation of opposites' mentioned many times throughout this thesis: a fundamental principle in Commedia dell'Arte and my work.

My analysis will focus specifically on certain aspects of the Postdramatic. First of all, 'the challenge to the traditional concept of mimesis' (Cawson, 2015 p.577). My work does not attempt to faithfully reconstruct the 'real world' on stage but rather create a theatrical interpretation of that world. This is a fundamental aspect of Commedia dell'Arte as I will discuss extensively in Chapter 3.1: Artisan Theatre. Secondly, the emancipation of the performance from the literary text.

Like Commedia and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre, my work does not focus on text and (linear) narratives. Indeed, Scala reminds us that comedies fundamentally consist of actions; and in narration 'only by accident'. It is a dramaturgy led by the actors' actions, found in rehearsal through a process of improvisation and devising. It is malleable, changeable and ultimately democratic because is the product of the ensemble. This approach, utilised to develop A

Floating Caravan Under the Moon (2015/16), led to the definition of a specific type of dramaturgy that I labelled 'Accidental Narratives'. The actors explored through improvisation a specific theme. They responded to a variety of stimuli - images, texts, sounds and objects - and played freely till a seed of a character or a situation started to emerge. They developed a dramaturgy that stemmed from a collaborative experience beyond the written text of a single author. This is an Actor's Theatre meaning that the *content* of the piece and the *style* of the performance are defined by the actors. This will be discussed in Chapter 3.2: Accidental Narratives. Video 6.5: '*Scattered Objects*' *Devised Exercise* [Time code: 08:09] offers a practical example of actors' free exploration in rehearsal.

The notion of Actor as Creator challenges the traditional hierarchical structure 'of one person's text under another person's direction' (Oddey, 1994, p.4) recognising the pivotal role that actors play throughout the creative process. In Devised Theatre, and more specifically in my practice, the role of the director is to collaborate with the actors in editing and 'shaping' the material that they create. As the 'co-author', my role is to re-write some of the material created by the actors through improvisation or integrate written texts from a variety of sources – e.g. plays, poems, novels, newspapers, social media. The piece is shaped by the ensemble throughout the creative process in a dialogue between actor and director/writer. The outcome is the realisation of a common vision shared by the group. In Chapter 3 I will expand on this specific stage of the creative process that I labelled 'The Actor-Director Devising Cycle' (see p.96).

Since my initial workshops with London Met students in Spring 2015, I tested exercises and activities that could stimulate the actors without imposing a specific topic, narrative or style. First, I had to discover what really interested them and what issues concerned them; then I had to find the best approaches to help students to trust their creativity. Only then could I start offering some creative stimuli and teach them appropriate techniques to develop material for the stage. One of the activities that I employed is the 'Home List Exercise' where actors were asked to write down anything that they associated with the 'home' and 'feeling at home'. We started with our senses (taste, smell, sight, hearing, touch, kinaesthetic sense), a very powerful way to access our memories; and then added places and feelings associated with the word 'home'. This exercise was utilised to stimulate the actor to access their own personal material and discover what really mattered to them in relation to the broad theme 'home' (see Fig. 15 and Chapter 3.1: Artisan Theatre - Methodology, activities and examples p.98)



Figure 15: Actors working on the 'Home List Exercise'. London Metropolitan University, 2015.

The information gathered through my questionnaires and debriefings seem to indicate that actors and students felt a great level of freedom in testing ideas and, at the same time, their imagination was stimulated in challenging and inspiring ways. One of the students who collaborated on the creation of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* stated that the actors were 'able to explore freely but always in a safe environment' (BA student at London Metropolitan University, post-show de-briefing, October 2015). Other students confirmed that they were given lots of freedom and felt they were working in a supportive environment in which they could play and improvise. As this comment confirms:

I found the workshops engaging and challenging, the way they were planned meant that we were able to explore the stimulus freely, individually and as a group giving me the time to really understand the concept of 'home' and how we could use this idea to create an exciting performance...(ibid., 2015).

Performers who create their own characters and stories are the contemporary counter-part of Flaminio Scala's *Commedianti*.⁶⁰ actors who can *perform* as well as *lay out* good comedies.

Many influential practitioners followed the example of the Commedia dell'Arte. Vsevolod Meyerhold believed that 'an actor can inspire an audience

⁶⁰ *Commedianti* = Commedia dell'Arte actors.

only if he transforms himself into the author and director' (The Theater Theatrical, 1906). Max Reinhardt envisioned a theatre in which the actor would be 'at once sculptor and sculpture' (cited in Fisher, 1992, p.172). He wrote that that where 'the actor is a dramatic writer, he has the power to create a world according to his own image, thus awakening the drama to its highest form of life...' (ibid., p.166). And of course Dario Fo, the Actor-Author, who epitomised Commedia's teachings on the centrality of the Actor.

The notion of Actor as Creator and the pre-eminence of actions over words lead to another fundamental feature of the Post-dramatic: the importance of the body. Working through the body in rehearsal 'can liberate the imagination' paving the way to the collaborative creative process (Callery, 2001, p.3). In *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, Dymphna Callery identifies some significant parallels amongst a range of theatre practices rooted in working through the body: the emphasis is on the Actor as Creator; the working process is collaborative; the stage-spectator relationship is open; the working practice is somatic; the live-ness of the theatre medium is paramount (ibid., p.5). Callery's statement echoes Scala's words and shows astonishing parallels between contemporary (devised) physical theatre and the Commedia dell'Arte.

The actor's creative process described by Dymphna Callery is at the core of my investigation: it is a fascinating moment when anything can develop from an apparent situation of *chaos*. In devising one tends to be lost most of the time: frustration and confusion are unavoidable. We try, we get lost, we hit a wall or sometimes we open a door to a new world. Sometimes we find ourselves back from where we started and the process has to start all over again. As one of my actors in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* said in her feedback 'sometimes ideas will work, sometimes they won't, but the fact that we are free from judgement allows us to experiment and take risks' (Actors' post-show feedback, 2015). Openness is the key. In rehearsal actors have the opportunity to play freely with objects, sound, music, costumes, visual stimuli and text. Many possibilities open up: actors have to make choices, test ideas and explore different options until a seed of a character or a situation start to emerge. At times it is just an image or a physical score. Further exploration requires appropriate 'tools': a devising methodology and specific techniques. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, Commedia dell'Arte is one of the useful 'tools' at our disposal to create ensemble and solo devised pieces.

This process of discovery does not end with the dress rehearsal. I believe that the performance is a continuation of this journey. Although a structure exists and the actors have been working extensively on their characters there is still a level of unpredictability on how the audience is going to respond. In my work, the spectators shape the performance with the actors. In my latest production, *Home* one of the characters, *Arlecchino*, guides the audience to take their seat during a semi-improvised prologue. During my performance in Arezzo, this improvisation lasted much longer than I expected, partly due to the intrinsic playful nature of the character, partly to the openness and desire to play that I felt from the audience (Fig. 16) I have played *Arlecchino* many times and I know that his energy, pace and exuberance is always strongly affected by the audience and this is exactly what happened in Arezzo.



Figure 16: *Arlecchino* Mask. Prologue, *Home*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2017.

The spectators' responses influenced my tempo-rhythm, pace and use of the stage. They also contributed in shaping the script; I modified it on the spot in response to their input. The audience became actively involved not only in interpreting the piece (making sense of it) but also in creating the 'performance text'; that is the interweaving of all the actions on stage, the layering of images, sounds and symbols, as well as the complex and unpredictable occurrences taking place throughout the live event.

For example, during a semi-improvised scene, one of the character, Gino, the Conman, engages the audience in a game where the spectators, divided in two competing teams, had to guess the name of a Saint. To my surprise, the

audience got so excited that the scene lasted much longer than expected. They took ownership of the game; and I started to follow their input to see where they would take me. The audience offered me material for the stage. I could develop my scene utilising their inputs. This is related to the concept of 'Accidental Narratives' that I will discuss in Chapter 3.2.

Furthermore, this interaction with the audience gave me the opportunity to get more information about them. I could make jokes tailored to the specific situation. For instance, towards the end of the improvisation Gino rebuked a group of spectators telling them to shut up because Americans are not supposed to be as loud and anarchic as Italians are. See Video 6.20: *Gino, the Conman. Audience Interaction*. [Time Code: 39.45]. This type of interaction allows performers to engage on a personal level with their spectators playing with the specific qualities of the people present in the space. This 'special' connection or interaction between performer and spectator will be explored in Chapter 3.3: 'Stage Resonances'.

At times the audience might challenge actors' ability to respond to the 'present moment'. This requires openness as a member of the ensemble observed after the first showing of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*:

...openness and warmth is something that needs to be part of each show so the audience can really connect and come along on the journey and get thoroughly moved. This warmth and humanness really works. That, and keeping the spontaneity at all times, is really needed for this kind of work (Actors feedback forms, 2015).

The 'warmth' of a human interaction and the actors' 'openness' on stage, that is the ability to respond to the 'here and now', are recurrent topics in the work of the most influential practitioners of the twentieth century; and a defining feature of the Postdramatic. Performers must be able to respond to the external stimuli, those received from the other actors on stage but also the ones received by the spectators. Improvisation and audience interaction increase the level of unpredictability and uncertainty in performance. This demands a specific type of 'alertness' and the ability to respond quickly to new stimuli. This is linked to the notion of Actor as Creator. Actors keep playing on stage creating new material and developing the piece during the performance. They 'write' a new script with their audiences.

Breaking the boundaries between stage and auditorium, as we did in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home*, alter the dynamic between actors

and spectators. See Fig.17 and *Video 6.3: Breaking the boundaries between performers and spectators* [Time code: 04:29].





Figure 17: Examples of spectators and performers sharing the same space. The actors are not only breaking the fourth but also challenging the boundaries between auditorium and stage area. Actors and spectators share the same space. In the first image the story-teller Zie Jackson, joins the audience on the floor; in the second image, Istaso, the Fisherman's Wife moves the audience to create a corridor for the next scene; in the last image the audience had just followed the actors to the theatre's roof where Professor B is giving his lecture. From: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, Arezzo, 2016.

Proximity is one important factor. Entering somebody's personal space is normally an indication of familiarity or intimacy. A behaviour not expected from a stranger. In the context of a theatre performance, however, a temporary 'invasion of spectators' personal space' might not be so 'threatening' as in everyday life. Both performers and spectators agreed to challenge those boundaries. However, this 'unusual' proximity will still trigger a special type of alertness. In this scenario, audience members' somatic experience is different from a situation where they can keep a 'safe' distance between them and the actors, sitting in an auditorium in the dark. This closeness affects the actors and their level of alertness too. First, the audience can be unpredictable and interfere with their actions hence affecting their performance; second, it is actors' responsibility to 'read' the audience and be sensitive enough to understand how far they can push the boundaries between them.

For instance, during my prologue in the solo piece *Home*, there have been instances where some members of the audience felt intimidated by the mask of Arlecchino. It is my responsibility to read these signals of 'uneasiness' from the spectators and keep a reasonable distance from them. In other occasions, the

response to the Mask of Arlecchino might be completely different. Audience members' willingness to play comes across very clearly through their physicality, facial expressions and gestures. In those instances, Arlecchino can afford to jump on them, kiss them or even steal their drinks and they will get along with it, as I have experienced many times since my first performance in Arezzo. This ability to 'read' the audience and somehow integrate the input received by the environment in the performance is one of the skills that Commedia dell'Arte's actors were highly praised for. It is an inheritance of popular theatre and a feature of postdramatic theatre. I must acknowledge that in any theatrical context, not only in interactive or improvised theatre, 'the response of the audience may influence the delivery of the performance'. The energetic exchange between performers and spectators is an inevitable and exciting quality of a live event. 'The live presence of spectators and performers in shared time and space' is indeed a characteristic of any theatre experience' (Freshwater, 2009, p. 15).

The lack of definite boundaries between performers and spectators, discussed in previous paragraphs, is linked to the notion of 'liminality'. Following Turner's theories, Sue Broadhurst coined the term 'liminal performance' for a range of experimental types of practices that emerged in the last few decades of the twentieth century where the active participation of the audience is paramount. She describes *liminal performance* as something 'located at the edge of what is possible,' asserting that:

an important trait of the *liminal* is the centrality of non-linguistic modes of signification. In much of the liminal, significatory modes are visual, kinetic, aural and so on. [...] Other traits which are central to the liminal are hybridisation, fragmentation and the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture. For instance, central to many of the works is a mixing of popular knowledge with 'elitist' knowledge (1999, p.11).

This seems to echo Scala's observation on the autonomy of the theatre with its own 'language' characterised by the pre-eminence of body and image over text and the negation of a hierarchy between literature (high culture) and comedy (popular culture). This sits perfectly within the wider context of 'Post-dramatic theatre', whose defining features are: the 'centrality of non-linguistic modes of signification', fragmentation, a non-hierarchical theatre aesthetic, a visual dramaturgy not subordinated to the text, the importance of the body (physicality) and the 'active role' of the audience. All these concepts will be analysed in relation to my practice in Chapter 3.

Broadhurst and Lehmann's use of the term 'active' might lead to misconception about the role of the audience in theatrical contexts other than postdramatic theatre. Ranciere's article *The Emancipated Spectator* challenges the idea of 'spectatorship' as 'a passivity that must be turned into activity' and the 'misguided tendency to link 'seeing with passivity'. He believes that 'the act of watching should not be equated with intellectual passivity' because in any theatre performance each spectator is engaged in interpreting the events occurring on stage in their own unique way. It is our natural human condition as spectators to link what we see with what we 'have seen and told, done and dreamed.' (Ranciere, in Freshwater, pp.16-17) Ranciere argues that this dichotomy, active vs passive, is based on the false assumption that first, 'viewing is the opposite of knowing' because

the spectator is held in a state of ignorance [...] about the process of production and the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act. (p.2)

I believe that the audience can be active or passive in any theatrical context. Attending a theatre performance is a subjective experience. The level of engagement of each member of the audience is the result of many factors: the specific taste of each spectator, their mood, their energetic level on that specific night and also how challenging the performance is. Each spectator will have a personal emotional, intellectual or physical response to the event. However, it is fair to say that the audience's physical effort increases when the actors-spectators' boundaries dissolve. In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* members of the audience were invited to move, stand, dance, follow the characters outdoor on the roof of the theatre and then come back indoor (See Fig. 18). They were protagonists of certain scenes or victims of a joke in other scenes.



Figure 18: The Carnival Procession: singing, clapping and dancing with the audience. A Floating Caravan Under the Moon, Arezzo, 2016.

For example, in my solo-piece one of the characters, Gino, invites two members of the audience to dance with him and then follow him backstage. They did not have any choice but being physically *active* (See Fig 19). This topic will be explored further in Chapter 3: Stage Resonances. However, it must be emphasised that my focus will be primarily on the actor's rather than the spectator's experience. Interacting with the audience allows me to have an immediate feedback that helps me to find the right mood and energetic level throughout the performance. It is a tool at my disposal to connect with them, refine my performance and re-write my script.



Figure 19: Gino, the Conman interacting with two members of the audience invited to dance with him. Finding Home, London Metropolitan University, 2018.

The defining features of the Postdramatic discussed so far are the inheritance of a very long tradition of popular theatre including Commedia dell'Arte at its origins. Indeed, Broadhurst's further analysis of liminal performance seems to reveal interesting similarities with Commedia dell'Arte and folk cultures as interpreted by Bakhtin. Firstly, these performances put greater emphasis on the corporeal; secondly, they interweave a variety of 'languages' or 'texts' (dance, images, symbols, music) to 'mean' together - texts that are, 'beyond' but also inclusive of verbal language. 'This is particularly relevant with the emphasis placed on the human body, and its complex nature as a performance signifier' (Machon, 2011, p.5). There is therefore an emphasis in exploring the body as a medium of expression.

My work shows 'liminal performance' qualities that are an inheritance of Commedia dell'Arte. First of all, stylistic promiscuity and eclecticism; 'the mixing of codes, pastiche, parody, cynicism, irony, playfulness and self-consciousness. [...]'. Secondly, 'the use of montage and an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and open-ended nature of reality' (Broadhurst, 1999, in Machon, 2011, p.2).

Indeed, *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* integrate a range of codes, styles and genres to develop an episodic narrative opens to multiple interpretations. These theatrical experiences 'no longer represent the world as

fictional totality', but a world open to their audience, a 'world pregnant of potentiality' (Lehmann, 2006, p.12). This implies that the spectator has

to make the kind of choices usually considered the province of the writer and/or actor. As a result, each piece must be considered only partially composed when it is presented to the public, [...] because it requires an audience to realise the multitude of possibilities on which it opens. (Savran, D., 1988 in Freshwater, p. 18)

Lehmann describes this type of theatre, characterized by 'open' dramatic forms offering multiple meanings, as 'a surreal montage dramaturgy...in which the reality-level of characters and events vacillates hazily between life and dream and the stage'. It exists 'outside any homogeneous notion of space and time' (Lehmann, 2006, p.84). Like dreams, this type of work produces a rich texture of images that 'resemble collage, montage and fragment rather than a logically constructed course of events. 'The dream constitutes the model *par excellence* of a non-hierarchical theatre aesthetic'; its essential quality is the non-hierarchy of images, movements and words – 'an inheritance of Surrealism' (ibid.,p.84). This might explain 'why fans of other arts (visual arts, dance, music) might feel more comfortable with this kind of theatre than theatre-goers who subscribe to literary narrative' (Lehmann, 2006, p.31).

The use of a symbolic and oneiric language is a pivotal aspect of my recent productions: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (Appendix 3), *Home/Finding Home* (Appendix 4) and the students' production *The Mountain Giants* (Appendix 5). This theatre speaks to the senses first, then the intellect. The actor communicates through the language of the body, a very powerful tool. Indeed, Scala asserts that gestures can trigger emotions and feeling far more easily than words. (Scala, 1619) Something resonates with the spectators and captures their attention even when they cannot fully understand what the actors are saying or doing. The process of understanding on an intellectual level can follow but it is not necessarily a *conditio sine qua non* to enjoy and appreciate the performance. This is a theatre that 'establishes a communion between the actors' gestures and the spectators' sensing body' (Tessari, 1981, p.53). This network of connections established between performers and spectators is pivotal to my practical research. I labelled it 'Stage Resonances' (see Chapter 3.3).

According to one of my students, 'the most enjoyable aspect of an audience experience is to realise things by themselves [...]; this is a fundamental aspect of the performers-spectators' *shared* experience' (Students' feedback

questionnaire, 2015). Indeed, Lehmann asserts that in postdramatic theatre the concept of *performance text* becomes more *presence* than representation, more *shared* than communicated experience, more *process* than product [...] more energetic impulse than information' (Lehmann, p.85). Even though this thesis focusses on the performers' experience and not the spectators. It has been useful to gather information from the audience in both London and Italy. Our audience's feedback confirmed that they felt engaged throughout the whole performance and intrigued by mysterious situations that they could not fully understand but somehow resonated with them. Sounds, voices and images created a multi-layered 'performance text' that spectators were invited to experience through the 'senses'. They did not have to fully comprehend it to be able to appreciate it. See Video 6.13: *Audience Feedback* [Time Code: 25:00]. 'Such a powerful performance!' – states a member of the audience after the first showing of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* at London Metropolitan University:

I'm not going to lie, at the beginning I didn't know what was going on the play but I felt incredibly engaged and curious about it. I felt terribly emotional in most of the sequences...hearing my language in particular: even not being very sure about the topic I felt the nostalgia again, homesickness (Audience feedback, 2015).

In this example the cultural connection between performer and spectator triggered a strong emotional response. Other members of the audience found the same character, Itaso, the Old Fisherman Wife, very funny and entertaining. But they did not connect so strongly on an emotional level. Spectators responded differently to each character and each story due to their individual cultural references and experiences, their mood and their personality.

A Floating Caravan Under the Moon's episodic narrative challenges the traditional linear narrative of a single-author. This aspect of the Postdramatic resonates Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition as an 'incredulity towards grand narrative' (ibid., p.13). However, Wessndorf clarifies that: 'even though the concept of postdramatic theatre is in many ways analogous to the notion of postmodern theatre, it is not based on the application of a general cultural concept to the specific domain of theatre'. Lehmann's postdramatic theatre 'derives and unfolds from within a long-established discourse on theatre aesthetics itself, as a deconstruction of one of its major premises (ibid., p.14): the pre-eminence of the text.

Postmodern theatre is understood as an epochal category while postdramatic is not. 'Post' does not refer to a chronological 'after drama' - a forgetting of the dramatic form - but as 'a rupture and a beyond that continues to entertain relationships with drama [...] an anamnesis of drama.' In this respect, both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* integrate written drama (written text) with physical sequences and devised material. This is once again relevant to the notion of 'reconciliation of opposites' in Commedia dell'Arte. Postdramatic theatre 'includes the presence or continued working of older aesthetics'. Theatre and 'art in general cannot develop without reference to its earlier forms.' (ibid., p.27).

Lehmann himself acknowledges that researchers and practitioners should 'be cautious with the assertion of caesuras in the history of an art form [because] there may be a danger in overestimating the depth of the rupture.' He asserts that 'perhaps in the end postdramatic theatre will only have been a moment in which the exploration of a 'beyond representation' could take place on all levels.' Eventually postdramatic theatre will develop into a new theatre in which 'dramatic figurations will come together again, after drama and theatre have drifted apart so far' (ibid., p.144).

As stated in the opening paragraph of this chapter, drama has always co-existed with other approaches to theatre making since antiquity. Popular Theatre has always heavily relied on music, sound, images, symbols and actors' physicality; and their ability to communicate through the language of the body. This type of theatre has always been present alongside or even 'interwoven' with 'dramatic' theatre. However, in a culture historically dominated by the written-text and the 'dramatic tradition' some voices have been silenced and forgotten. The Commedia dell'Arte is one of them.

Indeed, a sub-culture of touring theatre companies had existed since the days of the Roman Empire through the dark Ages and flourished throughout the Middle Ages. To overcome language and dialect barriers these troupes were highly accomplished mime artists: it was a theatre of gestures rather than words. Although written evidence is scanty, 'it is quite enough to put its continued existence beyond doubt' (Dransgale, 1993, in De Vega, Introduction, p. ix). With the emergency of common national languages in the 17th and 18th century, a new kind of verbal theatre developed alongside it and gradually superseded mime theatre (ibid., p.ix). This happened in Italy during Goldoni's Theatre Reforms: written drama succeeded at the expenses of the declining improvised comedy.

The success of 'dramatic theatre' dominated Western stages for centuries however other forms of popular entertainments still have survived across all Europe and were 're-discovered' by some of the most influential practitioners of the 20th century like for example Meyerhold, Copeau and Lecoq.

A lack of documentation of non-dramatic theatre does not mean that it did not exist. An array of different forms of popular entertainment, from mime to street performers, clown, dancers and storytellers were still present. These performers and companies are the progenitors of contemporary ensemble devised theatre, contemporary mime and combined arts performances.

Lehmann recognises the necessity to identify and define this 'other theatre': a rich and complex world of performance that he labelled 'postdramatic theatre'. Jürs-Munby – who translated Lehmann's book - emphasizes the importance of the Post-dramatic because it represents 'a significant cultural moment in which contemporary theatre experimentation has its own *institutional history* (Lehmann, 2006, p.9). Within this broad spectrum of theatre practices, we can find both fringe and mainstream productions, large scale shows in historical buildings and established venues, as well as intimate performances in tiny cafes and unexpected secret locations.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Practice-as-Research

To define and discuss my methodology I should identify how my work fits within the broader context of Practice-as-Research (PaR). Candy (2006) makes a distinction between 'Practice-based': a research where the creative work "acts as a form of research"; and 'Practice-led': where the practice leads to research insights. Practice-as-Research (PaR) may be said to embrace both and will be used in this thesis to define my approach.

My research is indeed one in which the professional and creative practice - teaching, workshops and productions – plays an instrumental part in my inquiry. The actors' creative processes in rehearsal and performance are simultaneously my research methodology (the 'tools' I used) and my findings in answering my research questions on *how to develop a contemporary Mask rooted in the actors' own experience*; and *how to develop a devising methodology drawing from Commedia dell'Arte's techniques and principles*. The understanding and analysis of my creative process develops *through* practice, meaning that the practice itself serves a research purpose; but also *for* practice because my research aims 'were subservient to my practical aims' (Prof Rust, Prof Mottram and Prof Till, 2007, p.11). For example, in rehearsal I explored how to utilise actors' autobiographical material (e.g. my grandmother Nonna Ida) and Commedia dell'Arte Masks and techniques (e.g. Pantalone) to develop a contemporary Mask for the 21st century. This *practice* led to the definition of the 'Experiential Mask' (see Chapter 3.1.- Findings, p.111) that is simultaneously a fundamental *research outcome* and a valuable *practical outcome*; it fulfils my need to develop a character for my solo piece *Home/Finding Home*.

My approach to practical research is supported by two arguments that according to Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean are often overlapping and interconnected. Firstly, the creative work in itself, that is *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home/Finding Home*, is a form of research and generates research outputs. These are the Experiential Mask, the Artisan Theatre (see Chapter 3.1, p.88), the Accidental Narratives (see Chapter 3.2, p.115) and the Stage Resonances (see Chapter 3.3, p.142). Secondly, the creative practice 'can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research' (Smith and Dean, 2009, Introduction, p.5). In the previous

example of Nonna Ida, the *creative practice* is my rehearsal process and performance. This led to an important *research insight*, the definition of the Experiential Mask. This finding was then *written up as research* in Chapter 3.1 through an evaluation of its originality in relation to the wider context of contemporary devised theatre.

It is important to emphasise that performing is a fundamental aspect of my research methodology. Indeed, my 'research unfolds in and through the acts of creating and performing' (Kjorup, Soren in Biggs and Karlsson, 2011, p.46). The performance is a continuation of the practical exploration developed in rehearsal; it is a step in the creative process and also a step in the research process. Indeed, the performances *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home/Finding Home* allowed me to test the efficacy of my devising methodology and to explore and reflect on two fundamental aspects of my practice; the 'Accidental Narratives' and 'Stage Resonances' as I will discuss in Chapter 3.2 and 3.3 (pp. 115-167).

According to Freeman (2010) research must be understood as:

a form of re-search: a drawing on one's previous experience and developing this into knowledge. Viewed in this way, practice as research is about developing practical work into knowledge by transposing the experience of what it is that one does into data and then subjecting this to the type of reflection, analysis and discipline that is involved in serious compositional study (Freeman, 2010, p.264).

In my investigation the 'practical work' is articulated in a series of activities that include teaching Devising, Commedia dell'Arte and mask techniques to students in a variety of settings including university course modules, short courses and masterclasses. In these workshops and classes, I explored approaches that allow participants to use Commedia's principles to create material for both devised and text-based performances. I planned, structured and led rehearsals with different groups of students and actors following their creative process from rehearsal to performance, testing my devising techniques through the use of Commedia principles in the creation of ensemble pieces and a solo performance. These practical outputs and most importantly the 'experience of what I did' were then transposed into 'data'. My kinaesthetic, emotional and intellectual experience as well as my actors', audiences' and peers' experience was documented in notes, sketches, audio and video recordings, questionnaires, and interviews. This material and the less tangible - but equally important - memory of that experience, has been evaluated and analysed utilising as a

framework Scala's prologue to *Il Finto Marito* (1619) and Lehmann's *Post-dramatic Theatre* (2006).

My practice - that is the fundamental activity employed to develop my research as well as the 'result' of this research - includes not only the devising activities developed in class (rehearsal) and the performances mentioned above (artefacts), but also the rehearsal notes, videos, photographs, actors' feedback, audience responses, questionnaires and interviews. All this material is an integral part of my research methodology as well as serving the purpose of documenting my PaR. This is why it is such a fundamental component of this thesis as explained in the introduction.

The practice of recording my work - and my students' work - through writing and filming, served as a foundational tool to evaluate and analyse my practice. It allowed me to look at my work as an 'outside eye' to understand it better and improve it. This offered me a) *artistic insights* to redefine my devising methodology and develop my productions; and b) *research insights* to reformulate my research aims and reflects on my findings.

The process of 'stepping in' and 'out' of the creative process is essential to my practice due to the demands of simultaneously wearing many hats; actor, director, writer and researcher. I had to define specific work parameters due to the different set of skills required by each role. This was the biggest challenge during the creation of my solo piece when I had to switch role many times both during rehearsal (actor/director/researcher) and outside rehearsal (author/director/researcher).

To develop my characters, I utilised a variety of stimuli: historical texts, objects, autobiographical material and Commedia Masks. My work as *an actress* was to play freely with this material. As a *director*, I watched the recorded footage and identified the strongest qualities in each character. I then thought about specific tasks or other material that could be integrated into the work to develop the character further. To test the validity and efficacy of my directorial ideas I went back to my actress' role to put them into practice.

My work as a *researcher* developed in different stages. First, I had to take notes in rehearsal clarifying how my practice related to Scala's principles and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre. Second, I had to evaluate the efficacy of my practice looking at the footage and reflecting on my experience and the audience's responses. Finally, in order to translate this artistic insight into

research material I had to identify the originality of my findings and translate this knowledge into analytical language through the writing of this thesis. Indeed, practice can contribute to research only 'when it is subject to analysis and commentary'. It is my task, as a researcher, to translate my practical knowledge 'into analytical language.' (Trimingham, 2002, pp.54-55).

'Research outcomes cannot be kept as the personal insight of the practitioner' because research 'must be for the benefit of others apart from the researchers themselves'. This thesis is my attempt to share with others the insights and understanding I have reached through my practice (ibid., p.55). I agree that 'if we want to *understand* and not just *experience* we have to think.' (ibid., p.56). I would argue that it is also true that to *fully understand* my practice it needs to be experienced not only thought about by reading its evaluation and analysis. Some of the most important findings discussed in this thesis requires both *thinking* and *experiencing*. The 'Accidental Narratives' (see Chapter 3.2, p.115) and 'Stage Resonances' (see Chapter 3.3, p.142) can be better understood by readers of this thesis by combining the written document (analysis) with the videos and the live performance (experience). My research methodology is 'experiential' not only because my research process developed *through* a practical experience, but also because the reader of my thesis will understand through both an intellectual and somatic experience.

Carole Gray underlines some crucial aspects of practice as research relevant to my work; 1. the research is initiated in practice where questions, problems, and challenges are identified and formed by the needs of the practitioners; 2. the research strategy is carried out through practice, predominately using methodologies familiar to the practitioners. (Gray, in Smith and Dean, 2009, p.213).

As a practitioner, one of my challenges was to make Commedia dell'Arte Masks relevant and accessible to my actors and our audiences, by creating characters relevant to our society. My aim was to develop a new Mask for the 21st century rooted in the actor's experience as well as the tradition of Commedia dell'Arte and more specifically Scala's teaching, for his remarkable similarities with Lehmann's discourse on the Postdramatic.

My research strategy was carried out through a *practical exploration* in rehearsal and performance. The methodologies I employed included:

- a. Brainstorming and discussions to define the actors' interests, passions and concerns (e.g. the theme 'home' in *A Floating Caravan Under the*

Moon; and 'propaganda, oppression and misogyny' in my solo piece *Home/Finding Home*);

- b. The selection of inspiring material in response to the chosen themes; i.e. images, aural stimuli, texts, props and costumes. For detailed examples see pp. 99-103 and video 6.5: '*Scattered Objects*' *Devising Exercise* [Time Code: 08:09].
- a. A series of devising activities and exercises to develop characters and stories. Detailed descriptions of activities and examples are available in the 'Methodology, activities and examples' sections in Chapter 3: pp.98-110; pp. 121-137; pp.152-164.
- b. Rehearsal notes and reflections (documented in Appendices 3, p.280 and Appendix 4, p.295).
- c. Students', actors' and audiences' responses. See for instance Video 6.13: Audience Feedback [Time Code: 25:00].
- d. The use of video and audio recordings to watch my work and listen back to my observations and analysis.

Throughout the research process these practical methodologies and activities went through a process of 'revision' in response to the discoveries made in rehearsal and performance but also the new knowledge acquired through theoretical research. Trimingham suggests that 'the "hermeneutic-interpretative" spiral model where progress is not linear but circular' allows the researcher to incorporate this renewed knowledge. 'This spiral indicates that as one part of understanding changes, the whole changes too.' In my case, renewed understanding of Postdramatic theatre and contemporary studies on Commedia dell'Arte, affected the practice; and my renewed understanding of the creative process (e.g. the actors' strengths and weaknesses; the challenges of working on my own) changed the directed tasks set for the actors. The spiral constantly returns researchers to their original point of entry but with a renewed understanding (Trimingham, p. 56). For example, after the first couple of rehearsals of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, I realised that each actor needed different types of stimuli and support. Some responded particularly well to visual stimuli others to text. Some devisers were happy to explore freely whereas other actors needed specific tasks and guidance. This information shaped future rehearsals (practice) as well as providing an important insight: the notion of Actor as Creator refers not only to the creation of original material for

the stage but also to the definition of an individualised devising creative process influenced by their unique cultural references, knowledge, experience and skills.

Using Heidegger's examination of the particular form of knowledge that arises from 'our handling of materials and processes', Barbara Bolt argues that out of creative practice can arise 'a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice'; its insights, she argues, can induce 'a shift of thought' (Bolt, 2007, cited in Smith and Dean, 2009, Introduction, p.6). This approach reflects current perspective on Practice as Research (PaR) including Haseman's conceptualisation of the new research paradigm generated by practice-led research as 'performative research', which he sees as distinct from both qualitative and quantitative research (Haseman, 2006).

Traditional research methodologies – both quantitative and qualitative research - are characterised by well-established and widely shared procedures and protocols, using research strategies and methods that afford a high level of methodological 'hygiene' (Law, 2004, cited in Smith and Dean, 2009, p.9). For these approaches, naming the research problem, controlling variables, disciplining data and specifying findings are fundamental quality assurance measures. However, for artists and creative practitioners, the definition of problem, variables and data is subject to its own peculiar complexities. For example, the fact that the experience that should be transposed in 'disciplining data' is an ephemeral one: a live performance.

The analysis and interpretation of my practice through writing will focus on how my specific concerns and questions on the 'contemporaneity' and 'accessibility' of Commedia dell'Arte' can be examined and brought out by production of artefacts' (idib, p.11). These outputs are the ensemble piece *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015/2016), the solo-piece *Home/Finding Home* (2017/18) and my workshops on Commedia dell'Arte and Devising Theatre. The presentation of my methodology and findings will be structured following the performance principles that guided my research; Flaminio Scala's teaching. This is organised in three chapters: Chapter 3.1. Artisan Theatre and the Experiential Mask: the Ethos; Chapter 3.2. Accidental Narratives: the Dramaturgy and Chapter 3: Stage Resonances: the Style. I will not follow a chronological order but rather select specific moments in rehearsal, workshop or performance that are of particular significance in understanding the relevance of Scala's principles in my practice as both a director and a performer.

CHAPTER 3: PROJECT and RESULTS

3.1 ARTISAN THEATRE AND THE EXPERIENTIAL MASK: THE ETHOS

*'In comedies there isn't any rule or precept other than good practice. Experience and practice produce Art⁶¹. Indeed, all rules and precepts are desirable, but the essence of every art – and science – lies in putting things into practice; being true that rules are always taken from usage, and not usage from rules. [...] Who better than the actors themselves can know these rules? Every day they put them into practice by performing, and thus they learn the Art by doing, by practice.'*⁶² – Flaminio Scala, 1619

Sub-Context: experimental practices, stylistic promiscuity, use of vernaculars and multilingualism in Devised Theatre

The term 'Artisan Theatre' embraces the notion of theatre as craft: 'artistic know-how'. My own work 'favours' the practical over the intellectual. I consider my work, both as a director and an actor-director, comparable to the work of a tradesman: an artisan, a carpenter or a builder. Through practice, I develop both the craft of theatre and the subsequent emergence of rules, 'being true that rules always come from usage, and not usage from rules.' (Scala, 1619). As Scala pointed out 'experience and practice make the art of performance' and even though rules and precepts are good, the essence of every art is ultimately practice ⁶³(ibid.). This is a fundamental principle of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre and in particular devising: the creative process is a practical 'experience'. Through practice, my actors and I build the vocabulary to understand each other and select appropriate material for the piece learning *by doing* what *works* and what *does not work* without excluding anything a priori. It is an empirical approach.

Although very useful, my experience as a director in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* did not seem sufficient to fully understand how Commedia dell'Arte principles work in contemporary devised theatre. To fully evaluate and analyse how Commedia and its Masks inform my work, I felt it necessary to experience it from the perspective of an actor-director. That is the reason why I developed my solo-piece: *Home/Finding Home*. In agreement with Scala I believe that nobody 'better than the actors themselves can know the rules of the

⁶¹ *L'Arte* = the Art: the actor refers to the Art of the stage, the theatre.

⁶² The Actor put forward a 'revolutionary' concept alien to the world of literature – and performance – of the time: actors can teach playwrights because they know better than anyone else the rules of the stage.

⁶³ Here 'Art of performance' means both the craft (know-how) and the 'Art of the stage'.

stage' (ibid.). By exercising my craft and integrating my experience and knowledge of Commedia dell'Arte, I felt I would have had an even deeper understanding of how actors can develop a Mask for the 21st century rooted in the reality of today. As I researcher I would have had a better ability to evaluate the actor's creative processes through a direct somatic experience.

My approach to theatre making is both experimental and experiential. I experiment with ideas, a range of approaches, styles and a variety of stimuli to develop my own methodology putting particular emphasis on the *experience* rather than the outcome – i.e. the final product or show. It is a unique experience for the group of people working together and their audience. 'Devising is a craft, which is inevitably learnt on the job. Certain skills are acquired empirically, and it is difficult to imagine one system of working across the board. Every project generates its own working process' (Oddey, p 25). Indeed, the techniques and approaches utilised for the two versions of *A Floating Under the Moon* were very different in response to the different needs and experience of the actors involved.

Furthermore, the Artisan Theatre challenges the notion of a rigid definition of roles and hierarchy within the company. Commedia dell'Arte troupes were led by a capocomico (impresario) that was in charge of all the practicality; something comparable to a contemporary producer. However, all company's members had to share every aspect of the work: finding and maintain costumes and props; creating the set; attracting an audience and so on. In my projects, although certain people might be allocated specific roles due to natural predisposition, the roles are quite fluid.

From the historical documents of that period, it emerges that the role of the director, as we understand it today, did not exist. Each actor had the responsibility to work on their character/s and have a repertoire specific– i.e. material learnt by heart and well rehearsed consisting in speeches, soliloquies, dialogues and *lazzi comici*. Actors had to be ready to adapt their repertoire for different scenarios. Their major skill was to know exactly when to utilise their material and piece it together with other actor's parts through lengthy rehearsals. This montage required a person in charge of orchestrating the action on stage. Someone comparable to the corago in Ancient Greek theatre – i.e. the chorus' director. This is the role I had as the director of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*. I had to bring together each episode and work with the actors to adapt their material to fit in with the rest of piece. However, besides the orchestration of actions on stage, I also had to work individually with each actor providing

guidance to shape their characters and their physical and vocal scores. Perhaps, this is the role that more experienced actors had in the Commedia dell'Arte troupes when younger performers joined their company. Or perhaps, as it happens in collaborative ensemble projects today, actors provided feedback to each other.

In my solo piece the process was the same even though the only way I could observe my work was through the lens of a camera. First, I developed each individual character and their stories in response to a theme and an initial stimulus; then I worked on the montage adapting and reshaping each scene. The orchestration of the whole piece included the integration of other stage elements like sound, music and lighting. In both pieces my directorial role is therefore quite similar to the Commedia dell'Arte's corago. Furthermore, like Scala, I took on the role of the author; not a playwright but a writer of scenarios and *canovacci*.

The term 'Artisan Theatre' also refers to another intrinsic quality of my practice: my work is rooted in the every day reality of ordinary people, the world that surrounds us. Within the tradition of popular theatre, my productions like Scala's comedies, deal 'with mundane actions and events of common people' (Scala, 1619): that is whoever is involved in the project and their world. It is therefore a pivotal aspect of my work to deal with the present, my culture, my identity and my reality: what I labelled 'the familiar'. The things, people, places, events, values and ideologies we – actors, director and spectators - are 'familiar' with. Firstly, the content of my performances is relevant to current issues in our society. Secondly, actors can access this material much more easily than Commedia dell'Arte traditional scenarios and types because it belongs to them – hence the adjective 'familiar'.

'Accessibility' and 'familiarity' are two interconnected concepts pivotal to my practice. In my experience, technique and rigid forms are not always the best way to access creativity. Actors' spontaneity might be inhibited by the demands of conforming to a specific set of rules. Instead, in my rehearsals the creative process always begins with something that actors know very well and they can easily access; then, once they have something to play with, I can encourage and enable them to integrate appropriate techniques. I guide them through a process of transformation by working on specific parts of their body, breathing pattern, voice, gestures, tempo-rhythm and text. This is the process by which everyday 'life material' becomes 'theatrical material'.

The warm-up phase is therefore very important. Not only warming up body and voice but also the 'imagination'. Actors' mind, senses and feelings must be activated prior to the devising process. In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* the ensemble was asked to think about what *home* meant to them. They had to engage with feelings, memories and images associated with *home*. They made this material available and immediately accessible for the devising creative process to begin.

The notion of 'familiarity' refers also to the language used in my productions: it must be our own idiom. The most effective language is plain, simple, natural and familiar to the actor rather than focussing on Received Pronunciation and standardised regional accents. I recognise that working on RP and regional accents is an excellent training for young actors, however in my Artisan Theatre 'sophistication should be avoided' in favour of an everyday language (Scala, 1619) rooted in the reality of actors and spectators; their jargons, accents, dialects and languages. As mentioned in Chapter 1, multilingualism, the use of vernaculars and 'the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture' are also features of postdramatic theatre (Broadhurst, 1999, p.11).

This does not mean that I do not work on voice and language in rehearsal; on the contrary my training can significantly expand actors' vocal skills. However, the starting point is 'the Familiar', a language or accent that actors feel comfortable with. This is used as a springboard to create something new: a jargon, dialect or language unique to their character. They have to re-define both their speech and physicality to achieve a full process of transformation into their Mask. In my solo-piece it was very important to clearly distinguish each Mask's voice avoiding similarities and 'contamination' between characters. I worked with different languages and nuances in pitch, speech patterns and intonations.

In both versions of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* the actors found their characters utilising their own language. This played a fundamental role in unlocking their full creative potential. For example, Belén González, who developed the character of Salvador Dalí, devised her piece in Spanish playing with stereotypical features of Spanish sonorities: loud, passionate and full of emotions with the integration of Flamenco and bullfight expressions (Fig.20).



Figure 20: Salvador Dali' as the passionate Spanish artist: an example of how actors can integrate cultural stereotypes in the development of their characters' gestuality, CrisisArt festival, Arezzo, 2016.

Ester Calle Peña, the Old Fisherman Lady, also spoke in Spanish. While the Congolese actor, Olivier Kitenge, utilised more than one language: his family's Congolese dialect, French and English. Veera Väisänen, utilised her mother tongue, Finnish, to deliver a tradition folk story that she learnt as a little girl. We worked on an English version but it did not have the same impact. Finnish words seem to have an onomatopoeic quality that matched the sounds of the forest, the snow and the animals she was describing. While Anna Zehentbauer, Norwegian, worked better in English. Firstly, her story was set in London; secondly, her exaggerated Scandinavian accent added an extra comic feature to her quirky and absurd character: Hedda, the Tortoise Lady (Fig.21).



Figure 21: Hedda, the Tortoise Lady: an example of how actors can integrate cultural stereotypes in the development of their character. Rehearsal at London Metropolitan University, 2015.

Besides being faithful to the notion of 'familiarity', this orchestration of languages and accents enriched the performance, by interweaving an elaborate palette of sonorities, rhythms and intonations. In my solo-piece, I mixed Italian, dialects and English. The character of Germino, the Zanni-Soldier speaks in a rough patois of Northern Italian dialects from Piedmont (where I grew up), Bergamo (where the Mask of *Zanni* comes from) and Veneto (my mother's regional accent) (Fig.22). The character of Nonna Ida speaks with my grandmother's dialect from Vicenza (Fig.23). See Appendix 6, *Video 6.4: Multilingualism in A Floating Caravan Under the Moon and Home* [Time code: 06:11].



Figure 22: Germino, the Zanni-Soldier. Example of invented dialect: mix of vernaculars from Northern Italy (Festival Teatrale Europeo, Rome, Feb 2019).



Figure 23: Nonna Ida. Example of use of regional dialects in performance: inspired by my grandmother's vernacular from Vicenza, Veneto.

In contrast, the two authoritative figures in my performance speak in English. Cardinal Borromeo has a very annoying nasal pitch and utilises a sophisticated and 'artificial' jargon: a mix of historical texts translated from archaic Italian and contemporary political rhetoric (Fig.24). Gino, the businessman, is a stereotypical conman who sells holy waters, Saints' relics and all the accessories for the perfect execution of witches and heretics: he is a liar and a swaggerer. He speaks with a very strong Italian accent inspired by the

stereotypical Italian macho-type, ex-Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi and a traditional Commedia Mask: the Captain, the braggart par-excellence (Fig.25).



Figure 24: Cardinal Borromeo in *Home*: example of sophisticated language artificially constructed utilising historical text, religious sermons and political rhetoric.



Figure 25: Gino, the Conman in *Home*: use of cultural stereotype, Commedia dell'Arte Mask and a real political figure, Silvio Berlusconi, to develop accents and jargons.

None of these choices were set a-priori: it all emerged through experimentation in rehearsal. *A Floating Caravan under the Moon* and *Home* took shape in unexpected ways that I could not have envisioned at the beginning of the creative process. All I had was the theme (home) and some props and images brought to rehearsal by the ensemble. The ensemble brainstormed

ideas, shared inspiring material and improvised with objects, costumes, sounds and music. Then each actor worked individually to develop their own Mask and tell their personal story.

Openness and playfulness were the prerequisites of our work. The actors with their experiences, physicality, memories and skills were the 'engine' of the creative process. I left them free to go in any direction they chose in response to my initial stimuli – i.e. music, props, images and costumes. One of the actors said that she liked 'how we first all gather the various aspects of what home meant to us and then just played with objects and tried to make them like home to us.' Another performer thought that 'the process was very easy; independent thoughts and directions per participant developed almost as soon as we started' (students' feedback forms, 2015).

By freeing the actors from the exigencies of dramatizing a play (text) we were at liberty to experiment without limitations in content, style or aesthetic. My work 'operates beyond drama': independently from 'the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre' (Lehmann, 2006, p16). Indeed, Lehmann recognises that experimental practices emerged when theatre stopped orientating itself 'around the requirements of the drama to be staged.' Thus, removing the 'security for the criteria of theatre craft, the logic and system of rules that served dramatic theatre' (ibid., p.50). In my work – as in Scala's comedies - a 'logic system of theatrical rules' does not exist because 'rules' are discovered through trials and errors. 'The devising process is about the ways and means of making a theatrical performance'. The company brainstorm ideas and then collectively come up with a range of possibilities on 'how the product is to be created'. This process 'involves decisions about the most appropriate process'; it might 'include methods of research, discussions, workshopping material, improvisation, visual experimentation and writing.' (Oddey, 1994, p.12).

These can be collective decisions if the actors have enough experience to recognise what direction they want to take and they have the tools to work on it; however, in other cases the director responds to the inputs received by the actors, interpreting 'their' needs and shaping the rehearsals accordingly. This is what I experienced with *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* – where some actors needed more direction and stimuli:

Often I was stuck with my individual work but the director (Chiara) always found a solution or a way to continue the development but in such a way that the process was still a mutual response. I personally struggle to work

alone but thrive in these environments when I can be much more productive and useful towards a group endeavour (Jacob Harrison, students' feedback forms, 2015).

As a director, I had the role of taking final decisions in shaping the piece; however, I believe that my choices ultimately originated from the actors, consciously or unconsciously. I offered some tools to help them to create – what Jacob refers as 'a way to continue the process of creation.' However, actors inspired me to make certain choices that I would not have made with another group of performers. This specific project required their willingness to share personal stories and memories. Therefore, only *these actors* could have offered *this* specific material, which we then shaped into a performance.

In my work each actor 'has a personal input and commitment to the making of the product from the start' (Oddey, 1994, p11). This openness to integrate the input received by the ensemble resulted in an 'eclectic' piece. Stylistic promiscuity, hybridism and mix of genres are defining features of my work and fundamental qualities of Lehmann's Post-dramatic as well as Commedia dell'Arte. This is valid for both the ensemble piece *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and my solo piece *Home*. My performances' stylistic eclecticism is therefore not only related to the plurality of voices and experiences but most importantly to the experimental nature of my approach to theatre making. This implies a genuine curiosity and willingness to explore different ways to transform life experiences and historical events into 'theatrical material' by developing a unique language for the stage.

This 'manufactured' language - akin to the language of dreams - as Lehmann pointed out - does not have to comply with verbal everyday communication. Indeed, theatre has its autonomous 'vocabulary' and

it must be allowed to recreate the world through its own resources, its own symbols, and rites if it is to fulfil its own full potential...It communicates with the real world, borrowing its forms, colours and its accents, but gives it back an image composed only from its own resources (Copeau cited in Evans, 2006 p.48).

This *image* is not a literal imitation of the real world rather an interpretation. This is clearly expressed by Scala in his prologue when he argues that the 'verisimilar' is enough. It is not necessary 'to imitate life as much and accurately as possible'. Commedia dell'Arte actors observed the reality around them and created a colourful, bigger-than-life and grotesque version of it. The

craft of the *Commedianti* was their ability to bring on stage the mundane, that is the tragedies and dramas of their every day life, and turn it upside-down through the use of the Grotesque, the Absurd and parody. Like Commedia dell'Arte actors, I am not interested in a realistic representation of life.

Methodology, activities and examples⁶⁴

In the creation of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* I asked the actors to think about what 'home' meant to them. The ensemble initiated a conversation on the different concepts of 'home': from something tangible like their family home to abstract concepts such as 'a peaceful state of mind'. After our preliminary discussion, we worked on the *Home Lists*: an exercise that I designed to make memories, sensations and feelings associated with 'home' immediately available to the actors prior to the devising process.

They had to write down anything that they associated with 'home' and 'feeling at home.' We started with our senses; taste, smell, sight, hearing, touch, kinaesthetic sense. This is a very powerful way to access our memories. Then we added a list for places, one for feelings and emotions and another for words and expressions associated with 'home.' These lists included things like: 'the sea'; 'the smell of fresh bread from the local bakery'; 'mum's tortilla'; 'the sound of cicadas'; 'the burning sensation under my feet at the beach'; 'calmness'; 'security'; 'feeling safe'; 'feeling protected' – to quote a few examples. These lists are a 'reservoir' of images, words, feelings, tactile experiences and sounds. The group shared this work drawing on others' material as well as their own (Fig.26). This process is like 'preparing the ground'. Its purpose is to warm-up the imagination by engaging with specific memories, images, sensations and emotions stored in the recesses of our brain. This might not have been immediately available to us without the preliminary work. Once the actors have 're-discovered' this material and brought it to light they can start working with it. This process initiates 'new visual and physical languages of performance that enabled actors to explore their experiences and feelings as part of the process of generating material' (Govan et al., 2007, p. 40).

⁶⁴ For a detailed description of exercises and activities, rehearsal structure, notes and observations see: Appendix 3: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*; Appendix 4: *Home*.



Figure 26: The *Home Lists* exercise. London Metropolitan University, 2015.

We utilised these lists to select images, texts, songs and objects to bring to rehearsal. These were our working tools. The devising process began with the *Scattered Objects* exercise. This is a very long improvisation that can last for over an hour. The material brought by the ensemble in response to the chosen theme is scattered around the studio and actors can interact and play with anything in any way they want without thinking about any character or situation. This is Stage 1: 'unbound playfulness'. This is a way to discover the potentials of our tools: the objects, costumes, text and images available to us. For instance, we might explore how many different shapes we can create with a piece of clothing; or how many sounds we can make with a bamboo stick and so on. At any time the actors can use the 'Home Lists' as a reminder and an inspiration. The theme 'home' must always be present in the background and inform our exploration. See: *Video 6.5: 'Scattered Objects' Exercise* [Time code: 08:09] and Fig. 27: Playing with objects.



Figure 27: Olivier Kitenge paying with objects. *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* rehearsal, London Metropolitan University, 2016.

As a director my role is to help the actors to be free to explore anything they want without any judgment or expectation. Some actors love to play like children and do not need any direction from me. However, for others too much freedom can be overwhelming. It is my duty to understand when actors need more structure and guidance. I might suggest working with just one object or specific physical tasks; or focusing on an image or an emotion. I might also experiment with different music and sounds to see how different atmospheres and moods affect their work. In the context of Commedia the traditional Masks provide a useful structure. In devising theatre - and specifically in my devising approach - useful tools are props, costumes, images, sound and music; and at a later stage Commedia dell'Arte Masks too.

The ability to access these stimuli, be able to connect and be inspired by them is central to the creative process. This is why in 'the early stages of devising, it is important to explore and experiment with a range of stimuli, to understand how the group operates in different situations. 'Knowing, using and reflecting the strengths of the people in the group are vital resources for the devising process and product' (Oddey, 1994, p.25). In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* some

actors relied on their vocal skills while others on the development of physical scores through the use of objects. Others seemed to unlock their creative potentials when they had a text to rely on.

Once each actor had played long enough to find something inspiring or intriguing, I asked him or her to go back to that specific moment, action or image, repeat what they were doing, and become more conscious of their choices. Often actors are not aware that their characters are already emerging. Patterns and motifs are more easily recognisable from the outside; an outside eye is very important. This is when I ask my actors to think about their improvisations and recognise how they can start working with their physical and vocal scores to create a character. This is Stage 2: 'awareness'.

When I see that a character is arising or an image is particularly powerful or evocative, I intervene and work individually with each performer asking them to go back to specific moments: a sound, a walk, a posture, a repetitive action or a mannerism. This direct intervention in guiding the actors is a process of integration between their creativity and my ideas. This is Stage 3: 'integration'. At this stage some actors needed to work on a very specific physical score to feel 'safe': they had ideas and images in their heads but required more 'direction' from me in translating those ideas into actions. Other actors worked more independently and offered a series of inspiring and beautiful images and physical actions without my intervention. In these cases, my input was mainly on tempo-rhythm, pace and use of the space.

I followed a similar process to develop my one-woman show by switching between my role as actor and my role as director. I played with objects and costumes and then observed my work recorded on camera. The practice was the same: I had to remind myself that it is a long and slow process of discovery. Amongst all the material produced in improvisation there are only a few moments that can become material for the stage and worths further exploration. This is an advice that I regularly give to my students. It was easy to forget it when I was alone in the studio and my frustration 'of not going anywhere' was building up. It is interesting (and reassuring) to know that other solo performers – including experienced theatre makers such as Tim Etchells – feel the same in the rehearsal room. The only way to create something meaningful is to keep 'failing', getting frustrated and trying over and over again. This is a tip that he gives to other practitioners: 'Talk to yourself, physically, verbally. Practice. Practice. [...] you

just have to keep doing it, keep doing it. Use mirrors. Use video. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.’ (Craddock, K & Dey, M. p.108).

My devising process with both ensembles and solo artists can be summarised as the following:

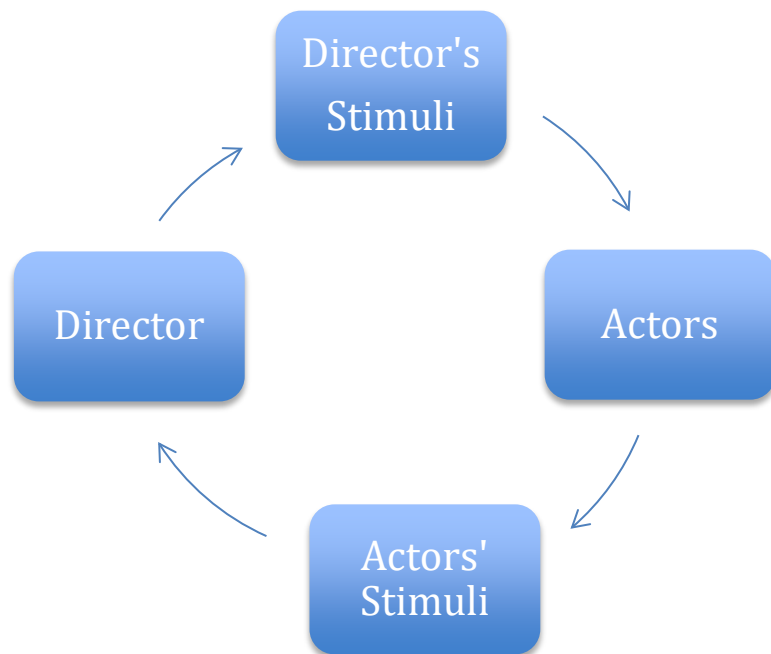
- The director set the theme. A brainstorming session takes place with the ensemble. This is followed by the *Lists Exercise* on the theme chosen by the group (e.g. ‘home’).
- The ensemble selects appropriate material to bring to rehearsal (i.e. visual, aural and written stimuli; props and costumes);
- Actors play freely with the material scattered in the room and make offers without thinking about character or narrative.
- Actors and director identify some significant moments during the improvisation and record it (writing notes, sketches or video).
- The director steps into the space while the actors are working and gives individual directions when she feels that a character starts emerging or an action or image is particularly powerful or evocative.
- The actors start developing patterns and motifs.
- The director helps the actors to identify those patterns and motifs guiding them to build a structure – i.e. their physical and/or vocal scores to embody their Masks.

This exchange between actors and director is a process of giving and receiving stimuli. In one session I might run 3 or 4 ‘cycles’ (See Graph 1). It is repeated throughout the creative process until each actor has found his/her Mask.

I labelled these Masks the ‘Experiential Masks.’ They are *experiential* for two reasons: 1) they stemmed from our life *experience*; and 2) each actor *experienced* the process of creating their Mask through devising. As sculptors or carpenters would transform a block of marble or a piece of wood, actors transform their source material: their body, voice, memories and images.

They are *Masks* because unlike realistic characters they do not faithfully depict ordinary people in plausible situations. Everyday life is only the starting point to find inspiring material. Each actor – as with Commedia dell’Arte’s performers – chooses specific traits and qualities observed in real people. They then put a magnifying lens to the observed world and develop ‘bigger-than-life’ characters. Utilising autobiographical and historical material we worked from the

'literal' (real events, people and places) and transformed it into something 'non-literal' without imposing any specific style or aesthetic. This is when Commedia dell'Arte's techniques, principles and Masks became extremely valuable.



Graph 1: The Actor-Director 'Devising Cycle'.

In my work Commedia traditional Masks are 'templates', not immutable stock characters. The Experiential Masks are malleable and are not required to conform to an existing code of postures and gestures. Actors develop their Masks' physical vocabulary without imitating, emulating or 'interpreting' existing types. They re-invent the traditional Masks creating new ones; because ultimately they are *creators* not *interpreters*. The Experiential Mask stemmed from an alternative perspective that goes beyond the widely accepted notion of Fixed Types or Universal Archetypes (See: 'Archaeological' and 'Recontextualised Commedia' at pp.51-55). As discussed in Chapter 1 Commedia dell'Arte Masks can be best understood if rooted in the reality of their times. In this light they can only be culturally specific not 'universal'. This is not a rejection of Commedia dell'Arte; on the contrary, it is a re-discovery of its true essence and a re-invention of its Masks through the integration of a wider range of cultural references specific to the actors involved in this project.

For example, in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* the character of Hedda, a young Norwegian woman desperate to find a house in London,

stemmed from one performer's personal experience of moving home 10 times in her first 6 months in the city. By pushing this situation to an extreme the actress transformed her real experience into something akin to a Ionesco's play: her character became an Absurd Mask. Hedda carries on her back everything she owns because she is constantly migrating from place to place. Even when she finds a house, it does not last for more than a day. In improvisation the actress seemed to explore new and unusual places, usually pretty uncomfortable and unstable like her home situation: up a steep ladder, on top of a radiator or underneath a small chair (Fig. 28). It seemed an interesting choice. We explored it further till we discovered its extreme possibilities. She ended up asking a mouse if it wouldn't mind to let her live in its little hole in the wall



Figure 28: Hedda, the Tortoise Lady having tea on a ladder.

London's spectators could immediately recognise a familiar situation. The absurd comic scenario made them laugh about Hedda's situation but also think about their own experience of dealing with unscrupulous estate agents or greedy landlords trying to rent horrendous dens for ridiculous prices. This Mask transcends the individual dimension to become a tool to comment on our society exactly as *Zanni* or *Colombina* (Commedia Female servant) made their audience think about abuse of power and inequality. *Colombina* made audiences laugh about her ability to trick the old sleazy *Pantalone*, her Master. But the audience knew too well that the reality was different: young maids were often sexually abused by their employers. By turning the tragic truth into comedy and turning their reality upside down, Commedia uncovered and commented on society's injustice showing an alternative to the status quo through the subversive power of laughter (Bakhtin, 1984).

In another episode, *The 'Dream Home'*, Jacob Harrison developed a Grotesque character rooted in his own personal experience. The cost of properties is so high that for him to own a house in London is more an impossible dream than a future prospect. In improvisation Jacob seemed fascinated by an old book and a vintage car model: his methodical examination of these objects became the clue to develop his character. His meticulous actions and pedantic attitude emerged straightaway. We knew his character would be a scholar; and his little car and old books were the building blocks of his dream home. For a long time Jacob was stuck in repetitive actions: he could not find a way to express his character and develop a story.

For Jacob these objects were not enough to develop his Mask. I found the solution in a simple text that matched Jacob's character's pretentiousness: elaborate wine descriptions. Jacob had fun playing with them as template to develop his pompous speech on his character's ideal home. The vintage toy automobile inspired him to integrate *The Great Gatsby* as source material. We worked with the stereotypical features of a British Scholar, a Professor from Cambridge in the late 1920s. By pushing to an extreme his character's pedantry and pomposity, Jacob found his Mask. Parody was the key and the Doctor of Commedia dell'Arte was a useful point of reference (Fig. 29). There are many characters and types similar to this scholar but Professor B. could have only been developed by Jacob because this Mask stemmed from the actor's autobiographical material. The personal material was then transformed to transcend the individual dimension and become an Experiential Mask.



Figure 29: Professor B. Mask in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, 2015. Professor B.'s Dream Home is made with a collection of books and accessories including *The Great Gatsby's* automobile.

The Moonlight Fairy, interpreted by Jenny Whitehead (Fig. 30), is neither Absurd nor Grotesque: she belongs to the world of the Surreal. She is like a fairy or a ghost. She does not have an experience, neither a word nor a concept, for what the other characters call 'home'. She curiously observes the world around her trying to understand what 'home' means. Because she cannot have a physical experience or intellectual understanding of the word 'home', she collects clues by observing and photographing other characters' homes.



Figure 30: The Moonlight Fairy in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, London Metropolitan University, 2015.

She captures the reality that she observes through the lenses of her camera in an attempt to put together the pieces of a puzzle. The materiality of her camera – a heavy squared object with an audible clicking noise – clashes with her otherworldly qualities. This incongruousness between object and character had a strong comic effect. It was like seeing an angel, once ‘floating under the Moon’, falling down to Earth. The Moonlight Fairy does not speak: she communicates through singing. When the actress tried to develop her text she could not find anything suitable. After a few rehearsals, we simultaneously realised that her dream-like qualities required a language completely different from all the other characters. She lives in a different dimension and the ‘concreteness’ of everyday language did not match her poetic features. Verbal expression - spoken words and eligible language - seemed to ‘destroy’ her Mask’s believability.

This process led to the creation of all the other Experiential Masks in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*; i.e. The Devout Portuguese, The Old Fisherman’s Wife and The Perfect British Housewife. In the second version of the piece with a larger cast we found more Masks. Some inspired by historical characters and others from folk tales or family stories: for example, Salvador Dalí, the Finnish Snow Queen, the Religious Boy, The Portuguese Explorer and The Cornish Pirate’s Girl.⁶⁵ See *Video 6.6: Finding the Experiential Masks* [Time code: 09:22]. Returning to the notion of Artisan Theatre as a form rooted in popular tradition, it is interesting to note that to unleash the actors’ playfulness and develop their characters, it is very important to suspend any moral judgement and forget about ‘political correctness’. In both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* we made great use of stereotypes, clichés and superficial generalisations throughout the whole creative process.

In my solo-piece, my grandmother’s boyfriend lost in the battlefield during WW2 inspired me to develop a character called Germino: the Zanni-Soldier. I have never met him, but someone mentioned him once when I was a child. I decided to call him Germino that is a typical peasants’ name from Veneto. It is also my grandmother’s brother-in-law’s name and comes from the verb *germinare* (= to germinate). I choose it because of its direct reference to the character’s peasant origins. It is also relevant to the content of his monologue

⁶⁵ See Chapter 3.4.1 for text and background information and appendix 3 for the visual material of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2016).

that describes his experience on the battlefield and how the land suffered war as much as any other living being. The violence inflicted to humans and animals, affected the land too, because their blood, sweat and fear penetrated deeply into the earth. As a result, the trees could not bear fruit and provide sustenance anymore – i.e. to germinate. I utilised my relatives' accent, gestuality and physicality as a template to develop my character. They have a lot in common with Commedia Servant: in fact, they can be considered *Zanni's* descendants. Another source of inspiration was Ruzante's short dialogue *Il Parlamento de Ruzante che iera vegnu de campo*. This tragicomic play tells the story of a peasant-soldier's return back home from the battlefield; the Cambraic War⁶⁶.

In rehearsal I improvised with my 'scattered objects' from which I selected a baggy shirt, a belt and a funnel. These props and costumes helped me to develop my Mask and 'guided' me to tell his story: they stimulated my imagination and helped me to build Germino's physical actions. To sustain Germino's voice and physicality required pushing my physical and vocal skills to an extreme. By integrating Commedia dell'Arte's techniques and the *Zanni* Mask, I transformed the 'familiar' - my grandmother's relatives - into a Grotesque Mask. Germino is simultaneously autobiographical and fictional: he is a product of my imagination even though rooted in the observation - or remembrance - of real people. I utilise life stories and memories just as a starting point to develop a character that does not exist in real life nor has to retain a strong resemblance to reality. In my work I do not look for authenticity. The autobiographical material (the familiar) is just a tool at my disposal to find inspiring and stimulating material.

The tragic events that shaped my grandmother's existence – the loss of a beloved one, the devastation of war, hunger and pain - are the same suffered in any situation of conflict anywhere in the world, in any time in history. Her story is relevant and resonates with contemporary audiences because they are able to recognise the tragedy of post-WW2 and of any other war - past or present. When Germino is talking of his nightmares and the bombs still haunting him, contemporary audiences can immediately connect with images we daily see in the news (Fig. 31). Despite being culturally specific and retaining qualities unique to the actor who created them, the Experiential Masks transcend cultures and time: they live in a timeless dimension as mentioned in Chapter 1.

⁶⁶ The War of the League of Cambrai (1508-1516) was a major conflict in the history of Italian Renaissance Wars. The main participants were France, the Papal States and the Republic of Venice. They had a strong impact on the life and work of Angelo Beolco (known as Ruzante), the precursor of Commedia dell'Arte.

The notion of 'familiarity' for character building informs my directing as well as my teaching. From text-based projects to Commedia dell'Arte, my work always begins with the exploration of the 'familiar'. I might ask my students to observe their pet, a relative, a friend, a person in the street that captures their attention, or a celebrity. It must be someone – or something - they deeply engage with. I invite them to select material that inspires and excites them: the details, oddities and idiosyncrasies of the characters they met in their life. This will be transformed in 'workable material' for the stage. For instance, to build the Mask of *Nonna Ida* the material I used was my grandmother's accent, her gait, her mannerisms and her habit to put her handkerchief inside her sleeves.



Figure 31: Germino, the Zanni-Soldier. Festival Teatrale Europeo (Roma, Feb 2019).

'Familiarity' is the first step to start the process of transformation into a character, independently of genres or styles. Students feel more confident and comfortable if they start working with familiar material, because they have a point of reference. They are safely rooted but not 'stuck': they can play. Total freedom can be terrifying and often off-putting. Young actors need some fixed points, some boundaries and structures. However, they also need some freedom. Indeed, Commedia dell'Arte Masks provide a useful structure, however they can

also stifle the actor's creativity. It is hard to improvise, to be creative and build a character without knowing the Masks' vocabulary. The risk is to *reproduce* 'shapes', the so-called stock characters, rather than *create* original material.

I guide my students to shape their work towards Commedia dell'Arte Masks (or the characters of the chosen play) only after they had the opportunity to play with something more familiar. For example, in my adaptation of Pirandello's *The Mountain Giants* at Rose Bruford College (2016), I used Commedia dell'Arte principles to work on both text-based and devised scenes without integrating the traditional Masks (Fig.32).



Figure 32: Characters as Masks in an adaptation of Pirandello's *The Mountain Giants*, Rose Bruford College, 2016.

With the students at East 15 in *Commedia Extravaganza* (2016-17) and *Commedia dell'Shakespeare* (2016) we initially worked with animals, social types (e.g. the Posh boy as the Lover) and public figures (e.g. Jimmy Saville as *Pantalone*) that the students could easily connect with. Through the integration of Commedia dell'Arte techniques the traditional Masks started to emerge (e.g. Romeo and Juliet as The Young Lovers; The Nurse as a *Servetta*; Macbeth as the greedy *Pantalone*; the three Witches in *Macbeth* as *Zanni*).

Appendix 5 provides an overview of how my devising methodology was disseminated through teaching. The supporting material includes examples of activities, notes and links to galleries and videos from three key studies: Commedia dell'Arte courses at East 15 Acting School and related productions

(2016/17) (Fig.33); the production *The Mountain Giants* at Rose Bruford College (2016) and *Extraordinary Journeys* devising workshops at London Metropolitan University (2015).



Figure 33: Masks of Commedia dell'Arte: Captain DJ and Arlecchino, Street Performance, East 15 Acting School, Southend-on-Sea, 2016.

Findings

The most relevant discovery made through the exploration of Commedia dell'Arte masks and the integration of Flaminio Scala's teaching in my devising methodology is the 'Experiential Mask'. This is a *re-invention* of Commedia dell'Arte Masks through a *rediscovery* of the fundamental principles of Commedia. In my practice old and new generations of Masks co-exist: the new Masks learn from the old ones utilising them as malleable templates and inspirational material. This process of rediscovery is different from a re-contextualisation or a reinterpretation of Commedia dell'Arte.

My work differs from a traditional approach to Commedia dell'Arte - both Archaeological and Recontextualised Commedia - because I do not utilise traditional masks (leather masks), nor the style and scenarios (plots). In my work Commedia Masks (i.e. the types) are used as a tool to create original characters: *create* rather than *imitate*, *reproduce* or *reinterpret* ancient crystallised forms. To embrace the notion of *Actor as Creator* is linked to another fundamental principle of my practice: *familiarity*. Actors can connect with material that is *familiar* to

them. Indeed, Artisan Theatre is rooted in the everyday reality of the actors and their audiences. The world they inhabit. Through experience and practice – as artisans – performers can mould and transform this ‘familiar’ material into ‘theatre material’.

Techniques required by a traditional approach to Commedia Masks encourage performers to invest a significant amount of energy in trying to remember specific codified gestures and postures. The rational part of our brain dominates all our interactions, interfering – or shutting down all together – our instinctive responses. The conscious mind cannot figure out every detail of our every move, or what another person is going to do on stage or where they are going to move. It is impossible. Hence, we should trust our ‘unconscious knowledge’, finding the resources ‘inside’ ourselves: our experiences, memories and intuition. This will enable us to be open to perceive external stimuli and respond to them. The need to conform to certain rules at the early stages of the creative process might also lead to a self-imposed censorship. Less experienced actors – and students - tend to withdraw rather than take risks. The fear of doing something ‘wrong’ blocks them. A feeling familiar to almost anyone who is learning a new language; it is quite intimidating to have a conversation for the first time. If instead we allow our body to respond instinctively to the stimuli received, it is generally easier to create.

In devising an external eye is necessary to take on this task. *Experiencing* and *reflecting* on that ‘that is experienced’ are two separate processes. Often when actors try to retain too much information in a short period of time their brain becomes ‘hyperactive’ at the expense of the body. When we are improvising we should temporarily suspend our analysis (analytical processes) so that our body can respond to the stimuli received. If we engage with our rational mind too soon in the process, we become less open and responsive because we are absorbed by the task of ‘remembering’ and reproducing. Remembering what we did before, the images we liked and so on. This is important later on in the process when we fix the physical scores; however, during the creative phase it is advisable just to play and ‘be’.

Another important discovery is that Experiential Masks have socio-political value similar to Dario Fo’s characters. They transcend the ‘individual dimension’ by becoming a tool for social commentary. This happened almost ‘by default’ during the transition from *characters* to *types*. By putting a magnifying lens on specific aspects of our autobiographical material our stories became

metaphors or symbols exploring issues of an entire community or our society at large. For instance: social injustice and inequality, the London housing market and the cost of gentrification; propaganda, mass-media manipulation of the masses and the 'culture of fear'. This offers the performer the opportunity to explore and express personal politics or beliefs in the shaping of the piece' (Oddey, 1994, p.11).

I recognise that these are common traits between my work and the tradition of popular theatre, in particular Dario Fo, who was not interested in accurate academic historical reconstruction but invited us to re-appropriate our own culture and challenge mainstream mass culture and beliefs. However, my work differs from Fo's in style and aesthetic. Fo's plays are farce and his monologues utilise traditional story-telling techniques: one-man shows without set, props, costumes and lighting. On the contrary, I utilise a wide range of styles and mixing of codes and genres. My work is both physical and visual: I rely on body expression as much as lighting, set, costumes and sound. Visually my productions are closer to Federico Fellini's oneiric and surreal style. In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, each actor's story with its unique style contributed to the creation of an episodic narrative, characterised by the juxtaposition of tragic and comic moments, poetic and grotesque images, Absurd Theatre and realism.

My work differs from other examples of contemporary devising theatre (e.g. Complicite and Lecoq-lineage companies) both 'ideologically' and methodologically. I use Commedia Masks as templates to create new types rooted in the actor's experience. These Masks are culturally specific not universal. This goes beyond the notion of immutable Fixed-Types embraced by Jacques Lecoq amongst others. He rejects the idea of Commedia as an expression of a specific place and time believing that a better nomenclature would be *la comédie humaine* (the human comedy). He suggests that 'historically, the social relations of the Commedia are *immutable*' (Lecoq, 2002, p.124). Its function is 'to shed light on human nature...' and the 'timeless elements of the human comedy...' (ibid.). Even though Commedia dell'Arte masks and my Experiential Mask can shed light on 'human nature', I believe that they are also far more complex and sophisticated than 'fixed types' or stock characters.

Commedia dell'Arte Masks and their social relations are *mutable*: this is inevitable because they are culturally specific. Commedia dell'Arte Masks have changed and will keep changing by maintaining a connection with the reality of their times: i.e. the reality of the actors who bring them to life. As discussed in

Chapter 1, Lecoq's position might seem to clash with the humanist values and the ethos emerging during the Renaissance that profoundly influenced the Commedia dell'Arte:

Many modern interpreters of the Commedia miss this point and, like Lecoq, revert to the idea of universal *tipi fissi* (fixed types) as if the springs of human action are to be found beyond the individual's control in the primordial character of man. [...] It implies that the social structure is the product of man's fixed character and that hierarchies of power are natural hierarchies. Thus, only a fool would challenge such hierarchies' (McGehee, 2015, in Chafee & Crick, p.15).

This position does not seem to reflect neither artistically nor ideologically Scala's vision of actors as creators of their own art – and their own Masks! Like Scala, I believe actors can create not only their own Masks - the Experiential Masks presented in this chapter - but also the production as a whole by collaborating in developing the performance dramaturgy as we shall see in the following chapter: 'Accidental Narratives'.

3.2 ACCIDENTAL NARRATIVES: THE DRAMATURGY

'I believe that the art of making good plays well belongs to those who can perform them well, because if experience is the teacher of all things, then she can teach to whoever has the ability to create and perform the actable scenario⁶⁷, how to lay them out⁶⁸ too; [...] so much so that the actor may give rules to the playwright, but not the latter to the former; [...] for comedies truly and in essence consist in actions, and in narrations merely by accident.' – Flaminio Scala, 1619

Sub-Context – 'visual dramaturgy', 'performance text' and montage in Devised Theatre.

In my approach to devising, the notion of Actor as Creator refers not only to the actor's ability to build a character but also his pivotal role in shaping the performance as a whole. My role as a director is fundamental in the development of the piece's dramaturgy; however, I consider it a collaborative experience where actor and director inspire and stimulate one another. As Govan suggests:

Creating an original performance, as opposed to staging a play, inevitably involves drawing upon personal experience or reframing pre-existing material within a collectively designed structure. The selection of these events and moments, and the ordering and retelling of them, involves performance-makers working with narrative devises. (Govan et al. 2007, p.55)

The 'Actor-Director Devising Cycle' is therefore relevant to the development of my performances' dramaturgy (Chapter 3.1, Graph 1 at p.76).

Indeed, experience and practice can teach how to lay out good comedies to 'whoever has the ability to create and perform' material for the stage. An interesting lexical choice: rather than *scrivere* ('to write') Scala chooses *distendere* ('lay out' or 'spread out') that means 'to arrange according to a plan'⁶⁹. Scala here is affirming that experienced actors are able to *write* plays (literal meaning) – as he demonstrated by writing *Il Finto Marito* amongst other successful plays - as well as '*arrange well*' the material they create and perform. In other words, actors understand dramaturgical principles. They do not have to follow an author's narrative, they are free to create through improvisation and devising: the narrative will eventually emerge 'by

⁶⁷ Basic plots, themes of Commedia dell'Arte scenarios.

⁶⁸ 'To lay out' means to be able to write a comedy in a literal sense and more broadly understand dramaturgical principles.

⁶⁹ In Scala's time '*le commedie ben distese*' (well laid-out comedies) were 'written comedies' to distinguish them from 'improvised comedies.'

accident'. This is because whereas 'the plot is everything in tragedy, in comedy the characters are crucial: they determine how the story will unfold' (McGehee, 2016).

As Scala's scenarios and plays, my work is *character-led* rather than *narrative-led*. This does not imply a lack of narrative; both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* have dramaturgical coherence. However, the narrative was 'found' at the end of the creative process rather than being the 'driving force' or 'core' of our work. We did not have to deliver a specific story: we found our stories by playing and experimenting with the material produced by the actors, 'merely by accident'. This is where the expression 'Accidental Narratives' comes from. In this type of theatre 'the progression of a story is not relevant' (Lehmann, 2006, p 11) because is a theatre 'of actions'. The actors' interactions with each other, with the space and with objects lead to the development of episodic narratives.

This type of work is characterised by a non-hierarchical theatre aesthetic: a 'visual dramaturgy'. 'This does not mean an exclusive visually organised dramaturgy but rather one that is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic.' With this 'de-hierarchized use of signs', it is possible to dissolve conventional⁷⁰ theatre's logocentric hierarchy and assign 'the dominant role to elements other than dramatic logos and language' (Lehmann, 2006, p.93). These elements are images, physical actions, gestures, music and sounds; and they can often be more powerful and effective than words.

For example, the final scene of my solo piece *Home* - the witch's trial and execution - relies entirely on music, lighting and imagery (Fig.34). The image of a wooden-cross carried on my shoulders evokes the witch's martyrdom and simultaneously the passion of Christ. This powerful image is effective and 'economical': its symbolic value immediately resonates within the audience because of the cultural heritage shared between performer and spectators. By equating Jesus' crucifixion and the actress' execution the piece declares her innocence: she is as pure as the most virtuous of all men according to Christian values. It also works as a reminder to the audience of the horrific consequences of propaganda and 'culture of fear'. Throughout the history of humanity violent repressions, persecutions and genocides have always been promoted and perpetuated through the manipulation of the masses. By integrating texts from

⁷⁰ See p.28 and the glossary for the definition of 'conventional theatre'.

current political speeches, Hitler's propaganda and the Inquisition's invectives, this simple image at the end of the show becomes more eloquent and powerful than other theatrical devices including text.



Figure 34: The Execution of the Actress. (Festival Teatrale Europeo, Rome, 2019)

The crucifix is a motif present throughout the whole performance. The actual object is utilised to symbolise the Catholic Church. Cardinal Borromeo uses it as a weapon to intimidate the masses. During one of his monologues he makes a direct reference to the crucifixion of Jesus mimicking his emblematic final words: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' Here Borromeo asks God to forgive those innocent men seduced by the Devil while watching a Commedia dell'Arte performance. Those sinful women on stage are indeed the *organum diaboli* (instrument of the Devil): they trigger lustful desires in men and corrupt their souls. The irony is that Jesus' saying on the cross is known as 'The Word of Forgiveness'. This is in stark contrast with Borromeo's and the Inquisition's unforgiving, merciless and cruel measures taken against the Actress/Witch. The impact of physical actions, symbols and images on the audience is enhanced by the use of colours, lighting and sounds. Black represents death (the Inquisition); white represents life and innocence (the Actress's veil and Germino's shirt) and red is violence (the burning at the stake).

Characters' physicality is a fundamental element of the 'visual dramaturgy'. In both productions, I integrated physical story-telling and Commedia dell'Arte techniques to 'translate' words into physical actions: exaggerated gestures and physicality, clocking of the audience, use of sounds and onomatopoeia. All the characters who speak foreign languages or dialects

employ these devices: Germino and Nonna Ida in my solo piece, and The Old Fisherman's Wife, the Devout Portuguese, The Snow Queen and Salvador Dali' in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*. See *Video 6.4: Multilingualism* [Time code: 06:11].

There are also less explicit ways in which gestures and actions on stage can add meaning and complexity to the overall narrative. For instance, in *Home/Finding Home*, the Actress' physicality changes dramatically throughout the performance: initially she is playful, energetic and vibrant (Fig.35). Later in the piece she appears as an automaton doll: her movements are wooden, constraint and repetitive. In the background Borromeo's voice cites passages from the Bibles concerning the unequivocal superiority of men and their right to subjugate women (Fig.36, next page). In the final scene the Actress without her white veil - that symbolises her freedom of expression, her Art and her life - walks with difficulty in a body depleted of vitality, strength and beauty (Fig.34, previous page). This physical transformation on stage symbolises the different stages of women's repression, from subjugation to physical abuse and violation till the most extreme act of violence: murder. See *Video 6.7: The Actress' Evolution* [Time code: 15:21].



Figure 35: The Dancing Actress. Festival Teatrale Europeo (Roma, 2019).



Figure 36: The Holy Mary Doll. Festival Teatrale Europeo (Roma, 2019).

All the performance elements mentioned so far - objects, symbols, imagery, characters' actions and physicality - are signs. The audience's interpretation of these signs contributes to the development of a 'performance text'. Lehmann – and Richard Schechner before him – utilises the expression 'performance text' to define a dramaturgy that includes the linguistic material ('written text'), the staging and how all this 'interacts with the theatrical situation'. This includes:

the relationship of the performance (and performers) to the spectators, the temporal and spatial situation, and the place and function of the theatrical process within the social field (Lehmann, p.85).

Lehmann distinguishes this type of theatre based on a 'performance text' from the text-based theatre based on the mise-en-scene of a 'written text'. In the latter the meaning of the performance is determined by the sequence of events, in the former, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it emerges by the interweaving of all the actions on stage, the layering of images, sounds and symbols; as well as the complex and unpredictable occurrences taking place throughout the live event. The 'performance text' exists only at the end of the creative process when performers share their work with an audience.

In this context, the word 'text' means 'a weaving together'. This 'weave of the performance' according to Barba 'can be defined as "dramaturgy", that is, *drama-ergon*, "the work of the actions" in the performance' (Barba, p.66). These

expressions, but also text, lighting, set, objects, changes in the dynamics of the scene, tempo, rhythm or pace:

In a performance, *actions* (that is all that which has to do with dramaturgy) are not only what is said and done, but also the sounds, the lights and the changes in space. [...] or even the evolution of the musical score [...] All the relationships, all the interactions between the characters or between the characters and the lights, the sounds and the space, are actions. Everything that works directly on the spectators' attention, on their understanding, their emotions, their kinaesthesia, is an *action* (ibid., p.66).

This echoes Scala's observation that 'comedies truly and in essence consist in *actions*': anything on stage that triggers the spectators both physically and emotionally.

These *actions* become texture - or 'text' – either by *concatenation* or *simultaneity*. At times, actions follow a chronological order of cause and effect; at other times they occur simultaneously (ibid., p.67). This is evident in both *Home* and *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*. Each character's story unfolds following a clear progression: a chronological sequence of events (=concatenation). For instance, in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, Hedda's search for a home becomes progressively more ridiculous in an escalation of absurd situations. In *Home* Cardinal Borromeo becomes progressively more menacing and the Actress loses her freedom and vitality till her final execution. In her first scene the Actress appears bowing at the adoring audience at the end of one of her performances then she reappears singing an opera and dancing. As time passes her situation evolves. In her third appearance Cardinal Borromeo has subjugated her and she has become an automaton doll; in her final appearance she is executed. In both productions the audience can follow each character's progression through a clear chronological unfolding of events.

Occasionally two scenes might overlap. The simultaneous presence of different characters and scenes on stage contributes to the narrative of the piece. As Barba observed 'complex' meanings arise from a performance that explores *simultaneity*. These meanings derive from the interweaving of many dramatic actions, each one with its own 'simple' meaning, and 'from the assembling of these actions by a single unity of time' (ibid., p.68). In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, for instance, The Moonlight Fairy's appearance in other characters' stories is a reference to the plurality of opinions and perspectives. In this episode,

the multiple interpretations of 'home' make it impossible for her to come up with a univocal definition of the word 'home'. The pictures she collects are scattered images that cannot be put together in a coherent whole because they belong to different characters: they are fragments of diverse and divergent perspectives. This is also a comment on the ephemeral nature of the theatrical experience and the impossibility of capturing it on camera. In our tangible reality – not the fictional world of the performance - her images are only a bias version of the actual real experience: the live event. Another example of simultaneity is the menacing voice of Cardinal Borromeo layered on the automaton doll's physical sequence; a direct reference to the historical role of the Catholic Church in promoting misogyny (Fig.38).

The material produced in rehearsals – all the different characters and their stories - is put together as a coherent piece during the final stages of the devising process: the montage. This is when 'the director guides, divides, and reassembles the spectator's attention' by choosing a specific order of scenes and polishing or altering performers' actions 'thinking about the words of the text, the relationships, the music, the sounds, the lights and the use of props.' Through a process of trial and error I play with the actors' material juxtaposing and interweaving different scenes, moments and images. When necessary I work on transitions thinking about the effect the actions must have on the audience pay particular attention on each scene's pace and tempo-rhythm. The director's choices made through montage guide 'the spectators' senses letting them to experience the performance text' (ibid., p.180).

Construction of meaning can occur when the director organises the material 'into a succession in which one action seems to answer another, or into a simultaneous execution in which the meaning of both actions derive directly from the fact of their mutual presence' (ibid., p.180) - as the examples above of *The Moonlight Fairy* and *Cardinal Borromeo*. Rather than a perfect 'illusion of reality', my *Accidental Masks* live in an outlandish and quirky world, an altered version of 'reality'.

Methodology, activities and examples⁷¹

Devising theatre heavily relies on improvisation. However, as mentioned

⁷¹ For a detailed description of exercises and activities, rehearsal structure, notes and observations refer to Appendix 3: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*; Appendix 4: *Home* and Appendix 5: Teaching Commedia dell'Arte & Devising.

in Chapter 3.1, improvisation in an 'empty space' can be extremely challenging. It is particularly counter-productive for young actors and students. Performers need inspiring material at the beginning of the creative process. Inspiration can be found in their own life and artistic experience, and in the stimuli offered by the ensemble during the research phase. This is an important step because improvisation can inhibit rather than liberate the performers. Indeed, 'the desire to create an original piece of work brings an enormous freedom' (Oddey, p.27) however, this can be terrifying at the beginning of the creative process. Before starting an improvisation, it is important to make an 'inventory' of what one has at his disposal. This is why discussions, brainstorming and exercises like the 'Home Lists' are fundamental.

Anything that contributes to the creation of my performances – written, visual or aural material – ends up in a comprehensive 'collection' of inspiring items. This is my contemporary re-invention of the *zibaldone*. In Commedia a *zibaldone* or *libro generico* is a commonplace book where actors would collect a personal repertoire of recyclable commonplaces, speeches and extracts. The actual definition of *zibaldone*, widely used since the 15th century, can be translated in English as 'hodgepodge' – meaning a collection of miscellaneous things – or a 'commonplace book'. Its definitions are: 1) a notebook containing multiple writings collected in a scattered fashion; 2) a collection of loosely connected thoughts; 3) a confusing mixture of diverse things: writings, sketches, images, objects or people. The latter best describe what a *zibaldone* represents for me - in my practice: a diverse mix of items not organised or systematised or prioritised.

It refers to anything that contributes to the creation of the piece from the initial stimuli - such as the 'Home Lists', texts, sketches, sounds, music, objects and costumes - to the material created by the actors through improvisation: anything that the ensemble uses to develop their character and stories. By definition a *zibaldone* is not organised or structured therefore it can be confusing to anyone but the director.

The costumes and props included in the *zibaldoni* of *A Floating Caravan under the Moon* and *Home* were mostly re-cycled from previous performances or 'found objects'. I borrowed this expression from Kantor and Visual Arts: a 'Found object' is 'a natural or man-made object, or fragment of an object, that is found by an artist and kept because of some intrinsic interest the artist sees

in it'.⁷² I reused costumes, props and even music, exploring ways to make them fresh and unique through a process of re-invention. This approach is comparable to the renovation of old furniture by a carpenter; in line with the notion of 'Artisan Theatre'. I labelled it 'recyclable theatre.'

Recycled (reused) props or costumes can become something different when they are used in a new context. Each actor - with his specific physicality, skills and culture – has the power to transform that object into something unique. In both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* costumes and props were re-invented and transformed according to the needs of our characters; they acquired different meanings and 'different emotive colourations' (Barba, p.66). Old music and sound tracks were edited and mixed with new samples producing something specific for this piece, and the chosen theme: 'home.'

The 'unbound playfulness' of the early stages of rehearsal can be at times confusing or disorientating for both actors and directors. This moment of apparent confusion can be described as a 'fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness.' Victor Turner describes it as 'a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process' (Turner, 1982, cited in Broadhurst, 1999, pp.11-13). Characters, situations, and images emerge by chance from this 'chaos'. They are little gems amongst a vast amount of material that is often uninteresting and not particularly inspiring; or cannot be integrated with the rest - even though as an isolated piece, or scene, could be very interesting. It is an intrinsic feature of devising: a small percentage of what is produced in improvisation is eventually used in performance.

Through observation, isolation and repetition the ensemble starts collecting potential material for the performance. These are the 'threads' that will be interweaved or juxtaposed during the montage phase to develop a 'performance text': the dramaturgy. These threads are like the pearls of a necklace. They are found after a long process of research that embraces 'failure'. The director picks these 'pearls' and supports the ensemble to transform this 'raw material' into 'performance material': i.e. repeatable physical and vocal scores. Actors and director work together in polishing these gems through repetition. In

⁷² 'Found objects (sometimes referred to by the French term for found object *objet trouvé*) may be treated as works of art in themselves, as well as providing inspiration for the artist. They are not normally considered materials from which art is made, often because they already have a non-art function.' (Tate Website, Art Term: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/found-object>).

devising 'a director or 'outside' eye is needed to edit or discard material, make technical decisions and lead the group overall' (Oddey, p.26).

During the rehearsal of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* promising material emerged from the actors' improvisation when they did not focus on realistic situations. Their work was far more interesting and captivating when they played like little children without any concern about believability. Paradoxically the more 'abstract work' was more believable than the rest because performers were fully engaged in *doing* rather than *illustrating*. They were not thinking about a logical unfolding of events: the narrative. They did not fall into clichés, predictable patterns or mannerisms. On the contrary, they became less believable and engaging when they became too 'literal' reproducing real characters and situations in their attempt to be 'understood'. It emerged that 'hinting' at reality can be far more effective than 'illustrating' reality in every detail, as stated by both Flamimio Scala in the prologue of *Il Finto Marito* and Dario Fo in *The Tricks and the Trade*.

While rehearsing choral scenes in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* I noticed that any tentative adjustment in movement or positioning – for instance shuffling a bit on the right to align with the rest of the group – affects the believability of the action. It breaks the 'illusion'. This shows that the actors are thinking rather than doing and being. An outside eye can see them trying to figure out what to do next. If some members of the group get too concerned about the possibility of doing something 'wrong', they would immediately appear 'out of the game'. Equally, if an actor has some expectations that are not fulfilled – for instance a specific interaction with another member of the ensemble – he might get frustrated. This is another way to temporarily step 'out of the game'.

As stated by both Copeau and Lecoq, children are far more credible than actors because they are totally engaged in playing, they do not have time to analyse how well they are 'playing'. The full conviction that children have in the playground allows them to transform the imaginary in reality; and the unbelievable in believable. Actor's full commitment is therefore paramount. They can create anything for the audience without 'describing' or 'illustrating' it in details. In fact, the preoccupation to 'explain' would be detrimental. In the early stages of the devising process, there is nothing 'to adjust' or 'explain' because there is not 'right' or 'wrong'. There is not a specific sequence of events to follow. The story has to be found by the group: it is 'written' while playing.

At times actors might feel the need to establish a narrative too soon. If this happens the work becomes less intriguing and far more predictable. Early improvisations ('unbound playfulness' phase) are usually more interesting. When actors feel the 'need' to explain an action or add an interpretation – usually a linear unfolding of events – not only their work becomes a slavish imitation of reality, it can also appear 'fake' because an observer can see the mechanisms of acting. I often have to ask actors to fight against their need to impose a narrative and allow it to emerge by 'accident'. Indeed, the juxtaposition of images works like a sequence of illustrations in a comic strip. An observer can fill the gaps. The resulting narrative has its own language and demands a certain level of participation from the spectators. An external eye (the director) can see these 'accidental narratives' emerging from the chaos through the juxtaposition or layering of simple scores.

In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* each individual story had a unique genesis. At times the actor's narrative stemmed from an existing text from which the performer's physical and vocal scores stemmed. For example, Zie Jackson and Veera Väisänen worked with folk tales. Other times the stories we developed did not have any recognisable features of the text utilised as source material. This is the case for Jacob Harrison and his use of *The Great Gatsby* and Rita Guerreiro who utilised a folk story of a Portuguese explorer lost at sea, the notion of *saudade*⁷³ and a *fado*⁷⁴ song. In my solo piece Cardinal Borromeo's story and his text stemmed from a mixture of historical texts, biblical texts and contemporary political speeches. His narrative and character progression was interwoven with other characters' narratives and was a build up from extreme farcical features to a dark and meaning presence. At the end of the piece he is almost totally devoid of physicality. In his last appearance Borromeo is a voice: the words of the Bible resonate as if God were speaking through him. See Appendix 4 and *Video 6.8: Cardinal Borromeo's Evolution* [Time code: 17:42].

⁷³ A word that claims no direct translation in English or any other language. It describes a deep emotional state of nostalgic or profound melancholic longing for an absent something or someone that one loves. Moreover, it often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never return. A stronger form of *saudade* might be felt towards people and things whose whereabouts are unknown, such as a lost lover, or a family member who has gone missing, separated or died.

⁷⁴ A type of Portuguese singing, traditionally associated with pubs and cafés, that is renowned for its expressive and profoundly melancholic character

Other characters' narrative evolved from physical scores without the use of any written text. For instance, Esther Calle Peña developed her character's story, Istaso, from a sequence of movements and sounds developed in improvisation. Esther's piece combined a very precise structure with moments of improvisation and audience interactions. Her text in Spanish was semi-improvised however, from a certain moment onwards, her physical and vocal scores were perfectly timed on a pre-recorded sound score: the storm. This had a specific duration and tempo-rhythm that determined the development of her narrative. The Moonlight Fairy had to follow a structure but her piece was mainly improvised. The actress had a specific cue to come on stage (the wind blowing) and a trajectory to follow. Only a few actions had been rehearsed and she had total freedom to decide how and when to perform those specific scores. Her main task was to be alert and curious: her actions were a sequence of 're-actions' to other characters and the audience.

In both productions I did not have a precise idea of how I wanted each story and the overall narrative to unfold. I allowed the actors to keep improvising and devising new material; then I directed them in developing their physical actions, images and text. From here stories started to emerge. Each self-contained story (or micro-narrative) was the *arrival* point of our investigation, not the departure. The montage of these 'micro-narratives' in a coherent whole produced a 'macro-narrative'.

Due to the eclectic nature of the work that integrates different sources and styles, the resulting script is not comparable to a play. It consists of a 'structure' that provides a sequence of events (each episode); a description of each character; texts, songs and stage directions; technical notes; entrances/exits and transitions. This is my re-interpretation of a Commedia's *canovaccio*⁷⁵.

In Commedia dell'Arte the *canovaccio*, or *scenario*, is a written plot of a theatre piece divided in acts and scenes with the explanation of situations, actions, stage directions, clear indication of entrances and exits, the type of interactions between characters, the asides and the list of *lazzi* (comic gags) - but without dialogues. Dialogues were improvised or 'semi-improvised': each actor had a repertoire of written texts learnt by heart that were recycled and often

⁷⁵ Example of *canovacci* can be found in Appendix 3: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and Appendix 5: *Commedia dell'Shakespeare*.

adapted to different scenarios. We can see from the documents and accounts of the *Commedianti* that very little (if anything) was left to chance. They used an immense repertoire of written texts: soliloquies, ‘*concetti*’, monologues and dialogues. In Italian the word *canovaccio* indicates a piece of loosely woven cloth. It can be a rough fabric utilised as a simple dishcloth or a soft material for embroidery. This term simultaneously embodies the popular origins of Commedia (the humble jobs carried out with a dishcloth) and the original meaning of the word ‘text’ as defined by Barba: ‘the weave’ or texture of the performance that becomes more complex and layered (‘embroidered’) as the creative process develops.

In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* each character’s story, or micro-narrative, was held together by a common theme (‘home’) and a leit-motif (the sea). In their ‘home lists’ most actors mentioned the sight, smell and sound of the sea. Many of the images and sounds produced in improvisation were related with the sea: from Itsaso, the Old Fishermen Woman who is waiting for her husband to come back home after the storm has passed; to the Portuguese Explorer. I thought that the sea could be not only a recurrent motif – e.g. the sounds of the waves or the image of paper boats adrift as a reminder of the refugees’ crisis; but also a model in constructing the overall narrative of the piece. Each story is like an ocean wave: it builds up in size and intensity and then dissipates while another wave (i.e. another story) is already ‘building up’ behind it. Characters and stories, appearing and disappearing in an incessant flux, all belong to same ocean; i.e. the same macro-narrative. During the montage of the piece I worked with this model in mind to orchestrate the sequence of events. The passages between episodes occurred in different ways: a) overlapping of scenes (cross-waves); b) transitions (merging of waves); and c) abrupt switches of scenario (crashing waves). The different qualities of the sea – for example calm, energetic or stormy – provided a useful template to define the macro-narrative (the ocean) and re-work each scene (single wave) finding more nuances in each character’s physicality, tempo-rhythm and pace.⁷⁶ (See rehearsal notes and observations in Appendix 3b).

⁷⁶ The best way to describe different moments and passages within the whole composition (the piece) is through art music’s terminology: *adagio*, *andante*, *allegro*, etc...

The reoccurrence of the same props and symbols contributes to build a sense of connectedness and unity. Paper boats, bamboo sticks, playing cards, bread, wine and white cloths reappear in different moments throughout the performance. These objects were essential to the development of the characters and their story. They are an intrinsic feature of the character, almost an extension of their body; these characters cannot exist without *those* objects. For example, Itsaso, the Old Fisherman Woman's physicality, gait and tempo-rhythm were found when Esther started to use the bamboo cane as a walking stick (Fig. 37). The same object became a hitting stick and then a smoking pipe for the Snow Queen (Fig.38); while the Cornish Pirate's Girl utilised it as a fishing rod (Fig. 39). These are just a few examples of objects that reoccur as a motif throughout the piece and provide a 'visual' unity.



Figure 37: Itsaso, the Old Fisherman's Wife with her walking stick in *A Floating Under the Moon*, CrisisArt Festival, 2016.



Figure 38: The Snow Queen smoking a pipe in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, Crisis Art Festival, 2016.



Figure 39: The Cornish Pirate's Girl fishing on the roof of the Teatrino. *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* at the CrisisArt Festival, 2016.

In the final montage I worked on transitions and choral moments. Some characters – that I labelled the ‘dynamic characters’ because unlike others were not anchored on a specific spot - facilitated these transitions either by diverting the audience's attention or guiding them to another space. In the first version of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, Hedda enters unexpectedly from one of the fire-exit doors behind the audience to divert the audience's attention; later she reappears from the technician's booth banging at the window and pointing a torch towards her face again with the purpose of redirecting the audience's attention. Towards the end of the show, Beverly, the Perfect Housewife storms out of the

room leaving the door open behind her inviting the audience to follow her to the courtyard (Fig. 40).

This was necessary to allow the actors to set up the stage for the final scene. When the audience followed Beverly back to the studio all the characters gathered in the final tableau resembling a family picture. Each held a candle while singing 'Happy Birthday, Dear Home' in their own languages (Fig. 41 and 42). In the second version of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, actors invited the audience to join them in a carnival procession integrating chanting and dancing on the way out to the theatre's roof.



Figure 40: Beverly, the Perfect Housewife in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, London Metropolitan University, 2015.



Figure 41 and 42: 'Happy Birthday Dear Home' in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* at London Metropolitan University (2015) and CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo (2016).



Figure 43: The Religious Boy's Carnival procession: singing and dancing. *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2016.



Figure 44: Syrial Lullaby. *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, 2015.

Besides the final scene and the Religious Boy's Procession (Fig.43), other examples of choral moments are the Syrian Lullaby (Fig.44) and Dali's enactment of Michelangelo's *Last Supper* (Fig. 45). Dali's homage to Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* serves as a comic device. After calling on stage the filmmaker and stage managers Dali places himself at the centre of the composition sharing bread with his twelve apostles. This idea emerged towards the end of the creative process after noticing that there were in total thirteen students involved in the project, an example of 'Accidental Narrative'. See *Video 6.9: Choral Scenes* [Time code: 19:12].



Figure 45: Dali's Last Supper in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo 2016; and *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci.

In the final piece *Home* (2017) I utilised the same devising techniques although I developed a more 'defined' script than *A Floating Caravan under the Moon*. Modelled on Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo*,⁷⁷ each episode is introduced by a prologue that contextualises the work and provides some background information (historical research). After I found my characters and their stories (accidental narratives), I developed their text employing different approaches. Nonna Ida and Germino's text were devised. Their scenes have a very precise

⁷⁷ Dario Fo utilizes the term *giullarata* to distinguish his solo-pieces from traditional monologues. In this *giullarata* he interacts with his audience employing traditional story-telling techniques: the performance opens with a talk where the actor provides background information and a contextualisation. Each story - introduced by a prologue - is treated as an independent story that does not have any connection with the others besides the 'theme' (e.g. exploitation of the lower classes) and origins (popular theatre of jesters, story-tellers, buffoons). Each episode has different characters, situations and scenarios.

structure however, in performance there is space for improvisation. Audience interaction had an impact on the pace and tempo-rhythm of these scenes but did not alter their content and words.

Cardinal Borromeo's text is a mix of a variety of historical documents: writing from Tommaso Garzoni, Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza, Cardinal Borromeo and excerpts from the New Testament and the *Malleus Maleficarum* and quotes from Theresa May's and Donald Trump's electoral campaign speeches. The editing and adapting of this eclectic range of sources took place in rehearsal. I improvised with the text and found a progression in content (the text becomes progressively darker scene after scene); in style (Borromeo becomes progressively less grotesque and more menacing); in tempo-rhythm (his delivery becomes progressively slower and steadier) and in quality of his voice (progressively colder and more controlled). For Gino the Conman, I utilised both devising techniques and written texts. I developed each scene's structure through improvisation – as I did for Germino and Nonna Ida – and incorporated excerpts from a wide range of source material as I did for Cardinal Borromeo: historical documents, the novel *La Chimera* by Sebastiano Vassalli⁷⁸, Commedia dell'Arte traditional *canovacci*⁷⁹, news and social media's quotes. I utilised the famous Vittoria Pisimi as an inspiration to build the character of the Actress. I worked with the Mask of the Prima Donna of Commedia for quite a long time but it did not seem to work. Incorporating the feedback received from my supervisors, I worked on this character thinking of her as a 'presence' or an image. Rather than a full-rounded character, her function is to symbolise a view or perspective that is in direct antithesis with the Catholic Roman Inquisition. Her language is non-verbal, ephemeral and magical. She communicates through images, dance and music. As the Moonlight Fairy in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, she belongs to another world.

Some characters that emerged through improvisation did not feature in the final production but provided useful material to further develop the piece. For example, the Inquisitor was 'incorporated' in Cardinal Borromeo providing the material to build his dark and menacing qualities that became prominent towards the end of the show. Another character explored during the early stages of

⁷⁸ A fictional story based on a real trial of a witch that took place in 1600 in a small village in my region, Piedmont.

⁷⁹ *Sproloquio* del Dottor Graziano on the evilness of Women in Placido Adriani's *Selva overo Zibaldoni di concetti comici* (1734).

rehearsal was the Misogynist Doctor, inspired by the traditional Mask of Doctor Graziano. His speech – the *sproloquio* of Dottor Graziano on the evilness of women - offered inspiring material to develop Gino's speeches. *Video 6.10: Gino, the Conman. The Saint Relics' Speech* [Time code: 20:46].

Unlike *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, in my solo piece all characters are interconnected. During the montage phase, I re-worked each micro-narrative around a specific event: the Witch/Actress trial. This had an impact on the development of the characters. Nonna Ida was supposed to be a sort of female *Pantalone*: a bitter, mean and unsympathetic character. Instead, she became quite sweet and lovable. As the narrative developed and her relationship with the other characters became clearer, so did her personality. Rather than a nasty bigot responsible for the accusation of the Actress, she became just a victim of external circumstances. She is corrupted by the monstrosity of the world surrounding her. Borromeo's terrifying propaganda changed Nonna Ida. The 'culture of fear' won over her docile nature turning her excitement towards the Actress – and that which the Actress represents - into hatred. She ended up believing Borromeo; burning the Witch at the stake is the only solution to avoid calamities and to get rid of the Devil. See *Video 6.11: Nonna Ida's evolution* [Time code: 22:21].

Both productions integrated text-based and devised scenes, audience interaction, moments of slapstick (equivalent to Commedia's *lazzi comici*) and improvisation. Some transitions were fixed and rehearsed while others were improvised. There was an element of freedom within a structure. This was partly a stylistic choice, partly imposed by the circumstances. In both showings of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* we had just a few hours to adapt our piece to a new space completely different from our rehearsal studio. This imposed a series of last minute changes in staging, timing and duration of each scene. Adapting the piece to the demand of a new space presented the actors with an opportunity to re-discover spontaneity and playfulness; two qualities of performance that sometimes can be lost through repetition. Unexpected circumstances can contribute to the development of our 'Accidental Narratives': actors should be open and prepared to welcome and integrate new input throughout the performance. Indeed, discoveries made on stage should shape future performances.

In my teaching I develop a dramaturgical approach that is different from what I have described so far because I usually work with written plays, as

Pirandello's *The Mountain Giants* (Rose Bruford College, 2016) or traditional Commedia *canovacci* as *Commedia Extravaganza* (East 15 Acting School, 2017). In the montage phase, I follow the same principles utilised in my ensemble-devised productions. The final composition is the result of a weaving together of episodes or scenes autonomously developed by small groups of students. In my adaptation of *The Mountain Giants* I played freely with the text integrating devised scenes developed by the students through improvisation. Pirandello stated that the action takes place in 'an indeterminate time and place, on the border between fable and reality' (Pirandello, 1936, p.1). This surreal world populated by bizarre characters was a great inspiration to develop a 'visual dramaturgy' where symbols, visual and sound are as important as text (Fig. 46, Fig. 47 and Fig. 48). See *Video 6.12: Cotrone's Fireflies, Mary Magdalene's Carnival and Mary Magdalene's Waltz* [Time code: 23:19].



Figure 46: Cotrone's Fireflies. *The Mountain Giants*, Rose Bruford College, 2016.



Figure 47: Mary Magdalene's Carnival Procession. *The Mountain Giants*, Rose Bruford College, 2016.



Figure 48: Mary Magdalene's Waltz in *The Mountain Giants*, Rose Bruford College, 2016.

Findings:

One of the most relevant discoveries made during the development of my productions is the definition of a character-led dramaturgy that I labelled 'Accidental Narratives'. Inspired by Scala I decided to utilise the term 'accidental' ('*per accidente*' in Italian) to emphasise the direct connection between my practice and Commedia principles. I integrated Commedia dell'Arte techniques and postdramatic theatre's notions of 'visual dramaturgy' and 'performance text' to re-invent and re-interpret traditional practices as the use of *zibaldoni* and *canovacci*.

In comparison to Dario Fo and contemporary Lecoq-trained practitioners or companies, such as Complicite, my work demonstrates a distinctive emphasis on characters rather than narrative. My devising process does not originate from a situation or a story: a play, a novel or an event. Fo defines his work as a 'situation-led theatre' because characters function as 'vehicles' to deliver a specific narrative and message (Fo, 1987, p.126). On the contrary, my aim is not to communicate a specific message or tell a specific story. Our narratives are found 'by accident' through experimentation and improvisation. In this approach to devising actors have a central role not only in creating their characters (the Experiential Masks) but also in the content of the piece by shaping the performance dramaturgy. This is linked to Commedia and the central role of the Masks. The 'story' (*fabula*) is made by an accumulation and interweaving of different parts: if one Mask is added or removed the story changes. The structure of a classic Commedia scenario is far more 'predictable' than my devising productions however the actors and the parts they can play (i.e. the masks available for each production) determines what type of scenario the company would play. This is the opposite of a having a story (a play, novel, real event or anecdote) that determines the characters – hence the cast – that will deliver it.

The freedom of playing in any way we wanted without a specific story to deliver – and a specific style or genre to comply with - gave us the opportunity to find 'unexpected' characters and situations. Often actors become less available to the external stimuli when they start thinking about aesthetic (form) and 'meaning' (content/narrative) too early in the process. At this stage ('unbound playfulness'), performers should play freely leaving to an external observer (the director or fellow actors) the responsibility of 'reflecting' on the process. As a director, I 'shape' this material through experimentation responding to the stimuli received by the actors. The characters themselves lead me to discover stories.

These narratives found 'by accident' are shaped and refined to become part of a coherent 'whole'. Rather than a *plan* - such as a play to stage or a story to deliver - I have a *seed*, an initial stimulus that ramified in multiple directions. This character-led dramaturgy leads to a performance that is more similar to a living organism rather than a well-functioning machine. As Barba pointed out 'the final state of a machine is "good" and "functions" if it corresponds exactly to the original plan and if each part works correctly at the right place at the right time.' The final form of my work never corresponds 'to a *plan* but the unforeseeable result of an *organic process*' (Barba, p.291).

In both *Home* and *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, actors' personal stories and memories were the initial source of inspiration. However, unlike 'autobiographical performances', this material was just a tool to trigger actors' imagination. My focus is on the characters and stories that emerge from the 'familiar'. Throughout the creative process the autobiographical elements are totally transformed and become unrecognisable. Instead, autobiographical performance tends to focus on issues of *authenticity* and *non-performativity* – i.e. performing the 'self'. Often actors are presenting themselves on stage or a stage persona sharing their own stories. Therefore 'autobiographical narratives are spaces where an individual's private stories are offered for public consumption' (Govan et al., 2007, p.59). My work is different. My productions are a grotesque, surreal and absurd interpretation of the real world (reality). Characters are highly stylised and audiences are invited to take part in an experience rather than 'witnessing a confession' (ibid.,p.69).

Autobiographical theatre is a term that embraces different types of performances however the general consensus is that it should be characterised by a certain degree of authenticity. The work might be placed in that grey area between 'truth and fiction, memory and imagination. [...] Indeed, memory is a key aspect in the creation of autobiographical performance. The human memory acts as a filter and, as a consequence, what is remembered may not be the truth but an embroidered version of the real (ibid., p. 63).

In my exploration I do not question the truthfulness of the material shared by actors: my aim is simply to find images, characters and actions that trigger interest in the performers and stimulate them to create. Their memories, embellished versions of the 'truth', are only a starting point of our investigation.

Another discovery that distinguishes my practice from other approaches to devising is the notion of ensemble. The work we have developed in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* is quite different from other devising companies in the UK, for instance Complicite or Told by An Idiot. Rather than being an imperative condition to start the devising process, the 'ensemble' is found throughout the creative process. Actors developed their characters and stories autonomously: they worked at their own pace, with their own personal material and their own style. They started working on choral scenes (e.g. *The Last Supper* scene) and characters' interactions quite late. Nonetheless, they were still working together throughout the whole creative process because they shared the same ideas, space, and objects. Inevitably they influenced each other and 'tuned' with one another without consciously being asked to do so.

Often ensemble work is interpreted as a cooperation taking place since the early stages of the rehearsal process - for example by responding as a group to a specific text or visual stimulus. This usually leads to chorus work that consists of groups of actors breathing together, moving at the same tempo-rhythm, acquiring the same physical qualities and so on. This is my experience of exploring Complicite's devising techniques and other practitioners within the lineage of Lecoq, but also Meyerhold and Grotowski. In most of the workshops and professional experiences I had, I felt that actor's individuality and instinct were often constrained by the necessity of conforming to a specific style or aesthetic. I perceived the pre-eminence of collectiveness vs. individuality.

My approach to ensemble and collaboration 'is based on a vision of the power of the creative actor that is highly individualised'; even if the process is a democratic 'collective experience' where we share ideas, knowledge and all the 'tools' that will contribute to the creation of the piece (e.g. props, costumes, texts and so on). The outcome is an ensemble performance where actors develop a 'technical ability to generate a shared dynamic and rhythm' between one another (ibid., p.37).

Another interesting discovery is that the audience might interpret a scene as an 'ensemble moment'; instead, they are simply observing a juxtaposition of autonomous and independent physical and vocal scores. Each actor had worked separately developing individual scores. In these instances, the audience add meaning to the scene. This is just one of many occasions in which spectators contribute to the development of a narrative. These instances that can become

'signs' for the spectators – and therefore assume specific meanings for them – do not necessarily correspond to the same meaning they had for the performers.

In this light I find it stimulating to develop a practice that recognises that 'to understand a performance does not only mean to see what its authors (performers, directors, playwrights...) have put into it, or to find out what has been hidden deep within it, but rather to make discoveries during a carefully studied journey' (Barba, p.288). I agree with Barba in stating that a director, to make a performance understood, should not plan discoveries but rather 'design and construct embankments, along which the spectators' attention will navigate.' Spectators should make their own discoveries (ibid., p.288) as we shall see in the following chapter: 'Stage Resonances'.

3.3 STAGE RESONANCES: THE STYLE

'...words alone will have a small part on stage, because even the smallest gesture at the right moment, and made with feeling, will have a greater impact than all the philosophy of Aristotle, or the rhetoric of Demosthenes and Cicero. And it's true that feelings are aroused more easily by gestures than words. [...] because the senses from the senses are more easily moved than by abstract concepts, just as like is drawn to like.' (Scala, 1619)

Sub-Context – the actor's body, the actor-spectator proximity and 'total text' in Devised Theatre

Traditionally communication in theatre is understood as verbal. In this light, theatre is interpreted as *dramatisation* of literature: a 'translation' of written words into spoken words aided by gestures, sound, lighting, costumes and set. This hierarchy, at the top of which we find verbal language, prioritises 'harmony and comprehensibility' as the most valuable attributes of a performance (Lehmann, 2006, p.86).

My devising approach does not recognise this hierarchy. In all my productions, including *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home*, the text is only one element, or layer, of the scenic creation, not its main component. All means are employed with equal weighting. This non-hierarchical approach 'aims at a synesthetic perception.' My work strives to produce an effect amongst the spectators and it is less preoccupied to remain true to a narrative or a text (ibid., pp.86-87).

This 'reaction to the dominance of the written text' (ibid., p16) echoes Scala's beliefs that words have a small role in comedy (comic genre) where emotions are more easily triggered by gestures than words because 'feelings are more easily moved by feelings than by abstract concepts or words' (Scala, 1619). In this passage Scala utilises the word *sensi*, here translated as 'feelings', to refer simultaneously to *sensations* in the body and the *emotions* associated with them. He is talking of the actors' bodies, their gestures, movements, voice and actions, as powerful instruments of communication. Scala supports his argument on the efficacy of 'gestures' vs words - and sensations vs abstract concepts - by providing the example of two lovers:

Who are moved and attracted by the beloved's tear, or glance, or kiss, or suchlike - not to mention anything more daring – far more than by the persuasions of any great moral philosopher or poet (Scala, 1619).

Indeed, *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* originated in the actors' body: their senses, sensations and feelings. During the devising process, actors' senses associated with the theme 'home' triggered their imagination and actions leading to the creation of their Experiential Masks (See Chapter 3.1). In performance actors' bodies and gestures, and the images, voices and sounds that they generated, triggered the spectators' senses (their body) and feelings (emotions). Theatre 'relies upon a totality of perception that could be better termed kinaesthetic.' (Beckerman, 1970 in Freshwater, p. 18) Like Flaminio Scala, I aim to appeal 'to the senses by establishing a communion between the actors' *gestures* and the spectators' *sensing body*' (Tessari, 1981, p.53). These 'corporeal responses or "gut reactions"' are integral to the experience of theatre-going. (Freshwater, p.19)

In postdramatic theatre 'actors' actions trigger the spectators' senses (sensuality) establishing a connection that does not necessarily require making sense of those actions. The postdramatic process occurs *with*, *on* and *to* the bodies rather than '*between* the bodies'. According to Lehmann:

the body doesn't have to content itself with being a signifier but could be an *agent provocateur* of an experience without 'meaning', an experience aimed not at the realisation of a reality and meaning, but at the experience of potentiality (ibid., pp. 162-163).

Therefore, the spectators might interpret in different ways the stimuli received by the actors. They have 'to make their own decisions about the significance of actions or symbolic material' on stage. 'Each spectator according to his part, enters into a dialogue with the work. The act of interpretation becomes performance, an intervention in the piece.' (Savran in Freshwater, p. 18) In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* our spectators interpreted in many different ways the character of the Moonlight Fairy taking pictures of other people's home. Some spectators interpreted it as an attempt to remember events of her past, as if she was collecting images for her family album. Others thought that she was an angel. And others connected her appearance to the opening of the piece; the image of paper boats adrift. To them the Moonlight Fairy was the ghost of a deceased going back home. (Fig. 49)



Figure 49: The Moonlight Fairy, London Metropolitan University, 2015

The audience was invited to participate in the processes of meaning-making throughout the whole performance. Even when spectators did not fully *comprehend* what was happening on stage, they could still *connect* with it on a visceral level. Their appreciation and enjoyment came from the experience of an event. After the first showing of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, an actor stated:

the idea of home is different for everyone but at the same time is relatable to everyone. It didn't matter if a performer's interpretation and 'theatricalisation' of 'home' was totally different to their expectations; they still found parallels and drew comparisons between what was on stage and their own experience (students questionnaires, 2015).

Indeed, spectators engaged and understood our characters' journey even when the characters were speaking a foreign language. The audience could relate to the actors' physical vocabulary and the performance's imagery, symbolism and metaphoric language. For instance, *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* opens with a Syrian lullaby and an image of paper-boats adrift. Floating paper-boats were a motif throughout the whole piece as a reminder of the refugee crisis (Fig. 50 and 51). I was not sure that the audience would pick it up but they did, as the audience feedback confirmed: 'Got the sea reference and no, it doesn't need to have more examination, the refugee crisis sits in the back of many people's mind.' (Audience feedback, 2015)



Figure 50: Paper boats a drift singing a Syrian Lullaby. *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, London Metropolitan University, 2015.



Figure 51: Paper boats during the storm scene. Itsaso, the Old Fisherman's Wife in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, 2015.

From their responses, it emerged they felt engaged. The reactions to the characters speaking in foreign languages were extremely positive. *Video 6.13: Audience Feedback* [Time code: 25:00]. This is one of the responses from a member of the audience in Arezzo:

I had no clue what any of the actors were saying, that were speaking a language other than English; but they were so clear and coherent with their language, their body language and their storytelling that I knew *exactly* what they were saying. (Audience feedback, 2015/16).

In this example the spectator engaged with the actions on stage with a sort of extra-ordinary focus, paying attention to any move, gesture, facial expression and intonation, because she could not rely on verbal communication as in everyday life.

This extra-daily connection between actors and spectators echoes Karen Jurs-Munby describes the audience experience as a “shock” through enthusiasm, fascination, inclination and curiosity - not paralysing – incomprehension’ (in Lehmann, 2006, p.55). In other disciplines, like visual arts, we seem to be more acquainted with this type of experience: to feel moved by a painting we do not need to know what it depicts. To appreciate Wassily Kandinsky or Marc Rothko’s abstract paintings we do not need to know what they were painting, what inspired them or even what they aimed to communicate. We might want to have this information to satisfy our intellectual curiosity; however, it is the experience of those paintings that triggers emotions and allows us to connect with the artists. Critics might write extensively about the philosophical, historical or psychological meaning of those paintings; however, this analysis will not necessarily enhance our emotional experience and visceral connection with those images.

It is inspiring to interpret an artwork in our own unique way. To discover characters and stories produced by our imagination rather than the artist’s imagination. I believe it is the same in theatre: ‘the divergence, the non-coincidence between spectators’ view and performer’s view of the performance makes theatre an art, and not just an imitation or replica of the known’ (Taviani in Barba, p.288). Spectators do not necessarily have to understand every detail of a story, every word and every logical unfolding of the narrative to be moved on a deep level and captivated by the actions on stage.

This 'theatre of potentiality', open to multiple interpretations, seems to be a natural development of the creative process described in previous chapters: a 'fructile chaos or storehouse of possibilities' (Turner, 1982, cited in Broadhurst, 1999, p.11). Although well structured, organised and rehearsed, my performances retain qualities of unpredictability, instability and potentiality. For example, the actors might have to work harder than expected to convince the spectators to follow them from one space to another. In *A Floating Caravan Under Moon* most spectators in Arezzo seemed initially reluctant to follow the actors outside the theatre during the Carnival parade. In my solo piece, *Home*, the transitions between characters became short scenes comparable to the *lazzi* (comic gags) of Commedia dell'Arte. The impossibility to hide from the audience during the transitions opened up unexpected opportunities to play with my costumes that I had not foreseen in rehearsal.

These dynamics in the relationship between performer and spectator contribute to the development of the performance. As I have experienced in both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home/Finding Home*, the clarity and intensity of the actor's physical language and the actor-spectator proximity are paramount. Breaking the boundaries between actors and spectators reduces the physical distance between them. Sharing a common space and establishing eye contact or physical contacts deeply affect both actors and spectators' somatic experience. In *Home/Finding Home* my interactions with the audience play a fundamental role in building a sense of 'togetherness'. They allow me to connect on a deeper level with the spectators and feel the energy in the room, adjusting my performance accordingly. Welcoming the audience, establishing eye contact (not as a character but as Chiara, the researcher) and engaging them in conversation creates a special bond between us. Without that direct interaction it would be harder for the audience to 'accept' my transformation into different characters, follow my flights of fancy and complex layering of historical and autobiographical material. Through these interactions I feel that I am writing a new performance each night *with* the audience, rather than *for* the audience. At least this is what I felt on stage, and what emerged from my informal conversations with my audiences. See *Video 6.14: The Researcher's Prologue* [Time code: 28:33].

According to Oddey, this is a specific feature of devised theatre where 'both spectator and performer engage in a different way to traditional text-based

theatre, because of their direct, personal involvement with the process' of creation. She argues that 'the nature of a devised performance is different to conventional theatre because it explores the dynamics in the relationship between performer and spectator in the chosen space, developing through process to product.' (p.19) I would agree with Oddey in recognising that in a conventional setting it would be harder to develop the same type of personal connections as the ones described in previous paragraphs. The fourth wall and the physical distance between stage and auditorium would limit my ability to engage with the audience and make jokes specifically tailored to them. In my one-woman show the spectators are invited to respond to my 'provocations' and their responses generate material for the performance. Only *that* audience at *that* specific time and place could have co-created *that* scene with me. (More examples of this type of interactions can be found in the following paragraph: Methodology and Examples, pp. 153-160).

However, Oddey's neat separation between devised theatre and conventional 'text-based theatre', does not take into consideration the wide spectrum of different experiences within both approaches to theatre making. The variety of ways and degrees in which spectators *can* be involved throughout the performance in both devised and text-based theatre greatly varies. One cannot assume that the devising process automatically will establish a 'direct and personal involvement' of the audience.

Furthermore, we cannot make assumptions about the spectators' level of engagement because each individual would respond differently to the same stimuli; their experience and their level of involvement with the performance are unique. Therefore, although, it is possible 'to speak of "an audience"', it is important to remember that there may be several distinct, co-existing audiences to be found among the people gathered together to watch a show and that each individual within this group may choose to adopt a range of viewing positions. And differences are present within individuals too. A spectator can judge and respond to a production in a number of different ways (Freshwater, p7; p10).

The enjoyment and engagement with the performance is the result of a collection of instances where spectator and performer 'meet' for a fleeting moment and then leave each other to meet again in other moments throughout the performance. Even in performances when I was totally captivated - physically, intellectually and emotionally – my connection with the actors on stage

was discontinuous; interrupted and then found again, 'recovered'. These short encounters are 'moments or recognition' that I labelled 'Stage Resonances'. In these instances, spectators feel a sense of familiarity or belonging. The events and characters on stage *evoke* something in the audience on a sensorial and emotional level. These moments of recognition might occur during or even *after* the performance. Lehmann argues that symbols, images and motifs in performance *suggest meaning* but then might 'fail to make the expected meaning *recognisable*' (Lehmann, 2006, p.146). They leave an impression on the audience or, at least, some members of the audience. Each spectator processes and interiorises these stimuli in their own way.

For this to happen, the spectator's 'perception has to remain open for connections, correspondences, and clues at completely unexpected moments.' Borrowing from Freud's analysis notion of 'evenly hovering attention', this can be understood if we imagine the spectator as the analyst and the actors as the analysands: 'minor and insignificant details are registered exactly because in their immediate non-significance they may turn out to be significant for the discourse of the analysand'. In the context of psychoanalysis, a little twitch, a yarn, or a change in facial expressions might be interpreted as a clue that a specific topic or a word acts as a trigger. In a theatrical context the clues for the spectators can be a gesture or a sound or an image. In my performances the audience is 'not prompted to process the perceive instantaneously but to postpone the production of meaning and to store the sensory impressions with "evenly hovering attention"' (Lehmann, 2006, p.87). The more challenging it becomes for the spectator to interpret the meaning of what is happening in front of his eyes, 'the strongest is his sensation of living through an experience' (Barba, p.68). An example might be the Moonlight Fairy in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* mentioned at the beginning of the chapter (see p.141, Fig 51). As Taviani points out:

those exalted moments, which have become legendary instances of *communion* between performer and spectator, are moments in which, within the strong bond between them, there is an enormous gap between the spectator's view and the performer's view (ibid., p.288).

In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* some spectators did not immediately understand how the theme 'home' related to the character of The Moonlight Fairy or did not notice the tiny details of Professor B's 'house': the

books, cards, balloons, and a toy automobile that were an incarnation of his 'dream home' as he describes it in his monologue (Fig.52). Many spectators did not notice until the end or even after the performance the leit-motif of cards and bamboo sticks that appear in every story and linked them to one another. However, those images entered into the spectator's consciousness, they became aware of those signs. And *those signs* might trigger other images or connections generating meanings, as it happens in dreams. In this type of theatre 'performers and spectators are gathered at a unique performance' where multiple interpretations of signs are welcome; spectators are not obliged to agree with the performers or with one another. (ibid., p.288) Each spectator has his own unique experience.



Figure 52: Professor B's Dream Home: details. In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, London Metropolitan University, 2015.

Indeed, the 'collection' of moments, or 'resonances', will not necessarily be the same for every spectator, not even on the same night. The proximity or distance from an actor, the perception of certain sounds, the eye contact or interaction that the performer might have had with them would affect their experience in a unique way. Even though audience members at the end of my performance might have agreed that a specific moment was particularly moving or funny or a certain image was particularly powerful, for instance the execution of the Actress, each spectator would have had their unique 'stage resonances'.

Theatre is a gathering 'where a unique intersection of aesthetically organised and every day real life takes place' (Lehmann, p.17). In contrast to the other arts, which produce an object (e.g. a painting, a sculpture) and/or are communicated through media (e.g. a screen, a book), here 'the aesthetic act itself (the performing) as well as the act of reception (the theatre going) take place as a real doing in the 'here and now' (ibid., p.17). The experience of looking at a painting takes place in the 'here and now' too, however the creation of that painting does not. The artist is not painting it 'here and now' in the presence of – and influenced by - his audience unless it is a live art, performance art or happening. In this case theatre and visual art boundaries blur. In theatre actors are creating the 'product' (the performance) *with* the audience. The 'artefact' does not exist until the performance is taking place. And it does not exist anymore as the performance has ended: it is transitory, ephemeral. It can only be experienced as it is being created. Its 'instability' is particularly relevant to postdramatic theatre that is not 'a work of representation, "a refined product", but 'a moment of communication'. It is 'a communicative exchange that not only admits to its momentariness but asserts it as indispensably constitutive of the practice' (ibid., p.147).

Whereas the written-text exists as a tangible artefact, the 'performance text' (see p.70 and glossary) is an ephemeral experience where 'the emission and reception of signs and signals take place simultaneously'. This implies that 'the theatre performance turns the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a *joint text*, a text even if there is not spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and audience.' (ibid., p.17). Lehmann named this complex web of connections '*total text*'. This includes all the explicit and 'hidden communicative processes' that take place between all the people involved in the live event: performers and spectators (ibid., p.17). In this type of performance that relies on the audience to build a narrative, there is another aspect of the work that performers should take into account: the unpredictability of the outcomes. Not only the audience's unforeseeable interpretations of the piece but also the unpredictable transformation of the piece in performance discussed in this chapter.

Like improvisation, self-reflexivity is another tool that enhanced the actor-spectator connection. In my experience breaking the 'illusion of reality' builds complicity between the audience and the performers; it is a way to acknowledge that we are in the same space playing together. Therefore, actors play *with*, not

for, the audience. In both productions the actors openly declare the theatricality of the event. For example, in the first version of *Home* I joked about the lack of theatrical resources while changing costumes switching from character to character. In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, Hedda, the Tortoise Lady utilised the lighting technicians' ladder, the technician's booth and fire exits exposing the technical mechanisms behind the performance, showing 'theatre as the subterfuge it is, with all its insincerities, pretensions and intrinsic "theatricality"'. This operation reinforces the artifice and fiction of the play disrupting 'any illusion of reality that the dramatic action on stage might perpetrate'. In postdramatic theatre 'theatre is emphasized as a situation, not as a fiction.' (Lehmann, p.128).

Methodology and Examples:

In my approach to character building, efficacy and clarity of gestures is achieved through a combination of two apparently contradictory elements: discipline and *familiarity*. *Familiarity* is used to describe anything that an actor knows very well and comes almost spontaneously without effort. Actors can access *familiar material* very easily; it emerges almost spontaneously and instinctively. This can be effectively used in performance after a process of transformation that requires discipline and effort: the opposite of spontaneity. Indeed, the dictionary defines spontaneity as 'a spontaneous, unconstrained and unstudied behaviour arising from a natural inclination or impulse and not from forethought or prompting'. And discipline as 'the training or conditions imposed for the improvement of physical power or self-control' and 'the state of improved behaviour resulting from such training or conditions' (Cambridge Dictionary).

In both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home* each character is a unique Mask built on the experience, strengths, weaknesses and specific innate qualities of each actor (= the familiar). This 'raw material' has to be shaped and transformed because precise, clear and economical gestures are the most effective on stage. Firstly, in order to be believable it is important to have a purpose; hence, to identify what is the impulse that triggers the character. This is how spontaneous movements become physical actions – i.e. repeatable scores. Secondly, the actor must work on tempo-rhythm and timing. As Scala pointed out, 'even the smallest gesture at the right moment (= timing), and made with feeling (= clear purpose), will have a greater impact than all the philosophy of Aristotle, or the rhetoric of Demosthenes and Cicero (= words)' (Scala, 1619).

This does not mean that words cannot have a strong impact on the audience. It simply means that in specific contexts words can be replaced by gestures and actions. For Scala it is important to recognise the equal value of all the tools available to actors and Actor-Authors; words as well as gestures and physical actions. Actors have to recognise when and how to utilise these tools. In comedy often gestures can replace words; in other forms of theatre it might not be the case.

To achieve this result – i.e. ‘to have a greater impact than words’ – it is necessary to rehearse. Training and repetition are the tools to become confident. The ability to recreate what we have found in rehearsal through improvisation must be cultivated through practice. Although the initial stages of work are playful and spontaneous (Stage 1: ‘unbound playfulness’) the subsequent stages are more technical. Actors have to become aware of their actions and movements. They have to be more analytical breaking them down in smaller (workable) sections so that they can re-work them and integrate the feedback received by the director (Stage 2: ‘Awareness’ and Stage 3: ‘Integration’).

In developing the character of Nonna Ida I could easily and spontaneously play with the familiar: my grandma’s mannerisms and expressions, Catholic gestures and ritualistic actions. It was natural to me; it did not require any particular effort or technical skill. However, this was just the starting point of my process of discovery and definition of character. I had to work with discipline and patience to re-define specific moments of these first improvisations to make them theatrically effective. I had to isolate and repeat them over and over again to ‘own’ them. I then integrated Commedia dell’Arte techniques and the Mask of *Pantalone* to develop a new Mask through a process of synthesis. As Petrarca said, ‘bees should not be storing up the flowers but turning them into honey, thus making one thing of many various one, but different and better. Bees otherwise would have no credit’ (Petrarca cited in Chron-Schmitt p.233). To embody my character, I had to go beyond an emulation of forms. Indeed, spontaneity and organicity are not the same thing. The former stemmed from *the familiar*, the latter from *discipline* and technique.

Barba remarks that in theatre ‘the term *organic* is used as a synonym of alive, credible’ (Barba, 1991, p206). He also explains that sometimes ‘an actor experiences certain action as organic, whereas the same is not true for the director and/or spectators.’ While other times the director and the audience ‘perceive as *organic* actions that the actor experiences as inorganic, tense and

artificial' (Barba, 1991, p.206). This point is particularly relevant to Commedia dell'Arte and my work with the Experiential Masks. 'This disparity of judgement or awareness contradicts the belief in a direct correlation between what the actor feels and does, and what the spectator experiences. In fact there is not such correlation, but there can be an encounter' (ibid., p.206).

The 'efficacy of this encounter' is related to the *organic effect* that Barba describes as 'the capacity to make the spectator experience a performing body-in-life'. Therefore 'an actor's main task is not *to be* organic, but *to appear* organic to the eyes and the senses of the spectator' (ibid., p.206). It seems that the combination of instinct and spontaneity (the familiar) with technique (discipline) can achieve what Barba describes as the *organic effect*. A performer must look natural and at ease even when their postures, gestures and actions require effort or even provoke discomfort. For instance, the Doctor's back hyperextension and *Pantalone's* or *Zanni's* extreme rotation of the pelvis are not natural neither spontaneous: our skeleton is not designed to perform these extreme postures (Fig. 53, next page). See *Video 6.15 'Unnatural postures': Training with Commedia dell'Arte Masks* [Time code: 32:19]. They are not 'comfortable', or 'organic'; they feel completely *artificial* to the performer. The actor can achieve the desired effect, to look 'organic', only through training and acquisition of technique. However, this process is

often accompanied by a feeling of unease, by a sense of *inorganic* character. Only after a long and arduous process – and not always then – is a meeting possible between the new organic quality of the actor's actions and the perception of the spectator' (ibid., p.206).

Therefore, the capacity to connect with an audience beyond verbal communication and develop a deeper actor-spectator relationship does not occur by chance, it requires work.



Figure 53: 'Unnatural Postures' with Commedia dell'Arte Masks: *Pantalone*, *Zanni* and the Doctor.

In my solo piece *Home*, Cardinal Borromeo's gestures and actions originated from an improvisation of a sermon where I experimented with religious gestuality and rituals. During the initial stage of improvisation Cardinal Borromeo was moving erratically around the space. It was fun to play in this way but his movements were too generic and the physical scores unclear. I needed a clearer structure and some 'boundaries'. Progressively it became clear that his delivery would have been far more effective if I had kept him anchored in one spot: his pulpit (Fig. 54: Borromeo's pulpit. Next page).



Figure 54: Cardinal Borromeo's pulpit. Example of Artisan Theatre. The pulpit was created with found and re-cycled objects: a ladder, some black fabric and papier-mâché skull masks.

His movements, limited to his head and hands, were stiff, sharp and mechanical: like a puppet. This staging had a much stronger impact both in the clear definition of the character's physicality and his role in the piece. He became progressively more grotesque and funny. At the same time this mechanical quality made him also more disturbing. A man who acts like a puppet can be far more dangerous because does not think about his actions: he simply executes orders. The allusion to present day politics is made explicit by integrating politicians' quotes in Borromeo's sermon. The references to politics and current affairs might have received different responses from the audience due to their cultural specificity. For example, British spectators could grasp my allusion to recent General Election hearing Cardinal Borromeo's lines 'We must be strong and stable!' while the Americans might have been more responsive to the reference to Donald Trump's wall. See *Video 6.16: Finding Cardinal Borromeo's Mask* [Time code: 35:42].

Cardinal Borromeo's movements had to be big and precise. My hands had to be clear, detailed and extremely expressive. I had to deliver an array of emotions - anger, despair, sadness, aggressiveness, lust, and desire – utilising

a minimal part of my body while standing on the top of a ladder. Each gesture and action had to have a specific intensity, quality, tempo-rhythm and pace. Equally my voice and facial expressions had to match this grotesque body in particular because only the lower part of my face was visible. (See Fig. 55). The delivery of text had to be appropriately timed. I had to 'tune' body voice and text.



Figure 55: Grotesque facial expressions. Working with Commedia dell'Arte Mask (Arlecchino) and the Experiential Mask (Cardinal Borromeo). The mouth and the jaw work particularly hard with the half-mask of Commedia.

I built the character of Germino following the same principles, however the work was different. Germino utilises the whole body and entire stage. His physical vocabulary is far more complex than Borromeo. I utilised every bit of my

body, from the top my head to the tip of my toes, and an array of facial expressions. In this case all my face was involved – not only mouth and jaw. My eyes had to communicate my emotions, feelings and let the audience see what I see – the mountains, the village and the battlefield – switching from the present to the past, and from reality to illusion. The approach was exactly the same. I had to break down every sequence (line of physical actions) into small units (individual gesture and action), polish them through repetition and work on clarity and precision. And most importantly I had to discharge anything superfluous. Indeed, the first lesson learnt through Commedia dell'Arte is that 'less is more'. At this stage of the devising process I could tap into the Masks' extensive physical vocabulary and utilise it to develop my own Experiential Masks. Barba believes that this 'extra-daily way of acting and thinking removed from daily criteria' – that is for instance the Grotesque, the Surreal and the Absurd of the Masks - 'is an indispensable requirement for the efficacy of the theatre craft' (ibid., p.207).

I have experienced it both in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon and Home*, especially with the characters of Nonna Ida and Germino. They have an unnatural voice and extreme physicality: they are removed from 'daily criteria' and as an actor I relied on what Barba called 'extra-daily way of acting'. Both characters speak in dialect yet the audience, independently of their nationality, felt a strong emotional connection with them. This is an example of 'resonance' when feelings are more easily moved by gestures than words (Scala). Unlike the other characters, Nonna Ida and Germino stemmed from my personal life experience. Perhaps, my personal connection with these characters, deeper than with the others, could explain the stronger emotional impact on the audience. Or, perhaps, it is a combination of other factors, including the fact that it is easier to empathise with innocent victims than perpetrators of violence. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the audience connected so strongly with two non-English speaking characters whose idiom was incomprehensible to them. This is what I felt on stage. It is my experience as an actor looking at the spectators' reactions – laughing, crying, smiling; as well as informal conversations with the audience after the performance in Arezzo.

Nonna Ida and Germino's text is still an important part of my piece; it was my intention to make its meaning clear. By introducing each scene with a prologue the audience could understand what was happening on stage. They could also use this background information to draw links between past and present events connecting my personal stories to the wider socio-cultural context

of the piece. Breaking the fourth wall and the use of prologues is an inheritance of Commedia dell'Arte and is extensively used by Dario Fo in his *giullarate* (monologue). The prologue roughly establishes *what* will happen in the scene (the content) freeing performers of the preoccupation of not being 'understood' and the spectators of missing out something. However, the emotional connection between actors and spectators occur during the performance not the prologue. Actors' actions and gestures trigger the 'stage resonances.' In my practice, the actor-spectator proximity plays an important role in determining the intensity of these connections – i.e. Lehmann's *total text* (see p. 149).

Germino's tragedy touched the audience, even those who could not understand his words: everyone saw his fatigue, injuries, his fear and the horrific memories of the battlefield through his body and facial expressions. Throughout the scene he climbs mountains and travels for miles on his bare feet before reaching his home village. Once arrived, he almost cannot recognise it: the major's house is so big and the church so full of gold and artworks that he thinks it might have ended up in the wrong village⁸⁰. He then recognises the inn and when he is ready to get in and get a drink, a horrific vision of the battlefield strikes him. His memories of bombs, explosions and dismembered bodies haunt him. Suddenly, this dark cloud disappears and Germino realises that is not amongst *dead* soldiers but in front of an *alive* audience. He then explains to his spectators how devastating and insidious war is. It is like a cancer that grew roots inside of him and does not leave him in peace, not even now. This moment touched the spectators. Both Italian and non-Italian speakers felt Germino's pain and connected with this tragic moment. However not every spectator had the same experience. Proximity played an important role in particular in this lyrical moment. It contributed to build a deeper intimate connection between the character and the audience. Germino could make eye contact with the spectators in the first few rows, they could hear his breathing pattern and perceive his presence more vividly than the rest of the audience (Fig. 56). See *Video 6.17: Germino, the Zanni Soldier* [Time code: 36:50]. Indeed, if we reduce the distance between performers and spectators to the point that 'the physical and physiological proximity (breath, sweat, panting, movement of the musculature, cramp, gaze) masks the mental signification,' and the performance becomes 'a moment of *shared energies*.' (Lehmann, p.161).

⁸⁰ This is a reference to war economy back in the 1600s as today. The two powerful figures in town flourished when Germino was fighting *their* war.



Figure 56: Germino, the Zanni-Soldier and his visions. Festival Teatrale Europeo (Roma, 2019).

This emerged clearly in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, where the boundaries between actors and audience were constantly broken. Spectators were invited to take part in the scene and become participants and co-creator of an event. They had to be physically responsive. For example, Itsaso, the Fisherman's wife walks amongst the spectators and bosses them around, as a grumpy Spanish grandmother would do. She forced them to accommodate the actions on stage. They were asked to travel outside the theatre taking part to a carnival procession before re-joining all the characters back indoor for the finale. The proximity, physical engagement and interaction between actors and spectators contribute to the development of stage resonances (Fig. 57, next page). See *Video 6.18: Itsaso's Audience Interaction* [Time code: 38:18].

Audience interaction is directly linked with improvisation. In previous chapters I looked at improvisation as a creative tool for devising. Here, I will expand on improvisation on stage. This is another important inheritance of Commedia dell'Arte rooted in a long tradition of popular theatre. In my productions I utilise improvisation in different ways. The first can be better described as actors' responsiveness or readiness. Jenny Whitehead, the actress playing the Moonlight Fairy, had a specific line of physical actions; however, within this structure most of her work was a response to the stimuli received by other characters and the audience. The triggers could have been a sound, a gesture or a word. The impulses received by other actors were predictable but

the ones received by the audience were not. These responses established a special connection between The Moonlight Fairy and the members of the audience she responded to, another thread amongst a complex web of stage resonances.



Figure 57: Itsaso, *The Old Fisherman's Wife* telling the audience off. *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, Arezzo, 2016.

In my solo-piece *Home* the transitions between scenes were challenging because I am the only performer on stage and have a few utilise costumes changes. As the Researcher, however, I could stage my transformation into different characters and made these transitions a feature of the performance during the introduction of each scene. The use of prologues not only gave me the opportunity to contextualise my work, it also allowed me to build a stronger connection with the audience. A large part of my interactions with the audience as the Researcher were improvised. I followed a script (See Chapter 3.4.2) but I also left lots of space for improvisation. See *Video 6.19: The Researcher's Audience Interaction* [Time code: 38:39].

Throughout the performance all the characters had moments of improvisation. These were perfectly timed and planned. There was freedom within a structure; I knew the text very well and I already had a few ideas on what topics or gags to play within my improvisations. Cultural and language differences were one of the recurrent topics I utilised throughout the performance. It was an easy choice because of the mixed audience. Similarly to Commedia, I utilised 'known material', recycling 'what [I] had already devised and

learned, picking from [my] mental *zibaldone* those items which would best fit the current situation' (Richards, 1990, p. xii). See *Video 6.20: Gino's Audience Interaction* [Time code: 39:45].

In Renaissance Italy good actors, like good orators, were appreciated not because they had learnt their material by heart, but because they 'knew the material so well that they could revise, change, digress, and add with freedom and confidence during the delivery itself.' During my showing of *Home*, I had a similar experience. Improvisations, audience interventions and interactions did not affect the delivery of my story because I knew the material so well. As Crohn-Schmitt observes:

With their role in the very marrow of their bones, improvising actors could vary their set speeches and address anew any of the recurring or even fresh situations they encountered in the scenarios (Carruthes, Mary, 1990, cited in Natalie Crohn Schmitt, 2010, p.238).

This is the type of improvisation that we can see for instance in Fo's *Mistero Buffo*. In Fo's monologues there is very little space for improvisation. Each episode in *Mistero Buffo* was performed every single time with the precision of a Swiss clock. The 'intermezzi' and prologues when the Actor, Fo, talks to the audience could have elements of improvisation and even then he often 'recycled' old jokes and anecdotes 'picking from his mental *zibaldone*'. Stephen Greenblatt defines this type of improvisation as 'the ability to capitalise on the unforeseen and to transform given materials into one's own scenario. The spur-of-the-moment quality of improvisation is not as critical here as the opportunistic grasp of that which seems fixed and established' (Greenblatt cited in Chron-Schmitt p. 227).

Actors have the ability to make it believe that they have not rehearsed and are improvising this unique thing 'here and now' for the audience. Even adding thinking pauses and moments of hesitation would increase the audience's admiration for actors' ability to create in the moment. This is Dario Fo's lesson. In *Mistero Buffo* he seems to improvise all the time. But if one looks carefully, one would realise that 'invention' is dependent upon having an 'inventory' of material from which to work: the aforementioned mental *zibaldone*.

Stage Resonances occurred not only as a result of the actors' expressivity and physicality as discussed so far. Imagery, sound, and objects equally stimulate the spectator's imagination and have a strong impact in their emotional connection with the piece. In *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* The

Snow Queen's folk tale, delivered in Finnish, was an atmospheric piece where the audience's senses were stimulated by an orchestration of movements, sounds, lighting and onomatopoeia. This was a theatrical interpretation of a journey on a canoe across an icy cold stream through a Finnish Forest.

Other examples of the use of imagery, sounds and objects in devised scenes come from my adaptation of *The Mountain Giants* at Rose Bruford College. One of these scenes was inspired by an image: Cotrone's fireflies. The second by a sensual and melancholic character: a vulnerable young woman, called Mary Magdalene⁸¹. These oneiric and atmospheric scenes did not add anything to the development of the 'plot', or story. They were however effective in translating the essence of Cotrone's villa, where the play is set. This is a world suspended between fantasy and reality. These scenes were designed to take our audience on a 'sensorial journey'; an aural and visual experience. They were almost a 'taste' of Cotrone's world. Lighting, sound and music were the main tools to leave a strong impression on the audience,⁸² triggering a sensorial response. This is an example of Stage Resonances (Fig.58 and 59). *Video 6.12: Cotrone's Fireflies, Mary Magdalene's Carnival and Mary Magdalene's Waltz* [Time code: 23:19].

⁸¹ Pirandello clearly chooses this name to make a connection between Christ and his followers – the poor, the crippled, the blinds...and the inhabitant of Villa Scalogna. A bunch of misfits and outcast that, rejected by society, found refuge in a villa isolated in the mountains under the magician Cotrone.

⁸² This emerged from an informal personal communication with members of the audience including tutors and students.



Figure 58: Cotrone's Fireflies. *The Mountain Giants*, Rose Bruford College, 2016.

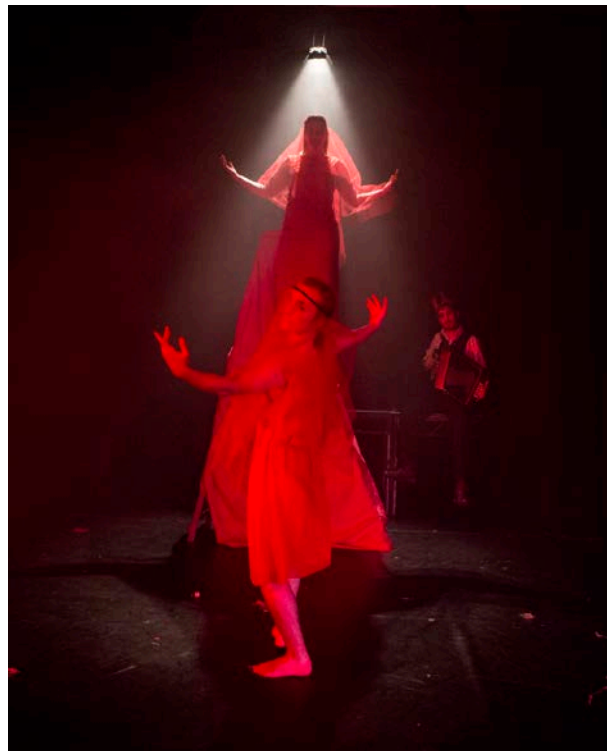


Figure 59: Mary Magdalene's Waltz. *The Mountain Giants*, Rose Bruford College, 2016.

Findings:

Through the integration of Commedia dell'Arte techniques and Lehmann's notion of 'join text', I have explored the efficacy and power of non-verbal communication on stage. My investigation led to the definition of a specific

terminology, Stage Resonances, to describe a complex web of communicative processes that connect spectators and performers.

Gestures and actions can be more effective than words in triggering a visceral and emotional response in the audience. It is therefore necessary to work on the actor's body, its clarity, precision and perfect timing, to maximise the results. Commedia dell'Arte's principles and techniques are extremely valuable in training the actor's body. However, my practice differs from a traditional approach to Commedia dell'Arte based on emulation and repetition of models (e.g. *Zanni*, *Arlecchino* etc.); i.e. Commedia fixed types or stock characters. This type of training aims to achieve a 'perfect form' – or at least what a specific school or practitioner considers to be the 'perfect form'. This is pedagogically extremely valuable in developing actors' physical dexterity, however, it can also inhibit actors' freedom and creativity – at least in the early stages of the creative process.

The purpose of any actor's training is to find a balance between spontaneity and discipline, unlocking actors' creativity while developing their technique. In my practice familiarity is the key factor. Actors utilise their own experiences and memories, and explore their physicality, voice and language. Fully embracing the notion of Actor as Creator, I place the actors' body, with their strengths, weaknesses and peculiarities, at the heart of the creative process. Actors' uniqueness is an asset and the starting point of the creative process. Discipline and technique are integrated to support actors in expanding their physical dexterity and confidence on stage but only later on in the process, not at the beginning.

This approach distinguishes my work from other contemporary physical theatre companies that focus on rigorous actor's training and discipline. Within the Grotowski-lineage, companies such as Song of the Goat and Gardzienice Theatre, train their actors to develop a very specific physical and vocal language. This code of gestures, postures and actions shapes their actors' physicality and expressivity through repetition. This approach seems to leave such a strong impact on the actor's body that the performer's unique physicality, hidden behind the 'form', might be underestimated. This is strongly connected with another aspect of this type of training mentioned in Chapter 3.2: the pre-eminence of collectiveness vs. individuality. I highly value this type of work; and I also

recognise its important role during my formative years.⁸³ However, I am more interested in a work that stimulates actors – independently of their skills, physical abilities and experience – to find their own unique physical vocabulary rather than ‘conform’ to a style.

This is one of Dario Fo’s main qualities. His acquisition of skills through his training with Lecoq and Commedia dell’Arte helped him to develop his own unique physical vocabulary and ‘style’. It did not replicate an existing code of gestures and actions, he created his own. Like Fo, I utilise techniques inherited from Commedia dell’Arte and storytelling without necessarily replicate the traditional Commedia scenarios. Some of these techniques are the breaking of the fourth wall, use of prologues, highly stylised physicality and improvisation contribute to build a stronger connection with the audience and overcome language barriers. Actor-spectator proximity is another inheritance of ancient traditions of popular performance - street theatre, mimes, carnival parades and storytelling - that contributes to the development of Stage Resonances.

In comparison to Dario Fo, however, my work demonstrates a distinctive emphasis on breaking the boundaries between stage and auditorium. Dario Fo and Franca Rame worked extensively in unconventional spaces (e.g. community centres, factories, streets) interacting with their audience and involving them in post-show discussions. Nonetheless, they always relied on a traditional staging with a clear separation between stage and auditorium. In both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home*, actor and spectators entered ‘into *direct contact*’ sharing the same space and interacting through ‘eye contact and, possibly, fleeting body contact’; experiencing what Lehmann describes as ‘a peculiarly “underdefined” sphere, neither completely public nor completely private’ (Lehmann, p.134). This implies a democratisation of the theatrical experience where spectators become not only *participants* but also *co-creators*.

In both *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* and *Home/Finding Home* I responded to the space without transforming it. I adapted my performances according to the elements present in the different venues and their specific architectures. I openly declared the theatricality of the event and commented on

⁸³ In Italy I trained and performed with the Labperm: Laboratorio Permanente di Ricerca sull’Arte dell’Attore di Domenico Castaldo, who trained at the Workcentre of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards. I trained in Poland with Song of the Goat and Theatre Gardzieniec. Between 2005 and 2013 I collaborated with Alison Hodge on the development of the ‘Core Training’, a new methodology for Actor’s training inspired primarily by Włodzimierz Staniewski’s teaching.

the mechanisms 'behind the scenes'; for example, by utilising fire exits or the technician's booth as Hedda did in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*. This declaration of the contingent reality in the here-and-now is inherited from the tradition of popular theatre. Being together in the same space with the audience and playing with the 'reality of that space' contribute to reinforce the actor-spectator stage resonances. In this light, theatre has to be 'understood as a 'situation'. It simultaneously takes a step towards the dissolution of theatre *and* to its amplification. Thus declaring and commenting on theatrical mechanisms and devices (ibid. p.134).

The actor's expressive body and the actor-spectator proximity supported by a strong visual aesthetic contributed to build the complex web of connections and interactions that I labelled Stage Resonances.

3.4 CASE STUDIES: SCRIPTS and BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.4.1 Case Study 1: *A Floating Caravan Under The Moon* (2015/16)

A Floating Caravan Under the Moon is an ensemble devised piece with an episodic narrative developed with the Theatre and Performance Studies BA students at London Metropolitan University between 2015 and 2016.

The piece was developed in two stages: the first version was a 30minutes piece presented at London Metropolitan University in October 2015. The second version was a one-hour performance showed at the CrisisArt Festival in Arezzo (Italy) in June 2016.

The two scripts are available in the following pages: Table C and Table D. Further documentation is available in Appendix 3. This includes examples of activities, rehearsal plans, notes, observations and links to photo galleries and videos.

Background

This project started with a question, a very personal question: What is home? I started to think about when I felt (or I feel) at home? And Why? What tastes, smells, sounds, actions, places make me feel at home? After over a decade in London I've realised that both London and my hometown do not feel like home. Neither of these two places is *fully* home.

It seemed that home has a much more complex and deeper meaning than what I had originally thought. In London I still feel like an outsider. I feel the city is an open and dynamic place where there will be always space for me. But it does not feel like home. At 'home' – my hometown – I have a strong sense of familiarity. I recognize places, smells, tastes...people of course. I have lots of memories related with my upbringing, family and friends. But it does not feel *home* anymore. I've discovered that many people in London experience the same and that this topic resonates with many people.

The original title - *A Flying Caravan in Tarantella Mood* - explicitly referred to my Italian origins: I choose a traditional folk dance, Tarantella, for its energetic and passionate quality generally associated with Italians; the 'Flying Caravan' was an surreal image - homage to Fellini – but also an explicit reference to the nomadic life of many Commedia dell'Arte troupes as well as my personal story

as emigrant actor. Although I've never travelled in a caravan it seemed an evocative image!

My aim was to develop a surreal and oneiric piece telling the stories of different characters in search of a place they could call 'home' or a way to get back 'home'. Inevitably, the piece evolved following a new direction as a result of the diverse responses received from actors coming from different countries. Rather than 'imposing' my ideas and cultural references I wanted to allow each actor to bring their own personal material. The title then changed into '*A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*' due the recurrent motifs emerging from the group in rehearsal: the sea, the moon and the nocturnal atmosphere of many stories.

'Home' can be interpreted in different ways: from the house we live in (literal interpretation) to an imaginary place or a state of mind. Since the early discussion with the group, it became clear that the piece would have been developed as a collection of different stories linked by the common theme. It was my intention to celebrate the differences within the group allowing each actor to respond to the question in any way they wanted. For some of the actors home was synonym with 'family'. Hence, a concept and understanding of home strictly connected with memories. For others home was interpreted as belongings: the objects, furniture, accessories that make us feel at home wherever we go. These could be objects with an emotional value such as our Teddy bear, our favourite scarf, our pillow, pictures of our loved ones, posters, postcards, and mementos of our family or homeland. Both interpretations include physical (tangible) entities related with the past and strongly related to our memories.

Another concept that emerged was home as cultural and national identity - beyond the family unit to include a bigger 'group'. Home could be expressed by the language, the jokes, the gestuality and specific sense of humour of our country of origin. An important quality that emerged was spontaneity: the spontaneous and instinctive expressions that rarely one can find in a second language.

We then discovered the connection between Familiarity and Spontaneity: it 'comes' natural hence 'we feel at home'. Indeed the idiomatic expression 'make yourself at home' seems to be related exactly to this feeling: being at ease, comfortable, safe...in the sense that we feel in our comfort zone, a 'known place'. We experience a 'natural way of being' without effort. We feel a sense of belonging. But also this notion of home as cultural identity brought to our attention the importance of food, drinks, rituals, habits, social events and celebrations.



Figure 60: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon's* performers. London Met University, 2015

Home could be found in religion. 'God's home' is a sacred place of worship where some people can find comfort, peace and safety.⁸⁴ God's home is a sacred place represented by a temple, a shrine, a cathedral, a church or a sacred river. Religious rituals were present in some actors' memories of home and were integrated in the piece. On a spiritual level home can be interpreted as a non-physical 'place' but a 'state of being' reached through spiritual practice or at the end of our journey on this planet in our physical body. Home therefore can be interpreted as oneness, infinite consciousness or God.

These ideas were shared and discussed with the ensemble starting with the literal definition of the word 'home' from the English dictionary. The senses became a big part of our investigation. The first exercise that I proposed to the group was in written form: I asked the actors to write down what home smells, looks, sounds and feels like. The sea was a recurrent element and during the practical exploration it became a recurrent motif so much so that eventually it became the *leit motif* of the piece. As a director I could see the potential of the sea as a unifying feature – both stylistic and thematically.

⁸⁴ Interestingly these adjectives- *comfort, peace and safety*- are associated with home and 'feeling at home' and were constantly mentioned throughout our investigation.



Figure 61: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*'s performers. CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2016.

***A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, London Metropolitan University (2015)**

AUDIENCE enters from Door B + dim light/bluish + foggy.

Quite atmospheric but very gentle.

Audience move to the rostra – lower levels.

Sound of the sea-gentle.

*A massive thunder (sound) provokes a **blackout** (lights off).*

IMAGE 1

Voices singing a lullaby from far away it becomes louder.

It's a call, a scream, a chant...a lamentation...

An image slowly starts to emerge from the dark: it's a blurred image like a mirage or a dream: paper boats with lights arriving from both Door C and D.

The boats disappear in a big thunder/wave.

Blackout

*Big noises from **DOOR A** get our attention: Hedda storms in and move to the ladder = spotlight on the Ladder.*

SCENE 1. Hedda - Part 1

Hedda moves up the ladder as if she is going upstairs.

Hello!

I was just wondering if you have a space for me to stay? I can stay in your kitchen. I'm not so big, so I can fit in the cupboard. I don't have much stuff, I have everything on me. No, I'm a single lady...My husband is dead, but I carry him with me. Yes, I'm from Norwayno I can't go home...it's too cold. I would just like to have a little place that I can call home.

No? Ok, thank you.

Sound of telephone ringing.

While the audience is listening to Beverly's conversation- Hedda comes down and gets off stage through Door D (Anna has to run through the corridor up the tech stairs).

SCENE 2. Beverley - Part 1

Lights on Beverley's area she appears from behind a table.

Hello? ..Oh Hi Brenda! How are you? ...I'm great thanks! So happy! So happy!... Oh yeah the house is gorgeous. I love it. I am so settled here. It is just so... spacious.... you know we've got a double garage!... Well I tell you what I'm having a little home-warming tonight; I've done a little buffet, you know something simple...a bit improvised really...a last minute thing!

(something on these lines: in contrast with the anxiety for all the details)

...come on over and you can have a little nosey around... Alright, I'll see you in 15 minutes. *(puts phone down)*

Okay 1,2,3,4,5,6,7... oh we'll have to get the computer chair out an' all.

Drags out computer chair.

Got more cheesy pineapples in the fridge if we run out.

Moves plates of food around. Give this a quickie wipe down.

Sweeps table.

Plump o' the cushions.

Plumps two cushions. Get the under the sofa - Sprays air freshener. Whiffs it. Yes.

Sound of the doorbell. She Turns on the record player (rope centre stage). Cheesy music plays out. Dances to the music, then spots she is wearing rubber gloves and pulls them off hastily.

She exits.

SCENE 3. Prof. B.

Lights on Prof B.'s world when the "Cuckoo clock" strikes 3.00pm. Prof B.'s head pops up from his books + piano at the tech door.

...a sublime feudal silhouette against the sky, lush gardens, sparkling odor of jonquils and the frothy odor of hawthorn and plum blossoms and the pale gold odor of kiss-me-at-the-gate (he smells it)...

Something is affecting his beautiful vision: this bloody music. Open his eyes. Sharply right-left with the head then he understands: the radio! He switches it off. He closes his eyes, big sigh...he can now carry on:

...enchanted marble steps ... a masterpiece perfectly carved one by one...(he makes steps)

At then the rich ornate gate leading to music-rooms and Restoration salons...(he moves the little toy man in position)

...the magnificent period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers,

...bathrooms with sunken baths (white and/or cream!)...1 shower, ornate brass head, ornate brass towel rack (of course), a skylight l'art *nouvelle* ...a bath-tub that evokes legend and fascination with its brilliant garnet-red and flashes of amber. The bouquet is both pleasing and intense with aromatic notes of violet and oregano...it's a bath tub that exudes glory, nobility and power.

He stops for a second to admire the Kitchen.

Sigh and caresses it gently.

An irresistible kitchen whose elegance draws you subliminally into its orbit (*gravitational pull to the kitchen*). Intense ruby-garnet in colour, it is redolent of a profusion of aromas of coffee, cherries and dried fruits... nuts, apricot, orange zest, fig, date, and honey, enlivened with floral nuances of broom and lime blossom, and in the background, spice and toasty oak.
...with its vintage chestnut table, dining chairs with period Egyptian embellishments (....) sweet smell, warm yet woody!

The automobile: a rich cream colour, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrors a dozen suns and with many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory. (*plays with the car*)

It gets distracted by Hedda knocking from the tech window.

He takes the binoculars and looks (maybe points a torch?)

SCENE 4. Hedda - Part 2. (*from the window*)

Hi There! (loud) I was wondering if you have a spare room...a space...a little space or a hole where I can stay for a bit? I'm very tidy...and quiet. I'm very professional. I can stay in the bath. Or if you have a secret room. I came on the train, I tied myself on top of the roof, my husband too but he got stuck. But I made it. Can you please help me? No? Do you know ..

Balloons bursting (3). He exits in despair disappearing behind the piano.

Anna through the corridors goes back in position near to DOOR C.

Jacob from the tech room through the corridor gets ready with other 2extras + black scarves: they will appear on Door C near the Chapel.

SCENE 5. Itsaso

She arrives from underneath the rostra (climbing up probably with her lantern). She checks her laundry, cooking, cleaning.

(singing)...Le voy a preparar su comida favorita, qué contento se va a poner!

No me puedo creer que vuelva después de todo este tiempo en la mar! Mi Anchon! Como le he echado de menos.

Todavía me acuerdo de cuando nos conocimos, qué majo era! Jatorra! Mutil kacharroa le llamaban, con esos ojos que tenía como dos luceros.

Y que bien lo pasábamos en la romería, ayy cuantos recuerdos...

Pero hoy vuelve al hogar! que contenta estoy...

Parece que viene galerna, aay madre mia, qué preocupación! Espero que vuelva sano y salvo, mi Antonchu.

Voy a ir a buscarle a los muelles!

Pobrecito mio, mi Antonchu.

The calm sea in the background becomes louder and stormy again throughout her speech. She moves forward towards the audience- down the rostra. Massive thunders then the storm fade out.

Towards the end of Esther's piece we hear a distant voice singing a lullaby (from outside Door C): very quiet at first then louder. Lights off Esther's rostra and on Jenny (same lights at opening?)

SCENE 6. The Fairy.

Sound of Howling wind (track 8) + singing + moves to rostra.

Scene ends when she sees Hedda on the ladder opposite side of the room.

Itsaso and The Fiary slowly disappear underneath the rostra during Hedda's scene.

SCENE 7. Hedda - Part 3 (ladder as before)

It's me again! I was wondering if you have changed your mind?...would like some tea? (Show the teapot). Milk, do you take sugar? I...make very good tea. No? Ok, Thank you. See you again some other time.

While she leaves – We start to hear Fado music + lights on the Chapel.

Hedda exits from where she came (door d).

SCENE 8. Maria. Fado in the background.

(Pray Holy Mary's walking on her knees towards the altar)

(do the Cross Sign)

(start to play cards)

Falar como o meu marido já não gosta de mim, chega a casa e só vê televisão e não faz amor comigo (*complaining*)
(Deus pergunta –me sobre o meu filho)
falar de como o meu filho é um grande orgulho e até dá gosto ser mãe quando se tem um filho assim (*being really proud*)
(Deus pergunta-me sobre a minha filha)
dizer como ela saiu de casa com o primeiro rapaz que encontrou (num tom queixoso) e não telefona e que é uma vergonha. Dizer como se a visse na rua lhe daria um par de estalos e que levaria mais todos os dias (*build up the speech, get really angry*)
(*she wins and takes the money*)
“Desculpa”

She leaves. The three ladies in black move to follow her but a noise is audible.

SCENE 9. Hedda - Part 4.

Excuse me! Hi!

Hedda's face pops out -the three ladies stop and point their torches at Hedda as if she were the mouse.

I was wondering if you have some room for me in there? No space at all?

Can I come in? I have some cheese - brown cheese ...(*phone ringing*)...from Norway...(*phone ringing again*)

Hedda + 3 ladies off

Everyone –except Steph – is now outside in the corridor or under the rostra (Esther+ Jenny) with their bread + candle. The Bread and the Candles for the final scene might be stored in the corridor.

SCENE 10. Beverly - Part 2.

(*On the phone*) How did it go? Oh fine! (pause) ... Well no... actually, the sandwiches were a little bit soggy and the electric doors weren't working on the double garage. I had to open it manually!!! I was ever so embarrassed. You know Ann I'm not sure about this place anymore. This living room is ever

so pokey and small- you couldn't swing a cat in 'ere. No, I had a feeling I wouldn't settle here. ...Really? You mean the house on the corner? ... is up for sale? Interesting!..., now they've got a gorgeous living room...

She looks around her own living room with utter disgust.

The scene ends with Beverly storming out of the house towards Door A where the audience came in; audience should follow Beverly.

She think for a moment outside then she realizes that there isn't anywhere else to go: she gets back in from DOOR B.

The AUDIENCE follows her inside again to find all the characters gathered together in position with candles lit:

FINALE

Sound + lights as opening scene. Everyone in position with bread + candles to sing "Happy Birthday Dear Home"- in character, with the following order:

Hedda – very upbeat and smiley.

Beverly – pissed off.

Maria – Fado style, very melancholic.

Itsaso – Old Sweet Lady: she's singing the song to her husband at sea.

Fairy – Beautiful and Poetic: she's singing to a baby.

Blow the candles all together at the end of Jenny's moment.

Big Thunder (track 2) on the candle blow!

Blackout

Table 3: *A Floatting Caravan Under the Moon* – script 2015

A Floating Caravan Under the Moon, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo (2016)

Objects under the table:

Laura's cloak, bottles and wooden spoon;

2 bubbles, 1 big paper boat (hat) for Veera's piece;

1 baguette, 1 bamboo stick and 1 fireplace brush for Belen (Dali).

*AUDIENCE enters dim light/bluish, gentle sound of the sea then a massive thunder followed by a **blackout**.*

OPENING SCENE:

A veiled woman with fairy lights on her head, stands in the middle lit by just 1 paper boat/lx. Characters on both sides are facing the wall.

Voices singing a lullaby from far away it becomes louder. More voices. It's a call, a chant...a lamentation...Paper boats with lights. From both sides. Waves sound.

The boats disappear in a big thunder/wave. After the chorus (4 times)

Blackout

SCENE 1. The Snow Queen (Veera)

The Evil Queen (Veera) let her veil fall. She has a fan made of cards. And a stick that she uses as a cigarette. She is shouting orders in Finnish. She is very angry. Esther has to take the paper boat with torch that was on the table under Veera and hide it. All the characters scatter around terrified. They hide behind the curtains except

Esther/Zie and Laura that keep running aimlessness around the table trying to understand what she wants. Rita's character (Maria) sits at her chair (scared) Jenny's character (The Moonlight Fairy) observes from her corner.

Eventually Esther's character (Itsaso) realizes that the Queen wants bread: she passes the bread that is under the table: the Queen eats with greed almost like a starved wolf and eventually she calms down. She comes down and walks behind the curtain that opens for her.

Esther takes her position in Itsaso's corner / Zie goes behind the curtains after the Queen. Laura disappears under the table at the end of Veera's piece

Haluan ruisleipää! Ruisleipää! Salmiakkia! Tuokaa minulle salmiakkia!
Juomaksi Karhu-olutta! Ja Jallua! Kolmen tähden jallua! Ymmärrätekö te?!
Karjalanpiirakoita! Haluan marjoja! Uusia perunoita! Ja päälle paljon voita!
Savustettua lohta! Miksi kestää niin kauan?! Jälkiruuaksi lakritsia ja jäätelöä!
Kahvia! Fazerin sinistä! Tuokaa niitä minulle! Nopeasti!

[I want rye bread! Rye bread! Salmiac! Bring me salmiac! I want to drink Bear-
beer! And Jallu! (a type of Finnish whiskey and cognac blend) Three star Jallu!
(The best kind) Do you understand?! Karelian pies! (a type of bread) I want
berries! New potatoes! With lots of butter on top! Smoked salmon! Why is it
taking so long?! Liquorice and ice cream for dessert! Coffee! Fazer chocolate!
Bring them to me! Quickly!]

SCENE 2. Saudade, The Portuguese Explorer (Rita)

Portuguese song - Fado. Maria the Portuguese Explorer moves from the chair to the table following the boats' path. Text in Portuguese explaining what Saudade is. It builds into an explosion of emotions. From sadness, to desperation, hysterical crying to anger. It moves to euphoria and ends in sadness again. [semi-Improvised text on a canovaccio]

Laura gets ready (black cloak) and prepare her items: 1 spoon, 1 bottle & 1 flask. Laura explains what happens to the audience. Her head pops up from under the table. Dead-pan English humour style:

Basically she is sad.[beat]

She is very sad. [beat]

She is homesick!

Laura gets under the table again and the Maria, the Portuguese Explorer carries on till the end of her emotional speech.

SCENE 3. The Lunch Song (Laura and Jenny)

Laura pops up saying the last line of the previous scene then starts her procession. Maria the Portuguese crawls behind the curtains (with the others).

Laura goes all around the table clocking firstly Maria while she's escaping, then the audience, then the Crucifix. She puts the three items on the table with

authority as if a sacrifice is going to take place soon. She let the cloak falls on the floor. Jenny's character follows all her movements.

Esther's character brings her the guitar (angrily).

Song + chorus. *Itsaso, the Old Fisherman Woman is out of tune and spoils the song. She does not like it much. She eventually gets angry: everyone is intimidated by the Old Fisherman's Wife. They disperse.*

Olivier, Laura, Jenny, Rita: hide behind the audience.

The others hide behind the curtains.

Zie reassures the audience. That she will calm down in a moment.

SCENE 4. God and Bad Wolf, The Storyteller (Zie)

Do not worry! Come closer! I've to tell you a story....pick a boat ...there is a message for you. For each and everyone of you...

The audience gets closer to the table. Zie carries on his story. [text + improvisation]

Zie leaves at the end of his piece again interrupted by an angry Esther.

Esther hands over the cards' box utilised by Zie to Olivier who is now amongst the audience. She also has a go at some members of the audience for their messiness.

SCENE 5. The Storm, Itsaso, the Fisherman Wife (Esther)

Itsaso see the neighbour Ramona and gets angry; then she tells us about her husband and her memories of their youth...

The second time she mentions Ramona we hear the first distant thunder. The calm sea in the background becomes louder and stormy again throughout her speech.

...Le voy a preparar su comida favorita, qué contento se va a poner!

No me puedo creer que vuelva después de todo este tiempo en la mar! Mi Anchon! Como le he echado de menos.

Todavía me acuerdo de cuando nos conocimos, qué majo era! Jatorra! Mutil kacharroa le llamaban, con esos ojos que tenía como dos luceros.

Y que bien lo pasábamos en la romería, ayy cuantos recuerdos...

Pero hoy vuelve al hogar! que contenta estoy...

Parece que viene galerna, aay madre mia, qué preocupación! Espero que vuelva sano y salvo, mi Antonchu.

Voy a ir a buscarle a los muelles!

Pobrecito mio, mi Antonchu.

She moves forward towards the audience - down the rostra. Massive thunders then the storm fade out while Jenny's character starts singing behind the audience back (opposite side of the room).

SCENE 6. The Moonlight Fairy (Jenny)

Sound of howling wind. Fellini's style.

Scene ends when The Moonlight Fairy takes a picture at the opposite side of the room: she travels across the 'stage'.

The Fairy is interrupted by a sudden Flamenco 'call' (it's Salvador Dali').

SCENE 7. El Pan, Salvador Dalí (Belen, Laura and Esther)

Call from Belen. Guitar from Laura who runs in position with Esther. Song: 'Maria de la O' followed by a short Flamenco sequence. Reference to Michelangelo's 'La Pietà' (Angelic singing). Then he moves to the Ode to El Pan.

El pan. El pan, el pa, le pain, il pane, o pao. Bread.

El pan se huele, el pan se siente, el pan se escucha, el pan se saborea.

El pan no se corta con el cuchillo. (*Angry: cue for the Last Supper Moment*)

El pan se parte con las manos para respetar su estructura. (*Angelic voices*)

Quick changes into the tableau moment: Reference to 'The Last Supper' by Da Vinci. Veera and Esther under the table. Everyone else either behind the curtains or behind/amongst the audience. Tyne gets ready to go out for her piece.

El pan es pintura, es pan es un lienzo, el pan es Arte, el pan soy yo.

El pan es el sol, la luna, las estrellas, la tierra, el pan es la vida.

El pan es el tiempo, el pan es un elefante de largas patas, el pan es Jesucristo

Dalí is annoyed by the Flamenco's dancer and disappears behind the table. Esther follows Dalí. Laura disappears with the guitar behind the curtains.

SCENE 8. The Big Grey Wolf (Veera)

The Finnish Snow Queen appears slowly from under the table and sits in front of it. She takes her position with the brush (previously used by Dalí). She is on a canoe along an icy river. The Fairy is upstage: she crosses the stage; her parasol resembles the Moon.

Kuljen metsässä, **yksin**. Annan jäätävän virran johdattaa kapeaa venettäni. Puut ympärilläni kohoavat jylhinä, tummina hahmoina taivasiin. **Yksin kuu** valaisee kimaltavia hankia, tietäni. Taivaalta putoilee **lumihutaleita** kuin pumpulia - isoja, pehmeitä tähtiä. Yhtäkkiä puiden lomasta kuuluu rasahdus! 'Crack!' Korvissani humisee oma hengitykseni, **sydämeni lyö tahtia tiheämpään**. Toinen rasahdus! 'Crack!' Yritän kuunnella, mutta hiljaisuuden rikkoo vain puron solina. Ymmärrän, **etten ole yksin. Iso harmaa susi** on muassani. Veneeni soljuu eteenpäin. Välillä näen vilahduksen harmaan hännän päästä, ja kuulen uuden rasahduksen. 'Auuuuuuuuu' Iso harmaa susi ulvoo. Se seuraa minua, kulkee kanssani metsässä. Iso harmaa susi pitää huolen, että pääsen perille. Vartijani pitää huolta, että löydän turvallisesti myös takaisin kotiin.

[I go along in the forest, **alone**. The ice cold river leads my narrow boat. The trees around me rise up high, dark beings to the sky. **The moon alone** lights my way in the dark night, shining on the blankets of snow. **Snowflakes** like cotton fall from the sky – big, fluffy stars. Suddenly, there is crack from amongst the woods! (Crack) I can hear my own breath and **my heart beating faster**. Another crack! (Crack) I try to listen but the only sound breaking the silence is the river carrying my boat. I realise **I am not alone. The big grey wolf** travels with me. The boat flows along. Every once and again I see a tip of a grey tail, and hear another crack. (Owwwwwwwww/Howl) The big grey wolf howls. It follows me, goes along with me in the dark forest. The big grey wolf makes sure I get to where I am going. My guardian makes sure I get safely back home.]

The Snow Queen's chant fades away. Big noise from the back of the audience.

SCENE 9. Playing with Cards, The Religious Boy (Olivier)

The Religious Boy is playing with cards. He creates a path on the floor and follows it jumping from card to card – he has created a corridor in the middle of the audience. All the characters gather around him with the audience: they all join in.[Improvised Text on canovaccio]

*Altar moment (Jesus) then song (Jenny's humming till he hits the drums)
The singing and dancing procession follows the Religious Boy to the roof where we find a woman fishing.*

SCENE 10. Fishing, The Cornish Pirates' Girl (Tyne)

Content text: the three rules of fishing. The description of Cornwall's gorgeous beaches and finally the distribution of fish. She leaves talking to the crowd about sharing, community, and abundance...[Improvised Text on canovaccio]

SCENE 11. The Perfect Architecture, Prof B. (Jacob)

Standing with his back to the audience, Professor B. is scanning the landscape before them with his binoculars. Starts talking:

'Tutte le strade conducono a Roma' 'All roads', indeed 'lead to Rome', but theirs also is a more mystical destination, some bourne of which no traveller knows the name, some city, they all seem to hint, even more eternal - Richard Le Gallienne.

He turns to take in the sight of the house, goes to an edge/some kind of surface, and places the case down. He opens it, it's spilling over with various texts, scraps of pages and damaged books, maybe a pad and pencil to make notes.

...a sublime feudal silhouette against the sky, lush gardens, sparkling with the odor of jonquils and the frothy odor of hawthorn and plum blossoms and the pale gold odor of kiss-me-at-the-gate" [writing on scrap of paper] 'kiss me at the gate', yes that's good...enchanted, marble steps perfectly carved one by one... a masterpiece... like the resplendent statue of 'David', because indeed, "the Creator made Italy from the designs of Michaelangelo!" - Mark Twain.

An irresistible kitchen whose elegance draws you subliminally into its orbit. Nello stile antico! Intense ruby-garnet in colour, redolent of a profusion of aromas of coffee, cherries, apricot, orange zest, fig, date, and honey, enlivened with floral nuances of broom and lime blossom, and in the background, spice and toasty oak.

Perhaps addressing the words to individual audience but disappearing into his own world.

Bravissimo, Capolavoro, Magnificent, Splendid! Grandiose! Sumptuous! Elevated, Majestic, Transcendent! August! Beautiful wrapped in wonderful! A place that exudes glory, nobility and power! (*Peak*)
(*Laura enters, monotone*): “It is a nice room.”

Noticing a member of the audience, takes a closer examination, subdued, whatever colour eyes they have, or clothes they're wearing, becomes the colour for the next room

(i.e.) ‘Basil green’ a deeper rendition of it’s paler cousin, the ‘pear’... adorning the walls of the gloriously rich LIBRARY HA HA!

“Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me

From mine own library- with volumes that

I prize above my dukedom.”

...ah Prospero, what blessed Eden of wisdom may we blossom for ourselves!

(*writes on paper mumbling*) ...'Eden of wisdom...'

... “Blossomed like a flower and the incarnation was complete.”

(*he finds the car*) The Great F. Scott's car! A rich cream colour, bright with nickel, a monstrous length, terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrors a dozen suns and with many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory he runs away playing with the car ...

He runs away. The other characters urge the audience to follow him quickly.

FINALE

Sea Sound + lights as opening scene.

Everyone in position with bread + candles to sing “Happy Birthday Dear Home”- in the following order:

Itsaso – Out of Tune/Old sweet Lady (Spanish)
Olivier – Happy Smiley, Playful (French)
Maria the Portuguese – Fado style (very melancholic) (Portuguese)
The Snow Queen – Very Harsh (Staccato)
Fairy – Beautiful and Poetic (she's singing to a baby) (English)

Blow the candles all together at the end of Jenny's moment.

Big Thunder on the candle blow.

Blackout.

Table 4: *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* – script 2016

3.4.2 Case Study 2: *Home* (2017)

Home is a devised solo piece with an episodic structure developed in Summer 2017 and presented at the CrisisArt Festival in Arezzo in June 2017. Further information about the piece are available in Appendix 4. This includes rehearsal notes, links to photo galleries and videos.

Background

This piece is a journey back home to rediscover my cultural, historical and personal roots. Utilising both biographical and historical material I originally wanted to look specifically at what it means to be a migrant artist; not necessarily as the eternal 'traveller' but rather the eternal 'outsider': the one who doesn't fully 'belong' and is therefore 'other'...different. This felt particularly relevant to me since the result of last June's referendum and post-Brexit climate in the UK.

However, the theme changed throughout the creative process. The piece progressively diverted towards another topic still related to the notion of 'outsider' and 'outcast', the 'one who doesn't belong' and is not 'at home': the discrimination and demonization of women - from the Witch Hunting during the Inquisition till widespread misogynist and sexist attitude present in our society.



Figure 62: The Execution. *Home*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2017

The Church had promoted misogyny for centuries and between the 16th and the 17th century their anti-women propaganda reached its peak with the persecution of ‘witches’. By making references to current affairs and contemporary public figures I want to show that the same mechanism of manipulation of the masses are at work today as they were 400 years ago. As Mandrou pointed out ‘the witch-hunt was the first persecution in Europe that made use of multimedia propaganda to generate a mass psychosis among the population’ (Mandrou, 1968 cited in Federici, p. 136).

***Home*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo (2017)**

ARLECCHINO

Improvisation

Venghino! Venghino! Siore, siori , siorette. Forsa, forsa...ndemo! Ghe sta' un Monsignore importante...un Cardinal...da Roma eh gia'.. ghe sta pure n'atrice tanto brava..uhmm una importante ancha ela. Una bela...na voze...puhh...e

na ballerina...anca. Na dansatrize insomma . Co ste bele gambe lunghe , sti brazi (e)leganti (*flirt with one or more members of the audience- play*)

THE RESEARCHER

Prologue

This is my friend: *Arlecchino* a Mask of Commedia dell'Arte. I'm here thanks to him: after seeing a great *Arlecchino* - called Claudia Contin - I started studying theatre. Commedia is where my journey began...

That's why this show is a journey back home: to re-discover my artistic 'roots' (COMMEDIA) but also back home to my ancestors in the Po' Valley!

Before I carried on with the PROLOGUE of the piece. I need to add a prologue of the prologue to apologise because in reality what you will see it's a not a show – as I was ambitiously hoping to do- but it's a very early stage of a work-in-progress. And I'd like to watch it as an open rehearsal...

This is a work-in-progress Apologies for the messiness. The research part carried me away. Originally I thought to present a 30-40mins with just 3 short scenes and me as a story-teller. But I am unable to work without props and costumes and I had so much material; historical sources, biographical and contemporary politics... that I got lost! This is a draft/sketch of a painting I'd like to paint. With your help!

It's the first time I show the material to an audience, the first time I put all the bits together...I took away some stuff however some parts are still very row (you will see me probably lost! I have issues with costume changes but maybe YOU will come up with ideas! I put this together in two weeks alone! Most of the work I did the 2 months before didn't ended up in the piece! I totally changed direction...I changed the piece 2 weeks ago!

1. What is Commedia dell'Arte? Complex phenomenon not only a style. It developed for over 300 years: it cannot be 1 thing : it's many things, as diverse as the cultures, countries and people that populated Europe in the late Reanissance and baroque time – mid-500s till mid-700s. I don't think anyone can say with certainty what commedai was! But I can tell you. What Commedia

dell'arte is for me. It's a Meeting of written and oral culture- meeting of opposites. two rivers that run parallel and in this moment in history merged. Scripted/Improvised; Masked/Unmasked/ Outdoor/Indoor; tragic/comedy... Major features that makes it so relevant to contemporary theatre /theatre makers: 1. Professional= the actors came together to make a living off their shows. It's not a leisure activity courts' palaces or amongst literates) 2. Significant presence of female on stage: a revolutionary aspect of Commedia. 3. Actor's Theatre not Author's theatre (playwrights) . Theatre I'm passionate about: The Actor is the creator, the writer & the director. Important point to make because our culture back then and today give prominence to words-written words. There is a hierarchy. Commedia challenges that hierarchy and recognise the power of visual and physical language. All equal. This seems still relevant today when we have to defend the dignity of non text-based work vs mainstream text-based theatre.

2. Who are my ancestors? The 'Zanni lineage: Paesant family Po' Valley Nonna Ida (20th Century Zanni) – Zanni are the Servants of Commedia this Arlecchino is a Zanni= the lowest class. The workers.

I almost immediately recognized the similarities between the personal and the historical & the present and the past material I was dealing with: in the 16th and 17th century the 'displaced' people – the immigrants- were the poor *Zanni*: they were starved peasants that moved in great numbers towards Venice - the ones who survived famine and wars - and tried to make a living. They ended up being exploited by the merchants, bankers and traders of the time. In post-war Italy and the early 60s: the Zanni from the Po' Valley –my ancestors- moved to Turin to find work and being exploited by the industrialists of that time: FIAT, the car industry.

But not only the Zanni were in search of home. The nomadic artists were also in search of a home: artistic home or an actual place to live.

This wasn't necessarily the case for everyone...We must note that that literates – the so called 'high culture' - and clergymen of the time (the Establishment)'s position towards Commedia dell'Arte was ambivalent. On one side the recognized companies under the patronage of kings and aristocrats were accepted and even praised by the Church – (those were the Hollywood stars

of the time),; HOWEVER street performers and companies that weren't granted the nobility's patronage (that means in other words they weren't granted the Establishment's approval and financial support) were nothing more than charlatans and 'outsiders'. Many historical accounts and documents of the time are invectives against the *Commedianti* Commedia dell'Arte success amongst the masses was described as an 'uncontrollable frenzy'.

According to many clergymen of that time there could be only one reason behind this frenzy: the DEVIL. Indeed the physical and transformative aspects of the mask were a source of grave concern. Their argument was that the 'first mask ever worn was, without doubt, that of the serpent's face worn by the Dark Angel to persuade Eve to commit the first sin.

Eve, a woman: the first sinner! This is another clear sign of the presence of the Devil. Behind Commedia's success is the presence of women on stage. And as we all know: Actresses instigate lustful desires in men and contaminates girls' minds. They were considered worse than prostitutes: because they performed in public- at least harlots were behind closed doors (brothels were widely accepted by clergymen too!). Women on stage were referred as "*Organum Diaboli*" (= instrument of the Devil).

Outsiders, outcasts and sinners.

Many actresses of that time couldn't find 'home'- meaning they weren't considered respectable citizens: and...they were destined to be 'homeless' even after death! They were in fact refused Christian burial in consecrated ground. Rejected once gain.

I cannot talk of Home, my home...rural Italy, without dealing with Catholicism and I cannot talk of Commedia and in particular Commedia Actresses without mentioning the Inquisition.

But before introducing you to some great historical characters of that time, Cardinals, Inquisitors, Actresses.. I want you to meet another friend: a Zanni called Germino who just came back from the war... this is my grandma's boyfriend ...lost in WW2 (*get into costume*). Here I re-imagine him coming back home...still haunted by the memory of the battlefield and the horror of war and

its aftermath. He walked for a very long time, he climbed mountains, arrived at the village and then realized that the horrors of the war were still in his head. He could hear the bombs, smell the smoke, touch the dead bodies and smell the blood. When he wakes up from this nightmare he realizes that is alive but and back home but the war is still with him; it's a cancer that is eating him from inside; and the blood and the soldiers' fear has penetrated into the soil and everything is rotten; the trees cannot give fruits as before, the water, once fresh and pure is now contaminated too and cannot placate his thirst. All the water of the Earth won't ever placate his thirst and the burning feeling of the war...
(light in the whole stage area but not the ladder fully - we wait until I mention Borromeo in the second speech).

SCENE 1: THE ZANNI-SOLDIER Germino

War

Arrived very tired. Initial he is with the audience in the present time then he starts to tell the story of his journey:

He walked, and walked and walked. He climbed mountains then had to run down the mountains. His legs are hurting but the view was wonderful! He arrives at the village. He is happy he recognizes the buildings but lots of things have changed.: the Church is bigger and richer; the major's house is also all new. He decides to go to the inn to have a nice glass of wine or grappa ...

...but suddenly his smile becomes terror. The audience sees the fear in his eyes: he hears and see something but the audience does not what it is yet. He remembers the bombs: he is back in the battlefield:

Smoke everywhere. He crawl amongst dead bodies. His friend explodes in front of his eyes: a mix of mud and blood hit his face. He taste the blood in his mouth...then suddenly opens his eyes and realizes he was just a vision.

He awakes from his nightmare. This is not the battlefield. He realises there are other people. Start talking to the audience (present time again):

La guera l'e' na brutta bestia; l'e' come un canchero che te magna, te rosica, te consuma; l'e' propi brutta sta guera...e che s'empregna dapertuto; e a mi me par che anche aora ca l'e' finia , ghe le bombe son passe', I cararmati sun ande via; I solda' come mi son turna' a ca' ...chi l'e' torna' – a mi me par che sta guera la si sente, la si respire ..I ase magna propi... me par che tuto sto

sangre, tuto sto piombo , tuto sto sudor de paura l'e' anda ne la tera, la impregna tuta; le tuta impastrocia', le dura e negra ...de sangre ...la se smarzita; anche ela la paise (patisce); la tribola' tanto che non gha' pi' la forza de crear, de dar de futo insomma; ...e el sangre l'e' percola'(ande')de suto nel'aqua nuova e pura ...ma che non l'e' pi' tanto nuova e pura. e anche l'aqua l'e' impastrocia' ...e che non te disseta mai. (*Cerca l'acqua ma non si trova- si toglie anche l'elmetto per raccogliarla...lo butta : e' vuoto*) Ma ze anca vero che quando te gha' fa la guera te gha n'arsura (take off clothing) che non te basti pi' ruta l'agua del Creato!

Music/LX off

Ghe s'e'...l'e' paradis? O che son morto o son vivo. Svegliate Germino!

Exits.

SCENE 2: The ACTRESS

Standing Ovation

Baroque Music. - Quick appearance: applause. Standing ovation.

1- clock audience: Baroque bow centre stage; stage right then stage left proper ballerina style (stay 2 beat down); walk back centre call the other actor move forward send them away simple gesture/clocking then indicate the audience up in the circles and down another baroque bow; walk back 1 jump bow; 2 jumps bow; 3 jumps bow exit fast (mask!); (beat) enter fast jump- jump bow- jump jump bow exit other side run jump centre exit; come back: fast bows (grotesque) run to podium taking off veil-music off

THE RESEARCHER

The Inquisition and Cardinal Borromeo

We just had a climpse of a stage of Commedia dell'Arte: I've chosen a Famous Actress-Author-Director: **Vittoria Piisimi**. She was -also known as the Dancing Actress. Here received a standing ovation by an adoring crowd. ...But as I said not everyone loved Commedia del'Arte so much!

For examples **Cardinal Carlo Borromeo** (1538-1584) hated it! He was one of the leading figures in the persecution of heretics during the Counter-Reformation that is – as you know - the response of the Catholic church to Luther's Protestant reformation. 1545: Beginning of The Council of Trent. *Concilium Tridentinum* – the discussion on how to promote the Catholic

counter-reformation. Coincided with year first documentation of a registered Company, i.e. Professional Troupe (1545).

Just few years earlier the Catholic Church had established the Roman Catholic Inquisition: *il Santo Uffizio dell'Inquisizione Romana* - whose aim was to fight heresy and defend Catholic orthodoxy - if necessary with the use of violence.

1559 Establishment of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (List of Prohibited Books): a list of publications deemed heretical, anti-clerical or lascivious, and therefore banned by the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Borromeo was very efficient in getting books burnt; but he realized that “live voices” - the theatre - were worse than written books - because “they can scar adolescents’ minds even more deeply than the dead voices in printed books!”. He hated Commedia: He felt that burning books was pointless if people could gather in streets and piazzas to watch comedies, where words came to life. A serious preoccupation amongst the religious authorities of the time that saw theatre as a threat to their absolute control over the masses. Cardinal Borromeo labeled Commedia as a ‘*perniciossissima zizzania*’ (=Pernicious dandelion): a fast growing phenomenon that couldn’t be controlled, couldn’t be easily censored and could be understood and accessed by everyone. Cardinal Borromeo, was even more disturbed by the power of women on stage.

The Catholic Church has promoted misogynism for centuries. And in this specific historical period (late 1500s/16th century) this anti-women propaganda reached its peak with another persecution alongside the heretics: the persecution of witches.

Indeed to destroy heresy and blasphemy The Roman Inquisition exhumed a text written almost 100 years earlier, well before ‘Commedia time’. This book is the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*) the most famous treatise on witchcraft. It endorses extermination of witches. The recommended procedures include torture and death penalty: the only sure remedy against evils of witchcraft and heresy.

Initially the Church itself took a distance from the author- accusing him of being “crazy and senile”. However, later on, the repression of witches became as relevant as the repression of heretics across all Europe. And it became useful to silence enemies...of course (e.g. Giordano Bruno 1600). Peak of the phenomenon: 1580-1630. Paradoxically coincides with the flourishing/golden age of Commedia dell'Arte. But we are a country of contradictions after all! The *Malleus Maleficarum* became the best seller of the time -second only to the Bible- both in the Protestant and Catholic world.

But I want to clarify something, supported by many scholars: It's true that the Inquisition and centuries of Church's misogynous campaigns against women, played a fundamental role in the witch-hunt.

However, contrary to stereotype, the witch-hunt was not just a product of the machination of the Roman Inquisition. The secular courts conducted most of the trial; the Inquisition always depended on the cooperation of the state to carry out the executions. The witch-hunt was a major political and financial initiative.

It's important to remember that all witches (and heretics) possessions were confiscated: it was a useful tool to gain land, estates and power. And the culture of fear, the terror, that widespread across Europe was an excellent tool to control the masses...as we know too well! (*Move towards Borromeo and get dressed*).

I utilised the historical character of Cardinal Borromeo as an inspiration to symbolize The Inquisition and their repressive and violent attitude – more specifically against women. And I utilize the exuberance of Commedia dell'Arte – an Actress of Commedia dell'Arte to symbolize the “the untamed woman” so dangerous for Borromeo.

SCENE 3: CARDINAL BOROMEIO

Index Librorum Prohibitorum

From the pulpit the Crucifix appears before Borromeo. Angelic music. This part is mainly against the immoral conduct of Commedianti first of all their temptresses: the ACTRESSES!

What's the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* for? We took strict measures against the obscenity of books, we commanded they should be burnt and extirpated from human kind's memory; and whoever reads them should be punished with serious charges and pain... But what's its use? If / what the eyes can see / penetrates much deeper into the soul than that which they can read in those kind of books? (= *cantilena/mano*) Performers' live voices can scar adolescents' minds even more deeply than the dead voices in printed books!

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We never witness anything more suited to the Devil's purpose than this: the THEATRE! (*crucifix jump*) Where books come to life, images become real ...animated by gestures, actions, music, songs, symphonies: all the instruments that The Lord gave us to serve him/ it's here turned around by the Devil to offend Him! (*sad/defeated*)

(*up again*) This Commedia...is a '*perniciossissima zizzania*' (*penicious weed*)...a curse: it grows roots everywhere, in streets and piazzas...in cities and villages:

Those *Commedianti* use the public female appearance to *allure us* (*withdraw his left hand*), because they know from experience that women – seen and heard - attract audiences much more than any other theatre device⁸⁶.

They live in promiscuity men and women....those shameless women...getting dressed and undressed; sometimes even combing their hair and putting their make up on in front of those poor men... sometimes in bed...sometimes half naked and always, always!, talking of lascivious things with one another! (*head on the left- puppet*)

⁸⁵ Cardinale Borromeo from the homily performed on the 17th of July 1583.

⁸⁶ Ottonelli, G.D. (1652) Della Christiana Moderatione del Theatro.

(Back like a spring) Those women on stage - like Eve - turned their back on us, innocent men (as *defeated and sad: poor victim*), and betrayed our Father! Those Females...with their 'female gestures...their female voices...their female bodies' ...sinful bodies– ahg! Those actresses are worse than *harlots*: they trigger lustful desires in men by showing those love scenes in public, in front of us (*victim again*)!⁸⁷ Blasphemy!

Those troupes stay in town for 2 or even 3 months and they trigger so many disasters: attacks, quarrels, fights, heat-waves, famine, drought, floods, water turned into blood, and firstborns' death!

We must fight back! (*move forward*) then(*breath in + move back*)...all these gatherings in the streets and piazzas of our towns must stop now! ... We're under the attack of dark forces...(crucifix across)

We must be Strong and Stable! (*bangs with crucifix*) ...Strong & Stable in this moment of uncertainty, danger and instability! And I need YOU [*pointing at the audience*],...together we will beat our Enemy! Together we will crash the Devil! In tough times, everyone – EVERYONE - has to take their share of the pain...(whispering) especially you.

SCENE 4: GINO, THE CONMAN

The Saints' Relics Catalogue

Don't worry! Don't worry! I'm here. Gino, at your service!

Don't panic Ladies and Gents. I've everything you need ...

Holy water, amulets, saints, little saints, santi, santini, santoni, Saints' relicts...Do you want Saint Marc's tibia we got it! Are you after Saint Francis' scapula we got it and what about Santa Chiara's pelvis: we've got that too!

And you are lucky! You are the lucky ones, my friends, Because today – only today - I have a special offer: 2 Saints for the price of One! And not any other saints, non, no. These are first class Saints!!!

⁸⁷ Mendoza, P.H. (1631) *Scolasticae et morales disputationes*.

Look at this beauty: look at the perfection of this occipital bone, the roundness of this nasal bone, the whiteness of these teeth.

(Jump on the other side): And What about this gem? *(Touch the skull with passion – take it centre stage):* how could you not recognize this sublime symmetry of the zygomatic bone, the divine proportion of the forehead and the supreme holiness of the lacrimal bone. I get emotional every time I approach such SANCITY all at once. *(fake crying to impress)*

And it can be yours! ...Ladies and Gents, I am going to ruin myself! I'm going to do a little game. This is yours -for free- if you tell me who this Saint is! *(play with the audience ask around taking the bone him using the stick as a mic in a TV studio– tease them: take one- But don't worry I won't tell Cardinal Borromeo- cocky mafia style attitude/little slap on the face)*

...and you Gorgeous (to a lady): do you know who that is? Don't worry babe, I'll give you my number anyway...I feel generous today! *(glasses down- wink)*
This gem is St Peter *(holding it up)*

(shouting) And it can be yours for just €2999...only today! All I need is your name and card details and St Peter is yours, with a complementary Saint Lucia.... 2Sants for the price of x1..2x1 *(market place)* *(St Peter/Saint Lucia routine)*

This is once in a lifetime opportunity (hold his chest). I tell you from the depth of my heart, ..my soul, ...my cock...my soul: act now! When it's gone, it's gone. Listen to your Christian soul, your Christian conscience, your Christian faith. Only this will protect you for heretics...only this will protect you from witches, only this will protect you from the Devil! *(point)!* -Call now 0800 111 333.

Exits then pop back quickly.

Only today!

The RESEARCHER

Propaganda and the Culture of Fear

Saints' Relicts were indeed a very prolific and profitable business for the Church in particular during the 600s. The Church was very efficient in making sure this business flourished. And it was also very effective in fuelling suspicion

and fear of witches and heretics amongst the population. Not alone but with the help with secular authorities.

Witch-hunt wasn't a spontaneous process "a movement from below to which the ruling classes were obliged to respond." ON the contrary: before neighbour accused neighbour, or entire communities were seized by a panic, a steady indoctrination took place, with the authorities expressing anxiety about the spreading of witches and teaching how to recognise them; threatening to punish those who hid them or came to their assistance⁸⁸.

In Northern Italy the ministers and authorities fuelled suspicions, and made sure that they would result in denunciations, they also made sure that the accused would be totally isolated, (forcing them, amongst other things, to carry signs on their dresses so that people would keep away from them). According to some scholars the witch-hunt was the first persecution in Europe that made use of multimedia propaganda to generate a mass psychosis among the population.

One of the first tasks of the printing press was publicising the most famous trials and the details of the witches atrocious deeds, through pamphlets. An effective tool to spread a culture of fear.

Now, we'll see an old lady –inspired by my granny- who actually likes Commedia dell'Arte. She really likes Vittoria, the dancing actress. So she is confused after the Cardinal's sermon. She doesn't know if it's a sin to like them so much. So she goes to Church and asks God. He's quite busy so she does not get an answer and leaves when she hears the voice of the actress on stage from the piazza outside...she resauures God that she'll come back in the evening for an answer... (*While I'm explaining this I dress as NONNA IDA*)

SCENE 5: NONNA IDA

Come me piase la Comedia!

Slowly approach the Church. Crosses sit down Padre Nostro.

⁸⁸ Larner Christina (1984)

(a dio) Seore...Seore? Deo? *(no answer- she looks at the audience/wait a bit /call a again)* - l'e' impegna'! ...ghe sta' Jesus?

(al pubblico) Non ghe sta' nisun. Son tant indfara'. Lavoran tanto, se capisse. Insomma, e na famiglia anca imporante. Anca a Maria...la mama, la gha tanto da fare.. uhh. Con tute e cose che capitan a sto mondo... e guere, atentati, uccision...quando da lavorar! Anca gli angioetti, gli angeli, I santi, I Cherubini I martiri...anca loro son impegna'. *(espressione come a dire Si capisce! E' ovvio)*

Ben, mi no gho freta, aspeto. No gjo niente da far. *(she tries to wait but she cannot contains herself. She needs to ask God about this Commedai dell'Arte)*

(a dio).Deo, senti, Ma ze' peccato che me piase a comedia?...*(al pubblico)* Gha sento qualcosa voialti? Perche' mi son un po' sorda allora alle volte non...*(a dio)* Ben ben...quando ga' tempo (un mementino) me rispondera'.

(al pubblico) ma sti comedianti che son qua al paese mi sembran brava zente anca loro. El Cradinal dise che son cativa zente e quell altro el comendator, el come se ciama queo che ma' venduo l'acqua santa la scorsa settimana...l'e' anche un bel l'omo- ben el dise che le done poi son tanto grame. Le femine de sta compagnia. Ma le tanto bela sta atrise *(poi parla a loro)*. La Vittoria uh...

(a dio). Te gha vista?...la canta anca el fa zerti ziravolte. L'e tanto elegante. Ma ze' veramente peccato de varder ste cose?

(aspetta..non sente e chiede al pubblico) Le gha risposto? Perche' mi son un po' sorda.. el gha ditto qualcosa?

(music and singing voice of Vittoria audible from the piazza)

Oh Speta! Oh Scusa deo! Ghe sta la Vittoria...L'e' tanto bela.speta speta... Ma sta li' che vegno...non te preoccupare

(Exit running. I get changed behind the chair).

SCENE 6: The ACTRESS

Opera Buffa

Stizzoso, mio stizzoso, voi fate il borioso, ma, no, ma non vi può giovare,

ma, no, ma non vi può giovare; bisogna al mio divieto, star cheto, cheto, e non parlare zit... zit... serpina vuol così, zit, zit serpina vuol così

stizzoso, mio stizzoso voi fate il borioso ma, no, ma non vi può giovare bisogna al mio divieto, star che to che to, e non parlare

zit... zit... serpina vuol così, voi fate il borioso, ma non vi può giovare, bisogna al mio divieto star che to e non parlare,

zit... zit... che to zit... zit... e non parlar, serpina vuol così, vuol così, serpina vuol così

cred'io che m'intende, sì, che m'intendete, sì, che m'intendendete, da che mi conoscete son molti e molti dì, son molti, molti, e molti dì. (1 Round: 1'50)

The actress is acting out what Borromeo told us: they get change back stage, throw veil in the air, sing with beautiful seductive voices etc...

Get changed behind the pulpit. And I reappear as before on top of the ladder as Borromeo.

SCENE 7: CARDINAL BORROMEO

Masks: the Agent of Satan

Visibly more distressed and concerned. Against the MASKS and the foreigners who bring them in our country-against our values!

Fornicators! (*crucifix pops on the side towards the actress*) Slaves of Satan! (*Crucifix back*) Sinners, blasphemous beasts, horrible creatures, seductresses, harlots, worse than harlots, shameless snakes, vipers, chimeras...(*this list said while I'm getting the robe behind the ladder: make it a proper stage action as if the priest is getting ready before the mass*) (*Crucifix pops up quickly then Borromeo appears slowly*)

(*clock the audience 2 mask hits*) And You...you were watching the Devil

I confess my children (*innocent victim*) ...while I was distracted for a moment, the enemy lure you, tempted you. [*3 hits with the Crucifix flagellante style*] "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!" [*crucifix as puppet*]

[*back to opening position*] There could be only one explanation for this “uncontrollable frenzy”: and that is the Devil! [*little sign of the Cross*] Look at those Masks! (*lean forward*) The agent of Satan! The ‘first mask ever worn was, without doubt, that of the serpent’s face worn by the Dark Angel to persuade Eve to commit the first sin!

There is far too much tolerance for these sinners...we need to become far more vigilant and effective in identifying them and stamping them out. We cannot and must not pretend that things can continue as they are. Things need to change.

...Defeating these evil forces is one of the greatest challenges of our time We are engaged in a struggle that is fought on many fronts and in many forms!

WE should continue to pursue the values of the Catholic Church. We will put up a wall and keep them out of our cities!

Our response must be, as it has always been -when we have been confronted by the enemies! We must come together, we must pull together, (*tension in the hands on ‘together’*) and united we will take on and defeat our enemies.

It is time to say ‘enough is enough!’ (*bang his head on the crucifix*)

We won’t show any mercy! (*almost whispered*)

SCENE 8: GINO, THE CONMAN

The Torture Catalogue

Don’t worry! Don’t worry! Gino is here, at your service!

I’m back ladies and Gent and I have something that will blow your mind!

The Ultimate Torture catalogue. Latest edition! Fresh from the press! We have different models: Classic, Deluxe and Experimental. All with detailed instruction manual and 3 years warranty.

In the classic range we have the timeless Rope or Pulley. This wonderful product comes with a set of weights (no less than 45kg each) -to pull even harder! You grab the naked bitch and securely tie her hands behind her back; then you hoist her up to the ceiling - you hold her there for, be aware, no more

than 30minutes - you don't want to provoke heart failure: no! You don't want to kill her, yet!

(mime these actions) You pull that bitch/witch up, then suddenly let her drop and BANG - you stop the descend before she touches the floor, jerking every nerve and joints in the body. This is a winner, ladies and gents: the confession is guaranteed...I promise! And if you want to spice it up you can also burn the witches' legs with torches candles and burning fat. All accessories included in this Deluxe package!

And what about the Experimental Range? The Latest Rack: equally effective for heretics and witches. You tie your Witch across the board by her ankles and wrists. Then turn the roller (*action*) and pull her body in opposite directions, ah yea a bit more, and a bit more....And snap! The most effective Rack on the market ladies and gents: you won't dislocate 1 joint, not 2 joints, not 3 ...you will dislocate every joint of the body! Confession guaranteed: she will confess even things she didn't do! This rack is a God given miracle!

But I can give you more! I offer you a fantastic tailored package. Give me your witches age, height, weight, colour of the eyes, colour of her hair, profession, special features...and I will build a made to measure appliance just for you! Included in the price is a detailed examination of the witch - you need to know her inside out...if you know what I mean! (*think Magnolia scene-sexual gesture- glasses down*).

For example let's say your witch is an actress: well, that's a tough one...but we will bring together the best quality material and the latest research (latest technology) in the field and offer you only the BEST: we'll combine the rope, with the rack, suffocation, the pendulum, boiling oil, slicing of the toes, whipping (*whip with the branch*), ... and last but not least Hot Branding: on the Witch's breast (*sound*)the stake is guaranteed! All that for only €99,999, 30-Day Money Back Guarantee!

And for just extra €2000 you can get The Witch Chair...yes that's right. You don't want to miss out. In those beautiful auto-da-fe, when you follow the bitch all the way out of the village, up the hill to the stake you don't want to miss the best bit! No, you don't! You need our latest portable chair with a comfortable

and easy-to-use handle, adjustable height settings: you will follow the Witch's agony till the very end, minute after minute, second after second: all from the comfort of your very own personal seat! Exclusive Live coverage only GINO can offer you! Call now 008 111 333...(out/in) only today/offers ends today

The RESEARCHER

Propaganda Wins

So history thought us that propaganda works. Repetition, repetition, repetition: that's the secret...not really much of a secret! "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."- probably you now the source of this quote.

And the most vulnerable are always the ones more easily manipulated and turn against an enemy, an imaginary enemy, a scapegoat that can be easily identified and isolated. An heretic, a witch, a Jewish person in Nazi Germany...So Nonna Ida, the granny we met before, who loved the Dancing Actress and Commedia, now changed her mind, the pressure was too much on her...and she came to the conclusion that it was the Devil trying to allure her: and the Devil must be destroyed... (*scarf on and she storms in, agitated*). They are foreign, different and there is no place for them here. She even says – and this is from historical document- that these actors bring storms, rain and illnesses and she even witness an actor w=dying on stage and being replaced immediately by the Devil who carried on the performance in his place...

SCENE 9: NONNA IDA

Al Rogo la Stria!

Ze vero. Son stranieri,..foresti non son brava zente come noi altri! Non ghe posto per loro. Devon star fora da chi!

E quela la tuta desnuda, a balar: Ze na svergognata...na' balorda...na vipera. Quee femene.. .del teatro ...son cative, son endiavolate.

El gha rason el Cardinal: a femena deve starsene a casa a badar a l'omo e ai fioi; non nea piazza a mostar cosse. (*quiet as a secret revealed whispering*)

Qele la son putane...Son opera del Demonio!

Aier solamente gho visto che uno de quei comedianti ze morto...stecchito sul palco e tutaa ntrato el demonio gha pia' a forma de queo, li , del comediane morto, e el gha' contuuu' a comedia. (*segno de la croce*) ...Quei comedianti

gha anca a forza de portar piova e a tempesta. E quea femena la ' fa morir
anca ee piante, bestie e l putei!

Xe una stria: la Gha razon el Cradinal ...Deve bruzae all" inferno...

*Exit. Nonna leaves praying and disappears back the ladder. We hear
Borromeo's voice. Recorded Voice. I get changed into the Actress as
Automaton Doll.*

*While we hear Borromeo voice (text below). The actress appears with a veil
and the Crucifix, She moves mechanically. Places the crucifix centre stage. It's
a doll.*

SCENE 10: CARDINAL BORROMEO

The Holy Woman

...she must subdue to God's order!

(I start on stage behind the ladder then VO carries on)

...to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to her own
husband, that the word of God may not be reviled!

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the
head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, and is himself its Savior.
Now as the church submits to Christ, so also women should submit in everyway
to their husbands.

The women should keep silent. For they are not permitted to speak, but should
be in submission, as the Law also says...

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to
teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For
Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman
was deceived and became a transgressor

To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain
you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he
shall rule over you.

SCENE 11: THE ACTRESS

Holy Mary Doll

Already centre stage. Physical sequence: 'Puppette Automatique'. At the end of the choreography the music and lx fade out.

Blackout

SCENE 12: CARDINAL BORROMEO

The Final Solution

Everything exists in pairs of opposites: God and Satan, Mary and Eve, and man and woman. Each positive principle in a pair, is delineated (*music: click play here*) by its negative pole. Perfection is defined not as the integration or preservation of opposites, but rather as the extermination of the negative element in polar pair'

Light fading towards the end.

Blackout

EPILOGUE: THE ACTRESS

The Execution

FINAL IMAGE: stick across my shoulder: crucifixion image (symbolic).

Lx fade out into blackout. Slowly music fades out too.

Table 5: *Home* – script 2017.

CONCLUSION

'To know oneself means to be oneself, means to be one's own master, to find oneself, to step out of chaos, to be an element of order, but of one's own order.'
- Antonio Gramsci

In this thesis I have discussed the legacy of Commedia dell'Arte in postdramatic theatre. This investigation contributes to discussions on Commedia's contemporaneity and its relevance to theatre practitioners interested in the applications of Mask work in devised theatre. My approach to Commedia dell'Arte can be understood as a *reinvention* of Commedia Masks through a *rediscovery* of Commedia's principles as they have been discussed by Flaminio Scala in his prologue to *Il Finto Marito* (1619). In this document Scala outlined the basic tenets of Commedia's aesthetic, offering to future generations of Actors-Authors – like myself - an ideological framework to clarify and legitimise their theatre as an autonomous art form independent from written drama. This distinction between drama (text-based theatre) and 'non-dramatic' forms of theatre and the recognition of equal status between them is the foundation of Lehmann's discourse on postdramatic theatre.

The first research question outlined in the Introduction was: *How to develop a contemporary Mask rooted in the actors' own experience embracing the notion of Actor as Creator in devised performance?* To answer this question, I have worked collectively exploring a physical approach to characterisation that integrates autobiographical material and Commedia techniques to develop a new Mask rooted in the reality of our times. I have labelled it the 'Experiential Mask'.

In response to the second research question -*How to develop a devising methodology drawing from Commedia dell'Arte's techniques and principles without necessarily utilising the traditional types, masks and aesthetic?* - I have evaluated my approach to devising, discussing three main areas of practice: my ethos (Chapter 3.1), my dramaturgical approach (Chapter 3.2) and my theatrical language or style (Chapter 3.3). In each section I have linked my practice to Scala's teachings, demonstrating how Commedia dell'Arte's principles and techniques informed my practice, testing its efficacy through teaching, directing and performing.

I have utilised my latest productions, *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015/16), and *Home/Finding Home* (2017), as key studies to show the striking connections between Commedia dell'Arte's core principles – Scala's teachings – and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre.

What new knowledge has been contributed to the field?

In my discussion I have proposed to distinguish three main approaches to Commedia dell'Arte: 'Archaeological' 'Recontextualised' and 'Experimental' Commedia. These approaches are all valid both artistically and pedagogically. However, for my investigation on the legacy of Commedia dell'Arte and its relevance to contemporary devised performance, I have focussed on the 'Experimental' approach because, unlike the others, it is rooted in the reality of our times. It does not attempt to resurrect or reconstruct Commedia dell'Arte imitating its style and aesthetic. My intent is to leave the actors free to develop their own characters, stories and 'theatrical language' fully embracing the notion of Actor as Creator. I therefore utilised Commedia techniques and principles, without relying on traditional Masks, style and scenarios.

Many practitioners interpret Commedia dell'Arte as a codified form comparable to the ancient traditions of Asian Theatre. According to this view, the Masks are Fixed Types or Stock Characters recognisable for their specific and immutable code of postures and gestures. However, the idea of fixed-types and stock characters that will never change in any condition or circumstance, ignores Commedia dell'Arte's cultural and philosophical roots: the Renaissance (McGehee, S., in Chafee & Crick, 2015). In this sense, the notion of fixed types clashes with the humanistic belief of 'man as self-maker, as the architect of his own being' (ibid., p.15). The reproduction of fixed immutable forms is indeed an *emulation*, or at best an *interpretation*, but not an act of *creation*. Instead, Scala urges us to recognise the centrality of the actor in the creative process and his role as a *creator* not simply an *interpreter*.

I have explored Commedia from a new perspective looking at its contemporaneity within the context of postdramatic theatre; an original contribution to contemporary studies on the Commedia dell'Arte. The starting point of my investigation was to identify Commedia's major 'performative' features relevant to contemporary devised theatre. These are:

- The notion of Actor as Creator

- Playfulness
- Stylistic promiscuity and the mix of codes and genres
- The Ensemble/Collaborative process
- The Body as a Medium of Expression
- The Use of Improvisation (in rehearsal and performance)
- The Performer-Spectator relationship

I have described my methodology discussing each of the above principles as the foundation of my work, the first principle being the notion of Actor as Creator. Devising theatre practitioners typically recognise the fundamental role of the actor as 'creator'. In this light, my work shares many similarities with contemporary devised practices including physical theatre and autobiographical performance. However, each practice proposes different interpretations of how actors express their unique creativity and collaborate with the ensemble. In discussing my findings, I have underlined both differences and similarities with other practitioners' methodologies. First of all, what distinguishes my work from others' is its strong connection with Flaminio Scala; not only in its practice but also in its terminology. The 'Artisan Theatre' refers to my ethos; the 'Experiential Mask' relates to my work on character; the expression 'Accidental Narratives' describes my dramaturgical approach and the term 'Stage Resonances' relates to my theatrical language.

The terms 'Artisan Theatre' and 'Experiential Mask' refer to the empirical, experimental and 'experiential' nature of my practice. As Scala pointed out, 'the essence of every art lies in putting things into *practice*,' being true that '*experience* is the teacher of all things' (Scala, 1619). The devising process is therefore a *practical experience* through which actors and directors develop their craft; and where there are no specific predefined rules. The 'rules' are discovered in the rehearsal room. Actors are engaged intellectually in the discussion of the work, and practically, not only in the creative process of making the performance, but also in the definition of the devising methodology. Each production might require different training and activities according to the size of the group, the skills and experience of each performer and the specific topics of exploration.

The Artisan Theatre, rooted as it is in the tradition of popular theatre, deals with themes and issues that originate from the actors' personal life experiences. This is linked to two interconnected concepts pivotal to my practice: 'familiarity' and 'accessibility.' They refer to the content of my productions - the

people, places and events familiar to us - and the form. In my approach to characterisation, the actors' creative process begins by them accessing their autobiographical material ('the familiar') and then discovering their own style through an integration of a variety of approaches, techniques and genres. During the early stages of rehearsal – the 'unbound playfulness' phase - playfulness and openness take a pivotal role; actors improvise freely utilising their own language without any concern about technique or style.

This type of exploration led to the definition of the Experiential Mask: an alternative to the notion of Mask as Fixed-Type. I labelled it 'Experiential' not only because of its roots in the actor's life experience, but also because of the actor's experience of creating her Mask. The emphasis is again on the 'process' rather than the 'final product' – e.g. a codified 'perfected' form. Rooted in the notion of Actor as Creator, this approach celebrates each actor's uniqueness and recognises difference as an asset, including accents, dialects and languages. Multilingualism is indeed a defining feature of my work and an inheritance of Commedia dell'Arte.

My work differs from autobiographical theatre because I do not pursue authenticity. In my productions personal stories and memories are utilised purely as sources of inspiration. The relevance of my devising process is to discover something that resonates with the actor and work with that as a starting place. The actor may travel incredible distances from this starting place, so far that the original thought, memory or idea may become totally unrecognisable...even forgotten at times. Through improvisation and devising, characters and situations emerge that often do not have any resemblance to the original material. For me it is neither the autobiographical element nor the process of remembrance (how do we remember life events and subjectively piece them together) that matters, but simply how our life's events can trigger actors' imagination and creativity. Their memories are just a key into a rich reservoir of material that can be manipulated to become performative material. Through the integration of Commedia techniques actors transform 'the familiar' (autobiographical) into material for the stage; the literal and mundane becomes Grotesque, Surreal and Absurd.

Through improvisation with the Experiential Masks, stories started to emerge, by chance: the Accidental Narratives. Rather than being imposed by a written text, our stories were found 'by accident'. This approach emphasises once again the fundamental principle underpinning my practice; the notion of Actor as

Creator. Actors had a central role not only in creating their characters (the Experiential Masks) but also in determining the content of the piece and shaping the performance dramaturgy. These 'accidental narratives' consist of *actions*, to be understood not only as physical actions but all the elements on stage that have an impact on the spectators. They can be movements, gestures, facial expressions, but also text, lighting, set, objects, changes in the dynamics of the scene, tempo, rhythm and pace. The interweaving or juxtaposition of these actions during the final stages of the creative process – the montage - results in a visual dramaturgy not subordinated to a linear narrative of the single author. It is indeed the ensemble's collective endeavour. In comparison with Dario Fo or contemporary devising theatre companies as Complicite, my work put greater emphasis on characters rather than narratives. It is a *character-led* rather than a *narrative-led* theatre.

Finally, the term Stage Resonances refers to my theatrical language. Like Scala and Lehmann's post-dramatic theatre, my non-hierarchical approach to theatre making aims to stimulate the audience on a sensorial level. This type of actor-spectator connection, that I called *resonance*, challenges the pre-eminence of spoken words above other forms of communication. The theatrical event consists of sensations, feelings, thoughts and memories triggered by the actors through the use of gestures, images, sounds and words. I named Stage Resonances the web of connections taking place throughout the performance between actors and spectators.

In my performances there can be a discrepancy between the spectators' view and the performers' view. The spectator is simply invited to *enjoy* the theatrical event through the senses not necessarily *understand* it through words. Like abstract art, it is not the intellectual comprehension but the emotional and sensorial experience that determines the 'success' of the work. The efficacy of the connection between performer and spectator is related to the ability of the actor to communicate through his body. Without techniques actions and gestures are too vague and ineffective; the clarity of the communication between performers and spectators can be compromised. On the other hand, techniques can inhibit actors' creativity if introduced too soon in the creative process. I believe the purpose of actor's training is to find a balance between spontaneity and discipline to enable actors to access and explore their creativity. This relates back to one of the fundamental principles of my practice: familiarity. My training is a combination of spontaneous and instinctive responses to the stimuli received

(the familiar) *and* Commedia dell'Arte techniques (the discipline) where the pre-eminence of the body as a medium of expression is paramount.

My approach differs from physical theatre practitioners from the lineage of Meyerhold and Grotowski who put a great emphasis on a rigorous and codified actor's training. Companies like Song of the Goat or Gardzienice Theatre, train their performers to develop a very specific physical vocabulary. As a result, actors' unique physicality and expressivity is often (not always) sacrificed to conform to the 'aesthetic of the ensemble'. The need to comply with a common physical vocabulary and style often prioritises collectiveness vs. individuality. On the contrary, in my practice, actors develop their own Experiential Masks finding their own style to tell their stories: some performers utilise text, other actors don't. Some favour improvisation while others work with a very specific structure and a script. Actors' individuality is a fundamental aspect of my work.

Improvisation, an inheritance of Commedia dell'Arte and more broadly the traditions of popular theatre, has a pivotal role in my practice and is a common feature of contemporary devised theatre. I utilise improvisation both in rehearsal, as a tool to generate material, and in performance. However, the role of improvisation in Commedia has been often misinterpreted or overstated. Performers did not improvise on the impetus of the moment around a vague subject; they were fully prepared along with their fellow actors for each performance. Andrea Perrucci⁸⁹ describes the Commedia *all'Improvisa* a 'wonderful and dangerous enterprise' and technically demanding. In his *Treatise on Acting, from Memory and by Improvisation (Dell'Arte Rappresentiva, Premeditata ed all'Improviso*, 1699), he explains that actors' spontaneity on stage is acquired through exercise and practice. He polemically states that those actors who go on stage and improvise on the spot, saying whatever comes to their mind, will undoubtedly fail. 'Commedia's actors, instead, were armed with a wealth of tricks of the trade that could be easily adapted to any comic situation as well as specific dialogues or monologues written for the performance and learnt by heart'. Actors certainly had to respond quickly to their colleagues on stage, however, they always went on stage with well-rehearsed material and 'memorised repertoire' (Richards and Richards, 1990, Introduction, p. xii). Improvisation on stage was a technique that relied on a conspicuous amount of

⁸⁹ Andrea Perrucci (1651-1704) Italian writer and librettist. Author of *Dell'Arte rappresentativa Premeditata ed all'Improviso*.(1699).

rehearsed material. This is the type of improvisation I explore with my actors and it is linked to another important feature of my practice: audience-interaction and the dissolution of the boundaries between actors and spectators.

How could I have designed the project differently?

The Performers' View

I wanted to give my actors the freedom to express what mattered most to them with de-brief sessions and open questions questionnaires. They reflected on how their characters emerged in rehearsal, what happened to their body during that process and how they related to the audience through their Experiential Masks. Even if my research mainly relies on *my* observations and evaluations of the actors' creative process, their reflections were very useful in redefining my devising methodology. I think it could have been interesting to ask more detailed and precise questions about character work, Masks and the use of autobiographical material, guiding them to direct their attention to specific areas of research relevant to my thesis. However, at the beginning of the creative process the Experiential Masks or the concept of Accidental Narratives and Stage Resonances did not exist yet; they were found through practice and research. Therefore, the 'right' questions to ask to my actors became clearer only later on in the process.

This is the reason why I decided to work as a performer as well as a director. In this way I could access more easily the information I needed. That is: what Commedia's principles and techniques do I use to develop my character? At which stage of the creative process do I start integrating them into my practice? What is the relationship between autobiographical material, spontaneity and technique? Working simultaneously as an actor, a director and a researcher improved significantly my understanding of my devising methodology and more specifically its connection with Commedia dell'Arte.

As a possible development of my creative outputs, it could have been useful to integrate even more the actors' input into my thesis (discussion and analysis) not only in the definition of my methodology and performance (practice).

The Spectators' View

I presented my work in front of an audience in three occasions. Even if this thesis focusses on the actor's processes, it was useful to integrate the audience's responses into my research. This gave me the opportunity to collect

data regarding the efficacy of my devising approach and some insights on the spectators' responses. In the first showing of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015) I utilised questionnaires. This type of approach did not seem to stimulate a free expression of ideas and feelings. Therefore on a second occasion, a year later, I decided to ask the audience to respond freely on camera without any specific structure or question. Although these responses were not a critical evaluation but rather a subjective expression of appreciation, they helped me to develop a better understanding of the spectators' experience and the impact of my performances on the audience. This is when the concept of Stage Resonances started to emerge more clearly. *Video 6.13: Audience Feedback* [Time code: 25:00].

In my solo-piece I relied on my subjective perception of the audience's responses *during* the performance, rather than collecting their feedback *at the end* of the performance. I had informal conversations with many members of the audience but I did not plan a post-show talk or a Q&A. By following a traditional 'qualitative research' approach, I could have collected a sample of audience feedback to support my argument with 'tangible' data. Instead, I decided to apply Scala's principles, I took the risk of entrusting my understanding to my senses and personal experience, because 'experience is the teacher of all things'. I therefore trust that my subjective perspective is a valuable source of information to develop my practice, and deepen my understanding of my devising methodology. However, in future performances I might experiment with other approaches too; for instance, through Q&As and post-show talks; or by setting up a camera in the foyer to allow the audience to leave their impressions and thoughts on camera.

What use might this research be to future researchers/practitioners in the field?

This research offers a deeper understanding of Commedia dell'Arte; a phenomenon far more complex than commonly perceived. Commedia is more than an ancient form of comic theatre, mainly improvised and characterized by 'stock characters' (fixed-types) and traditional scenarios. As discussed in the introduction Commedia is a vast phenomenon where both scripted and improvised comedy coexisted. Throughout the centuries actors had a pivotal role in shaping and redefining it responding to the reality of *their* times. Actors today can also shape Commedia in new ways responding to the reality of *our* times.

My work aims to inspire and encourage other practitioners and researchers to integrate Scala's teaching into their practice by adopting my devising methodology in different contexts. Although, my practice is not Commedia dell'Arte, I believe that Commedia's principles are living through my work by the assistance of Scala's teaching. My study may be of value to practitioners and students interested in creating devised ensemble theatre through grotesque characterization, Commedia dell'Arte and the use of autobiographical material. Actors will have at their disposal the Experiential Mask, a new tool to explore character building.

The Future:

This work might stimulate other researchers to investigate further the use of autobiographical material and Commedia Masks. Extensive literature is available on autobiographical performance however it focuses primarily on memory and authenticity. My approach looks at how actors can borrow from life – their personal experience and memories – and transform this material for performance by experimenting with the Experiential Masks and Accidental Narratives.

Another area that could be further explored is the role of the audience in devised ensemble performance. My research focuses on the *actors' experience* rather than the *spectators' experience*. Even though I have investigated the relationship between actor and spectator, I have looked at it from the actor's perspective. In future, it could be interesting to investigate how the audience interpret and respond to my performance, how they shape the 'performance text', and how their input affects future performances. This is a very fruitful topic of analysis but certainly beyond the purpose of this thesis. The focus of attention should shift from *the performer* to *the spectator*, and from the *creative process* to *the performance*.

Even if this analysis would be material for another thesis, I can continue to develop my practical investigation by working on my one-woman show. I would like to perform it in the UK and abroad, exploring how different audiences shape the 'performance text'; and how their input affects my future work. Reprising Barba's words I see this production, and my work as a whole, as a living organism rather than a well-functioning machine; the final form never corresponds 'to a *plan* but the unforeseeable result of an *organic process*' (Barba, p.291); a collaboration between my audiences and I.

GLOSSARY:

This glossary offers an overview of terms that stemmed from my practical research, i.e. my own devising terminology, or concepts, theatrical terms or expressions whose meaning might be complex or not univocally accepted within the academic and artistic community. For the purpose of my research, I attempted to provide a definition according to my understanding of these terms and their use.

Actor-as-Creator: An actor that contributes to create original work through improvisation and devising.

Actor-as-Interpreter: An actors involved in the creative process as an interpreter of a written text (a play).

Actor's Theatre: A theatre where actors lead the creative process. The *content* of the piece and the *style* of the performance are both defined by the actors.

Accidental Narratives: This expression refers to *character-led* rather than *situation-led* narratives. This means that the narratives are 'found' at the end of the creative process rather than being the 'driving force' or 'core' of the work. The stories told in performance are 'found' by the actors 'merely by accident'. This is where the expression 'Accidental Narratives' comes from. In this type of theatre 'the progression of a story is not relevant' because is a theatre 'of actions' (Lehmann, 2006). Through improvisation and devising, the actors develop a dramaturgy that stems from a collaborative experience beyond the written text of a single author. The actors and their interactions with space and objects lead to the construction of an episodic narrative that consists 'in *actions* and in narrations merely by accident' (Scala). See Chapter 3.2: Accidental Narratives.

Archaeological Commedia: An approach to Commedia dell'Arte that aims to maintain alive the ancient form and the traditional scenarios with a style as close as possible to what they believe Commedia might have been in its Golden Age; Actors wear period costumes. Leather masks are faithfully reconstructed utilising original artefacts as a reference. Characters' posture, physicality and language

are reconstructed utilising historical documents, paintings and drawings of the time. Each Mask (e.g. *Arlecchino*, *Zanni* or *Pantalone*) has a specific code of postures and gestures and the actor has to conform to this codified language.

Artisan Theatre: It refers to my ethos: my practice's strong connection with the tradition of popular theatre. This is related the notion of theatre as craft (*Arte* in *Commedia*) and actor as craftsman/maker. Artisan Theatre is rooted in the reality of the every-day and utilises the Grotesque and the Surreal to transform the mundane into material for the stage, within the lineage of popular theatre, *Ruzante* and *Commedia dell'Arte*. In this type of approach to theatre making actors utilise personal references and material that is familiar to them. Artisan Theatre celebrates actors' uniqueness, their culture and language. One of the defining features of Artisan Theatre is the understanding of characters as 'Experiential Masks'. See Chapter 3.3: Artisan Theatre and the Experiential Mask.

Canovaccio/scenario: 'In *Commedia dell'Arte* the *canovaccio* is a simple synopsis, a technical indication of scenic content, a list of characters and the action to be accomplished by them. Sometimes together with hints about arguments and dialogues. *Scenario* is a term which came into use late in the development of the form; earlier names were, besides *canovaccio*: *centone*, *soggetto* and *commedia*.' (Rudlin, 2003)

Contemporaneity (of *Commedia dell'Arte*): the relevance of *Commedia dell'Arte* principles and techniques in theatre studies and practice today.

Conventional Boundaries: The boundaries that separate a stage area from an auditorium where the audience sits to enjoy the performance, usually in the dark.

Conventional Theatre: A wide range of performances typically characterised by the staging of plays (written drama), often with a three acts structure, on a stage clearly separated from the audience in the auditorium by a proscenium. This serves as the frame into which the audience observes the events taking place upon the stage. Characters and situations are believable and the audience is prepared to suspend their disbelief for the duration of the performance. The fictional world created on stage is realistic and often the set consists in a faithful reconstruction of the 'real' world. The actors on stage do not break the fourth wall.

Usually this type of work recognises the authority of the playwright and the director within a hierarchical structure.

Devised Theatre: A diverse range of theatre performances that have in common the creation of original pieces of theatre without a prescribed script. It is a collaborative process of theatre-making in which all artists involved explore a specific theme, event, or topic of interest and develop a performance. A devised piece may begin with a theme or an event that a group, or solo artist, wishes to explore. Its creative genesis can be anything from a picture, to a theme, to a poem, to an existing piece of dramatic or non-dramatic literature.

Dramaturgy: (*drama-ergon*) 'The work of the actions in the performance. These *actions* are anything perceived by the spectators: movements, gestures, facial expressions, but also text, lighting, set, objects, changes in the dynamics of the scene, tempo, rhythm or pace. In a performance, *actions* (that is all that which has to do with dramaturgy) are not only what is said and done, but also the sounds, the lights and the changes in space. All the relationships, all the interactions between the characters or between the characters and the lights, the sounds and the space, are actions. Everything that works directly on the spectators' attention, on their understanding, their emotions, their kinaesthesia, is an *action*.' (Barba). **Visual Dramaturgy** is a non-hierarchical theatre aesthetic, not an exclusive visually organised dramaturgy but rather one that is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic (Lehmann).

Experimental Commedia: A methodology that utilises Commedia techniques and principles in rehearsal to develop both devising and text-based theatre, leaving more freedom to the actors to develop their own characters. This approach includes an umbrella of theatre expressions with different styles and intents: from a purely 'stylistic' approach to a 'political approach.'

Experiential Masks: They are the characters in Artisan Theatre; understood as 'types' or Masks. These malleable Masks are *experiential* for two reasons: 1) they stemmed from the actors' life *experience*; and 2) each actor *experienced* the process of creating their Mask through devising. As sculptors or carpenters would transform a block of marble or a piece of wood, actors transform their

source material: their body, voice, memories and images. They are *Masks* because unlike realistic characters they do not faithfully depict ordinary people in plausible situations. Each actor, as with Commedia dell'Arte's performers, chooses specific traits and qualities observed in real people. They then put a magnifying lens to the observed world and develop 'bigger-than-life' characters. Utilising autobiographical and historical material, actors work from the 'literal' (real events, people and places) and transform it into something 'non-literal' without imposing any specific style or aesthetic. See Chapter 3.1: Artisan Theatre and the Experiential Mask.

Immersive Theatre: *This is the definition offered by Josephine Machon in 'Immersive Theatres' (2013):* The term 'immersive' is currently used widely to define a style of performance practice and applied to diverse events that seek to exploit all that is experiential in performance. Immersive events are interdisciplinary, sensory and participatory performances occurring in places outside of traditional theatre venues. The term is used to describe contemporary performance practice involving a visceral and participatory audience experience with an all-encompassing, sensual style of production aesthetic. Although heterogeneous in form, there are central features that go some way to identifying how far an event is immersive; the event should always establish an 'in-its-own-world'-ness where space, scenography, sound and duration are palpable forces that comprise this world. To allow full immersion in these worlds, some kind of 'contract for participation' is shared early on between the spectator and the artist. On entering these immersive domains, spectators are submerged in a medium that is different to the 'known' environment and can become deeply involved in the activity within that medium, all their senses engaged and manipulated. Bodies are prioritised in these worlds, possibly performing and always perceiving bodies – the latter belonging to spectators, whose direct insertion in and interaction with the world shapes and transforms potential outcomes of the event. This live, immediate interaction, the spectator's physical body responding within an imaginative environment, is a pivotal element and thus a defining feature of immersive theatre. It is in this way that the role of the spectator shifts from the usual requirements of an attendee at a theatre performance. The presence and participation of the audience member within the work ensures she or he inhabits the immersive world created. This creative agency, involving processual

interaction through the event, shapes the unique journey for each participating individual. (Machon).

Performance Text: A dramaturgy that includes the linguistic material (written text), the staging and how all these elements of the performance interact with the theatrical situation. The theatrical situation includes the space as the actual venue (architecture) but also the temporal and spacial situation; the relationship between performance and spectators and between performers and spectators.

Play: A literary work written for performance on the stage; a drama.

Recontextualised Commedia: This approach to Commedia dell'Arte utilises the traditional *canovacci* and characters in a contemporary setting. Set and costumes can vary according to the needs of each production and the leather masks are not necessarily strict reproductions of ancient models. Mask-makers are given more freedom to express their own creativity. The performance can be adapted to both indoor and outdoor venues.

Recyclable Theatre: It refers to my practice of re-using props, costumes and music already utilised in previous performances. This does not mean to use them as they were previously used but rather explore ways to make them 'fresh' and unique through a process of re-invention. See Chapter 3.3. Artisan Theatre.

Site-specific: *Due to the complexity of this term here are listed some possible definition/qualities of site-specific theatre that distinguish it from 'conventional theatre':* 'This term refers to a staging and performance conceived on the basis of a place in the real world (ergo, outside the established theatre). A large part of the work has to do with researching a place, often an unusual one that is imbued with history or permeated with atmosphere: an airplane hangar, unused factory, city neighbourhood, house or apartment. The adaptation of a text [or the creation of a devised piece] in this 'found space' throws new light on it, gives it an unsuspected power, and places the audience at an entirely different relationship to the text, the place and the purpose for being there. This new context provides a new situation and gives the performance an unusual setting of great charm and power' (Pavis, 1998 in Parson, 2010). Wilkie made a distinction between the following: '*site-specific*, a performance specifically generated from/for one selected site; *site-sympathetic*, an existing performance text physicalized in a

selected site; and *site-generic* performance generated for a series of like sites'. (Wilkie). Moreover, Rather than simply occupying an 'unusual setting', site-specific performance is adjudged to hold 'possibilities for responding to and interrogating a range of current spatial concerns, and for investigating the spatial dimension of contemporary identities', representing 'formal and aesthetic but also political choices'. Not only does the use of non-theatre venues contribute to 'an enquiry into what theatre *is and might be*', it also incorporates 'a set of productive spatial metaphors, whereby practitioners use their focus on geographical space to explore a range of theatrical, conceptual, political and virtual spaces. Thus the potentially restrictive *specificity* of the work is expanded to allow for ambiguity and multiplicity.' (Wilkie, 2008, in Parson, 2010)

Stage Resonances: The complex web of communicative processes taking place between actors and spectators in performance. The spectators' enjoyment and engagement with the performance is the result of a collection of instances where spectator and performer 'meet' for a fleeting moment and then leave each other to meet again in other moments throughout the performance. These connections are discontinuous; they might be 'interrupted' and then found again, 'recovered', many times throughout a performance. These short encounters are 'moments or recognition'. In these instances, spectators feel a sense of familiarity or belonging. The events and characters on stage *evoke* something in the audience on a sensorial and emotional level. These moments of recognition might occur during or even *after* the performance. In these instances, the symbols, images and motifs in performance leave an impression on the audience that might be 'processed' after the performance ends. Each spectator processes and interiorises these stimuli in their own unique way. See Chapter 3.3: Stage Resonances.

Text-based Theatre: In text-based theatre, the starting point for a production is the script, and the aim of the process is to realise the vision of the playwright and the director.

Total text: A complex web of connections taking place during a performance. It is a *joint text*, a text even if there is not spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and audience. It includes all the explicit and 'hidden communicative

processes' that take place between all the people involved in the live event: performers and spectators (Lehmann, 2006).

Zibaldone: In Commedia a *zibaldone* or *libro generico* is a commonplace book where actors would collect a personal repertoire of recyclable commonplaces, speeches and extracts. The actual definition of *zibaldone*, widely used since the 15th century, can be translated in English as 'hodgepodge' – meaning a collection of miscellaneous things – or a 'commonplace book'. Its definitions are: 1) a notebook containing multiple writings collected in a scattered fashion; 2) a collection of loosely connected thoughts; 3) a confusing mixture of diverse things: writings, sketches, images, objects or people.

APPENDIX 1

Flaminio Scala (1619), *Il Finto Marito* prologue, Venezia.

Original text in Italian:

Comico: Olà, olà, signore, dove andate? Non si va di costà.

Forestiero: Oh, donde?

Comico: Di qua, in malora.

Forestiero: Oh, piano; non è questo l'apparato, la scena, et il luogo dove si ha da rappresentare la Commedia?

Comico: Et quello è il luogo dove hanno a stare gli ascoltanti, e non questo: né di qui si passa.

Forestiero: Orsù, andrem d'altrove; ma che zannata è questa che si deve recitare?

Comico: O, costui è fastidioso: è *Il finto marito* di Flaminio Scala.

Forestiero: Di chi?

Comico: Dello Scala, sì, che a' suoi di ha fatto mille soggetti. Voi torcete il naso? Ché, ve ne maravigliate?

Forestiero: Sì, ch'io me ne maraviglio, perché altro è impiastrare un soggetto perché sia rappresentato all'improvviso, et altro è distendere una Commedia affettuosa e sentire un bel disteso co' suoi graziosi e ben formati periodi che udir dire "dagli lo scaldaleto", "i lazzi", "in questo", "resta", "e via" all'usanza de' comedianti. Che per mia fé, ch'io non voglio tanti urtoni come veggo che si tocca laggiù a star tra il popolo. Andiamoci con Dio, ché in ogni modo la sarà, com'io dissi, una zannata.

Comico: Oh, piano un poco, ch  lo Scala ha avuto sempre felicit  nell'inventare, che alla fine poi   l'anima et il tutto nelle commedie.

Forestiero: Io ne ho pur sentite delle sue che non mi hanno fatto maravigliare.

Comico: Troppo ci vuole a far maravigliare un par vostro, ch'al sentire tanto sa, o per lo meno se lo crede, stimandovi forse avere in voi l'idea de' componimenti scenici; che per  biasimate voi solo chi finora nelle stampe vien universalmente assai lodato. Ma non mi negherete gi  che, dove lo Scala ha portato i suoi soggetti, sempre hanno dato gusto e son piaciuti.

Forestiero:   vero, ma perch ? Perch  egli ha cercato fargli apparire con le azzioni; e le buone compagnie de' comici son quelle che, ben recitando, nobilitano i soggetti; ma quella composizione, poich'  solamente scritta sopra un foglio, s'ella non ha in s  l'arte del bene scrivere che l'accompagni, resta fredda e cade.

Comico: Dunque questa, ora recitata, piacer , perch  hanno fatto scelta de' personaggi.

Forestiero: Sta bene; ma essendo imparata a mente, se il disteso non   vago proprio e di buona lingua, non daranno in nulla.

Comico: Cotesto   vero quando con un bello e nobile encomio si vuol celebrare chi che sia, o pure narrare un fatto seguito, ma nella Commedia basta che vi sia una buona imitazione et il verisimile, e che la locuzione non sia scabrosa o barbara; anzi, che la familiare, e senza tanta arte,   la pi  propria, perch  la Commedia rappresenta azzioni comuni, e non di uomini di alta qualit ; onde l'esquisitezza gli   impropria.

Forestiero: Ben dite nel troppo; ma per imitare pi  parti et introdurre ciascuna a parlar propriamente, bisogna saperne assai, perch  non si pu  dilettere con la variazione o del bergamasco o del veneziano o del bolognese, ma bisogna con la propriet  delle parole, ancorch  non

si muti linguaggio, ben imitare; et a questo ci vuol del buono. Sì che torno a ridire che non spero molto di questa, perché ognuno val nell'arte sua.

Comico: L'arte vera del ben far le commedie credo io che sia di chi ben le rappresenta, perché se l'esperienza è maestra delle cose, ella può insegnare, a chi ha spirito di ben formare e meglio rappresentare i soggetti recitabili, il ben distenderli ancora, quando però quel tale non sia nato in Voltolina o dove si lascia l'*io* per il *mi*. Ma in che consiste, di grazia, cotant'arte?

Forestiero: Nel servare i precetti e nell'imitare il più che sia possibile.

Comico: Chi può sapere meglio i precetti dell'arte che i comici stessi? Che ogni giorno gli mettono in pratica esercitandola? E però gl'imparano dall'uso; e chi ha più la vera arte dello imitare di loro? Che non solo imitano nelli affetti e proprietà delle azioni, ma ancora, con l'introdur varie lingue, sono necessitati a procurare di sapere ottimamente imitare, non solo con la propria favella, ma anco con l'altre, perché se il veneziano parlasse fiorentino et il fiorentino bergamasco, si darebbe loro il premio con le meluzze!

Forestiero: I precetti bisogna cavarli da' buoni autori che hanno scritto le poetiche, perché l'imitazione del linguaggio poco vale, se non v'è nel modo del dire e nelle parole l'espressione dell'allegrezza o del dolore, del timore o dell'ardire; ché di questo l'oratore et il filosofo ne insegnano il mondo, e non il comico.

Comico: Tutti i precetti veramente son buoni, ma il ridurre le cose all'operazione, quello è la essenza di ogni arte o scienza.

Forestiero: Ben dicesti; ma all'operazione bisogna che preceda la regola, o vogliamo dir l'ordine, che da' precetti solamente si cava.

Comico: L'esperienza fa l'arte, perché molti atti reiterati fanno la regola, e se i precetti da essa si cavano, adunque da tali azioni si viene a

pigliar la vera norma, sì che il comico può dar regola a' compositori di commedie, ma non già quegli a questi.

Forestiero: Da quanto in qua avete voi preso la forma del sillogizzare?

Comico: La mia è logica naturale, fondata sopra la sola ragione.

Forestiero: Con questa, adunque, vi voglio combattere: l'artefice non può perfezionare l'arte sua senza la materia e gli strumenti, e se non ha fine al quale egli si indirizzi.

Comico: Ve lo concedo.

Forestiero: La materia, ora, della nostra arte è l'orazione, o vogliamo dire locuzione, gli strumenti sono i concetti et invenzioni, et il fine è l'imitare e dilettere, dal quale ne segua il frutto dell'utilità.

Comico: Bene sta.

Forestiero: Adunque, per ottenere il fine d'imitare e dilettere con giovamento, si ricercano, oltr'all'invenzioni, concetti proprii, espressivi e significanti quello che si vuole imitare, et orazione o locuzione bene ordinata, rappresentativa et espressiva, atta a mettere innanzi a gl'occhi quello che imitar si vuole, acciò che da questo ne segua il diletto e l'utile.

Comico: Chi dubita di questo?

Forestiero: Resta perciò provato che i veri precetti, cavati da chi gli sa dare, ne fanno conoscere i buoni concetti che propriamente esprimano e significano quello che imitare si vuole, et anco somministrano l'invenzioni, perché con la distinzione che ci porge il precetto che seguir si dee, differente da quello che si deve sfuggire, ci vien fatto scorgere il non buono dal buono. E l'orazione rappresentativa e le parole proprie espressive poi, ben concatenate et atte a mettere innanzi a gl'occhi per ottenere il fine d'imitare, senza le regole e

senza i precetti né imparare né usare si possano, ma né anco s'arriva a conoscerle senza i proprii documenti, i quali sono il vero fondamento.

Comico: Il vostro argumentare scolastico, se bene è con ingegno, credo che, essendo sofistico, resterà gettato a terra dalla mia naturalezza.

Forestiero: Alle mani!

Comico: Sarebbe vera la vostra proposta se noi avessimo da gli scrittori veri precetti intorno all'orazione e locuzione e modo di dire comico, come ancora de' concetti e dell'invenzioni che in quel modo di poetare usar si dee. Ma ricordatevi voi, che dovete averlo letto, che io posso aver sentito dire che il vostro Aristotile dà i precetti della Tragedia solamente, né mai dello stile comico discende a' particolari, e da Orazio non se ne ritrae cosa di sustanzia. Onde della Commedia non ce ne è altra regola, né altri precetti, che il buon uso et i buoni autori, da' quali si son cavate le forme che oggidì si costumano, essendo verissimo che le regole furon sempre cavate dall'uso, e non l'uso da quelle. E da questo avviene che molti gran litterati, e de' migliori, per non aver pratica della scena, distendano commedie con bello stile, buoni concetti e graziosi discorsi e nobili invenzioni, ma queste poi, messe su la scena, restan fredde, perché, mancando dell'imitazione del proprio, con una insipidezza e languidezza mirabile, e talora con l'inverisimile, per non dir coll'impossibile, fanno stomacare altrui, né conseguiscono perciò il fine di dilettere, e meno del giovare; e non si gli porgendo però l'attenzione, si perde la memoria non che il frutto degl'auditori. Onde i buoni concetti si conoscano dalli effetti, e non da' precetti, perché chi nega il senso (dicono quelli che sanno) ha bisogno di sentir l'effetto delle cose sensibili, e si fanno però ridire que' tali col bastone!

Per tal cagione adunque l'orazione, o locuzione ancora, e le parole sole, poca parte avranno in questo dell'imitazione, perché ogni

minimo gesto a tempo et affettuoso farà più effetto che tutta la filosofia d'Aristotile, o quanta retorica seppone Demostene e Cicerone. E che sia il vero che gl'affetti si muovono più agevolmente da' gesti che dalle parole, ciascuno che ha intelletto et anco gl'animali bruti sempre faran più caso e moverannosi più a chi alza il bastone che a chi alza la voce, perché, dice il bergamasco: "Dal dech al fach al gh'è un gran trach". E ciò avviene ancora in ogni altra cosa al senso sottoposta. Però sovvenngavi che la virtù de' sassi fece scendere quel galantuomo dal fico, e non le parole; perché in effetto alle azioni son più simili l'azioni che le narrazioni, e le commedie nell'azioni consistono propriamente et in sostanza, e nelle narrazioni per accidente. Chi adunque vorrà azioni imitare, con le azioni più se gli appresserà che con le parole, nel genere comico. E considerasi ciò ne gl'amanti, che più da una lacrimuzza, da uno sguardo, da un bacio, per non dir più, e da simili coserelle vengano dal subietto amato tirati e mossi, che dalla persuasiva di qual si voglia gran filosofo morale, che con ben ordinata scrittura, perfetti concetti, ottima locuzione et esquisite parole e migliori ragioni esorti alla virtù, persuadendo a lasciar da canto la sensualità; perché i sensi da' sensi più agevolmente vengon mossi che dalle cose che sono in astratto, accostandosi sempre il simile volentieri al suo simile.

Forestiero: Veramente voi vi portate bene, e quasi quasi ch'io mi lascio andare, e se bene avrei qual cosa da rispondere, mi contento per ora far buono il vostro detto [...].

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWS 'WHAT IS COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE?'

This appendix contains transcripts of five interviews that I hosted between 2015 and 2016 with Commedia dell'Arte practitioners and/or scholars from Italy, the UK and the US. The interviews are presented in chronological order.

Each interview is available in audio format in the links provided below. Each audio file can be found in the USB in the folder: 'APPENDIX 2: Interviews'.

Appendix Index:

- 2a. Geoff Beale <https://vimeo.com/250445397> - Password: 2a
- 2b. Laura Pasetti <https://vimeo.com/250447181> - Password: 2b
- 2c. Olly Crick <https://vimeo.com/250447939> - Password: 2c
- 2d. Paola Cavallin <https://vimeo.com/250448437> - Password: 2d
- 2e. Scott McGehee <https://vimeo.com/250448971> - Password: 2e

2a. GEOFF BEALE INTERVIEW (Ophaboom Theatre Company founder, Commedia dell'Arte Practitioner & Tutor) - London, September 2015

C: You were telling me about your approach to Commedia?

G: I was at the Desmond Jones School of Mime and Physical Theatre, which obviously had an aspect of Commedia and masks, but was also a year-long training in mime and those kind of physical theatre skills.

C: And with Ophaboom you specialised specifically in Commedia?

G: Yes, I think initially, because we were trying to explore it, we would have said that we were half mask... clown, even. Our first street show was kind of looking at the charlatans, which is a classic Commedia opening, but our first show had two long noses, a master/servant relationship and then Commedia characters that came in and were involved; and these two characters, essentially they were exiled, and so they travelled across Europe and met all these people who were more or less friendly, depending on what was going on – so it was a little bit more surreal and definitely not...

C: Not the kind of conventional scenario or anything like that?

G: No, definitely not! I suppose the other thing was, because we started in street theatre and we wanted to look at the characters, certainly our first two shows, which were Richard III (the street show) and then Romeo and Juliet - we had the idea of looking at a group of Zanni who were working as a troupe, and they were putting on – somebody had said there was money in Shakespeare, so they got a group of people together, and certainly in Richard III we imagined that it was like somebody had told the Zannis of the plot of Richard III when they were all drunk, and what they woke up and remembered the next morning was kind of the show. So it was a very simplistic version, my Zanni playing virtually every character, apart from Howard's Zanni, who played Richard III. We got a second rate younger actor in, who played Henry VII, and we had another female Zanni who played the female roles, and my character played virtually everyone else, so they basically all got killed, it being Richard III. Eventually we got fed up and then swapped sides and then joined Henry and...

So then we did Romeo and Juliet, which we thought might be successful. And that was a similar thing, but we were starting to look at much more – the street show was just half an hour, whereas with Romeo and Juliet we were looking at an hour and ten minutes, we were looking at taking down, playing with the energies, so looking at the dramatic love scenes. We were also introducing the Lovers properly – the Younger Lovers – and looking at them. That's kind of what we did with each new show – we'd look at a new Commedia character. We looked at a new Commedia character in any of our new shows. Because we went to Aurique in France, which is a big street outdoor festival, and obviously we went to Venice, and we'd seen quite a lot of Italian Commedia and quite a lot of French Commedia, and some of it was very good. But there were two things for both me and Howard that were lacking. In Italian and French Commedia limitations we noticed: One was that there seemed to be a slight assumption that everyone knew who these characters were, so they would come on and wouldn't necessarily explain, or it wouldn't be obvious in the physicality or in anything about them, who they were. There was kind of this assumption that people knew who they were.

C: Based on the fact that they think, "Oh well, everyone knows who Pantalone

is, so...”

G: That kind of coupled with the other thing, which for us was very important from day one really - the language. Because in both France and Italy there was a lot of play on language, which is fine unless you don't speak the language, in which case it can be really dull, because you don't know what the joke is. So we definitely wanted to look at how we brought the characters in, and also we wanted to make sure that you start with the physicality, the characters, then you put the emotions in, and from the emotions you get situations. The final thing is putting the words on top – the words are the icing on the cake, the words are playing around with stuff. And I don't think that happens. I think a lot of Commedia companies forget that, and therefore, because we used to take the shows abroad, we would find that the shows would change because we knew that we were not dealing with our first language, and our physicality would really heighten, and we found it fascinating that for us as performers, going abroad was when the show really started to work, and when we brought it back to this country it was so much better, having been abroad, because we'd have to be so much more physical, so much more demonstrative.

C: And probably that repeats what I gather from the information from old companies, because they had to move from city to city at a time when Italy was so fragmented that nobody understood other dialects, and when they had to move outside Italy it was the same. They found themselves inventing languages. And progressively it might have been that the masks became so huge because they had to heighten the physicality to be understood.

G: Yes. When you talk with students, people forget that when you're talking about characters and being an actor, for an audience, the first time you walk onstage, they've got to understand who you are. Particularly in Commedia, in a big market place with lots of people, you've got to make an entrance. Entrances and exits. It's fundamental.

C: So I go to the big question – and it's massive. If you had to say what Commedia is for you, because you've devoted so much of your artistic life, or let's say influenced Commedia so much – what is it to you Commedia?

G: Fundamentally I think it's an actor working with other actors, working with an

audience to have fun. And it goes back to everyone having fun, and being silly – it starts to build out from that – what kind of fun, what do I mean by fun? But essentially it is an actor working with a bunch of other actors and with the audience to have fun.

C: So what makes it different from other types of comedy – for example more clown-based comedy? I did a very beautiful clown workshop with Spy Monkey. Basically their philosophy is exactly the same – a bunch of actors, they love each other, they seem to have loads of fun, and they want to have fun with the audience - but they don't do Commedia. So?

G: There's a number of things. One, I think the masks themselves create archetypes. I think that in some way actually means that the relationship with the audience is stronger than with a company like Spy Monkey. They need to spend time creating those links with the audience, whereas in actual fact with Commedia, the audience, if you're doing it right, should be able to recognise these characters and know people like that, know these people, understand it. So then that link between the character and the actor and the audience is very strong.

C: So, in a sense you actually said something really great – in a sense the characters will be different, in the sense that presumably you create a specific Zanni for this specific production, but because it's based on an archetype, it's connected to an almost universal thing, and people might connect immediately, even on a deeper level, that creates another character.

G: It's amazing. Ninian [Ninian Kinnier-Wilson: mask maker] used to say about the Clown – I don't quite agree with him, but I like it as a thought – he says that Clown is all of the characters of Commedia in one person. I'm not sure about that, because the Clown can play shy (apart from bloody Pierrot!), and I don't think there are any shy Commedia characters. Shy is an emotion that you don't really get in Commedia - not even the Younger Lovers.

C: They pretend maybe.

G: Yes! In China in particular, they were looking to create Chinese archetypes -

particular archetypes, or at least a Chinese version of the archetype. There are two particular instances, one dealing with the Elder Lover, the First Lover: there was a Mongolian dance that one of the actors did, and I just went, "That's absolutely the First Lover!" The movements, the shapes... everyone saw it. So you're immediately thinking, "That's what there is for them". It's a particular dance, with swords and very, very, very flamboyant. Flamboyant but very structured.

The other one was one of the young actors. They kind of got the Zanni, and it was fun – again, I think a lot of people understand these characters - and then one of them put on a particular accent, and the whole room erupted, and they all went, "That's it, that's it!" And apparently it's some really rural area in China where he comes from originally, so when he did the accent the whole room just lit up, and they went, "That's the Zanni!" It was a particular accent and obviously I didn't understand what they were saying!

C: The equivalent is Gianni, who has a peculiar accent – Bergamo is a very tiny province but it's so specific, it has a very coarse, kind of rough accent. It's from the Bergamo countryside, it's not from anywhere else.

A: And Ninian again - we talk about Pulcinella, who obviously comes from Naples, and in England Ninian comes from Liverpool.

C: Ah, yes, this Liverpool/Naples connection has been made so many times.

A: This is what's happening to an audience – they're making connections. And in that way, the audience aren't having to think – they're reacting, they're emotionally responding. They're more active in that sense because they're joining in more, I think on an emotional level. In terms of Commedia, you don't want them thinking, because that stops the laughter, stops the natural instinct to laugh, if the brain becomes involved. So I would say that that's an important distinction in terms of Commedia. It's dealing with archetypes, dealing with the fundamental truth of life, which is: have sex, fall in love, get money, eat, sleep, get on with people, lie your way through life – whatever it is – but it's dealing with the fundamental concerns that frankly, I would imagine, haven't changed since the invention of money. Before then it was probably different in terms of Commedia plots and stories, but probably from the invention of money onwards

we've been doing this crazy stuff. Or the invention of love.

C: Because you mentioned the connection between Liverpool and Naples, I was wondering if you think Commedia is relevant to contemporary theatre, and why. Pedagogically we know that you teach and you see a brilliant physical training, it helps the students to do something else and be less “ego-maniac”. But I'm more interested in the performance itself. What is the place for Commedia now in contemporary theatre?

A: I think there are two things there. One is the state of contemporary theatre, which is the indoor, to a certain degree state subsidised, to a certain degree the more middle class, Guardian reading – not academic but surely -let's say- the more “high-brow” theatre. And I think Commedia's relevance there is to remind people of where the roots of theatre are. I think Commedia should be explored by more authors – this is the big thing we're talking about.

But I want to express the other side, which is the more populist, the more outdoor theatre, the Carnival, the festival-type show, and there I think Commedia still actually functions, and it functions very well, in those situations where it's allowed to flourish. Certainly in France there are a lot of festivals we've played at and they're all well attended – you're talking about 2,000 people turning up to see you – it's great, it's really nice and it's very lively and it's a very active scene, very accessible, it's very open, it's very communal. So I think there it still has a very big relevance in attracting audiences, in building audiences, in creating audiences and allowing audiences to feel they're part of something. (for popular theatre/open outdoor theatre). I think there it's not only contemporary, I think it's actually necessary. I think we still need to keep building audiences, because you get to the National Theatre, and I love it to death, but it's generally white guys with white hair, and white women with white hair, or students. But contemporary theatre is losing an audience. It's very important that Commedia brings people together...

On the actual idea of using Commedia, its influence is there in the expansion of puppetry that's coming in, the interest in making non-naturalistic theatre, the interest in rhythm and music that's coming in, and to a certain degree I think that maybe what should happen is that when you think about Commedia and

Harlequin - maybe it needs to go for a 21st century audience, we need to look at Pulcinella more, to fit with that darker side that we seem to enjoy and embrace. Punch is somebody who seems to be growing in interest for people, whereas Harlequin seems to have been stuck in pantomime.

C: Sometimes there's a bit of confusion between Commedia and pantomime.

G: Yes. It's fascinating that England, which had no Commedia tradition per se, ended up with Punch and Judy from Pulcinella and ended up with pantomimes from Commedia. Obviously they decided to take it, eat it, gorge it and then spit out a new child, something else.

C: Do you think that Commedia had a political, a subversive quality and that this is also something that is or could be present now, besides making people laugh? ...and have a stronger power to comment on society?

G: I'm sure it did. I think that in a number of ways the early roots of Commedia - within itself it was quite political and it was commenting on stuff - having women on stage obviously, and the fact that we don't have many records but we do have some, of them attacking the church. There are records of letters where it seems that where they felt safe, they would attack the church, but clearly there is no specific character.

Somebody talks about the Second Doctor. Antonio's father has three Doctors: the older, First Doctor, who's the fat one, Balanzone; then we have the Third Doctor, who is the student doctor, very young, very excited, who can also be used as a lover: he's very tense, he gabbles, everything's exciting. All three of them have the same powers of speech. The Second Doctor is kind of a lawyer, smiling, who doesn't say anything in particular - it's like they operate so you can't directly quote anything that they say: "If I were to say that on the one hand we might look at this question and look at it thoroughly with my eyes, but then some people, by looking at a question by using our ears...." That kind of thing - it's an ability to talk without saying anything, and some people say it's a lawyer, it's also possibly a politician, but some people say it also might be a cleric. It might be that that is a possibility (when they felt safe!).

From our experience, we were often quite able to say things abroad that were quite political – we equated Marine Le Pen with the Devil, Mephistopheles, down in the South of France. That got a very good reaction near Marseilles, but in Normandy half the audience booed. Sometimes comedy does that – sometimes an audience will laugh, and then realise what you've said, and some of them will get shocked. And that can come from political comment. It can come from...actually...

The other thing that is interesting, and I think here we're talking about comedy in general, and I think one of the problems with comedy in terms of politics, is that you need to create a community of people for everyone to laugh, to get that access, to feel that they can laugh, and so therefore you have to be quite general with your satire, and quite gentle, I think, with your target. So I think you can get away with the odd line.

C: So do you think Fo could do what he could because of the historical period – in a sense because the 60s and 70s in particular were so politicised and the Communist Party was so strong?

G: Yes, I think he probably could. In the same way that M6 do the same – it does vary. I still think you can, but I'm not sure there's quite such a popular back-up for it.

C: That's what reminded me because Fo had all that period we had La Commune and people were constantly in meetings, outside the factories, so there was a momentum and he managed beautifully to be a part of that and to utilise it. He came to mind because he was the first to say how strong Commedia was in being political and satirical.

G: Yes, I think we did strong satire.

C: Do you re-contextualise? Were you inventing stories, were new things coming up through devising, besides those that you've mentioned?

G: It really varied. Obviously, when you do Robin Hood you can't but be political, and I think our particular tack was about going down the environmental route.

I think the most interesting one for us in terms of that was Faustus - we were doing that during the end of the Bosnian War. We realised that war in Europe had really influenced our version of it. We had war and empires, a great big war between Zanni and Faustus [like with the 'unplanned' influence that the refugee crisis had in our work and the theme Home/Sea/Syrian lullaby...]; and when we took that to Poland, they as an audience took that show a lot more seriously than anywhere else we took it. I think it's because Mephistopheles was basically selling Faustus the ultimate capitalist dream, and in Poland, Mephistopheles became this new person who was for them coming in, personified. So we found that they were talking about stuff a lot afterwards, which was quite interesting. So I think you do contextualise.

C: Are you planning to make more Commedia shows?

G: We closed the company down with a show that we wanted to do still breathing. There was a show we wanted to do, which was a Commedia Western, just to look at archetypes in Westerns and then translate them into Commedia.

C: In Western culture that's so strong, so much so that if you play a tune by Sergio Leone, everyone knows it.

G: You've got Mexican Zannis, loads of wandering captains on horses, again there are strong women – the women that ran the bars, the prostitutes, there are lots of strong women who run the towns, you've got the mayor, you've got the money-grabbing people, you've got the crack doctors...

C: You've got the sheriff - that's a sort of Capitan-esque figure.

G: I think the Lovers would be the interesting choice, to find the correspondence with the Lovers, both the Second and the First. The First would be quite easy – some jealousy, revenge, "I've left this town, you've left this town", both of them probably gamblers or sharp shooters or something like that. For the Younger Lovers I suppose you could have farm boys... the Younger Lovers we never really thought about, but that's where we wanted to go – looking at the archetypes for Westerns in relation to Commedia and building some sort of "Yee-ha" club.

C: Ophaboom 2 people?

G: 10 years we kind used about 7 actors/actresses. A good core group.

C: But masks are so regional specific: how do you translate this in England or Sweden for instance?

G: Actors can find the physicality but experiencing in their body than then affects the voice and the equivalent can be found in the regional distinction and accent in the different area in the UK, Maybe the rhythm and pace will give an hint to the actor and then the actor will make their choices. Captain can be from anywhere. Zanni is slow; Arlecchino fast; Pulcinella cunning...Stereotype is a key to access something and then play with it to go beyond the stereotype. Archetypes are rooted in something than we recognize and know. And then they can make connections. It's about resonances ...something that echoes.

2b. LAURA PASETTI INTERVIEW (Charioteer Theatre Company Artistic Director & Commedia dell'Arte Expert) - Skype Interview, October 2015

C: What is Commedia dell'Arte for you?

L: Commedia is theatre...expression of life through archetypes, through storytelling; storytelling that becomes a body, storytelling that becomes a character then that is Commedia dell'Arte. So everybody after Commedia dell'Arte took from Commedia dell'Arte. So we have: Kantor used Commedia dell'Arte, Grotowski used Commedia dell'Arte; even Stanislavski at the end used Commedia dell'Arte. Because every time you explore the archetypes you use Commedia dell'Arte. So through the archetypes you are able to embody circumstances of life that everybody can recognize and from that point, you can reach the audience in a very effective way and you're able to communicate effectively and quickly whatever you want to do. So I think, it's a base and as training, I think it's essential for a character to do that because the character becomes really rich. You start from the archetypes and then you go deeper and then you can detach from that and make it very personal or very poetic, depending on what you want to do. It can become metaphorical but certainly, starting from the Commedia dell'Arte, from the archetype, from the code - from a specific code - from a technique, a craft, you are able to start from a very strong point. So I think it's essential for every actor to do it.

C: Okay, and for you personally, do you work with the masks?

L: I don't work with the mask now, but I will go back to work with the mask I think, not to the Commedia dell'Arte mask necessarily, but other masks; but I definitely work with archetypes and I definitely use Commedia dell'Arte in developing my own characters. We always think that especially the very funny characters are developed from Commedia dell'Arte but not necessarily, because you can find the archetypes also in the sadness, in the rage, in the anger. So in a way you're able to 'crystallize' the acting process into certain specific movements that can be repetitive ... that you can bring on stage and move them around on stage, but you start from a very definite point to start your exploration. As in theatre we do not have rules, really specific rules, something like Commedia dell'Arte can offer that; so I use them, I use them a lot. I use them, although I don't do Commedia

dell'Arte in the traditional way. I've done it, I've done shows, I brought it to the islands ...Arlecchino, Pantalone, the Dottore and so on...but I like to use them [the Masks] to open other doors and I think nowadays this is very necessary, so yea, absolutely.

C: Fantastic. Something I'm really, really interested in is the work of Tadeusz Kantor. You said that there's a connection between Commedia and the work of Kantor.

L: Yes definitely, for me, yes definitely.

C: Would you expand? What is your thought? What is the connection? Because I always thought, yes its true, what I see in Kantor's work and his approach [reminds me of Commedia], although, I have to say, I'm not at all an expert and I find it perhaps 'uncomfortable' to talk about Kantor because I feel I don't know enough. However, his characters are certainly types and I clearly recognise that. But beyond that, do you think there's even more in the link between Kantor's work and Commedia dell'Arte?

L: Well, I think there is a link because you work with archetypes as well in Kantor; you use a character which is very visual and from that point very precise but at the same time, you go very deeply in representing something that everybody can recognize in themselves, mirroring the human nature, like Commedia does; and because there's this visual aspect which is very important- and in the Commedia this is very important too - definitely linked together. Recently I worked with Andrei and Teresa Verbinski from the Kantor tradition, and I felt there was a lot of Commedia in that as well. I wasn't on stage because I was directing and I edited the dramaturgy of the script so I was a writer and a director. But I was watching the way they were developing the actors/actions and clearly you have to find, you know, the relationship with your objects, the relationships with the other people on stage in a very 'codified' way, so you have firm points to work with and I think this is very much like Commedia dell'Arte.

C: Wow, this is a very interesting point, really interesting because...- now I'm digressing from my original plan, but this is very interesting for me! - because one of the things I find very fascinating about Kantor's work is the concept of by-

objects, because they're almost...I think sometimes the way the characters relate to the objects is similar to the relationship with a mask. The actor develops a work with the object that seems to me that the object becomes a mask. So it goes beyond the actual object; the object is never a prop, it's something different; and I feel it's almost an extension on the actor ...becomes a mask with this by object, this is my digression...

L: I think this is very relevant, I hope you develop this more!

C: Yes...it is interesting that you brought it up [=Kantor and Commedia dell'Arte] because my supervisor is really interested in Kantor and keeps trying to lead me to follow that direction; not try, I mean, ...I can see there is a connection ... I feel like since I've been introduced to Kantor somehow, in my productions, he always 'sneaks in'...in one way or another. It's a very powerful work his work. So I think it might be in that direction. This is just the beginning of my second year in PhD so it's still the phase when I'm 'shaping' it, then I will have to make some decisions on what direction to take. So partly, you already answered... the other question was: Is Commedia relevant to contemporary theatre and if so, why and how? And partly..

L: Yes, yes.

C: you answered that question: both pedagogically and in terms of the universal language of Commedia. I guess that is the major point from what you told me so far. And do you think (this is something I find difficult to understand fully) it is possible to define the political or subversive role of Commedia?

L: Well, you know, Commedia was clearly developed for (over a period of) 250 years because everybody could relate to it; but unfortunately, when they went to France and started to put on stage characters that in a way were mirroring the behaviour of the king, that was really, really difficult and so Commedia dell'Arte started to be put in a corner in a way.

C: Tamed!

L: Absolutely. So I think it's very clear that with Commedia the irony and the satiric part of Commedia is very strong so you are putting on stage human nature; but putting on stage human nature requires some humour and in Commedia dell'Arte it was very clear that there was the Miser and the Miser usually was also lying, was a liar, and usually was a politician...So it's very clear the connection and I think, it's a shame that's been diminished so much at that time, but nowadays for example, it will be so easy...if you think of Italian politicians, it will be so easy to represent them on stage and in a Commedia show, because they are that type of characters, they hold so well human limitations, defects - let's put it that way - and of course politicians and people in charge don't like to be seen (as they truly are) and that's what Commedia was offering, was showing the weakness of human nature. So the peasants can laugh about it but the aristocracy didn't like that. Also they felt they were losing power...So, I think for example, a lot of comedians nowadays use Commedia dell'Arte.

C: Yes, that true. [...] I have a couple of questions that stem from this (topic). One is the connection between the Carnival and Commedia in particular in relation to politicians and the carnival tradition in Italy. We know the tradition in Italy is, for instance, the parade with massive caricatures of whoever is in power; but it seems nowadays - although I haven't been to many carnivals - it has been tamed... The carnival doesn't have that kind of biting and strong satirical, dangerous and perhaps 'edgy' quality...There're a lot of books that make the connection between Carnival and Commedia for instance Bakhtin's 'Carnavalesque culture/the Marketplace' and Commedia dell'Arte. But I've never clearly understood how far that connection goes...also in relation to the subversive quality [of Commedia].

L: Me neither, so I don't really know how to answer your question because I don't really see it so much.

C: Okay, yeah...that might be the reason!

L: I think because Carnival was also satirical, was also something to mock...in a way...mmm...I'll say it in Italian because I don't know which word is best in English - [it was a way to] '*esorcizzare*', so clearly, they were making character grotesque, exaggerated, exaggerating the behaviour, exaggerating the physical

defects of a person. So, yes, again, you create archetypes that way because when you create a frame, a model, then there are many people that can refer to it. So that's the point. But I think, there was a strong division at certain point (= division in society represented in the Carnival). And now, what is carnival now... I don't really see the point, I run away from it, usually!

C: What about the not...as far as I know there isn't any religious Mask; any Mask in Commedia that attacks the religious power.

L: Sorry, can you repeat that please?

C: Yes, because Commedia [looks at the world through] lots of 'magnifying lenses' that focus our attention on the weaknesses of humanity and the different facets of human beings [...] and either the financial power or the intellectual /academic power of the time. But there isn't any Mask that represents the religious power and I've always felt that it can be explained with the fact that it was pretty dangerous to attack the Catholic Church considering the Inquisition and the power of the Church [at that time]. But still Venice was an independent state, with autonomy from the Papal State. So I was wondering if you ever came across or you know someone, some practitioner for example, that developed a Mask to represent the religious power.

L: No.

C: So that is something like... you know...Italy is a Catholic country where the influence of the Vatican is still immense, that's something quite striking. I think that there isn't a Mask taking the piss of the Pope or...

L: No, I never came across that. I don't know ...but at the time obviously they couldn't do it; they couldn't because they would have 'finished' much earlier...so yea.

C: That's interesting, I think. And well partly I think you already answered it ...but I'm interested in discovering a bit more: how do you integrate Commedia in your work? What is your pedagogy? How do you train your actors or how you work with your company?

L: Unfortunately, I don't train actors; I don't train actors in Commedia dell'Arte but I always try to include the study of the archetypes and I certainly encourage the creation of codified forms in order to explore characters. But I think the work on the mask is very important, it is very relevant. And when I work with actors, I always try to include something that goes in that direction but I don't really teach Commedia dell'Arte, no I don't do that. I may organize courses on Commedia but I don't teach them like that.

C: Okay so you facilitate them?

[...] it seems that everything [you talked about so far] has to do specifically with character work. Is there any other side of traditional Commedia that you think informed your work? Not necessarily in relation to the work with the actors and their characters, but something that might be in relation with your directorial approach. [...] I'm thinking about staging. Can you think of anything? Because I believe Commedia can be very useful not necessarily in the work with actors and characters.

L: We use Commedia dell'Arte a lot for the rhythm. The rhythm, you know, and the jerk to the audience. That's definitely something that needs to be done. The rhythm, definitely when I do something funny or I work on comedy, then I definitely use the rhythm of Commedia dell'Arte. And I use a lot the style of Commedia referring to the audience, looking at the audience, creating a sort of clown. [Clowns] relate to the audience in the same way. So I do a lot of that actually.

C: So this open channel with the audience, this is something quite strong. Well, also I think you have already answered this part of the question like why did you get so passionate about Commedia? I suppose again it is the universality and again the work with archetypes that basically offered you the great opportunity to work.

L: Sorry can you say this again?

C: Well actually it wasn't even a question, I was just...the question was: what makes you passionate or interested in Commedia? And I suppose you partly answered it throughout the previous questions.

L: Well I think it's because of what the actor can achieve through this style that I really like it. Because there is a lot that you can achieve through this style. Free your body; be able to use your body to really represent something and give the opportunity to really work on reaction, work on rhythm, so you have to be really good in listening to what is happening on stage. I think it's immense, I don't think I would be able to work without that.

C: And how was your background? How did you come across Commedia? Was it part of your formal training?

L: yes, I've trained for three years in Commedia dell'Arte with Ferruccio Soleri, which was...which is the last Harlequin (Arlecchino) alive at the Piccolo Teatro di Milano. And I also worked in *Harlequin, Servant of Two Masters* at the Piccolo Teatro with Giorgio Strehler for three years, so that is my background.

C: Wow, that's proper school. And is there with Soleri was it a quite 'technical' approach to Commedia, I would imagine.

L: Yes, yes, Soleri is very technical and he's an amazing Harlequin but not a very good teacher because he's very rigid. You know, he's very rigid, so basically he doesn't even allow you to try if you make a tiny mistake. And I love Ferruccio enormously...he's amazing; for me he's an amazing person. He has always come to see my shows, always being in touch. But his approach is very technical and he's very, very...mmm...he believes that technique is everything. He's very firm in that, so he makes it very difficult to understand. He can be very difficult to work with him.

C: He might kill a bit of the creativity.

L: Exactly, the actor can feel that at the beginning.

2c. OLLY CRICK INTERVIEW (Commedia dell'Arte Scholar, Researcher & Actor) - Skype Interview, November 2015

C: What is Commedia for you? In a sense, what I'm trying to understand for

each practitioner is the essence of Commedia - it's a personal answer sometimes, or you can give me a more academic answer – whatever you prefer.

O: OK. Commedia is a riddle. The myth of Commedia is that there was in the Renaissance a method of performing that incorporated a whole bunch of systems which allegedly have been lost to us, including improvisation, whereby a style of theatre that was based on improvisation and masks manages to survive for 300-400 years. So there is an intellectual fascination with whether this myth is true, and interrogating this myth to find out what the actual practices were, or the specific cultural climate through which Commedia, or what we call Commedia, operates. And there is an awful lot of myth involved, which one commentator, whose name I can't remember, blames on the George Sand book, which basically said: This is what Commedia was - Pantalone, the Doctor, Brighella, Pulcinella, Arlecchino; but that wasn't based on very good scholarship – or it has been critiqued. It was based on a level of excitement.

So Commedia dell'Arte, or the search for it, has always been a mixture of rigorous academic debate and also, because the form was improvised because theatre was ephemeral, lots of attempts through enthusiasm to fill the gaps with our knowledge of professional theatre practice now. It wasn't an artistic movement; it was a pragmatic and practical movement that at various times was aligned to artistic movements. It was born in humanism, it took on mannerist, performative characteristics, it adopted masks from Venetian culture. But there are still questions: how did they improvise, why did they improvise, were they like a collective, and things like that. The thing you can't deny is that it was successful. So my intellectual pursuit, academically, is to look at it historically and to ask 'how' and 'why'; and that's my view of it.

My own research is finding out that, apart from possibly the Neapolitan Mr Punch or Pulcinella, Commedia did in fact, in its Renaissance incarnation, completely die out or change beyond recognition, so that in the 20th and 21st centuries, I think the term is first used by a French scholar called Giulia Filacanapa, who called it Neo-Commedia – which is just anything that has been recreated from scratch. And then there is another puzzle within Neo-Commedia, because it was started with the Piccolo Theatre, in Milan's *A Servant of Two Masters*, who basically used Sartori's masks to create a move-perfect theatre machine, effectively, with no

improvisation whatsoever, but the directorial and performance rigour going into making each move absolutely perfect.

C: Plus it was on a script, because it was on a Goldoni play, so it's already changed what we think is the nature of Commedia.

O: Yes it was a recreation; anything that we call Commedia that we have seen now is in fact a recreation, so any comparison between Commedia dell'Arte and Neo-Commedia is extremely problematical - not in a bad sense, but it's a question of why somebody is recreating something now, to what purpose are they doing it and where did they learn it from. The Piccolo Theatre of Milan re-invented their Arlecchino in *A Servant of Two Masters*, which was in a sense a reworking of a Goldoni play which was just called *Servant of Two Masters*, and invented a methodology of movement and acting to create it.

Then you have the Movement school of Jacques Lecoq, which uses Commedia not for its own sake, but as another way of exploring the movement potential for an actor; and there is a bit of confusion when someone sees the Piccolo Theatre of Milan and says, "I want to do that", and then they learn Commedia from Lecoq. So there are competing methodologies.

Carlo Boso is more easy to explain, because he was a long term understudy of the Piccolo Theatre of Milan for *A Servant of Two Masters*, and also worked under Giovanni Poli in one of his early Zanni shows in the sixties as well as working with Ferruccio Soleri for about three or four years on a three hander Commedia. So Carlo's work with TAG was taking all his embodied knowledge – he can do the entire Piccolo Theatre *A Servant of Two Masters* show on his own, he knows all the moves in his body. So he took that embodied knowledge and applied it to Scala scenarios. Working with Carlo, he doesn't say, "Oh do it this way", he just shows you all the moves of every single character and how you do it, because when he thinks of it, he instinctively embodies it as well.

What is Commedia? It's a puzzle, and there are various people in the 20th and 21st centuries that have attempted to actually unravel that puzzle. There are some original sources; the first people are Piccolo Theatre of Milan, Lecoq, the masks from Sartori and then Giovanni Poli, who was focussing on the Zannis, and then

there was almost a second generation of people who came out of Lecoq, who came out of people like Theatre of Milan, who then did an awful lot of teaching, and then taught other Commedia people - so there's a whole series of waves of learning and then people adapting. Geoff Beale learned his Commedia technique, before inventing his own practice, from Fava. Antonio Fava's Dad was a Pulcinella from near Naples, but Fava was also a third-year Lecoq graduate who actually did the three years of Lecoq. So there's a particular methodology that comes out of that. The company I was in, The Unfortunati, and Fortunati, both were trained by Carlo Boso.

C: So how did you learn?

O: Well I read all the books that you could, and also went to practical workshops. There's a guy called Barry Grantham, who teaches more or less Commedia ballet movement, he works with movement and he was part of the Monte Carlo Ballet as well as being a non-musical dancer, but he was a professional comic. He teaches through movement and I did lots of classes with him and thought, this is very beautiful, but why is it funny? And I went to workshops by Carlo Boso and Carlo Boso works each particular scene to create fear out of it, so there is always a hook to drag an audience in. He applies dramatic principles to the movement, so you have something worth watching – he wasn't purely visual, he managed to align the visual with life or death and those situations.

C: That's amazing! It's a massive question, and there isn't an answer, but it's nice to ask people who have been either practically or academically working for many years in different ways with the masks, because then you have all those different ways of providing really different answers – but that's the beauty of it, and also the pain!

O: It started from a very few places, from four sources, and something I'm trying to map in the people I'm interviewing is who their main trainer was, so you can say: this was the purpose of the trainer, this is what they learned, this is how they changed, and then this is how they have added something. Someone like Fabio Mangolini is very interesting because he trained De Cru and Marcel Marceau, so his movement is very good, and then he worked with Carlo Boso's directed the troupe Sclazacani for about 12 years, so his very precise movement and

movement skills were being used dramatically, as apart from in short dramas. He played the young Harlequin in *The Life and Death of les [...]* which is one of the really good Scalzacani's shows from a long time ago.

C: Do you think Commedia had a political and subversive role in the past? And today?

O: I have problems with all of this. I would say original Commedia dell'Arte, the original Italian actors, were political - but not because they meant to be. They were political because they wanted to earn a living out of acting, and this was not considered a good thing by the Church. There's a new book by an American called Natalie Crohn Schmitt called *Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala*, and she has analysed the Flaminio Scala scenarios and says they're all completely socially reactionary. She makes a very good point - she says they maintain the social order, and she criticises what she calls our modern interpretation of them as being tales of love thwarted. They are basically tales of honour, and a family's honour, being maintained. So people who try and marry outside their parents' permission are seen as being wrong, but when their parents make even bigger mistakes, the younger people cover up for them, and the younger people maintain the family's honour.

And also with Scala, the roles of the servants are not in any way as they are written in the scenarios, turning the world on its head or turning the world upside down. It's impossible to say what actually happened in performance because Scala's scenarios weren't performed as they were written, because he wrote down and added to various scenarios as a good publishing move. He only uses Harlequin a few times – Gelosi and his mates never had a Harlequin, they just had two Zannis. Whenever he puts Harlequin in, it's theorised that Harlequin was popular in France so he stuck in Harlequin in order to sell a few copies.

But why it was political is because the Church couldn't remove them because the Commedia companies put themselves under the protection of local Dukes, such as the Dukes of Mantova and Ferrara. The Church would probably attack a small troupe that didn't have protectors, but the Church wouldn't attack someone who was under the protection of someone like the Duke of Mantova. So the Commedia companies and their performances were spreading a humanistic ideal under the protection of the secular Dukes - so they weren't trying to be political, but they

were promoting humanism just by their existence.

Now, I think if you look at the southern tradition of Commedia, if you look at the relationship between Punch and the Spanish Captain, there's a very different dynamic going on, because Naples was always being invaded - so it's theorised, again, that there was a lot more political comment that Pulcinella might have used.

Certainly in times of carnival there would have been the possibility of more comment, with the license given to carnival and mask, but in Peter Jordan's book *The Venetian Origins of the Commedia Dell'Arte*, available through Routledge - and Peter also used to perform for TAG - he makes the point that a lot of the very big events in Venetian carnival were sponsored by the Doge or sponsored by aristocrats, so within this time of excess and party, there was also an equal measure of social control being put in place to stop things getting out of hand. So that's one thing. If a bunch of actors were being overtly political and opposing something, they would be chopped down pretty quickly - so if you upset the Duke, the Duke had you executed. In one book that I read, it basically said that there was an unspoken agreement that you never created the character of a cleric onstage.

The putting of women onstage historically is problematical, and I think you have to look at it in two ways: one is that there were indeed a few educated women who were able to shine on a stage. Isabella Andreini is the prime example, and her writings show evidence of great knowledge of oratory and rhetoric, which was one of the five branches of the humanist education. I've done some research, and even if, as a woman, you couldn't go to school, if you could read there were a lot of pamphlets and text books of rhetoric and oratory available, not in Latin, in the native languages in England, in Italy and France. So you can't say that Isabella was trained in rhetoric but you can say that as a wealthy daughter she probably had access to that level of learning. Also the first leading lady of the Gelosi, a woman called Vittoria Armani, was known as a good orator. There was certainly a very high level of training amongst some of the actresses, in terms of social skills, such as singing and dancing. Whether this entirely came from the large courtesan class in Venice we don't know – there are quite a few American textbooks that have foregrounded feminist theory in this, and said that this is an

early example of feminism; or you could equally say that it is an example of the monetisation of sex: sex sells, let's put women onstage. So it's very hard to tell the difference, it's very hard to actually make a conclusion. You could take several positions on this one.

In terms of sexual politics it was revolutionary to have women onstage, I guess, but at the same time it's just good business practice as well, on a very base level. I think Drusiano Martinelli and his brother brought a troupe to England a few times, and apparently Elizabeth I didn't like seeing women onstage - whether the women were more pretty than her or they were just Italian actresses being rude onstage, because that's all you could do in a foreign language, is impossible to say, but it didn't catch on in England until after the Restoration, until after we'd had our Civil War and after we'd had our Commonwealth and our Republic. Women only came onstage when Charles II got the throne back.

The other problem I have with this, and this is on-going investigation – a lot of people I've interviewed have been very firm about the idea that, because of the implicit nature of comedy, Commedia dell' Arte is, or should be - which is different - very good at poking fun at authority. Now, a clown or a Fool is very good at that, because a Fool will pretend to be a King, and then for the purpose of getting laughs out of an audience will show that the King is an idiot, or Berlusconi is an idiot, or David Cameron is an idiot, and a lot of left wing people think that that is one of the purposes of clowning – to bring down authority. I think there is a distinction between Authority with a capital A, which is The Authority, the enemy; and authority with a small a, which is just all people who are pompous idiots above us, which is a non-revolutionary thing. If clowns were really revolutionary, the powers that be would have killed them, as Stalin did. So I find it problematical when people say that clowns or the Zannis are essentially the agency of revolution. They could be, but they have to purpose it; in order for it to be obvious, it has to be deliberately so, and actually being a revolutionary kind of goes against the purpose of being a professional actor. You can criticise the government if you're Ian McKellen with tons and tons of money behind you, you can criticise the sexual politics if you're Patrick Stewart with lots of Royal Shakespeare Company and Star Trek behind you. You can afford to and it isn't going to affect your work. So I'm curious as to whether the overtly political nature of a lot of fooling or clowning is an academic obsession, rather than reality.

C: And in that, where do you place Dario Fo and the idea of the jesters? He placed the jesters in two categories, the ones that were under the King, that were of course pleasing him, but there were the others that really risked their lives and often lost their lives, it seems...

O: Well, Dario Fo is not Commedia, but he's doing it overtly – he's actually making a point deliberately, and that is what he does. He is having a go at Authority with a capital A, as apart from all clowns doing it. Clown is having a go at authority, Dario Fo is having a go at the Government; he has a political point of view which he uses, he is a Gramscian, he believes that there are localised and national manifestations of Communism and socialism, so he is an Italian and he is a Communist, or he is an Italian and he is a socialist.

The issue with Dario Fo, which probably disproves my worries, is that while attacking the right from the left, using clowning or fooling as his main mechanism, sometimes people of the left have accused him of attacking them as well – so the agency of the clown is to debunk all authority, or else it's to satirise a particular aspect of authority. There's one of his plays, which isn't available in English, called *Seventh Commandment: Steal a Little Less*. There's a translation in English of his complaint about the audience, that they found it too funny so they missed the political point. I think he was trying to set the Italian State up as a metaphor of a graveyard, and people were trying to make money out of this graveyard by selling it or repossessing it or selling shares in it and things, and Franca Rame played the woman who looked after or was supposed to tend all the graves in the graveyard.

Dario Fo is being political and I have no problem with that, because that is what he intends to do, but when a lot of academics say that there is always an agency of the political in all fooling and clowning, you have to look at what the purpose behind it is. And a lot of these political comments about the nature of fooling and Commedia need to be examined further, because they come from clowning or fool theory and if you're looking at a Commedia troupe, are you looking at the whole troupe being the agency of fooling, or are you looking at just specific masks within it being the agencies of fooling? Because you have the agencies of authority and power within a troupe and you also have the agencies of idiocy and

fooling. So I think with Commedia you have a much greater range of possibilities, other than just a master and a clown - you have different levels of society; you have different ways of looking at it. Carlo Boso says you always get a happy ending when society doesn't change, but it's ironic. Everybody oppresses the servants, the servants fight back, the servants lose, but it's a happy ending! So that's making a political point, but in terms of looking for proof...has a Commedia play ever changed the world, or caused a revolution, or unseated one single corrupt Italian Member of Parliament? I don't think so. The danger is that you can see Commedia dell'Arte as a commodified political tool; it's a safe political thing. That isn't what I want it to be.

I'm looking at Bertolt Brecht at the moment and I'm looking at *Herr Puntila and his Man Matti* and also *Mann ist Mann* as being early comedies, and I'm looking at whether, within neo-Commedia, the dramaturgic framework hasn't been fully explored yet, and whether in the contrasting roles within a Commedia you can, as Brecht would have suggested, embody dialectics more, so that the whole thing becomes more overtly political the more you make your dialectical questions, or the more you make your dialectics more obvious to an audience. What's interesting is that I'm reading about *Herr Puntila and his Man Matti*, and in one American edition of Brecht on folk plays he says, "I've no idea how to perform Herr Puntila, probably in a style like the Commedia dell'Arte". And there's an English critic called John Willett who has removed that statement from about three or four translations of Brecht, and it only exists in one American one. So I'm examining *Herr Puntila and his Man Matti* as a comedy that embodies dialectics as a possible future model for a neo-Commedia dramaturgy, as a way of enhancing the politics or the contemporary relevance of some of the roles of some of the characters. Credit me if you use it!

C: Was there any intention to be in any way political or commenting on society, consciously or not, in your practice?

O: So far, no. With my last company, which was the fabulous Old Spot Theatre, we were steering clear of politics. We were trying to entertain a very wide range of possible audience members in village halls within Gloucestershire. Some bits of Gloucestershire are very rich and very moneyed and very Conservative, and some bits are very down at heel and broke and don't vote Tory. We were looking at a framework that interrogated the human spirit in a folkloric and local way,

rather than in a political way, so we upped the comedy and the folkloric elements. We foregrounded those rather than the class elements, and if we introduced a character like a king, we made sure they had some comic traits or comic character “defect” that would endear them to an audience as well - so we had no real bad guys. We had idiots who would eventually come round to our way, whether in authority or not. We were working in a professional environment, so we were trying to entertain all possible audiences.

With my performance research in Ormskirk, in our next show we are going to look at a modern Commedia on a Dario Fo model. The show's going to be called *Frack Off*, and it's going to be a farce involving twins, and police spying on a village that's trying to keep fracking developers out, and we're going to set a comic farce structure over that particular power battle to try to gain access to drilling rights in a particular village. We're going to do that play and see how popular that play is, see how much we can sell that.

C: Is Commedia relevant to contemporary theatre, and can Commedia today, used in the wide sense, be political; can it have relevance?

O: I think it can – you have to use something like Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as a model. I think Commedia can be politically relevant today, but you have to look at Brecht's historicisation; so what the audience sees is this nice bunch of ancient characters from our past in masks and pretty costumes, and we feel safe to watch them because of the historical distance between us; but then we find that they are talking about thousands of immigrants drowning in the rivers or trying to get into Venice, something like that, and we'll make a comedy out of that. So people will realise that we are using the historical distance to get people to think about modern or contemporary issues.

That's the point of view that Carlo Boso always takes, that a Commedia dell'Arte story in old-fashioned costume should always be a parable, in a Brechtian sense. And in fact Giorgio Strehler had a few meetings with Brecht during the early years of *The Servant of Two Masters*, and after those conversations he created a whole new part of the play, which was the actors in role outside the play. So Giorgio Strehler thought that Brecht and Commedia would go together. What's very interesting is the only character who didn't have two roles in the play [...] was the

character of Harlequin, who was the same outside and inside the play - so that's like, "Whoa, what's he trying to say here?" I don't know because I haven't seen that particular version of it.

So you can do a modern political, but you have to make sure that at some point the audience gets the parable. But as soon as you mention any modern words it spoils the magic "if", it spoils the parable.

C: There is certainly, for me at least, a pedagogical value in Commedia, in the sense that I find it extremely useful as a training for actors; but I'm intrigued to explore the other side, let's call it the 'performative value': how can it be so powerful today, so interesting today? Pedagogically there's no doubt that it works really well, but it's also about bringing onstage something that is really relevant and strong and powerful. What is the performance value? Do you think that there is still space for masks as they are: the masks of Arlecchino, Pantalone and Pulcinella?

O: It depends on your purpose. With Old Spot Theatre we created something that we called *Theatre From the Merry England That Never Was*. We created something that looked like Shakespeare but was funny, as a way of making people think that they went to real proper old-fashioned theatre but had a good laugh. The best response we ever got from it was someone who actually said, "You're like Shakespeare, but funny." So in terms of a dramaturgical frame that still has a lot of exploration to be done within it for contemporary performance, I think it is still relevant. I think it's been slightly trumped by immersive and interactive theatre and burlesque and things like that, as the new most exciting thing, but it's still a form that can have burlesque and satire and parody within it, and yet have a story line.

If you start to examine Commedia dell'Arte scenarios, you will see a three-act comic structure that you can apply to a sitcom, you can apply it to all sorts of things. If you look at the physical skills of the Zannis, you're looking at clowning, the late Rik Mayall and Ade Edmondson in *Bottom*, you're looking at vile slapstick - but the thing that is alien to the English, which is becoming my main focus of research, is that Commedia is a form that encompasses all the dramatic possibilities of unmasked characters with all the dramatic possibilities of masked

characters, and the performance rules or the performative experience for an audience are different from a masked character and an unmasked character. I know that a lot of trainers say that you must perform the unmasked characters as if they're masks, but the starting point of this current bout of research is that an unmasked character exists within the dramatic world, and they carry the storyline and the drama and the tension which will maintain an audience's interest over a period of time, say an hour and a half. Masked characters are more energetic, and they're more immediate, and a masked character is quite capable of getting off the stage and into the audience without breaking the audience's belief in it as an organic unit. But once you have a masked Arlecchino loose in the audience, you have something happening in real time.

This is an extreme example: on stage you would have an unmasked character maintaining a dramatic reality. In the audience or on the edge of the stage you would have a masked character maintaining a level of immediate time: there is a wild animal in the audience, someone has let loose a pig or a small dog or a monkey in the audience.

What Commedia has, therefore, which I don't think has been explored, is a range of meta-theatrical possibilities of levels of reality that an audience immediately perceives and understands, but which is quite complicated to describe, in terms of finding the right level of academic words to describe it. A masked character can be in the dramatic action or it can be out of the dramatic action; he can be in the dramatic action and talking to the audience about his master, so he's stepping out of the dramatic action; he can be talking about the actor who plays his master; and this is all contained within the dramaturgic frame of the Commedia. This must have been going on forever. One of the Prologues of Colombina: "Yes, yes, I'm really angry", is in fact talking directly to an audience, insulting the actors who are playing the roles, and asking for a real live member of the audience to come and rescue her from this life of misery. And if you examine that as a meta-theatrical item, she's talking as herself, or is she performing an aspect of herself; is this Colombina speaking, or is this the actress speaking? So the audience are asking: do I really stand a chance with that beautiful little actress, or is this bullshit? Are all the actors such arseholes?

So there's a whole range of meta-theatrical things which are going on in

Commedia which may have political aspects, but it also means that you're creating a multi-level world. It isn't a story from the past; it isn't about masks making you move more. A Mask has a different relationship to the audience than an actor does – the story creates a different level of expectation in the audience than a Mask stealing someone's handbag, than Arlecchino chatting someone up in the front row. I think that that, in terms of performativity, even though it hasn't been used yet, if we can provide a theoretical basis to describe it, has all the potential levels of reality that exist within a Commedia dell'Arte show.

C: It's a big discussion but it's interesting that then after Goldoni's reform and then the 19th century...

O: It all began to die out; it began to become much safer.

C: Yes, much safer, with the fourth wall and everything. And then progressively the rediscovery of ancient forms in the 20th century; and the meta-theatricality that for instance Pirandello talks about..

O: Well there are more levels of meta-theatricality in Commedia than there are in Pirandello, and it actually makes Gozzi a lot more of an interesting character, because he was text and then improvisation, and he liked fairy stories, so these stories are ones that the audience don't believe in literally, they are ones that we believe in imaginatively. So the dramatic storyline is another level of reality, it's a further leap of the imagination that Goldoni was asking us to make.

That argument's long gone and they are both dead, but there are certain elements in Gozzi when he was probably aware... we're only beginning to have terms like "levels of meta-theatrical engagement" now, so we can be conscious of the way this process works, and if we can be conscious of the way the process works, we can improve it and actually be more conscious of its use, and that's what I'm interested in.

These are things the audience understands immediately. We had a point in one of our Old Spot shows when somebody was fleeing from the police, was taken up by an acting troupe within the show and forced to perform the role of an actress in front of the chief of police, so there are three levels of disguise going on. The chief of police was so pleased with this woman's acting – she was acting

Scaramouche – that he then employed Scaramouche as his bodyguard. But also, when they have to put on this play for the chief of police, the chief of police comes and sits in the audience, so suddenly the audience becomes implicated in the play. I was just thinking that this was funny, but actually what it is doing is exploring all the levels of reality, all the relationships you can have within it. It's something the audience understands implicitly and instinctively, but we're almost struggling to find the vocabulary to say that Harlequin's operating in this particular world or level, and then he moves to this particular level, and the dramatic strengths of this particular level are this. That's what I'm researching at the moment.

C: Why did you get so passionate about Commedia? Did you fall in love with something that you saw? Did it come progressively by practicing? Was it more intellectual?

O: I had heard about it at university when I was about 20 years old, and it just sounded interesting – but I couldn't find out any more about it because it was this weird, obscure thing. You had to go to France to study and I couldn't do that. So it was just a thing that was in the back of my mind for ages, and then I met Barry Grantham teaching it in London, so it started with him doing the movement thing and going, well this is only a bit of what it was promised to be like, this is all the movement and the pretty stuff; where's its drama? And then in 1983 I went with some friends to the first International Commedia dell'Arte Festival in the Val de Marne, and we saw TAG Teatro de Venice doing *The False Magnifico*, and it was like, "Yes, OK, that's it, that's what I want to do, that's fantastic!" A three hour show, and within the first ten minutes the audience is on their seat cheering! It was when Carlo Boso directed *Il Falso Magnifico* with TAG Teatro di Venezia.

C: That was the moment.

O: Yes that was it. All other theatre, except for Peter Brooks, was boring after that.

C: And then from there?

O: I worked with some English Commedia actors...I stopped and became a

street performer, and ended up teaching at some drama schools, Commedia in London, I worked in a circus school in Bristol, and then stopped all that and then taught drama in a school for 10 years as a job when the children were young, and then started a theatre company locally when we were in the middle of rural nowhere in Gloucestershire, just to create some interest, but then found that people started to really like it, so we kept going.

C: So when you taught drama, not only Commedia – a wide range of different types?

O: Generally comedy, or generally physical or 'comically-infected'. The big productions I've worked on with students – we did *The Comedy of Errors*, we did *Servant of Two Masters*, we did Peter Brooks' *Conference of the Birds*, we did the *Ubu* plays, we did a Commedia tour with further education students for seven years. We found that Commedia is very good for teenagers because it allows them to go over the top and be mad and rude, but they hate performing to their friends because it's embarrassing. So we took them to colleges to perform to people of their own age range, away from their friends, and the first year we did that we had three bookings, and the last time we did it with that college we had a three-week tour with the other colleges within a 150-mile radius. The students love doing it because they were being dangerous and mad and silly, and also they were learning how to act. So it works for that particular age range.

One of the things that made it go "click" for me is that it isn't about movement, but yet the thing you remember is the movement of the comedy – so what is it behind all that actually that fuels it? Ninian Kinnear-Wilson and I were both impressed about every single workshop we'd done with Carlo Boso – I'd done about three or four, and Ninian had done about six or seven, he'd done lots, he'd been to Avignon and to Notre Dame and all sorts of places with Carlo, because Carlo really liked him as an actor. We'd be going, "How the fuck does Carlo manage to write so many good shows? He's got four groups of twenty people in a workshop, and he manages to write four astonishingly good shows for all these people – how the hell does he do it? He must have a system." So we basically took all the shows apart and went, "Oh yes, it's just the first act, second act, third act." There's a particular process that happens within each one: introduction, complication and disaster, further complication and disaster and then ironic resolution. That's the overall structure, and the individual story is that in each

scene you bring each character face to face with the thing that it loves most or hates most. And then that is the dramatic impulse that pushes the actor or the mask into extreme movement. So part of the structure of the Commedia play is that each scene is designed to get the best out of each of the masks, or the best out of each one of the actors playing the masks.

He's refined that even more now, he's got a dramaturgy that goes: each scene is three minutes long, in each scene three bad things must happen to each character, and there must be three events in each three minutes. An event could be a fight, it could be a murder, it could be a song, it could be an explosion, but there must be three events, so every three minutes you get three funny events, and then it's the next scene. It's a bit like a 'Commedia machine', but if it works, it's good.

2d. PAOLA CAVALLIN INTERVIEW (Commedia dell'Arte Expert, Actress & Director) - Skype Interview, November 2015

C: What is Commedia dell'Arte for you?

P: Commedia dell'Arte for me is theatre, I'd say it's what theatre should be – it's physical...It's not text-based, yet there is text, but there is also the body, there are expressions, there are different languages, so people can experience that [theatre] in many different ways. It's not just text - some theatre nowadays is a bit like a radio play. So for me Commedia is theatre, that's what I love about theatre.

C: OK, excellent. Do you think that Commedia had a political and subversive role in the past? And nowadays? I know that there is a lot of academic discussion but of course [we cannot know for certain] because it wasn't documented through film and we have less written information than, let's say, Shakespearean plays and written drama. However, there's always been this discussion about Commedia having a subversive quality or being critical about the Power (=the Establishment), either a financial power or intellectual. If you think Commedia was subversive and you had to underline why you think it was subversive: what would you say?

P: Well, I'm not really sure it was...first of all actors had to live on their work, so they were quite careful not to mock the religious class, or their patrons [...] I mean it's comical, ...maybe a little bit satirical, in particular certain figures like the Academic; but subversive...I'm not sure about that. The intention was to mock certain characters, to have fun, to entertain people, but I'm not sure that had any political or subversive intention at all.

C: Plus, I guess because Commedia developed for such a long period of time in so many different forms, probably some troupes became famous and travelled across European courts and maybe were quite tamed. And then you had other troupes that were more like street performers, so I suppose there are different facets or 'types of troupes'.

P: Yes, maybe you had street performers like the buffoons that were very political and very challenging of the authorities, you know; and others were more

entertaining. For what I know, the Commedia I know, subversive would be too big a word.

C: And you studied in Venice. Was it only practical, or was there also an academic or historiographical part of your course where you studied where it was born and how?

P: No, in Venice my school [the Avogaria] was just practical.

C: Do you think, from your own knowledge and experience and whatever you've heard, that there is a connection between the Carnival and Commedia (Bakhtin's theory of the Carnavalesque culture)? Any connection between Commedia's use of masks and outdoor performances and the same features found in the Carnival? Do you think there is a connection or not? [...] Well, I'm asking you this because I don't know and there seems to be different perspectives and opinions. I don't have an answer.

P: Yes, I read a lot about that; and I don't think there was a connection historically speaking. But for instance even in the school [the Avogaria in Venice] you perform during the Carnival time because that's the opportunity nowadays. But I don't think in the past it was connected to it. Commedia was theatre. There was a show ...and [they would perform] all year round whenever it was possible for them to perform. It wasn't strictly connected to the Carnival period.

C: Not even the connection with masks? Because the presence of masks hiding people's real identity seems a connection. [...] So you think that Commedia masks - *Zanni*, *Pantalone* and all the other Masks - have an independent development? Or is there some connection between Commedia masks and the Venetian masks and the Carnival masks?

P: No, I think the Commedia comes from the influence of the ancient Roman, and ancient Greek [farces], it comes from those ancient traditions. I see Commedia dell'Arte as a form of theatre, and the Carnival as a period when everyone goes out and all the rules are subverted, and everyone has fun. For me, Commedia dell'Arte is a form of theatre, that practically has been mixed up - for instance in Venice when they rediscovered carnival, and carnival became

something even for adults, but that was back in the early 80s or even the late 70s it became a kind of entertainment. But I don't think there is any connection [with Commedia]... Yes, there is the mask element, but the Venetians used the masks for many social occasions, to disguise themselves for instance, so the mask was a part of their social life. And when there was *la peste* (the plague), they had the long mask to protect themselves from infections. So they had masks with different functions. *La Bauta*, for example, that they used to hide really.

C: To use it as a disguise.

P: Yes. The *Repubblica di Venezia, la Serenissima*...had lots of secrets services...and hidden secrets and tunnels and spies and all that. The government...*Il Governo dei Dieci*, they were quite scary...and they had secret services there. Masks were part of that, part of the social life of the Venetians.

C: Yes, interesting. And do you think in some ways...I'll ask you this [question] because I think it could be interesting specifically for your practice. For example, my PhD is not about Commedia dell'Arte as such and the use of masks in performance, but about the legacy of Commedia dell'Arte. I'm interested in discovering how we can use Commedia in contemporary theatre. Certainly there are two major strands: one it's the pedagogical aspect – because it is definitely an incredible training for any actor; and the other aspect is its potential as a 'performative tool' ...the principles and technique of Commedia; for example audience interaction, work on rhythm, body expression, dexterity and precision etc...But we can explore that later. For you I have a specific question related to the role of women on stage. How do you see the role of women in Commedia? I find it interesting that many books/scholars say that it is the first time in history that we see female characters played by women; and it's interesting that it happened in Italy, of all places – so what do you think about that?

P: Yes, that's what I also read in the history books...women joined in and started to perform; apparently also because they were travelling a lot and there were families, so women joined in. It seems like...maybe the audience really liked to see women on stage, so it became really popular. We're not sure really. I don't know...I mean, maybe it is like that, but also I was wondering: is it really possible that there has never been a female buffoon? Never a female street performer in

the Middle Ages? We have proof of men, but that doesn't mean that women did not perform back then too just because we don't have proof that there were women! We know how the 'history of women' has always been erased and forgotten; it did not pass on. Men tend to remember, you know, what men do, not what women do! Only women tend to (re)discover women writers or artists who had been forgotten! [...] I recently saw Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's sister. Basically it has come out that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, when he was very young, used to tour with his sister, and she was a very talented musician [...] and at a certain point their father decided to sacrifice her because it would have been better for her to stop touring at a certain age and dedicate herself to future marriage and so on. Apparently she was even more talented and esteemed than her brother, but he had the opportunity to keep going while she had to stop. Apparently there are letters written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to his sister saying, "Oh, you're so talented, you should [...]". So, basically there was this talented woman who was 'sacrificed', but we didn't even know that.

It's possible that maybe after a period of time women came back on stage, maybe there was a period when they weren't on stage, but it doesn't convince me. It does not convince me because if you think that in the Middle Ages women, for instance, were able to inherit, so they had the possibility of economic independence - so maybe that means that they would have been able to run their own business. So if they were able to run their own business - and acting is a business - so maybe they were able to tour. We don't see the Middle Ages as a very progressive period, but maybe it wasn't like that. That's what the history books say... but who writes the history books anyway?

C: I agree completely – we have such a biased and one-sided perspective [of our history]. There was a beautiful documentary called *The Ascent of Women*. It was fantastic. A British researcher - a woman - was tracing the history of women...actually the history that hasn't been told, and how many incredible female artists and thinkers and politicians there have been throughout history; and in fact, the first poet ever, of all time, who wrote on clay tablets, was a woman, not a man. The first poet ever in the history of humanity was a woman, and I've never studied that in my history books when I was growing up!

P: The first play was written by a woman – that German nun, I can't remember

her name (*Hildegard of Bingen?*). That's how it is. I don't know if that's true, that some women went on stage with the Commedia dell'Arte.

C: It might be possible in that period, maybe for practical reasons. It makes complete sense, with the family and stuff, that there were maybe more women than before and therefore that came through history – it wasn't filtered.

P: Yes, I think women's history has always been erased. Think of [visual] artists – so many female painters who are not remembered. They are remembered when they are alive, maybe they are very popular [in that moment], but then after a few generations they are forgotten.

C: So true. Back to Commedia. Do you think then that Commedia is relevant to contemporary theatre, and if so, why and how? It could be related to the way you use it; you can choose to talk about how you use it in terms of pedagogy, so in terms of teaching, but also in terms of performance or character work. What do you think is the role of Commedia, if you think it's still useful or relevant to contemporary theatre?

P: I think it's very relevant, to be honest, and it's very undervalued. It's relevant in many ways. We've talked about the training: it's [undoubtedly] an amazing tool. But also it's relevant because we are so used to an acting [style] that is psychological, naturalistic, while with the Commedia we give space to the imagination for an audience; and it's a theatre for the actor, it's created for the actor, it's based on the actor. And the rest...well, what the actor creates has to be inferred by the audience, so it gives that space that activates the mind of the audience. Quite often the kind of acting we're used to, which is psychological, naturalistic, Lee Strasberg...bla bla bla...doesn't give that space. So in that sense I think Commedia dell'Arte as a form of theatre, as a theatrical language can be subversive *now*; in that sense it can be very, very relevant today; as a different form of theatre. Because of its 'language': a theatrical language that leaves that 'space' for the audience: the space of the imagination.

C: So more democratic: less 'spoon feeding' and more active participation of the audience. [...] But it can also be satirical? Can Commedia comment on society?

P: Yes. If you look at the old *canovacci*, the themes are always the same; they reflect the taste of the audience of that time – e.g. mockery of old age, the relationship between rich and poor, bosses and the astute servants. But it's like a structure (a template) that you can take and re-write or re-create and transform them and 'speak' to a contemporary audience nowadays. But I don't know what could happen if you gave a proper, serious Commedia dell'Arte training to a group of actors...with all the elements of contemporary theatre and see what happens...well, I did...with *Modern Times*, but it was just the beginning of it. Who knows what it could have been...I mean, it's a theatrical language that should not die, shouldn't disappear. But I don't know how it could...But if you look at Dario Fo for instance [...] Dario Fo and Franca Rame created their own theatre but their work is rooted in that: in Commedia. [...] Franca Rame comes of a family of *teatranti*, she has the roots in Commedia because of her family and she brought some *canovacci* from her family too that they then developed...So yes Commedia could have a very important role in contemporary theatre, it could, but who knows...

C: Do you think that there are other legacies of Commedia (not only in Italy). There are so many different ways of interpreting Commedia. Different histories, different developments of Commedia; for instance in France is perhaps Lecoq...did you come across other ways to interpret Commedia [outside Italy]? For instance we often talk about the way it has been interpreted here in the UK [Pantomime-influence]...so do you think Commedia is culturally specific or universal?

P: Characters are easily understood everywhere. For instance when I went to South Africa they immediately understood it. I did very brief workshops in Commedia dell'Arte in remote places in South Africa and people picked it up immediately. The traditional Masks were immediately understood: the captain, Pantalone, the pompous Doctor etc... And for instance also in Balinese theatre there are some similar characters – for instance Old Man, Masters and Servants etc...So I think it speaks to different cultures, definitely. Universal: I don't know. In terms of legacy: yes France certainly is the first that comes to mind. There are lots of companies also very famous and popular that were influenced by Commedia. Here (the UK) Commedia has been interpreted in an odd way. You know, Shakespeare was certainly influenced by Commedia: for instance *Romeo*

and Juliet – I've told you before - is inspired by the *canovaccio* of *La Finta Morta*. It's not by chance that he set so many comedies in Italy. Definitely there is a legacy. But then people interpret it in their own way. I don't know about other countries to be honest.

C: [...] How do you integrate your Commedia background in your own shows and performances? For my research the most interesting thing is to discover how practitioners/performers like you utilise Commedia in their practice. [...] How did Commedia informed your work. What do you take from your training?

P: Interestingly I was not aware of that. Sometimes you do things you are not aware of. But I have been told by English people that – being kind of outsiders could see better certain aspects - ...I have been told that the clarity of my movements and the way I move definitely comes from Commedia dell'Arte. I've never thought that ...but clearly some training obviously you can't [forget it]. It's more about the physicality, the acting. You know the clarity of the space; so it's about the training what it gave me. Commedia dell'Arte gave me as a tool the ability to...the awareness: I don't do many little [unnecessary] movements; I just do the movements that are relevant...the economical aspect.

C: Yes! Exactly. Dario Fo talks extensively of the 'economy of gesture'. In *// Manuale Minimo dell'Attore* talks of the 'inutile gesticolare' [...]. Finally, why did you get interested in/passionate about Commedia?

P: To be honest it happened just by chance! Because I was in Venice and that (the Avogaria) was the only drama school available. I went when I was 17...basically everyone was going there. If you were a bit alternative, Avogaria was the only school of theatre. Since I was in primary school Commedia dell'Arte was present in my life. We made little puppets with, you know, *Arlecchino*, *Pantalone*...And the Avogaria came because after WW2 there was a re-discovery of Commedia dell'Arte. So, it wasn't a conscious choice [...]. Then later on I became more aware and went back...but [originally] it wasn't a conscious choice. But then when I started dance I also started to appreciate and understand the meaning of it: Commedia and the Masks. And through Theatre du Soleil's study too. [...] In the 1980s Venice was very lively culturally and very interesting. It was fantastic. Then in the 90s people moved out and Venice became what is now. An

open-air museum... and a place for Commedia for tourists! [...] There are many schools and approaches. For instance Carlo Boso was brilliant with the actor to bring things out of you, but he was not technical at all. You know when Didi talks, she loves Carlo Boso...he is brilliant but he's not technical. Even though I saw him performing and he was quite technical when *he* was doing it [the *Arlecchino*]...he wasn't all over the place, you know! But his approach in teaching and directing is not technical at all. While, for instance, when I was working with Eugenio [De Giorgi], he was far more technical. [...] Eugenio comes from Soleri; Soleri was his teacher; and before he had Bonavera: they were much more technical. Because I met Eugenio later on I could appreciate the technical aspect too. At the Avogaria they were very technical. Boso instead had his own way. But this is how it is. You assimilate the techniques and then you make your own way of performing one character or teaching. But I remember at the Avogaria you had to stand in a line and perform the steps. Which obviously at 16 years old I thought: "Why should I do that? What?" They were quite technical. Later I appreciated it much more, with Eugenio. And I started to appreciate other things too: for instance my character [*Pantalone*]. But everyone is different. And it should be like this! It's creative arts after all: you don't want to create clones! You can go to the same school and study the same *Pantalone* but then there won't be a *Pantalone* identical to the other.

C: [...] there are different schools. But do you think the technique is fundamental and there is only a correct way to interpret each Mask?

P: It depends. I think there can be different ways to interpret the Mask but you need to respect the Mask. So the gestures and movements must be precise. But the actor must make choices. For instance I made certain choices: e.g. the foot, the back, etc... But at the end of the day: we must be honest we are just reconstructing the shapes/forms of these Masks off Callot's drawings and paintings [...]. Techniques are important but, as I said, as an actor you see what works and then make choices.

2e. SCOTT MCGEHEE INTERVIEW (Scholar & Director at Accademia dell'Arte, Arezzo, Italy) - Skype Interview, August 2016

C: [...] Is there a space for Commedia nowadays, and what might that space be?

Could it be a useful tool with which to make a political and social impact?

G: Oh yes. That's why I wrote the article. I was motivated to write the article because of watching a lot of teachers who have come to us to teach – some very great, brilliant teachers, and great actors in some cases – and I was always disappointed in the way that they introduced the characters. I think one thing comes across very clearly: one of the biggest objections I had is that it's not that frequent that you have acting teachers that have a deep background in the historical reality of the Renaissance. They are good actors and can teach technique, but they don't have a really good way of explaining what this phenomenon is, so they just make it up, they just make up a phenomenon. The biggest problem I was having was this notion - and this was frequently used - the concept of an archetype that they were using. Really it's kind of a second hand Carl Jung type of archetype, this sort of eternal human typology that is disconnected or has no real historicity to him. It's a human character type that you find in all cultures. And this to me is nonsense – this isn't verified historically, sociologically, it's only verified psychologically. The premise verifies itself, and that's not a very strong argument. I think people do this because they find it an easy way to deal with it and give it legitimacy. So they want Commedia to say that it speaks to all ages, but it doesn't speak to all ages because these types don't exist, the social structure that gave birth to this is no longer the social structure. There was a new social structure in birth at the time of the Commedia, and this is what makes it particularly interesting, because it was born in a moment of crisis / transition, so it picked up on what was developing and it gave meaning to it.

So, for example, now when we see these masks, we don't think of people in our contemporary world – the masks are self-referential. Arlecchino is the historical Arlecchino; you can put him in a modern context but we're still relating him to the historical Arlecchino. What I was objecting to was this mythology or this notion that there are these fixed universal types, which to me is a very reactionary idea: humanity doesn't change, it's always the same. And if you take Freud, who is an ambiguous character here, but you can take his *Civilisation and its Discontents*, the short book he wrote which is sort of his meta-theory about civilisation, which is the idea that we have layers of repression, then civilisation is literally created to repress this very frightening instinct that human beings have and the Oedipus

complex, so that increasing layers of complexity repress more deeply what is there, and it comes out in weird, subverted ways. We get an Adolf Hitler, for example; by having super repression it comes out in very distorted, very perverted ways. And this, to me, is a reactionary idea because what it tells us is that there's nothing we can do about it, we're pretty much screwed because we're assholes. There's always going to be a Pantalone, a Capitano to fuck things up, that's always going to be the case. And I think that specifically what Commedia was doing was showing us exactly the opposite. *(indeed Tessari talks about how Commedia challenged the status quo /the 'fathers' words/rules!)*

So I'm like you, I don't find the essence of Commedia in the mask itself, not in the physical mask. I think maybe you could make an argument: take away those physical masks, those leather masks, and throw them away. And then you say, OK there are masks, there are types that are socially constructed types, but just for example, the easiest example you can think about: Pantalone was an easily identifiable character in the Renaissance because he was the money guy, and you're looking at the Renaissance which was this transition period into a moneyed world, a moneyed economy. But the overwhelming majority of the economy, most people were not involved in monetary transactions - that came much, much later. There was money, but it was confined to the cities, it was not in the countryside. Peasants never circulated money, they circulated chickens and things like that.

So you have this emerging class at this moment. They're easily identifiable, in fact you can identify them with the Jews, you could say, well, Pantalone could be the Merchant of Venice. So you could identify him with this class of people that are outsiders - they're not insiders, they're outsiders, so in a way Pantalone is still an outsider. You can point your finger at him and you can mock him and you can make fun of what that means, but what is it today? There are no Pantalones, simply because we're all Pantalones. We all think through money, we all engage every aspect of our lives as an exchange, and this is what Pantalone does – he walks into a room, he glances around and he sees possibilities of profitability somehow. It's exactly what we all do, in some form or another. At least that's what the capitalists tell us is the natural condition of man.

The other thing that I've tried to point out in the article is that the proper approach to the Commedia would be not to think about how things happen onstage, but to

try to have an understanding of what actually happens in society around us – what do everyday people experience and through what mode do they experience it? Is it because you've got a greedy landlord? But I try to make the case that it's useful to think about the way that Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze formulated their ideas of the transition from a sovereign society.

It's embodied power, and so these are people who actually embody a form of power in the Renaissance. You actually had people and you could identify them, you could see them walking down the street and you could see exactly what kind of power they had. Today you can't see that, it's not possible – everyone looks the same. We live in a democratic society where those rankings no longer visibly show themselves in bodily comportment the way they did in the Renaissance. And then if you move, as Foucault argues, basically marking it in the immediate prelude to the French Revolution, you begin developing a different kind of power structure which resides in rules and regulations and laws, and it becomes impersonal. (*think multinationals: nobody is accountable, we don't have an individual in flesh but a corporation...the same for banks. Pantalone was identifiable!*). So power suddenly hides, it's no longer embodied, it's hiding elsewhere. It's not that people aren't involved in it and people aren't the carriers of this power, but you can't see it because the person is more the office holder, it's the principal of the school, for example, who holds that power, but when the principal is no longer the principal, that person no longer has that power. It's the office that has the power. And immediately that coincides with the decline of Commedia. It's exactly when Commedia begins to die, it's exactly when Foucault begins arguing that the disciplinary society is taking over. And then you have the French Revolution, and that's the nail in the coffin. There is no Commedia after the French Revolution to speak of.

And then you have Gilles Deleuze who argues that in contemporary society we've gone one step even further, which is that we now live in what he calls a control society, where it's no longer the external rules that govern us, the threat of incarceration, the continual surveillance, all these things that are external to us that control us. He argues that no, now the control is actually inside of us, that it operates through networking on Facebook and computer logarithms and if you want to have an existence, then you must be networked, you must follow the pathway of communications. And if these are internalised, we actually control

ourselves. We actually internalise that networking culture, and you don't need external – well he doesn't go as far as to say you don't need external controls – but essentially what he's saying is that we need to look more closely at how those logarithms and algorithms are actually embedded in our cellular system, metaphorically embedded. In a sense we've internalised these things.

So in my opinion, if you wanted to stay within the spirit of the Commedia you would expose the mechanisms of power in contemporary society in ways that people can recognise in their daily lives. And that was their genius, I really think that was their genius. And I think that we have to be really careful about using the term “political”, because we have to remember that in that period, with the possible exception of some city states and some moments, in general politics couldn't even use the same vocabulary that we use today. So we didn't have citizens as much as we had subjects. You weren't a citizen of a country, you were the subject of a king or a lord or a duke or a count, or whatever it is. So you have to be very careful about what it means. This is why when people attack Dario Fo by saying that Commedia was not political - it was incredibly political because what it did, and I love the way Bakhtin puts it, I think I quoted it in the essay, the idea of dethroning power, of bringing it down to the bottom, to the base level. I think that that's the genius of their politics. It's not, for example, that the Commedia troupes were revolutionary socialist, Marxist, communist, whatever the case is. That's not what they were, I would put them more in the category of the eternal anarchist, the eternal refusal to accept the domination of anything or anybody, and the impulse of perpetual freedom to create oneself. This is the way Bakhtin speaks about it, which I think he captures incredibly well.

After I'd read Bakhtin's book on Rabelais, I then decided maybe I should read some Rabelais. Rabelais is astounding, I was flabbergasted when I worked my way through some of it - I just thought it was utterly brilliant and incredibly complex. Rabelais is a great model of the Commedia dell'Arte, because he's extremely sophisticated, but he takes, as Bakhtin says, this sort of working class humour and fuses it with this almost philosophical, very erudite knowledge of the time. It brings these two things together in an astounding way that I think captures the Commedia perfectly, from my perspective.

It's great to read Rabelais because it gives you the feeling of the language, the

way he plays with language. I've not read very much, and you have to have another book to explain the book – it's so filled with references that we're not familiar with today - but it's wonderful.

It's the same with Cervantes. There's a great play, it's an Intermezzo by Cervantes, a one-act play.

C: *The Wonder Show*. I worked with that play; it's fantastic.

G: Yes, it's an incredible play and if you think about what he's doing in this play – this is what I think the Commedia does – he's actually playing on the political social structures that are embedded in our social status. He's playing with those in order to turn them on themselves. When he was writing, the Jews had just been expelled from Spain, and so nobody wanted to be identified with having Jewish blood. This is a particularly interesting play because it really marks the recognition of the birth of Western racism and the idea that race is determined by blood. He takes this idea that's purely a metaphysical idea, so it's a false idea but it's one that drives people's idea of themselves in the cosmos, and people are caught in a trap, the charlatans catch them all in a trap, and it's fantastic.

If you think about that play and start thinking about the Commedia and how they play around with the self-perception of Pantalone, Capitano, il Dottore, how they perceive themselves and how they're trapped in their own conception, and how that conception turns on itself to devour itself and bring it down to the bottom - that, to me, is truly genius. I think it's astounding - their sensibility and sensitivity to recognising what people are actually feeling and how power flows through those very subtle relationships. Very subtle things are happening that keep power in place, and Cervantes taps into this, also with Don Quixote. You can do the same thing with Don Quixote, but this particular play is so specific about one particular troupe, that I think it's worth looking at that play.

C: Because within the village there are also all the different classes, and the wife and the daughter. Yes, it's a fantastic play and it has the complete absurdity of this non-existent show, this vision. That's fantastic.

G: And the visions may as well be real, that's what's interesting. They may as

well be real because people are acting as though they are real. I'm going to make an enormous leap right now, but if you take the puppet show and you argue that what Cervantes is saying, he's arguing that it might as well be real because people act as though it's real, and perhaps they're even convincing themselves that it's real because they're scared to death to admit that they have Jewish blood, or that they're bastards, whatever the case is.

If you think of Marx's theory of value, if you get deep into it, Marx actually says the exact same thing about what value is. I won't get into the Marxist theory of value, other than to say that Marx makes it very clear. He says that there's something extraordinary that goes on with the capitalist economy, when we think of an abstraction in philosophy. We say for example that we have this thing in front of us, you can see it and you know what it is, and we have five or six of them, but we have to give them a general name, so we call them "books". We give "books" qualities that all of these things have: they're made of paper, they have print, you can flick through them, they have text, and so on. So that becomes the mental abstraction of these concrete things. We go from the concrete to the abstract mentally – we create abstractions so that we can manage the world around us. And what he argues is that value is exactly the opposite – it's peculiarly an abstraction that actually creates the concrete. I won't explain all of how this works, but basically he argues that the abstract concept of value has its origins not in thought, but in action. It's like the puppet in the puppet show – they act as though they're seeing the play and everybody suddenly is acting as though they see the play, but it's the idea that there must be a play there that's creating the action that verifies the existence of the non-existent play. And the capitalist economy works exactly the same way through this imposition of the abstraction of monetary value that descends from the abstract into the concrete, but it's an abstraction nevertheless. In other words we have to act almost as conspirators to make it real. So we still live in that world, even more so than in Cervantes' world.

So what are the characteristics of Commedia? It's a good question. We can say what they historically were, but that won't necessarily get us to the essence of what it is. The essence is something different than the phenomenon, so it appears to us as actor-generated. The actors created it, for the most part, as far as we know. It was masked theatre. It was overwhelmingly comic theatre, so it's got

those qualities.

C: My point is also that definitely it was comical and extremely grotesque, but still for me there were great tragedies. I feel that particularly in England they focus so much on the slapstick element, when I think that there's so much more depth to it.

S: I totally agree, and any good teacher of Commedia will impress upon the actors that for the characters, everything that goes on is a tragedy. It's a real tragedy for them - it's not comical, it's not funny, it's terrifying, it's scary. So for the actors it has to be a real tragedy.

I think it also brings up the whole issue about the relationship of comedy to tragedy, which is a much bigger concept. When I talk about tragedy and comedy, what I argue is that, generally speaking in Western comedy and tragedy, in comedy the plot doesn't make much difference, the plot's not very important; whereas the end of a tragedy can't be understood without the beginning of the tragedy. The plot is everything in tragedy, the plot's crucial; whereas in comedy it's the characters, it's the development of the human beings in their micro-world, the "small" of their world, the entry and exit through a door or a window, or something like that. That becomes everything, and it doesn't really matter what happens before or after, but the depths of the character are revealed in those *lazzi*. That's what I find so interesting about it.

I tell students when they're creating Commedia pieces that if the *lazzi* doesn't deepen the character, then don't do it. The *lazzi* needs to show you something about the character, something about the depths and the kind of person they are - or don't do it. You're forcing something if it doesn't come naturally from how the character would behave. Commedia is character driven. If you take Aristotle's six elements of tragedy – there's plot, character, ideas, diction, music, spectacle - Aristotle puts plot at number one. Number two is character. But in Commedia, I don't think there's any question, the character comes first. It's a development.

C: The plots are relatively simple in a way.

S: Yes they're very simple, and they're almost all identical, but the fact is it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what the plot is. That's what so incredible about it. And

this is why people think it's silly, or they don't understand the depths of it – they're looking only at the plot, and thinking, “That's a dumb plot that's been done a million times.” OK, fine, but watch, look at the language. I think it's Critchley I quote in the article, when he talks about how comedy is the intrusion of the physical into the metaphysical, which I think is a great way to put it, because I think that's exactly what Commedia does. It understands where is the metaphysical part of our lives and where is the physical part of our lives. This is why Bakhtin is so important to talk about the lower part of the body. Appetite, the physical part – and the lower classes understand this perfectly. They're not deluded by the idea.

I'm not interested in Commedia as archaeology. It's a good thing to learn. If you're an actor it's great to have some experience with that archaeology, just like it would be good to try to authentically produce a Greek play - that would be interesting, and it would probably stimulate further creative efforts, but in itself it's a museum piece. Here's a great way to think about it: the Commedia, to my knowledge, rarely played anachronistic theatre – they dressed in contemporary costumes. They didn't dress up in Greek or Medieval costumes, they dressed up in daily costumes – the same stuff you saw in the streets, just exaggerated. So when we do Commedia, we dress up in Medieval costumes - we're specifically not doing what they were doing. They did contemporary theatre. I don't know of any examples where the setting was important and it was in Medieval or in Classical Greece. I don't recall reading too many *canovacci* of that nature, to tell you the truth. You might take speeches or poetry from those things, but the setting was always, to my knowledge, contemporary.

C: Yes. What do you think about this idea of the troupe working as an ensemble, so as a sense as a democratic group? It's a difficult question, because obviously there were different troupes, from the ones that in a sense we might not have any recollection of because we don't have documents about them, to the big Andreini and all the other big names that were revered by the aristocracy at that time and by the courts - so I wonder if back then, exactly like now, there would have been the fringe of Commedia dell'Arte as well as the mainstream, and within that again a wide range of possibility between ensemble work and a “star” type of theatre?

S: Are you familiar with Robert Henke? He is someone who's done historical

work on the documents of the actual troupes themselves. One thing I would say is from the point of view of macro history, looking at the issue, what is interesting and what he writes about in *Performance and Literature in Commedia dell'Arte* is the first Commedia troupe that we have a record of, in 1545 in Padova. They were actually applying to be recognised to have Guild status. People often get confused about what a Guild actually is or was, so for example a lot of people will point to the Ciompi rebellion in the 14th century in Florence, when the dyers in the textile industry took over and ruled Florence for several months as a radical experiment, and were crushed. What they were seeking, people often say that it's an example of people fighting for democracy – but in point of fact they weren't fighting for democracy at all, they were fighting for Guild status (*corporazione*).

What's interesting is that the Commedia troupes wanted to be recognised for having a privileged status, as opposed to the status of just wandering minstrels, which were bums, guys that slept with dogs on the streets. They wanted the privilege of being above that, and you even see Andreini who used to denounce competitive Commedia troupes for not being up to the standards of the privilege of the Guild, which was a self-regulating Guild. The irony for the Commedia troupes was that they never obtained it, because the Guilds themselves were universally under attack at that point, and were continually under attack until they disappeared, because interestingly enough they thwarted capitalism. The Guilds were a brake on waged labour, not something that was good for waged labour. That's one way to think about that idea.

Henke talks about a lot of the mythology about the ensemble and the way they worked through families, and how people only played one role for their whole lives – all of this is mythology, according to Henke. It's not true at all – people played multiple roles and they would jump from one Commedia troupe to another if the money was better. They were much like actors today, there wasn't loyalty within a family. It might be true that children learned the craft in many cases, undoubtedly that's true. But I think that people want to relate the Commedia to Asian theatre, where it was more like that, where it was handed down father to son to son to son, where it was so rigidly codified. We have to remember that the Commedia, unlike Asian theatre, was never codified. There's no code. When someone says, "Oh, they only did this, they always did that", I tell students that any time you ever read or hear anyone say that the Commedia always did this or

never did that, you know the person doesn't know what they're talking about. They're making it up – because we don't have evidence that they only did this – for example, I was surprised to find in the Scala Collection how many times *Pantalone* is actually introduced as an aristocrat.

C: That's an interesting thing. There's also this quite bizarre question that the son and daughter of Pantalone, the Lovers, are represented as being aristocratic, and I always think that they just *want* to be aristocratic.

S: In the Scala Collection there are several times that Pantalone is introduced as an aristocrat, and I found some evidence that when the Commedia went as far down as Sicily, Pantalone disappeared as a character, and he became Barone. There's something else, as there were no merchants back then to speak of, it wasn't a merchant culture, so the Pantalone as a class, as a social reality, didn't really make an appearance in Sicily - but the sort of wasted and decadent aristocracy, the penniless aristocracy, did exist, so the Commedia adapted themselves and created Barone as a masked character, which no-one ever talks about. They say you can't play around with the aristocracy, it's too dangerous - which obviously is not true. I do think that it was too dangerous, for obvious reasons, to say anything about the church.

You had to be extremely careful as there's an interesting correlation between the birth of the Commedia dell'Arte and the Council of Trent and the beginnings of the witch burnings in Europe. And so the history of the Commedia actually overlaps almost exactly with the witch-burning phase. Everyone thinks witches were burned all the time – it's not true at all. The medieval world almost never burned witches – the witch burnings came in the Modern era, starting in 1540.

C: There is a very interesting article that makes a comparison between the theatricality of the Inquisition, and Commedia; the element of the negation of the body, and the emphasis on the body, the physical, that the Church tried to repress, so the distinction between body and soul – and on the other hand the celebration of the body and the sort of Carnavalesque culture of Bakhtin. [...] There's an interesting parallel between the two, and exactly what you are saying - it's quite interesting that historically the Inquisition and the Council of Trent and the period of the Roman Inquisition and Commedia dell'Arte – it's all the same

period.

S: Yes, definitely. Also to keep in mind that witches were burned everywhere in Europe. The Protestants burned more witches than the Catholics – they were particularly nasty. Do you know the historian Silvia Federici? If you're remotely interested in witchcraft, she wrote a book called *Caliban and the Witch*. I think she's at the University of Padova, she was maybe in New York for a while, but she's from Padova. She has a completely different theory of witch burnings – we always dismiss witch burnings as a sort of medieval superstitious thinking, the fear of the unknown, the anti-scientific, but she points out that it's not true. It emerges at exactly the same time as the scientific revolution, and is actually supported by some of the enlightened thinkers in France and England. She takes a map of Europe, a map of where all the witch burnings were taking place. So it will say that in this city there were X number of witch burnings taking place, so that gets a certain colour or something, and then she would take another map and lay it on top and see if there's a parallel phenomenon.

What she found was that in England, which is where her research mostly was, the witch burnings occurred in exactly the same places where the land confiscations by the rich were happening. So wherever they were confiscating lands, that's where they attacked the witches. And where they didn't confiscate the land, there were no witch burnings - so making the connection between the witch burnings and the reconfiguration of the labour laws and the reproductive rights, not so much of women, but of families and communities, to govern their own forms of reproduction. So capitalism is now free to come in because they've disrupted the old reproduction rights, which women had a fundamental role in. They needed to destroy the power that women had within the community, and that was the attack on the witches to pave the way for capitalism. It's a very interesting book.

So what is the thrust of your dissertation? Is it going to be on the modern Commedia?

C: I'm trying to figure out what is the legacy of Commedia dell'Arte in post-dramatic theatre, so I'm looking at the mix of genres, the use of parody or different languages and styles. For me the fundamental element is the actor, so that all

the material starts and is created by the actor - there is no playwright or text, so the relationship with the audience, obviously the non-existence of the fourth wall and this interaction with the audience. It seemed to be from early 2000, or even earlier, that there was a big interest in what is now labelled “immersive theatre”, this idea of the audience experiencing rather than witnessing something.

Although I know there was a specific, well-designed stage raised in the middle of the piazza, I still have the impression, at least from some of the interesting descriptions of the time, that the audience was very much part of it in a sense, so there was this active presence, and that's what I think as a theatre maker is what interests me – it's that meeting point between the performer and the audience. I remember the first time I saw this Commedia practitioner called Claudia Contin, and I was really in tears - it touched something really special, and since then I have tried to understand what this raw, visceral element is and how it is it possible to get to that. I'm not personally interested in the traditional masks, although I see them as a very good pedagogical tool; I call it an ‘archaeological approach’ to theatre. But I think it's something else, something in the work of the actor being the source of the material and something in that moment, in that relationship and space between audience and performer that I think is interesting.

And on the other hand there is this element of social commentary. I think the power that Commedia had, because it was really related to a specific society, was taking and mirroring that. That's why I think that the Masks as they are, the Arlecchino and the Zanni and the Pantalone and the Doctore, don't have much to say to a contemporary audience. What's possible is to understand how they came about, what they were back then and to understand what would be a contemporary counterpart of that - how can we, maybe, try to understand some of those principles, but in relation to our society? [...] Probably my focus will be on the actors as creators, and focusing on that aspect.

S: I always talk about the contradictions that each character must contain with their self, which I think is fundamental to bring these characters to life - in particular the Lovers, Dottore, Capitano and Pantalone, because their metaphysical side and their physical side are always in contradiction, so they have to hold two things simultaneously. If you look at Pantalone, for example, he possesses a power that is invisible, that is money, but his externality, or his

physicality, is that of an impotent old man. So these things are at odds with each other and this makes him almost automatically funny. Just that presence in that form. And the same with Capitano - physically he looks like a tornado, this enormous power, but his interior, in his metaphysical world, he's terrified of life. And with Dottore the same thing - he presents to the world that he's got the power of knowledge, but in point of fact he's driven almost entirely by his gluttony and his interest in good alcohol. And then the Lovers, of course - their sensuality is oozing through, but they can't recognise it because they're dominated by the idea, it's too powerful for them, and they've got to contain those contradictions through every gesture. That takes a lot of skill - to be able to do that so that it comes through even when you're not moving, just the way you stand, the way you look, the way you hesitate - and I think that helps to get students to begin to understand why these characters are difficult to play, because you've always got to possess those contradictory elements, and they both have to express themselves in the same gesture, simultaneously, which is very, very difficult. [...].

APPENDIX 3 - A FLOATING CARAVAN UNDER THE MOON (2015/16)

In this appendix I organised the material produced during the development of the ensemble-devised piece *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* in different sections aiming to offer an overview of the two projects (2015 and 2016) with examples of activities, rehearsal plans, nites and observations as well as links to videos and pictures. The visual material is also available in the USB in the folder: 'APPENDIX 3 - A Floating Caravan Under the Moon'.

3a: First Version of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2015)

- link to website;
- rehearsal plan, activities and observations.

3b: Second Version of *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon* (2016)

- link to website;
- links to videos.

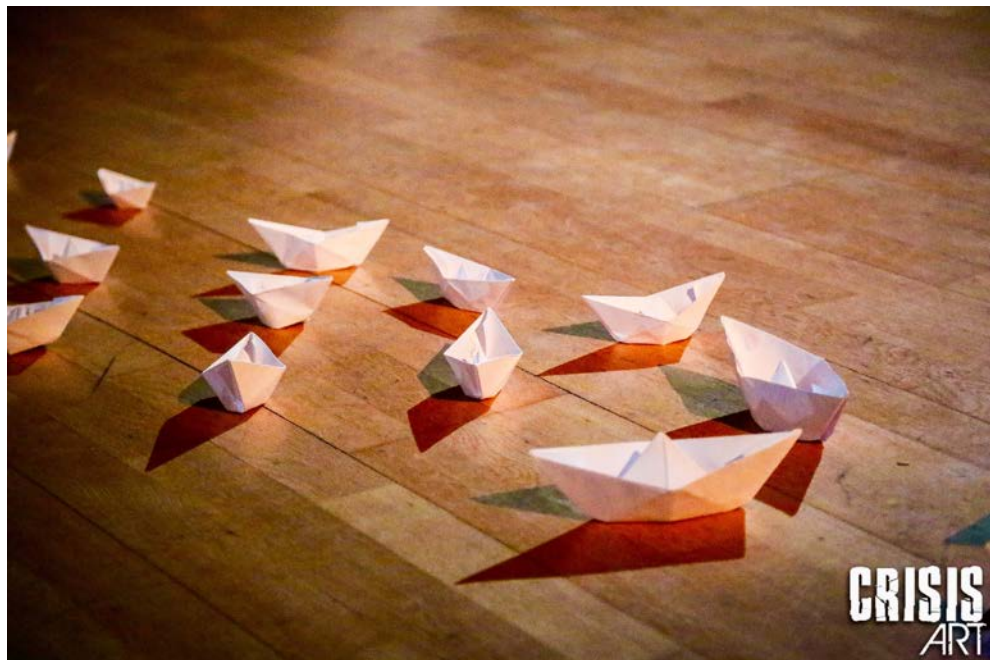


Figure 63: Paper boats, a motif in *A Floating Caravan Under the Moon*, 2015/16.

3a. A FLOATING CARAVAN UNDER THE MOON (2015)

London Metropolitan University, London

LINKS:

Project Overview: <http://pantareitheatre.com/portfolio-item/a-floating-caravan-under-the-moon2015/>

Gallery: <http://pantareitheatre.com/gallery/a-floating-caravan-under-the-moon-2015/>

REHEARSAL NOTES and ACTIVITIES

Actors: Jenny, Esther, Beatriz, Jacob, Anna, Steph

Support Team: Jamie

WEEK 1

MONDAY 21st

- **Exploration of the THEME:** Autobiographical/personal responses put into words (lists)
- **Creation of *canovacci*** (based on the lists)
- **Physicalized through storytelling techniques:** tell a story with actions, images, sound and words.

ACTIVITIES:

- Consent Forms + risk form
- Introduce everyone (give questionnaires).
- Talk about the theme/topic: give paper, pens, pastels, colours and allow everyone to write/draw what they think HOME and ROOTS.

- Share ideas: open conversation about our understanding of home. I also read some literal definitions of HOME⁹⁰, ROOTS⁹¹ and ROOTLESS⁹².

PART 1

Let's **warm up as a group in the space**. The following exercises will hopefully help the group to bond. Exercise purpose:

BE ALERT

BE AVAILABLE/OPEN

BE READY

BE ALIVE

BREAK PREDICTABLE PATTERNS

LISTEN and ATTUNE to each other

EXPLORE QUALITIES of MOVEMENT + INTENSITY

SENSE OF RHYTHM (as a group)

Running and balancing the space a nice and pleasant run. Aware of the others + the space. Freeing the body, different directions, free arms and spine, soft knees

⁹⁰ HOME definition:

1. A place where one lives; a residence.
2. The physical structure within which one lives, such as a house or apartment. A property.
3. A dwelling place together with the family or social unit that occupies it; a household
4.
 - a. An environment offering security and happiness.
 - b. The place where a person feels they belong.
 - c. A valued place regarded as a refuge or place of origin.
5. The place, such as a country or town, where one was born or has lived for a long period.
6. The native habitat, as of a plant or animal.

⁹¹ ROOTS definition:

Family, ethnic, or cultural origins: *'it's always nice to return to my roots'*

1. put down roots
(Of a plant) begin to draw nourishment from the soil through its roots.
(Of a person) begin to have a settled life in a particular place.
2. take root
(Of a plant) begin to grow and draw nourishment from the soil through its roots.

⁹² ROOTLESS definition:

1. Not belonging to a particular place or society:
'rootless refugees in a strange country'
2. Having no ties with a particular place or community
3. Having no basis of stability; unsteady: *'a rootless feeling'*
4. Having no place or position in society: *'a rootless wanderer'*

+ make eye contact but for a real contact...don't do it because you are told to but when you want to, for real!!

Develop a common rhythm in the run (1,2,3) that then develop into a bigger emphasis on the last bit: an ACTIVE STOP. Still but alive...precursor of the next movement >keep it flowing! The movement doesn't really ends or die...it's like a wave (don't reveal it: let them find the quality!).

At the count of 10 then and at the 10th get into a shape, explore every time something new, fresh + avoid patterns+ try to break them (I'll do it with the tambourine or clap then maybe I'll leave them on their own and I'll just give the beat to get out of the posture). Shapes of all kind: use levels, twisting, turning, different body parts...

Can you meet someone while you discover these shapes (eye contact/body shapes) across the room or close by? Add an INTENTION to our body by exploring attraction or repulsion. Do you flirt? Suggest? Attack? Invite? Are you curious? Scared? Or Angry towards this person? BE BOLD > CLEAR and try to SURPRISE yourself!

PART 2

The Inspiring Material lists are a more specific than the generic talk and brainstorm we had before because we work with specific categories: the *Home Lists*. Write neatly and clearly in big sheets of paper - each has a TITLE at the top like the following:

Senses:

- Taste (e.g. a dish or a drink that is home)
- Hearing: Sound/Music or voices (e.g. cicadas)
- Smell (e.g. frying garlic in olive oil)
- Sight: Visual memories (an image)
- Touch: Tactile Experience and sensations
- Kinaesthetic: An action (e.g. washing the dishes, cross sign etc..) or a ritual or maybe even a dance

Places, Feelings/Emotions, Language (word or expressions):

- Place/s where we 'feel at home'
- Feelings/Emotions associated with 'feeling at home'
- Sentences/words in the specific language (e.g. In Italian for me 'Ciao' 'Cappuccino e cornetto')

FEELING at HOME Canovaccio: With pen and paper or a laptop /phone. Pick one item or more from each list (a place, a taste, a sound...) use them like Lego *building blocks* and create a *canovaccio* (=story line in Commedia terms) or storyboard. A character who tells us a story about his/her home.

The group shared ALL the material available on the lists (not necessarily only their own input) and created few scenes collectively by a collage/juxtaposition of stimuli (images, sounds places found on those lists).

Discussion about our interpretation/understanding of home:

Anna = home as my things all gathered in a suitcase and carried with me whenever I go because I changed house on an average of every 6months! Giving away something is difficult because it's like losing a part of me. Carrying it all with me is like a reassurance/anchor/ the only continuity. The baggage is like the 'place to go back to'. A new version of home/feeling at home. Reconstructing the environment wherever I go (e.g. postcards on the wall, the objects I put of the shelves...). A 'contemporary Traveller' or a London (Urban) nomad.

We need to bring various objects and think about how to build a tortoise shell on your back? A wheelbarrow, or a bicycle or something than can be filled/loaded and pushed around. 'Kantor-esque image: look at Bio-objects.

Wider Topic: *Housing in London; the big city tenants' struggle.*

Esther = The sea in the Basque country. Food. Family. Language.

National conflict and personal conflict. A nation that is divided. Basque-Spain; Republican- Franco; Pro bull fight- Against bulls fight etc...

Personal story of an old fisherman's wife: Istaso and her beloved husband and little cosy home.

Work with the idea of conflict and opposites in symbols: Fire (fireplace) vs Water (the Sea). Opening of the show with the sea: the sea can become a motif within the piece bringing in our characters and their stories...and taking them away.

Wider Topic: *Conflict between life/death (the sea sustains and threaten at the same time)*

Jacob = Not solid sense of national identity. Mostly thinking of the ideal home. The dream home that seems almost impossible to achieve.

In a bubble maybe...disintegrate in a puff smoke? (or something similar?) Like for instance magazines cut out, write things, house plan, pictures, the dream dog all attached to the surface of balloons that get blown up: destruction of a dream.

Wider Topic: *Housing in London for young couples an impossible dream.*

Beatriz = Home is places (e.g. cafes, roads, bars) and activities: driving along the coast on her car. Meeting friends in cafes after dinner: drinking and socialising. The social and ludic aspect seems very important (=interaction between people as well as food and drinks.) The ocean is also very important (like Esther...like everyone who grew up or lives by the sea!). Another important element of Beatriz written work (devising inspirational material) is the non translatable Portuguese concept of *saudade*⁹³ and *fado*: a type of

⁹³ The *Dictionary of Portuguese Language* defines *saudade* (or *saudades*) as "A somewhat melancholic feeling of incompleteness. It is related to thinking back on situations of privation due to the absence of someone or something, to move away from a place or thing, or to the absence of a set of particular and desirable experiences and pleasures once lived."

The Dictionary from the Royal Galician Academy, on the other hand, defines *saudade* as an "intimate feeling and mood caused by the longing for something absent that is being missed. This can take different aspects, from concrete realities (a loved one, a friend, the motherland, the homeland...) to the mysterious and transcendent. It is quite prevalent and characteristic of the galician-portuguese world, but it can also be found in other cultures."

A word that claims no direct translation in English or any other language. It describes a deep emotional state of nostalgic or profound melancholic longing for an absent something or someone that one loves. Moreover, it often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never return. A stronger form of *saudade* might be felt towards people and things whose whereabouts are unknown, such as a lost lover, or a family member who has gone missing, separated or died.

Saudade was once described as "the love that remains" after someone is gone. *Saudade* is the recollection of feelings, experiences, places or events that once brought excitement, pleasure, well-being, which now triggers the senses and makes one live again. It can be described as emptiness, like someone (e.g. our parents or children or lover) or something (e.g. a faraway place where one was raised, things one used to do in childhood) that should be there in a particular moment is missing, and the individual feels this absence. It brings sad and happy feelings all together, sadness for missing and happiness for having experienced the feeling.

Portuguese singing, traditionally associated with pubs and cafés, that is renowned for its expressive and profoundly melancholic character.

Wider Topic: *Home as Community + Catholicism and popular culture.*

Observations:

In my exploration of the meaning of 'home' I've realised that there are many more related topics that are bound to emerge: homesickness, nostalgia and memories.

This notion/feeling/word – could be explored further for the relevance to the chosen topic: both our personal biographical experience and current events (refugees).

Staging

Ideas about staging elements that responds to the stimuli received and my vision (complemented by images collected after this session and my original thoughts):

- **Lighting**

Use torches, lanterns play with darkness and dim lights getting bigger. Think about silhouettes (back lighting) is very effective in particular if we use a smoke machine. Le *lucciole* (light flies) at night in the summer but also the fishermen boats off shore at night: that look like *lucciole*!

- **Soundscape**

Waves/the Sea

Animal: cicadas and crickets in Mediterranean countries

Owls and nocturnal birds

Wind and Birds sound in the forest

Singing for instance *Fado* or *Flamenco* (instead of my original idea of utilising *Tarantella*: it was *my* cultural reference not theirs!)

- **Set elements and Images (Snow Falling):**

Piece of paper with characters' lines and/or quotes could become set elements: short stories, lines and quotes written on pieces of paper that

fall from the sky like Anna's snow flakes in her story. The audience will have written material to take with them. These pieces of paper are the memento of their theatre experience with us. (Like Anna's character's objects on her back: a reminder of her life back home.)

Images created in Improvisation from the *canovacci*:

- **Waterfall** – possible to utilize a watering can + umbrellas
- **'Human lighthouse'** an actor with a massive torch possibly on her head.
- **Kitchen table dinner:** all characters joining in a big family/party gathering
- **Playing cards.**

HOMEWORK: bring interesting costumes, material, props, images: the richest the room the better it is. I'll bring lots of props to find the characters through improvisation.

TUESDAY 22nd

Exploration of quality of movement: water (in response to the recurrent theme of the sea from day 1)

Physical storytelling without words: today no words but visual storytelling in *tableaux* with bamboo sticks (exercise inspired by Marcello Magni's workshop)

Devising: find characters through the use of objects. Work with the theme in mind but feel free to improvise with everything. Task: respond to the objects, play with them but not impose a story or fix a character.

PART 1:

Warm up: back-to-back, awakening the spine and get in contact with each other. Utilise props, costumes and music.

Build characters. Let them play as usual. Their biographical material it's not their personal material anymore: it's the character's material.

Integrate some important elements of their list: their personal material is used into a new context because they are integrating props (found objects), costumes and physical actions.

Warm-up then playing with sticks: find the quality of water in your body; then in the 'ensemble body'.

ENSEMBLE PHYSICAL STORYTELLING:

Develop a story in images without speaking during the action and without 'fixing' the whole sequence. Just agree on the images you want to get back too (4 or 5) and transitions between them. It's not choreography or a defined sequence of physical actions. The task of this exercise is to listen and work as a chorus, adapt to the situation while you are going back to a few images you liked that came during the previous improvisation. Break down of activities:

Experiment in creating images in space (with music): come together and disperse like a flock of birds.

Talk about which images were more powerful/interesting or intriguing and put them together (montage) creating a story (physical storytelling).

PART 2

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER WORK

Work with objects to find possible physical actions for the construction of the characters (Tuesday morning) always remembering the initial thought of each of them: e.g. the house on my shoulders (Anna); the dream house (Jacob); food, leisure time, the smell= the environment + *fado* music (Beatriz); gathering memories from her childhood and her room at home= home as family (Jenny); the family is not together any more maybe we will discover that this collecting images is an attempt to pull everything back together; conflicts/opposites + the sea (Esther).

The actors played freely for over an hour. I brought or asked to bring some objects in response to the lists (e.g. teapot for tea; cards) but mainly I selected random objects for their availability (I used what I've got because I don't have a budget!) and versatility. For instance: material of various kind (black, white and colourful); parasols, old kitchen/fireplace tools...those were also partly relevant to the lists because home is often also related with food (= taste) and kitchen gathering (=family).

Re-define the major traits of the characters and their objects and we showed each other the sequences.

WEDNESDAY 23rd (half session 2-5pm)

- **Redefinition of the characters** we have found yesterday by selecting the appropriate props/costumes + sound/music.
- **Redefinition of the sequence** according to the director's feedback: the improvised sequence now has to be fixed (Stage 2) to create a repeatable sequence.

Notes on Characters/Observations:

Anna has to shorten her improvised text; leave aside all signs of 'tramp lady'. Bring the accent even further: from that I decided to develop her character on the stereotype of the Norwegian woman: accent, clothing, attitude. Work on the 3 or 4 interactions. Each shorter...build the pace. The repetitive structure works (typical in comedy and clowns) but the pace has to increase otherwise too predictable (avoid same length of each piece, same pace and intonation; each specific interaction has different 'urgency')

Jacob has to bring his character to another level: build the grotesque quality. (e.g. nose leading; staccato movements; sharp); bring unusual into the mundane/everyday (e.g. lie on the floor taking notes; appearing upside down acting as if it's the most natural thing on Earth...Slapstick style = Wes Anderson-style in film terms /Commedia and slapstick in theatre terms). The house of books or the house from books is inspired by literature (fantasy world dimension) but also physically constructed with books as bricks of the house (real world dimension) or Lego pieces (play world dimension). The professor, the book collectors, the antiques collector, the dollhouse or toy trains collector: all in one character. The Dream house has to reach perfection: it is an impossible quest. Use of symbols: the balloon with post-it with the list of perfect fitting and furniture as the real perfect home. The bursting of the balloons as bursting the dreams (fantasy world) and also toys (play world). Progressively the stereotypical British scholar will become our point of reference.

Esther: she has to 'open up' to the audience. The sea enters in the intimacy of her kitchen. The Absurd in the mundane (e.g. the roasted egg). Objects and sounds are fundamental: the sound made by those objects she uses, the physical sensation touching, moving, cleaning etc...but also the outside sound of the 'world outside' (opposite inside/outside; land/sea; security/uncertainty; safety/danger; fire/water; singing voice/recorded sound...). We will need to work

much more on the reactions to the soundscape. Stereotype: the peasant (fisherman's wife in this case) Old lady.

Beatriz: *the sacred and the mundane. The classic Fo's strategy and all popular theatre tradition since Antiquity and Carnival/Commedia (e.g. Troisi and la Smorfia; Benigni etc..) Her devotion to God in contrast with the casual attitude/café atmosphere: playing cards with God, eating and drinking. The fado icon rather than the religious icon. Then take the money from the offers because she won the game. She needs to work on the timing (in this piece it's all about building up to the punch line through a work on musicality). We don't understand Portuguese therefore the words aren't important for the audience; their musicality and intonation, the exact punctuation and the pauses are instead very important. They will reveal Maria's intentions and emotions. Paired up with her physicality: her facial expressions, postures and gestuality. Stereotype; the Devout switching into la popolana: the earthy, sexy, working class lady with a hint to melodrama, Brazilian soap-opera and Italian iconic cinema (Sofia Loren meets Anna Magnani meets Fellini's female models...back to the Female Servant in Commedia).*

Jenny: *delicate, otherworldly and magical features. She is like a fairy. She arrives silently and observes the world trying to understand what home is. Her camera captures the reality that she observes around her: she's trying to pierce together something that she can call home by collecting other people's interpretation of home. Each character however has such a different way to interpret home that she cannot understand what home is! This notion of home will always be alien to her, because she has not lived it and experienced it in first person. She has a documentation filtered by the lenses and immobilized forever hence 'dead'.*

Steph *created her own sequence, based on the topic of the 'unachievable perfect home'. It will be developed in the drama of wanting it perfect also for others: the appearance/façade. A sort of 'aspiring bourgeois' complex? The house warming party becomes a tragedy. Autobiographical elements (mother) mixed with the stereotype of the British housewife aspiring to become bourgeois. Abigail's Party was used as a reference - mostly aesthetically (costumes, set...)*

In the afternoon I experimented with a selection of music for the opening lullaby:

- Syrian Music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wLplmLBXCA>

(Syrian/Aramaic Folk Music)

- Syrian Lullaby 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8BzCak7xIU>
(Nami Nami – Live)
- Lullaby 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKR-AHy6Pq4>
(Nami - dedicated to the Children of Gaza)
- Jenny's chant: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9xY9siC81Q>
(Lullaby for Syrian Boy)

THURSDAY 24th (half session 10-1pm)

- **Definition of each sequence:** expand it, re-work on it and find details.
- **Selection of the material needed:** list of props, costumes and music.
- **Creation of the structure:** first draft.

Work on:

- Timing and interweaving scenes/actions: rhythm of the piece, pace and tempo.
- Soundscape
- Montage: sequence choices in relation to the space
- Ending: let's celebrate home. The Happy Birthday song is the same in the UK, Norway, Spain, Portugal and Italy. The same for all of us.

In the space we will be able to work on the composition more clearly after:

- Content of each scene is clearer (message),
- Character built through props, costumes and personal material
- Work in/with the space.

Then within that into the equation we will need to focus on:

- Tempo-Rhythm
- Pace
- Clarity
- Composition

FRIDAY 25th (11am - 4pm)

- **Working with/in the space**
- **Redefining the sequence:** acts order > montage.
- **Redefining each character's position** and journey in the space.

- **Audience awareness + their movements in the space.**
- **Creation of the second draft:** scenes, transitions and sounds/lx cues

Surprise/Unpredictability. This can be achieved by working on:

- COMPOSITION
- TIMING
- TEMPO-RHYTHM

Observations:

*Recurrent theme today: **waves and the sea**: It'd be very beautiful and interesting to bring the idea of the eternal motion of the sea/ocean and applying it to the all piece (initial investigation in rehearsal with the bamboo sticks). Each moment has its own quality like the waves: some are huge and strong, some long, some short, some times the waves arrive in multiple ripples other times a big gap is followed by a big or long wave. Translate this into theatrical actions and transitions: the motion of the sea as a model for the 'motion of the piece'.*

ATMOSPHERE: *My ideas on sound and LX are strongly informed by the initial autobiographical and personal response of each actor. I went back to their lists; their drawing and initial improvisations and their responses led me to the decision I took so far. It is an Actor's Theatre in every sense including the aesthetic.*

SOUNDS: *Through the information they provided I got inspired to create a rich soundscapes. They wrote that their sense of home was related to the sound of the sea; seagulls and other birds. Insects' sounds such as cicadas (daytime) and crickets and owls (night time). The smell of coffee, drinking wine and eating bread related with socialising (integrated in Beatriz's piece: playing cards with God).*

I also resonated with some of the actors' memories and stories: my personal memories of summer nights in Italy: the sound of crickets and the sea in the distance and fireflies. I wanted to have a reference to the fireflies at night and thought about the use of torches. They became eventually much more similar to fishermen's boats off shore at night: which was extremely relevant to our stories and my summer memories too.

LX: *It seems quite naturally to evolve into a nocturnal piece. Partly for the space itself (the dark Boiler House and then TMG65) partly but mostly it came from the*

actors: most scenes were taking place indoor (a church, a living room or a study) or at night (The Fisherman's Wife) during a big storms. Most of the material seems to be conducive to: darkness or dim lights.

WEEK 2:

Mon 4th and Tuesday 5th: ideally we should have worked in the space but we couldn't. Massive issue because this was the time set up to expand the work in response to the space. We spent only a couple of hours in the space last Friday.

MONDAY 4th:

We worked in TMG80: mainly in fixing the sequences: text, physical actions, intentions. Through repetition: we realized that we needed to be careful not to lose 'freshness' in particular with some characters (e.g Hedda). At the same time we could have been explored much more the details of each character's gestures and physical actions. It is necessary to find the balance between spontaneity and discipline.

TUESDAY 5th

In TMG82 sorting props, costumes and working mainly on the two text sequences that needed more attention and work: text for Jacob 'collage' from *The Great Gatsby* and wine descriptions. This is the only character whose text has been developed from existing sources. Not based on the original improvisation of the actor except a few words.

Observations:

The musicality and rhythm in Beatriz's dialogue with God needs further work. With this character the Fado and saudade set up the mood for the opening of the piece. This stereotype of Portuguese culture has been then placed within the Catholic setting (chapel) substituting the religious icon with the Fado icon. The sacred has been mixed juxtaposed with the mundane: drinking, eating and playing cards at the café.

I led much more this sequence than others: probably my intervention was too strong. The actress seems to own less this material. She seems trying to fulfil my expectations rather than exploring on her own.

Here the autonomy and independence of the actor vs the vision of the director might clash?

MON 12th:

Adaptation new staging in TMG 65 on Monday afternoon > Site-responsive.
Creative use of the space utilizing all its features (e.g. exits, entrances, doors, levels, element of the space: ladders, tech booth, rostra, patio outside..)

TUE 13th:

Technical day: lx and sound.

3b. A FLOATING CARAVAN UNDER THE MOON (2016)

Crisis Art Festival, Arezzo, Italy

LINKS:

Project Overview: <http://pantareitheatre.com/portfolio-item/a-floating-caravan-under-the-moon-2016/>

Gallery: <http://pantareitheatre.com/gallery/a-floating-caravan-under-the-moon-2016/>

Performance: <https://vimeo.com/247756935>

Project Documentary: <https://vimeo.com/221160071>

APPENDIX 4: HOME (2017)

I organised my material in different sections aiming to provide an overview of the project and links to visual material. Videos and photographs are also available on the USB in the folder: 'APPENDIX 4: Home'.

Appendix Index:

4a: Rehearsal notes.

4b: Links to website: videos and gallery.



Figure 64: Talking with the audience. *Home*, CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, 2017.

4a. REHEARSAL NOTES

Initial ideas: some notes and observations

- Characters: Use of fictional, real and historical characters. For examples: my Grandma', her boyfriend who died at war (autobiographical material), Cardinal Borromeo, The Inquisitor Domenico Buelli and the actress Vittoria Pisimi (historical characters), Gino, the Conman (fictional

character) and the misogynist Doctor (Doctor Balanzone, Mask of Commedia dell'Arte).

- Aims: to show the cyclical nature of history and our inability to learn from the past.
- Topics: misogyny, religious extremisms and propaganda, 'culture of fear', abuse of power, exploitation and war.
- The characters in the piece are Types: they transcend the individual dimension and become symbols. They represent values, ideologies and facets of humanity.
- Commedia dell'Arte Masks used as templates: *Arlecchino*, *Zanni* and the First Female Lover; Gino has some of the quality of the Captain but the major source of inspiration is a Social Type: the Italian macho.

Places:

- A Commedia stage: the venue where Vittoria Piisimi performed *La Zingana*. At the same time it symbolises the world of Commedia. It's the cultural space.
- A Church: this is where Cardinal Borromeo has his sermon. This also represents the Inquisition. It's the religious space.
- A Church's Forecourt: this is where Gino, the Conman sells his Saints' Relicts and Tortures. This symbolizes the piazza in the 16th century and the media (tabloid, TV, social media) in the 21st century. It's the public space.
- A Procession in the streets of Novara: Auto-da-fe' and the Stake, final scene.

Characters & Episodes (initial ideas not all used in the final piece):

- ***Arlecchino* (Second *Zanni*) Pre-show:** *Arlecchino*'s audience interaction in the foyer/courtyard (= before entering the stage area).
- **The Storyteller/Researcher:** I introduce the piece; I talk about its genesis and background: sources and themes - like Dario Fo in *Mistero Buffo*. I guide the audience throughout the show stepping in and out of character from scene to scene.
- **The Actress** inspired by Vittoria Piisimi:

The Actress Episode 1: 'Standing Ovation'; The Actress Episode 2: 'Opera Buffa'; The Actress Episode 3: 'Holy Mary Doll'; The Actress Final Episode: 'The Execution'. These are physical and visual sequences without text.

- **The Cardinal** inspired by Cardinal Borromeo (1538 -1584), Tommaso Garzoni (1549–89), and the Inquisitors Domenico Buelli da Arona (1570–1603) and Gregorio Manini da Gozzano (1603–1623):

Borromeo's Episode 1: '*Index Librorum Proibitorum*'; Borromeo's Episode 2: 'Masks: the Agent of Satan', Borromeo's Episode 3: 'The Holy Woman'; Borromeo's Episode 4: 'The Final Solution'. Text mainly edited from Cardinal Borromeo's original sermons, historical accounts and quotes from the *Malleus Malleficarum*.

- **Gino, the Charlatan/Con Man** – represents the greedy businessman driven purely by profit. Gino's Episode 1: 'The Saints' Relicts'; Gino's Episode 2: 'The Ultimate Tortures' Catalogue'. This is a man who can sell anything...even his mother!
- **The Misogynist Doctor** inspired by the Doctor Balanzone. Episode: 'The Inferiority & Evilness of Women'. This is a classic Doctor's *sproloquio* inspired by a *Commedia canovaccio*.
- **Nonna Ida and her Boyfriend** inspired by my family: Germino Episode: 'Germino, the Zanni Soldier'; Nonna Ida's Episode 1: 'The Pious Woman'; Nonna Ida's Episode 2: 'Al Rogo la Stria!'

Inspirational Texts:

- **La Zingara (canovaccio 1589)**: I utilised only two information from the historical character and event of her famous 1589 performance: Vittoria Piisimi was known as the 'Dancing Actress' and her most performance was La Zingana – the Gypsy. I built my fictionalised version utilising this info as a starting point. This scene is about a famous talented actress who plays so well the Gypsy/Future Teller that she got accused of being a 'real' Witch by Cardinal Borromeo - notoriously scared of women and their sensuality.

- From **Tessari's books** (*Commedia dell'Arte: la Maschera e l'Ombra*; *La Commedia dell'Arte* and *La Commedia dell'Arte nel Seicento*. "Industria" e "arte giocosa" della civiltà Barocca): historical documents from 1600s. Original sources from Tommaso Garzoni, Cardinale Borromeo, Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza against Commedia and in particular women on stage. Cardinale Borromeo from the homily performed on the 17th of July 1583. Ottonelli, G.D. (1652) *Della Christiana Moderatione del Theatro*. Mendoza, P.H. (1631) *Scolasticae et morales disputationes*.
- ***Malleus Maleficarum*** (*Hammer of Witches*): the most famous treatise on witchcraft; it was written by the Catholic clergyman Heinrich Kramer and published in 1487.
- From Vassalli's novel ***La Chimera***: Don Teresio, Bascapè and The Saints' Relics; The Trial & The Inquisitor; The Execution. Utilised as inspiring material not as text. Themes: hypocrisy, the Inquisition, church politics in Italy at the beginning of the seventeenth century, superstition and, of course, the role of women in Italian society.
- Commedia documents or **canovacci**: ***Sproloquio del Dottor Graziano*** on the evilness of Women in: Placido Adriani's *Selva overo Zibaldoni di concetti comici* (1734).
- **Ruzzante's plays and dialogues** (pre-Commedia): inspiration for the Zanni-Soldier in Veneto-accent.
- **Contemporary media's excerpts**: Theresa May's election campaign; Donald Trump's quotes. Various misogynist comments and remarks by politicians worldwide between 2012 and 2017.

Set:

Up Stage left: Ladder 'dressed' as a Monk (black robe with hood) with skull masks etc... 2 wooden chairs behind it with characters' stuff: 1 for Gino; 1 for Vittoria veil that will then be used to put Germino costume (underneath) and the cardinal costume.

Up Stage Centre: red organza on the floor. Symbolize both theatre curtain and fire (the stake). Wooden stick hidden behind- used for the last image.

Down Stage Right: a podium /lectern cover in black material with the script. I'll put Arlecchino mask –visible throughout the whole show. Zanni-Germino helmet is hidden behind the lectern. On the side a chair with Nonna Ida costume: 2 black scarves and a bamboo stick.

Props:

Mask, Bamboo stick, Wooden stick, Crucifix, 1 old book, 2 skull masks.

Costumes:

Black vest/top long sleeves/leggings (neutral) – Zanni: helmet + shirt+ belt;
Nonna: 2 black scarves; Borromeo: Black robe; Vittoria: white organza veil; Gino: sunglasses and Spanish shirt.

4b. HOME (2017)

CrisisArt Festival, Arezzo, Italy

LINKS:

Project Overview: <http://pantareitheatre.com/portfolio-item/home-2017/>

Gallery: <http://pantareitheatre.com/gallery/home-2017/>

Performance: <https://vimeo.com/246869220>

APPENDIX 5: TEACHING COMMEDIA dell'ARTE & DEVISING

This appendix contains examples of modules, courses and workshops developed between 2015 and 2017. I have selected three examples to provide a sample of some of the activities explored in class; examples of scripts or *canovacci* and a documentation of performances: links to online videos and galleries. These videos and photographs are also available on the USB in the folder: 'APPENDIX 5 – Teaching Commedia dell'Arte and Devising'.

The case studies are: Commedia dell'Arte courses at East 15 Acting School and the final productions *Commedia Extravaganza* and *Commedia dell'Shakespeare*; 'Staging Identity: Italian Theatre' module at Rose Bruford College and the final production *The Mountain Giants*; and the *Extraordinary Journeys* Devising workshops at London Metropolitan University.

Appendix Index:

5a: Overview.

5b: Commedia dell'Arte courses at East 15: Re-Contextualised Commedia dell'Arte: *Commedia Extravaganza* (Acting and Community Theatre Course, 2016/2017) and Commedia Masks and Shakespeare: *Commedia dell'Shakespeare* (Physical Theatre Course, 2016)

- links to videos;
- example of a Commedia production: material and structure (*canovaccio*).

5c: Devising with text: 'Staging Identity: Italian Theatre' module and final production: *The Mountain Giants* by Luigi Pirandello, Rose Bruford College (2016)

- link to video;
- module's content.

5d: Devising Workshop: *Extraordinary Journeys*, London Met. University (2015)

- workshop blurb;
- workshops' structure and examples of activities.

5a OVERVIEW

In the last three years I have designed and delivered modules on Popular Theatre, Physical Theatre and Commedia dell'Arte. I run workshops and lectures at symposia and theatre festivals. I've worked with Commedia dell'Arte traditional scenarios and characters (e.g. masterclass at RADA, Portsmouth University, Dulwich College) and experimented with Commedia masks techniques in devising theatre (e.g. London Metropolitan University, Goldsmiths University, Rose Bruford College) and text-based work including classic texts such as Shakespeare, Moliere and Lope de Vega (e.g. E15 Acting School and Canterbury Christ Church University).

I disseminated my methodology by testing my ideas both in class and rehearsal. Some of the aforementioned teaching experiences led to the creation of full-scale productions.



Figure 65: *Commedia Extravaganza* cast, East 15 Acting School, 2016.

5b. COMMEDIA dell'ARTE COURSES (2016/17)

LINKS:

Commedia Extravaganza (2016): <https://vimeo.com/245649160>
Password: Commedia1

Commedia Extravaganza (2017): <https://vimeo.com/245652234>
Password: Commedia2

Commedia dell'Shakespeare (2016): <https://vimeo.com/245726669>
Password: Commedia3

ABOUT THE COURSES:

The Community Theatre groups (May 2016 and 17) worked with me for 8 weeks and then develop in small groups a 10 minutes piece to perform in the streets of Southend-On-Sea. The title of the event was *Commedia Extravaganza*.

The Physical Theatre group (Nov-Dec 2016) worked with me for 10 weeks. Around week 6 we started working on a one-hour production inspired by Shakespeare's plays: *Commedia dell'Shakespeare*.

PRODUCTION: COMMEDIA dell 'SHAKESPEARE:

Shakespeare's plays were our source material. In some cases the students utilised Shakespeare's lines, in other they adapted the text and re-invented it. My intention was to discover how lead the students to 'physicalise' the text through the use Commedia dell'Arte's principles and Masks. The students worked in small groups and focus on a specific play of their choice.

From a directorial point of view it was quite challenging to combine the different scenes and create a coherent piece. The montage was indeed quite challenging in particular in relation to tempo-rhythm, pace and energy; but also logistically due to costume and Mask changes. It was extremely useful to discover that 'Accidental Narratives' can emerge even when working with text: the final composition (montage) 'shaped' the audience experience and the juxtaposition of actions (simultaneity) and concatenation of scenes from different plays created a complex dramaturgy: what Lehmann and Barba would label 'performance text'.

CHARACTERS & INSPIRATIONAL TEXTS from Shakespeare:

THE TEMPEST - Characters:

Ship-Master; Boatswain; Mariners = Servants= voices.

Alonso, King of Naples = Pantalone - CORA

Sebastian, the King's brother = the Captain - MARISA

Antonio, Prospero's wicked Brother who stole his dukedom = Doctor - ELI

Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, son of King Alonso= Male Lover – GEORGE

Trinculo, King's Jester = Arlecchino – KIM

Stephano, King's butler = Zanni – CHLOE R.

Miranda, Prospero's daughter = Female Lover - ELI

MACBETH - Characters:

Three Witches = Witch 1 as Diabolical Arlecchino – CHLOE H

Witches 2 & 3 = Second Zanni) – SCOTT & SHANEZ

Macbeth = Pantalone/Magnifico - GEMMA

Banquo = The Doctor (his friend) – ELLIOTT

King Duncan (A Captain) - DOM (Ghost/Dead)

Macduff = a Scottish Captain – HECTOR

Lennox= a Younger Captain – GEORGE

Two Chamberlains = Two Drunk Zanni – RONAN & LIAM

Lady Macbeth = La Signora - CHLOE R.

ROMEO & JULIET - Characters:

Romeo and Juliet: Young Lovers – LIAM & DOM

Lady Capulet= The Signora - LAUREN

Lord Capulet= Pantalone - NAT

The Nurse= A Mature Servetta/Female Zanni - CORA

Tybalt = A Spanish Captain - TOM

Benvolio = naïve Zanni - HECTOR

Mercutio = Brighella - RONAN

Friar Laurence = The Doctor – KIM

Paris = a Pantalone (Old Suitor for Juliet – just mentioned!)

HAMLET - Characters:

The Two Clown/Gravediggers = Arlecchino & Zanni – NAT & SCOTT

Ophelia = Female Lover – LAUREN (Ghost)

Polonius (her Father) = Pantalone – TOM (Ghost)

STRUCTURE (CANOVACCIO):

SERVETTA's PROLOGUE - [Shanez]. – Shanez asks the audience to make an effort to use their imagination because we don't have money for the set. She's very frustrated: she ended up with this pathetic bunch of amateurs while she would have liked to be in a musical at the West End!

1 - THE TEMPEST Act I Sc1 + ACT 2 Sc 1 – [Cora, Marisa, George, Chloe R, Kim, Eli]. Shipwreck on Prospero's Island. While the King is asleep, Ferdinand and Antonio attempt to kill him but he awakes. They all leave to look for Ferdinand, the King's son.

2 - MACBETH Act I Sc1 and Sc 3 – [Scott, Chloe H, Shanez, Elliot, Gemma]. Three Witches on another side of the Island are preparing a magic potion but get interrupted by Macbeth (Magnifico/Pantalone) and Doctor Banquo, two old friends & neighbours. They are a bit confused by the Witches' prophecy but they must leave for the banquet at the castle or Lady Macbeth will get angry!.

Ferdinand's crossing the Island (Male Lover motif). [George, Scott, Shanez and Chloe H] - The three witches pop their heads curious and amused.

3 - MACBETH Act II, Sc1: [Gemma, Marisa, Hector, Scott, Dom, Elliot, Liam, Ronan, Chloe R]. Macbeth is back at his castle they knock at the door but he doesn't want to see anyone- exit leaving his Maid [Servetta- Marisa] to deal with Macduff, a Scottish Captain [Hector] who arrives with a Servant that he recently captured in the wilderness of the Scottish moors [Zanni-Scott]. He wants to see the King [Captain- Dom]. Macbeth comes in to inform him that the king is in bed...dead. His neighbour Doctor Banquo is called: he has to explain the cause of death (=indigestion) with 'the help' of the drunken chamberlains [Servants: Zanni Liam & Zanni Ronan] who *last* saw him alive. Lady Macbeth (La Signora - Chloe R) faints. Captain is scared and leaves. All Exeunt.

Miranda's crosses the beach looking for shells - exit; she immediately followed by Ferdinand [George] crossing the beach: they miss each other.

4 - MACBETH Act III, Sc4: [Gemma, Chloe H, Chloe R, & briefly Elliott & George]. Macbeth sees the **ghost of the King** (instead of the ghost of Banquo as it's in the play): in reality it's just a trick played by the Witches [Arlecchino moves the Dead King like a puppet]. A comic situation with Servants, Lady Macbeth [Chloe R], a scared Lennox (Captain Ghostbuster) who pretends not to believe in ghosts but runs away as soon as he sees Arlecchino looking like the King Duncan's ghost. The Doctor is sent to cure Macbeth's vision: two very brief moments for both the Doctor and the Captain. (Possibility for Servetta [Shanez] to remark the mistake: "The ghost in this play is Banquo not the King! ...The Ghost of the King is in Hamlet: ignorant!")

Ferdinand crosses again. [George + Shanez, Scott, Chloe H] The three witches pop up and finally meet him: he's terrified and escapes leaving his scarf behind. The witches follow him.

King Alonso's & Co. cross the stage looking for Ferdinand – [Cora, Marisa, Chloe R., Kim, Eli]: they're exhausted. They see a piece of clothing that belongs to Ferdinand: they carry on knowing that they're on the right track.

5 - THE TEMPEST Act III Sc1 + Act IV, Sc 1 [Eli and George] Ferdinand enters running to escape from those ugly witches. Miranda enters: it's love at first sight. King Alonso & his brother with the Servants arrive too. [Cora, Kim, Chloe R, Marisa]: they were just following Ferdinand's track.

6 - ROMEO & JULIET, ACT I, Sc 5: Capulet's Ball. Capulet House: Nat, Lauren, Dom, Tom + Lovers couples that are the extended family; Montague Family: Hector, Liam, Ronan]. All Characters from R&J are introduced. Additional characters: Cora becomes the Nurse (Servetta); Lovers Dancing: George/Eli; Scott/Shanez; Elliott/Chloe H; Kim becomes Friar Laurence (Doctor); Gemma is Zanni (Capulet's Servant); Marisa is still Captain Sebastian and Chloe R is still Zanni (or perhaps Lady Macbeth – Signora?). All exit after Tybaltes attacks Benvolio, Romeo and Mercutio. Tybaltes is sent to sleep.

7 – MACBETH, ACT V – Sc. 1 - Lady Macbeth's soliloquy [Chloe R]. Lady Macbeth is drunk. Confused about the stains of red wine... A very quick scene to make fun of the blood vision scene (very quick scene useful for transition)-

Servetta [Shanez] drags her out telling her that now we're doing Romeo & Juliet not Macbeth!

8 - ROMEO & JULIET, ACT II, Sc 2: [Dom, Liam, Cora, Hector]. The balcony scene with the Nurse (Cora) + Benvolio and Mercutio

Servetta (Colombina)- [Shanez] enters saying it's all bullshit: Love? What love? ... there's only one thing these two really want! Let's talk straight. Audience interaction.

9 - ROMEO & JULIET, ACT III, Sc 2: [Ronan, Tom, then Liam & Hector too] Mercutio & Tybald fight - initially without Romeo and Benvolio. (Maybe the dead bodies stay dead on stage in funny positions: when Juliet enters in her ballet stage-crossing just elegantly jumps over them!)

10 - ROMEO & JULIET, ACT IV, Sc 1: [Dom & Kim]. Juliet (Female Lover) meets the Friar (Doctor- Kim): very short scene to get the poison. Maybe some Servants involved? Juliet exits and Friar follows her: she took the wrong potion!

Servetta (Colombina)- [Shanez] shouts at the dead bodies to get off that now we need to leave the stage for the important deaths! The actors exit a bit offended because their death is not so important as Romeo and Juliet: they cross Juliet's actress while she's entering very proud (diva-like) that her death IS more important than theirs. She takes her position as sleepy Juliet.

11 - ROMEO & JULIET, ACT V, Sc 3 (lines 93 & 182-184 the Lovers' death). [Liam, Dom & then Kim as the Friar + all the ones needed to carry the "dead" Lovers in procession except Scott, Nat, Tom, Lauren and Shanez (Servetta).] The Procession exits then it will come back again after the Gravediggers' moment to clash with Ophelia's funeral.

12 - HAMLET, ACT V, Sc 1 – [Scott, Nat + Tom and Lauren] Hamlet's Gravediggers moments is followed by the clash with Ophelia's and Polonius, Ophelia's father (Pantalone) and Lauren Ophelia (Female Lover/Ghost).

EPILOGUE- ENDING DANCE: '*Thriller*' by Michael Jackson. Nobody is dead: all ends well.

5c – DEVISING with TEXT: *THE MOUNTAIN GIANTS* (2016)

***The Mountain Giants* (2016):** <https://vimeo.com/246855751>
Password: Pirandello

This project offered me the opportunity to test how my devising methodology can be used in text-based theatre. I worked on characters and scenes utilising Commedia dell'Arte's principles and techniques for the mise-en-scene of *The Mountain Giants* by Luigi Pirandello. The course was structured in five weeks teaching and five weeks rehearsing. I introduced the students to Commedia dell'Arte masks (week 1), Dario Fo (week 3) and some of the most influential Italian playwrights (e.g. Goldoni, Pirandello and De Filippo).

In rehearsal I found it particular useful to play with the 'Scattered Objects' exercise (see Chapter 3.1). In this case rather than the theme 'home' the stimulus to select costumes and objects was Pirandello's play. We worked with 'found objects' and recycled costumes (Chapter 3.1: Artisan Theatre). The oneiric nature of Pirandello's play enabled the ensemble to experiment with symbols, surreal imagery, sound and music. Visual material utilised as a source of inspiration: pictures of Carnival parades, Catholic religious imagery, Renaissance Art, Caravaggio paintings and religious ceremonies.



Figure 66: Carnival parade scene. Imagery inspired by Renaissance sculptures, *The Mountain Giants* Rose Bruford College. 2016.

MODULE CONTENT:

Session 1

Theme: Commedia dell'Arte and the Market Place

“Gestures can be more powerful than words.” – F. Scala

- Origins and legacy of Commedia dell'Arte
- The language(s) of the market place: the language of the body
- An Actor's theatre: work on *canovacci* and improvisation
- The Importance of the Audience
- Grotesque characterisation: Commedia Masks

Session 2

Carlo Goldoni – *Adventures in the Country*

Theme: Goldoni Theatre Reform and the Italian Stage

“Art is imitation of Nature that is the best master above all books and rules.” – C. Goldoni

- The space: Commedia open air stages vs indoor theatres (Italian Theatre)
- The text: from an Actor's theatre to an Author's theatre
- The language: Literature vs Vernaculars. Goldoni's 'language for the theatre'
- The characters: from Types to Round Characters moving beyond the Masks
- The Importance of the Audience.

Session 3

Dario Fo & Franca Rame - *Mistero Buffo*

Themes: An Actor's Theatre & Politics, Ideology and Entertainment

“The Actor is an Instrument for Social Change.” – Dario Fo

- An Actor's theatre: the rediscovery of Commedia dell'Arte
- The language of the body and the *Grammelot*
- History, religion, current affairs and story-telling in Dario Fo and Franca Rame's masterpiece *Mistero Buffo*.
- The Importance of the Audience: “co-write and co-direct with the audience.”

Session 4

Eduardo De Filippo – *Napoli Milionaria*

Theme: The Italian Family

“The function of theatre is the desperate attempt on man’s part to put some meaning into life.” – E. De Filipp

- Gestures of Life: 'gestuality' as location for meaning.
- Folk traditions and music: the rhythm of Southern Italy on stage.
- Family and Society: The Private sphere vs the Public sphere in Eduardo De Filippo's plays.
- The role of Women in Italian society, in Art and on Stage: from Commedia dell'Arte to Contemporary Theatre.

Session 5

Luigi Pirandello – *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

Theme: Illusion and Reality

“The function of theatre is to show the Absurdity of Life...an illusion.” – L. Pirandello

- Is the goal of the theatre “to create a perfect illusion of reality”?
- The Nature of the Absurd in Pirandello: the tragedy and the comedy of life (*la crisi dell’Io* = crisis of the ‘Self’)
- Performativity and Role-play: “all world's a stage”?
- Meta-theatricality in Pirandello's plays

Session 6-10: Rehearsals for Pirandello’s *The Mountain Giants*

5d - DEVISING WORKSHOPS: EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEYS (2015)

WORKSHOP BLURB:

Extraordinary Journeys: Real, Surreal or Unreal?

In this series of workshops the students will utilize different vocal and physical techniques for devising, primarily inspired by the tradition of popular theatre and more specifically Dario Fo's 'epic theatre' and Commedia dell'Arte. These techniques will be only the starting point of our exploration of the Surreal and the Grotesque. Texts, music, sounds, images and objects inspired by a specific theme - '**Extraordinary Journeys**' - will provide a fantastical source of inspiration to stimulate the performers' to create ensemble material for performance.

The workshop will be quite energetic and physically demanding. Be prepared to work with comfortable clothing and bare feet. Bring water and warm clothes to keep your body comfortable and hydrated throughout the whole session. Some research and independent work will be required between classes. It will be an exiting, surprising and EXTRAORDINARY journey!

Period: January-March 2015

Source Material:

Alice in Wonderland – Lewis Carroll

The Little Prince - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The Wizard of Oz - Lyman Frank Baum

WORKSHOPS ACTIVITIES, NOTES & OBSERVATIONS:

SESSION 1 - Tuesday 3rd February 2015

PART 1

- Introduction: PhD topic (speech)
- Warm-up exercises: isolation, coordination, stretching, Yoga.
- Grotesque characters - body transformation through the use of Commedia 'archetypes': exploration of their animalistic qualities and grotesque body.

- Play with the Doctor and the Captain monologues. Theme: 'Extraordinary Journeys'. An exploration of both verbal and non-verbal medium of expression (body, sound, image) in the realm of the absurd, surreal and illogical.
- 'Means of transportations': exploration of how the performers' body can become anything we need for an 'extraordinary journey': a horses, a donkey, a boats etc...(lifting, carrying, back-to-back exercises).

PART 2

- Videos: Panta Rei Theatre's trailer. An example of how to apply the Grotesque and the Surreal in contemporary performances: combined arts projects.
- Brainstorming = the starting point for collaborative work and devising. In small groups create the following 'lists': 1) images 2) sounds 3) objects 4) means of transportation inspired by the suggested texts and theme.
- As a group underline/select the most inspiring image and the most evocative sound. The combination of this image and sound will be the beginning of your creative journey: '*your opening scene*' in the work that we will develop in the following sessions.

HOMEWORK for Tue 26th of February:

- With the rest of the group agree on reading at least one of the three selected texts making sure that within your group (collectively) you'll end up having read all of them (e.g. one can read Carroll, one Baum etc...).
- Individually choose a specific moment/event/scene from your chosen text(s) and think about: why you selected that specific moment? What did you find particularly inspiring? What are its 'theatrical potentials'? (Remember that this material will be used to create a short performance).
- Bring objects and/or materials useful to create the images and sounds in your lists (from the group brainstorm exercise at the end of session 1)

SESSION 2 - Tuesday 26th February 2015

PART 1:

- Brief warm up
- Recap on some salient points in the creation/development of grotesque characters and their grotesque world with particular focus on the theme

'Extraordinary Journeys' and all the actions related to it (e.g. walking, climbing, swimming, flying, sailing, meeting giants and witches, falling into rabbit hole...all situations/actions/characters inspired by the selected texts).

- Individually think about a scene/moment you liked in the chosen text. Close your eyes and picture it in your mind with all details you can possibly find in it.
- 'Live in' the image/move in it
- Utilizing some of what we've practice in session 1 (with the Captain's and Doctor's monologues): tell your audience your story switching between characters/action and the storyteller (storyteller= a narrative voice in open dialogue with the audience). The storyteller informs the audience about the plot. Commedia dell'Arte inherited this from the ancient tradition of storytelling. The Prologue explains WHAT is the story – it provides the major information. Then throughout the performance the actor can get back to his/her storyteller role and talk directly to the audience explaining a bit more. Use the bit of text chosen integrating animals and sounds. Some TIPS:

1. What are the salient moments (Beg/Pivotal situations/End)
2. Treat it as a storyboard. Each moment is an image (like comics/comic books). Have the 'train of images' (like a train of thoughts) as a *canovaccio* (= from Commedia dell'Arte the *canovaccio* is the list of acts and scenes; the plotline the performers used as a starting point for their improvisation).
3. What are the sounds in this scene? Think about it and write it down. For instance if you have a wolf or a chicken in your story you can use their physicality but also their sounds to portray them. Like in comic stripes/comic books you can use onomatopoeia and sound effects (e.g. splash, boom, zac...).
4. You can use not only foreign languages but also invented languages (e.g. Fo's *grummelot*)

- In the first few attempts usually we tend still to rely almost entirely on words (verbal language) or in actions that are often literal or simply reiterate what already said in words. The goal in this exercise is to notice this pattern and try to break it. The aim is to reduce the verbal

communication and substitute words and entire sentences with sounds and images (= physical storytelling). First of all avoid repetitions; if you physicalize something you don't need to explain in words what you are doing; vice-versa if you decide to verbalise something you don't need to physicalize it.

- Exercise on soundscape with the objects/materials brought by the whole group. (*too little to play with in this session: we will work more on this in session 3*)

SESSION 3 - Wednesday 15th April 2015

- Exercise on **Grummelot** (inspired by Dario Fo's work): how to tell a story with an invented language (body, sounds and verbal expressions). Real and invented languages. Same exercise we introduce last time. Choose a moment in the text with different characters; actions and sounds.
- **Soundscape** exercise (all group) with the objects that I've selected inspired by the texts and the students' "brainstorm lists" (session 1).
- Exercise with **objects**: improvisation led by the tutor utilizing all the elements explored so far (character, sound, voice) and the use of objects. (All group)
- **Final Improvisation** in small groups/companies: creation of a 2mins piece. Montage: juxtaposition of material.

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