

Making theatre *elastic*

A practice-led PhD based on performance research with Elastic Theatre, focusing on the body of work produced between 2005 and 2011

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PhD by Prior Output
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List of submitted outputs

Ophelia's Song

Presented at Teatro Abarico (Rome) in 2005 and London Metropolitan University (The Facility's symposium *Happily ever after...?*) in 2006.

Medea Made Medea

Presented at London Metropolitan University, London Contemporary Dance School (The Place), Westminster University and Theatre 145 (Grenoble) in 2007.

The Magdalene Mysteries

Presented at The Space Theatre, St. James's Piccadilly, the Southwark Playhouse and Teatro Sala Uno (Rome) in 2008.

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus

Presented at the Arcola Theatre and London Metropolitan University as part of *Borderline Opera* in 2009.

Medousa

Presented at the Riverside Studios, London Metropolitan University as part of *Borderline Opera*, the American University of Paris and Pavé D'Orsay (Paris) in 2009.

Baroccata / Baroque Box

Presented at the Riverside Studios in 2010 and re-developed in co-production with Greenwich+Docklands International Festival at the Old Royal Naval College in 2011.

All above outputs have been conceived, written and directed by Jacek Ludwig Scarso, developed in collaboration with Elastic Theatre (© J. L. Scarso and Elastic Theatre, 2005-2012). Written, photographic and video documentation on each of these outputs is included in the Appendices and contextualised in the main discussion.

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Abstract

The present discussion is based on my performance research with Elastic Theatre (originally named Vocal Motions and also known as Vocal Motions Elastic Theatre), a company that I founded and have directed since 2001. A specific focus is placed on the body of work produced between 2005 and 2011, which comprises six performance outputs: *Ophelia's Song* (2005-2006), *Medea Made Medea* (2007), *The Magdalene Mysteries* (2008), *Medousa* (2009), *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus* (2009) and *Baroccata/Baroque Box* (2010-2011). These productions have been informed by an overriding ethos, which is presented and reflected upon in the following chapters. I refer to such ethos by using the term *elasticity*, which I define in the Introduction, contextualising this within the broader spectrum of contemporary tendencies in performance practices, with particular reference to the notion of 'post-dramatic theatre'.

This concept of elasticity is presented in relation to three aspects of my productions: respectively, the combination of performance disciplines (Chapter 1), the dramaturgical approach (Chapter 2) and the staging choices made (Chapter 3). Across these chapters, I provide a contextual overview of the aspect treated, a discussion of my methodology in relation to this, and a reflection on my findings, referring to the concept of 'liminality'.

My Conclusion draws my reflections together, emphasising the original contribution that my work has represented in the field of contemporary performance.

Each of my outputs is documented in the Appendices, through written, photographic and video material. The Appendices also include a chronological overview of the productions discussed, a summary/glossary of my methodological strategies and a brief presentation of the company's history.

Additional details can be found on the website: www.elastictheatre.com .

Introduction

Framing *elasticity*

The following discussion describes and analyses the creative methodology employed in making the six practice-based outputs submitted, produced with my company Elastic Theatre. This methodology is described here with the term 'elastic', referring to a type of theatre that it is simultaneously

- a) flexible in its combination of performance disciplines and in its use of improvisation;
- b) hybrid in the way its content is devised by merging inter-textual stimuli;
- c) malleable in the way it is staged, as it is created and re-invented to respond to highly diverse venues and contexts of presentation, highlighting the subjectivity of the spectator's experience.

Thus, the performances generated through this methodology may be positioned within a number of contemporary practices that continue to draw scholarly attention. The concept of Post-dramatic Theatre, introduced by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006), will provide an overriding theoretical reference for this discussion. In relation to this, references will be made to specific instances within the post-dramatic context: respectively, Composed and New Music Theatre, as discussed respectively by Rebstock and Roesner (2012) and by Salzman and Desi (2008); Devised Theatre as according to Heddon and Milling (2006) and Govan, Nicholson and Normington (2007); and Site-Specific/Site-Responsive Theatre, with references to Noé (2009) and Gardner (2008).

This discussion may firstly be of value to performance practitioners, by providing a methodological model for those seeking to create work through improvisational, multi-disciplinary and site-responsive devising techniques. Moreover, the notion of 'elasticity' outlined in this paper and exemplified by the outputs may also contribute to current understandings of the post-dramatic, particularly in its connotations of liminality. By liminal I here refer to the use of the term as explored by Susan Broadhurst, applying Victor Turner's influential perspective on threshold stages in the study of ritual and cultural practices (1999; chap.1), to reflect on the emphasis on marginality and hybridisation characterising

contemporary theatre. Liminal is what happens “betwixt-and-between” recognised categories and, in the case of performance, such categories may range from the disciplines used to the aesthetic/conceptual reference points inherent to the work (e.g. styles, genres, themes, textual sources, narrative forms and staging formats). Liminal properties and their relevance to the post-dramatic will be discussed with each aspect of my work articulated in this document. Additionally, my work exposes the inherently liminal position of dramatic conventions in the post-dramatic: the position of being challenged, extended but not fully rejected. As Lehmann states:

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. What it does not mean is an abstract negation and mere looking away from traditional drama. ‘After’ drama means that it lives on as a structure – however weakened and exhausted – of the ‘normal’ theatre: as an expectation of large parts of its audience, as a foundation for many of its means of representation, as a quasi automatically working norm of its dramaturgy. (ibid.; p.27)

Elastic Theatre’s body of work indeed finds its inspiration in many previous or existent artistic practices: for instance, the ‘operas’ produced by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, both individually or in collaboration, in their provocative reference to the traditional form that they have in many ways radically challenged; the dance and vocal music productions of interdisciplinary artists like Meredith Monk; practices of ‘composed theatre’, in particular work of Heiner Goebbels and of Theater der Klänge; the exciting fusions of vocal music and dance-theatre found in productions by Les Ballets C de la B; the improvisational music theatre work of companies like Impropera and the site-responsive productions of Punchdrunk. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that while all these examples denote aspects similar to those mentioned above (multi-disciplinarity, the potential for flexibility of form and content, different stagings), they normally preclude others. Here are common features that will help in identifying a definition for the body of work that is central to this discussion:

- Each piece is the product of devising, through a process of improvisation across different disciplines. However, improvisation is never an end in itself, though may feature in sporadic sections of the live performance.
- Each work combines the use of vocal music, theatre and choreography, in many cases aligning itself to the forms of music theatre and contemporary opera. Here, each performer acts rather as a representative of his/her own discipline and is

expected to create an interpretation of a given character that is specific to such discipline.

- Each production revisits historical texts, whether dramatic or not. Such texts are, however, never approached as unified/unifying entities, but rather as objects of deconstruction and subversion.
- Responding to the diversity of venues used, productions may involve substantially different stagings, all equally representative of the work. Nonetheless, it is the core performance that is adapted (including text, music and choreography), and not just the spatial configuration: the challenge is to keep this adaptation true to the essential narrative and aesthetics of the work.

It is through this understanding that my work has represented for me a form of research, alongside its function as artistic practice. The combination of the above characteristics with my interest in Lehmann's concept of post-dramatic theatre has informed the following set of research questions, or areas of 'research inquiry' – to reference Nelson's proposed terminology that challenges the search for clear-cut answers within a Practice as Research (PaR) context (2013; loc.756):

How might the ethos of 'elasticity' inherent to the outputs discussed in this document highlight new possibilities in contemporary, post-dramatic theatre making? In particular, how can Elastic Theatre's practical methodologies be used to further the complexity of the notion of post-dramatic theatre, providing an insight into, respectively, the relationship between performance disciplines, the conception of narrative development and the function of space and response to site?

Contextual review: 'post-dramatic' and related themes in recent academic literature

Hans-Thies Lehmann's coinage of the expression 'post-dramatic' has provided in recent years a particularly influential reference point in identifying contemporary tendencies in theatre practice. For the purpose of this discussion, I will be specifically referencing the ideas explicated by Lehmann in his seminal text *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006). Lehmann's definition of this phrase pertains to a type of performance that reflects a progressive

autonomization of theatrical language, as independent of the dramatic one; a theatre in which the role of the director is no longer confined to the staging of the work, but is involved in the entire process of its creation; a theatre of simultaneity and ambivalence, of cross-disciplinarity, collaboration and dehierarchization; a theatre that exposes its own theatricality (ibid.). These notions, which will be explored throughout my discussion, are in opposition to the linearity and to the conventional aesthetics of traditional dramatic forms, but equally to the formalist abstraction and the total renunciation of these forms by some modernist practices.

Lehmann's emphasis on the implicit reference to dramatic conventions is also intrinsic to my understanding of elastic performance. While it would be tempting to merely oppose the concept of elasticity to the stable notion of unity promoted by classical models of drama, it is in fact the latent reference to these that allows my productions to be elastic. Total abstraction or total spontaneity in performance may appear to be the most obvious examples of elasticity, but within this perspective they may lack the very substance that needs to be rendered plastic. For something to be stretched it needs to be there to begin with, and within this understanding of theatrical elasticity both meaning and structure need to be clearly identifiable entities, before being increasingly flexed.

Lehmann's discussion inherently reprises themes found in both post-structuralist and post-modernist studies, which see fragmentation, displacement and shifting meanings as quintessential traits in the production and interpretation of culture. Through such themes, his observations can be connected, directly or indirectly, to an earlier range of literature looking at the effects of post-structuralism and post-modernism on theatre. Elinor Fuchs, as an example, examines the Derridean influence on theatre practices acting against logo-centrist assumptions of unity and truth, particularly with regards to Character and Presence (1985). Katherine Arens explores the disruption of absolutes and meta-narratives in her study of Robert Wilson and post-modern theatre (1991). Wilson is the chosen example for many other writings on the subject, including Andrzej Wirth's account of the practitioner's use of cross-cultural references as a manifestation of the arbitrary and deliberately disjointed vision of post-modern aesthetics (1989). Similar themes are reprised by Arnold Arnoson's overview of postmodern theatre design, promoting in the viewer a 'referential network' of juxtaposed, seemingly incongruous connections (1991; p.6).

Although clear links may be found between a post-dramatic understanding of theatre and previous discussions on post-modern performance (cfr. Jürs-Munby in Lehmann, 2006; p.13), it is important to point out Lehmann's criticism in relation to the latter phrase. The term post-modern, he argues, tends to reduce the study of theatre to a series of generic catchphrases that vaguely define it while attempting to allow for all its contradictions (2006; p.25). Moreover, the term "claims to achieve the definition of a whole epoch" (p.26), invariably positioning the subjects studied as reactions to modernity, which may or may not be the case (ibid.). This criticism suggests a desire on Lehmann's part to focus instead on the internal mechanisms of theatrical workings, relatable but not reducible to the cultural manifestations of post-modernity. As Wessendorf points out,

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, but derives and unfolds from within a long-established theatre aesthetics itself, as a deconstruction of one of its major premises (ibid.; p.14).

Since Lehmann's seminal text, much literature has acknowledged the post-dramatic as a reference term through which to analyse specific traits of contemporary theatre. Jean-Pierre Ryngaert mentions this, albeit paired with the term postmodern, in discussing current dramaturgical shifts promoting an end to the "old dependence on illusion" and a "more dangerous, more active" role of the spectator (2007; p.16). Jem Kelly includes this term when defining 'non-matrixed performances', challenging a traditional understanding of the relationship between performer and character (Mermikides & Smart, 2010; p.51). A recent symposium that I attended at Cambridge University explored the dismantling and paradoxical "re-mantling of the fourth wall" in post-dramatic theatre, through a contribution by Karen Jürs-Munby (Dec 2013), who translated Lehmann's book to English. In her critical introduction to this, Jürs-Munby emphasises the importance of the post-dramatic as signalling a crucial cultural moment in which contemporary theatre experimentation has now its own institutional history, is embedded in HE curricula and recognised in PaR contexts (2006; pp.7-9). Her most recent book, edited alongside Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, explores the political connotations of post-dramatic aesthetics (2013).

Despite its influential reach, the phrase post-dramatic has also been criticised in its broad and sometimes contradictory connotations (Rebstock and Roesner, 2012; chap.1) and in its debatable assumption of a 'crisis' of previous forms (Ryngaert, 2007; p.16). Furthermore,

because the term's original purpose has been to describe existent patterns looking retrospectively at relevant performance work, its application tends to result in an *a posteriori* approach in relation to the performance outcome, which may present a challenge when applying this to a devising methodology.

In light of this, what becomes apparent in this context is the need to both identify specific traits within such a broad spectrum of theatre practice, as well as the term's relevance to the theatre-making process itself. For instance, while all post-dramatic practices tend to share an interest in fragmentation, ambivalence and a questioning of logo-centrist forms, it is the degree to which they do so that generates very diverse creative needs in their realisation. If a theatrical work is so fragmented as to do away with any need for narrative or aesthetic cohesion, exploring its flexibility may not represent much of a challenge: the work may be transformed radically across performances, but its intended signification may be just as open. Instead, my approach with Elastic Theatre denotes a continual tension between the will to elasticise the development and presentation of my productions, and the desire to preserve an essential cohesion of both content and form, in order to maintain the legibility and integrity of the work.

With these ideas in mind, the broad spectrum of the post-dramatic increasingly appears as a greyscale of practices: of *limina within the liminal*, whereby the idea of liminality is intended not only in its "betwixt-and-between" nature, as originally suggested by Turner and consequently by Broadhurst (1999; chap.1), but also in its potential for shifting parameters and for malleability. By articulating my own practice, I hope to shed a light onto the complexity of this notion.

Discussion structure

In presenting my practice as a model of theatre making within the post-dramatic context, it is crucial to emphasise that no assumption is being made that such practice may constitute an "ultimate" or "pure" version of post-dramatic theatre. Firstly, the post-dramatic form is intrinsically diverse, which is precisely why it is so challenging to succinctly pinpoint its characteristics. Secondly, as also pointed out by Jürs-Munby citing an interview with Forced Entertainment's Claire Marshall (Lehmann, 2006; p.14), concepts such as the post-dramatic

are not so much goals to aspire to in creating theatre, as much as contexts within which to interrogate and explicate one's practice. Consequently, while the aspects of my work discussed here are all framed by a post-dramatic understanding, they are also relatable to other contexts of theatre making.

To evidence this, each of the next three chapters will explore a particular aspect of my work and relate it to a 'sub-context' within the post-dramatic, thus implying that it is analysed as part of the broad range of practices discussed by Lehmann, but targeting, at the same time, a specific possible approach within this. Hence, according to the previously mentioned references, the sub-context of Composed Theatre will be used to discuss the combination of performance disciplines in my work (chap.1); the one of Devised Theatre to analyse its dramaturgical approach (chap. 2); and the one of Site-specific Theatre to present its staging aesthetics (chap.3). Each of these sub-contexts is to be considered as a possible manifestation of post-dramatic theatre, as will be evidenced by my references to Lehmann's perspective in each case. By explicating my practice within the broader context of the post-dramatic and its sub-contextual possibilities, each chapter proposes a series of findings, articulated through the notion of liminality as it pertains to the specific aspect in question. In order to document how these findings are reached, each chapter will articulate the practical methodologies elaborated in my work, structured into three respective devising phases (see Appendix 1c for an overview of these). In each case, I will provide practical examples from my productions, as well as parallels and contrasts with existent practices in the field.

PaR, methodology and originality

The implication that an art practice constitutes research is invariably one that requires validation. Annette Arlander identifies an area of dispute in whether to evaluate the role of the art-work in the context of art-based research as either the research result or the method (Arlander in Biggs & Karlsson, 2011; p.328). Here, I would propose to use Søren Kjørup's argument that art as research should see the artistic practice as "not only the result of research, but also its methodological vehicle, when the research unfolds *in and through* the acts of creating and performing" (ibid.; p.46). It is for this reason that the research methodologies articulated in this document intentionally coincide with my methods of

rehearsal and of production. This understanding of research methodology reflects current perspectives on Practice as Research (PaR), including Haseman's concept of 'performative research' (cited in Nelson, 2013; loc. 1316) and Schön's 'reflection-in-action' (ibid.; loc. 1535), challenging the need to conform to standard methods of both quantitative and qualitative research in a PaR context. Further referencing Nelson's discussion (ibid.; loc. 2203-2217), such methods of 'doing-knowing' inherent to the practice itself, hereon referred to as 'Practical Methodologies', should nonetheless be seen as part of a broader methodological range, in conjunction with the inquiry of related academic writings which informs my work and the present discussion, as well as with the methods of documenting my outputs, as featured in the Appendices.

Conversely, the findings of such research may be identified in both the artworks themselves, that is my theatre productions, as well as in the discoveries that each of these has promoted in relation to the previously mentioned research questions: the former option (artwork as outcome) testifies "in the material sense... the development of art practice"; the latter (outcome as discovery through the artwork) indicates "in the cognitive sense... the understanding of what that art practice is' (ibid.; p.54). As Barone and Kjørup would agree, such findings should not be viewed as 'claims in propositional form' (Barone 2012; p.3) 'to enhance certainty' (ibid.; p.47), but rather as interrogative 'unfinished thinking ... through and with art' (Kjørup in Biggs & Karlsson, 2011; p.44). Furthermore, while the nature of this type of research is discovery-led, rather than hypothesis-led (see Rubidge cited ibid.; p.56), an empirical aspect is inherent to the elasticity discussed in this body of work, in its pursuit of repeated testing, evidenced in the methodologies (re-)applied to the six production outputs discussed, as well as in the way that each production is conceived, in itself, as a re-negotiable, re-testable product.

Despite the public recognition of the work's artistic innovations – see for instance the recent US publication *Theatre Today – a Panoramic View of the World Theatre*, selecting Elastic Theatre as exemplifying new theatre trends from across the globe (Haridy, 2013; pp.176-179), its originality in research terms remains a more complex issue to identify. Accordingly, as Biggs and Büchler observe, it is paramount to distinguish between artistic research that contributes to a cumulative understanding in the academic sense, from that which is orientated towards personal development mainly (Biggs and Karlsson, 2011; p.86). Yet, quantifying new knowledge contributed to a field is problematic, when the field in question is, as described by Barone, "pervaded by a dialectic activity in which ideas are held tentatively

rather than permanently and where conclusions are always partial and temporary” (2012; p.53). Hence, the context of the post-dramatic, also in its respective sub-contexts articulated in the following chapters, will be used to establish the research originality in Elastic Theatre’s work. This originality will be identified both in the practical methodology itself, as a model of devising within this context, and in the way that this methodology furthers the post-dramatic understanding of theatre, in its liminal connotations.

Before moving on to the next chapters, I would advise the reader to consider the Chronological Overview of the outputs submitted (Appendix 1b), which identifies the progressive development of my work. Each output is presented more extensively in Appendices 2-7.

Chapter 1

Elastic Disciplines

Sub-context: Composed and New Music Theatre

In order to narrow down the scope of my work with Elastic Theatre and in light of its consistent combination of vocal music, choreography and text, I locate most of my practice where the notion of post-dramatic performance overlaps with the forms of ‘new music theatre’ and ‘composed theatre’, respectively discussed by Salzman and Desi (2008), and by Rebstock and Roesner (2012). Many examples cited by both sets of authors are also used in Lehmann’s discussion as specific trends within the post-dramatic, hence representing a useful sub-contextual frame within this paper. The phrases ‘composed’ and ‘new music theatre’ are not necessarily synonymous, with Rebstock and Roesner arguing for new music theatre to be “on the more musical wing of composed theatre” (ibid.; loc. 819), hence implying a more open definition of the latter. Indeed, Salzman and Desi insist on the importance of differentiating between “theatre that sings and theatre that is driven by music” (2008; p.338), the latter being a true representation of music theatre.

Across Elastic Theatre’s productions, there has been a progressive alignment with this understanding, reflected in an increasingly prominent function of the music score as both organically developed with the staging and as intrinsically embedded in the narrative. But there are aspects to the work that inherently sit at the borderline of Salzman’s and Desi’s definition. My productions explore a context where music is indeed more than a mere aesthetic effect or mood reinforcement, but also where the idea of music leading the dramatic action feels restrictive, precisely because of the post-dramatic nature of the work. In this context, the function of music may not be easily categorised as either decorative or essential to the work. Music is neither an extra layer, added on top of everything else, nor the sole foundation of the work. Equally, text and staging may have no set dominance over it or each other. In Elastic Theatre’s productions, the relationship between these elements is constantly negotiated and they all directly inform the core meaning of the work. It is an *elastic* negotiation, because it does not simply imply an equal sharing of emphasis, but, according to each project or each scene or even each theatrical moment, it is open to

continuous, sometimes radical and sometimes subtle, changes. In this respect my work reprises Lehmann's concept of post-dramatic 'parataxis', according to which contemporary theatre may question conventional hierarchies of signification in favour of a simultaneity of signs (Lehmann, 2006; pp.86-87); it also echoes, in direct reference to Lehmann, the anti-hierarchical and collaborative emphasis that Rebstock and Roesner identify in Composed Theatre practices, in their post-dramatic nature (2012; loc. 742).

Importantly, the performance disciplines involved here are directly explored right from the start of the development of each work, as much of the content is devised in the studio. It follows that a fundamental aspect of my work is researching, on the one hand, the specific "logic" of each discipline and its way of communicating an idea; on the other, how an idea may evolve through the idiosyncrasies of a discipline and how links between disciplines may be promoted through this process. The property of the disciplines in my work to both function discretely and interdependently will be a key aspect in this discussion, particularly in relation to whether the work may be defined as multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary (see Chapter 1 Findings). This ethos may be compared to the one informing the body of work of US composer/choreographer Meredith Monk, which also manifests a clear interest in blurring the boundaries between art forms. Nonetheless, the often abstract register that characterises Monk's work, visible for instance in her 2008 piece *Songs of Ascension*, has very different implications to those of my projects, where the aesthetic merging of disciplines is also mitigated by the need to convey narratives.

My approach to the combination of performance disciplines is documented in a short film [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 1, "The making of *Baroque Box*"] commissioned to film-makers Savage Mills with support from the Wellcome Trust, which presents, in a deliberately accessible and concise way, our methodology of work. With extracts from rehearsals and interviews with company members, the film explores the way in which cast and production team have worked together in the creation of *Baroque Box* (fig.1) and the collaborative ethos through which this project was developed.



Figure 1 - Scene from *Baroque Box*

Practical methodology

Abstract Combination – Purposeful Layering – Selective Setting

All the outputs included with this research have featured a strong presence of improvisation, from the very beginning of the development process. Unlike companies like Impropera, however, improvisation is not the outcome of the work as such, though aspects of it filter through to performance according to the following process.

Most of my works develop from a narrative or visual concept that I begin to explore with my immediate collaborators (typically, the designer, the composer and the main performers). Already as we audition cast members, this phase includes improvisation tasks inherent to the concept under discussion: this is necessary not only to assess the candidates' skills in this respect, but also to envision how the concept can be directly shaped by the contribution of a performer. In this sense, it is important to emphasise that Elastic Theatre's productions have always developed in light of each performer's individual input. The aim of "tailor-making" the work to the interpreter has as its strength the solidity of our casting choices, as often pointed out in reviews and audience feedback; as its potential risk, the fact that, should casting changes be needed, these invariably cause radical changes to the work. The use of

understudies is hardly applicable in this case, as performers' devising contribution directly affects the work. Nonetheless, such changes may provide an interesting development for a piece. For instance, the character of The Scientist, performed by actor Giovanni Bienne in *Baroccata* and then by baritone singer Nicolas Simeha in *Baroque Box*, clearly demonstrated the performer's own devising stamp. Not only did the contrast between speech in the former and singing in the latter inevitably mark their individual interpretations of the character, but these in turn shaped the story directly and were vital in the development of the project from one production format to the other [Appendix 1d DVD: compare Links 2 and 3].

The initial phase of exploration, both during auditions and in the first rehearsals of each production, entails a deliberately broad approach to the topic in question. Together with reflecting a genuine open-mindedness at the start of a project, such broadness of approach, meaning here the use of as little directorial/authorial input as possible, is intended to promote a spirit of collaboration amongst the team: the emphasis is on every member being directly responsible for the development of the work. Usually, images or abstract concepts are used at this stage. Each performer is invited to respond to these by improvising in his/her own specific discipline. Solo material begins to be shaped in this way and arbitrarily juxtaposed in the creation of happenings, with no expectation of character relationships or narrative development. The very use of the term 'happening' links this approach to historical practices in performance, such as the work of Kaprow, or Cage and Cunningham: while borrowing the notion of disciplines co-existing independently, here this practice is however different, in that it represents a means whereby, rather than the aim of the work itself. It is a starting phase, which I often refer to as *abstract combination*, and which for instance can be viewed in the following footage from the devising of *Baroccata* (fig. 2) [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 5, "Rehearsal extracts from *Baroccata*"]. Here, dancers, singers, actors and musicians had the task of liberally responding to a selection of paintings by Caravaggio. Intentionally avoiding the use of words or of clearly identifiable narratives, the performer would respond through his/her own specialist discipline. The juxtaposition of such improvisations would gradually be directed towards interaction and the devising of narrative scenarios. Significantly, none of the material included in this footage was then actually featured in the end result, but all of it directly informed the choices made in relation to this, as it provided me with a basis to envision the characters of the piece and imagine their journeys in relation to the themes of the production.



Figure 2 Rehearsal from *Baroccata*

Abstract combination is also a fundamental way to experiment with the dramaturgical function of a discipline within a given theatrical framework, which, in turn, informs the creation of a plotline and the overall structuring of the production. In *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus* (fig.3), the juxtaposition of the singers' improvisation inspired by extracts from the ancient Greek hagiography of the two saints, with the dancers' improvisation stimulated by imagery from medieval depictions of martyrdom, generated an important question: aside from highlighting the emotional journey of the dance, what could the vocal score represent from a dramaturgical angle? The decision was to eventually conceive the vocal score as the internal thought processes of the two characters: an offstage intertwining of voices, representing fragments of memories, premonitions and unspoken words to accompany the depiction of the characters, performed silently by the two dancers.

As soon as such dramaturgical decisions are made, a new phase of development begins. My work as director/author increasingly informs the material explored and the combination of disciplines is directly guided by the narrative. I would often term this phase as *purposeful layering*; no longer are choreography, music and text seen as separate entities, but rather as forming a cross-referential web that in its complexity is intended to communicate the story of the piece. However, each element of this web still reflects an improvisational basis at its core. In the following extract [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 4, "Torture scene: *The Passion of*

Saints Sergius and Bacchus”] the representation of the torture and humiliation exerted onto Sergius and Bacchus by the Roman Empire is depicted through a scene that denotes a strong use of improvisation both in the dance and in the score. Rather than set, both choreography and music are structured around key moments. This type of composition reprises Edward Sarath’s notion of ‘retensive-protensive’ conception (Sarath, 1996; p.6): the principle according to which the improviser combines an ‘inner-directed temporality’, where “the localised present is intensified” (ibid; p.5), with the fundamental awareness of past and future directions, which allows the improvisational elements to maintain cohesion and a sense of journey. Certainly, such awareness may be facilitated by pre-agreed conventions: amongst the singers, for instance, by elements such as chord progression; amongst the dancers, by essential structures of movement development. However, it is the synergy required between the two that fascinates me the most and that will be explored further below; a synergy that I have admired in the music theatre works of Les Ballets C de la B, such as *Vsprs* or *Pitié*, where, similarly, musicians and singers appear to engage in a direct emotional dialogue that is both cohesive and, to some degree, spontaneous. In contrast to these productions, nonetheless, the composition of the score here was a direct result of such a dialogue, rather than a re-working of existent music.



Figure 3 “Torture scene” in *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*

This concept is also evident in the following section from *Baroccata* [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 6, “Layered scene”]. Here, we see the integration of three separate scenes (two physical

ones and one based on a scripted dialogue), all accompanied by the same piece of music, created especially for the piece. All sections included are based on semi-improvised material, and while being separate entities, they are conceptually and theatrically linked together. In one section, we see *Puzzled Jesus* bored, testing his boundaries with *God* while being tempted by a symbolic snake; in another, the archetype of *Doubting Thomas* is bickering with an *Angel*, representing the tension between doubt and faith; in the third section, the *Scientist* and the *Artist* discuss the makings of the soul and the seventeenth century belief in the physical presence of spirits in the body: a debate that concludes with hypothesising the mechanism of blood circulation (fig. 4). The layering of the three scenes, while deliberately open in its possible interpretations, is specifically conceived to highlight the contradictions between sacred and secular beliefs that are key to the baroque ideas explored in the piece. As a result, the themes of contradiction and ambiguity that are integral to this work are further enhanced by the combination of the disciplines involved, including, in other scenes, the use of opera singing.



Figure 4 "Layered scene" in *Baroccata*

As each production develops and reaches its performance outcome, the interplay of disciplines becomes increasingly set, yet nonetheless featuring some improvisational aspects. This *selective setting* in our work, that is to say the property of controlling the performance outcome while partly reflecting its improvisational origin, is paramount in ensuring that the work can reach and maintain a level of detailing that is needed in the

depiction of our complex narratives. The audience is usually not made aware exactly which parts of each work are open to improvisation. This was for instance evidenced in a review of *Medousa* published in *The Times* (Fischer in *The Times*, 11 August 2009). Within this production, both choreography and music score alternate set and semi-structured sections and the latter are vital not only in ensuring freshness in the live performance, but also in conveying the mixture of unease and unpredictability that is intrinsic to the piece. Indeed, I find that the contrast between set and improvisational material does contribute to the dramatic tension required by the storyline of this work, depicting the main character's imminent transformation into a monstrous creature. See for instance the transition from the obsessive, repetitive aria "Head Throat Wings Stone" (fig.5), which was set [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 7, "Set aria in *Medousa*"], to the improvisation-based "Dream Sequence" [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 8].



Figure 5 "Head Throat Wings Stone" in *Medousa*

Findings

Limn 1: between Multi-disciplinarity and Inter-disciplinarity

The methodologies explored above have increasingly been developed to retain the malleability of my works even after they are presented as polished performances; at the

same time, such malleability does not dispense with the need for narratively meaningful and aesthetically complex relations between the performance disciplines employed.

The use of progressively focussed improvisation tasks is essential to this end. Relating back to Ed Sarath's discussion, with particular reference to his concept of 'cognitive event cycle' (Sarath, 1996; p.8), the methodology utilised in the devising of Elastic Theatre's productions could be compared to a progressive narrowing down of the process that links initial creative impulses to their outward expression. Within the same comparison, such narrowing down increasingly delimits the actualities, possibilities and probabilities of the improvisational process (ibid.), eventually reaching an outcome that, as aforementioned, is neither completely fixed nor solely spontaneous: indeed, a *selectively set* live work. Texts, choreographic sequences and music scores deliberately alternate moments of precise and fixed composition, with ones of impromptu expression.

Of course, comparable processes can be found in other practices of devised performance. Particularly noteworthy in this sense is Theater der Klänge's creative methodology, outlined by composer/director Jörg Lensing as a process "from interdisciplinary improvisation to integrative composition" (Rebstock & Roesner, 2012; chap.7). This process shares many compositional concerns previously outlined in my work: from the integration of different types of performers to the progressive yet selective setting of the work. Nonetheless, aside from the differences between the two companies's theatrical aesthetics (see, for instance, the abstract register that distinguishes Theater der Klänge's *Suite Intermediale* of 2010 from the narrative emphasis in my productions), there is a key difference in the conception of how disciplines relate to each other. Lensing's explication of his company's exploratory approach as being "inter-disciplinary" matches the post-dramatic emphasis on what happens "between the arts" (Lehmann, 2006; p.112), which indeed Lehmann uses to describe practices of Composed Theatre, such as the work of Heiner Goebbels. Lehmann approaches this notion particularly broadly: it suggests a departure from the more formalist combinations of disciplines found in the earlier collaborations between Cage and Cunningham or in Kaprow's early happenings; it is also useful in distinguishing the collaborative and devising emphases of some practices of Composed Theatre from more mainstream examples of musical theatre.

Nonetheless, I propose that through the methodologies outlined in this chapter, my work exposes a further complexity in relation to this subject: the possibility for a liminal notion between multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary performance combinations. Undoubtedly, the beginning of my devising process emphasise a multi-disciplinary nature in the work, reinforced by the direct reference to happening compositions and by the open acknowledgment of each performer functioning as a “representative” of his/her discipline. In this sense, Elastic Theatre’s creative methodologies stem from a fascination for exploring each medium’s intrinsic aesthetic and logic. Yet, such exploration is also used to consciously identify possibilities of interaction between disciplines. These interactions are vital in the narrative development of each work: with performers embodying specific characters, the interaction between these and their respective disciplines becomes essential to the communication of our stories. Furthermore, as the company’s work developed through the years, the combination of disciplines has become increasingly organic and integrated. Compare for instance earlier works like *Ophelia’s Song* (Appendix 2) and *Medea Made Medea* (Appendix 3), where choreography, vocal music and text are mostly confined to discrete units, with *Baroccata* and *Baroque Box* (Appendix 7), in which the performance focus tends to more fluidly shift from one to the other.

On the surface, it would be tempting to suggest that my approach starts off by being multi-disciplinary and then, through narrative development, eventually becomes inter-disciplinary. However, this is only partially true, as the two modes never quite preclude one another and their relation is, once again, one of liminality, more so than consequentiality. In this respect, it is also different from the concept of trans-disciplinarity: while narrative development necessitates an increasing communication and overlapping between disciplines, the work is still consciously presented and acknowledged (in critical reviews and public responses) as featuring different performance languages that maintain a degree of independence, hence not transcending their distinctive nature. Nonetheless, the emphasis on improvisation and on the performer’s own stamp upon the work presupposes the desire for synergic endeavours amongst the performers and across disciplines. As previously illustrated with the example from *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*, while pre-conceived conventions may be agreed upon to structure the combination of choreography and vocal music, only the synergy between the singers and the dancers, intended here as a reciprocal sensitivity amongst the performers that is applicable both to the aesthetic quality of the work and to its content, can ensure that the two are integrated into a single, cohesive journey. It is precisely the

paradoxical nature of different performance languages being at once discrete and interdependent that which blurs the boundaries of such methodological distinctions.

Chapter 2

Elastic Dramaturgies

Sub-context: Devised Theatre

The aesthetic of fusion that characterises the form of my work, as discussed in the previous chapter, is also reflected in the way in which each subject matter is approached. Under the term *dramaturgies*, this chapter will explore the processes of devising and shaping the content of each output: processes that involve the combination of eclectic references, ranging from literary (e.g. dramatic texts, poetry, religious and medical documents), to musical (e.g. existent repertoires or quotations from historical music styles) and visual sources (e.g. paintings, sculptures and medical illustrations).

Further evaluating my work in the context of devised theatre provides an additional framing within the broader notion of the post-dramatic, which in Lehmann's study may or may not entail the collaborative ethos of devising. Such ethos implies a multiplicity of perspectives, as opposed to a strictly unifying authorial imposition, which, as pointed out by Heddon and Milling, reflects the de-centring tendencies of contemporary critical concerns (2006; p.192). It should be noted that my role as writer/adaptor of the texts explored does indeed represent a form of authorship, but that this is intentionally mediated by my collaboration with the performers and the creative team, including the presence of a 'dramaturgical consultant', who provides me with an external viewpoint to polish the creation of the storylines in question.

Looking back at this body of work, clear thematic patterns emerge: the use of historical texts and legends, a fascination for the concept of sacredness in its often contradictory ideological connotations, and the questioning of received models of gender and sexuality and their relation to broader ideas about the human body. While these themes may recur, the inter-textual references through which they are explored have varied substantially according to the narrative focus of each project.

These references are initially juxtaposed and then increasingly blended together as the devising develops; nonetheless, the resulting narratives always entail a degree of openness and abstraction. According to this, the logic of juxtaposition and fusion is neither concealed, as may happen in linear storylines that draw on diverse thematic stimuli, nor directly exposed, as in a collage composition. The result, in this sense, echoes Vandel Heuvel's proposition of a 'new dialogics of theatre', according to which contemporary practices in the field have questioned the supposed polarity between realist and linear representations and the more elusive and abstract processes of signification found in what he terms 'performance-theatre'. As Vandel Heuvel points out, "thinkers across a variety of disciplines have begun to recognize that such a binary opposition is overly simplistic, and have argued that the terms should be seen as dialogic (that is, as an association of different logics) rather than as mutually exclusive" (Vandel Heuvel, 1992; p.52). Govan, Nicholson and Normington further emphasise the blurring of binary oppositions specifically looking at devised theatre, arguing that "contemporary devisers construct theatrical narratives that are explicitly intended to challenge neat distinctions between the fictional and the real, between secrets and lies, and between imagination and authenticity" (2007; p.58).

These dialogic, de-centring and blurring tendencies are certainly inherent to my devising practice, which intentionally plays with shifting modes of representation, indeed reinforced by the aesthetic combination of disciplines, as discussed in the previous chapter. This is, for instance, evident in the following video-clip [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 9, "*The Magdalene Mysteries* trailer"], which condenses to trailer form my production *The Magdalene Mysteries* (fig. 6), exposing the plurality of strategies utilised to convey the story in question: these range from more literal scenes featuring the use of spoken dialogue, such as the interactions between Mary Magdalene and Peter, to more stylised and symbolic moments portrayed through song and choreography, such as those involving the Chorus and Magdalene's Shadows.



Figure 6 “Kyrie” in *The Magdalene Mysteries*

By articulating my dramaturgical approach and in light of the above ideas, this chapter aims to provide a further elaboration of Lehmann’s concept of ‘states’, in contrast to traditional ‘scenes’, as means to structure the content of each production. To be precise, Lehmann’s definition of states is one that, as a post-dramatic response to the concept of dramatic action, “deliberately negates, or at least relegates to the background, the possibility of developing a narrative” (Lehmann, 2006; p.68). As I will propose at the end of this chapter, Elastic Theatre’s devising methodologies suggest a further complexity in this concept. Indeed, my approach to conceiving storylines reflects Lehmann’s notion of *visual dramaturgy*, to mean, alongside an emphasis on images, a type of dramaturgy “that is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic” (ibid.; p.93). Rather than scripts or librettos, I often refer to my written documentation, included in Appendices 2-7, as ‘storyboards’ or ‘devising structures’: an approach that will be explicated in the following paragraphs. Nonetheless, my work does not negate the need for complex narratives. However, such narratives, according to the devising methodologies illustrated below, are conveyed through a combination of strategies and of conceptual viewpoints, in themselves the result of collaboration.

Practical methodology

Juxtaposition of Sources – Structuring – Cohesive Detailing

The first step in the conception of Elastic Theatre's narratives is to *juxtapose sources* of inspiration. This juxtaposition is never the outcome of a random selection, but always originates from an interest in how the combination of the sources in question may inform a new perspective on the subject that I wish to explore. In the *Miscast Women* trilogy (*Ophelia's Song*, *Medea Made Medea* and *The Magdalene Mysteries*), I deliberately set out to investigate three iconic female characters and re-imagine their stories by foregrounding their narrative viewpoints. Inherent to this intention was the aim to expose the patriarchal assumptions through which their traditional representation has often been reduced to one of irrationality and, invariably, powerlessness. In *Ophelia's Song*, I decided to combine the character's key speeches in *Hamlet* with a selection of verses by Shakespeare's contemporary Lady Mary Wroth. The emotionally charged quality of this selection was specifically chosen to contrast the often submissive connotations associated to Ophelia's role. See for instance her opening speech [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 11, "Grief! Killing grief! in *Ophelia's Song*"] utilised to this end as a symbolic prologue for the character's own tragedy (fig. 7).



Figure 7 "Grief, killing grief!" in *Ophelia's Song*

Medea Made Medea (fig. 8) focussed instead on the (anti)heroine's thought process before revenging her betrayal by Jason. In this case, the sources juxtaposed were Medea's speeches from Euripides' text (in a translation by Arthur S. Way) and a selection of traditional spirituals and Civil Rights songs that I re-arranged and performed a cappella with a group of live vocalists, in a direct reference to the notion of Greek Chorus. These choices were discussed in an interview on RCF Radio (French/English), which was used to promote our staging at Theatre 145 in Grenoble [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 11, "*Medea Made Medea* Radio Interview RCF"]. This unusual fusion was intended to highlight the placelessness of Medea, in her exile and semi-divine nature, and echo this with the themes of the songs utilised and the cross-cultural staging choices made, both in this juxtaposition and in the casting of the piece.



Figure 8 "Revenge" in *Medea Made Medea*

Although post-colonial implications may be derived from these cross-cultural references, it is not the intention of the piece to specifically set the story in a different cultural context and openly raise issues of ethnicity or nationality. Rather, these choices could be compared to Andrzej Wirth's reflections on Robert Wilson's theatre, with particular focus on his production *CIVIL WarS*, in its 'intercultural syncretism'. According to Wirth, Wilson's referencing of symbols and conventions from different cultures is not aimed at producing a universal theatrical language, as may be the ethos in intercultural theatre practices such as some of

the work by Peter Brook. Rather, it is about distancing and emphasising the spectator's individual reception (Wirth, 1989; p.180).

More specifically in my productions, this process is also designed to promote an aesthetic subversion of the original texts referred to, thus exposing the cultural and ideological construction of these. In this sense, it echoes the observations made by Govan, Nicholson and Normington, through the examples of companies such as Shared Experience and Complicité, regarding the potential for devised adaptations to expose its sources as “malleable”, rather than “stable artefacts” (2007; p.101).

A similar process was also present in *The Magdalene Mysteries*. Here too, cross-cultural references in the casting choices made (an international and multi-ethnic cast) and in the music styles employed, ranging from Gregorian chants to gospel pieces as well as extracts from *Misa Criolla* by Ariel Ramirez, highlighted the construction of the narratives featured in this work: the historical accounts surrounding the life of Mary Magdalene. However, in this case, the variety of literary documents that I drew inspiration from was far more extensive than in the previous two pieces. These included the four Gospels and *Epistles I and II* by Peter amongst the canonical texts; and, amongst the apocryphal ones, the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Gospel of Peter* and the Gnostic text *Thunder*. Other sources included medieval texts such as *The Digby Play of the Mary Magdalene* and *The Golden Legend*.

When drawing on and directly quoting so many sources, the necessity for *structuring* becomes paramount, in order to allow a large team to work together under a common intention in the piece, however open its interpretation may be. Creating a structure, in this way, allows us to map out a collective narrative journey, which, in turn, permits the performers to contribute directly to the devising of the work. For example, working with actress Sandra Shirley, who took on the ambitious role of Mary Magdalene in this production, became a fascinating process of negotiation between Sandra's improvisations in the scenarios inspired by the original documents and my own ideas on how to theatricalise and narratively link these.

This process was then integrated with the contribution of the performers interpreting the surrounding characters in the story (in what I termed in the previous chapter as *purposeful*

layering) and was informed by and, in turn, itself informed the aforementioned storyboards or devising structures. These documents are utilised in conjunction with my visual annotations, of which samples are also included in Appendices 2-7, and often consist of descriptions of events or choreographic sequences. Even when featuring a prominence of dialogue, as is the case in my earlier outputs, the purpose of these documents is never to confine the work to a text-centred performance, but rather to inspire and structure the devising process, which in some cases may lead to drastic changes to their original content.

The peculiarity of my devising structures is that these are rarely finalised into polished scripts or librettos and even when this is the case, such as in *Medousa*, sections will always be open to improvisation as according to the aforementioned principle of *selective setting*. The way in which these documents are presented, reprising the concept of visual dramaturgy, resembles a collection of fragments of text ideas and stage directions, which are then explored in the studio and utilised by the composer and the designer working with me. A good example in this sense is my devising structure for *Baroccata* [Appendix 7b], which concisely describes each section of the piece and deliberately leaves room for much exploration by the company. Alongside scientific texts from the seventeenth century, this work drew on a wide range of Baroque art works, from the paintings of Caravaggio, for instance *The Incredulity of Doubting Thomas* (explored in fig.9), to the sculpture of *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* by Bernini.



Figure 9 “Doubting Thomas tableau” in *Baroccata*

It is worth noting that this document may appear as rather disjointed and paradoxical in its content. Partly, this is to do with the nature of the piece, which, despite its reference to Baroque aesthetics, drew on my interest in the seemingly a-logical conventions found in the Russian Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*, in its continuous narrative jumps and in its use of archetypal characters devoid of a narrative past. On the other hand, the apparent lack of causality in the storyboard is also a strategy to stimulate the performers' collaborative contribution in imagining together narrative justifications for the sequences taking place.

This is the phase that I refer to as *cohesive detailing*, which entails a progressive refinement of the work aimed at clarifying the story and further exploring the depth of the issues that it raises. Hence, *cohesive detailing* applies to all aspects of my productions: from text to music, choreography, acting choices and design concepts. Utilising Pfister's notion of the dramatic content as denoting both a "deep-structural level – the story on which the presentation is based" and the "structural segmentation on the surface ... – the dramatic presentation of the story" (Pfister, 1993; p.230), it could be argued that here the latter may indeed inform the former. In other words, rather than conceiving the plot as a result of the underlining story, it is the first envisioning of the plot, in the shape of the storyboard, that motivates the uncovering of the story through devising. Conversely, as a story is increasingly defined thanks to this process, alterations and/or additions are often made to the initial devising structure, while always allowing for sections to be open to re-visitation through the notion of selective setting.

Under some circumstances, such alterations may be so radical as to cause the creation of a completely new storyboard. This was the case for *Baroccata*, which, following performances at the Riverside Studios in August 2010, was intended to be simply extended into a full production by June 2011. However, informed by the public's feedback on the clarity of the work as well as by a creative re-framing of this, so many changes were made to the piece as to justify the use of a different title altogether: *Baroque Box* (fig.10) [Appendix 7c; see Appendix 1d DVD: Link 13, "*Baroque Box* Inspiration video" for a short film describing the inter-textual sources that inspired the devising of this work]. Alongside key changes in music and staging choices, this new format saw, in narrative terms, the elimination of two secondary characters (Doubting Thomas and A Man under Surgery) and the condensing of the story into one viewpoint: the one of The Artist. His imagination, metaphorically

represented by the box shaped set that will be discussed in the next chapter, would in turn contain all the other characters, providing further cohesion in the work.



Figure 10 “Doubting Thomas tableau” revisited in *Baroque Box*

Findings

Limen 2: Between narrative development and ‘state’ narration

One of the paradoxical assertions in Lehmann's discussion of the post-dramatic is that, while he indicates that the aforementioned structuring in states inherently questions the need for “developing a narrative” (2006; p. 68), he also argues that “the principle of narration is an essential trait of postdramatic theatre; the theatre becomes the site of a narrative act” (p.109). This may understandably be considered as a contradiction on Lehmann's part, but there is a clear difference in his argument between conventional dramatic action as narrative expression and post-dramatic narration. The latter denotes an implication of self-reflexivity, as also argued by Jürs-Munby with the post-dramatic use of canonical texts (Jürs-Munby, Carrol & Giles, 2013; p. 211): such reflexivity may also be linked to the trends of contemporary ‘post-modern’ devised theatre, as discussed by Heddon and Milling (2006; p.208). Nonetheless, a post-dramatic approach to narrative and fiction seems to resist categorisations. Lehmann's discussion acknowledges that post-dramatic practices may

exhibit various degrees in which dramatic conventions, including those related to the narrative process, may be partially retained or completely rejected (2006; p.69). Furthermore, he cites examples of practitioners such as Jan Lauwers and Jan Fabre, whose work “undermines the categorization narrative/non-narrative” (p.110).

In light of the dramaturgical methodologies discussed in this chapter, the notion of borderline blurrings presents again a potential key to further inform a post-dramatic understanding of theatre. On the one hand, the multiplicity of perspectives used in each one of my outputs, inherent to both the collaborative nature of devising as well as the inter-textual references by which such devising is informed, contributes to a type of dramaturgy that questions a strictly linear logic. On the other, the progressive unification of the subjects explored, from ‘juxtaposition of sources’ to ‘cohesive detailing’ manifests a desire to define the narrative journey, however multi-faceted and changeable this may be.

In this sense, Lehmann’s notion of postdramatic ‘states’, in their supposed questioning of narrative development, would appear restrictive in this context. Nevertheless, Lehmann’s idea of states denoting a ‘scenic dynamic’, the somewhat pictorial approach to creating the content in contrast to the linear conception of dramatic action (p.68), is highly relevant to my productions. I would thus propose not only that there may be areas in which the concept of post-dramatic states may blur with the one of narrative development, but also that it is this blurring that allows for the elasticity of the dramaturgical content, as this is stretched beyond the confines of causality and finality (quite literally, in the continued transformability of the work), but still retains an important implication of cohesive progression.

The notion of post-dramatic self-reflexivity is also interesting in this respect. Lehmann argues that the conventions through which this is conveyed may resemble those used in historical forms of epic theatre, such as the exposure of narration devices. Indeed, Lehmann uses the term ‘post-epic’ to make this point (pp.109-110): the key difference, he argues, is that post-dramatic narration foregrounds the function of subjective, personal viewpoints, rather than the ‘demonstrative’, objective narrator of epic drama.

The presence of epic characteristics applies to my productions too. The fact that, in the devising structures discussed in this chapter, each sequence is first of all conceived independently and only later as part of a whole, echoes the episodic nature of epic forms.

These are further referenced through the frequent disruption of the fourth wall and the use of prologues, epilogues, chorus and narrators: all examples of ‘epic techniques’, which, as identified by Pfister (1993; p.84) ‘undermine concepts of drama that preserve its absolute autonomy with regard to author and audience’. Yet, what distinguishes this approach from previous models of epic drama is in this case not reducible to Lehmann’s aforementioned assertion of the prevalence of the personal, but is nonetheless intrinsic to a postdramatic understanding of theatre and further informed by the dialogic and de-centring tendencies previously discussed in this chapter.

I propose that it is through the self-reflexivity promoted by these epic conventions that the liminality of the theatrical content, blurring between narrative progression and the dynamic of states, is consciously exposed. Furthermore, the exposition of these shifting dramaturgical modes contributes to highlight the way in which my productions challenge the stability of their sources of inspiration: deconstructing and reconstructing these, as well as continually stretching their interpretation in the intentional refusal of a fixed, “ultimate” devising outcome.

Chapter 3

Elastic Stagings

Sub-context: Site-specific Theatre

Flexibility of presentation has, over the years, become a fundamental trait of Elastic Theatre's work. Many spectators come to see our performances more than once, particularly when the same piece is staged in contrasting venues. What is clearly presented to them, through promotion and dissemination material (in *The Magdalene Mysteries*, for instance, we publicised an offer to encourage viewing the piece in different locations), is that not only does the change of place provide a different framing system for the production, but it also directly informs compositional choices in its staging and in the overall spectatorship experience.

This process reprises Sven-Olov Wallenstein's observations on the relationship between a work of art and the site in which it is experienced. Wallenstein points out that the High Modernist ethos of neutralising the framing conditions for the aesthetic experience (Wallenstein, 1994; p.478), an ethos exemplified by the white cube gallery space, has been questioned in much contemporary art, which highlights a "reconsideration of subjectivity as a changing, historically produced phenomenon" (ibid.), thus inextricably linked to its context. In this sense, the endeavour of many performance practices to explore the potential of site in the creation of their work, thus moving out of a "neutral" black box space or traditional venue and conceiving their work specifically for non-theatrical spaces, reflects an interest in exposing the contextual implications, both physical and symbolic, of a place and in directly exploiting the performative potential of these.

This often termed *site-specific* approach represents another sub-context within the notion of the post-dramatic. Lehmann identifies it as theatre exploring non-conventional locations "not so much, as the term 'site-specific' might suggest, because the site corresponds well to a certain text but because it is made to 'speak' and is cast in a new light through theatre" (2006; p.152).

The phrase “site-specific” has undoubtedly generated much debate and encouraged a range of alternative terminology. Lyn Gardner influentially criticised the dilution of the term to any theatrical event that involves a non-theatrical venue, whether or not it implies a direct exploration of site: in fact, Gardner argues that much site-specific work should in fact be considered “site-generic”, in that, rather than creatively engaging with one location, it effectively caters for many (*The Guardian*, February 2008). It appears that the “specificity” of this encounter is thus part of the terminological problem. Ilya Noé argues against the fixedness in the connotations of this phrase and proposes “site-particular” as a term that, in contrast, “is open to changing geographies and based on the understanding that all strategies are context-contingent” (Riley and Hunter, 2009; pp. 149-150). Conversely, the increasingly popular phrase “site-responsive” and the even broader “site-related” (used by Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 2007: p.104) both suggest a widening of the concept of interaction with site. Acknowledging this debate will be useful in identifying the originality in Elastic Theatre’s staging approach at the end of this chapter.

Companies that have been known as creating site-specific or site-responsive work, such as Punchdrunk or Goat and Monkey, have explored a wide range of strategies to provide ‘immersive’ experiences for their audiences: these have often involved spectacular theatricalisations of unusual venues, where the separation between fictional space and audience is deliberately questioned: audience members may be asked to wear costumes and interact with the performers, thus promoting a significant blurring between subject, object and the context of their encounter.

My work with Elastic Theatre reprises some aspects of this process, but differs substantially in its explication. If we utilise Richard Schechner’s distinction, related to his definition and practice of ‘environmental theatre’, between ‘transformed’ and ‘found’ space (Schechner, 1968; pp.50-56), the former term may be applied to companies such as Punchdrunk. While the site in itself may inspire the conception of a work, its radical transformation to the aesthetics of this (for example, the transformation of an office block of a decommissioned pharmaceutical headquarters through set, props and multimedia effects in Punchdrunk’s *The Duchess of Malfi* in collaboration with English National Opera), implies that the site takes on a new configuration, which is effectively “tailor-made” to the production. As a consequence, many of these productions are often commissioned for one venue exclusively.

On the contrary, Elastic Theatre's staging concepts derive from ideas that are not specific to any site, but are then visibly adapted to the 'found' contexts of presentation, which also include traditional venues. It is the staging that bears the major marks of this adaptation, not the site. Audience and fictional space are still discrete entities, so it is not a case of environmental theatre as such. Rather, the audience is made aware, through our contextual documentation and supporting discussions, that it is witnessing a work in constant transformation: a transformation that derives both from the compositional changes made in response to each context and by the subjective viewpoint of the spectator, which is always differently informed by such changes.

Practical methodology

Visual condensation – Flexible composition – Site (re)adaption

The process of elastic staging always begins with a key compositional convention that is selected to be flexibly adaptable to a range of spaces. This step is what I refer to as *visual condensation*: usually, this is based on a reference to a symbol or metaphor linked to the themes of the work and whose staged realisation determines the overall composition of the piece. In this sense, the whole piece is conceived under one umbrella image, which ensures that, however changeable, staging choices are cohesive and justified by a visible criterion. In *The Magdalene Mysteries*, the symbol of the cross was utilised to this end (fig. 11); in *Medousa*, long string-like tubes, symbolising her hair made of serpents (fig. 12); in *Baroque Box*, the box itself, in the aforementioned metaphor of The Artist's imagination (fig. 13); in *Medea Made Medea*, a narrow path covered with cut grass, to represent the "poisoned weeds" referenced in the piece (fig. 14). Far beyond providing a "signature look" for each piece, these conventions allow for a starting point for the conception of the work, which in turn also informs its dramaturgy.



Figure 11 The cross in *The Magdalene Mysteries*



Figure 12 The strings in *Medousa*



Figure 13 The box in *Baroque Box*



Figure 14 The "poisoned weeds" in *Medea Made Medea*

As the concept of each work develops, the phases, described in the previous chapters, of *structuring* and *purposeful layering* are accompanied by a process of *flexible composition*. According to this, the initial symbol/metaphor deriving from the *visual condensation* of the piece is progressively conceived in multiple sub-sections, through which the staging of the work is mapped out, in relation to an internal logic that can be transposed to other venues. For instance, in *Medousa*, the legend's mythical cave was identified as the area covered by the hanging poly tubing, while the sections surrounding this were utilised as the path of Perseus' search for the protagonist (fig. 15). In *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*, the compartmented structure of Byzantine paintings was the inspiration for a floor design in golden tape, which marked the locations of different narrative sequences in the piece (fig. 16).



Figure 15 *Medousa*: staging

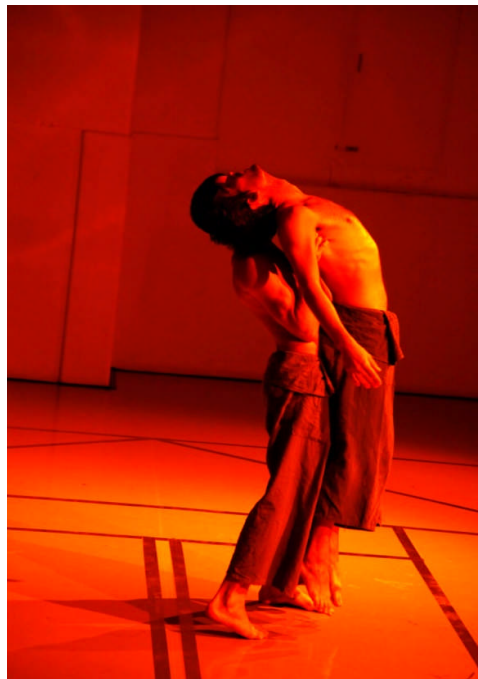


Figure 16 *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*: staging

These sub-sections, hence, relate to the physical and/or figurative loci presented by the narrative; however, the minimal and stark aesthetics of my staging ideas highlights the absence of strictly defined settings. There is no attempt to actually reproduce the look of a particular place; nor, on the other hand, is there a desire to deliberately emphasise the

artificiality of the presentation. *Site (re)adaptation*, the last step in the methodologies of staging used, essentially consists in informing the *flexible composition* of the work with the performative potential envisioned in a given space. Such a potential is explored by practically testing viewing angles and staging perspectives, identifying specific locations within a venue and examining whether these could be assigned to respective sub-sections in the composition. Circumstantial restrictions may admittedly not allow this process the time it should require, so over the years I have had to develop the ability for rapid adaptation of my staging ideas. This was particularly the case when I was invited to present *Medousa* at the Pavé D'Orsay chapel in Paris (fig. 18). With only half a day to realise the staging in a non-theatrical venue with no stage lighting, we utilised all aspects of the space, including internal balconies, created a setting of stacked chairs delimiting the fictional space, manually illuminated the performance area with hand-held torches, and devised a promenade section in the main entrance of the building. Audience feedback in a post-show discussion reported the efficacy of these choices both in exploiting the potential of the space and in subverting its original function.



Figure 17 Images from *Medousa*: Paris staging and rehearsals

In *Medea Made Medea*, the concept of a narrow path of weeds was staged both as a traverse performance area (London Metropolitan University, London Contemporary Dance School, Westminster University), as well as a lit corridor diagonally crossing a proscenium stage in Theatre 145 in Grenoble.



Figure 18 *Medea Made Medea*: traverse and proscenium stagings

Ophelia's Song was adapted both to a theatre studio (Teatro Abarico, Rome), where the auditorium was used as the performance area, and to an outdoor staging, utilising the whole of the courtyard of the Tower Building at London Metropolitan University (as part of The Facility's symposium, *Happily ever after...?*).



Figure 19 *Ophelia's Song*: outdoor and indoor stagings

Before its run at the Southwark Playhouse, *The Magdalene Mysteries* was adapted to the haunting crypt spaces of Teatro Sala Uno in Rome and to a staging for St James's Piccadilly. Here, the audience was positioned by the altar area and the balconies surrounding this, while the performance was staged on and in between the church's pews.

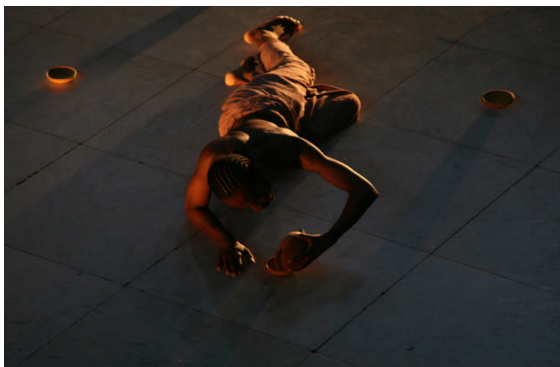


Figure 20 *The Magdalene Mysteries*: St James's Piccadilly and Teatro Sala Uno stagings

In all the examples listed above, the adaptation of each staging allowed me to experiment with different viewing angles, lighting moods, degrees of proximity to the action, spatial proxemics and with static or itinerant conceptions of the audience. In turn, I was able to notice in the spectators' responses that different performance emphases in each staging were perceived. For instance, audience feedback suggested that being close to the action may have promoted a greater degree of emotional involvement, whereas the use of larger spaces and wider proxemics may have encouraged a more conceptual understanding of the work.

In this sense, an elastic approach to staging contributes to a re-evaluation of the position of spectatorship in relation to a performance. The combination of radical (re)stagings with the improvisational implications of *selective setting* means that the subjectivity of the viewing experience is highlighted. Seeing *Medousa* at the Riverside Studios and at the Pavé D'Orsay is seeing two substantially different performances: highly contrasting presentations, divergences in musical and choreographic material at selected moments and two completely different framing contexts for the work. Additionally, the narrative of the piece allows for much scope of potential interpretations.

Even within the same staging, the subjectivity of the spectator's viewpoint is highlighted and this is particularly true in *Baroque Box*. Here, the concept of the box-shaped set, for the audience to "peep" into, was initially tested as a way to launch the making of *Baroccata* at The Facility's symposium *Correspondence*, before the production's proscenium staging at the Riverside Studios [Appendix 1d DVD: Link 12, "*Baroccata* launch as part of *Correspondence*"]. In *Baroque Box*, this concept was further developed into an itinerant and interactive format. Split in halves and placed at the far ends of a bespoke compartmented box structure, the audience could view characters appearing and disappearing in the curtained interior of the set [see Appendix 1d DVD: Link 14, "*Baroque Box* trailer"]. For most of the piece, the audience would see two scenes playing simultaneously alongside each other, according to the way that the box was segmented across, whilst hearing, through surround amplification, four scenes accompanied by the same live score. Walking around the set at key points in the piece, the audience would realise the events that the other half had been watching until then, as these would continue to unfold.



Figure 21 *Baroque Box*: itinerant staging

Findings

Limen 3: Between Symbolic and Metonymic spaces and between Site-specific and Site-generic stagings

In light of the methodologies articulated above, I propose that my approach to staging conceives of a limen between the contrasting notions suggested by Lehmann of 'symbolic space', representing a fictive world, and 'metonymic space', which is a continuation of the real performance space (Lehmann, 2006; p.151). In Elastic Theatre's productions, spectators are invited to both experience the illusion of a fictional place and be aware, through the essential staging choices, the often close proximity of the performers and the fact that in many cases they themselves may be visible to other spectators, of their position of conscious viewers. Furthermore, the change of locations in the stagings of my work poignantly diversifies the audience's negotiation between fictional illusion and conscious viewing. Evidently, the former may prevail in a focussed environment such as a purposefully lit theatre studio, and the latter in a more dispersive one such an outdoor location. However, a balance between the two perspectives is always sought; thus, the need to engage in the *site (re)adaptation* of the work, in order to ensure that a non theatrical venue may still provide fictive illusion, while a black box studio may nonetheless encourage the awareness of spectatorship that I believe to be conducive to the appreciation of the formal construction and the intellectual conception of the work.

Moreover, by being on the borderline between symbolic and metonymic emphases, I propose an additional layer of liminality intrinsic to my approach, for which each site is neither totally adapted to the fictional setting of the work, nor explicitly contrasted to this as a juxtaposed, unrelated context. The phrase 'site-specific' is here only partially applicable, inasmuch as the work is tailored to its locations but, poignantly, never exclusive to any of these. Conversely, Noé's definition of 'site-particular' and the broader term 'site-responsive' are also partially pertinent, in that they do suggest the interaction of the work with its context of presentation, but not necessarily its inherent malleable composition.

In fact, though used critically in the aforementioned article by Gardner, the concept of 'site-generic' does bear some relevance here, indicating the potential for open flexibility of the work, though missing its equally important endeavour to be re-invented for each specific location, rather than passively accommodating this. By existing at the borderlines of the

above definitions, my approach testifies further areas of investigation in performative approaches to site, going beyond Lehmann's discussion of post-dramatic practices.

These liminal properties are directly connected to the individuality of the viewing experience promoted in my work. Such individuality could, in turn, be linked to Arnold Aronson's reflection on post-modern theatre design, which both highlights shifting perspectives and negates "the presence of a representative objective viewer" (Aronson, 1991; p.2). However, the "very conscious lack of unity" of which Aronson talks about is only applicable to some degree here. Because of the *visual condensation* principle at the basis of my staging ideas, all of my productions feature a tendency towards compositional unity, however malleable the work: incidentally, such a tendency is metaphorically conveyed in the last scene of *Baroque Box*, where the two halves of the audience are finally reunited to witness The Artist's creation of the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. Pastiche, discontinuity and incongruity, key notions of postmodern design according to Aronson, are not what motivates my approach. Rather, it is a process of stretching the viewing experience: symbolically, by encouraging spectators to conceptually complete the stark and minimal staging through their own imagination; physically, by inviting them to witness the changing configuration of the work, as seen from different angles and/or in different places.

Conclusion

Relating back to the first question outlined in the Introduction (*how might the ethos of 'elasticity' inherent to the outputs discussed in this document highlight new possibilities in contemporary, post-dramatic theatre making?*), there are two levels in which the outputs analysed here may be of value to the broader spectrum of post-dramatic practice in contemporary performance.

The first level, which may be of interest particularly to practitioners exploring improvisational, multidisciplinary and/or site-responsive aesthetics, is in the methodological model itself. According to this, the ethos of elasticity has represented for me a form of resilience. Logistically, such resilience is connected to the adaptability of my work to different contexts and formats of presentation. It is thanks to this adaptability that the outputs discussed here have been disseminated internationally with often comparatively limited budgets: an advantage that undoubtedly has become even more valuable in the present climate of economic instability. Artistically, this resilience is inherent to the ethos of conscious hybridism and continual transformation, of referencing but never being confined to existent established categorisations (e.g. styles, genres, forms). This ethos has allowed me to foster an eclectic breadth of collaborations: for instance, with varied venues and festivals dedicated to theatre, to dance, to music, to opera, to outdoor arts, with academic organisations, with commercial enterprises, and even with religious and with medical institutions. Consequently, it has also promoted a diversity of audience reach, in terms of cultural background, age range, professional and general interests. In turn, the potential for such a diverse reach has attracted further support from professional organisations, ensuring the longevity of my company, now in its twelfth year of existence. Because of these benefits, I envisage the potential of this methodological model to be adopted and adapted by other practitioners. Indeed, the very flexibility of my approach intrinsically lends itself to be utilised in other contexts, beyond my own outputs and beyond Elastic Theatre itself.

The second level of contribution (also relatable to the second question outlined: *how can Elastic Theatre's practical methodologies be used to further the complexity of the notion of post-dramatic theatre, providing an insight into, respectively, the relationship between performance disciplines, the conception of narrative development and the function of space*

and response to site?) is to be found in the conceptual findings that this methodological model has allowed me to achieve, when analysed in relation to Lehmann's discussion and the selected three sub-contextual areas within the post-dramatic panorama (Composed, Devised and Site-specific theatre). The definition of these findings as "limina" (between multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary emphases; between narrative development and 'state' narration; between metonymic and symbolic space and between site-specific and site-generic approaches) is used to propose both a point in between the respective comparison terms, as well as a deliberate understanding of negotiable, 'elastic' thresholds. It is by consistently applying these practical methodologies across the six outputs submitted that these specific instances of liminality have become apparent in my practice. The implications of these, as articulated in the previous three chapters, denote the potential of the ethos of elasticity to go beyond the mere adaptability of theatrical material and provide a key to further the post-dramatic understanding of the relationship between performance disciplines, of the conception of narrative development and of the use of space and response to site.

Moreover, the approach discussed here may be useful in providing a further insight into the position of the dramatic within the post-dramatic, the elusiveness of which is symbolised by Karen Jürs-Munby (Dec 2013) as the "secret hyphen between *post* and *dramatic*". In a way, the ambiguous presence of drama in the post-dramatic, as it is so variably "pushed back in post-dramatic theatre – from an 'almost still dramatic' theatre to a form where not even the rudiments of fictive processes can be found any more" (Lehmann, 2006; p.69), contributes to the challenge presented in the Contextual Review at the start of this discussion, whereby Lehmann's definition of post-dramatic practices may be so wide as to potentially lose concreteness. Aesthetic similarities may be found across the wide range of such practices, as indeed has been pointed out when comparing Elastic Theatre's works with those of other companies and practitioners cited here. Nonetheless, it is the specificity of the methodological process described in this document that gives my approach a unique perspective upon this issue.

Looking across Elastic Theatre's body of work, on the one hand, it is through dramatic conventions that links across performance disciplines are preserved, that the dramaturgical process can maintain a sense of unity, and that different stagings of a production can be cohesive, despite their different responses to site. On the other hand, it is by also challenging dramatic conventions that, conversely, the aesthetic independence of

disciplines, the inter-textuality of dramaturgy and the malleability of the staging can be both exposed and played with. In this sense, the unstable yet persistent presence of drama, in its radically questioned but never quite eliminated function, is what dictates the elasticity of each work. Too much reliance on dramatic conventions would invariably fix the structure and content of a production, inhibiting its flexibility; too little, and the work may lack the cohesive core that needs to be elasticised. While it would be inconceivable to attempt to quantify the “right amount” of drama needed, the practical methodologies described here provide a way to creatively gauge the balance required by each production, indeed “how much drama it can afford” to use Lehmann’s words (2006; p.182), depending on its conceptual and aesthetic needs and on the desired experience for the audience.

The ethos of elasticity continues to inform my work. My current project, *Julius* (fig.22), explores further strategies in this direction. Launched at GV Art Gallery and supported by the Wellcome Trust and by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation, the piece explores a coming of age story of intrusive thoughts and obsessive compulsions. It is created in collaboration with high profile experts in mental health and organisations such as OCD Action and Bethlem Museum. Here, elasticity, for the first time in my work, is achieved through film, in a multi-screen installation with live events. An extensive project catalogue can be accessed on the following web-link: <http://www.gvart.co.uk/press/GV-Art-Elastic-Theatre-e-catalogue.pdf> .

Despite the use of recorded media, this production too is intended to promote a performative experience for the audience; hence the surround projections utilised to enhance the “live-ness” of the characters. And here too, the elasticity of the work can be found in the liminality of the combination of performance disciplines, of the inter-textual approach that informs its dramaturgy and the potential for flexible adaptation: from intimate to large spaces and from solely recorded to semi-live presentations.

No doubt the integration of recorded media will increasingly feature in my productions. Yet, such integration will continue to promote the strategies articulated in this discussion, stretched to new outputs and to new contexts of research.



Figure 22 *Julius*

Appendices

Please note that the majority of the digital resources included in the Appendices can also be accessed online, on www.elastictheatre.com



Appendix 1a

Elastic Theatre: company history

I founded my company in 2001, then under the name Vocal Motions, as a team of freelance collaborators. Initially presented as part of my MA in Voice Studies at Central School of Speech and Drama, the ethos of the company was centred already from the start on the fusion of text, movement and vocal music. My debut project with the company, *Easy but with an Edge to it / Cliché*, was commissioned by the Council of Rome for Enzimi Festival 2001 and consequently presented at the Battersea Arts Centre and the Bull Art Centre. London Metropolitan University was already central to the company's early development, supporting and hosting my following productions, including my triple bill: *Aqua*, *State Stating Statuses* and *So does the Bubble Machine* (2003-2004). These short works would then feature in other festivals and venues, including the Rudolf Steiner House and Northern Exposure Festival.

My role as Artistic Director of the company has always been an eclectic one, merging parallel functions, depending on each production. These have included the ones of stage director and writer across all my projects, as well as those of producer, choreographer, performer, designer and composer. A fundamental aspect of my role is to promote the concept of 'performance as research', ensuring that the creative questions that have motivated the development of my projects also denote an academic relevance. Within this context, my productions can be seen as the findings of my practical and theoretical research. In light of this, the creation of educational projects to accompany my productions has in many ways supported the academic context of my performance pieces and provided the opportunity to test and contextualise ideas related to these. Alongside London Metropolitan University, where I currently work as Senior Lecturer in Performing Arts, educational organisations that have collaborated with my company have included, to date, London School of Contemporary Dance, Circus Space, City Lit Academy, the Centre for Research in Opera and Musical Theatre (University of Sussex), Thomas Tallis School and, outside of the UK, Teatro Integrato Internazionale and Accademia Dell'Attore in Rome, NOA Opera Festival in Vilnius, CREARC in Grenoble, Arts Arena (American University of Paris), Opera National de Lyon, the European Network of Opera and Dance Education (RESEO), Opera Europa and The Living Theatre Conservatory in New York. Judith Malina, the award-winning founder of New York's Living Theatre, is now the company's Patron.

The performance projects analysed in this research have been those in which my ethos of elasticity has found its maturity. These have coincided with the company's collaboration, since 2005, with The Facility: Centre for Creative Practice at London Met, which has provided me with a range of opportunities to define and share my approach to performance as research. My emphasis on elasticity motivated me to rename the group as Vocal Motions Elastic Theatre, on the occasion of its registration as a non-profit Limited Company in 2008. Since then, the shorter name Elastic Theatre has been the one for which my work has been more widely known to the public.

Alongside The Facility, there have been a number of performance organisations that have supported Elastic Theatre's projects. These are listed specifically in the following Appendix sections and include Tête à Tête Opera Festival at the Riverside Studios, Southwark Playhouse, Arcola Theatre, St James's Piccadilly, The Space and Greenwich+Docklands

International Festival in the UK; and abroad, Roma Teatro Festival and Teatro Abarico in Rome, Bilingual Acting Workshop (Paris/New York), and Rencontres de Theatre Européen (Grenoble). Since 2010, my work with Elastic Theatre has been generously supported by the Wellcome Trust and, more recently, by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation. Following the six productions (2005-2011) featured in this discussion (*Ophelia's Song*, *Medea Made Medea*, *The Magdalene Mysteries*, *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*, *Medousa*, *Baroccata* and *Baroque Box*), the company is currently working on its first film based work: a multi-screen installation entitled *Julius*, in collaboration with GV Art Gallery, Bethlem Museum and OCD Action.

Elastic Theatre was recently announced as the 2012 Winner of the Fringe Report Award for Best Theatre Company, presented at Leicester Square Theatre in February 2012. Online documentation on all of the company's projects can be found on www.elastictheatre.com.

Recognition from the Press

2012 Winner of the **Fringe Report Award for Best Theatre Company**

"Celebrating the exciting work of Vocal Motions Elastic Theatre in crossing global and artistic boundaries to create and deliver remarkable performance" **Fringe Report** (February 2012)

"Scarso's impressive production...a fascinating exploration patriarchy and Christianity ...Multi-disciplined, cross-cultural and trans-national theatre company Vocal Motions Elastic marks itself out"

★★★★ **Time Out** on *The Magdalene Mysteries* (July 2008)

"The work Elastic is producing is unusual, exciting and innovative ... keep an eye out for this company as they have an exceptionally promising future producing pioneering and inventive theatre".

★★★★ **Fringe Review** on *The Magdalene Mysteries* (June 2008)

"Haunting...Snakily neurotic...Fabulously hot-blooded performance"

★★★★ **The Times** on *Medousa a Miniature Opera* (August 2009)

"Genuinely moving...fervid ecstasy... I loved this. Loved all of it"

Sideshow International Circus Magazine on *Baroque Box* (February 2012)

"An intensely enjoyable and thought-provoking study of obsessions and their manifestations"

The Urban Times on *Julius* (September 2012)

"Poetic... carefully researched"

New Scientist on *Julius* (September 2012)

Timeline

2001	<p>Company founded as Vocal Motions, as a result of a development from my MA Voice Studies Independent Project at Central School of Speech and Drama.</p> <p>Roma Europa Festival's commission for Enzimi 2001 to present <i>Easy, but with an edge to it</i> in Rome.</p>
2002	<p>Development of the above work as <i>Cliché</i>, presented at the Battersea Arts Centre and the Bull Art Centre (Northern Exposure).</p>
2003	<p><i>So does the Bubble Machine</i>, presented at the Rudolf Steiner House and the Bull Art Centre (Northern Exposure).</p>
2004	<p>Development of the above piece in a triple bill with <i>Acqua</i> and <i>State Stating Statues</i>, as part of a residency at London Metropolitan University.</p>
2005	<p>Creation of <i>The Penny Gaffe Scandals</i>, a "portable performance" presented in private residences across London.</p> <p>Devising and presentation of <i>Ophelia's Song</i> at Teatro Abarico, in collaboration with Teatro Integrato Internazionale.</p>
2006	<p>Adaptation of <i>Ophelia's Song</i> presented at London Metropolitan University, as part of The Facility's symposium <i>Happily ever after...?</i></p>
2007	<p>Creation of <i>Medea Made Medea</i>, presented at London Contemporary Dance School (The Place), London Metropolitan University, Westminster University and Theatre 145 Grenoble (CREARC).</p> <p>The Vocal Motions Singers, a branch of the company specialised in a cappella vocal music, in residence at Bloomsbury Central Church, also performing at the Bicentenary Ceremony of the End of Slave Trade.</p>
2008	<p>Creation of <i>The Magdalene Mysteries</i>, presented at The Space, St James's Piccadilly and the Southwark Playhouse in London and at Teatro Sala Uno in Rome (Roma Teatro Festival).</p>

Incorporation of the company as Vocal Motions Elastic Theatre Ltd.

- 2009** Creation of *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*, presented at the Arcola Theatre, and *Medousa*, presented at the Riverside Studios in London and at the Pavé d'Orsay in Paris (launched with Arts Arena at the American University of Paris). Both pieces were then presented at London Metropolitan University, as part of Elastic Theatre's *Borderline Opera* event.
- 2010** Creation of *Baroccata*, presented at the Riverside Studios, as part of Tête á Tête: the Opera Festival.
- Received a £30K Art Award from the Wellcome Trust to develop the above project into *Baroque Box*.
- 2011** Development of *Baroccata* into *Baroque Box*, co-commissioned by Greenwich+Docklands International Festival for a special staging at the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich. Presentation of the research behind this project at London Metropolitan University.
- 2012** Elastic Theatre announced as the winner of the Fringe Report Award for Best Theatre Company, presented at Leicester Square Theatre.
- The project *Julius* is awarded a £10k R&D grant from the Jerwood Charitable Foundation and a further £30k Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust.
- The first phase of *Julius* culminates in a multi-screen film exhibited at GV Art Gallery in London, alongside a calendar of highlight events between August and September.

Appendix 1b

Prior Outputs: a chronological overview

In the following paragraphs, I trace the chronological journey that led my research from output to output, with the aim of complementing the thematic emphasis of the main discussion in this document. Further details about each project can be found in Appendices 2-7.

The first series of works of mine that I would classify as *elastic*, according to the understanding articulated in the Introduction, is a trilogy of productions created between 2005 and 2008. These were contemporary re-visitations of well known female characters, foregrounding their narrative view-point and implicitly questioning the cultural/patriarchal bias in their traditional depictions. All of these productions were centred on the main character's speeches: the dramaturgical journey between these would then be represented through vocal music and contemporary choreography, both featuring improvisational elements. All three productions involved a selection of contrasting staging versions, substantially diversifying our audience's experience.

Ophelia's Song (Appendix 2), the first in the trilogy, was originally created in 2005 for Teatro Abarico in Rome and derived from the fusion of selected moments from *Hamlet's* narrative, with the poetry of female contemporaries to Shakespeare, in particular Mary Wroth. The concept of the piece was to reclaim Ophelia's voice, by identifying her tragedy not in her supposed ignorance in relation to the one faced by Hamlet, but in her conscious awareness of this: an awareness that is instigated by the key moment of the play within the play. Poignantly, the spoken role of Ophelia was opposed to the silent one of Hamlet, interpreted by a physical performer. The two were accompanied by a sung narration voice, commenting on Ophelia's thoughts, and by a chorus of actors/dancers, representing the Court, thus the protagonists' social sphere. In its original staging in Rome, the role of the Chorus was devised in an intensive laboratory just before the performances, working with local actors, thus combining the juxtaposition of English and Italian. In 2006, *Ophelia's Song* was re-conceived for an outdoors staging as part of The Facility's symposium *Happily ever after...?* at London Metropolitan University. Here, both the role of Hamlet and the choric ensemble were re-cast, with graduates and students from the Performing Arts programme. The aesthetic of the piece was radically adapted and so was the content of many scenes.

The interest in re-imagining classical female characters continued in the next piece of what would become the *Miscast Women Trilogy*. This work, called ***Medea Made Medea*** (Appendix 3), created in 2007, focussed on Euripides' anti-heroine, by exploring her thoughts just before revenging her betrayal by Jason. Once again, key roles surrounding Medea were depicted choreographically and in many cases, as poignantly silent; the role of the Chorus was revisited through a cappella singing, in a score that included cross-cultural references, also reflected in the casting choices of the piece itself. Rather than merely concentrating on Medea's emotional struggle, the piece fore-grounded her political intuition and strategic intelligence, as evidenced by the choice of text extracts utilised. Similarly to *Ophelia's Song*, the aesthetic of this work was also radically re-adapted: from traverse stagings at London Contemporary Dance School (The Place), Westminster University and London Metropolitan University, to a proscenium version at Theatre 145 in Grenoble, as part of an annual European Festival organised by CREARC.

Completing the trilogy in 2008 and continuing to build on the scale of these projects, the third production, ***The Magdalene Mysteries*** (Appendix 4), portrayed an imaginary journey across the life of Mary Magdalene, created by fusing and directly citing original historical documents, including both canonical and apocryphal early Christian texts. Here again, song and contemporary dance were used as narrative, rather than decorative elements, to allow scenes to take place through these in order to avoid creating new text additions, so to preserve the integrity of the original sources. Most importantly, the use of different disciplines entailed a symbolic significance, particularly as the spoken role of Mary Magdalene was combined to the emblematically silent one of Jesus, interpreted by a dancer. The eclectic vocal score performed by the Chorus, ranging from Gregorian chants to vocal improvisation and gospel music, also had a symbolic resonance, as it accompanied the disparate legends surrounding the central character. The flexibility of the production's staging was also further tested, with a site-specific version for St James's Piccadilly, and three contrasting proscenium versions for Southwark Playhouse, Teatro Sala Uno in Rome and The Space.

While the trilogy was a way to progressively investigate the juxtaposition of fragmented texts linked by cross-disciplinary devised work, what followed was a desire to further explore the role of music as a unifying element in my productions. Up until that point, music was used in isolated moments and was often the product of a diverse selection of existent pieces. The next step was to produce completely original scores that would lead, rather than punctuate, the theatrical action, while still being true to the devising ethos of the work and its flexible nature. In 2009, a double bill resulted out of this desire, contextualised in the phrase *Borderline Opera*, which was used as the title of an event at London Metropolitan University, where the two pieces were presented side by side. The concept of *Borderline Opera* was to question the definition of the operatic form and investigate the relationship between music, theatre and improvisation in a collaborative context.

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus (Appendix 5) was the first piece of the double bill, premiered in 2009 at the Arcola Theatre in London. A little known medieval hagiography, it is the story of two Roman military figures exposed to be Christians and subsequently humiliated and tortured. The account of their martyrdom is interestingly interspersed with references to their love for each other, which has led many to postulate their relationship as an early version of same sex union. The piece depicted their story in choreographic form, through an episodic structure inspired by the Byzantine iconographic representation. The vocal score was an original semi-improvised a cappella work for three singers on lyrics citing excerpts from the ancient Greek hagiography; this was performed live off-stage. In contrast to the trilogy pieces, the score did not represent a commentary to the story, but, rather, the inner psychological journey of the characters, thus being dramatically embedded in the action.

The second work in the double bill was ***Medousa*** (Appendix 6), also created in 2009. This chamber opera revisited the Greek myth, by focussing on the protagonist's imminent transformation into a monstrous creature. Reprising the approach to gender issues adopted in the trilogy, my libretto highlighted the character's conscious awareness of her circumstances, in this case ambiguously rejoicing in the evil powers that she is about to receive, and enticing Perseus, performed by a dancer, to make her an immortal symbol by, paradoxically, beheading her. *Medousa's* score was created as a result of collaborative devising by performers, cast and creative team, supervised by a music dramaturg and myself. Aspects of the music were left improvisational and indeed changed radically across performances. The staging too was adapted drastically between venues, from proscenium

performances at the Riverside Studios, to a promenade site-specific version at the Pavé D'Orsay in Paris.

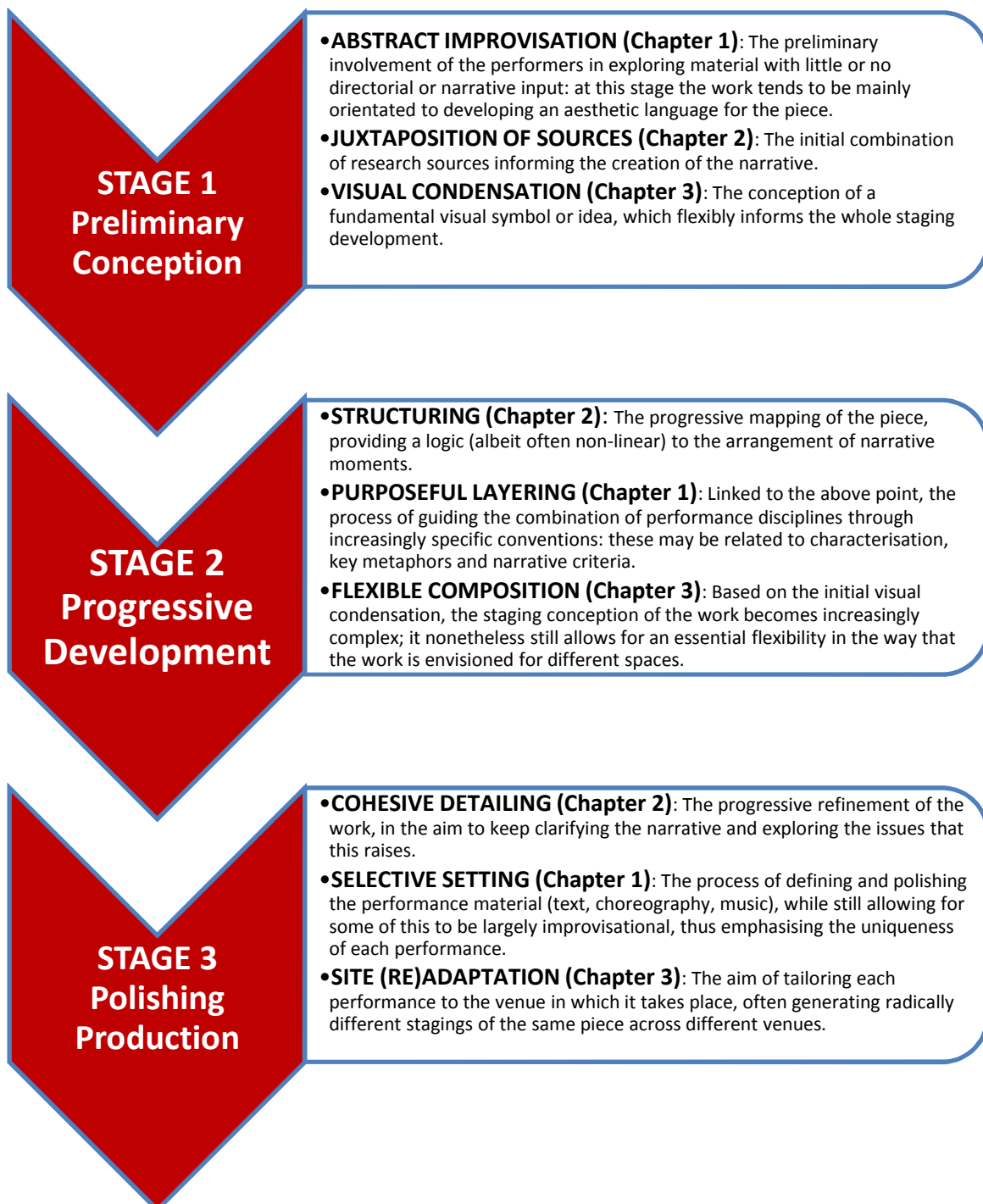
Up until this point, my company's work had always featured a mono-dramatic emphasis, intended here as an interest in exploring narratives from a single character's viewpoint (even the depiction of Sergius and Bacchus was conceived through an imaginary unified perspective between the two). The final output discussed in this document, ***Baroccata / Baroque Box*** (Appendix 7), challenged this, by fusing disparate micro-narratives. *Baroccata* was the title given to the work in its original proscenium staging at the Riverside Studios in 2010, before it was developed into a promenade version called *Baroque Box*, at the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich in 2011 (please note that because of the major differences between the two versions, this discussion may also refer to these independently of each other). The aim of the project was to merge together baroque ideas about the human body, by fusing concepts of seventeenth century science, religious concerns of the Counter-Reformation and the aesthetics of baroque painting and sculpture. Parallel narratives were depicted: an artist working on the statue of *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, the story of St. Teresa and her encounter with an angel, a scientist studying the process of blood circulation and a symbolically "puzzled" Jesus, reflecting the instability of the religious beliefs portrayed in the work. The transition from *Baroccata* to *Baroque Box* saw much dramaturgical distillation: this eventually resulted in the creation of a set in the form of a large compartmented box, in which the action would take place. Viewed by the audience from the outside, with different scenes visible according to the spectator's location, this was to represent the artist's brain, in which science and religion were in a co-dependent, increasingly dysfunctional relationship.

The chronology of the outputs submitted with this research testifies both the cohesive ethos that has informed their creation, as well as the continued development of my work. Such a development may be seen in the way in which my works have progressively explored new ways to integrate performance disciplines, to fuse narrative sources and to experiment with staging concepts. Alongside, the increasing funding interest that my projects have attracted over the years is reflected in the growing scale and public profile of these.

Appendix 1C

Practical methodology diagram/glossary

Below is an overview of the methodologies referred to in Chapters 1-3 (Elastic Disciplines, Elastic Dramaturgies and Elastic Stagings), listed in chronological order:



Appendix 1d

PhD Discussion DVD

Content:

1. "The Making of *Baroque Box*"
2. "The Scientist in *Baroccata*"
3. "The Scientist in *Baroque Box*"
4. "Torture scene: *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*"
5. "Rehearsal extract from *Baroccata*"
6. "Layered scene in *Baroccata*"
7. "Set aria in *Medousa*"
8. "Improvisation-based Dream Sequence in *Medousa*"
9. "*The Magdalene Mysteries* trailer"
10. "Grief! Killing Grief! in *Ophelia's Song*"
11. "*Medea Made Medea* radio interview RCF (French/English)"
12. "*Baroccata* launch as part of *Correspondence*"
13. "*Baroque Box* inspiration video"
14. "*Baroque Box* trailer"

Appendix 2 *Ophelia's Song*



Appendix 2a

Ophelia's Song **Project Profile**

Calendar

Creation of *Late in the Forest I did Cupid See*: a collection of poetry from female seventeenth century writers accompanied by original vocal soundtracks: May-July 2005
Practical Study on *Hamlet*: exploratory intensive at Teatro Abarico, Rome: Sep 2005
Devising process with Daisy Whyte and Fabian Wixe in London: Oct-Nov 2005
Intensive with Italian Chorus at Teatro Abarico: Dec 2005
Performances at Teatro Abarico: Dec 2005
Re-adaptation Intensive with London Chorus: March-April 2006
Performance at London Metropolitan University: April 2006

Production Overview

A preliminary creative project that led to this production was the creation of an audio recording of selected poetry by seventeenth century writers, to a devised vocal soundtrack that I both created and performed. This work, entitled *Late in the forest I did Cupid see* (a line from the texts utilised, eventually inspiring the inclusion of the symbol of Cupid in our narrative) was to become the start of a longer collaboration with actress Daisy Whyte. Excerpts from this recording are available on:

<http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/ophelias-song/>.

In September 2005, Elastic Theatre (then Vocal Motions) and Teatro Integrato Internazionale (based at Teatro Abarico, Rome) started a research collaboration in the form of a practical study on *Hamlet*. While the specific emphases of the collaboration regarded primarily the textual implications for the actor and the related translation issues in Italian, the full scope of the research path was much broader and involved, at different stages, performance practitioners from France, Croatia, Spain, as well as Italy and the UK. The idea was to play with such a canonical text and see where cultural differences in its interpretations may be broken or deliberately utilised as artistic stimuli.

Teatro Abarico then commissioned my company a short piece based on the same play-text in December. *Ophelia's Song* was the outcome of this, derived also from the parallel research of mine on writings by female poets of the seventeenth century, in particular Lady Mary Wroth. While Ophelia was performed by Daisy Whyte and interpreted with a strong emphasis on speech, Hamlet was physicalised by circus performer Fabian Wixe, combining mime and acrobatics and remaining significantly silent throughout the piece. Live unaccompanied singing provided both an atmospheric soundtrack as well as a narrative commentary on the actions taking place on stage.

An unusual aspect of this piece is the use of a Chorus, functioning both as Court and Narrator. In Rome, the Chorus involved the participation of Italian-speaking performers taking part in a short intensive only days before the first performance. The project was then adapted for The Facility's Symposium at London Metropolitan University, entitled *Happily*

ever after...?, involving this time selected from the Performing Arts programme at London Met.

Together with the difference of nationality, the two versions of *Ophelia's Song* saw radically different staging formats. In Italy, the intimate space of Teatro Abarico was unusually utilised, by placing the action on the tiered auditorium, with the audience viewing this from the area conventionally used as stage. At London Metropolitan University, the piece was staged across the whole of the L-shaped Tower Building courtyard, viewed by the audience from one fixed location. In both stagings, the singing aspect was performed from the back of the audience, thus promoting an in-the-round experience.

Plot Summary

The piece opens with Queen Gertrude's account of Ophelia's death by drowning. Her story is then depicted from Ophelia's point of view. In a flashback, the courtship with Hamlet already exposes the troubled state of his, which she communicates to Polonius. The play within the play is the point in which Ophelia gains an understanding of Hamlet's tragedy – an understanding that she wants to communicate to the Court, but that is deemed to be dismissed as the character's madness. The tragic fate of her relationship with Hamlet is symbolised in a court dance section, at the end of the piece.

Cast and Production Team

<i>Ophelia</i>	Daisy Whyte (actress)
<i>Hamlet</i> (Rome staging)	Fabian Wixe (circus performer)
Vocalist	Jacek Ludwig Scarso
Chorus (Rome staging)	Young actors from Teatre Abarico
Chorus (London staging)	Students from the Performing Arts programme at London Metropolitan University
Music	Jacek Ludwig Scarso, including the re-arrangement of traditional Elizabethan songs
Choreography	Vanessa Mildenberg
Concept and Direction	Jacek Ludwig Scarso

Supported by London Metropolitan University and Teatro Abarico

Elastic features at a glance

Disciplines

The fusion of spoken text (Ophelia), with physical theatre (Hamlet/Chorus). Speech components were integrated in the Chorus role, adapted to Italian and English, according to the staging. The action was accompanied by live a cappella singing.

Related questions:

- To what extent can the opposition of Ophelia's text-based characterisation to Hamlet's silence be conducive to highlighting her point of view in the narrative?
- How can the inclusion of singing inform the emotional journey of Ophelia's tragedy?
- What is the creative potential of utilising the different nationalities and languages of the Choruses in the two stagings of this production?

Dramaturgy

The integration of extracts from *Hamlet* with a selection of verses by Lady Mary Wroth, in the creation of an original narrative, deconstructing the role of Ophelia and highlighting her awareness of Hamlet's tragedy.

Related questions:

- What happens when an author of the classical canon is deliberately juxtaposed to a female contemporary of his? What gender issues can be uncovered in this process?
- Specifically to *Hamlet*, what effect can exposing Ophelia's awareness of the protagonist's tragedy have on the overall narrative?

Staging

The devising of two contrasting stagings: an indoor one at Teatro Abarico, and an outdoor version at London Metropolitan University.

Related questions:

- What are the aesthetic and semiotic implications of staging a well-known story such as the one of *Hamlet* in an essentially bare space, where no attempt is made in providing a setting for the piece?
- How can the representation and the perception of the narrative differ between a staging in a purpose-built studio space and one in a found outdoor location?
- What is the aesthetic potential of locating the live singing performance behind the audience, rather than visible to this?

Appendix 2b

Ophelia's Song **Devising Text**

Jacek Ludwig Scarso, December 2005-January 2006

[Sources: excerpts from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Jenkins, 2003), selected poetry by Lady Mary Wroth (Salzman, <http://wroth.latrobe.edu.au>)* and original lyrics by Jacek Ludwig Scarso]

Notes for the performers:

Please note that this text should not be approached as a literal "script"; rather, it is intended as guiding the devising process in the studio. Improvisation tasks will help create this production and may result in radical changes to this text.

CHARACTERS

OPHELIA: the interpretation of this character should specifically challenge her traditional representation. Her psychological journey should be informed by her growing awareness of Hamlet's tragedy.

HAMLET: significantly in the piece, Hamlet is performed in a stylised, movement-driven way, in order to allow for the audience's textual focus to be centred on Ophelia's words. On the other hand, his characterisation should still be driven by psychological motivation, particularly in his interactions with the protagonist.

CHORUS: the Chorus here symbolises the Court, at points embodying specific characters, such as Polonius, Gertrude and the players. In some sections, it is important for the Chorus to appear as a faceless crowd, emphasising the isolation of Ophelia and Hamlet within their environment.

VOCALIST: performed outside of the fictional space, singing should function as a way to punctuate and effectively comment upon Ophelia's journey in the piece – in some way, it symbolises the function of an outside narrator.

1. OVERTURE

[Cupid crosses the stage, laughing]

[The Prologue actor performs Gertrude's speech, recounting Ophelia's death.]

PROLOGUE (Gertrude's speech, ACT 4, sc vii)

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:

Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

[Exit.]

SONG

You seduce me
With your infinite genuine talk
You seduce me
And love me
And thrill me
With your infinite genuine talk
And finally stroke me
With your hands unkind
Your lips are ripe
My eyes inquisitive
Hold me with your vengeful arms
Your lips are ripe
My eyes are furious
And inquisitive
My lips my teeth
My eyes my mouth
My lips my teeth
My eyes my mouth
My lips my teeth
(improvisation section)

[During the song, Ophelia enters the space.]

OPH.*

Grief, killing grief: have not my torments been
Already great, and strong enough: but still
Thou dost increase, nay glory in mine ill,
And woes new past afresh new woes begin!
Am I the only purchase thou canst win?
Was I ordain'd to give despair her fill
Or fittest I should mount misfortune's hill
Who in the plaine of joy cannot live in?
If it be so: Grief come as welcome guest
Since I must suffer, for another's rest:
Yet this good grief, let me entreat of thee,
Use still thy force, but not from those I love.
Let me all pains and lasting torments prove
So I miss these, lay all thy waits on me.

[Enter CHORUS – Soundscape: the weeping brook]

2. CUPID

OPH.

Late in the Forest I did Cupid See
Cold, wet, and crying: he had lost his way,
And being blind was farther like to stray:
Which sight a kind compassion bred in me,
I kindly took, and dried him, while that he
Poor child complain'd he starved was with stay,
And pined for want of his accustom'd play,
For none in that wild place his host would be.
I glad was of his finding, thinking sure
This service should my freedom still procure,
And in my arms I took him then unharmed,
Carrying him safe unto a myrtle bower.
But in the way he made me feel his power,
Burning my heart who had him kindly warmed.

[Flowers appear, initially concealed by CHORUS members, to be picked by Ophelia. Soundscape continued. Exit CHORUS (except for Hamlet)]

3. HAMLET AND OPHELIA

[Hamlet and Ophelia meet for the first time]

OPH. [playfully teasing H.] *

Dear eyes how well indeed, you do adorn
That blessed Sphere, which gazing souls hold dear?
The loved place of sought for triumphs, near
The Court of Glory, where Love's force was born.
How may they term you April's sweetest morn?
When pleasing looks, from those bright lights appear
A sunshine day, from clouds, and mists still clear:
Kind nursing fires for wishes yet unborn.
Two Stars of Heaven sent down to grace the Earth,
Plac'd in that Throne which gives all loyes their birthe,
Shining, and burning; pleasing yet their charms:
Which wounding, even in hurts are deem'd delights;
So pleasant is their force, so great their mights,
As happy they can triumph in their arms.

[Hamlet grabs Ophelia by her wrist]

[ENTER CHORUS as Court + Polonius
Polonius and Ophelia (ACT 2 sc i)]

POLONIUS

How now, Ophelia! what's the matter?

OPH.

O, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

POL.

With what, i' the name of God?

OPH.

My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors,--he comes before me.

POL.

Mad for thy love?

OPH.

My lord, I do not know;
But truly, I do fear it.

POL.

What said he?

OPH.

He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being: that done, he lets me go:
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out o' doors he went without their helps,
And, to the last, bended their light on me.

4. THE PLAYERS' SCENE

[CHORUS in dumbshow – naive and humourous physical stylisation]]

Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly; the Queen embracing him, and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck: lays him down upon a bank of flowers: she, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exit. The Queen returns; finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner wooes the Queen with gifts: she seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love. (Hamlet, Act 3 sc.ii)

(Selected CHORUS members)

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing;
Confederate season, else no creature seeing;
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
Thy natural magic and dire property,
On wholesome life usurp immediately.

OPH. (ACT 3 sc ii)

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me,
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

5. OPHELIA'S MADNESS

[Ophelia's 'madness speech' as edited from ACT 4 sc iv.

CHORUS soundscape (echoing Ophelia, as incoherent thoughts) – EXEUNT]

6. OPHELIA'S DEATH

[Hamlet + Ophelia "river scene"]

SONG: How should I your true love know
How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.

He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass green turf,
At his heels a stone.

White his shroud as the mountain snow,
Larded with sweet flowers;
Which bewept to the grave did go
With true-love showers.

[Ophelia awakes Hamlet]

OPH.* [playfully once more]
So when the Queen of Love rose from the seas
Divinely fair in such a blest amaze,
The enamoured watery deities did gaze,
As we when charming Flammin did surprise,
More heavenly bright, our whole seraglio's eyes,
And not a nymph her wonder could disguise.
Whilst with a lovely pride the graceful boy
Passed all the ladies, like a sultan, by,
Only he looked more absolute and coy.

When with a haughty air he did advance
To lead out some transported she to dance,
He gave his hand as carelessly as chance.
Attended with a universal sigh.
On her each beauty cast a jealous eye
And quite fell out with guileless destiny.

7. COURT DANCE / EPILOGUE

SONG

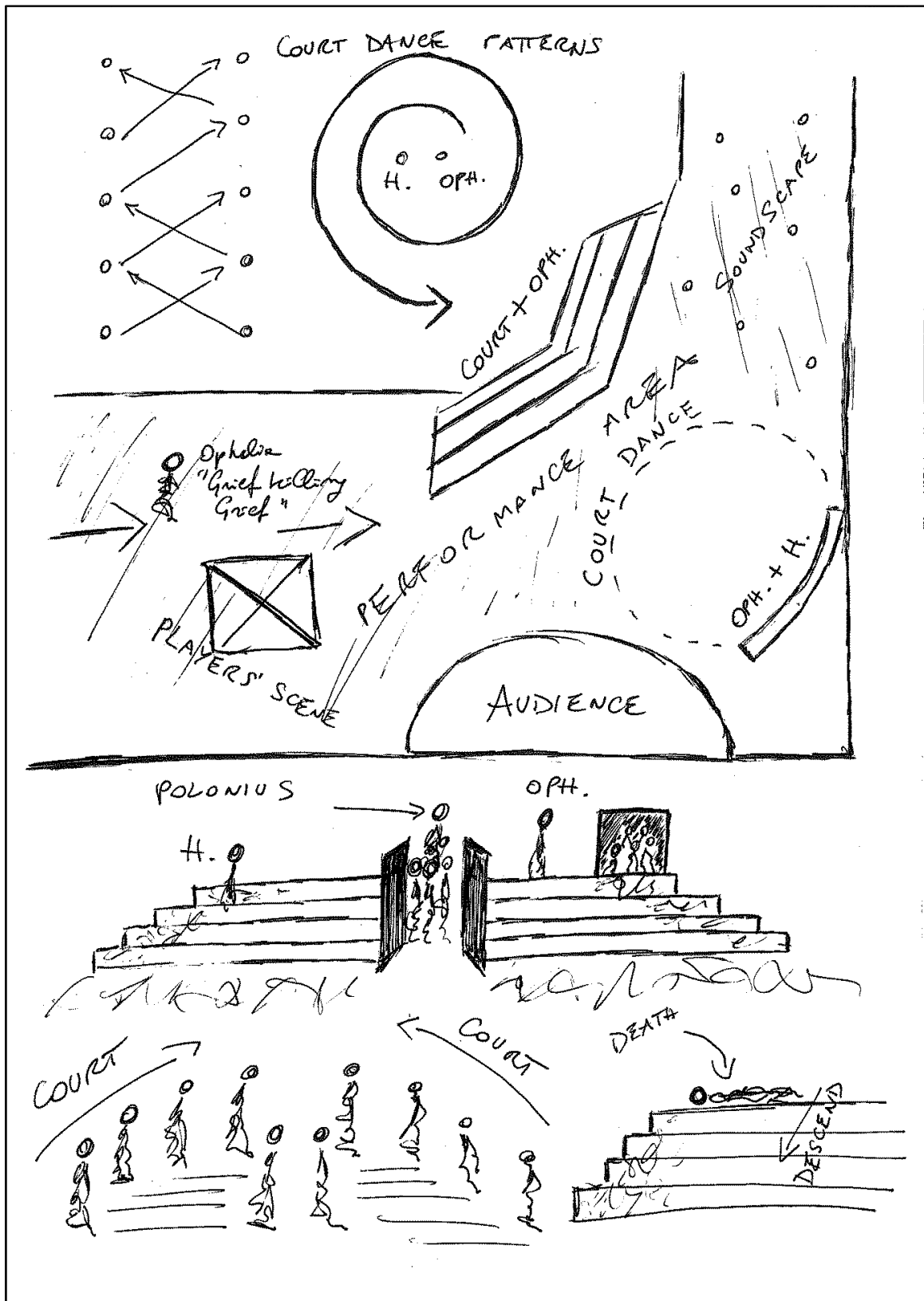
Look into my eyes
And fix your gaze deeply
Far away far away far away far away
Leaning so light, slowly progressing
Far away far away far away far away
Tuning so fine You would think it instinctive
Far away far away far away far away
Fearlessly moving
Through effortless patterns
Far away far away far away far away

[Hamlet and Ophelia in Court Dance
ENTER CHORUS to join the dance]

[Cupid separates Ophelia and Hamlet. Then runs away.]

The End

Ophelia's Song – Samples of visual annotations



Appendix 2C

Ophelia's Song **DVD**

Content:

- Live recording at London Metropolitan University (The Facility's symposium *Happily ever after...?*)
- Project abstract as featured in the symposium's documentation

To view a live recording of the staging at Teatro Abarico, Rome, please visit <https://vimeo.com/51322316> (password: **ophelia**). Further documentation on this project, including production images of both stagings and excerpts from the audio recording *Late in the forest I did Cupid see*, can be accessed on <http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/ophelias-song/>.

Appendix 3

Medea

Made Medea



Appendix 3a

Medea Made Medea **Project Profile**

Calendar

Vocal Motions Singers' Residency at Bloomsbury Central Church (Covent Garden): Jan-June 2007

Devising process with dancers and actors at London Metropolitan University: Apr-June 2007
Performances at London Metropolitan University, London Contemporary Dance School (The Place), Westminster University and Theatre 145 in Grenoble (19th Rencontres du Jeune Théâtre Européen): June-July 2007

Production Overview

Medea Made Medea was created in parallel with my residency with the Vocal Motions Singers, a branch of the company dedicated to a cappella vocal music, at Bloomsbury Central Church in Covent Garden. Here, we developed a repertoire of traditional gospels and spirituals combined with vocal improvisation work, which was showcased in a range of concerts internationally. My aim at the time was to test whether this musical style could be applied within the function of Greek Chorus to a text like Euripides' *Medea*, and in doing so, continue to explore the themes of the *Miscast Women Trilogy*.

More often than not, it is Medea's disturbing killing of her own children that tends to be at the centre of many critical accounts of this tragedy, as opposed to the extraordinary content of Medea's speeches. In these, many more dimensions to this character can be deduced: her moral awareness, her struggle as a woman in a patriarchal society and even her heroic potential. Focusing on such speeches, my piece aimed to question the traditional construction of this character in misogynistic terms.

The original text (in a translation dated 1912 by Arthur S. Way) was edited to concentrate on five main speeches. The characters surrounding Medea were mainly portrayed through movement. The role of the chorus, on the other hand, was explored exclusively through singing. The musical material, performed a cappella, was partly devised for the piece and partly drawn from wide ranging songs (including traditional spirituals and Civil Rights songs), inspired by the common themes of foreign-ness and 'otherness', highly relevant to this text. While chorus and dancers began to devise their independent work already by the end of January 2007, all performers were brought together at the very latest phase of the process.

Medea Made Medea was presented in two contrasting stagings. At London Metropolitan University, London Contemporary Dance School (The Place) and Westminster University, the project was presented in a traverse configuration, with the audience very close to the action. In Grenoble, where my company was invited as UK representative to the 19th Rencontres du Jeune Théâtre Européen, the piece was reconceived for a proscenium stage.

Plot Summary

In an intensely physical sequence, Jason is observed by Medea, as he seduces Glauce. Their union is announced in the Prologue, and Jason and Glauce are seen symbolically expropriating Medea of her authority. As Medea curses Jason, she begins to plot her revenge. Firstly, she ensures Creon's permission to stay in the land one more day: during this time, she plans to kill all three. Her fury at Jason's betrayal is depicted in a choreographic sequence in which his role as warrior is antagonised by Medea, who reminds him that his victories were only achieved thanks to her help. Medea laments that all she needed was for Jason to ask for her consent before marrying the young Glauce. Selecting her poisonous weeds, symbolically represented by the cut grass covering the performance area, she continues to plot her revenge, which is choreographically depicted on stage. The dilemma remains as to whether her two sons should also be her victims, before she flees the land.

Cast and Production Team

<i>Medea</i>	Sandra Shirley (actress)
<i>Jason</i>	Alexandre Achour (dancer)
<i>Glauce</i>	Lola Maury (dancer)
<i>Creon/Aegeus</i>	Amir Sardari (actor)
Chorus	Rosemarie Samuel, Louise Taylor, Claire Fennel, Jonathan Thomson, William Helfrecht, Jacek Ludwig Scarso (vocalists)
Music	Traditional spirituals rearranged with vocal improvisation by Jacek Ludwig Scarso
Concept and Direction	Jacek Ludwig Scarso

Supported by CREARC, London Metropolitan University, Westminster University, LCDS

Elastic features at a glance

Disciplines

The fusion of spoken text (Medea, Aegeus/Creon), with dance (Jason and Glauce). The action was accompanied by live a cappella singing, symbolically replacing the role of Greek Chorus.

Related questions:

- Similarly to *Ophelia's Song*, what is the effect of contrasting Medea's spoken voice, to the silent depiction of Jason and Glauce through dance?
- To what extent can the combination of speech, dance and singing function as an implicit contemporary revisitation of ancient Greek theatre performances, which also combined these disciplines?
- What is the effect of replacing the role of the Chorus in Euripides' text with live

singers?

Dramaturgy

The adaption of Euripides' original text, by focussing on five key speeches of the protagonist. The integration of traditional spirituals and gospels, combined with vocal improvisation.

Related questions:

- Is it possible to highlight the heroic qualities of Medea, while acknowledging the controversial deeds that she commits in the myth?
- What structural choices in the devising of the plotline can be made, in order to present both the feminist potential of this character, and the misogynistic construction through which she has been traditionally portrayed?
- Is it possible to condense the text of Medea and stylise its performance, while still being true to its core themes?
- How do the themes of other-ness and foreign-ness found in the selection of songs used in the piece combine to the themes of the play-text?

Staging

The devising of two contrasting stagings: a traverse version for London Metropolitan University, Westminster University and London Contemporary Dance School; and a proscenium one for Theatre 145 (Grenoble).

Related questions:

- How do audience proximity and visibility in the traverse stagings affect the emotional involvement with the text, if compared to a proscenium staging?
- How can the proxemic choices made in the different stagings of the piece affect the relationships between the characters and between these and the audience?

Appendix 3b

Medea Made Medea

Devising Text

Jacek Ludwig Scarso, April-May 2007

[Sources: Extracts from Euripides' Medea translated by Arthur S. Way (Way, 1958). Music material includes vocal improvisation and new arrangements of traditional gospels, protest songs by Sweet Honey in the Rock and a gospel arrangement of Kurt Weill's *Oh Heavenly Salvation]**

Notes for the performers:

Please note that this text should not be approached as a literal "script"; rather, it is intended as guiding the devising process in the studio. Improvisation tasks will help create this production and may result in radical changes to this text.

CHARACTERS

MEDEA: it is important that this character is presented as multi-dimensional to the audience; in this sense, the emotional charge of Medea should not obscure her political intelligence. However, the conclusion of the piece should reflect the tragic state of the character in realising the cost of her revenge.

JASON, GLAUCE, CREON, AEGEUS: on the contrary, these characters are represented as stylised in relation to the protagonist. Physicality should be emphasised in their performance, but this should nonetheless psychologically driven.

Chorus: it is vital for the singing not to merely represent a decorative element in the production. The vocalists effectively replace the notion of Greek Chorus, and their performance should both accompany and reflect upon the narrative journey of Medea.

[The Stage: the performance area, essentially bare, is conceived as one long corridor viewed in traverse or diagonally across the stage for proscenium performances. The Chorus is positioned at one end of this, with Medea at the other, where, two ornated chairs are positioned side by side.]

1. OVERTURE

[Choreography I: the dancers engage in a risk-taking sequence, symbolising Jason's conquest of Glauce. There is a line of weeds and plants along the main path. As the dance develops, these are repeatedly thrown in the air and scattered around. The dancers then walk forwards, side by side (on both sides of the line of weeds), as if to symbolise Jason's and Glauce's union.]

CHORUS: *

Oh Heavenly Salvation
Our precious city has been spared
The storm has passed and vanished above us
The storm has ended
And death steps back
Into the waters once more
Oh Heavenly Salvation
Oh Heavenly Salvation...

[During the singing, Medea utters her speech]

MEDEA

O Lady of Justice, O Artemis' Majesty, see it, O see it –
Look on the wrongs that I suffer, by oaths ever-lasting who tied
The soul of mine husband, that ne'er from the curse he might free it, nor free it
From your vengeance! O may I behold him at last, even him and his bride,
Them, and these halls therewithal, all shattered in ruin, in ruin!
Wretches, who dare unprovoked to do to Medea, Medea, despite!
O father, o city, whom erst I forsook, for undoing, undoing,
And for shame, when the blood of my brother I spilt on the path of my flight!

2. PROLOGUE

CHORUS ACTOR

[Prologue: enters the corridor and physically directs the audience's attention to the relationships between the characters.]

Upward and back to their fountains the sacred rivers are stealing;
Justice is turned to injustice, the order of old to confusion:
The thoughts of the hearts of men are treachery wholly
And, reeling from its ancient foundations, the faith of the Gods is become a delusion.
Everywhere change! – even woman men's voices hence-worth shall honour;
Her life shall be sunlit with glory; for woman the old-time story
Is ended, the slanders hoary no more shall as chains be upon her.

3. CORINTHIAN DAMES!

[Medea actively stands on the two chairs, delivering her speech with politician-like authority.]

MEDEA

Corinthian dames, I have come forth my doors
Lest ye condemn me. Many I know are held
Mis-proud – some, since they shrink from public gaze;
Some, from their bearing to their fellow-men;
Some quiet lives for indolence are defamed;
We women are of all unhappiest,
Who, first, must buy, as buys the highest bidder,
A husband – nay, we do but win for our lives
A master! Deeper depth of wrong is this.
Here too is risk – will the lord we gain
Be evil or good? Divorce? – 'tis infamy
To us: we may not even reject a suitor!
And if we learn our lesson, if our lord
Dwell with us, plunging not against the yoke,
Happy our lot is; else – no help but death.
But we, say they, live an unperilled life
At home, while they do battle with the spear –
Unreasoning fools! Thrice would I under shield
Stand, rather than bear childbirth-peril once.
Woman quails at every peril,
Faint-heart to face the fray and look on steel;
But when in wedlock-rights she suffers wrong,

No spirit more blood-thirsty shall be found.

CHORUS:

*Well I've been working
Working, working all day long
Well I've been sweating
I've been torn
Sweating, I've been torn
Working all day long*

4. PERSUADING CREON

[As the character of Creon is presented on stage, his dialogue with Medea should be located in close proximity to the audience. In traverse stagings, the two could stand on reserved chairs in the auditorium, communicating across the two sides of the main corridor. In more traditional venues, Creon could appear from amongst the audience, with Medea on stage.]

CREON

[authoritative voice]

I fear thee
Wise art thou, cunning in much evil lore;
Chafed art thou, of thine husband's couch bereft:
I hear thou threatenest, so they bring me word,
To wreak on sire, on bridegroom, and on bride
Mischief. I guard mine head ere falls the blow.

MEDEA

O Creon, dread not me –
That against princes I should dare transgress.
How hast thou wronged me? Thou hast given thy child
To whomso pleased thee. Wed ye, and prosper. But in this your land
Still let me dwell.

CREON

Soft words to hear! – but in thine inmost heart,
I fear, thou plottest mischief all the while;
And all the less I trust thee than before.

MEDEA

Zeus, Zeus, forget not him who is the cause of this!

CREON

Hence, passionate fool, and rid me of my trouble.

MEDEA

Troubled am I; new troubles need I none.

CREON

Soon shalt thou be by servants' hands thrust out.

MEDEA

Nay – Nay- not this, Creon, I implore!

CREON

Why restive then? – why rid not Corinth of thee?

MEDEA

Suffer me yet to tarry this one day,
And somewhat for our exile to take thought,
And find my babes a refuge, since their sire
Cares naught to make provisions for his sons.
Compassionate these – a father too art thou
Of children –
Not for myself I fret, if I be banished:
For them in their calamity I mourn.

[Pause]

CREON

One day.
Too short for thee to do the deeds I dread.

5. POISONED WEEDS

MEDEA (*aside*)

This day of grace he grants me
To stay, wherein three foes will I lay dead,
The father, and the daughter, and mine husband.
And, having for them many paths of death,
Which first to take in hand I know not, friends –
To fire yon palace midst their marriage feast,
Or to steal softly their bridal-bower,
And through their two hearts thrust the whetted knife.
Yet one thing bars the way – if I be found
Crossing the threshold of the house and plotting,
Die shall I mid the mocking laughter of foes.

[Grabs weeds in her hands, walking on the path of scattered plants]

Best the sure path, wherein my nature's cunning
Excels, by poisoned weeds to destroy them – yea.
Now, grant them dead: what city will receive me,
What host vouchsafe a land of refuge, home
Secure, and from the avenger shield my life?
There is none.
Ah, by the Queen of Night, whom I revere
None, none shall vex my soul, and rue it not.
Bitter and woeful bridal will I give them,
Bitter troth-plight and banishing of me.
Up-then! – spare naught of all sorcery-lore,
Medea, of thy plotting and contriving;
On to the dread deed! Now is need of daring.
Look on the wrongs: thou must not make derision
For sons of Sisyphus, for Jason's bride, -
Thou, sprung from royal father, from the Sun!
Thou know'st the means. I prove me woman indeed!

CHORUS

*As long as I have breath in my body
I'll see this battle over
I'll see this battle through.*

6. I SAVED THEE

[Choreography II: Jason travels across the stage, with actions reprising a battle. He reaches Medea, at the other end, engaging in an intimate quiet kiss, then goes back to his throne. Medea suddenly begins to shout at him while frantically throwing weeds at him. He remains unfazed throughout this.]

MEDEA

I saved thee! This knows every son of Greece
That stepped with thee aboard thine Argo's hull,
Thee, sent to quell the flame-outbreathing bulls
With yoke-hands, and to sow the tilth of death.
The dragon, warder of the Fleece of Gold,
I slew, and raised deliverance-light for thee.
Myself forsook my father and mine home!

[Jason returns to his initial position, sitting by Glauce.]

Be not thou, as touching me, fair-seeming
And crafty-tongued: one word shall overthrow thee:
Thou shouldst, were thou not base, have wed this bride
With my consent, not hid it from thy friends.

7. PERSUADING AEGEUS

[Enter Aegeus. The conventions of staging the following section reprise those used in the dialogue between Creon and Medea.]

AEGEUS

Medea, joy to thee! – for fairer greeting
None knoweth to accost his friends withal.

MEDEA

Joy to thee also, Aegeus.

AEGEUS

Why droops thine eye? – why this wan-wasted hue?

MEDEA

Aegeus, of all men basest is mine husband.

AEGEUS

What say'st thou? – Clearly tell me thine heart's pain.

MEDEA

He wrongs me – Jason, never wronged of me.

AEGEUS

What hath he done? More plainly tell it out.

MEDEA

Another wife he takes, his household's queen.

AEGEUS

Ha! Hath he dared in truth this basest deed?

MEDEA

Yea: I am now dishonoured, once beloved.

Yea, also am I banished.

AEGEUS

Of whom? A monstrous wrong thou namest now!

MEDEA

Creon from Corinth driveth me an exile.

AEGEUS

Doth Jason suffer this? – I count it shame

MEDEA

In pretence, no – o, he bears it well!

But I beseech thee, lo,

I clasp thy knees, thy suppliant am I now: -

Pity, o pity me the evil-starred

And see me not cast forth to homelessness:

Swear never thyself to cast me forth thy land!

AEGEUS

By Earth, the Sun's pure majesty, and all

The Gods, I swear to abide by this thou hast said.

[Exit]

8. PLOTTING

MEDEA

[Laughs. Aside]

Pass on thy way rejoicing: all is well!

I too will come with all speed to thy burg,

When mine intent is wrought, my wish attained

O Zeus, Justice, Light of the Sun!

Over my foes triumphant now my friends,

Shall we become: our feet are on the path

Now is there hope of vengeance on my foes.

For this man, there where my chief weakness lay,

Hath for my plots a haven in storm appeared.

And all the plots to thee will I tell now;

[Choreography III: a stylised enactment of her plans begins]

CHORUS

We are rising up

Rising from

The depths of our despair

MEDEA

One of my household will I send to Jason,
And will entreat him to my sight to come;
And soft words, when he cometh, will I speak,
Saying, "Thy will is mine", and, "It is well";
Saying, his royal marriage, my betrayal,
Is our advantage, and right well devised.
I will petition that my sons will stay –
Not for that I would leave on hostile soil
Children of mine for foes to trample on,
But the king's daughter so by guile to slay.
For I will send them bearing gifts in hand
Unto the bride, that they may not be banished,
A robe fine-spun, a golden diadem.
If she receive and don my ornaments,
Die shall she wretchedly, and all who touch her;
With drugs so dread will I anoint my gifts.
Howbeit here I pass the story by,
And wail the deed that yet for me remains
To bring pass: for I will slay my children,
Yea, mine: no man shall pluck them from mine hand.
Then, having brought all Jason's house to wrack,
I leave the land, fleeing my dear babes' blood,
And having dared a deed most impious.

[The enactment ends.]

For unendurable are mocks of foes
Let all go: what is life to me? Nor country
Nor home have I, nor refuge from mine ills.
Then erred I, in the day when I forsook
my father's halls, by yon Greek's words beguiled.
For never living shall he see henceforth
The sons I bare him, nor shall he beget
A son of his new bride, that wretch foredoomed
In agony to die by drugs of mine.
Let none account me impotent, nor weak,
Nor spiritless! – o nay, in other sort,
Grim to my foes, and kindly to my friends.
Most glorious is the life of such as I.

9. O CHILDREN, MY CHILDREN

Two roman candles are lit (respectively, symbolising Medea's children). Medea kneels at the centre, speaking softly, as if praying.

O children, my children, yours a city is,
And yours a home, where, leaving wretched me,
Ye shall abide, for ever motherless!
[she repeats these lines]

CHORUS

[Improvisation ("No")]

MEDEA

[to the audience]

O me accurst in this desperate mood!

For naught, for naught, my babes, I nurtured you,

Alas! What shall I do?

Women, I cannot! Farewell, purposes

O'erpast! I take my children from the land.

What need to wring their father's heart with ills

Of these, to gain myself ills twice so many?

Not !! Not !! Ye purposes, farewell!

Yet – yet – what ails me? Would I earn derision,

Letting my foes slip from mine hand unpunished?

I must dare this.

O heart, mine heart, do not – do not this deed!

Let them be, wretched heart, spare thou my babes!

There dwelling with me shall they gladden thee.

[Choreography IV: Jason and Glauce move in twisting, contorting actions, as if poison is contaminating their bodies]

10. EPILOGUE

[Chorus Actor blows the roman candles out. The Chorus advances singing.]

CHORUS:

Will the circle be un-broken

By and by Lord, by and by?

There's a better home awaiting

In the sky, Lord, in the sky.

(improvisation)

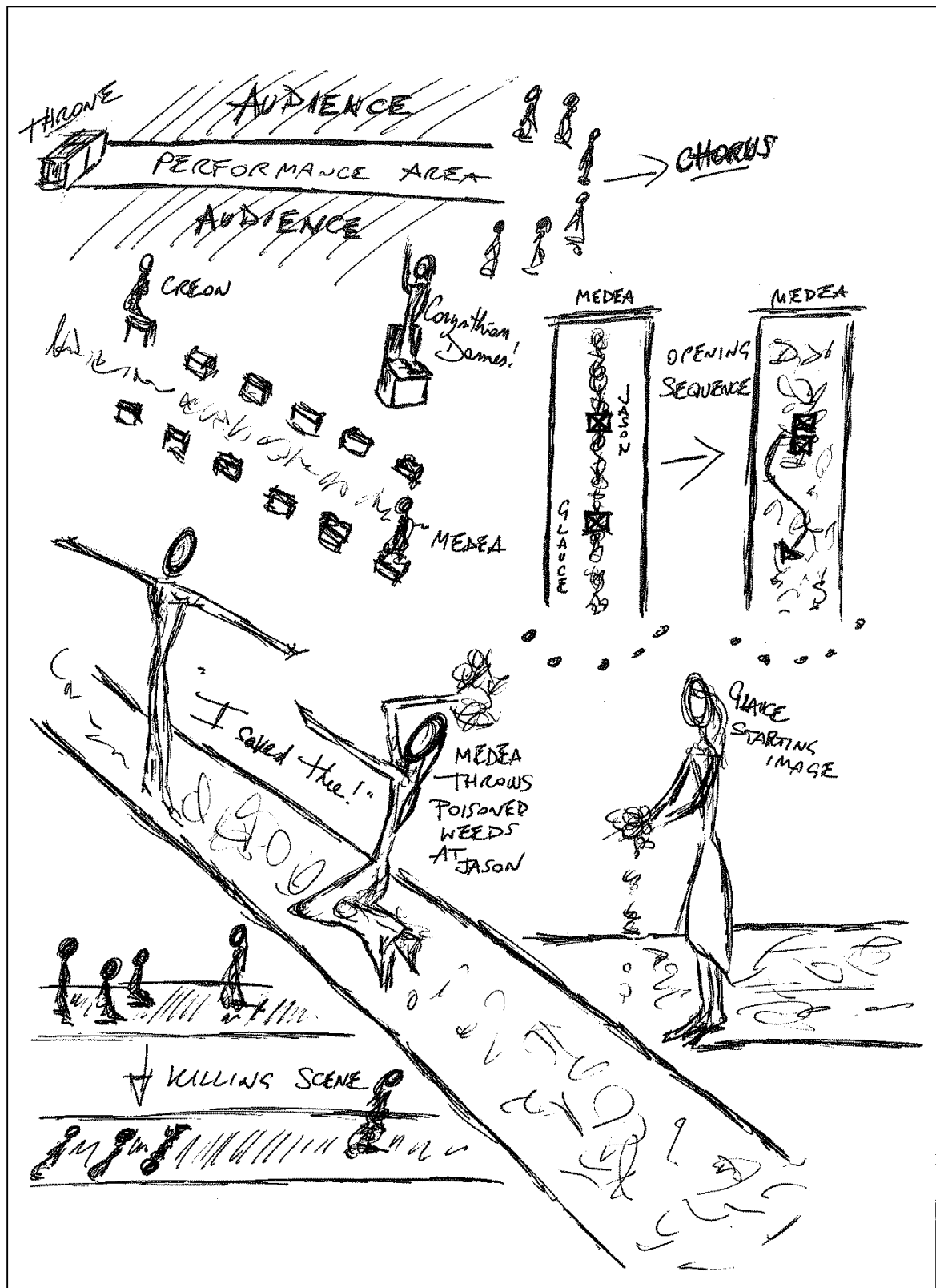
[During this, Medea stands on the throne and utters]

MEDEA

Jason! Foes! That ye may fall in the net that ye spreadest for me.

[The End]

Medea Made Medea – Samples of visual annotations



Appendix 3C

Medea Made Medea **DVD**

Content:

- Live recording at London Contemporary Dance School (The Place)
- Production photographs (including images of the proscenium staging at Theatre 145, Grenoble)
- Radio interview RCF (French/English)

Further documentation on this project can also be accessed on
<http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/medea-made-medea/>.

Appendix 4 *The Magdalene Mysteries*



Appendix 4a

The Magdalene Mysteries

Project Profile

Calendar

Research of text sources: Nov-Dec 2007

Devising process with the Company (London Metropolitan University): Jan-Apr 2008

Performances at The Space (Enterprise 08), St James's Piccadilly, Southwark Playhouse and Teatro Sala Uno (Roma Teatro Festival): May-July 2008

Production Overview

Concluding *The Miscast Women Trilogy*, *The Magdalene Mysteries* was an imaginary journey across the life of Mary Magdalene, created by fusing original historical documents. I began researching on the gospel associated to this saint and comparing this with a range of apocryphal and canonical documents: these included the four gospels and the *Epistles of Peter* amongst the canonical ones, and the *Acts* and the *Gospel of Peter* and the Gnostic text *Thunder*, amongst the apocryphal ones. Further sources included Ireneaus' *Against Heresies*, *Homily 33* by Pope Gregory I, *The Digby Play of the Mary Magdalene* and *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine.

Fragments of these texts were edited and dramatised to fit into the main narrative path – the life of Mary from her first encounter with Christ to the erasure of her gospel by the early Church. Song and contemporary dance were used as narrative elements, allowing scenes to take place through these, in order to avoid creating new text additions – a principle that we kept throughout the devising process, in order to preserve the integrity of the original sources. The music included company-devised vocal improvisations and adaptations, liberally based on the liturgical songs of Hildegard Von Bingen, selected sections of the *Misa Criolla* by Ramirez, as well as traditional spirituals.

Unlike *Medea Made Medea*, here the Chorus was integrated in the action itself, embodying the role of the Apostles. Significantly within the narrative of the piece, these included female performers and Mary Magdalene herself as one of the Twelve.

In *The Magdalene Mysteries*, four main characters were conveyed through spoken voice: Mary and Peter, whose opposition was central in the piece, as well as the Church Father and Jacobus de Voragine. The latter two characters symbolised the way in which history has remembered the figure of Mary Magdalene: as the repentant sinner, invariably sexualised and effectively objectified through traditional patriarchal assumptions. This stereotypical view of Mary was, in the piece, represented by her "Shadows", conveyed through movement and through the obsessive repetition of the penitence phrase "Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison".

Significantly, the character of Jesus was portrayed choreographically and silently, except for whispering "Eloe Lema Sabakdani" just before his death. His representation was informed by the Gnostic documents consulted for this work, resulting in a somewhat mystical and abstract understanding of this character.

The Magdalene Mysteries was presented in a range of venues in London, as well as in Rome. The public in London was specifically invited to witness how the piece would change from venue to venue. Highly different in this sense were the stagings at St James's Piccadilly and at the Southwark Playhouse. Contrasting the darkness of the latter (the venue is built under the vaults of the London Bridge railway), the former saw a staging in daylight, located on and between the pews of the church, with the audience placed by the altar area and the balconies above this.

Plot Summary

The piece opens with Mary Magdalene as witness to key moments in the life of Christ: the Last Supper, the Betrayal and Calvary and his death. She is depicted as rival to Peter in the leadership of the disciples: a rivalry that culminates in the witnessing of the resurrection, dismissed by Peter. The story moves to the medieval accounts of her journey to the desert and her supposed thirty years of contemplation there. An apparition of Christ inspires Mary to write her own controversial gospel. As her words are erased by the early Church, her tragedy unfolds before her eyes: the repentant sinner, here symbolised by her Shadows, becomes the icon by which she is remembered, and forgotten, in history.

Cast and Production Team

Mary Magdalene
Jesus

Sandra Shirley (actress)
Alexandre Achour (dancer)
Femi Oyewole (dancer)

Peter
Jacobus de Voragine
Church Father
Magdalene's Shadows

Vincent Jerome (actor)
Amir Sardari (actor/singer)
Thomas Thoroe (actor/singer)
Lola Maury, Wanda Caddick,
Katharine Yates (dancers)
Maya Sapone, Holly Rose, Heather Knight,
Jessica Martenson, Katie Draper (vocalists,
in addition to other members of the cast)

Music

Company-devised improvisations and adaptations of the songs of Hildegard Von Bingen, extracts from the *Misa Criolla* and traditional spirituals

Musician
Musical Director
Dramaturgical Consultant
Producer
Concept and Direction

Mircha Mangiacotti
Naveen Arles
Rishi Trikha
Iris Musel
Jacek Ludwig Scarso

Supported by London Metropolitan University, Action Claims, Hurleypalmerflatt, La Volpe e l'Uva Sas., St James's Piccadilly and the Southwark Playhouse

***Elastic* features at a glance**

Disciplines

The combination of spoken text (Mary Magdalene, Peter, Jacobus de Voragine and the Church Father), with dance (Magdalene Shadows and Jesus) and vocal music (the Apostles).

Related questions:

- Continuing with the aesthetics of *The Miscast Women Trilogy*, what is the effect of isolating the spoken voice to highlight the antagonism between the central character and those that epitomise the patriarchal tradition within the narrative?
- In light of this, can the use of dance allow for the representation of a character like Jesus to challenge traditional assumptions, particularly in his relationship to Mary Magdalene?
- How can the role of the Chorus be fully integrated in the action, while preserving the aesthetics of discrete musical sections?

Dramaturgy

The fusion of a wide range of historical texts, including canonical and apocryphal documents. The direct quotation of these in the creation of the dramatic text for the piece. The use of dance and singing as integral aspects to the narrative, allowing for the development of the plotline, while preserving the integrity of the quoted original sources.

Related questions:

- What is the effect and what are the inherent responsibilities in creating a dramatic text that is solely based on quotations from a wide range of historical sources?
- How does this process meet the necessity to provide cohesion in the delivery of the central narrative of the piece? Conversely, can this strategy be utilised deliberately to convey the construction of Mary Magdalene, as a “mosaic” of historical facts, legends and cultural assumptions?
- What is the effect of drawing on the evangelical narrative without making Christ the central dramatic figure? Ideologically, what is the potential of basing a dramatic development on the opposition between Mary Magdalene and Peter?

Staging

The creation of contrasting stagings, responding to the different architectural configurations of the venues utilised: The Space, St James's Piccadilly and the Southwark Playhouse in London; Teatro Sala Uno in Rome.

Related questions:

- How do the contextual associations of the spaces utilised inform the significance of the piece? Specifically, how do the histories of the venues meet the historical emphases of this work – noting that The Space is a deconsecrated church, the

Southwark Playhouse is built under the Victorian vaults of London Bridge, St James's is still a practising place of worship and Teatro Sala Uno is built under the Holy Steps landmark in Rome?

- In the case of St James's Piccadilly, can the subversion of the spatial configuration, by utilising the altar area as auditorium and the pews as stage, symbolically support the ideological subversions inherent to the piece?

Appendix 4b

The Magdalene Mysteries **Devising Text**

Jacek Ludwig Scarso, Dec 2007 – Jan 2008

[SOURCES: canonical Gospels, *Epistles 1 and 2* of St. Peter, the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (Leloup, 2002), the Gnostic text *Thunder Perfect Mind*, *Acts of Peter* and the *Gospel of Peter* (Barnstone & Meyer, 2006) *Homily 33* by Pope Gregory I (cited in Burstein & De Keijzer, 2006; p.155), *The Digby Play of The Mary Magdalene* (NeCastro, <http://machias.edu/faculty/necastro/drama/magdalene.txt>) and *The Golden Legend* (Halsall, 2000).]

GENERAL NOTES

Please note that, rather than a conventional script, this is the initial stimulus for our devising process. The finished product will be achieved strictly through our practical process and may entail substantial changes to this model. This text derives from the dramatisation of original historical documents. However, this is not a historical play; rather, an imaginary journey into the life of Mary Magdalene based on the possibilities argued by official and non official sources. Primarily, the hypothesis that Mary Magdalene may in fact have been a spiritual and political leader in her own right (as implied by Gnostic texts), whose role was censored by the early Church and diluted to become a repentant prostitute – an image still popular today, though officially dismissed by the Church itself in 1969. I would like to emphasise that this play-text does not reflect a religious position or agenda and is the product of a critical/feminist reflection on the above documents, rather than a theological one. The staging of *The Magdalene Mysteries* will resemble a cross between an epic play, a contemporary opera and a piece of dance theatre. The setting is minimal and the performance stylised. According to the ethos of Elastic Theatre, the production will be staged in a variety of formats, to reflect the diverse architectural spaces that will be used. Accordingly, stage directions in the playtext are kept loose and subject to potential changes. Music sources: *Misa Criolla* by Ariel Ramirez, selected pieces by Hildegard Von Bingen, traditional gospels and spirituals.

CHARACTERS

MARY MAGDALENE (actor): although her depiction is based on legend, the aim is to present her as the most three-dimensional character in this piece. Specifically, the production intends to challenge the emotional fragility and submissive personality often associated to her in traditional accounts.

PETER (actor): the first official leader of the Christian church. Conspiracy theories argue that there may have been a rivalry between him and Mary Magdalene in the early Christian organisations, which may have resulted in the suppression of Magdalene's followers and their writings.

CHURCH FATHER (actor/singer) : in his homily 33 (591 AD), he initiated the association between Mary Magdalene and a repentant sinner

JESUS (dancer) : significantly silent in this production

JACOBUS DE VORAGINE (actor/singer): the author of the *Golden Legend* (1275), a medieval account of Mary Magdalene's life after Jesus' resurrection.

MAGDALENE'S SHADOWS (three female dancers) : symbolising the disjointed received notion of Mary Magdalene, conflating different female figures (Mary of Bethany, "the other Mary", the unnamed sinner woman, etc.) in the gospels

THE SINGERS: as Chorus, they both comment on the action and symbolise Mary Magdalene's inner thoughts.

THE TWELVE (All dancers, Singers and Peter): symbolising the Apostles.

[A bare performance area, dimly lit, in a cross configuration. Twelve wooden bowls are found at the edges of the space. The audience is likely to be positioned on three sides of the cross, where possible viewing the action from above.]

1. ANTIPHON

[One by one, three female dancers (Magdalene's Shadows) run in and out of the space. Drum pulses are heard from a distance. Dancers stop on one end of the space, facing the same direction, and begin fast solos, their movements taken from liturgical dance, alternated with sensual gestures. Their breath is increasingly audible. Off-stage, on the drum beats, the Singers begin the first section of KYRIE (MISA CRIOLLA), repeated three times. They stop. Abstract sounds gradually becoming words are spoken. They recite passages from the canonical gospels, traditionally associated with Mary Magdalene. These are edited from the sections below]

[John 12:1-8] Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages" He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

[Luke 7: 36-50] When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

[Luke 8: 2] After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

[Mark 16:9] When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

[Mark 15: 40] The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

[Two male singers move forwards, away from the rest. The first one symbolically becoming CHURCH FATHER, the second one JACOBUS DE VORAGINE.]

CHURCH FATHER [to the audience, but looking at the dancers, authoritative in voice and manner] She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did the seven devils signify, if not all vices? ... It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts. What she therefore displayed more scandalously, she was now offering to God in a more

praiseworthy manner. She had coveted with earthly eyes, but now through penitence these are consumed with tears. She displayed her hair to set off her face, but now her hair dries her tears. (From *Homily 33*, 591 AD)

JACOBUS [also to the audience, resembling a medieval court jester]

This Mary Magdalene is she that washed the feet of our Lord and dried them with the hair of her head, and anointed them with precious ointment, and did solemn penance in the time of grace, and was the first that chose the best part, which was at the feet of our Lord, and heard his preaching. Which anointed his head; at his passion was nigh unto the cross; which made ready ointments, and would anoint his body, and would not depart from the monument when his disciples departed. To whom Jesus Christ appeared first after his resurrection, and was fellow to the apostles, and made of our Lord apostlesse of the apostles. (From *The Golden Legend*)

MARY MAGDALENE

[Slowly enters, walking across the length of the cross]

I was sent forth from the power, and I have come to those who reflect upon me, and I have been found among those who seek after me.

Look upon me, you who reflect upon me,
and you hearers, hear me.

You who are waiting for me, take me to yourselves.

And do not banish me from your sight.

And do not make your voice hate me, nor your hearing.

Do not be ignorant of me anywhere or any time. Be on your guard!

Do not be ignorant of me.

For I am the first and the last.

I am the honored and the scorned .

I am the whore and the holy one.

I am the wife and the virgin.

I am she whose wedding is great,
and I have not taken a husband.

I am the slave of him who prepared me.

And whatever he wills happens to me.

I am the silence that is incomprehensible
and the idea whose remembrance is frequent.

I am the voice whose sound is manifold
and the word whose appearance is multiple.

I am the utterance of my name

Mary Magdalene.

(From *Thunder, Perfect Mind*. This mysterious text, originally associated with the early Christian goddess Sophia, will be used at different stages in the play as Magdalene's prediction of her own destiny).

[Dancers run out. Mary Magdalene kneels or sits, as silent onlooker for the following scenes.]

2. WALKING ON THE WATERS

[At the other end Jesus enters carrying a large bowl of water. He positions it at one end of the line of smaller bowls. He bathes his hair, symbolising his baptism. He slowly stands up and begins a slow motion travelling sequence, diagonally crossing each bowl. In the meantime one Singer performs an improvisation inspired by *De undecim milibus virginibus spiritui sancto honor sit responsorium* by Hildegard Von Bingen. Exit Jesus.]

3. THE TWELVE

[The Singer is joined by the others and the dancers in standing before each of the bowls and picking it up. Last in the row is Peter, who therefore picks the one containing water. SOFT GUITAR SOLO. Singers and Dancers interact with the twelve bowls on stage, in a unison gestural sequence. Mary Magdalene from one side, lights an incense stick in one of the bowls, so that smoke comes out of this.]

PETER

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus, to those who have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God: Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust. Yes, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence; and in moral excellence, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control patience; and in patience godliness; and in godliness brotherly affection; and in brotherly affection, love. Therefore I will not be negligent to remind you of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth. I think it right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you; knowing that the putting off of my tent comes swiftly. (From *Epistle II*)

4. THE REPENTANT SINNER

[Now the Twelve stop, to face Jesus at the back. For a moment, they recreate a tableau reprising the Last Supper. Drums are heard again. On the same path used for the walking on the waters, Mary Magdalene moves towards Jesus, while kneeling down, holding the larger bowl previously used for the baptism. She keeps repeating the words “Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Lord forgive me”. Reprising the gospel account, the image of Mary Magdalene anointing Jesus and washing his feet with her tears is recreated. The Singers now perform the full version of *Kyrie (Misa Criolla)*. All exeunt except Peter. He walks towards Jesus and kneels down for his blessing, in front of Mary Magdalene. One of her Shadows appears, whispering in a haunting and menacing way “Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison”, leading to a movement solo.]

5. JERUSALEM and BETRAYAL

[The guitar solo is increasingly rhythmical. Jesus, Magdalene and the Twelve re-enter the space. The Singers perform Gloria(Misa Criolla). All dancers and Jesus start a faster gestural sequence, again inspired by liturgical movements.

Music stops abruptly. One Singer slowly approaches Jesus and, taking on the persona of Judas, kisses him. The Singers look at Peter, while humming a sustained and increasingly harsh pitch. Peter, three times, utters “I know him not!”. All exeunt, except Peter]

6. PETER’S DENIAL

I do confess, dearly-beloved brethren, that I was with him: yet I denied him, even our Lord, and that not once only, but thrice; for there were evil dogs that were come about me as they did unto the Lord's prophets. And the Lord imputed it not unto me, but turned unto me and had compassion on the infirmity of my flesh, when (or so that) afterward I bitterly bewailed myself, and lamented the weakness of my faith, because I was befooled by the devil and kept not in mind the word of my Lord. O the divers arts and temptations of the devil! O the contrivances and devices of the wicked! he that nourisheth up for himself a mighty fire in the day of wrath, the destruction of simple men, the ravening wolf, the devourer and scatterer of eternal life! Thou didst enmesh the first man in concupiscence and bind him with thine old iniquity and with the chain of the flesh: thou art wholly the exceeding bitter fruit of the tree of bitterness, who sendest divers lusts upon men. Thou didst compel

Judas my fellow-disciple and fellow-apostle to do wickedly and deliver up our Lord, who shall punish thee therefore! (From the *Acts of Peter*) [Exit.]

7. DEATH OF JESUS

[Drums and lamenting from a distance. Jesus runs on stage, across the full shape of the cross. His manner is frantic. Exhausted, he whispers “Eloe Lema Sabakdani”. Exit. Now, the Singers enter in slow procession, carrying Jesus’ body. They perform DRONES + SOLO IMPROVISATION. Mary Magdalene follows, lamenting and crying. In the background, going the opposite direction, three Shadows walk with torches, symbolising the women’s journey to Christ’s tomb.]

8. APOSTLE TO THE APOSTLES

[Mary tells Peter she’s seen an apparition of Christ resurrected.]

Peter: Mary

MM: Peter! I’ve seen Him.

Peter: Seen whom?

MM: The Master

Peter: You’ve seen him?

MM: Yes. He is risen. I saw him, I saw him, this morning – we went to the tomb. And near the tomb was a man and a young boy, And the man said to me: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus is not here” so we went to the tomb and the stone was up-turned. The grave... the tomb was open. We looked for Him, He was not there.

Peter: You mean the Master’s body wasn’t there. Has He been stolen?

MM: no no no, let me finish. When we were leaving the cemetery, I saw another man, He saw how destroyed we were. He said “Woman, why do you weep?” and then He said my name, Mary ... Mary. And it was then that I saw it was Jesus. I fell to my knees and I reached for Him.

“Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father” he said. “But go to my brothers and tell them”.

[Peter is hesitant]

MM. You don’t believe me. You don’t believe me! I tell you I saw Him: it was our Lord!

Peter: Mary.... Mary, you’re tired. Please, please go

MM. I saw him, Peter. I saw him.

Peter: women’s fantasies..

MM. Fantasies? Was His death a fantasy?! I saw Him die! I was there and I wept at His feet. Why should He not have appeared to me?! He has risen. He told me to tell you. And I have done so.

(This is the only dialogue in the play taken from contemporary sources. From Zeffirelli’s *Jesus of Nazareth*).

[Exit Peter.]

MARY MAGDALENE

I am shame and boldness.

I am shameless; I am ashamed.

I am strength and I am fear.

I am war and peace.

Give heed to me.

I am the one who is disgraced and the great one.

Give heed to my poverty and my wealth.

Do not be arrogant to me when I am cast out upon the earth,
and you will find me in those that are to come.
And do not look upon me on the dung-heap
nor go and leave me cast out,
and you will find me in the kingdoms.
And do not look upon me when I am cast out among those who
are disgraced and in the least places,
nor laugh at me.
And do not cast me out among those who are slain in violence.
But I, I am compassionate and I am cruel.
Be on your guard!
(From *Thunder, Perfect Mind*)

[Drums. Exit]

[GUITAR SOLO. Shadows traverse space.]

9. THE GOLDEN LEGEND

[Jacobus enters, reprising the mannerisms of a court jester]

JACOBUS

When the disciples were departed, Mary Magdalene, and many other christian men were taken of the
miscreants and put in a ship in the sea, without any tackle or rudder, for to be drowned. But by the
purveyance of Almighty God they came all to Marseilles
(From *The Golden Legend*)

[For the next section, the action happening in this area, including Mary Magdalene, will be highly
stylised.]

MARY MAGDALENE

He that from my person seven devils made to flee,
By virtue of him all things were wrought;
To seek thy people I will ready be.
As thou hast commanded, in virtue they shall be brought.
Wyth thy grace, good Lord in Deity,
Now to the sea I will me high
Now spede me, Lord in eternall glory!
Now be my speed, allmighty Trenite!
(From *The Digby Play of the Mary Magdalene*)

[Two members of the Chorus now take on the roles of Shipman 1 and 2]

SHIPMAN. 1

Strike! Strike! Let fall an anchor to ground!
Here is a fair haven to see!
Cunningly in, look that ye sound!
I hope good harbour have shal we!

MARY MAGDALENE

Master of the ship, a word with thee!

SHIPMAN 2

Already, fair woman! What wil thee?

MARY MAGDALENE

Of whence is this ship? Tell thee me,
And if thee sail within a while.

SHIPMAN 1

We will sail this same day,
if the wind be to our pay.
this ship that I off see,
Is of the land of Marseilles.

MARY MAGDALENE

Sir, may I not with you sail?

SHIPMAN 2

Of shipping ye shall not fail,
For us the wind is good and safe.

[A boat is symbolically re-created. The actors mime being in the middle of a tempest. In the meantime, the Singers, from behind Jacobus, perform *I was standing by*, which is the soundscore to the rest of the scene. As Jacobus continues the *Golden Legend* story, more performers (except Jesus) take part in miming this.]

JACOBUS

Then Mary Magdalene set the sign of the cross on their shoulders, to the end that the fiend might not empesh ne let them in their journey. Then charged they a ship abundantly of all that was necessary to them, and left all their things in the keeping of Mary Magdalene, and went forth on their pilgrimage. [Mime and music end.]

And soon after they came to the port of Marseilles, the blessed Mary Magdalene, desirous of sovereign contemplation, sought a right sharp desert, and took a place which was ordained by the angel of God, and abode there by the space of thirty years without knowledge of anybody. In which place she had no comfort of running water, ne solace of trees, ne of herbs. (From the *Golden Legend*)

MARY MAGDALENE

In this desert abiding will we, abide
My soul from sin for to save;
I will ever abide me with humility,
And put me in patience, my Lord for to love.
In charity my works I will grave,
And in abstinence, all days of my life.
Thus my conscience of me doth crave;
Than why should I with my conscience strive?
And furthermore, I will live in charity,
In goodness to be liberal, my soul to edify.
Of worldly foods I will leave all refection;
Be the food that cometh from heaven on high,
That God will me send, be contemplative.
(From *The Digby Play of the Mary Magdalene*)

JACOBUS

And every day at every hour canonical she was lifted up in the air of angels [audible sounded breath vocalised by the Singers], and heard the glorious song of the heavenly companies with her bodily ears. Of which she was fed and filled with right sweet meats, and then was brought again by the angels unto her proper place, in such wise as she had no need of corporal nourishing.

10. CONTEMPLATION AND APPARITION OF JESUS

[Mary Magdalene is alone, kneeling down. The Singers, offstage, perform *Anybody Here?* Jesus appears and performs a movement solo around Mary Magdalene. They kiss. He then pours red sand across the performance space, in front of Mary Magdalene.]

[This is the moment she decides to write her own gospel.]

11. THE GOSPEL OF MARY MAGDALENE

[Mary Magdalene begins to write in the sand]

MARY MAGDALENE

"Will matter then be destroyed or not?" The Savior said, "All nature, all formations, all creatures exist in and with one another, and they will be resolved again into their own roots. For the nature of matter is resolved into the roots of its own nature alone. He who has ears to hear, let him hear". Peter said to him, "Since you have explained everything to us, tell us this also: What is the sin of the world?" The Savior said "There is no sin, but it is you who make sin when you do the things that are like the nature of adultery, which is called sin". That is why the Good came into your midst, to the essence of every nature in order to restore it to its root." Then He continued and said, "That is why you become sick and die, for you are deprived of the one who can heal you. He who has a mind to understand, let him understand. Matter gave birth to a passion that has no equal, which proceeded from something contrary to nature. Then there arises a disturbance in its whole body. That is why I said to you, Be of good courage, and if you are discouraged be encouraged in the presence of the different forms of nature. He who has ears to hear, let him hear". When the Blessed One had said this, He greeted them all, saying, "Peace be with you. Receive my peace unto yourselves. Beware that no one lead you astray saying "Lo here or lo there!" For the Son of Man is within you. Follow after Him! Those who seek Him will find Him. Go then and preach the gospel of the Kingdom. Do not lay down any rules beyond what I appointed you, and do not give a law like the lawgiver lest you be constrained by it". When He said this He departed. But they were grieved. They wept greatly, saying, "How shall we go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare Him, how will they spare us?" Then Mary stood up, greeted them all, and said to her brethren, "Do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for His grace will be entirely with you and will protect you. But rather, let us praise His greatness, for He has prepared us and made us into Men". When Mary said this, she turned their hearts to the Good, and they began to discuss the words of the Saviour. Peter said to Mary, "Sister we know that the Saviour loved you more than the rest of woman. Tell us the words of the Saviour which you remember which you know, but we do not, nor have we heard them". Mary answered and said, "What is hidden from you I will proclaim to you". And she began to speak to them these words: "I", she said, "saw the Lord in a vision ... and He said to me, "Blessed are you that you did not waver at the sight of Me. For where the mind is there is the treasure". I said to Him, "Lord, how does he who sees the vision see it, through the soul or through the spirit?" The Saviour answered and said, "He does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind that is between the two that is what sees the vision and it is..."

[As she writes in the sand, the Singers enter the space. They perform a vocal/movement sequence re-enacting the middle section of the gospel of Mary Magdalene, the most enigmatic and abstract, depicting the ascent of the soul through seven levels.]

MARY MAGDALENE

When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Saviour had spoken with her. Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things...: "Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us?" Then Mary wept and said to Peter, "My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Saviour? Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Saviour made (me) worthy, who are you indeed to reject (me)? ... (This is) The Gospel According to Mary. (All quotations in this scene are from the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*)

12. DESTRUCTION OF THE GOSPEL OF MARY

PETER

(Brethren, as you see there also arise) false prophets among the people, as among you also there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned. In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber. These are wells without water, clouds driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved forever. For, uttering great swelling words of emptiness, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by licentiousness, those who are indeed escaping from those who live in error; promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption; for by whom a man is overcome, by the same is he also brought into bondage. (From *Epistle II*)

[The gospel of Mary is destroyed by Magdalene's Shadows. With the sand, they create the shape of a large cross, symbolically depicting the dominance of the Church.]

MARY MAGDALENE

I am the one whom you have scattered,
and you have gathered me together.
I am the one before whom you have been ashamed,
and you have been shameless to me.
I am godless,
and I am the one whose God is great.
I am the one whom you have reflected upon,
and you have scorned me.
I am unlearned,
and they learn from me.
I am the one that you have despised,
and you reflect upon me.
I am the one whom you have hidden from,
and you appear to me.
But whenever you hide yourselves,
I myself will appear.
For whenever you appear,
I myself will hide from you.
(From *Thunder, Perfect Mind*)

[Exit Mary Magdalene]

13. EPILOGUE

[Enter Church Father and Jacobus.]

JACOBUS

Then she durst not, because she was a sinner, appear tofore the just and good people, but remained behind at the feet of our Lord, and washed his feet with the tears of her eyes and dried them with the hair of her head, and anointed them with precious ointments. For the inhabitants of that region used baths and ointments for the overgreat burning and heat of the sun. And because that Simon the Pharisee thought in himself that, if our Lord had been a very prophet, he would not have suffered a sinful woman to have touched him, then our Lord reproved him of his presumption, and forgave the

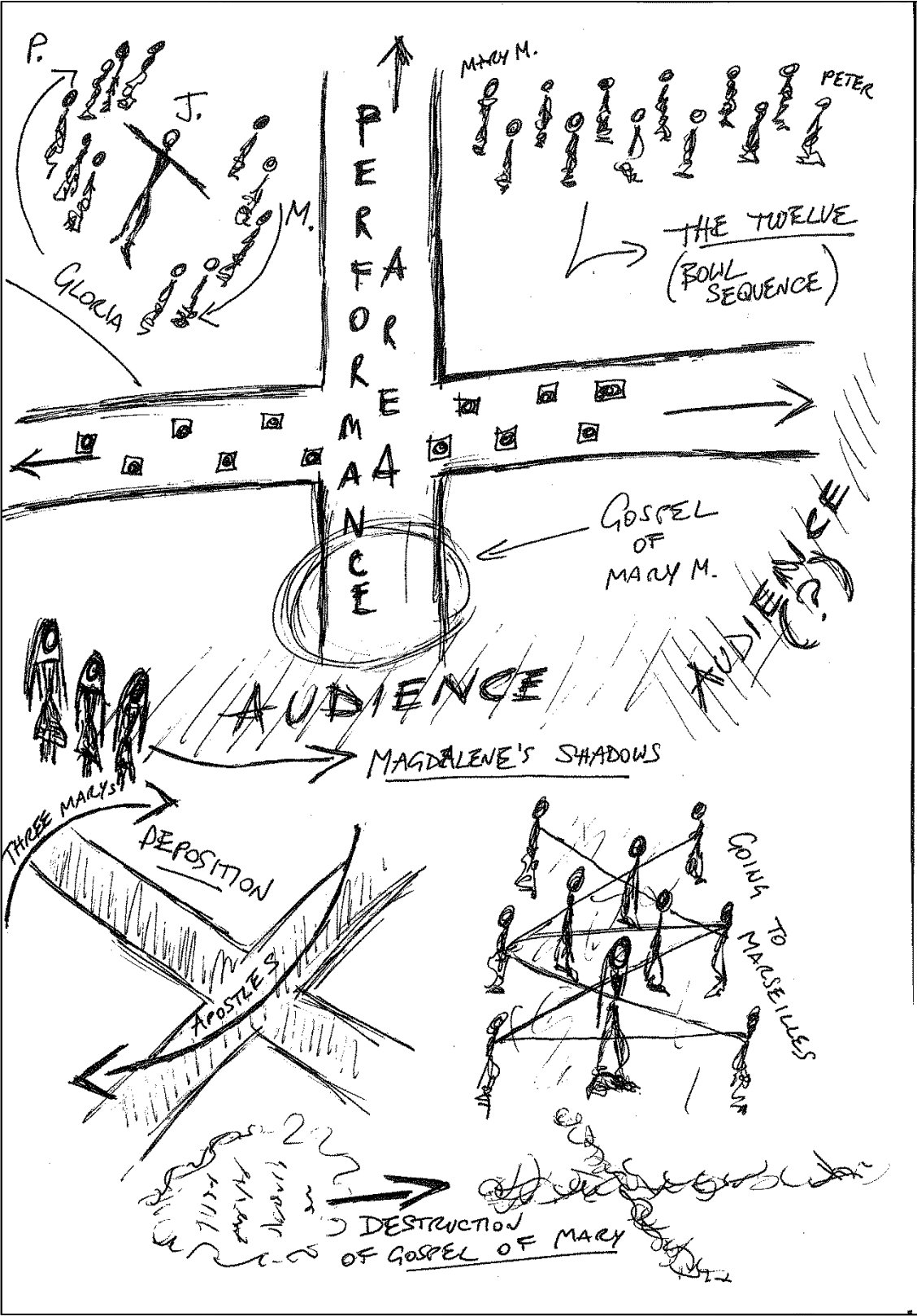
woman all her sins. And this is she, that same Mary Magdalene to whom our Lord gave so many great gifts. And showed so great signs of love, that he took from her seven devils.
(From *The Golden Legend*)

CHURCH FATHER

She had spoken proud things with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord's feet, she now planted her mouth on the Redeemer's feet. For every delight, therefore, she had had in herself, she now immolated herself. She turned the mass of her crimes to virtues, in order to serve God entirely in penance, for as much as she had wrongly held God in contempt. (From *Homily 33*)

[Magdalene's Shadows reprise the Antiphon choreography. Singers perform "Agnus Dei" from the *Misa Criolla*. Fade out.]
[The End]

The Magdalene Mysteries – Samples of visual annotations



Appendix 4C

The Magdalene Mysteries **DVD**

Content:

- Live recording at the Southwark Playhouse
- Trailer
- Photo gallery

Further documentation on this project can also be accessed on
<http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/the-magdalene-mysteries/>.

Appendix 5

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus



Appendix 5a

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus **Project Profile**

Calendar

Initial exploration and research: Dec 2008

Collaborative devising of vocal score: Jan-June 2009

Devising of choreographic material: March-July 2009

Performance at Arcola Theatre (Create 09): July 2009

Performance as part of *Borderline Opera* event at London Met: Sep 2009

Publication of article about the project on *Ecumenica Theatre Journal*: Autumn 2009

Production Overview

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus represented an exploration of the concept of ecstasy, here seen as a merging between eroticism and sacredness. The ambiguous way in which the hagiography of these two saints of the third century Roman Empire depicts their love for one another has inspired a range of accounts, suggesting an early notion of same-sex union between the two. It is this ambiguity that became the focus of our performance exploration.

As the start of our process coincided with the fascinating *Byzantium* exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, which also included a depiction of Sergius and Bacchus, choreographer Lola Maury and I took the opportunity to view this in search for inspiration. We agreed that the distinctive intricacy, stylised composition and often minute size of Byzantine artworks would become our main reference points in the choreographic conception of the piece. Moreover, I decided to recreate on stage the compartmented configuration of Byzantine iconography, by tracing the outline of an imaginary painting, in which each section would be used to depict a specific scene from the passion.

The vocal score that accompanied the piece, which I created in collaboration with vocalists Heather Knight and Holly Rose, was inspired by ancient liturgical hymns of the Byzantine rite. The libretto of the score consisted of citations from the Greek version of the passion, symbolically vocalising the internal thoughts of the characters, and accompanying their story, narrated through movement by two dancers.

Having agreed on the aesthetic framework of the production, our focus increasingly engaged with the homo-erotic connotations of this passion. An example of this was juxtaposing the physical torture and humiliation exerted by the Roman Empire by forcing the two saints to parade in cross-gender clothing, with the image of sacred union, in which their reciprocal eros was depicted. In theatrical terms, this juxtaposition was created by alternating lighting states across the piece, which also reinforced the episodic and non-linear structure of this production.

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus was premiered at the Arcola Theatre in July 2009 for *Create 09* and then re-staged for the *Borderline Opera* event at London

Metropolitan University in September that same year, as a double bill with *Medousa*. Here the process of elastic staging was less concerned with responding to the space utilised, and, rather, focussed on the effect of juxtaposing the byzantine inspired floor pattern used for the piece with whatever surroundings the performance space offered (in this case, the contrast between the roughness of a factory space hired by the Arcola Theatre for *Create 09*, with the starkness of a white theatre studio space at London Met).

An article of mine reflecting on this piece was published in the US peer reviewed *Ecumenica Theatre Journal* in the Autumn of 2009, as part of their issue *Sex and Sacredness*.

Plot Summary

The piece opens by presenting the two protagonists as soldiers in the Roman army, secretly engaging in Christian worship. Imprisoned by the Empire, we see them subsequently exiled, made to dress up in women's clothing and tortured. Bacchus, who dies first, appears in a vision to Sergius, becoming the source of his ecstasy. Set within the outline of an imaginary painting, the action is accompanied by a vocal score, referencing extracts of dialogue from the ancient Greek account of this hagiography.

Cast and Production Team

<i>Sergius</i>	Igor Urzelai (dancer)
<i>Bacchus</i>	Moreno Solinas (dancer)
Vocalists	Heather Knight, Holly Rose, Jacek Ludwig Scarso
Dramaturgical Consultant	Rishi Trikha
Technical Manager	Drew Turner
Music	Collaboratively devised, coordinated by Jacek Ludwig Scarso
Choreographer	Lola Maury
Concept, Libretto and Direction	Jacek Ludwig Scarso

Supported by London Metropolitan University and the Arcola Theatre (CREATE 09)

Elastic features at a glance

Disciplines

The collaborative nature of the work between dancers, singers and creative team. The use of structured improvisation to inform both the choreography and the vocal score.

Related questions:

- What strategies can be employed in making sure that the music score for this piece is more than just an atmospheric and decorative element? In this sense, can the use of fragments of dialogue, albeit in ancient Greek, in the vocal score allow this to

convey an internal thought process of the characters onstage?

- How can the fusion of set choreography and improvised movement be used to both stylise the narration of the story and still convey the emotional depth that is inherent to this?
- How can the merging of song and dance be used to convey both the rituality of religious depiction, as well as the deconstruction of this in light of the issues explored by the piece?

Dramaturgy

The creation of a non-linear storyline using fragments of the hagiography of Saints Sergius and Bacchus. The combination of this with references to historical depictions of saints in of different artistic styles, including Byzantine, Renaissance and Baroque.

Related questions:

- In dealing with a little known narrative such as the legend of Sergius and Bacchus, what type of representation can both be conducive to the audience's open interpretation and still emphasise a connection with the original accounts of this story?
- Can the conventions of historical art styles (in this case, the use of floor patterns to symbolise the outline of a byzantine painting and the general references to pictorial depictions of saints) be used to structure and provide a logic in the presentation of the narrative explored?
- How can the relationship between the two characters be represented as a complex and emotionally dynamic one, despite the arguably one-dimensional account of this, as presented by the original hagiography?

Staging

The use of a key visual structure (the outline of the byzantine painting), that can be transferred to a variety of venues, whether theatrical or non.

Related questions:

- To what extent can the floor structure be utilised to provide a fictional and aesthetic definition of space, whatever the venue of presentation?
- What is the symbolic potential of presenting the internal thought process of the protagonists as coming from off-stage, with the vocalists visible to the audience but outside of the floor outline?

Appendix 5b

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus **Devising Structure** November 2008 – January 2009

[SOURCES: The hagiography of Saints Sergius and Bacchus (Boswell, 1996)]

STRUCTURE BREAKDOWN

1. Overture: “Contemplative portraits” (Looking up) / first interactions between Sergius and Bacchus.
2. Soldier sequences: the characters establish their military life-style.
3. Ritual: Sergius and Bacchus secretly pray together; they are found out by Roman guards.
4. Torture and Mockery: Sergius and Bacchus are tortured and made to parade in female clothing, as a form of humiliation. This leads to the sequence of cups, which needs to be both sensual and religiously symbolic.
5. Laughter release, preceding Bacchus’s death.
6. Sergius is alone in his cell, lamenting the death of his friend and confronting God in an angry prayer.
7. Bacchus appears in a vision.
8. In a metaphorical union, the two reach their saintly ecstasy. This precedes Sergius’ death.

CHARACTER-WORK

Notes for dancers:

The following is a breakdown of the piece, as seen in terms of characterisation: this is worded through the concepts of INNOCENCE and EXPERIENCE.

INNOCENCE: child-like emotions, awe, curiosity, creating a world of one’s own through imagination, blissful ignorance, unconditional spiritual faith and ecstasy. You look at things as if discovered for the very first time.

EXPERIENCE: adult emotions, *conscious* experience of feelings such as pain or anger or lust, active awareness of the social environment, spiritual doubt. Experience is not necessarily better than innocence, as it often makes us doubtful, cynical, suspicious.

Let’s imagine Sergius and Bacchus as shifting between these two states, across the different scenes – on the one hand the inexperience in their dialogue with God and their love for each other, which they cannot explain; on the other, their experience of pain through torture, Sergius’ anger at God on Bacchus’ death, the sexual tension between them, of which they are increasingly conscious..

- LOOKING UP – *INNOCENCE*, your mind is in a world of its own as you communicate with God.

- SOLDIER SEQUENCES – *EXPERIENCE*. Both in Sergius' first run and in Bacchus' fighting sequence, you are training as roman soldiers, aware of your social environment and its gender expectations.
- RITUAL – *MIXED*. Innocence as you pray, in your unconditional faith; experience as you become more aware of the sexual tension between you.
- TORTURE, DRESSES and CUPS – *EXPERIENCE*. You are consciously experiencing pain, aware of the reasons why the Romans are condemning you as Christians and possibly as gay. However, in the torture sequence, SMILE – *INNOCENCE*, as you return to your unconditional faith and hope.
- LAUGH – *INNOCENCE*, it's a moment of blissful release, you're unaware of what's about to happen
- SERGIUS' SOLO – *EXPERIENCE*, as you consciously realise your love for Bacchus, you're angry at God for letting him die. Keep your focus upwards (to God) for this.
- CHEEK to CHEEK and KISS – *MIXED*. You both consciously experience the sexual implications of your union (*EXPERIENCE*), as well as the inexplicable spiritual ecstasy of it (*INNOCENCE*).
- END – *INNOCENCE*, as Sergius meets his death, you both fully embrace the ecstasy of your union. The cup in this case is a symbol of life through death, referring to the idea, in the legend, that Bacchus urges Sergius to make his way to heaven and obtain their spiritual union.

TEXT EXTRACTS FOR VOCAL SCORE

Notes for Singers:

Please note that these will be used as a stimulus for vocal improvisations, which will be eventually structured into a full score. These extracts are taken from the hagiography of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, dated 373-395. The text in Ancient Greek is transcribed phonetically, with the translation below (transl. John Boswell). For the purpose of the score, it is important that the phonetic sounds are emphasised as much as the meaning of the actual words. The vocal score should represent the internal thoughts of the two protagonists.

EAN GAR KAI POREUTHOMEN EN MESO SKIAS THANATOO
OO PHOBETHESOMETHA KAKA`
OTI METH'EMON EI KYRIE

"Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, Lord"

OPOS ARNESAMENOI PASAN ASEBEIAN KAI TAS EPITUMIAS
KAI APEKDUSAMENOI TOU PALAIOO ANTHROPOO TO SKEMA,
GYMNOI TEI PISTEI AGALLIASOMETHA EPI SOI, KIRIE,
OTI ENEDUSAS EMAS IMATION SOTERIOO
KAI KITONA EUPHROSYNES PERIEBALES EMAS
OS NYMPHAS KATEKOSMESAS EMAS GYNAIKEIAIS STOLAIS,
ARMOSAMENOS EMAS EAUTOI' DIA TES EIS SE OMOLOGIAS.

"Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and putting off the form of the old man, naked in faith we rejoice in you, Lord, because you have clothed us with the garment of salvation, and covered us with the robe of righteousness; as brides you have decked us with women's gowns and joined us together for you through our confession."

OS EX ENOS STOMATOS

“as with one mouth”

EN TE ODO' TON MARTURION SOO ETERFTEMEN KYRIE, OS EPI PANTI' PLUTO

“we have rejoiced in the way of martyrdom, as much as in all riches”

PROS KYRION EN TO THLIBESTHAI ME EKEKRAXA KAI EISEKOOSSEN MOO EX OROOS AGIOO AUTOO'. EGO' EKOIMETHEN KAI YPNOSA OTI KYRIOS ANTILEPSETAI MOO, OO PHOBETHESOMETHA APO' MYRIADON LAOO' TON KYKLO' SUNEPITITHEMENON EMIN.

“In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me from his holy mountain. I laid me down and slept; for the Lord sustained me. We will not be afraid of thousands of people, that have set themselves against us round about”

Sergius

OIMOI ADELFE' KAI SYSTRATIOTA MOO BAKKE, OOKETI PSALLOMEN LEGONTES: IDOO' DE TI KALON E TI TERPNON, ALLE' TO KATOIKEIN ADELFOOS EPI TO AUTO'. APEXEUKTES GAR MOO ANABAS EIS TOO OURANOUS, KATALEIPON ME EPI TES GES MONON MEMONOMENON APARAMYTHETON.

“No longer, brother and fellow soldier, will we chant together ‘behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity’. You have been unyoked from me and gone up to heaven, leaving me alone on earth, bereft, without comfort”.

Bacchus

TI LYPESAI KAI ADAIMONEIS, ADELPHÉ'? EI GAR KAI TO SOMATI APELEIFTHEN SOO, ALLA' TO TES OMOLOGIAS SYNDESMO, SUN SOI EIMI' PSALLON KAI LEGON, ODON ENTOLON SOO EDRAMON, OTA EPLATUNAS TEN KARDIAN MOO. SPEUSON OON KAI AUTOS, ADELFE', DIA TES KALES KAI TELEIAS OMOLOGIAS KATADIOXAI KAI KATALABEIN ME, TON DROMON TELESAS.

“Why do you grieve and mourn, brother? If I have been taken from you in body, I am still with you in the bond of union, chanting and reciting, ‘I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou hast enlarged my heart’. Hurry then, yourself, brother, through beautiful and perfect confession to pursue and obtain me, when finishing the course.”

Sergius

PROKEITAI OON SOI TO SOMA, KOLADSE KAI TIMOREI OS EAN TELES, TOOUTO EIDOS OTI KAI TO SOMA APOKTEINEIS, TES DE PSYCHES MOO OO KYRIEUSAI DUNESE

The body is subject to you: torture and punish it if you wish. But bear in mind that if you kill my body, you cannot kill my soul.

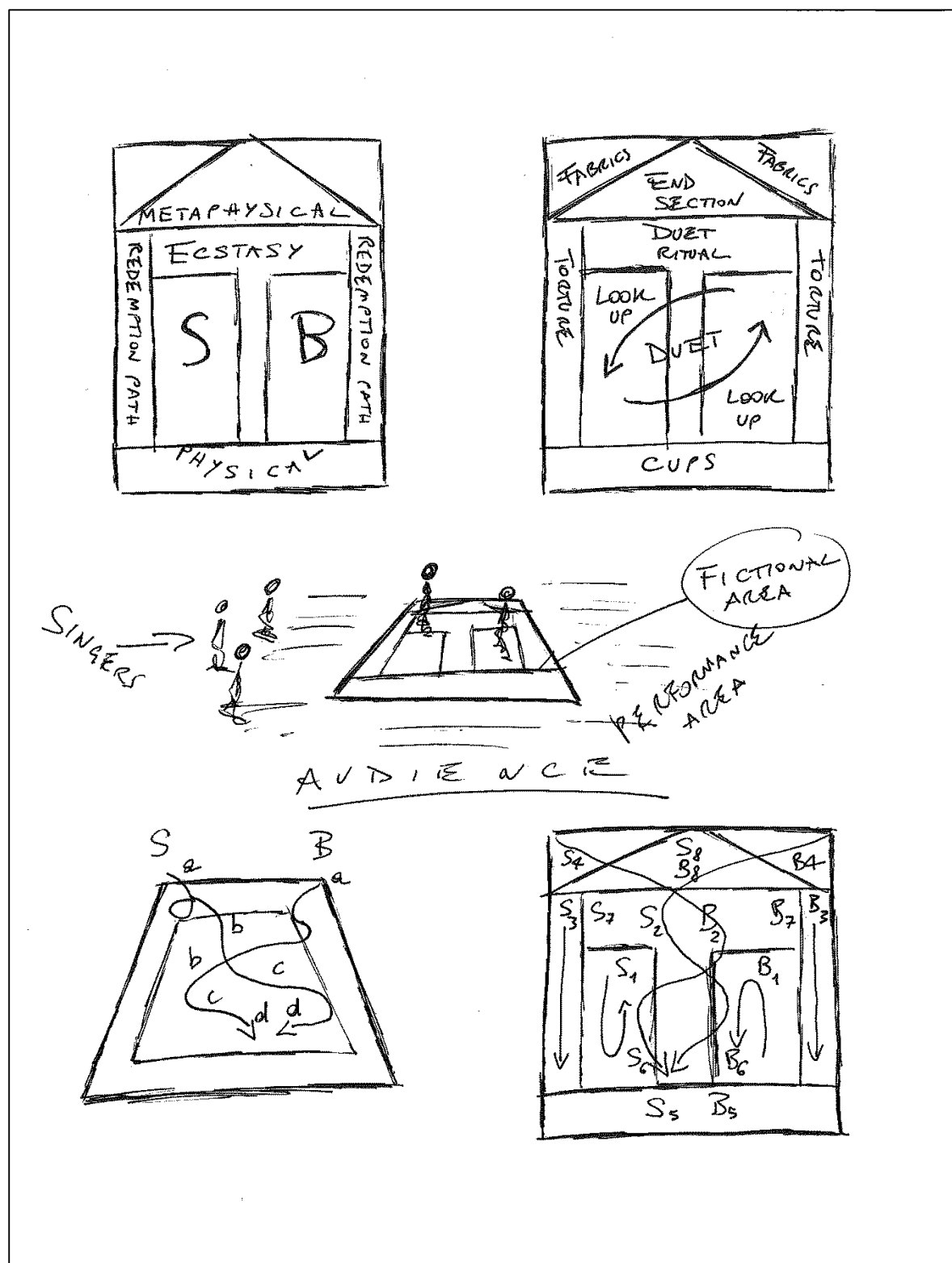
OOK EISIN MOI PEEKRAI AUTAI AI BASANOI, ALLA' GLYKEIAI YPER MELI KAI KERION.

“These tortures are not bitter to me, but sweeter than honey”

PROSDEXAI DE, KYRIE, TEN EMEN PSYCHEN

To you Lord do I commend my soul

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus – Samples of visual annotations



Appendix 5C

The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus DVD

Please note that this is a combined DVD with *Medousa* (Appendix 6)

Content:

- Live recording at London Metropolitan University, as part of *Borderline Opera*
- Photo Gallery

Further documentation on this project can also be accessed on

<http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/the-passion-of-saints-sergius-and-bacchus/>.

Appendix 6

Medousa



Appendix 6a

Medousa **Project Profile**

Calendar

First draft libretto as stimulus for the devising work: Dec 2008
Collaborative devising process in different instalments: Jan-Aug 2009
Sharing of the creative process at Arts Arena (American University of Paris): March 2009
Performances at Tête à Tête Opera Festival, Riverside Studios: Aug 2009
Performance as part of *Borderline Opera* event at London Met: Sep 2009
Performance at Pavé D'Orsay in Paris (Arts Arena/BAW): Sep 2009

Production Overview

The original score for *Medousa* was the product of a collaborative process. The aim was to produce a completely original score that would nonetheless reflect the collaborative ethos of the Company. Applying the creative methodologies of devised performance, the work developed from Maya Sapone's vocal improvisations on my libretto, integrated with instrumental explorations by the musicians, increasingly shaped by music dramaturg Andrew Morley. Both score and choreography included improvisational aspects and were thus significantly informed by the input of the cast and music ensemble. This performer-driven approach to opera making was launched in March 2009 as part of Arts Arena's conference on performance as research held at the American University of Paris. Here, I introduced this approach by presenting live excerpts of exploratory work in collaboration with the performers and inviting the audience's suggestions in experimenting with a new section of the libretto. This event was useful in both testing initial material and gauging the public's interest in our approach.

The project continued to be developed in separate instalments over a period of eight months. Choreographic sequences related to the character of Perseus, here represented through dance, were explored separately until four months into the process. Then, the interactions between Medusa and Perseus became increasingly central to the work, having established each character's individual traits and objectives in the narrative (e.g. Medousa's obsessive premonitions and Perseus' physical and metaphorical relationship with his shield). A key aspect in this interaction was the reference to Medusa's mythical petrifying gaze. This motivated a series of exploration tasks in which the performers would be sensing each other's presence, without relying on sight.

In many ways, *Medousa* continued to explore some of the issues inherent to the *Miscast Women Trilogy*: it re-imagined the narrative of an iconic female character from her point of view, specifically by exploring her blurring between victim and villain in the story. On the other hand, the piece also explored a new theme in my work, shared by *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*. The theme was the concept of ecstasy, in its broadest understanding, as a liminal moment between heightened physical and metaphysical experience. Here, ecstasy is depicted in the moment when Medusa transforms into the legendary monstrous creature. What should be a punishment by Athena for offering herself to Poseidon becomes a source of divine power. It is this ambiguity that subtly suggests Medusa's position as subject, rather than object, in the story.

The piece premiered in a proscenium staging as part of Tête à Tête – The Opera Festival at the Riverside Studios in London (August 2009), a festival that is aimed at promoting innovation in the field of new opera and music theatre. It was then presented in the *Borderline Opera* event organised by the company in September and was then re-adapted in a unique site-specific staging at the Pavé D'Orsay in Paris, in collaboration with the Arts Arena and the Bilingual Acting Workshop.

Plot Summary

Having offered herself to Poseidon, god of the sea, in the hope of gaining divine powers through their encounter, Medusa senses that she has provoked Athena's rage. By the end of that same night she will be turned into a monstrous creature by the jealous goddess. As she awaits Athena's revenge, full of foreboding for her own body's terrifying transformation, Medusa foresees Perseus in a dream. Using the reflection on his shield to detect where she is, he is on his way to kill her and exploit her petrifying gaze as a weapon of his own. Yet the waiting is strangely exciting. As her punishment approaches, the prospect of the evil powers she is about to receive entices her increasingly.

Cast and Production Team

<i>Medusa</i>	Maya Sapon (soprano)
<i>Perseus</i>	Fernando Balsera Pita (dancer)
Cello	Carina Drury
Flute	Eva Caballero
Musical Supervisor	Andrew Morley
Dramaturgical Consultant	Rishi Trikha
Production Manager	Drew Turner
Concept, Libretto and Direction	Jacek Ludwig Scarso

Supported by London Metropolitan University, Arts Arena and Bilingual Acting Workshop (Paris)

Elastic features at a glance

Disciplines

The collaborative nature of the work between creative team, musicians and stage performers. The combination of vocal music (Medusa) with dance (Perseus).

Related questions:

- Is it possible to create a cohesive score from the input of different performers and musicians and without the presence of an "official" composer?
- How can the collaborative methodologies of devised performance be applied to music composition?
- What is the operatic potential of the myth of Medusa? Furthermore, what is the effect

of contrasting an operatic character (the protagonist), to a danced one (Perseus)?

Dramaturgy

The devising of the storyline from different versions of this myth and with an implicit reference to *The Laugh of Medusa* by Cixous. The creation of a libretto to inspire the devising process, therefore open to a collaborative input by the rest of the team.

Related questions:

- What is the effect of creating a libretto as a starting point for a collaborative work involving the whole company, rather than just a composer or selected members of a creative team? To what extent can the libretto represent a negotiable document, rather than a fixed text?
- Can the myth of Medusa be revisited to highlight the active presence of this character, proudly embodying her connotation of 'otherness' and 'abjection'?
- To what extent can the transformation of Medusa into a monstrous creature be compared to a state of both 'hubris' and ecstasy? What is the effect of presenting Medusa as an ambiguous persona, deliberately blurring her notion of victim with the one of villain? In this respect, who is the victor in the myth: Medusa or Perseus?

Staging

The creation of two contrasting stagings: an end-on one for the Riverside Studios and London Metropolitan University and a site-responsive one for the Pavé D'Orsay in Paris. Both stagings featured the use of a structure of poly tubing, to represent Medusa's cave and her serpent-hair. At the Pavé D'Orsay, stacked chairs were used to cover the floor and delimit the action, while the audience was located at one side of the space, looking away from the altar area. Sections of the work involved an itinerant relation with the audience.

Related questions:

- Is it possible to condense different symbols of the Medusa myth into one key visual idea, such as the structure of poly tubing? Can this be utilised as a way to provide cohesion across very contrasting stagings?
- How can a venue such as the Pavé D'Orsay, a practising place of worship, be utilised in such a way as to temporarily disrupt its religious functionality and promote a different aesthetic outlook?
- What are the atmospheric, visual and acoustic implications of the use of contrasting venues for this piece?

Appendix 6b

Medousa - A miniature opera

Devising Libretto

December 2008 – January 2009

Notes for the performers:

Please note that this text should not be approached as a traditional “libretto”; rather, it is intended as guiding the devising process in the studio: in this sense, the stylised presentation of the lyrics is designed to stimulate a liberal delivery of these and a creative approach to the score. Improvisation tasks will help create this production and may result in radical changes to this text.

Characters
 MEDUSA Soprano
 PERSEUS Dancer

STAGING NOTES

<p>Characterisation MEDUSA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalised focus (“<i>blind motif</i>”) – obsessive premonitions – “madness”? • “<i>drawing motif</i>” - using hands to make premonition images “palpable” • Constant shift between fear and excitement • OMNIPOTENT ambition • Danger 	<p>STAGING CONCEPT</p> <p>Plastic tubes: the structure they form represents Medousa’s cave. At the end of the piece, they are used to suggest snakes from her head.</p> <p>Floor-lights: as the piece progresses, more lights appear, to suggest the passing of time.</p> <p>The action takes place in three conceptual corridors, symbolising the physical distance between the characters (this also allows characters to be visible on the stage when out of scene, as they are implicitly in different spaces). The central corridor, entered by Perseus only at the end of the piece, is the one where the centre of the cave is located.</p> <p>At no point can Medusa and Perseus look at each other directly.</p>
<p>Characterisation PERSEUS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External focus – constant alertness, using sight, hearing and smell • “<i>Crab motif</i>” • Shield as “extra limb”. When used as mirror, there is an alluring force in the images it reflects. • As the piece progresses, Perseus gets closer and closer to Medousa’s cave. The tension should build accordingly. • Danger 	<p>SCENE BREAKDOWN</p> <p>Overture Prologue Poseidon Aria Perseus Dance 1: Shield Challenging Athena Perseus Dance 2: Senses Sleepless (Head Throat’) Dream Transformation (Hubris)</p>

OVERTURE

PROLOGUE

Gross Gross Gross

Slit throat axe
crimson crimson

Blood

Spurt up
Gush over
The earth under my feet

Feast gross Feast

Blood

Rush through my inflated veins
As you feast on my poison
Poison

Drop by drop
SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS
Drop by drop
SS SS SS SS SS SS SS SS
Sinuously

Slit throat axe
Slit throat axe
Slit throat axe
It's only a matter of moments

SCENE 1 – IN THE SEA

Oh Poseidon
God of the sea
Gently you bathe me
Covering my skin in salt water
Deeply I am immersed
Under your tide
Wave
After wave
AaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaaAaaaa

Divine
Divine
Make me divine
Fill me with strength
As you fill me with you

Divine
Divine
Sacred sublime
Flood me with god-like
Omnipotent powers

Moisten my flesh
Baptize my skin
Make me divine
Make me divine

Pores breathing sweat
Baptize my skin
Make me divine
Make me divine

I know she will hate me for this
Athena Athena
She's wanted you all to herself
I know her revenge is in the air ?
Perseus Perseus...
Three twelfths from sunset to sunrise

SCENE 2 – PERSEUS' SHIELD DANCE

SCENE 3 – CHALLENGING ATHENA

I enjoyed every moment of it. I knew I would be.
I'd do it all over again.
Athena, the rival of me, jealous of me, I knew you would be.
I'd do it all over again.
Poseidon was a fine lover, though I had better.
But I'd have him all over again.

His lips, his chest, his hips, his back, his hands, his fingertips
AAAAAAAAAAAAA
HAHA HA HA HA!
You'd think I'm a whore.

I await your revenge.

SCENE 4 – PERSEUS APPROACHING

SCENE 5 – SLEEPLESS

I cannot sleep
I will not sleep
My eyes won't close
Random thoughts
Obsessively crossing my mind
No order
No logic
Beyond me

HEAD THROAT WINGS STONE
HEAD STONE EYES SEE SEE
SAND SNAKES RATTILING FORKED
TONGUES FRIGHTFULLY TWISTING
HISSING AWAY HISSING AWAY

FLOWERING OUT OF MY BLOOD
AS THEY HISS AWAY
DROPS SPILL DROPS SPILL
RATTLING FORKED TONGUES
FRIGHTFULLY
HEAD THROAT WINGS STONE
HEAD STONE EYES SEE SEE
SAND SNAKES RATTLING FORKED
TONGUES FRIGHTFULLY TWISTING
HISSING AWAY HISSING AWAY
FLOWERING OUT OF MY BLOOD
AS THEY HISS AWAY
DROPS SPILL DROPS SPILL
RATTLING FORKED TONGUES
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TONGUES FRIGHTFULLY TWISTING
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FLOWERING OUT OF MY BLOOD
AS THEY HISS AWAY
DROPS SPILL DROPS SPILL
RATTLING FORKED TONGUES
FRIGHTFULLYHEAD THROAT WINGS STONE
HEAD STONE EYES SEE SEE
SAND SNAKES RATTLING FORKED
TONGUES FRIGHTFULLY TWISTING
HISSING AWAY HISSING AWAY
FLOWERING OUT OF MY BLOOD
AS THEY HISS AWAY
DROPS SPILL DROPS SPILL
RATTLING FORKED TONGUES
FRIGHTFULLYHEAD THROAT WINGS STONE
HEAD STONE EYES SEE SEE
SAND SNAKES RATTLING FORKED
TONGUES FRIGHTFULLY TWISTING
HISSING AWAY HISSING AWAY
FLOWERING OUT OF MY BLOOD
AS THEY HISS AWAY
DROPS SPILL DROPS SPILL
RATTLING FORKED TONGUES
FRIGHTFULLYHEAD THROAT WINGS STONE
HEAD STONE EYES SEE SEE
SAND SNAKES RATTLING FORKED
TONGUES FRIGHTFULLY TWISTING

HISSING AWAY HISSING AWAY
FLOWERING OUT OF MY BLOOD
AS THEY HISS AWAY
DROPS SPILL DROPS SPILL
RATTLING FORKED TONGUES
FRIGHTFULLY

SCENE 6 - DREAM

Eyelids lift up
Terribly tempting view
Away from your shield Away from your shield
Retina retina Retina retina
Lush colourful iris DON'T BLINK White dense around
Let your eyes give in DON'T BLINK Let your eyes give in
White dense around DON'T BLINK Lush colourful iris
Penetrating gaze Penetrating gaze
Stare stare into me Dare dare to look
Away from your shield Away from your shield
Terribly tempting view
Pupils dilate

SCENE 7 - HUBRIS

Nine twelfths from sunset to sunrise

Just a dream. In sleep everything looks different. And strangely familiar. A tangible dream... I felt my body changing.

SCALY SKIN
STARING EYES
HUGE WINGS
LOLLING TONGUE
SLITHERING SERPENTS
DIRE FORCES
PETRIFYING GAZE

MEDOUSA...
MEDOUSA...
Is this how I'll be remembered?
MEDOUSA...
MEDOUSA...
My body. The Other. The void where every fear is projected.
And every desire suppressed.

SCALY SKIN
STARING EYES
HUGE WINGS
LOLLING TONGUE
SLITHERING SERPENTS
DIRE FORCES

PETRIFYING GAZE

The moment has come
I'm strangely excited
I'm strangely scared
I'm strangely enticed

Athena, take my body
And do whatever you will
I'd rather be monstrous than powerless!
I'd rather be dead than mortal.
Perseus where are you... Perseus I need you... Perseus... come...
HA
HA
HA HA

Divine powers
Pervade me!
Pervade the cells
Of my fragile humanity.
Spurt through me:
Do away with the mortal in me!

Divine powers
Progress unto me!
Invade me,
Invade me gigantically.
Spurt through me:
I'm as base as you want me to be!

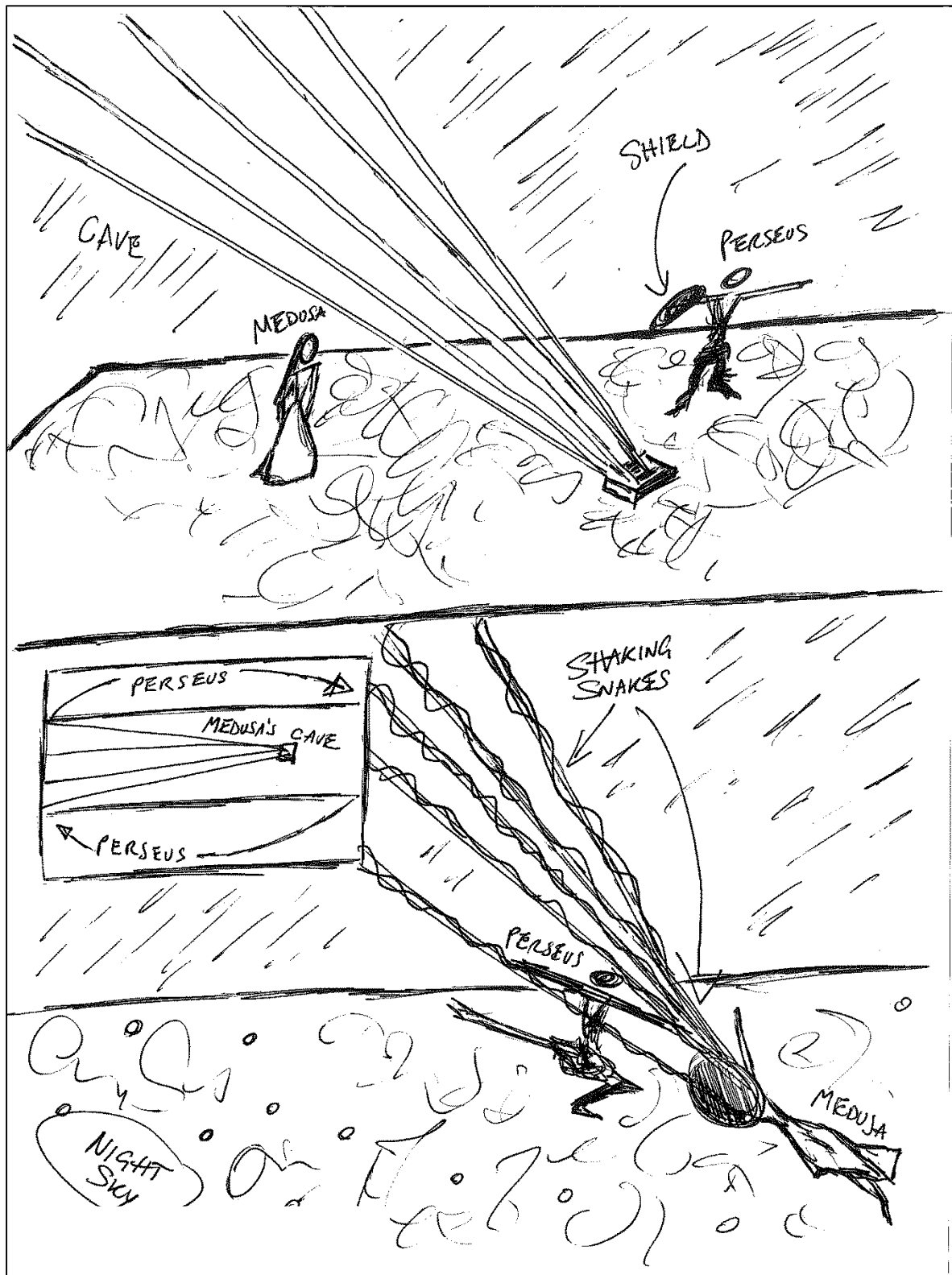
I am the Other god
Gross gross gross
The one that confuses you
That one that you cannot contain...

Step step step step step step where are you, Perseus!
Step step step step step step stop hiding, Perseus!
Step step step step step step, there you are, Perseus!

GO ON
I'M READY
I WILL TURN YOU ON
TILL YOU'RE HARD LIKE A STONE

GO ON! SLAY ME!
I'M FALLING ASLEEP!

Medousa – Samples of visual annotations



Appendix 6C

Medousa **DVD**

Please see Appendix 5c for the combined DVD with *The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus*. Below is the pamphlet accompanying this.

Content:

- Live recording at the Riverside Studios
- Photo Gallery

Further documentation on this project can also be accessed on
<http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/medousa-a-miniature-opera/>.

Appendix 7

Baroccata *Baroque Box*



Appendix 7a

Baroccata / Baroque Box **Project Profile**

Calendar

Initial exploration and research: Dec 2009 – March 2010

Devising of *Baroccata*: March – July 2010

Launch of the project as part of *Correspondence* symposium (LMU / Islington Exhibits): June 2010

Performances of *Baroccata* at the Riverside Studios (Tête à Tête Opera Festival): Aug 2010

Re-development of the project as *Baroque Box*: Oct 2010 – June 2011

Discussion and launch event at LMU: June 2011

Performances at Greenwich+Docklands International Festival: June 2011

Film documentation of the work: May – Aug 2011

Production Overview

There are two separate outcomes to this project, as the titles suggests. In many ways, *Baroque Box* could be seen as a development of *Baroccata*; in others, the two represent independent pieces, both inspired by the desire to revisit baroque ideas about the human body and merge these with scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century. It was thanks to the generous support of the Wellcome Trust that I was able to sustain the work on both pieces for an extensive period of time. As part of the grant scheme, Wellcome Trust facilitated my research in collaboration with Dr Erin Sullivan (Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham), whose consultancy was crucial in investigating key medical and anatomical discoveries of the time: in particular, the transition from a humoural understanding of the body, to one informed by the discovery of blood circulation. Other related concepts included the blurring, typical of this period, between the soul and the mind, and the anatomical beliefs, related to such blurring, pertaining the presence of spirits in the blood and of the pineal gland in the brain, as the “seat of the soul”. The writings of Robert Burton, René Descartes and William Harvey represented key sources in this investigation.

Our findings were then re-imagined theatrically and combined to an exploration of baroque aesthetics. Specifically, I was interested in the ambiguity of religious depictions in seventeenth century art, particularly within catholic traditions, suggesting an almost voyeuristic attitude towards anatomical and erotic connotations of the body. Artworks by Caravaggio and Bernini were of particular inspiration in this sense. An extensive period of improvisation (utilising opera, dance and Commedia dell'Arte) and devising tasks based on the above sources led to the development of a series of narratives, which in *Baroccata* were conceived as intersecting stories: a scientist exploring how blood works, an artist trying to depict the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, and Puzzled Jesus, an ironic and elusive character, representing the instability of the religious beliefs of the time. Additionally, the characters of Doubting Thomas and the Angel were conceived, symbolising the tension between faith and scientific inquiry.

The aforementioned theme of ecstasy was once again a key idea in my work. Within the context of this project, the ambiguity of its physical/metaphysical and of its sacred/erotic

connotations was now the stimulus for a playful and at times humorous exploration, based on Bernini's famous depiction of Saint Teresa of Avila.

Before the premiere of *Baroccata* at the Riverside Studios (Tête à Tête Opera Festival 2010), I was invited to present a launch of this work as part of *Correspondence*, an event at London Met organised by The Facility with Islington Exhibits. Here, I designed a long and narrow black box in which the characters of the story would inter-relate in extremely close proximity, viewed by the audience from one end: this was intended to provide a voyeuristic experience for the spectators, as well as a subtle reference to the 'camera obscura' utilised by artists in the seventeenth century. It was this concept, alongside precious audience feedback on *Baroccata* on the legibility of the piece, that eventually inspired the development of *Baroque Box*. For this, I supervised the creation of a more complex box structure, which would invite the audience to view the action from two ends, swapping sides at key moments and reuniting at the conclusion of the piece. The performance would allow for four scenes to happen at any one time, thus deliberately challenging the position of spectatorship. In comparison to *Baroccata*, the narrative saw fewer characters and a more unified narration viewpoint, through the character of the Artist. A completely new score, created by Ivan Hussey, was commissioned for this. *Baroque Box* was co-produced by the 2011 Greenwich+Docklands International Festival for a special staging at the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, indeed a very suited venue for the baroque references of the piece. *Baroque Box* was presented in a marathon run of 21 performances over nine days.

Plot Summary

Baroccata

The narrative intersects a range of different storylines. Here we follow the journey of an Artist, striving to represent the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* – a sixteenth century nun who had visions of an Angel piercing her body with a golden spear – and a Scientist, studying a patient to determine whether blood circulates in the body or evaporates into spirits, which in turn become thoughts and the soul. Along the way, an Angel and Doubting Thomas (the apostle who would not believe the descent of Christ unless he could touch him with his own hands), keep bickering with one another, symbolising the tension between religious faith and doubt. Then there is Puzzled Jesus, the quintessential enigma. His body conveys all the contradictions of the Baroque – a field of sacred, voyeuristic, anatomical and superstitious views. As art and science gradually move towards secular doubt, he keeps appearing and disappearing: perhaps by miracle, or perhaps by accident.

Baroque Box

The piece opens with the Artist, loosely inspired by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who has just been commissioned by the Pope to depict *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* and is determined to make her the "star of the Baroque". But how to capture this state of ecstasy? Is it in the body, or the mind, or the soul? While the Artist invokes divine guidance from an unwitting Jesus, a Scientist proposes some solutions. Ecstasy could be an imbalance of the four humours, a violent torrent of spirits from the blood, or the workings of a gland at the centre of the brain, where the soul has its seat.

Cast and Production Team

<i>The Artist</i>	Chiara D'Anna (actress)
<i>Teresa in Ecstasy</i>	Maya Sapone (soprano)
<i>The Scientist (Baroccata)</i>	Giovanni Bienne (actor)
<i>The Scientist (Baroque Box)</i>	Nicolas simeha (baritone)
<i>Puzzled Jesus</i>	Adam Kirkham (dancer)
<i>The Angel</i>	Madalena Pinto (circus performer)
<i>Doubting Thomas (Baroccata)</i>	Maxine Calleja (dancer)
<i>Man under Surgery (Baroccata)</i>	Danny Standing (baritone)
Music Ensemble (<i>Baroccata</i>)	Anna Tam (cello), Kate Ryder (toy pianos), Eva Caballero (flute), Gordon Curtis (clarinet), trio Voice
Music Ensemble (<i>Baroque Box</i>)	Ivan Hussey, Samy Bishai, Cosimo Keita, David Jean-Baptiste
Dramaturgical Consultant	Rishi Trikha
Technical Manager (<i>Baroccata</i>)	Drew Turner
Technical Manager (<i>Baroque Box</i>)	Paul Millen
Production Manager	Greg Piggot
Designer	Nadia Malik
Dramaturgical Consultants	Rishi Trikha, Eva Danickova
Medical Consultants	Sheelagh Heugh, Erin Sullivan
Music (<i>Baroccata</i>)	Andrew Morley
Music (<i>Baroque Box</i>)	Ivan Hussey
Concept, Text and Direction	Jacek Ludwig Scarso

Supported by the Wellcome Trust, Greenwich+Docklands International Festival, London Metropolitan University and Tete a Tete: The Opera Festival.

Elastic features at a glance

Disciplines

The collaborative and inter-disciplinary approach utilised, featuring a strong emphasis on improvisation.

Devising/Research questions:

- How can the combination of creative disciplines be utilised to specifically reflect the juxtaposition of art, science and religion, inherent to the piece?
- How can the performance disciplines utilised (opera, Commedia dell'Arte, dance, acting, circus arts) be tailored to each character's narrative/symbolic function in the piece?
- How can this inter-disciplinary fusion be explored with specific reference to Baroque

aesthetics, albeit allowing for a contemporary re-visitation of these?

Dramaturgy

The fusion of different textual and visual sources of the seventeenth century, including scientific and religious documents, as well as baroque artworks by Caravaggio and Bernini.

Research/devising questions:

- To what extent can the Baroque as an overall concept be utilised as narrative and aesthetic stimulus? How does the Baroque compare to other cultural movements of the seventeenth century, including those found in science, philosophy and religion?
- While acknowledging the disparateness and the often contradictory nature of the sources researched, what strategies can be employed to provide cohesion in the narrative depicted?
- What are the implications of utilising different languages in creating performance, and what effect does this have on the legibility of the production?

Staging

The use of both end-on (*Baroccata*) and itinerant (*Baroque Box*) staging concepts. Through different visual ideas (the muslin strips in *Baroccata*, the box structure in *Baroque Box*) the segmentation of the space, to promote the coexistence of different aesthetic and narrative elements.

Research/Devising questions:

- Is it possible to visually refer to baroque aesthetics, while employing contemporary concepts of staging? What is the potential of this combination?
- What is the potential of staging co-existing narratives, de-stabilising and de-centring the performance focus?
- Specifically to *Baroque Box*, what is the effect of promoting the view of two co-existing scenes, while four are actually audible at the time? What symbolic and performative implications can be explored through the box and the dynamic spectatorship that it promotes?

Appendix 7b

Baroccata

Devising Structure

Jacek Ludwig Scarso, April-May 2010

[SOURCES: Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Burton, 2001), William Harvey's *On the motion of the heart and blood in animals* (Halsall, 1998), the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila (Peers, 2007)]

CHARACTERS

The Artist
The Scientist
Puzzled Jesus
Teresa in Ecstasy
Doubting Thomas
An Angel
A Man Under Surgery
A Chorus of spirits and vapours

STAGING

The set comprises of long strips of white muslin hanging from the ceiling and stretching to the floor. In the course of the piece, these are used by the Artist and the Scientist to write down or draw annotations of their work. The fabric is also intentionally reminiscent of material to bandage the body after surgery, while the curved shapes that are created with it are so to suggest a Baroque aesthetics. According to lighting angles, shadows are created from behind the fabric, used to signify the dreamlike visions of the Artist and the Scientist. Musicians and Chorus are visible on stage.

1. Overture

In the blackout, the sound of a man falling is heard. Lights: Puzzled Jesus has descended (...clumsily). He looks at his body, as if seeing it for the first time. He opens his arms suddenly (subtle reference to the cross); he wiggles his fingers, and looks at them, then wiggles his toes too. He plays with his toes, with straight legs. One knee suddenly bends, which surprises him. He continues to discover how his body works.

The Overture begins. For some time, Puzzled Jesus is still visible, then disappears. The whole set is gradually illuminated. The chorus is lit – their heads in profile visible as shadows behind a strip of fabric. Gradually, the Artist and the Scientist are seen too, scribbling annotations on the muslin strips. Gradual fading.

2. Man under Surgery – First section (Tense)

A Man, as if in the process of being operated upon, always appears lying down as he sings, each time in a different location on the stage. The Scientist sees him and takes notes on a strip of muslin.

"I'm fine... just fine... really fine... toes, how are you today? The elbows, the shoulders, the hands, the fingers, one, two, third, four, five, six, seven, eight...and two thumbs: all accounted for, all there, all fine..."

The Scientist ponders, with humming noises.

3. The Incredulity of Doubting Thomas

Caravaggio's painting *The Incredulity of Doubting Thomas*' is recreated, with Thomas's finger approaching Jesus's wound. The Artist, the Scientist and an Angel surround Thomas. Blackout. Lights – Thomas's finger is getting closer: the Artist and the Scientist start to discuss the implications of touching the wound; the Angel is increasingly concerned. Blackout. Lights – Dance, parody exaggerating the previous tableau: the Angel is trying to pull Thomas away: the Artist and the Scientist become more physical and stylised in their discussion. Blackout. Lights – the touch, with vapour coming out of the wound. Awe. Blackout.

4. Teresa in Ecstasy I – Titillating

Teresa in Ecstasy storms in, laughing – an Angel, teasingly, follows her. Her ecstasy is depicted comically. The Artist is annotating the scene on the fabric and commenting, with vulgarity, on how enticing she looks.

[Exit Teresa and the Angel]

5. The Four Humours

The Scientist, in showman-like fashion, is in the middle of a lecture-demonstration. He describes the body, based on the theory of the four humours. Each humour is represented musically and through a unison dance sequence, performed by the dancers as shadows behind the fabrics. The Artist watches the scene, eventually correcting the dancers and demonstrating the movements herself.

6. The Proportions of the body

The Artist is trying to visualise how to depict the story of Saint Teresa in Ecstasy. She talks about the proportions of her body, in comparison to those of the Angel and of the symbolic potential of the scene. An Angel appears and surprises her.

7. Man under Surgery – Second section

"I think I'm fine... surely I'm fine. I must be fine! Stomach, why do you gurgle? Pulse, heart, both of you race so fast...they're all there... they're all fine...."

The Scientist continues to ponder, with humming noises.

8. Tangible spirits

The Scientist is in the middle of another lecture-demonstration. He now maps the body in the space, describing the role of spirits – as vapours creating thought and the link between body and soul. In the background, Doubting Thomas, blind, is trying to touch spirits with his hands. An Angel is seen again, seemingly flying in and out of the smoke, repeatedly teasing Doubting Thomas.

9. Shadowing

An Angel and Doubting Thomas are still in the space, spirits have left. The Artist runs in, holding a glass. She tries to catch the Angel, as if it were an insect. Enter Doubting Thomas, followed curiously by the Scientist. Then both Artist and Scientist follow Doubting Thomas.

10. Teresa in Ecstasy II – Petite mort

The Artist is vividly expressing the desire to go beyond the surface of anatomy to represent Teresa in Ecstasy, and to show the ambiguity of the statue, conveying at once physical pain and sensual pleasure. Teresa is now seen lying down, suggestively punctured by the arrow of the Angel.

11. Debating the body, while Puzzled Jesus is bored

On a strip of muslin fabric, the Artist and the Scientist are seen scribbling annotations about anatomy, debating on how to represent the body. In the background, Doubting Thomas is carrying the Angel on his back. The two are pointing towards different directions, eventually trying to pull each other towards their destinations. On another side of the stage, Puzzled Jesus is sitting down, seemingly bored. He amuses himself by looking at his own body. Occasionally, he looks up.

12. A Man under Surgery – Third Section (delirious state).

“Am I fine? Am I fine? Hands, you used to be so strong... Toes, why don't you work for me? Wiggle, wiggle... Am I fine? Am I fine...” The shadow of Doubting Thomas is seen, as he tries to touch the Man's open wound.

13. Inspecting the uncontrollable body

Reminiscent of images of martyrdom, Puzzled Jesus starts to slowly move his body in a subtly seductive way. The Angel, then Doubting Thomas, then the Artist, then the Scientist come closer to him, inspecting his movements. As if to move away from them, Puzzled Jesus executes frantic and bizarre travelling sequences, alternating the slow motion sections. The Angel stops, looking in the direction where Teresa in Ecstasy is about to appear. Artist, Scientist and Doubting Thomas continue to follow Puzzled Jesus. He disappears.

14. Teresa in Ecstasy III – A brutal encounter

Swift lighting change. Teresa is scared, intimidated by the Angel approaching her, increasingly sinister.

15. Possessed Tarantella, with Epiphany and Ecstasy

In a sustained and eventually climactic scene, all characters are seen on stage. Teresa and Man are lit, so their facial expressions are visible, as they gradually reach ecstasy. Man under Surgery is heard singing "Blood, keep flowing... keep flowing". The Artist is trying to understand how to represent the state of ecstasy and dances to the loud beats of the music to reach this state herself. The Scientist is trying to prove the theory of circulation. The Angel and Doubting Thomas are seen as shadows, behind the muslin strips. Puzzled Jesus frantically moves in pain, breathless, somehow reminiscent of the suffering of the Passion. Eventually, his hands are seen with blood marking the stigmata. This represents the epiphany for the Scientist and the Artist. As the music reaches an abrupt end, all characters are breathless. Long silence.

16. Teresa in Ecstasy IV – subdued

Teresa in Ecstasy walks downstage, lit from the back. The Artist stays, intensely looking at her, moved by the truth of her emotion. The Artist removes the mask.

17. Back to work

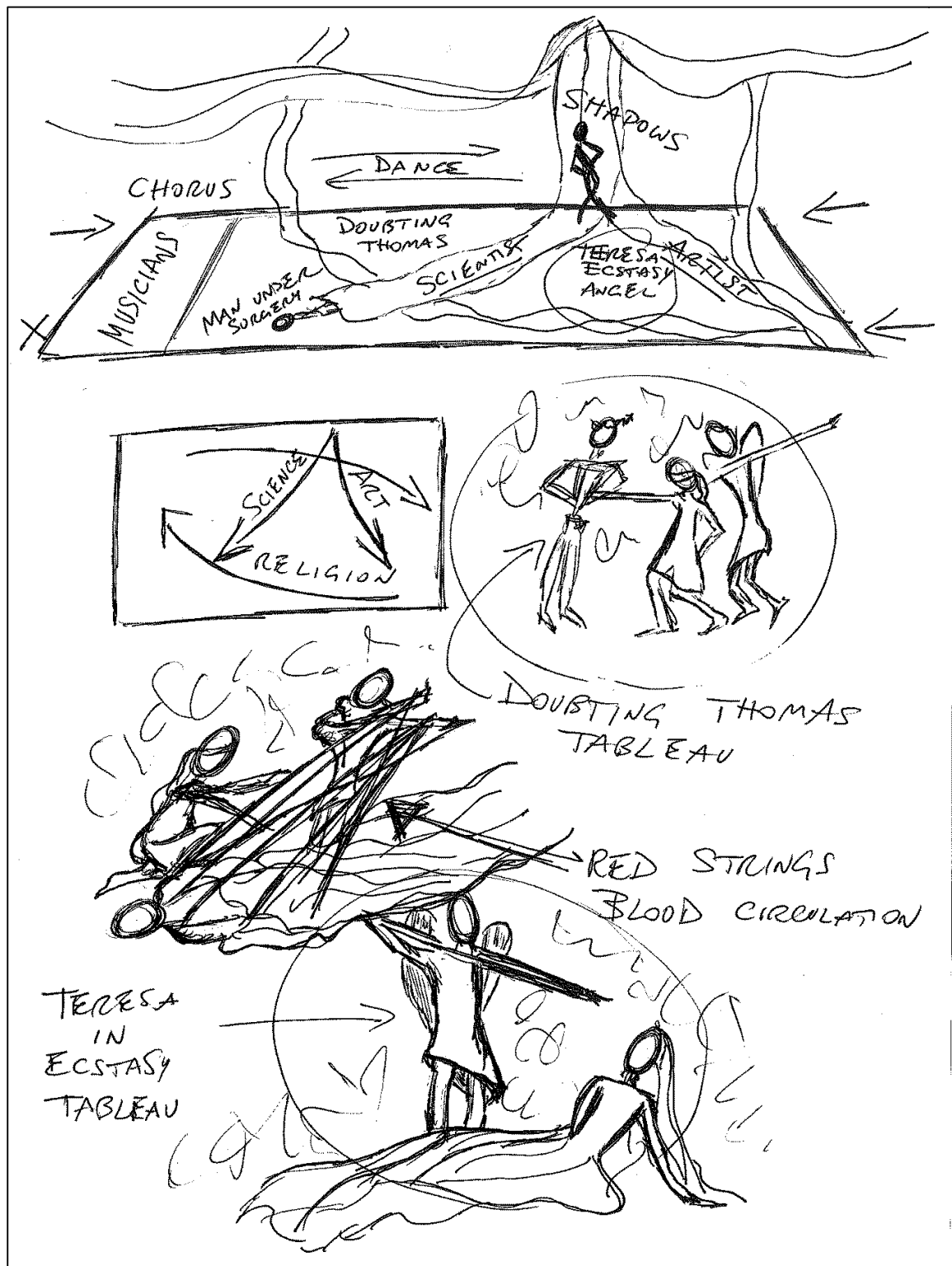
The Artist and the Scientist are seen busy writing/drawing on their respective rolls of paper. The Scientist is completing his theory of blood circulation and concludes: *"it is still to be believed that these spirits are inseparable from the blood, like those in the veins; that the blood and spirits constitute one body (like whey and butter in milk, or heat in hot water), with which the arteries are charged, and for the distribution of which from the heart they are provided. This body is nothing else than blood. The soul is nothing else but blood"*. The Artist ponders, with humming noises.

18. Fading into Doubt

Light change. Smoke appears from behind a new tableau of *The Incredulity of Doubting Thomas*, this time only including Puzzled Jesus, Doubting Thomas and the Angel. Puzzled Jesus, annoyed, slaps the hand of Doubting Thomas, still trying to reach for his wound – Doubting Thomas is surprised, the Angel giggles. Blackout. Puzzled Jesus is now by himself, looking puzzled. He tries to jump up again (...clumsily). Blackout.

[The End]

Baroccata – Samples of visual annotations



Appendix 7C

Baroccata **DVD**

Content:

- Live recording at the Riverside Studios
- *Baroccata* trailer
- Rehearsal extracts
- Photo gallery
- *Baroccata* launch as part of *Correspondence*

Further documentation on this project can also be accessed on
<http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/baroccata-a-dance-opera/>.

Appendix 7d

Baroque Box

Concept – Staging – Structure – Character Description

Jacek Ludwig Scarso, January-March 2011

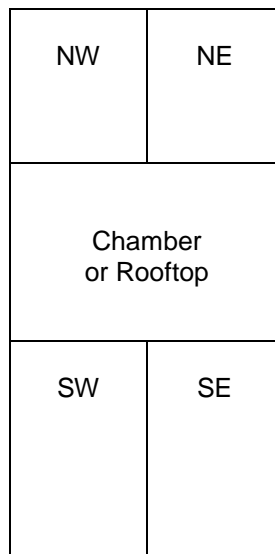
[SOURCES: Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Burton, 2001), René Descartes' *The passions of the soul* (Descartes, 1989), the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila (Peers, 2007)]

CONCEPT

Baroque Box is a dance-opera structured in four movements/tableaux (here referred as 'visions'), revisiting seventeenth century ideas about the body. The Box, which symbolises the brain, contains the workings of the imagination of a Baroque artist (loosely inspired by Gian Lorenzo Bernini), who has just been commissioned to depict the highly suggestive story of Saint Teresa in Ecstasy. Inspired by Teresa's autobiography, in which she recounts her ecstasy as the outcome of an Angel, repeatedly piercing her body with a spear, the Artist wants to inquire further into this ambiguous state: at once fiercely corporeal and sublimely spiritual, painful and pleasurable. A state full of the contradictions of the baroque. A Scientist (with loose reference to Robert Burton, William Harvey and René Descartes), begins to help the Artist with new hypotheses about the body. Is ecstasy an imbalance of the four humours? Does it reach the soul through spirits, evaporating from blood? Is the soul contained in a gland at the centre of the brain? In the meantime, Jesus descends into the Artist's imagination. Will he provide the answer? Significantly, all characters in *Baroque Box* are seen in separate compartments of the set. Only at the end, in a chaotic climax that is the Artist's self-induced ecstasy, do they all become aware of each other's presence – a sudden realisation of the whole, immediately forgotten.

STAGING

A long box, consisting of two adjacent corridors (W and E) with a central section (and an opening to the roof), is viewed by the audience from two ends. Each movement/tableaux, representing the Artist's dream-like visions, takes place in the box, alternated by dialogues outside (from the roof-top or the musicians' area). All movements feature most characters in juxtaposed scenes: this means that the voices of the Scientist, Theresa and the Artist will be heard at the same time. During Vision 4 smoke spurts out from all openings of the box, and amidst the chaos, all characters can see one another, symbolically representing the realisation of the Artist.



CHARACTERS

The Artist
The Scientist
Teresa in Ecstasy
Puzzled Jesus
An Angel

STRUCTURE

1. Overture

This is performed while the audience is positioned at either end of the box. During the Overture, the Artist is seen pacing across the courtyard, eventually reaching the performance area.

2. Prologue

The Artist has just been commissioned by the Pope to depict the Ecstasy of St Teresa, inspired by her autobiography. He is determined to capture the raw physicality and sublime spirituality of the saint's encounter with an Angel. In a prayer, he asks Jesus what ecstasy entails. He kneels down – sign of the cross. Probably has not prayed in a long time... barely remembers how to.

Artist:

Jesus! (listens out for a sign... nothing)... Jesus?... How are you?...

... First of all, thank you. Grazie Jesus!

They've just offered me that commission:

SANTA TERESA IN ECSTASY...

IN ECSTASY!

She could have been simply praying, or crying, or meditating,

BUT NO: IN ECSTASY! Much more exciting, grazie!

(Takes a letter from inside the book and reads it aloud)

“Caro Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Artista (says proudly)
 His Highness the Pope has come to the decision that it should be YOU to receive the honour of representing SANTA TERESA at the peak of her sainthood, in an intimate encounter with an ANGEL. Keep it sacred, will you please.
 All inclusive fee on completion by 1652.
 Please find her diary, for inspiration.”
 Allora, Jesus, the reason I’m calling... In this diary Teresa says that only he who’s felt divine ecstasy, can tell what it is.
 ... (humbly) You tell me, eh!
 ... Is it painful?
 Where is it in the body? Or is it in the soul? Where is the soul? In the body?
 Jesus, I want to show the real ecstasy! I want to make Saint Teresa the star of the Baroque!
 I want to make her alive!
 Jesus... Jesus? (no answer)... mah!
 (Drum beat)
 Jesus! Is it a sign?
 ...Or is it just the soundtrack?
 (The Artist looks at the box.)
 Jesus... are you inside there?
 (He enters the box. MUSIC.)

3. Scientist’s first lecture

The Scientist appears from the roof-top.

Scientist:

Hypothesis : The four Humours

To understand how Man is fearfully and wonderfully made, we have to understand the four humours. A humour is a liquid or fluent part of the body and is either innate or born with us. There are four primary humours which are comprehended in the mass of blood, yet they have their own affections, by which they distinguish our emotions and dispositions.

Ecstasy could be an imbalance among the four humours:

Blood, Melancholy, Choler, Phlegm.

4. Vision : Foreboding and Humours

The Artist enters the box (SW) and, holding a lamp, inspects the inside (SW – NW), over-hearing Teresa and the Angel in the adjacent corridor, as well as the Scientist from the roof-top. Teresa wanders perplex, feeling that something is about to happen (SE); the Angel is just behind her, preparing the a spear (in the shape of a piece of rope) to pierce her. Both slowly appear from the dark background of the box, reaching the ends, visible to the audience. In the meantime, Jesus descends on earth, looking puzzled: he doesn’t quite seem to know why he is there and becomes fascinated by the way his new body looks (NE).

Further option: the Angel initially is seen behind Puzzled Jesus, as he descends. Puzzled Jesus, after looking at his own body, is scared by the Angel’s presence and sends him away (to Teresa in SE).

Scientist	Teresa	Artist
<i>Blood: Hot, sweet, temperate, red – begotten in the heart</i>	<i>I tremble My senses awaken At this foreboding</i>	[muttering to star. Then, from the diary]
<i>Melancholy: cold, dry, thick, black, sour – nourishing the</i>	<i>My eyes pierce the air, sharply My skin aches and quivers I hear footsteps, towards me,</i>	<i>It was our Lord’s will that in this vision I should see an angel. He was most beautiful; his face</i>

<p><i>bones</i></p> <p><i>Choler: hot, dry, thick – gathered to the gall</i></p> <p><i>Phlegm: cold and moist – moistening the members of the body</i></p> <p><i>The combination, keeps changing, trembling, out of balance – each proportion, out of balance, trembling, out of balance</i></p>	<p><i>as fast as my pulse, and faster still,</i> <i>Shivers all through my flesh</i> <i>My blood flows hot</i> <i>The air is cold</i> <i>I tremble</i></p> <p>[After the audience swap]</p> <p><i>Angel, your spear is so sharp... So golden... So fiery... It burns me!</i></p> <p><i>Pierce me... Pierce my heart... My very entrails...</i></p> <p><i>Angel! Come here! Go on, pierce me some more!</i></p>	<p><i>burning, as if he were one of the highest angels, who seem to be all of fire.</i></p> <p><i>I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to be thrusting it into my heart, and pierce my very entrails, and leave me all on fire t with.</i></p>
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5. Scientist's second lecture

The Artist exits from one end of the box (NE), on his way to the other (SE), muttering to himself Artist: *Eh, tremble, tremble, humours mixing out of balance... All very well, but from the body, how does ecstasy reach the soul?*

The Scientist appears again from the roof-top. The Artist is intrigued but cannot quite see him from where he stands and keeps jumping up, in an attempt to have a look.

Scientist:

Hypothesis: The Spirits

Linking the body and the soul are airy substances, called the spirits. These spirits travel like smoke, with the blood in the veins and the arteries. There are three types of spirits: the natural one, coming from the liver and linked to our appetite and desire. The vital spirit, produced in each heartbeat, to do with motion, perception and sensation. Then the psychic spirit, refined in the brain, the link to our soul, or maybe its very substance.

Ecstasy could travel, through the spirits, from the soul to the blood. And vice-versa.

6. Vision: Fire and Spirits

The Scientist creates a web of red strings across section NW, representing blood circulation; he maps out the human body, showing the journey of the spirits within it. Teresa is seen lying down (head towards the end of SE), with a huge skirt floating across the section and the Angel underneath this, instigating her sensual experience. Behind strips of muslin, the silhouette of Puzzled Jesus (NE) is seen with strings (similar to those of the Scientist), tied to his body while he moves dynamically. In section SW the Artist, reading passages from Teresa's diary, is also seen in silhouette.

The Artist and Puzzled Jesus swap sections, creating changes in the silhouettes visible to the audience, as if by magic.

Further option: The Scientist is initially mapping the body using the Angel as his model. The Angel disappears and moves to SE to join Teresa.

Scientist	Teresa	Artist
<p>[Mapping the body and the circulation system]</p> <p><i>Liver Heart Brain</i></p> <p><i>From the liver, the natural spirit</i></p> <p><i>From the heart, the vital spirit</i></p> <p><i>In the brain, the psychic spirit</i></p> <p><i>Just like smoke</i> <i>Just like smoke</i></p>	<p><i>I burn</i> <i>I am thrown into flames</i> <i>To be consumed</i> <i>Fire devours me</i></p> <p><i>Heat</i> <i>Rich heat...</i> <i>Thick heat...</i> <i>Irresistible...</i> <i>All-embracing...</i> <i>Unbearable...</i> <i>Suffocating...</i> <i>I burn</i></p>	<p><i>It is not we who apply the fuel; the fire is already kindled, and we are thrown into it in a moment to be consumed. For an arrow is driven into the entrails and into the heart, so that the soul knows not what is the matter with it, nor what it wishes for.</i> <i>A spark seems to have fallen suddenly upon it, that has set it all on fire.</i></p>

Half-way through this vision, the Artist starts to chase Jesus around the box.

Artist: *Jesus! Jesus! Is that you? Tell me: what is ecstasy!*

[At this point, another audience SWAP takes place during this vision. The audience walking around the box impedes the Artist from reaching Puzzled Jesus, who disappears inside it]

[Music stops abruptly]

Artist: *Yes, pleasure, pain, pain, fire, spirits travelling to the soul. But where is the soul exactly?*

7. Scientist's third lecture

Hypothesis: the Pineal Gland

There is a little gland at the centre of the brain where the soul has its seat. This gland is suspended in the cavities containing the spirits and is moved by them. It is from this gland that the soul radiates from the pores of the brain, through the nerves, across the body.

Ecstasy could originate in the pineal gland.

Artist: *Dottore, grazie! ...But, if the soul is in my brain, is God there too? Where is God outside my mind?*

The Scientist doesn't know. He returns inside the box. The Artist is confused.

The Artist is frustrated, doubting the spirituality of ecstasy and the existence of God. In the middle of the speech, Puzzled Jesus appears miraculously on the roof top. Only, this time, the Artist is turned away and doesn't notice him.

Artist:

Jesus, I have asked you many times now, but no answer! If ecstasy is all in the body and in my brain, has it anything to do with God? I may as well feel ecstasy by myself... In fact, I will!

A Tarantella-style music begins to play. The Artist excitedly starts to dance, somewhat possessed. *"I feel it... I feel it! Shivers! Trembling!"* – in Italian and broken English, he lists random body-parts in which he experiences rapture.

8. Vision : Rapture and Smoke

The Artist is seen dancing to the beat of the music, experiencing a self-induced ecstasy. Smoke spurts out from all openings of the box. Amidst it Jesus dances too, behind the Artist. Characters keep appearing and disappearing in the smoke, in all sections of the box. Puzzled Jesus starts shaking, in an increasingly disturbing way. The Angel becomes more menacing, attempting to strangle Teresa. The Scientist, frustrated, undoes the web of red strings from the previous vision and starts tearing sheets of paper, full of his annotations.

9. Ecstasy Aria

The audience is led to stand between the musicians' area and the box. The Angel and Teresa appear on top of the roof, in a tableau that recaptures Bernini's statue. The Artist looks at them, in front of the audience. From the respective sides of the box, the Scientist and Puzzled Jesus peek out, looking at Teresa, the Angel and the Artist.

Teresa:

*Oh Soul, Oh Soul, Oh Soul
Transform in to God
Oh Soul, Oh Soul
Transform in to God
I levitate.*

*Flow hot, blood, flow hot
Transform in to God
blood, flow hot
Transform in to God
and evaporate*

*Senses suspended
perfectly powerless
Senses suspended
perfectly powerless*

(cadenza)

*Oh Soul, Oh Soul, Oh Soul
Transform in to God
Oh Soul, Oh Soul
Transform in to God
I levitate.*

The Artist is excited and moves to the pillars at the back of the Musicians' Area (as the audience turns around towards him, the other characters hide back inside the box).

He writes a letter to the Pope:

*Your Holiness the Pope,
I am pleased to tell you that I seemed to have found the inspiration for my depiction of Santa Teresa in Ecstasy. I do not mind to tell you that it was very difficult, and a bit confusing. I shall ensure of course that Your Holiness will be the first to inspect the work. Until then, it shall be locked in the darkness.*

He pins the letter to the box. Near it, spy-holes are visible in the wall. As the Artist excitedly runs back to the courtyard, the audience is invited to peep through these and see the image of Bernini's statue.
The End

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

The Artist

The Artist is a character inspired by Gian Lorenzo Bernini – the quintessentially baroque sculptor who famously created the ambiguous and highly suggestive statue of St Theresa in Ecstasy. As we see the action from his point of view (the box is the Artist's brain), he is perhaps the most three-dimensional character in the piece, albeit still stylised. The piece opens as he has just received the commission from the Pope. The Artist is adamant that his depiction should be 'real', and convey ecstasy in all its physical rawness and sublime spirituality. It's difficult to tell whether he is religious or not – he feels he ought to be, thus, rather clumsily, invokes Jesus in a prayer. Yet Jesus never really answers his questions and, at the same time, new scientific ideas catch his imagination. Yet, science too is not enough. The key obstacle for the Artist is that he is only capable of partial vision: hence his brain is compartmented and the characters in it exist unaware of each other's presence. It is only at the end, when, frustrated by the lack of solutions in both science and religion, as he enters a state of self-induced rapture, he reaches a recognition of the whole – where the sacred and the scientific meet. Once reached, this recognition is immediately forgotten, but somehow present in the outcome of his work.

The Scientist

With reference to key texts of the 17th century (*The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton, *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood* by William Harvey and *The Passions of the Soul* by Rene Descartes), the Scientist embodies the excitement in the new discoveries about the body, as science becomes increasingly based on experimentation. He is a dynamic and slightly eccentric character. He initially explains the nature of ecstasy as the imbalance of the four humours, which leads the Artist to ask what connection can be found between the humours and the soul (as surely ecstasy is more than just a corporeal sensation). Through the rather bizarre concept of spirits, somehow evaporating from the blood and becoming the substance of the soul, the Scientist then locates the latter in the pineal gland (a key discovery of the century), right in the centre of the brain. Yet the idea that the soul can be exactly located in the brain instigates the Artist to inquire whether God itself is a product of the mind. The Scientist, frustrated, admits he doesn't know. It is important here to emphasise that, while increasingly modern in its approach, 17th century science was still embedded with religious beliefs. Beliefs progressively at odds with a field that begins to rely on doubt as its major strength.

Teresa in Ecstasy and the Angel

It is important that these two characters should be seen always in relation to one another. They embody the surreal and ambiguous accounts of the life of St. Teresa from Avila, a nun of the 16th century whose experience of ecstasy, at once intensely physical and spiritually sublime, fascinated baroque artists – clearly reflecting the contradiction of baroque art: obsessively religious and yet somewhat profane at times and voyeuristic. We first encounter the two in separate compartments of the box (Vision 1): Teresa wandering alone, sensing that something is happening to her body; the Angel somewhere else, excitedly looking for her. The Angel is in some sense to be seen as the agent of ecstasy. That is why he may appear in conjunction to both Puzzled Jesus and the Scientist (see further options in visions 1 and 2). In Vision 1, their relationship is ambiguous: they almost tease each other, with Teresa repeatedly (playfully) rejecting the potentially sinful pleasure of their intimacy, yet secretly longing for more. Their encounter is at this stage bizarre and comically portrayed.

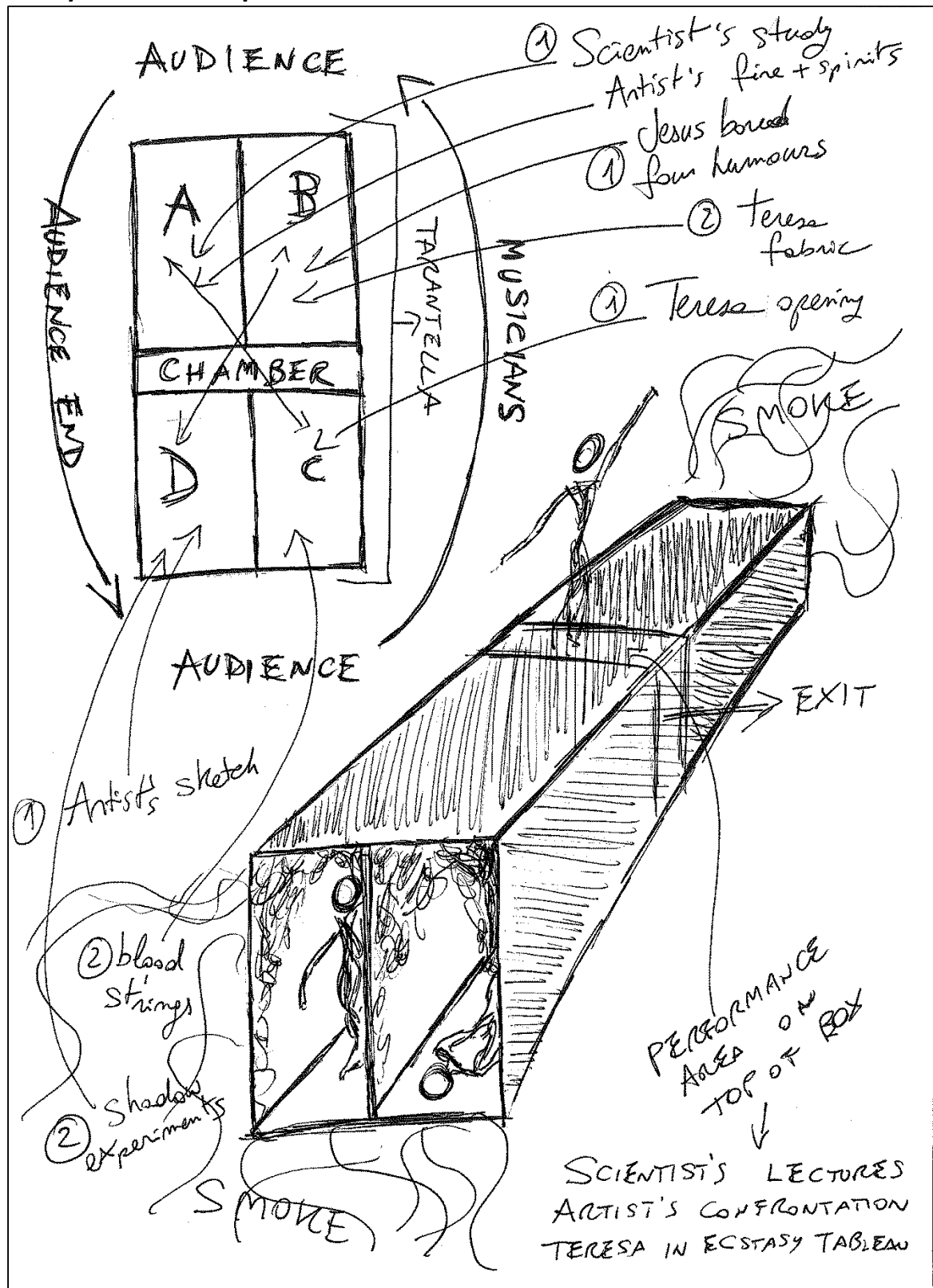
In Vision 2, Teresa accepts the sensuality of her experience. A highly suggestive image of her lying down on the floor with a huge skirt floating the air and the Angel underneath this conveys this

sensuality. Yet it's not ecstasy yet, as it is purely a physical state. Vision 3 suddenly sees the Angel become menacing. This tableau is linked to the darker side of Teresa's autobiography, where her state of rapture suggests obsessive behaviour and a violent experience. Cathartically, the story of the two resolves in the last aria, where Bernini's sculpture is recreated on the rooftop of the box. The scene embraces all the contradictions of their relationship.

Puzzled Jesus

Jesus is undoubtedly the most elusive character in the piece. We are never quite sure whether his presence goes beyond the imagination of the Artist, and his puzzled state ironically hints at the religious doubts of the protagonist. His first appearance inside the box, descending on earth in a rather clumsy way, is deliberately portrayed as random. Yet, as the piece progresses, more and more connections are created between the topics of the Scientist's lectures and his actions, which remain to a great extent abstract nonetheless. After many vain attempts by the Artist to get hold of Jesus (he even chases him around the box) and ask him questions that only he could answer, Jesus eventually appears, miraculously. This coincides with the moment when the Scientist has declared his inability to explain the ultimate link between the soul and God. Jesus' appearance should provide a comforting security, but it's impossible to understand what he's trying to communicate. He begins to shake, an image that, linked to the Passion, continues to haunt the Artist until his sudden realisation of the whole: a contradiction in its own right, with the Scientist examining Jesus' body, in a tableau reminiscent of the depictions of the legend of Doubting Thomas.

Baroque Box – Samples of visual annotations



Appendix 7e

Baroque Box **DVD**

Content:

- Live recording as part of Greenwich+Docklands International Festival
- Trailer
- *Baroque Box* inspiration video
- Documentary: *The Making of Baroque Box*
- Photo gallery

Further documentation on this project can also be accessed on
<http://www.elastictheatre.com/productions/baroque-box/>.

Bibliography

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Please note that the list below includes the resources consulted both in the creation of the prior outputs and the in the discussion of these, as part of this document.

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