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The Fox, the Nun and the Dragon:
an Autoethnographical Opera

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Abstract

This thesis re-narrativises the fiction of the dominant composer, deploying a mixed methodology combining Actor Network Theory [ANT] and autoethnography. I propose the concept of the 'Operatic Collaborator Network [OCN]', through which I trace a Latourian network of the opera creation process. Through the OCN I expand the purview of an ANT reading of opera-making to embrace emotionality, memory and a creative ideation network. This enmeshes ANT with an autoethnographical lens, simultaneously de-centring the composer and the notion of 'text' as the focus of opera studies, yet bringing personal, embodied, emotive experience and intersubjectivity to the fore. I enact this through using a range of qualitative data: memory-based, self-reflexive accounts ('mystory' texts), observational ethnographic field notes and reflexive dyadic interviews. This data is viewed through an analytical meta-narrative drawing on a wide literature relating to the sociology of art, ANT and autoethnography, and in particular on Derrida's notion of 'hauntology', and, in the latter part of the thesis, my own related concept of a dream rhetoric framework.

The OCN is traced through the creation of my three portfolio operas: 'The Angel Esmeralda', 'Fox-Tot!', and 'Catriona and the Dragon.' I also analyse an R&D process based on re-designing my opera 'Bambino' for the COVID-19 era, where the concepts of haunting and a collective dream-telling framework come together. In this way I use work from the past to explore notions of futurity within opera-making, with my portfolio operas representing a transition from opera before the pandemic, to the realities of opera creation within an OCN reconfigured by the virus-actor COVID-19. Embodied creative processes are viewed through the eyes of the artist-researcher, who assembles the textual opera as an artful narrative to stand alongside the portfolio operas.

Lay Summary

My research examines the ways new operas are developed, and the diverse range of people involved in their production. This is viewed through my own experience as an opera composer. By drawing on this experience, I explore how the composer is only one role that is no more important than the many other roles at play. Twinned with this idea is the notion that material objects are just as important as people in the creation of new operas. This line of inquiry is designed to challenge the narrative of the dominant composer in opera studies (the academic study of opera), where the composer's work is often the centre of attention. I propose the concept of the 'Operatic Collaborator Network' to embrace all people and material objects within the creation of opera.

Alongside this re-narrativisation, I explore the experience of grief through remembering my late mother, and how this affected the experience of the opera-making process.

I focus on the making of three of my own operas, about which I interview colleagues fulfilling different roles. In discussing *The Angel Esmeralda*, I interview the librettist (writer of the opera's text) Pamela Carter about her creative process, and the Assistant Director May Howard-Shigeno on the workings of production and technical roles in rehearsal and performance. Looking at my opera for toddlers *Fox-Tot!*, I interview mezzo-soprano Katie Grosset about her experience of pregnancy while working on the opera, as well as the role of material objects in her development as an artist. I write about the personal, embodied experience of composing the community opera *Catriona and the Dragon*, and how considering the input of other members of the opera's creation team shapes that experience.

BambinO, an opera for babies, is the focus of the latter half of my thesis. I analyse the field notes I took during the R&D (Research and Development) process I undertook with colleagues in April 2021, based around redesigning *BambinO* for the COVID-19 era. A dream metaphor framework is used to explore how collaborative creative processes function. This leads me to consider a 'nightmare' moment which arose when *Fox-Tot!* became the focus of discussion during the *BambinO* R&D. I explore creative failure in the light of *BambinO*'s successful process, and also attempt to reclaim *Fox-Tot!* as a meaningful work in remembering my mother.

*In memory of my mother,
Flora Paterson*

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***The Fox, the Nun and the Dragon:* an Autoethnographical Opera**

Chapter 1: Pre-Curtain Programme Perusal

1.1 INTRODUCTION

We are sitting in the opera house, waiting for a performance of *The Fox, the Nun and the Dragon* to begin. Alas this is a world premiere performance, so we cannot rely on previous knowledge of plot or music to guide us through. Instead, we consult the programme book newly purchased in the foyer, looking for some insight into the operatic entity about to unfold before our eyes.

Yet this opera is an ‘autoethnographical opera’: a textual, photographic opera if you will. The following thesis is a performative text, moving back and forth between the personal and the analytical. It is experimental in its approach to structure. This first chapter is our programme book: here we find the theory and underlying ideas driving this opera.

A question immediately arises: why front-load this opera with the theoretical, when our main interest is the embodied, the emotional and the subjective? After all, this textual opera strives to be an art work in its own right, standing alongside the three operas submitted as my PhD portfolio: *The Angel Esmeralda*, *Fox-Tot!* and *Catriona and the Dragon*.¹ As suggested by the programme book analogy, this opening chapter can create a textual framework through which our understanding of the opera itself is enhanced and deepened. It can act as a bridge between the traditional PhD thesis, with its introductory requirements of methodology and literature review, and an artful and embodied form of inquiry that is ‘sensuous, emotional, and intimate[...].’² Another useful analogy is that of the art work exhibited in a gallery, with accompanying blurb: a textual point of reference

¹ See Appendix A for synopses of the portfolio operas.

² Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, “Artful and Embodied Methods, Modes of Inquiry, and Forms of Representation,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 444.

next to a piece of art to be contemplated by the viewer. Without the blurb we rely purely on our own interpretation, an endless space where we might miss intended references or meanings; with its presence there is the opportunity to deepen our understanding of both the work's technical production and to delimit our interpretative space. This chapter functions as such a blurb, intended to ground the reader's observations of the thesis itself within a specific framework. Yet beyond this I hope the reader will take Carol A. Mullen's words to heart, and enter into the performance of this 'art-based inquiry through your own experiences, emotions, and intellect.'³

The textual opera to follow will act as a bridge between a sociologically-inclined reading of the opera world and an autoethnographical journey concerned with creating meaning through creative assemblage and juxtaposition. This also suggests a bridge between qualitative research and the 'kind of knowledge [that] cannot be generated otherwise than in or through the production of art.'⁴ The thesis is practice-based and artful: it resists what Marcel Cobussen has noted as a trend within practice-based research, where it is 'precisely the written thesis that somehow functions in the margins of the main thing, the artistic production. Banned to the periphery, the thesis at most confirms in another language what the artwork already expresses.'⁵ In my own thesis I am bringing the thesis centre-stage as an integral part of artistic production, poised between a creative approach to qualitative research and an artistic outlet for the ideas and emotionality there was no space for in my portfolio operas. These are all commissioned operas with specific pre-conditions and briefs. Conversely, this autoethnographical opera is an open space for academic and artistic inquiry, an environment where I can accept Mullen's invitation: 'Feel free in this postmodern gallery space to talk and move about as you wish, experimenting with ideas and materials.'⁶

Materials... The tracing of the material world, of human and non-human actors, and its meeting with memory and subjective emotional experience: this is the ideological interface of this opera, the meeting of Latourian Actor-Network-Theory and autoethnography.

³ Carol A. Mullen, "Guest Editor's Introduction: "A Self-Fashioned Gallery of Aesthetic Practice,"" *Qualitative Inquiry* 9, no. 2 (2003): 166.

⁴ Marcel Cobussen, "The Trojan Horse: Epistemological Explorations Concerning Practice-based Research," *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 12, no. 1 (2007): 19.

⁵ Cobussen, "The Trojan Horse," 19-20.

⁶ Mullen, "Guest Editor's Introduction," 165.

Explaining this union of seemingly disparate methods will take up most of our pre-curtain perusal time, a necessary endeavour for setting up the ‘postmodern gallery space’ of the opera itself, our textual setting. Despite mining these sociological and ethnographical methods to create the opera’s theoretical framework, I must profess that I am no sociologist, and neither do I pretend to be. Within the scholarly labelling game, I am a musicologist, with a specific focus on opera studies. However, invoking the aforementioned methods reveals my discursive view of music within this opera: music as material object and non-human actor, both part of the (textual) setting and the performance, temporally mediated and fluid in its intersubjective meaning-making. At no point will I analyse musical content from a supposedly ‘objective’ or quasi-scientific point of view. Here music is not part of a *‘mind-mind game’*, but mediated and *created* through embodied and corporeal experience.⁷ Even the composer-at-work is subject to endless mediations through their own bodily and psychological processes, embroiled in a performative act. The composer as performer and actor. Commenting on Suzanne Cusick’s observations on the ‘Mind/Body Problem’ within musicology, Cobussen hints at the sort of insight I hope to achieve through my research:

‘Here, I think, we are encountering a site, a site of knowledge, which is accessible only for artists, a site which could function as a legitimisation of PBR [Practice-Based Research]. The site of the performer, the site where mind and body meet in a non-pre-established hierarchy, gives access to knowledge that is impossible to achieve through more detached and exclusively mind work.’⁸

This in itself is a cogent argument for the value of the performer-as-scholar, a figure with access to a special kind of knowledge within arts-based research. In this opera I strive to convey this performative meeting of mind and body, the composer as the anchoring point of a broad network of operatic knowledge, continually using the artist’s body and positioning in the material world as a site of new understanding and insight.

Before we continue, I must point to the fact that two of the operas under discussion (*Bambino* and *Fox-Tot!*) are for an audience of young children and their carers, while the other two are written specifically for young performers. *Catriona and the Dragon* involves beginner-level orchestral musicians as well as more advanced youth players, a children’s

⁷ Cobussen, “The Trojan Horse,” 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*

chorus and a youth chorus, while *The Angel Esmeralda* was written for the singers of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama Opera Department, and orchestral musicians from across the Guildhall. This undoubtedly had an effect on both my own creative process and the collaborative process of each opera. The two baby operas grew out of Research and Development workshops, where the requirements of such a young audience were discussed at every stage of collaboration. The effect was to consider how to hold the attention of babies, while also creating a flexible-enough musical and dramaturgical structure (besides extremely durable set, props, and costume design) that could withstand the unpredictable nature of a baby audience!

With *Catriona and the Dragon*, the prerequisites I had to consider were far reaching and much more specific than in most projects I have worked on: the musical limitations of each musical group were specified very clearly by the project co-ordinator and choral director before any music was written. The librettist, Laura Attridge, and I had to consider carefully how to craft the title role of Catriona - for a young, non-professional singer - in such a way that it would not be too vocally taxing. *The Angel Esmeralda* was also tailored to each Opera Department singer's vocal requirements, as will be explored in the next chapter. Beyond this, the librettist Pamela Carter and I redrafted our original conception of the opera in line with the needs of the Guildhall Opera Department and Vocal Studies programmes: there was a requirement for a certain number of title roles and an extensive use of the chorus for the opera to fulfil its educational role.

Now let our programme perusal begin!

1.2 OPERA'S BLACK BOX

I want to open up opera's black box...The black box is a mysterious device of which all we know are its inputs and outputs. For opera, these inputs can embrace many elements: the operatic text of music and libretto (along with composer, librettist, and possibly dramaturg), creative and technical personnel (singers, music staff, conductor, director, production team), the materials of set and costume design, among many other material actors. The outputs are similarly numerous, and dependent on context, but for our current purposes largely limited to: the operatic score (this time as end product if we are investigating creative process as our black box), and the operatic performance in the theatre watched by audiences. What I want to find within this device are the 'intermediary processes' in the creation of new operatic works.⁹ These are the processes by which our inputs are transformed into outputs: the embodied, collaborative work of opera, whereby ideation is transformed into material performance.

Within opera studies, I would argue there is an absence of scholarship dealing with certain intermediary processes: namely, the embodied experiences and practices of the composer during the opera-making process, including collaboration with material things; and on a larger scale, the ways in which creative ideation is transformed during the production (rehearsal) period through human collaboration and material embodiment. To be clear, there is a rich and growing body of scholarship on questions of human and material agency in the work of opera, together with increasingly complex investigations of *mise-en-scène* and the embodied, material nature of the voice, as we shall see in the literature review. Yet what we are largely missing is research exploring human interaction with materials and technology *during* the ideation and rehearsal process on an embodied level, and how this interaction functions within the unfolding of creative work.

Materiality and embodiment (bodily processes) are crucial to the intermediary processes still concealed within our operatic black box. Generally speaking, opera scholarship does not deal with the intersection of emotionality, craft, ideation and collaboration inherent to opera's creative processes. Rather, creative process is usually dealt with more objectively: the stages of the creation process by composer and librettist are recounted historically (and linearly), pieced together through archival documents and, where the focus is

⁹ Howard S. Becker, *What About Mozart? What About Murder? Reasoning from Cases* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 95.

contemporary work, sometimes through traditional dyadic interview protocols or via researcher-artist correspondence. It seems to me this manner of tracing creative process reveals *what* happened creatively, but not *how* it happened; in other words, it is only a partial opening of the operatic black box. Similarly, much writing on the staging of opera is more concerned with the end product: the performance in the theatre, or as mediated through digital media, and questions of performativity. Yet the intermediary processes of a staged opera are largely to be found in the rehearsal room, during the production period well before opening night at the theatre. Frequently, questions around performer and material agency are probed, and the mediations entangled in operatic performance; but to my mind, this doesn't make room for the fact that such issues as agency and mediation are greatly complicated if we extend our purview outwith the 'public' performance space to the entire rehearsal process.

It is exactly these absent processes - the *how* rather than merely the *what* of creative collaboration in opera - that have led me towards a hybrid methodology of autoethnography and Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). The study of embodied creativity requires research tools alive to emotionality, memory, and the evocative (all core aspects of autoethnography), as well as the flat ontology of ANT, to disentangle biases around the role of human and non-human actors in creative work. To bind these disparate facets of creative work into a cohesive framework, I introduce the notion of an 'Operatic Collaborator Network' (OCN), drawing heavily on Bruno Latour's definition of 'network' in *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*: 'Network is a concept, not a thing out there. It is a tool to help describe something, not what is being described.'¹⁰ He describes tracing a network as

'a string of actions where each participant is treated as a full-blown mediator [...] a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors *do something* and don't just sit there. Instead of simply transporting effects without transforming them, each of the points in the text may become a bifurcation, an event, or the origin of a new translation. As soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators, they render the movement of the social visible to the reader.'¹¹

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

Note the fundamental concept of ‘actors’ within ANT, ‘defined as a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; an actant is that which has efficacy, can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.’¹² ANT argues for a flat ontology where ‘humans and nonhumans should be treated symmetrically and considered to coexist relationally in a ‘flat ontology’ [...]’.¹³ This is crucial to Latour’s project of redefining the notion of social: to ‘scrutinize more thoroughly the exact content of what is ‘assembled’ under the umbrella of a society.’¹⁴ It is also one of the key reasons why I have chosen ANT as a methodology: a framework where human and material actors are treated equally is useful in mapping creative processes where there is a complex reciprocity between artists and materials.

Latour’s particular formulation of ANT as presented in *Reassembling the Social* opened an avenue for me to consider the vibrancy and agency of material things within the opera world, and how they interact with the people in that world. However, there are certain limitations with ANT which make it fundamentally in tension with research on creative practice and art worlds. In my attempt to create an artful thesis - which is just as much an expression of my creative practice as the portfolio operas - I have blurred the edges of ANT so that it is enfolded within an autoethnographic methodology. I delve into the personal experiences of individuals within the opera world, but also connect these experiences to abstract concepts like ‘collective creative memory’ which are at odds with the doctrine of ANT. Rather, I have made an attempt to be playful and creative with theory, even where that means it is moulded into some new shape. Yet I will signal to the reader when these points of tension arise. As Born and Barry note when considering the application of ANT,

[...] according to its own epistemological premises, [ANT] argues that the theory should change when confronted with new objects and transplanted into new environments. ANT is not, then, a ready-made methodology that can be taken off the shelf and applied - an approach that would, with considerable irony, contradict ANT’s own semiotic foundations.¹⁵

¹² Christopher Morris, “Casting Metal: Opera Studies after Humanism,” *The Opera Quarterly* 35, no. 1-2 (2019): 80.

¹³ Georgina Born and Andrew Barry, “Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory,” *Contemporary Music Review* 37, nos. 5-6 (2018): 446.

¹⁴ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 2.

¹⁵ Born and Barry, “Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory,” 447.

In applying ANT to the opera world, its limitations become apparent: namely, the largely absent considerations of ‘aesthetic, subjective and temporal dimensions [...]’.¹⁶ These are precisely the aspects prized by autoethnography, to which we might add emotionality and memory as an expansion of the latter two dimensions. It should also be noted that in discussing an art world and the creative practices pertaining to it, it is fundamentally important to consider matters of agency: creative, human agency and its relationship to multiple mediations, as well as material, nonhuman agency. While ANT emphasises the latter as a way of ‘undermining the subject-object dualism’, it also proves to be ‘the premise for evacuating entirely the question of how to theorise human subjectivity.’¹⁷ Born and Barry explain that

‘ANT’s concept of the actor sets itself against any notion of subjectivity that centres on intentionality. This is achieved through the retroactive definition of actors, thereby avoiding any assumption of the primacy of the intentional human subject in engendering action.’¹⁸

Subjectivity, intentionality and agency underlie the discussion of creative practice in this thesis. This discussion involves analysis of abstract ideation processes, and extrapolating insights on ideation from sites of embodied knowledge. This contradicts Latour’s placing of ‘strict and very particular limits on talk about agency [...]’.¹⁹ He insists that:

‘If you mention an agency, you have to provide the account of its action, and to do so you need to make more or less explicit which trials have produced which observable traces [...]’.²⁰

Consider how human agency and intention are necessarily taken for granted in Becker’s concept of the ‘editorial moment’, the artist’s ‘actual moment of choice’ within a creative process:

‘all the elements of an art world come to bear on the mind of the person making the choice, who imagines the potential responses to what is being done and

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 456.

¹⁷ Ibid., 476.

¹⁸ Ibid., 476.

¹⁹ Ibid., 462.

²⁰ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 53.

makes the next choices accordingly. Multitudes of small decisions get made, in a continuous dialogue with the cooperative network that makes up the art world in which the work is being made.'²¹

My positioning of subjective, collectivised processes as a part of the OCN - defined by a myriad of 'editorial moments' - not only pushes against Latour's limitations on agency, but causes me to cross scales in the analysis of opera's 'micro and macro social mediation.'²² This is necessary to examine the systems of influence and power that exist within creative collaboration, and here takes a political stance: to deconstruct notions of professional and artistic hierarchy in the production of contemporary opera. Crossing scales in this way again contradicts ANT, where scale 'becomes an effect produced by actor-networks.'²³ On this Born and Barry highlight the limitations of Latour's epistemology:

'[...] much is left out of the analytical and explanatory possibilities available if we are forbidden to think across scales and restrict our ethnographic (and historical) imagination to the 'micro' and 'local' as they forge what may come to appear 'macro' or 'global'. The fact is that ethnography can rarely access directly the large-scale processes that impinge on localised ethnographic experience. Instead, such processes are often glimpsed or overheard at the margins, leaving no alternative but for research to proceed by inference from that which is available (including 'observable traces').'²⁴

Inference is a necessary tool in the analysis of creative practice, since creative ideation is partially abstract but also bound up with both material things and human actors. My inquiry into this area necessarily examines the relation between ideation, materiality and embodiment, if we take anthropologist Marilyn Strathern's definition of relation as an 'abstract concept', as a 'state of coexistence imagined as a link or tie, entities and entailments unspecified.'²⁵ Born and Barry go on to suggest a 'Strathernian rather than a Latourian course, analysing music's mediation at different scales through inference and

²¹ Becker, *Art Worlds: 25th Anniversary Edition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press), 198-201.

²² Born and Barry, "Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory," 471.

²³ *Ibid.*, 469.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Marilyn Strathern, "Afterword: Becoming Enlightened about Relations," in *An Anthropology of the Enlightenment: Moral Social Relations Then and Today*, ed. N. Rapport and H. Wardle (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 171.

abstraction.²⁶ While I remain heavily influenced by Latour's approach to a sociology of associations throughout this thesis (his mechanism for trying to 'fathom controversies about the range of heterogenous elements that may be associated together'), the use of a hybrid methodology embracing autoethnography and also hauntology (see chapter two) has allowed me to broaden the epistemological scope of my analysis to match the demands of exploring creative processes.²⁷ I am ultimately pursuing a project of attempting to democratise the view of creativity and agency in the production of new operas, where embodied creativity is mediated by a vast array of actors. This is also a '*transformative act*', where this democratisation of creative agency transforms my view of my own creative practice by resituating the composer within a web of collaborative processes.²⁸

If tracing the OCN is transformative, then theory too is transformed: ANT becomes one tool with which to shape our artful narrative; its limitations frequently pushed past to let autoethnography take over the frame. In this way there is a direct correlation to my compositional practice: distinct harmonic or rhythmic systems are frequently set in tension, where breaking the 'rules' becomes an essential tool of creative practice. Ideological and aesthetic tension becomes a source of creative transformation. Above all this is an autoethnographical opera, where ANT is used as a means to bind the imaginative and the emotional to the material world.

²⁶ Born and Barry, "Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory," 470.

²⁷ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 159-60.

²⁸ Graeme Sullivan, "Research Acts in Art Practice," *Studies in Art Education* 48, no. 1, Arts-Based Research in Art Education (2006): 22.

1.3 METHODOLOGY: FROM THE HEART

Within the OCN, there are really two black boxes of interest here: that of the opera's production and, nested within that box, or sitting along side it, or cutting *through* it, that of the composer's creative practice. To undo this 'blackboxing' requires a methodology which can embrace yet move beyond ANT to expose questions of subjectivity and temporality. It will require moving between more conventional sociological analysis and the highly personal. To do this, I will use an autoethnographical framework, which will intersect with analysis through ANT and mediation theory.

Put simply, '[a]utoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)'.²⁹ Personal stories are used as 'windows to the world, through which [autoethnographers] *interpret* how their selves are connected to their sociocultural contexts and how the contexts give meanings to their experiences and perspectives'.³⁰ While many different varieties of autoethnography have been defined (such as the binary opposition between 'evocative' and 'analytic' autoethnography expounded by Leon Anderson³¹), Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez have defined a

'continuum anchoring on two ends, one emphasising autobiography and the other ethnography [...]. On the autobiographic end, researchers are likely to put more emphasis on self (auto) narration (graphy); on the ethnographic end, researchers focus more on the cultural interpretation (ethno) of self (auto). The continuum of AE research allows researchers of various disciplines to self-select their positionality in telling their interpretive stories'.³²

My thesis will take the form of a 'layered account', an approach to autoethnography which focuses

'on the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature [...] [L]ayered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection [...] to "invoke" readers to enter into the "emergent experience" of

²⁹ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Historical Social Research/ Historische Sozialforschung* 36, no. 4 (2011): 273.

³⁰ Heewon Chang, Faith Wambura Ngunjiri and Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez, *Collaborative Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2013), 18-19.

³¹ Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (August 2006): 373.

³² Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez, *Collaborative Autoethnography*, 18.

doing and writing research [...], conceive of identity as an “emergent process” [...], and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses [...].³³

My analysis will invoke ANT in order to trace the OCN. To cross scales between the materialist approach of ANT and the analysis of subjective personal experience, I will also invoke considerations of temporality, including Mads Krogh’s discussion of the Husserlian ‘spatiotemporal object.’³⁴

Broadly speaking, my thesis will comprise four case studies: the portfolio operas and a Research and Development [R&D] process based around redesigning an earlier opera - *Bambino* (2017). These will be viewed through the lens of an autoethnographic layered account, while displaying a hybridity of approach within the delimits of autoethnography. I will embrace what Norman K. Denzin has defined separately as ‘interpretive autoethnography’ and ‘performance [auto]ethnography’.³⁵ Interpretive autoethnography is ‘a critical, performative practice, a practice that begins with the biography of the writer and moves outward to culture, discourse, history, and ideology’.³⁶ In pursuing this approach,

[w]e move back and forth in time, using a critical interpretive method, a version of Sartre’s [...] progressive-regressive method. Interpretation works forward to the conclusion of a set of acts taken up by the subject, while working back in time, interrogating the historical, cultural and biographical conditions that moved the person to experience the events being studied.³⁷

Such an existentialist view allows the composer-scholar to reflexively write the self ‘into and through the ethnographic; isolating that space where memory, performance, and meaning intersect.’³⁸

³³ Ellis, Adams and Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview,” 279.

³⁴ Mads Krogh, “A Beat is a Hybrid: Mediation, ANT and Music as Material Practice,” *Contemporary Music Review* 37, nos. 5-6 (2018): 540-41.

³⁵ Norman K. Denzin, “Interpretive Autoethnography,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 124.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

Here Denzin advocates the use of a ‘performative “I”’ over a ‘narrative “I”’ (a concept explored in depth by Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei).³⁹ He continues this line of thought in his definition of performance [auto]ethnography:

‘the merger of critical pedagogy, performance ethnography, and cultural politics; the creation of texts that move from epiphanies to the sting of memory, the personal to the political, the autobiographical to the cultural, the local to the historical. A response to the successive crises of democracy and capitalism that shape daily life; showing how these formations repressively enter into and shape the stories and performances persons share with one another. Showing. It shows how persons bring dignity and meaning to their lives in and through these performances; it offers kernels of utopian hope of how things might be different, better.’⁴⁰

This image of ‘the sting of memory’ is one I will return to, since it locates a crucial aspect of generating self-narratives, or ‘mystory’ texts. ⁴¹

There are four categories of qualitative data I will use in this study: field notes, personal documents and artefacts, interviews, and literature. Each mode of inquiry can be broken down further into subcategories, some unique to ‘musical autoethnography’, others more standard tools within ethnographic research.

What exactly is the “field” in autoethnographic inquiry? Anderson and Glass-Goffin suggest that ‘the “field” may be the “state of mind” that one assumes when recording one’s own experiences, and how one is changed by these’.⁴² While this accounts for the fact that ‘many (perhaps most) autoethnographers create field notes from more distant memories’⁴³, Heewon Chang offers a broader definition:

‘autoethnographic fieldwork takes place in the autoethnographers’ offices or homes, archival libraries, their significant others’ places, interviewees’ locations, and other locations pertaining to studies: anywhere where they can create

³⁹ Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei, “Experience and “I” in Autoethnography: A Deconstruction,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 1, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 299-318.

⁴⁰ Denzin, “Interpretive Autoethnography,” 125.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴² Leon Anderson and Bonnie Glass-Coffin, “*I Learn by Going: Autoethnographic Modes of Inquiry*,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 67.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 66

encounters and re-encounters with their memories, with objects, and with people'.⁴⁴

My field notes will be of three kinds: memory-based, text-mediated, self-reflexive accounts (Denzin's 'mystory'); observational ethnographic field notes; and 'musical annotations' made during rehearsals. Of the first variety, Denzin writes

'[t]he mystory [...] is simultaneously a personal mythology, a public story, a personal narrative, and a performance that critiques [...]. It locates itself against the specialised knowledges that circulate in the larger society'.⁴⁵

This narrative places emphasis on 'self, biography, history and experience', and must move

'back and forth between three concerns: the concerns of performance, of process, and/or of analysis. A focus on performance produces performance texts, the tale and the telling [...]. A focus on process examines a social form, or event, for example epiphanies. The focus on analysis looks at the specific lives of individuals, who live the process that is being studied in order to locate their lives in their historical moment.'⁴⁶

In this form of account, the autoethnographer 'always works outward from the epiphany to those sites where memory, history, structure, and performance intersect, the spaces of [the] "performative "I" [...]. These are performances that interrupt and critique hegemonic structures of meaning'.⁴⁷

The 'mystory' invokes poststructural theories of experience and voice. Through the act of narration, building outward from personal experience to locate the self in socio-cultural processes, the 'performative "I" is a becoming "I" that, rather than predetermined, is *constructed in the process of attempts at truth-telling*, and uses experience as a provisional strategy to "offer a way out of the closure of knowledge"⁴⁸. This 'deconstructive autoethnography' 'illustrates an engagement with the *discursive* construction of

⁴⁴ Heewon Chang, "Individual and Collaborative Autoethnography as Method: A Social Scientist's Perspective," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 108.

⁴⁵ Denzin, "Interpretive Autoethnography," 133.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

⁴⁸ Jackson and Mazzei, "Experience and "I" in Autoethnography," 305.

experience, a critique of the *relations of power* in the production of meaning from experience, and a treatment of experience as *already an interpretation*'.⁴⁹ Such considerations suggest how autoethnography can be useful for the composer-scholar to map their practice and experience as an artist onto the relational and societal concerns traced through the OCN. Just as the creative process is embedded within a Latourian materialist network, simultaneously existing alongside and *across* the network, the narrative self is intertwined with creative process, only 'becoming' through being traced across multiple scales of analysis.

Our second source of data, personal documents and artefacts, also serves as a bridge between autoethnography's reliance on self-reflexivity and the materialism of ANT. Just as the piano can be an actor within the OCN - one which acts as a site of translation across macro- and microsocial levels - the piano can also be an object or machine which generates self-reflexive epiphanies, and can be located in self-narratives as an embodied (partial) form of compositional practice. Such objects can be scaled down to an actor within a network, the material object implicated in a particular temporal moment, or they can be scaled up as a crucial site of a multitude of translations, a machine which is embroiled in - and enables - the social world of the operatic rehearsal room. The piano is at once an actor in the microsocial world of the composer's studio, and an actor in the macrosocial world of opera, becoming the site of continual mediations between and across these two levels. Drawing on Hennion, Mads Krogh observes that

'[i]f music is especially illustrative of our collective construction of objects, it is precisely because music in particular seems to require the mobilisation of a wide range of mediators - including things - and these mediators are far from transparent; rather, they relay, they distort, they act'.⁵⁰

Furthermore, to open the black box of opera it is necessary to acknowledge that

'musical practices *are* material; they unfold by way of material circumstances; objects, bodies, places, surfaces and boundaries all help to constitute human action and interaction in the context of musical events'.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 304.

⁵⁰ Krogh, "A Beat is a Hybrid," 535.

⁵¹ Ibid., 530.

It is precisely the ‘human action and interaction’ of musical events that will form the basis of this study’s self-reflexive accounts. However, there is perhaps a disparity between which non-human actors will be traced in the OCN, and those which are most pertinent to autoethnographic narrative. As Anderson and Glass-Coffin note,

‘[t]he value of any document or artefact for [autoethnographic inquiry] depends on its evocative potential - its ability to either open the researcher to deeper reflection on relevant experiences and relationships or to evoke compelling images, emotions, or understandings in other readers.’⁵²

Thus the ontologically flat reading of the opera world created by an ANT-influenced reading contrasts with the evocative and subjective-reflexive mode of an autoethnographical account. Rather than creating irreconcilable friction, tracing this dialogue between two modes of inquiry can situate the intersection of the OCN with the composer’s creative practice. The concept of the composer as interface between two networks can be explored through this intersection.

The range of personal documents and artefacts will be treated as an assemblage, which Hughes and Pennington describe as involving

‘the gathering of a collection of items, including relevant literature, that fit together to provide multiple perspectives and rich, multilayered accounts of a particular time, place, or moment in the life of the autoethnographer.’⁵³

Going further than traditional qualitative triangulation, assemblage juxtaposes different modes of representation to expose and interrogate the unstable relationship of authorial voice and performative subjectivity. Assemblage data may extend to member checking by those implicated in the research, increasing the verifiability and reliability of data generated through self-reflexive means. I will return to this later with regard to relational ethics.

The assemblage will include the analysis of a wide range of artefacts such as: hand-written manuscript scores, composition notebooks, Sibelius-generated score drafts (with hand-written annotations), libretto drafts, diaries (with rehearsal and meeting dates), rehearsal schedules, email correspondence, opera programmes, répétiteur scores,

⁵² Anderson and Glass-Coffin, *“I Learn by Going,”* 68.

⁵³ Sherick A. Hughes and Julie L. Pennington, *Autoethnography: Process, Product, and Possibility for Critical Social Research* (USA: SAGE, 2017), 23.

production photos, opera performance films and press materials. A multilayered account could be created through assemblage about, for instance, a break-through moment during the creative process. First a 'mystory' would be created about this epiphanic moment after examining manuscript material and relevant score/ libretto drafts. I would turn to the relevant diary and composition notebook for this period to note any significant events or performances attended. This might prompt a re-telling of the mystory from a different perspective. If an opera was attended near this epiphany, I would examine the opera programme to prompt a narrative sketch. Following comparison of the mystory and sketch, this might prompt another re-telling, and so on. I may choose to compare my account with a range of other narratives about opera attendance, noting what subjective mechanisms can be translated across these accounts. In this way we might arrive at an autoethnographic case study questioning what relationship exists between being part of the social world of opera attendance, and the microsocial context of the creative act. Subsequently tracing this case study through the lens of the OCN and the framework of DeNora's/Krogh's 'musical event' with its attendant retentions, present features and protentions would in turn open up an evocative account to questions of mediation, materialism, agency and temporality.⁵⁴

This hypothetical example reinforces the idea that '[w]riting is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry'.⁵⁵ Autoethnographic writing offers a process of 'textual call and response', creating a 'mobile textual and material assemblage' moving back and forth between the self and others, the personal and the societal.⁵⁶ This assemblage accounts for 'the materiality of bodies, places and spaces', offering both human and non-human actors to be traced through the OCN.⁵⁷ Through this writing process,

'autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyse experience, but also consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders.'⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Mads Krogh, "A Beat is a Hybrid," 541.

⁵⁵ Ellis, Adams and Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," 280.

⁵⁶ Susanne Grannon, "Sketching Subjectivities," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 230.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ellis, Adams and Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," 276.

Two types of qualitative interview will be used as a data source: self-interviews and reflexive dyadic interviews. While the ‘mystory’ may potentially focus entirely on the present moment of writing, the self-interview is explicitly intended to open up a ‘dialogue between one’s past and present selves, at times actively with others as well, in which memories and understandings about the past are constructed anew.’⁵⁹ Reflexive dyadic interviews involve a traditional question-answer interview protocol, but the interviewer actively shares personal experience with the topic.⁶⁰ As Ellis notes, the focus here is on the ‘interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics within the interview itself. Though the focus is on the interviewee and the interviewee’s story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher are also considered’.⁶¹ While the researcher’s story is not in the foreground, their account includes ‘subjective and emotional reflections’ to add ‘context and layers to the story being told about participants’.⁶²

The reflexive dyadic interview offers the composer-researcher an ideal way to discuss the complex interpersonal, collaborative matters involved in operatic production. I will conduct interviews with three colleagues from the case studies involved in this study: a mezzo-soprano, librettist and Assistant Director, a trifecta of performer, ‘creative’, and production team respectively. These three distinct professional roles represent different actors within the OCN, immediately raising a myriad of connections between both human and non-human actors involved in operatic production. More than this, these three actors offer a subjective view of both the microsocial world of each individual opera project, and the macrosocial level of the opera industry. Importantly for autoethnographic research, these interviews will allow for critical self-reflexivity between author and participants to *problematise* both our emotional responses to each project, and our roles within operatic production. These interviews will also contribute to the triangulation of data concerning my own subjective view of a chosen narrative context, strengthening the reliability and verifiability of my thesis.

⁵⁹ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, “*I Learn by Going*,” 69.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶¹ Carolyn Ellis, *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography* (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2004), 62.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Self-interviews and the inclusion of reflexive dyadic interviews invoke questions of 'relational ethics'. Autoethnography relies on the 'privileged perspective of the author-researcher-participant', and as such autoethnographers must be mindful of the way they implicate others in their stories and analysis of personal histories.⁶³ Quoting Ellis, Heewon Chang has described relational ethics as

'recognizing and valuing "mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work", ethical standards that researchers follow when acting and taking "ethical responsibilities toward intimate others who are implicated in the stories we write about ourselves"'.⁶⁴

This latter relational concern highlights the complicated nature of ethical standards in autoethnography. Procedural ethics as mandated by Institutional Review Board (IRB) committees are 'grounded on the premise that research is being done on strangers with whom we have no prior relationships and plan no future interaction'.⁶⁵ The remit of autoethnography frequently falls outwith these guidelines. Thus it is necessary to constantly question and reflect on ethical decisions throughout the autoethnographic research process. Such techniques as member-checking may be used, sharing the final research outcomes with those implicated in any narratives told.⁶⁶ Throughout my research process I will refer to Ellis' article 'Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives', as she offers 'examples against which you might compare your experiences and practices, begin a conversation, and raise questions for us to consider together'.⁶⁷

The matter of taking care over my ethical duty to 'intimate others' is especially relevant, as I will also conduct reflexive dyadic interviews with my partner and immediate family members. This is essential to dealing with a matter which will return throughout my writing: the impact of grief and its relationship to the creative process. This in turn will be linked to work-related trauma with regards to *Fox-Tot!*, an issue which will require especially careful consideration of relational ethics. Processing grief as a creative artist is a central reason

⁶³ Chang, "Individual and Collaborative Autoethnography as Method: A Social Scientist's Perspective," 111.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Carolyn Ellis, "Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives," *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no. 1 (January 2007): 4.

⁶⁶ Hughes and Pennington, *Autoethnography: Process, Product, and Possibility*, 85.

⁶⁷ Ellis, "Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives," 5.

for my methodological approach of combining autoethnography with an ANT-influenced tracing of the OCN. I am interested in the ways grief might be embodied in creative work and what relationship personal crisis can have to working in the social world of opera. My reasons are twofold: firstly, I have a desire to process and learn from trauma as a way to suggest ways of coping in times of future difficulty, and to explore the transformative power of autoethnography. As Christopher N. Poulos has written,

‘[w]hen faced with a problem, or a challenge, or a dilemma, or a sharp, painful, wracking memory...sometimes all I can do is *write my way through it* [...] Writing this way has taught me that the path to healing is a narrative path, that the power of narrative is a power of *transformation* [...]. Writing this way has taught me that the opening to possibility that inheres in crafting an autoethnography - in writing my way through trauma and pain and danger and even joy - is, in fact, a path that carries me *through memory to transcendence*’.⁶⁸

Perhaps more important is my second reason: to analyse and question the ways in which personal life and artistic life are intertwined and embedded within the world of opera, with the hope that this will resonate and offer something of value to readers, especially other composer-scholars. This echoes Andrew F. Herrman’s belief in the communal potential of autoethnography:

‘[g]iven its dialogical impetus, autoethnography strives to be accessible, invitational, vulnerable, and trustworthy, relationally based on the dual concern for the self and the other [...] Autoethnographers ask you to “think with a story... to experience its affecting one’s own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one’s life”’.⁶⁹

One might ask why this should be the focus of scholarly study, and indeed there are those who believe that ‘autoethnography is an abrogation of the honourable trade of the scholar’.⁷⁰ However, in the context of creative practice research, I do believe autoethnography offers a unique avenue for the ways in which composers’ and performers’ ‘personal lives and cultural experiences intertwine in the creation and interpretation of

⁶⁸ Christopher N. Poulos, “Writing Through the Memories: Autoethnography as a Path to Transcendence,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 324-325.

⁶⁹ Andrew F. Herrman, “Ghosts, Vampires, Zombies, and Us: The Undead as Autoethnographic Bridges,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 7, no. 3, Special Issue: The Bridge Building Power of Autoethnography (Fall 2014): 337.

⁷⁰ Sara Delamont, “The only honest thing: autoethnography, reflexivity and small crises in fieldwork,” *Ethnography and Education* 4, no. 1 (March 2009): 61.

musical works'.⁷¹ An embodied writing style allows for the communication of this highly complex entanglement of the subjective and the social, which could be of great value to other performer-scholars facing similar dilemmas.

Considering the familial sphere also expands the OCN to include an abundance of other human and non-human actors. Foregrounding the loss of my mother reveals her extensive continuing connection to the way I relate to the OCN, through memory, her relationship to my creative practice, and the artefacts she left behind. These include: her poems, her many paintings, a film of her 'artistic manifesto'. In attempting to locate processes of grief and personal transformation through working practices, I will use three methods in combination: field notes in the form of memory-recall narratives (stimulated by artefacts relevant to the context I am trying to recapture); the aforementioned self-reflexive dyadic interviews with my sister and father generating further narrative sketches based on these interviews; and analysis grounded in the abundant autoethnographic literature on experiences with grief.

Having outlined my methods, I will turn to six key concepts that will serve as a foundation for my research, drawing on the writings of Leon Anderson and Bonnie Glass-Coffin.⁷² These are: complete member researcher (CMR) status, strong reflexivity, engagement, vulnerability, rejection of finality, and commitment to an analytic analysis. CMR is the most fundamental aspect of autoethnography: 'the researcher is a complete member in the social world under study'.⁷³ In the context of this study, I am an "opportunistic" CMR, since my membership in the world of opera 'precedes the decision to conduct research on the group'.⁷⁴ I am fully engaged in the action of the research setting, while also documenting and analysing it. Strong reflexivity refers to 'an awareness of reciprocal influence between autoethnographers and their settings and co-participants'.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, "Artful and Embodied Methods," 447.

⁷² Anderson and Glass-Coffin, "*I Learn by Going*," 57-83; and Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (August 2006): 373-395.

⁷³ Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," 379.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, "*I Learn by Going*," 73.

CMR status creates a 'mutual informativity' that can change the researcher's sense of self.⁷⁶

Engagement refers to two ideas: the first is that researchers should 'present the results of their research to the affected communities, but also that the agent of knowledge be placed along the same critical plane as the object of inquiry'.⁷⁷ I also take engagement to embrace Anderson's call for 'dialogue with informants beyond the self', referencing interviews with those within the world under study.⁷⁸ Vulnerability describes the challenge of reliving the past through the process of writing, which may be painful at times. In autoethnography there is a need on the part of the scholar to embrace the exposure of self-narrative in the public domain. There is also a need for emotional honesty in telling our narratives. The author's life is intertwined with others in the observed social world, so it is necessary to be aware of the vulnerability of others and be vigilant with regard to relational ethics.

Rejection of finality requires us to recognise that 'social life, identities, and relationships are fluid, not static, and autoethnographic inquiry is self-consciously situated ethnography'.⁷⁹ This 'resistance to finality and closure reflects a conception of the self (and society) as relational and processual, mutably written in a moment that opens onto a panoramic, albeit not unlimited, future of possibilities'.⁸⁰ An open-ended approach to the analysis of creative process will be maintained, since compositional practice is amorphous and continually adapting. A rejection of closure is also relevant to an ANT-influenced reading, since whatever OCN is traced, it will not be a closed, fixed notion but one reliant on fluidity and continual revision.

The sixth and final concept is described by Anderson thusly:

'The purpose of analytic ethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an "insider's perspective," or to evoke emotional

⁷⁶ Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," 383.

⁷⁷ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, "*I Learn by Going*," 74.

⁷⁸ Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," 385.

⁷⁹ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, "*I Learn by Going*," 78.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 78-9.

resonance with the reader. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytical social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves. The data-transcending goal has been a central warrant for traditional social science research'.⁸¹

My commitment to an analytic agenda will be expressed through mapping my personal narratives across the tracing of the OCN, to posit the positionality of the composer between -and at the intersection of - micro and macrosocial worlds. The cornerstone of my research will be recognising the corporeality of composition and performance work, and the rejection of a mind-body split when analysing creative practice. In writing self-narratives on practice, I will 'listen for disjunctures between sounding and embodying that shake up common-wisdom epistemic priorities'.⁸² The composer-performer is a site of embodied knowledge, simultaneously enacting creative labour and reproductive work, a mediated body engaged in the 'microsocialities of performance'.⁸³ Questions of mediation will return repeatedly throughout, invoking materialism, temporality and feminist theory. The composer is entangled with 'technologies, things, material cultures [...] and infrastructures'.⁸⁴ The music the composer creates is subject to multiple mediations:

'sound (itself composed of multiple mediations [...]), embodied practices, discursive exegeses and interpretations, visual inscriptions, material devices and interfaces, commodity forms, physical location, venue, site or space, socialities and social relations, imagined communities and so on'.⁸⁵

By extension, choosing an autoethnographic framework for a PhD thesis in creative practice research recognises that autoethnography relies on the 'aesthetic crafting of critical reflexion upon the body as evidence'.⁸⁶ In other words,

⁸¹ Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," 386-387.

⁸² Amy Marie Cimini, "Music Theory, Feminism, the Body: Mediation's Plural Work," *Contemporary Music Review* 37, nos. 5-6 (2018): 680.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 671.

⁸⁴ Georgina Born and Andrew Barry, "Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory," *Contemporary Music Review*, 37, nos. 5-6 (2018): 448.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 448-449.

⁸⁶ Tami Spry, "Bodies of/as Evidence in Autoethnography," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 1, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 603.

'[j]ust as the work of a musician is corporeal, an autoethnographer also draws on and works from embodied knowledge and experiences. This focus frees the voice and body from the conventional and restrictive mind-body split [that would inhibit study of creative practice].'⁸⁷

Through creating an 'artful autoethnography', it is possible to create a thesis which pursues its own aesthetic ambitions and can interact with portfolio work in a more meaningful way. As Brydie-Leigh Bartleet notes, 'our goal is to write in such a way that our creative identity can be fulfilled through the autoethnographic process'.⁸⁸ The composer-scholar can move fluidly between musical and textual formats, and project their voice across both forms.

⁸⁷ Bartleet, "Artful and Embodied Methods," 452.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 456.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW: OPERATIC MATERIALITY

Before the curtain rises on our tracing of the opera world, let us turn to opera studies as a means to situate our research. I will give a brief account of the current state of opera studies, before considering what a practice-led, autoethnographic lens can offer to the field. For the composer-scholar, who is after all interested in the embodied, the subjective and the *material*, a dichotomy is immediately apparent: between what I will term ‘historical’ and ‘contemporary’ opera studies. The vast majority of opera studies is historical in nature, in that the operatic works studied are by creators long dead. That is not to suggest scholarly inertia: the operatic world is dominated by a core canon of historical works, so it follows that this is reflected in scholarship. In reality, opera scholarship of the last two decades has become ever more diverse and alive to the materiality of operatic production *and* performance. ‘Contemporary’ opera studies here refers to scholarship dealing with new works. As we shall see, it has gained much from approaches to historical work, while studies of contemporary operas increasingly invite dialogue with attitudes to historiography.

In Victoria Johnson’s survey of the impact of multidisciplinary ‘academic turns’ and their impact on opera studies, she defines ‘three major lines of inquiry’: the “critical” approach (involving ‘a search for present meanings, either social or personal, in operatic works’); the “systems of meaning” approach (concerned ‘with the historical meanings available to the creators and consumers of operatic works’); and the “material conditions” approach (involving ‘the reconstruction and analysis of the organisational, political, and professional structures underpinning opera production and consumption in specific historical contexts’).⁸⁹ Johnson’s three approaches run through what David J. Levin has called ‘the new opera studies’, where scholars - such as Roger Parker and Carolyn Abbate in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* - sought to ‘engage canonical works in novel ways.’⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Victoria Johnson, “Introduction: Opera and the Academic Turns,” in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-14.

⁹⁰ David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2-3.

Noting the influx of scholars from an array of disciplines into opera studies, Levin notes that

‘a growing number of publications on opera have approached the genre from a variety of unfamiliar perspectives (including poetics, philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, film theory, medical history, and gender studies, among others), discovering new instances of “the imperfect, the ambiguous, [and] the illogical,” and proposing new ways of conceptualizing those discoveries.’⁹¹

Yet Levin, writing in 2007, draws a distinction between these academic developments and the transformation of opera production since 1976. Opera houses (mainly in Europe) committed to a project of ‘rethinking central works of the repertoire combined with an interest in previously unexplored formal conditions and thematic relations’, creating productions which ‘unsettle our conception of these particular works and of the genre more generally [...]’.⁹² The new opera studies largely did not engage with this reconceptualisation as it unfolded through contemporaneous productions, mainly confining questions of performance to the historical. In this context, Levin proposed a paradigm shift: a theory for reading ‘opera’s performance text’ through new modes of analysis.⁹³ Drawing on Roland Barthes’s definition of text as ‘mobile, plural, and furtive, resistant to ready encapsulation and commodification’, Levin uses the term

“opera text” to designate opera’s agitated and multiple signifying systems - for instance, the score, the libretto, stage directions - prior to performance. On the other hand, opera in performance, its “performance text,” lends expression to this condition of agitation and multiplicity while at the same time partaking of it’.⁹⁴

Levin shows a particular analytical interest in stagings which are ‘polylogical’: productions that ‘lend expression to multiple, sometimes conflicting expressive registers’, and ‘render the tension between opera’s constituent elements [...]’.⁹⁵ This aligns with his embrace of the tension between text and music, not as a matter to be resolved, but as a core element of opera understood as a dialectical art form. Ultimately Levin’s own project in reading

⁹¹ Ibid., 4.

⁹² Ibid., 5-7.

⁹³ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 3-11.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 12-32.

opera texts and opera's performance texts is to 'animate the intersection of creative interpretation in the academy and onstage, adding vibrancy and substance to both.'⁹⁶ Fundamental to this is the development of the language of dramaturgical analysis in opera studies, requiring 'a more nuanced analytic vocabulary, including a more variegated conception of *mise-en-scène*, in order to account for the dramatic and conceptual achievements of a given production.'⁹⁷ In Levi's view,

'the *mise-en-scène* needs to engage the dramaturgy of the text, and criticism needs to illuminate that engagement. Why? Because the results, onstage and in criticism, might well be more complex and less predictable. And we might gain a clearer - a newly unsettled - view of a genre whose complexity and achievements in performance we have only just begun to map.'⁹⁸

Levin's rallying cry has been met with a proliferation of scholarship giving opera's performance text its due, helped in no small part by his time at the helm of *The Opera Quarterly*, the journal he reconceived to sit 'at the intersection of performance, theory, and history.'⁹⁹ The performance text has been approached in increasingly sophisticated ways, with analysis of *mise-en-scène* frequently influenced by a materialist approach, and used as a way to reevaluate approaches to historiography. An example of the former can be observed in Christopher Morris's 2019 article *Casting metal: Opera Studies after Humanism*, where he considers 'the materiality of actual operatic practice' through an examination of the 2007 Salzburg Festival production of *Benvenuto Cellini*.¹⁰⁰ Morris notes that the production's director and designer, Philipp Stölzl, creates opera productions that 'lavishly play on opera's own materiality and media identity by summoning and representing associated and contributing media.'¹⁰¹ In *Benvenuto Cellini* this comes to fruition in

'a chaotic *mise-en-scène* that takes visual cues from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* - futuristic cityscapes, robots/ cyborgs - but also channels the film's pastness as

⁹⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁹ "The Opera Quarterly: About the Journal," *The Opera Quarterly*, [n.d.], <https://academic.oup.com/oq/pages/About> (accessed May 5, 2022).

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Morris, "Casting Metal: Opera Studies after Humanism," *The Opera Quarterly* 35, nos. 1-2 (2019): 81.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

part of a wider retro-futurism in which historical features and aesthetics - vintage automobiles, art deco design - color the representation of a projected future.¹⁰²

Morris focuses on matters of agency: firstly in the representation of the character Ascanio as a cyborg, 'part-human, part-machine, her head covered in resistors and diodes on the back, her human face feminized.'¹⁰³ Through a reading of the staging of Ascanio's aria "Mais qu'ai-je donc", in which Ascanio appears decapitated, head singing beside her body, Morris probes 'the implications of this fragmented but singing body for our understanding of the role of things and of humans in opera.'¹⁰⁴ Drawing on Bonnie Gordon's 'cyborgian take on the castrato' as the meeting of body, culture, and technology (itself a working through of Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg that I reference in the third chapter), Morris analyses several aspects of blocking and use of props.¹⁰⁵ He suggests that the connected movement of head and body - both spinning simultaneously, body gesturing contemplatively to the head - produces the cyborg dynamic through 'ambiguity between independence and connection, wholeness and fragmentation', leading to questions of 'the representation of agency: Who or what speaks and acts?'¹⁰⁶ Ascanio's costume and make-up invoke complex gender implications in their relation to the trouser role, with feminized head but armour-clad, masculinized body. Morris connects Ascanio's gesture of throwing the metal cladding of their own right forearm into the furnace for casting the statue of Perseus to the reciprocal agency of craftsmen and molten metal, alluding to the characterisation of metals in organic terms found in the libretto. Reflecting on the LED level meter visibly registering sound that is mounted on Ascanio's stomach, Morris proposes that this is 'a form of remediation, one that registers sound precisely by remediating it as image.'¹⁰⁷ The meter 'registers the field of matter and energy that binds the supposedly separate body parts', and also breaches the fourth wall when the audience's applause is registered.¹⁰⁸ In a virtuoso move, Morris extends this breach to ask 'doesn't this reaching out across the fourth wall point to how matter/energy might penetrate

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 83-4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 88.

that fifth wall: the media wall that separates this auditorium from the audience for the video?’¹⁰⁹ His access to the production under discussion was through the medium of video rather than theatre attendance, a point he uses to emphasise that videos of opera stagings are ‘complex (re)mediations that inflect and color the work of spectator and researcher alike, and as such deserve attention in their own right.’¹¹⁰ Consideration of agency is expanded outward to include the materials and humans involved in the dissemination of video opera:

‘[...] to return to the field of matter/ energy that binds mic to its sound sources and cameras to its light sources, consider the transmitted light and sound that are registered by spectators seated in front of screens with headphones or in cinemas by speakers. Like the level meter, the spectators too are enfolded in a field that binds them to a supposedly remote and inaccessible space; and in the case of recorded video, a remote and inaccessible time. The point stressed by the scholarship of materialism is not the connection between spectators and performers but a broader inter-action and inter-connection between the forces and materials (including bodies) at play in this field and a reconsideration of the location of agency.’¹¹¹

Morris focuses his attention on the ‘idea of co-production and agentic capacity.’¹¹² Co-production here refers to the ‘mutually dependent formation of the human and the technological.’¹¹³ He asks

‘what about coproduction and collaboration with props, spaces, instruments, technologies of mediation and dissemination, or with bodies and voices understood in their material sense and not only as extensions of human agency?’¹¹⁴

To probe these questions, Morris brings the performer centre-stage: namely, Kate Aldrich, the mezzo-soprano playing Ascanio, who discusses her role and demonstrates the make-up process in a television documentary about the production. Aldrich reflects on how

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 86.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 88.

¹¹² Ibid., 89.

¹¹³ Ibid., 88.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 89.

getting into the cyborg costume “helps put you in the robot thing” and makes it “hard not to move like this”, a process of ‘applications to and extensions of the body, and learning to gesture with and through these applications.’¹¹⁵ Together with the application of make-up and its removal at the end of the night, this ‘engagement and disengagement with materials come to seem like a collaboration, a co-production’, where ‘the actor works with the materials’ and ‘the materials transform the actor [...]’.¹¹⁶

Morris seeks to counter the anthropocentric default position inherent in much performance theory with a more detailed look at the make-up process. He focuses on the tiny rhinestones applied to Aldrich’s skin as a teardrop pattern, pointing to the way they accrue symbolic value through the chorus of metalworker’s paeon to jewels. As ‘(fake) diamonds’, they are

‘brought to life when evening arrives - brought to life as participants in theatrical play [...]. [J]ust as the chorus of metalworkers imagines their awakening, so recent scholarship has reminded us of the repeated re-awakening of matter.’¹¹⁷

The artificiality of the rhinestones in real life and as cyborg-adornment connects the performative identity of Aldrich as Ascanio, and her identity as a singer. Morris notes how this ‘play of self and other’ is refracted by opera’s ‘deeply collaborative nature’: going beyond human collaboration to an ‘intimate engagement with materials’, he postulates the rhinestones performative journey in a way that decentres matters of agency from human to material.¹¹⁸

‘On stage, the rhinestone is illuminated and “awakens,” like the “glittering chorus” of props and lights arrayed on and above the stage. Then, in the wake of the performance, removal, darkness, and slumber, perhaps to come alive again at the next performance or find itself discarded and replaced by another.’¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 89-90.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 90.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 91.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

This decentring of human agency reflects Morris's adoption of Jane Bennett's concept of "distributive agency" (who in turn draws on Latour's conception of "actants"), ' a field that includes humans and non-humans, bodies and other matter', which could describe 'the richly complex and collaborative form of operatic production, present and past.'¹²⁰ Morris calls for a consideration of 'creative practice as a collaboration or networking of agents human and non-human, organic and inorganic.'¹²¹ He concludes with a reflection on the wider direction of the field:

'As opera studies continues to map "opera" as a discursive, ideational and affective field that reaches far beyond the opera house, far before and after the premiere, the particulars of opera begin to seem less particular and more embedded, more distributed, more interdependent. In this reading opera is instructive and exemplary in ways that have wider currency for the study of performance, the role of materiality in performance, and the limits of the human.'¹²²

Casting Metal is a prime example of how the "performative turn" and the "material turn" in opera studies often go hand in hand: a natural fit, since the performative body *is* material. In the 2021 article *Certain Loves for Opera*, Carolyn Abbate evocatively describes how 'nineteenth-century opera history is being rewritten nowadays as new material history according to the four elements: Water, Fire, Air, and Earth.'¹²³ Air comes to be the element most fundamentally entwined with the reconceptualisation of performers' embodied experience in history:

'[...] air in singers' lungs, an explosion in medical research into vocal anatomy, reveries given expression in medicalized ideas about breath and operatic voice. Breathing and singing and coughing, opera's pulmonology trifecta.'¹²⁴

As Abbate reminds us of singers' voices: 'you can't put those in a black box.'¹²⁵ Even before the materiality of voice came under such scrutiny, there was a rich tradition within

¹²⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹²¹ Ibid., 93.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Carolyn Abbate, "Certain Loves for Opera," *Representations* 154 (2021): 51.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 64.

opera studies of examining both the logistical and social framework of singers' professional lives, as well as their creative agency: John Rosselli's *Singers of Italian opera: the history of a profession* (1992); Hilary Poriss's *Changing the Score: arias, prima donnas, and the authority of performance* (2009) and *Pauline Viardot, Travelling Virtuosa* (2015).

The singing voice brings us directly to contemporary opera studies. Emma Gallon's chapter 'Hearing Voices in Adès's Operas' in the 2021 volume *Thomas Adès Studies* interrogates 'the play between voice as embodied sonority and more metaphorical conceptions of voice as carrier of meaning', as a way to 'access and understand traits in the relationship between surface and structure and the use of musical techniques for semantic ends [...]'.¹²⁶ Gallon foregrounds 'the vocal timbres, the mouths, throats and breath, and the noisy non-verbal vocalisations that emanate from the singing bodies in specific performances', in order to 'provide a long-overdue theoretically grounded hearing of the sonorous voices in Adès's music and of the performers that so capture our attention from the operatic stage'.¹²⁷ This project draws on 'the attempts to re-embody the voice as part of a 'material turn' in opera studies', most notably the work of Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin in their contributions to the 2019 volume *The Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality* (also an important reference for Morris and Abbate in their articles above).¹²⁸

In readings of key moments from *The Tempest*, Galloon contemplates the significance of Feldman's idea that

'some kinds of vocal failure [...] when emitted by a virtuoso, can be as necessary to the arsenal of the extraordinary singing voice as lyricism, pyrotechnics, or eloquence, and at least as apt to affect its auditors.'¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Emma Gallon, "Hearing Voices in Adès's Operas," in *Thomas Adès Studies*, eds. Edward Venn and Philip Stoecker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 213.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹²⁹ Martha Feldman, "Voice Gap Crack Break," in *The Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality*, eds. Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 188.

Comparing sopranos Cyndia Sieden's and Audrey Luna's performances of the aria 'Five Fathoms Deep' as Ariel in *The Tempest*, where the vocal writing reaches dizzying heights, Gallon argues that

'the humanity of the performer is never more apparent than when the voice is pushed to such extremes - in Sieden's and Luna's cases, in tackling the stratospheric part, and in the precarity of each attack and the demands on the vocal apparatus that produces it. Sieden makes use of actively voicing the consonants at the beginnings of words as a springboard up to this aria's higher pitches, and Luna's voice cracks on the penultimate note - an E6 - at the end of this punishing aria.'¹³⁰

The 'physicality of performance' is brought centre-stage.¹³¹ We learn how the bodily movements and costumes and make-up of the singers, and their positioning in relation to the set design, creates contrasting embodiments of Ariel: 'Luna's Ariel is more of an active participant in the scene, in contrast with the shifts between disembodied sonority and detached narration of Sieden's Ariel.'¹³² Gallon connects these contrasting performances to the matter of agency, and how it is conveyed through vocal technique and bodily acting:

'Vocally, there is greater richness to Luna's performance than to Sieden's, with more of the body in her voice; ethereality is less the aim here. There is slightly more attack on each syllable, and the more extensive, wider vibrato begins immediately after each attack. We hear more of the teeth and the lips in the formation of each word and see the mouth and throat movement producing the vibrato, particularly at the line '[t]hose are pearls that were his eyes' [...]. Luna's rather menacing facial expression, as compared with Sieden's expressive neutrality, suggests a sense of greater agency and intent on the part of Ariel [...]. The whole effect is rather sinister as a result of the visceral, more explicit embodiment of this creature's vocal exhortations and the self-conscious nature of this sung performance.'¹³³

In Gallon's reading, we are shown 'the integral role that the sonorous material voice plays in the discursive presentation of [...] operatic narratives', a theoretical mode where the performative realities of vocal technique are vital to the analysis of opera's performance text.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Gallon, "Hearing Voices in Adès's Operas," in *Thomas Adès Studies*, 220.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 221.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 232.

Perhaps the most comprehensive development of Levin's approach to operatic analysis has come from Yayoi Uno Everett. In *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Opera*, Everett outlines a multimodal discourse on opera. She begins by defining 'the concept of *intermediality* as a framework illustrating how different media elements depend on and refer to each other in co-articulating the structure of narrative.'¹³⁵ This is linked to a 'dynamic model of musical discourse for the analysis of contemporary operas', shown in figure 1.

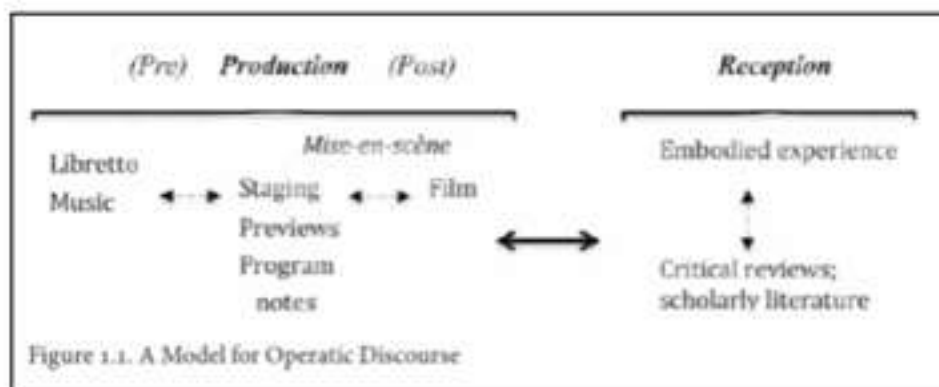


Figure 1. Yayoi Uno Everett's model for contemporary operatic discourse.

Using this model as the basis for a theoretical framework, Everett argues that '*multimodality* presents an important basis from which to examine operatic production in its totality.'¹³⁶ Multimodality is defined as 'the encoding of media elements from the perspective of production', while multimediality is the 'decoding [of] these elements from an interpreter's stand point.'¹³⁷ Recognising the complexity of viewing opera as a 'multimodal experience', Everett maps the media elements involved into 'four modalities' (invoking Lars Elleström):

- '1) *material* refers to the corporeal interface of the medium [...]; 2) *sensorial* to the physical and mental acts of perceiving the interface through sensory

¹³⁵ Yayoi Uno Everett, *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Opera: Osvaldo Golijov, Kaija Saariaho, John Adams, and Tan Dun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

faculties [...]; 3) *spatiotemporal* to the structuring of the sensorial perception of the interface with respect to space and time, and 4) *semiotic* to the creation of meaning in the medium by way of sign interpretation [...]. [T]he viewer's perceptual grouping of media elements according to one or more of the four modal categories [is] a *semiotic field*: as an area of signification, each field contributes to the composite sign system with its (integrative) meaning. Our embodied response to a particular operatic sense is typically shaped by the combination of material, sensory, and spatiotemporal modalities of experience.¹³⁸

Everett also invokes Linda and Michael Hutcheon's concept of '*multimodal narrative* to refer to the embodied action of viewing opera.'¹³⁹ Here 'performative *mise-en-scène*' adds to the 'accumulation of meaning(s)' of authors' texts through production and design, so that

'even if the story is already familiar to the audience, the way it is told *holistically* defines our multimodal narrative experience [...] The director's aesthetic intention, indeed, *constrains* our narrative experience in a definitive manner.'¹⁴⁰

Everett integrates the multimodal into a broader analytical strategy with a tripartite structure: she examines

'structuralist and semiotic approaches for explaining the grammar of myth and narrative; psychoanalytic approaches for exploring the role of the unconscious in relation to myth and music; and multimodal and intermediate approaches for analyzing operatic narrative.'¹⁴¹

This is ultimately to show

'how different components of an operatic production interact to tell a story with multiple references; while the elementary narrative structure can be extracted from the initial source materials (libretto and music), production components add other layers that complicate our multimodal narrative experience.'¹⁴²

The first two case studies of *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative* offer contrasting examples of how this strategy can be applied. Discussing Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar*,

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Everett covers the historical background to the opera, before building a semiotic analysis of David Henry Hwang's libretto, and an analysis of the opera's musical structure, referencing the function of the ballad, popular song forms, electroacoustic elements, and the styles of *flamenco* and *duende*. Separate analyses of the Santa Fe production (2006) and Staatstheater Darmstadt production (2008) follow, used as the basis for a semiotic comparison of the *mise-en-scène* in both productions, resulting in a multimodal narration reading. The next case study of Kaija Saariaho's *Adriana Mater* begins with a similar structure: background to the opera (based partly on an interview Everett conducted with the composer), followed by a musical analysis, highlighting semic units and expressive registers. Everett argues that 'semic units, through repetition and transformation, endow music with the capacity to comment on the characters' expressed (conscious) and unexpressed (unconscious) emotions [...].'¹⁴³ This is linked to instrumentation, pitch contour, rhythm, pitch profile (set-class), expressive indications and character/ expressive register. What follows is an analysis of the expression of trauma: musically, narratively (via the libretto), and through the *mise-en-scène* of Peter Sellars' production.

Everett has created an analytical style in which tensions between text, realisation and experience are not problematic, but in which points of tension become the site of new narrative readings as conveyed through multimediality, and new sites of embodied operatic experience. Invoking Levin, Everett contemplates 'a *polylogical* mode of storytelling: the juxtaposition of incongruities raises a broader set of questions for the audience to contemplate without offering interpretive closure.'¹⁴⁴ Such a rejection of closure sits well with our autoethnographical framework.

I argue that another paradigm shift could radically expand the purview of opera studies: namely, a practice-led, autoethnographic approach. Such an approach would privilege CMR status, driven by artist-scholars who already belong to the opera world, as well as a more personally reflexive mode of analysis. Through studying the creative collaboration - between humans and materials - that leads to operatic performances, and being attentive to the emotionality and embodiment of those processes, we might find ways to explore matters of agency in a way that reflects the actual experiences of opera personnel.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁴⁴ Yayoi Uno Everett, "John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer*: Straddling the Fence between Myth and Realism," in *Singing in Signs: New Semiotic Explorations of Opera*, eds. Gregory J. Decker and Matthew R. Shaffel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 339.

Practice-led research encourages a focus on process rather than product, and thus notions of materiality and performativity could be expanded to include the production (rehearsal) period, reflecting how embodied opera-making adapts radically throughout the production process. Autoethnographic approaches to opera may also enable researchers to reflexively situate themselves within the wider operatic community, and to disentangle research focus from artistic biases as a member of that community. This could open an avenue for opera studies to be less dominated by the reflex-approach to composer-focus and mainstage work, where the same canonical figures dominate research, regardless of academic lens applied. In particular, this would be useful for encouraging greater focus on grassroots opera companies or opera houses' non-mainstage projects, and the social implications of this more readily accessible work.

Within opera studies generally, there are few analyses of embodied creative process on the part of the composer and their collaborators. Due to a dominant historical focus, most discussions of creative process are mediated through archival documents and artefacts; *inference* is essential, often deriving from a mixture of score text-based analysis, autograph documents, communications, and testimony. An especially rich example of attempting to reconstruct historical creative process comes from Martin Knust's study of Wagner's creative process during his Zürich exile.¹⁴⁵ Of course, this reflects the great volume of manuscript documents and testimony relating to Wagner, a unique abundance in the history of opera. However, even in contemporary opera studies, a practice-led approach is largely absent. There are exceptions, most notably in the journal *Contemporary Music Review*. In *Devising an Opera: Myisi*, Litha Efthymiou outlines the application of devised theatre practices in a collaborative opera-making process. She tracks this process through four phases, from collaboration with academics and artists, the development of the score and libretto, to the development of the stage design, set and digital media, and 'finishing touches.'¹⁴⁶ Efthymiou creates a theoretical framework through which to view her own collaborative practice, drawing on the devised theatre practice writings of Alison Oddey, Jane Milling and Deirdre Heddon. The result of this is the realisation of four 'distinctive features' of the generated opera, leading Efthymiou to the conclusion that '[a]s a result of generating this work through an iterative, multidisciplinary

¹⁴⁵ See: Martin Knust, "Music, Drama, Sprechgesang," *19th-Century Music* 38, no. 3 (2015).

¹⁴⁶ Litha Efthymiou, "Devising an opera: *Myisi*," *Contemporary Music Review* 35, no. 6 (2016): 601.

process, *Myisi's* set, stage-design, film, and choreography hold the same weight as the libretto and score.¹⁴⁷

In *Composing Clémence in L'amour de loin*, Joy H. Calico focuses on the creative dialogue between Kaija Saariaho and soprano Dawn Upshaw, as the titular role was rewritten expressly for her voice. Calico describes the composition process firstly through the prism of primary documents (Saariaho's sketches, notes and drafts), before relating the process of recomposing Upshaw's role with reference to email correspondence (including between Saariaho and Calico), comparison of the two versions of Clémence, and the role of *Fach* (vocal category). The latter concept leads Calico to ponder the divergent characterisations of the role as they exist in coloratura and lyric soprano forms. This is further extrapolated to relate to 'the particularities of each individual voice' influencing singers' understanding and performance of the role, and shaping 'audience perception of the character.'¹⁴⁸ Calico reveals how contemporary composer-singer collaboration 'in which the artists act as co-creators' connects seamlessly with the collaborative history of opera, citing the practices of *puntature* (small melodic adjustments to better suit an individual voice), the rewriting of castrato parts for trouser role mezzo-sopranos, and 'aria insertion and substitution.'¹⁴⁹ As with Morris's article, we can see how situating the embodied practice of artists at the heart of opera scholarship can not only connect historical texts and practices to contemporary performance texts, but also retroactively connect contemporary collaborative practice to the historical work of opera.

We have already observed the performer's voice used as the basis for explorations of agency and materiality, as well as its role as the sonic and material actor motivating compositional work. Yet imagine how much richer work in this area could be if we expanded the materiality of the voice by more overtly practice-led means: its changeability during the role-learning and production process, the impact this can have on compositional work and also on blocking/ bodily movement on stage, the distance between the initial embodying process of a role and its final performative embodiment (influenced by personal artistic choices, conversations with fellow cast members, guidance from coaches and the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 609.

¹⁴⁸ Joy H. Calico, "Composing Clémence in *L'amour de loin*," *Contemporary Music Review* 38, nos. 3-4 (2019): 414.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 408-409.

Music Director, as well as the collaboration on interpretation between singer and Director). These factors are far from inconsequential for research purposes: after all, this changeable vocality is at the heart of the work singers and their collaborators do before opening night. Such a view of vocality must also embrace illness (the ever-present threat of a cold or virus thwarting a performance run), and injury (including the development of nodes). Working in opera myself as a répétiteur and composer, there are issues that recur on every production that I have seldom seen mentioned in opera studies: conversations about vocal health on a frequent if not daily basis, from off-hand comments about needing to “mark” (singing in a covered rather than full voice to preserve vocal stamina), to anxiety over flu season (more pronounced since the pandemic), to discussions about blocking body position during high and vocally strenuous passages, and contemporary vocal writing that may damage vocal health. We do not see any of this in the final production, but if we want to understand performance texts as extending back to the beginning of the creative, collaborative work of opera in a production run, then we must embrace all of these factors. Of course, in historical opera studies, where we do not have direct access to the artists themselves, beyond archival documents, an understanding of how operatic practice functions today could inform approaches to embodied performance and vocality as material history.

Within music autoethnography, there are already examples of how the musician’s body is in a state of flux, and how this can profoundly alter the researcher-musician’s bodily knowledge. In Chris McRae’s contribution to the volume *Music Autoethnographies: Making Autoethnography Sing/ Making Music Personal*, he explores the experience of learning the bass guitar as a trumpeter:

‘If music is an embodied experience, and performance can imply different cultural meanings, then what do I know from my embodied experience of playing the bass guitar? The changes are slowly happening. Physically the changes are in my fingertips [calluses]. The changes are in my posture, both on and off the stage. Hearing and listening for bass line changes, the way I talk, the way I walk, and the way I argue. This embodied knowledge is about the feelings and grooves, about the structures and rhythms, about constraint and restraint.’¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Chris McRae, “Becoming a Bass Player: Embodiment in Music Performance,” in *Music Autoethnographies: Making Autoethnography Sing/ Making Music Personal*, eds. Brydie-Lee Bartleet and Carolyn Ellis (Bowen Hills: Australian Academic Press, 2010), 143-4.

As McRae notes, this knowledge reveals how the ‘body is always being altered and shaped by the various technologies’ he encounters.¹⁵¹ Immediately we are reminded of the way Kate Aldrich was aided in the embodying of the cyborg Ascanio by her restrictive costume. We can imagine Morris extending this discussion to ask: how was Aldrich’s vocality altered by her meeting with stage technologies via collaborative process? How did the working-out of cyborg-like movement in rehearsals affect the manner of her vocal interpretation? This would involve an expanded data field: it would be necessary to interview Aldrich, or other artists involved in the same production. Might we not dare to be more ambitious in the resources we employ for the sake of a greater understanding of the embodied work of opera?

Autoethnographers know the transformative power of practice-led research. In *The Sound of My Voice: Self-Revelation Through Autoethnography*, Louise Godwin juxtaposes her own text-based and musical works - her separate voices as scholar and musician - to explore her ‘standpoint as researcher - including [her] beliefs, biases and assumptions’ - and her own ‘phenomenology of practice.’¹⁵² This dialogic conversation, invoking theories of voice in its ‘continuous construction of self’, ultimately leads Godwin to a revelation of identity:

‘Having promoted in this essay the binary notion of musician voice versus researcher voice, I now confess it as a constructed fault-line that exists only in my imagination. My voice as musician or researcher, whether music, text or speech, is *my sound*. The sound is voice and identity as a socially - and individually-mediated process. And it is the place within my identity project where my intersecting images of self - self/other - meet in *myself*.’¹⁵³

I imagine the wealth of new perspectives if such a reflexive autoethnographic mode were to be applied to opera scholarship: researchers could reposition themselves explicitly as members of the operatic communities in which their performance texts unfold. In this way, the limited and specific perspective of the researcher could be exposed and reflected upon: we might learn what it is that draws the writer to a particular composer, to a certain

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 144.

¹⁵² Louise Godwin, “The Sound of My Voice: Self-Revelation Through Autoethnography,” *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 18, no. 2 (2019): 59.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 69.

genre, to certain modes of performance. The recontextualising of research on historical works within the researcher's own operatic engagement would more fully situate this work as being thoroughly contemporary: performance texts necessarily include the researcher as participant, either as audience or, in the case of artist-researchers, collaborator. In this way, the material turn in opera studies might extend its materiality to the body of the researcher.

We see how an autoethnographic reflection on researcher as audience-participant could play out in Melanie Gudesblatt's review-essay *A "Fantasia" Goes Digital: Heartbeat Opera's Lady M Virtual Soirée* for *The Opera Quarterly*. Gudesblatt explores how, through a radically reworked collage-like opera text of Verdi's *Macbeth* creating a digital performance text, Heartbeat Opera 'used the medium [of Zoom] to lay a foundation for new kinds of operatic performance and experience.'¹⁵⁴ As a participant in this experience, Gudesblatt notes:

'The event in which I participated stretched and tore habits of sensation and thought I had developed through years of watching performances (both in person and on screen), listening to recordings, and reading scores.'¹⁵⁵

Gudesblatt relates her embodied experience of *Lady M* to her knowledge and experience of Verdi's opera, making clear for the reader how this new performance text defied her expectations and forced new ways of interacting with the work. She reveals how '[o]ver the course of the soireé, we (both company members and ticket holders) developed social practices that heightened my sense of connection with the performers and performances as well as other attendees.'¹⁵⁶ Soireé attendees experimented with nonverbal communication, such as using reaction emojis, Gudesblatt noting how this relates to the ubiquity of Zoom during the COVID-19 era, and how she was '[s]low to switch into a recreational mindset [...]'.¹⁵⁷ As Gudesblatt acknowledges, the nature of the event meaning she was unable to ground observations in interpretive practices with which readers might be familiar prompted her to 'add scaffolding for both synoptic description

¹⁵⁴ Melanie Gudesblatt, "A "Fantasia" Goes Digital: Heartbeat Opera's *Lady M* Virtual Soirée," *The Opera Quarterly* 36, nos. 1-2 (2020): 60.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

and critical assessment.¹⁵⁸ This scaffolding (such qualification showing us we are firmly *not* in autoethnographic territory) takes on a reflexive function:

‘These residues of my interpretive labour will illuminate points of friction between my own habits of listening and interpretation, on the one hand, and the modes of consumption that Heartbeat’s soireé activates, on the other.’¹⁵⁹

I extend Gudesblatt’s final hope to embrace my own hope for the future of opera studies taking a more practice-led approach: ‘surely the opera world can [...] learn from and draw on the techniques of creation, mediation, and consumption we have been forced to explore [by the pandemic].’¹⁶⁰ The opera world remains unsettled, so what better time to reexamine the position of the researcher in this strange new world.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 61.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 66.

Chapter 2: Material World

2.1 Overture

Setting: Composer's Studio



Figure 2. The composition 'studio' in my flat in Glasgow.

Our autoethnographical opera opens in the composer's studio. *My* studio to be precise. It is both the place where I am writing this opening - the researcher's work space - and the

first ‘field’ of the autoethnographer’s fieldwork. It is the place where different worlds intersect: the interior, emotional world; the embodied, performative acts of composing and writing; a portal into the world of online meetings and interviews. Such an intersecting space resonates with Jing Wang’s insight that ‘[autoethnography] works on the fragile and ephemeral verge between inside and outside.’¹⁶¹ I will be building a bridge between these existential territories in this autoethnographical opera, just as I seek to build a bridge between performers and audience in my composition work. The potential for ‘*writing bridges*’ echoes throughout the literature on autoethnography.¹⁶² These bridges between author-researcher and reader, present and memory, different lived experiences: these can be built through using the body as a guide to help ‘find language, meaning, and evocation of experience.’¹⁶³ The corporeal experience of the opera composer will reverberate throughout this textual opera, with bridges extending to other artists, the living and the dead. Like all operas, there will be a journey with transformations. As Lesa Lockford writes,

‘Bridges convey us from where we are to where we want to be. They are both a tool and a part of the journey. And like a bridge, ethnography and its sister autoethnography have taken me to places I hoped to go, to places that surprised me once I got there, to places I never dreamed I’d be.’¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Jing Wang, "Mapping an Existential Territory: An Autoethnography of a Sound Researcher," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 7, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 488.

¹⁶² Christopher N. Poulos, "Introduction: Writing Autoethnographic Bridges," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 7, No. 3, Special Issue: The Bridge Building Power of Autoethnography (Fall 2014): 276.

¹⁶³ Lesa Lockford, "Trusting the Bridging Power of Autoethnography," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 7, no. 3, Special Issue: The Bridge Building Power of Autoethnography (Fall 2014): 287.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

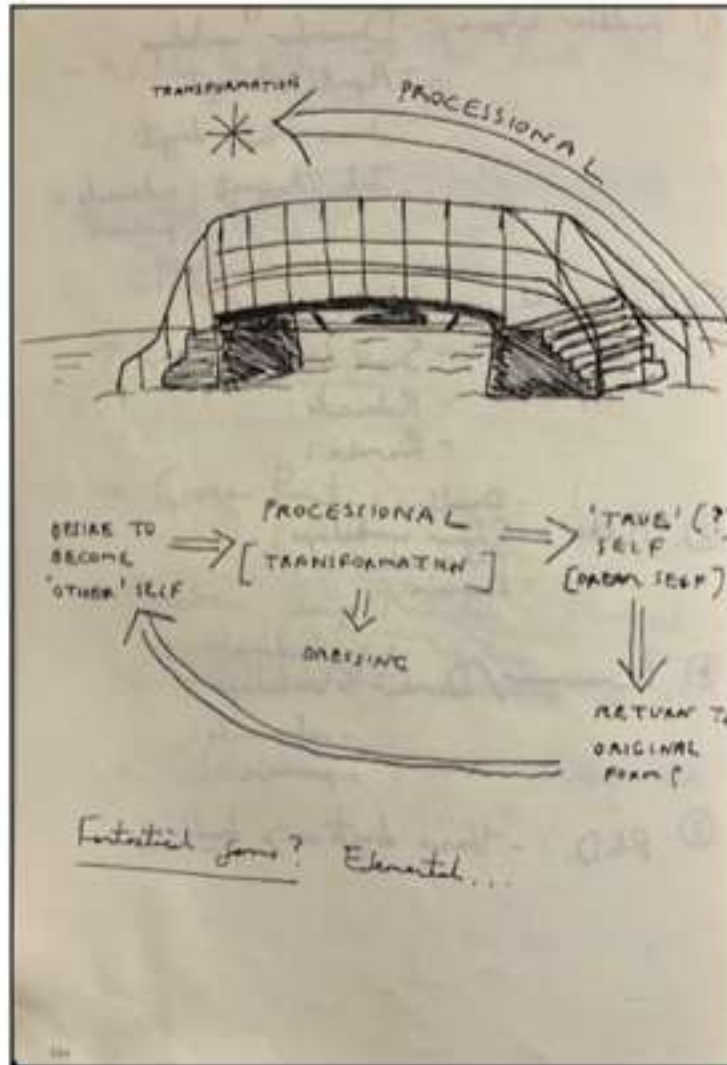


Figure 3. A sketch of the 'Bridge to Nowhere' in Dunbar from my composition sketchbook. This was the initial inspiration for *Catriona and the Dragon*.

This journey requires a critical view which bridges detachment and empathy, a 'familiar-to-strange process' which 'requires that we go beyond decoding and recognition towards heightened perception.'¹⁶⁵ I will be moving between the emotional and embodied, and the analytical, Latourian connection of traces spanning across the creation of new operatic work. On this, Liora Bresler's words ring out as a challenge to be met:

'Rather than an 'either-or' detachment or connection, I argue that the challenge of qualitative research is trying to understand the other empathically, while

¹⁶⁵ Liora Bresler, "Research education shaped by musical sensibilities," *British Journal of Music Education* 26, no. 1 (2009): 12.

maintaining detachment from habitual forms of seeing and the necessary distance of disciplined scholarship.¹⁶⁶

Rather than focusing on the theoretical and technical aspects of creating a new opera, I will be making the creation process *strange* to myself - and by extension to you, the reader. This needs a way of seeing which deconstructs - even disregards - the idea of creative process as *content driven*. Instead, the creative process must be seen as something much more fluid in temporal and material terms, and not something which can be easily examined as a goal-oriented, fixed process. The protentions and retentions at play in the creation of even a single opera are manifold. As Latour writes,

‘we have no access to the divine view, the view from nowhere. We go from our bounded view to a sliding view that will carry us from a labyrinth of transformations to the general frame [...] - and that will never be more than a few square centimetres big. The frame has the same dimension, in a sense, as the object it frames. The big is no bigger than the small [...].’¹⁶⁷

On this journey, the final performance of an opera is brought to the same level as the act of scribbling notes across manuscript paper, or a conversation between the composer and their colleagues or intimate others. Material objects - a specific brand of pen, mugs of coffee - assume intrinsic importance. These objects are ‘far more than an indifferent frame around our subjective passions.’¹⁶⁸ In talking of the non-human actors thronging Paris, Latour provides an eloquent summary of the relationship between the human and non-human, very much suited to the composer-scholar’s needs:

‘Their Lilliputian action partly composes the circulating self, a sort of external brain serving as a counterpart of the internal one [...].’¹⁶⁹

What, you might wonder, is the purpose of this journey, this textual bridge? Of course, the personal motivation goes beyond a desire to experiment with hybrid methodologies. By invoking autoethnography, I am signposting my desire to connect personal experience - *lived* experience - with the experience of others. Counterintuitively, by scrutinising my own

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁷ Bruno Latour and Emilie Hermant, “Paris: Invisible City,” trans. Liz Carey-Libbrecht, *Bruno Latour*, 2006, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/index.html> (accessed 28 September, 2020), 9.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

subjective experience, I wish to melt down the totemic image of ‘the composer’ and shine light on the way creative process interacts, and is in many ways *created by* a myriad of lived experiences and actors, both human and non-human. This is the reason for melding the emotionality of autoethnography - with its concern for temporality through memory recall and analysis - and the flat ontology of ANT. As Born and Barry note,

‘[w]hen we turn to ANT and Latour, neither time nor history feature as preoccupations. The idea of the network, after all, is a spatial rather than a temporal one.’¹⁷⁰

Thus autoethnography offers an avenue for the temporal to become a driving concern within an ANT-influenced narrative, with memory and intersubjective relationalities guiding inquiry. It ‘highlights the existential and the ethical, bridges the chasm between objective empirical evidence and intersubjective human meaning.’¹⁷¹ As Poulos notes, what might be regarded as “too therapeutic” for scholarly inquiry instead hinges on the Greek *therapeutikós*, meaning ‘to attend to’ or to ‘pay attention.’¹⁷² Writing through memory - whether painful or joyful, offers ‘a path that carries me *through memory to transcendence*.’¹⁷³ We may lack access to the ‘divine view’, but transcending the myopia of an individual creative process to become part of a network of embodied, emotional, temporal and aesthetic experience can tell us something new about the way opera is created. The narrative journey itself will reveal exactly what that is.

Like Latour in his Parisian ‘sociological opera’, my thesis will put narrative text and graphic documents into tension.¹⁷⁴ There will be a procession of photographs relating to the operas under discussion, and textual documents: mystery accounts, interview excerpts, etc. These documents allow different routes to be traced, through creative processes, lived experience, interpersonal relationships and memory. This exploration follows the nebulous traces that accumulate to form the creation of an opera, an aesthetic idea, object and *experience* which reaches into different subjectivities and is temporally mediated by a complex web of memories. If this ANT-inspired autoethnographical journey

¹⁷⁰ Born and Barry, “Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory,” 472.

¹⁷¹ Herrmann, “Ghosts, Vampires, Zombies, and Us,” 332.

¹⁷² Poulos, “Writing Through the Memories,” 325.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Latour and Hermant, “Paris: Invisible City,” 1-5.

appears to point to the obvious at times, the most commonplace objects and observations, I would defer to Latour's guiding ethos:

'Why should social theory estrange us for a second from the city in which we both live [...]? [...] We shouldn't be offended by concepts if they reveal certain features of the most ordinary life.'¹⁷⁵

I will follow a journey to becoming 'the person who, in a continuous flow of traces, picks out an image that will teach them both who they are, in particular, and the global frame in which they should be situated.'¹⁷⁶ Let us pick images from our 'continuous flow of traces', creating a meta-narrative around our textual and photographic autoethnographical narrative. I set forth as both participant and observer in this opera, my gaze shifting between the ethnographical and the analytical.

2.2 Scene 1a: Different Digital Keyboards

Mystory 1: 12/ 08/ 2020

I have made a coffee and opened the Velux skylight above my Yamaha Clavinova. Across the other side of the room, the TV is on, volume very low. *Arrested Development* whispers away. My mind is full of anxieties today, so anything to fill the silence is not just welcome but necessary to function creatively. Occasional hammering and drilling from the property development further up the lane does an excellent job of providing a free white noise machine.

Why is my shoulder still sore? I've been doing all the stretches from my physio... At least the tendonitis that stabs through my left wrist has eased to a dull numbness. Note to self: don't play too forcefully or for too long.

I move from my work table to the piano, positioning my coffee behind me. The dictum from music school days to keep all liquids away from pianos has become an ingrained caution. I look at the libretto for *Catriona and the Dragon* to the left of my piano stand, and my

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 11.

manuscript sketches on the right. First I glance over the anthem I wrote a couple days before.

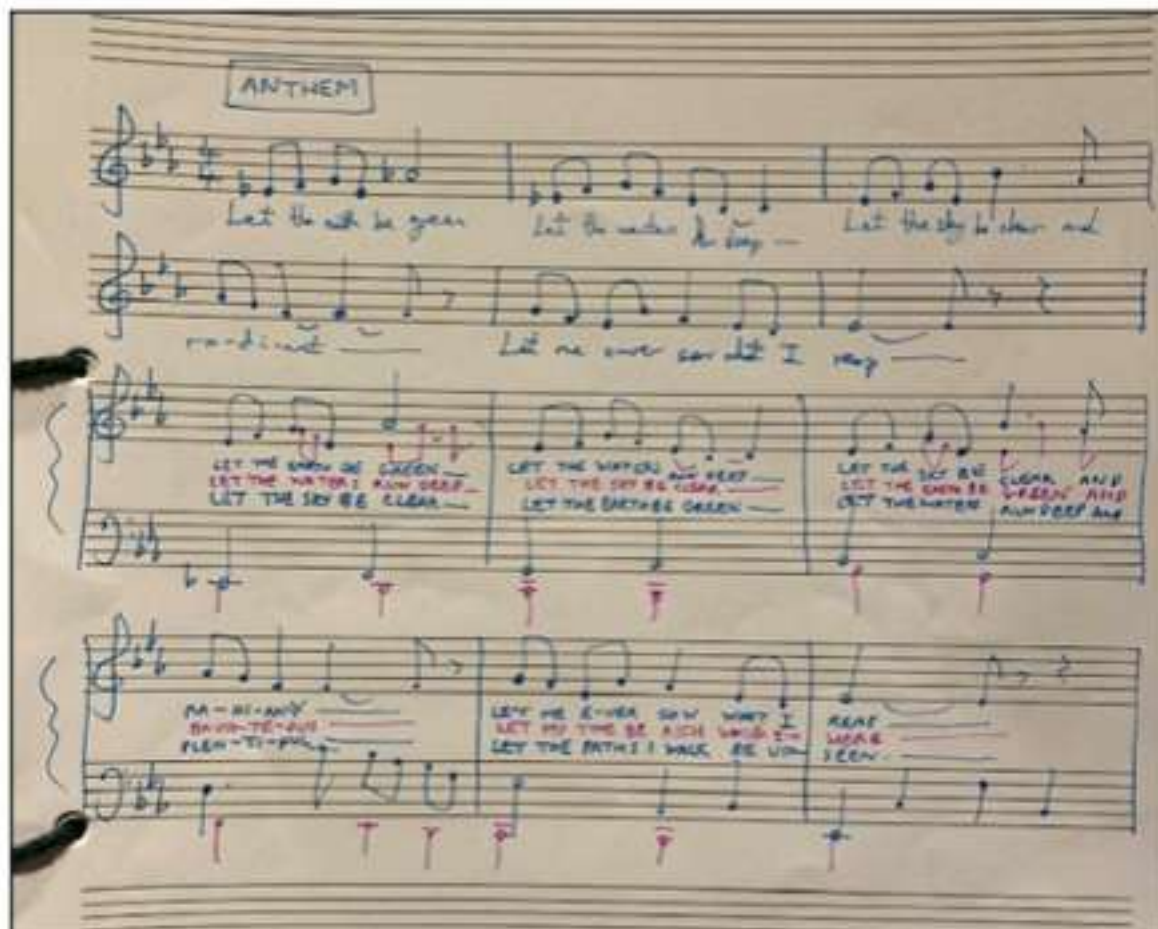


Figure 4. Manuscript sketch for the anthem with audience participation in *Catriona and the Dragon*.

Maybe I can work this theme through the opera?

Laura reacted positively when I emailed her a recording of the anthem yesterday, so I can proceed without caution in finding ways to weave it through the orchestral fabric.¹⁷⁷ My boyfriend Dave sensed some sadness in it. I wonder if this is a sign of my general state of mind working its way into the music. More likely it is the poignant beauty of the words drawing out a matching sense of poignancy in the melodic arches it is traced through. Two lines hit me every time:

¹⁷⁷ Here I refer to Laura Attridge, the librettist and director for *Catriona and the Dragon*.

Let my time be rich while I'm here.

Let the paths I walk be unseen.

I turn to the fanfare music I began sketching for the chorus. I play through it, and improvise my way forward through the following stanzas. As soon as I finish playing, I grab the manuscript pad from the stand, balance it on my knee and hurriedly notate five bars: *Hail, hail, hail to our Queen, the most royal Catriona, we sing hail to you!* I've used duplets written across dotted crotchet beats, and changed time signature from 6/8 to 9/8 and back.

Will this be too challenging for the combined children's choirs and adult community chorus? I can't think of another way to notate it... I'll write it down for now and check with the project coordinators, Sue and Moira.¹⁷⁸

The pad is back on the stand and I'm improvising again, an orchestral break followed by the next stanza: *She is bold, she is strong and she knows right from wrong, so we pray with our song that her reign may be long!* Now my right hand is playing the chorus line again, dictating to the pen in my left hand which scurries across the page. Mid-phrase I pause.

What was it Moira said about the highest end of the comfortable singing range for the Dunbar Voices children? I'm sure it was G. This last phrase returns to F twice, with text on these notes... Will it be intelligible?

I mouth the words *that her reign may be long*, pausing to imagine what vowel modification might occur on *reign* and *long*. I notate the rest of the phrase, deciding that the words will likely be clear. Pen down, hands back on the keys, improvising another short orchestral break and the lead into the next phrase. I partially notate this, then suddenly stand up and begin pacing around my living room, notating more with the pad resting against my right palm and forearm. Occasionally I stop to feel my right shoulder, checking the pain isn't getting any worse. I can be obsessive with these physical ticks while I'm working. Somehow the creative process makes my entire body more agitated and restless.

¹⁷⁸ Sue Baxendale is the project coordinator, and Moira Morrison is the choral director for *Catriona and the Dragon*.

I sit back down at the piano and the process repeats in continual cycles: improvisation, notation - notation leaning against the piano stand, notation propped against the knee, notation while standing. I seem to be moving around more the further I get into the fanfare chorus. The continual change of heart in where to modulate adds a feeling of pressure, like time is running out to make the right choice.

Does this rondo form return to D major every time, or does it gradually move towards C major for the last stanza? No, everything but a return to D sounds forced, like gears grinding. What will people think of a chorus that returns to the same key so resolutely? The conductor...Sue... the critics...

Somehow my thought patterns have looped around to thinking about *The Angel Esmeralda* for a second. Almost simultaneously my thoughts pivot between thinking about the chorus in that opera and the image of judgmental music critics. I feel a jolt of *something* as I picture critics in the audience at *Catriona and the Dragon*... a small electrical spark in my brain that gives the briefest flash of pain and anxiety. This is almost freeing as I remind myself:

This is about making the best project experience for everyone involved. Focus on writing what will allow the performers to really enjoy the opera. The only critics that matter now are the project co-ordinators and the musicians.

I refocus my thoughts on reaching the end of the fanfare chorus. A few last ditch attempts at improvising unexpected key changes fall flat in their clunkiness. Instead, I repeat the music of the opening stanza wholesale, except for two bars - *and we've seen quite a few* - which I transpose up a semitone to B major to brighten the overall effect. Queen Catriona is arriving at her throne after all.

Didn't Moira say that one of the trickiest things for young singers was the same music repeated but with small differences? It might work if I support the key change strongly in the orchestra. I'll leave it for now, but must check in with Moira soon...

The fanfare chorus is now sketched out, albeit with only one vocal line and minimal orchestral detail. I play through the chorus once, and then my eyes flick to the stage direction following the chorus' completion:

There is an expectant silence, and Catriona takes a breath as if to speak, then sits instead [...]

I wonder if there should be actual silence, or if this should be underpinned by something subtle, like a sliding timpani roll and lower strings. A warning flashes into my head, of actual silence in opera causing the energy to fall flat. I conjure up the sound of timpani and improvise a small gesture. Not convinced, I then begin to wonder if I should actually notate Catriona taking a breath. Laura might need the freedom to decide where this occurs. I decide to notate it but only as an option to be freely ignored. Curiously, the dramatic breath intakes in *BambinO* flash up inside my mind like technicolour mementos: I see the soprano Charlotte (Uccellina) in her fabulous bird costume, reacting with surprise to a golden egg.¹⁷⁹

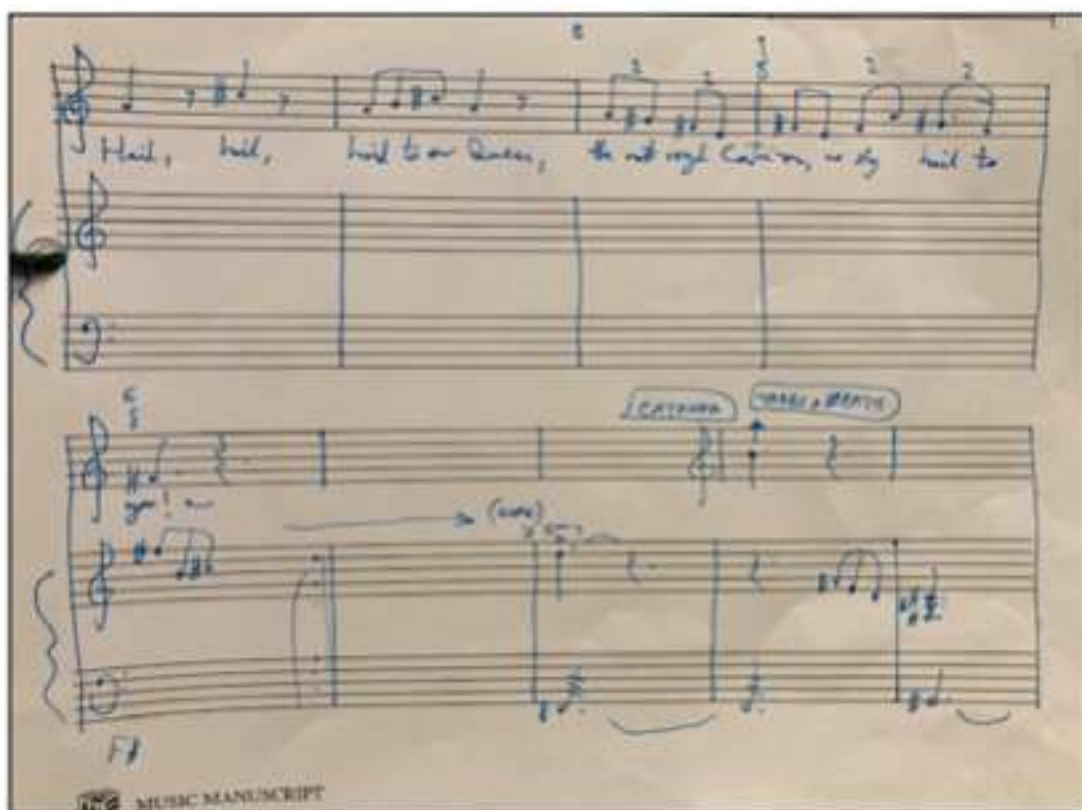


Figure 5. Manuscript sketch for *Catriona and the Dragon*: Catriona takes a breath as if to speak.

¹⁷⁹ *BambinO*, an opera intended for an audience of babies and their carers, was commissioned by Scottish Opera, the Manchester International Festival, and *Improbable*, co-devised and directed by Phelim McDermott, and premiered at the 2017 Manchester International Festival.

Déjà vu subsided, I get up and decide its time for another coffee. I am pleased at the lack of pain in my left wrist, but my right shoulder continues to reel in my thoughts. At least playing doesn't aggravate it. Waiting for the kettle to boil, I realise now would be an ideal time to write this mystery text...

Figure 6. Uccellina's dramatic breath intake in *BambiO* in my original rehearsal score.



Figure 7. Soprano Charlotte Hoather as Uccellina in a performance of *BambiO*.

2.3 Bodily/ Embodied Composition

This mystery account reveals how physically dynamic a working composition session can be. Beyond the physical processes of piano playing and writing, I frequently change position while I write; my mind is occasionally taken over by anxieties over physical pain. Here is composition and creative process as bodily process. So let us begin our tracing of the OCN with the opera composer's body. Thinking of the wider musicological discussion of compositional processes, it seems that the observation Suzanne Cusick made in 1994 still largely rings true:

'Music, an art which self-evidently does not exist until bodies make it and/ or receive it, is thought about as if it were a *mind-mind* game. Thus, when we think analytically about music, what we ordinarily do is describe practices of the mind (the composer's choices) for the sake of informing the practices of other minds (who will assign meaning to the resulting sounds). [...] We end up ignoring the fact that these practices of the mind are nonpractices without the bodily practices they call for [...].'¹⁸⁰

Marcel Cobussen describes the analytical recognition of these bodily practices as 'embodied music theory.'¹⁸¹ Reaching back to our introduction, we recall Cobussen's placement of the performer themselves as 'a site of knowledge', produced through the interaction of mind and body, without any hierarchical preference or privileging of abstract analysis.¹⁸² This knowledge, Cobussen suggests, is

'a corporeal and, to a certain extent, prereflective (sic) knowledge. [...] [M]usic is always incorporated. There is no music without a body that moves, plays, sings, and hears. The 'embodied music theory' opens the possibility to acknowledge music's tactility as well as the added value of [Practice-Based Research].'¹⁸³

The mystery narrative shows this tactility through the composer's body as mediator of creative process through physical or bodily processes. Certain conditions are preset before creative work begins: caffeine supply, airflow through opening a skylight, television

¹⁸⁰ Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 16.

¹⁸¹ Cobussen, "The Trojan Horse," 28.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 28.

playing at low volume to help focus the anxious mind on creative matters. Physical processes are constantly interweaved: improvisation at the piano, notation on manuscript paper (as well as changing writing position), reading libretto text, and singing. There is no divide between intellectual conceptualisation of the music and piano or singing performance. Both micro and macro-musical structures must be conceptualised mentally but also enacted and often directly shaped by bodily performative act. For example, my plans to end the fanfare chorus with a series of ‘unexpected key changes’ were proven ineffective and inelegant only through improvising different outcomes at the piano. This resulted in a slightly modified repetition of the chorus’ opening stanza to achieve closure, which was not initially part of the schema held in my mind.

We also see the composer as mediator of composition process and logistical (or *musico-logistical*) concerns. Writing chorus music that changes time signature prompts concern over whether the children’s and adult voice choirs will find such a musical device too challenging. Further improvisation is interrupted by trying to remember the optimal singing range for the Dunbar Voices choir. These logistical concerns are already taken into account every time I begin a composition session, but they are actively restated while working, either through what seems like involuntary prompting from the musical material itself, or consciously trying to recall a pre-stated musico-logistical framework. This framework is always set out by either a commissioning body or a music professional associated with the project (in this case the project’s choir director Moira Morrison). Here also is the composer as mediator of specialised knowledge outwith their own expertise, and compositional act. Already we have articulated three levels of mediation enacted through the composer. Within the context of writing commissioned opera at least, there is no creative process ‘itself’, some unmediated mind-game: the creative act is irreducible from logistical preconditions, physical (bodily) processes and sites of specialised knowledge that are rethought both involuntarily and actively. The composer’s body is destabilised within the OCN to become one of a series of actors we are tracing. We have not yet traced our view outwith the composer’s studio, but already we see the dissolution of ‘the boundaries between the material and the discursive body.’¹⁸⁴ Bodily process and compositional discourse become inseparable.

Amy Marie Cimini describes exactly the epistemology I am exploring:

¹⁸⁴ Ken Gale et al., *How writing touches: An intimate scholarly collaboration* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 4.

'the body can be put into discourse to question the conditions under which its different materializations become legible and audible (or not). Once liberated from mind's bullying authority, for example, an anti-Cartesian body no longer coincides with the Cartesian body on whose behalf it can then be asked to work. Conjunctural and prepositional grammars differently specify what aspects of the body are at stake in various registers of analysis. Conjunctions can scramble common-wisdom hierarchies by insisting on the equal rank of the two terms ('body and'); prepositions can indicate new functions or characters ('body as'). These grammars register the body's implication in new epistemic coordinates, critical registers, social relations and justice projects.'¹⁸⁵

The composer's body as the site of creative *and* reproductive work: cycles of repetition, of musical material repeated and refined for transcription, or simply repeated once notated; the repetition of musico-logistical frameworks, both in the mind and as enacted through their realisation in musical (material) terms.

Mashino and Seye suggest how reproductive work is enmeshed within musicians' - and by extension, composers' - corporeality:

'a musician's body is a trained body, just like a dancer's body, created through the repetition of certain movements that correspond with certain sounds. Through practice, the auditory image and the corresponding body motion become increasingly tightly coupled in the experiences of musicians, as has been demonstrated by empirical studies on cognition [...]. Jonathan De Souza [...] points out that after Beethoven lost his hearing, he would have perceived and composed music in terms of the "kinesthetic analogues" [...] coupling body movements and sonic components, which were deeply inscribed in his body and mind through long-term experience as a musician. Such coupling can be acquired by anyone who accumulatively practices and experiences the sound-movement correlations.'¹⁸⁶

This raises questions about the interrelationship between my piano training - perhaps more pertinently my répétiteur training - and composition process. One performative aspect not captured in 'Mystory 1' is the extent to which répétiteur playing techniques are manifest in my improvisation and replaying of notated passages while composing. I learned these techniques while at the Guildhall Opera School and through working as a professional répétiteur, with the long hours of repetitive practice that entails. Different

¹⁸⁵ Cimini, "Music Theory, Feminism, the Body," 671.

¹⁸⁶ Ako Mashino and Elina Seye, "The Corporeality of Sound and Movement in Performance," *The World of Music* 9, no. 1 (2020): 27.

orchestral groups require different uses of touch and pedal application; much emphasis is put on representing different instrumental timbres and articulations simultaneously, and with balancing the foreground and background levels of an orchestral texture. Careful attention to shaping bass-line phrasing especially is seen as integral to creating an orchestral sound which supports the singers. Physically this can create more dynamic bodily movements while playing, in an attempt to capture such a rich tapestry of sounds through the limitations of the pianist's body: more florid, hectic use of the pedals, exaggerated articulation with finger action plucking, hammering or attempting to 'glide' between keys; corresponding exaggerated arm movements led by the hand to mentally connect to the sort of large-scale phrasing often articulated in orchestral music, but perhaps less frequently in piano music. Répétiteur training also stresses the ability to sing while playing piano, and being able to read and play from a full orchestral score (with enhanced textural and timbral perception the goal, rather than fully fluent score reading).

These performative principles effect the way I conceptualise operatic music during composition. I automatically try to achieve an orchestral sound within the orchestral-logistical framework specified for the project. Imagining how a flute or trumpet might articulate a phrase often defines the way it is ultimately composed-out and notated, with these imagined articulations expressed through my improvisation. The physical act of articulating the phrase is connected deeply to the mental task of conjuring the instrument's timbre and typical articulatory techniques. Absent material actors manifest themselves through embodied action. On a larger scale, shifts from full orchestration to thinly orchestrated passages induce a radical difference in physical state: posture changes from leaning forward with weight bearing down through the shoulders to leaning back, taking as much weight as possible away from my arms. Singing while playing often causes a mirroring effect where piano phrasing becomes more exaggerated to match and support the sung phrase, especially if the sung phrase is fully or partially improvised before notation. The tight coupling of auditory image and corresponding body motion is revealed as fundamental to the very process of composition, a process manifest as fully through the corporeal reality of the performer-composer as it is in the mind.

What of other artist-collaborators within the OCN? Cimini highlights potential limitations to documenting the microsocialities of an individual's music performance, by way of citing Georgina Born:

'Prioritising the perceptual qualities and embodied experiences of individual agents can yield vivid and granular descriptive accounts. Apart from formalist routines, musical meaning might emerge in performances' 'small acts' and 'individual experiences' [...] and might then be stabilised via first-person narration or other descriptive practice. Yet, those accounts easily retreat into the Romantic interiority of exceptional individuals that stands apart from social and institutional formations.'¹⁸⁷

To destabilise these narratives, and to trace a broad and diverse range of actors within the OCN, it is necessary to use layered accounts, an assemblage of different perspectives on working in opera. The following Skype interview with Pamela Carter - librettist for *The Angel Esmeralda* - turns the narrative away from the microsocialities of the composer's studio towards the libretto-writing process and collaboration. It is worth noting that across the Skype interviews appearing in this thesis, I have tried to represent manners of speech as faithfully as possible, resulting in seemingly erratic punctuation and textual phraseology. This is to capture the 'grain' of the voice of each interviewee in text form.

Excerpts from a Skype Interview with Pamela Carter: 30/07/2020

Excerpt 1.

Pamela Carter (PC): [...] At the moment I'm talking to you on my desktop. So I'm either here at my desk, or if I... less and less so I do it on a laptop now. The terrible thing is age: I have a bad back. [*Laughs*]. It's quite difficult. So I don't know if you can - I've got myself a really nice chair, it's got sheep skin on it, you know [*laughs*] for comfort, my desk I can wind up and stand at it. So there's all these sort of [...], you know kind of creature comforts in order to give myself no excuse other than to just get on with it.

Excerpt 2.

PC: [...] I can't really write without feeling a keyboard under my fingers. [...] I carry a notebook around and I might write you know sort of little scraps of ideas or little half sentences. But genuinely I can't write dialogue [...] into a notebook... [...] it just doesn't feel right, it doesn't feel like I'm shaping something. And I think, so I've got used to thinking and feeling something under my fingers. And I think maybe it's also about the commitment to the screen, that you can - you know, I might do this for hours: I'll type a line out and then

¹⁸⁷ Amy Marie Cimini, "Music Theory, Feminism, the Body," 670.

I'll just erase it. And then I'll type some words out and then I'll just spend half an hour just rearranging them on the page, or I'll just *blurch* and then I'll sort of make it look more shapely on the page [...].

So there's something about that seeing it set out very clearly in front of me, being able to sort of manipulate it, and also being able to.. to think quite reasonably freely and [...] to be able to look up and look out and imagine things in my head, rather than trying to sort of stare at a piece of paper.

Excerpt 3.

PC: [...] We've often sat together and sort of like drawn shapes out and drawn sort of blocks [...] that's definitely when I need my notebook and a pencil to hand. And it always has to be a pencil; I don't like using pens. Something about being able to change something. But there's something about being able to sort of conceive of things spatially... and I think what it is is: sitting at a screen I can sort of zone out from it, and so what I'm trying to do - in a sense you're trying to sort of feel depth - there's a spacial analogy sort of there. What I'm trying to do also is then imagine in my head a theatre space. And people - bodies in it. And then going: okay, well what that person might say at that point. So like - so something about sort of lifting away from the.... away from the keyboard and the book - you know the notebook, that allows me to sort of you know close my eyes and then still be kind of poised, you know, to be able to sort of *play*. I mean I guess its as close as I'm going to get to [*laughs*] you know to just sort of [...] playing a piano.

Mystory 2: 23/ 09/ 2020

Sat at the piano, I am working on the second travelling duet for *Catriona and the Dragon*. Dave and I have just enjoyed a large lunch, after which we made strong *americanos* to get us through the afternoon working session. As per usual my coffee is behind me on the table; Dave is through in the back room he is using as a studio space. The soothing tones of Drew Barrymore sing over quirky music as *Santa Clarita Diet*¹⁸⁸ plays on the TV: the usual white-noise machine, making creative ideas flow a little more easily.

I play through the opening of the travelling duet's second verse, then focus my attention on the libretto page to the right of my manuscript paper. Glancing at a chord progression I used in the first verse, I decide to use it again, this time a tone higher, and as a transitional tool rather than an arrival point. I go to pick up my favourite *Bic intensity* light purple pen, but realise the page is covered in blue ink.

Now I remember the pen began running out of ink last night. I must buy another set of Bic pens.

Instead, I pick up the *Pilot Frixion ball* blue pen from the side of the piano and begin writing notes quickly across the page. As per usual, I pivot between singing and playing, writing, playing-while-writing, and singing-while-writing. All four combinations are continually succeeding each other as I work today.

As I notate a high lyrical line for the Dragon's Voice (played by the opera's only professional soprano soloist), it occurs to me that this ought to be her final entry.

The soprano was only on stage near the end of Scene 2... although she is now singing offstage, she will need time to change costume before entering at the top of Scene 3... ideally I would love another dragon entry in the travelling duet, but it would be cutting it too close... Perhaps I will use the dragon's motif in the orchestra as a substitute... mental note to self.

¹⁸⁸ *Santa Clarita Diet*, directed by Marc Buckland, et al. (Santa Clarita, California: Netflix, distributor, 2017-19), TV streaming.

I move to a fresh manuscript page, and realise there isn't much paper left. I call through to Dave: "I'm running out of manuscript paper!" The reply comes: "Maybe we can go to that music shop tomorrow".¹⁸⁹ We agree that's a good idea.

It occurs to me that rather than move around a great deal as I usually do when composing, I've remained sitting at the piano, leaning against the music stand to write. This might be because my arms and back are tired from a gym workout earlier in the day. The new programme from my trainer is quite exhausting, so I'm conserving more energy when composing. Bound to the piano stool, I occasionally turn to the table behind me to sip coffee or examine a libretto page, or turn leftwards to catch a quick update on the zombie-related antics of *Santa Clarita Diet*.

Starting the third stanza, I improvise different options for the mezzo and baritone counterpoint.

Should the mezzo line start on an A, or start on E, descending into the chest register? Will this be comfortable to sing? If I choose the latter, should I give the option to sing up the octave? This would dovetail nicely with the Dragon's Voice...

Distracted by the TV for a moment, I call out to Dave: "this person's going to explode!" He comes through to the living room, sketch book in hand, and briefly sits on the sofa as we both laugh at Drew Barrymore and Timothy Olyphant reacting to a body they had wrapped up inside a tarpaulin exploding with extreme flatulent sounds. I glance at Dave's open *Leuchtturm1917* sketch book and the series of early-cartoon inspired, gender-fluid sketches he's developing in preparation for an animated film. I'm happy at the thought of us both pursuing our creative endeavours, the TV our shared pop culture soundtrack.

¹⁸⁹ The shop in question is Biggars Music, located in Glasgow's Buchanan Galleries.

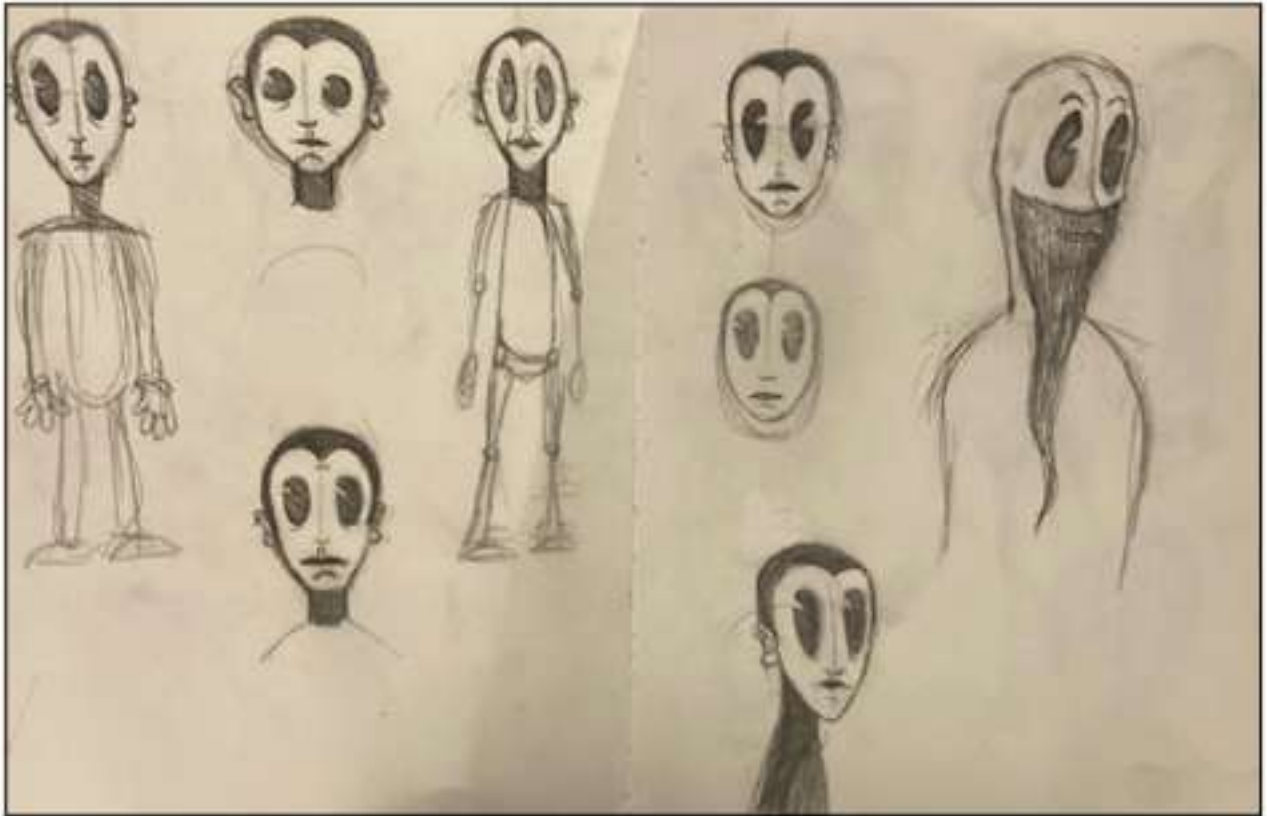


Figure 8. My partner Dave's sketches for his next animation film.

Dave returns to his room, and I play through the third stanza material once again. As my thoughts return to the Dragon's Voice, I reread the libretto for the opening of Scene 3. I'm trying to imagine how the travelling duet will lead into this scene. A line in the stage directions jumps out at me:

'There might perhaps be some comic shushing and tutting as [Catriona] has to climb past other audience members to get to her seat, and some 'sorry, excuse me's' from her.'

Will these comic admonishments be accurately notated in the score, or will these be developed in rehearsal? Note to self to discuss with Laura.

My eyes drift to the opening text for the Dragon in Scene 3, and I'm suddenly gripped by an idea for how to make this moment seem like a pastiche of nineteenth-century Grand Opera. I play an E-diminished 7th chord in first inversion, and sing a long drawn out 'sleep' in a *faux-soprano*, falsetto voice. I continue to sing and improvise chords, and finally find the harmonic direction of the opening stanza:

Sleep
[and] dream of a meadow
full of flowers
[and] a river running
clear and deep -
sleep...

I sing each phrase repetitively as I notate them, changing my mind about rhythmic values several times before committing pen to paper. As I work, I occasionally make myself laugh at the atrocious quality of my falsetto wailing. Just as I'm writing the final bar, Dave calls through that he's enjoying this new material.

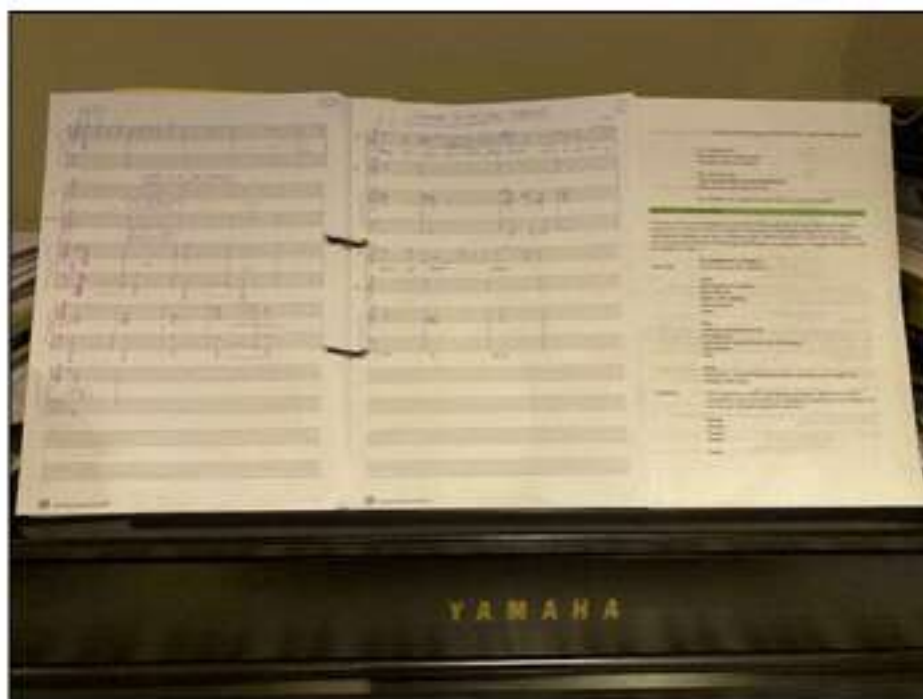


Figure 9. Manuscript sketch and libretto for Scene 3 of *Catriona and the Dragon*, sitting upon the music stand of my Yamaha Clavinova.

“Maybe I can perform the whole thing for you?”

Dave comes through, and I explain that this is the opening of Scene 3 at the Opera House, and that there will be a chorus sustaining some words of the Dragon's text. I play a few

chords to demonstrate what that might sound like. I change the setting of the piano to ‘Strings’, and sing through the first stanza. Dave’s very enthusiastic response makes me feel confident in the material.

Dave returns to his studio space again, and I decide it’s time to write the ‘mystory’ account of this composition session. More coffee made, I ask Dave if it’s okay to turn the TV down for a while, remarking “it’s funny I can compose easily with loud background noise, but not write.” Our working environment is suddenly quieter, *with* whispering zombies but *without* wailing composers.

2.4 Scene 1b: Haunted Objects

Voices weave in and out of these textual documents: my own, Dave, Laura, Sue, Moira, Pamela, Drew Barrymore, Timothy Olyphant... So too do objects, non-human actors populating each scene: specific brands of pens, notebooks, cups of coffee, manuscript paper. Latour notes that ‘objects transport the action given to them through time [...]’¹⁹⁰ We could also say that objects are haunted: they can transport the memory of a person or event through time. I notice the importance of writing implements in these documents: the specificity of pencil over pen for Pamela to feel a sense of fluidity and malleability in sketching out theatrical structures in her notebook; the preference for one specific pen over another in notating sketches for *Catriona and the Dragon*.

For me pens can be haunted objects. This occurred to me reading over the preceding ‘mystory’ narratives, invoking Poulos’ words:

‘Memory is such a curious phenomenon.
It shows up, unbidden, and demands attention.’¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Latour and Hermant, “Paris: Invisible City,” 73.

¹⁹¹ Poulos, “Writing Through the Memories,” 315.

The pens I use to compose - *Bic intensity* light purple, *Pilot Friction ball* blue - these conjure up memories of my mother.

My mother, Flora Paterson, who passed away on 7th March 2019.

Immediately I am a teenager again, standing in the small kitchen of our family home in Ellon. Mum is explaining why Pilot pens are the most efficient pens for a pleasing writing style - and writing experience. She is holding a *Pilot V5 Hi-Tecpoint 0.5mm* pen as she talks. As I write, I pause to move this very pen - or rather this very *product* - around in small circles between my hands. I can picture her clearly when I focus on the pen, how serious the subject of suitable writing implements was, something that affected the quality of daily life, not a small pleasure but a necessity.

My mother, the artist who attended Glasgow School of Art.

These pens are points of connection with my mother, reaching back into the past, into memory, and transporting their action through time into the composition of *Catriona and the Dragon*. They represent something fundamental about my mum and about the values she passed on to me: placing pride in the quality of materials you use for writing and creative endeavour. Mine was a childhood filled with art materials: clay, watercolour sets, crayons, acrylic paints, glue, a myriad of drawing pencils and paintbrushes. These materials were the tools for expressing the innate creativity within yourself; there was nothing precious about it. Twenty years later, this attention to the material tools of artistic production remains. Now it is about specific brands and models of pens, the right thickness and quality of manuscript paper.



Figure 10. Flora Paterson at Cruden Bay beach, with the bleached birch tree that inspired her painting 'Bay'.



Figure 11. In my father's art studio at Aberdeen University. 'Bay' is the central painting



Figure 12. Flora's art materials at her work station in my father's studio.

2.5 Hauntology and haunting

To use the word 'haunted' in academic discourse is to invoke the ghost of Jacques Derrida. In *Spectres of Marx* - a book where he professes that 'the messianic spirit of Marxism still holds promise', as well as observing that 'spirits, spooks, and haunting loom large in Marx's writings' - Derrida introduces the notion of "hauntology".¹⁹² Put simply, 'hauntology functions as a critique of ontology as we have understood it [...]; it reimagines it.'¹⁹³ This reimagining entails thinking 'outside of the identity of a thing as the marker of truth'; truth is found 'through our interactions with that thing.'¹⁹⁴ Haunting is the mechanism through which these interactions take place: it is 'an epistemology concerned with the treatment of

¹⁹² Martha Lincoln and Bruce Lincoln, "Toward a Critical Hauntology: Bare Afterlife and the Ghosts of Ba Chúc," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 1 (2015): 191-2.

¹⁹³ Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer, "On the Haunting of Performance Studies," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 5, no. 1 (April 2009): 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

the other as an ethics of difference.¹⁹⁵ The ghost or spectre as *other*, an idea for Derrida based on the ghostly apparition of Hamlet's father, is used to convey non-linearity: 'the spirit comes by *coming back* [revenant], it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again.'¹⁹⁶ The returned dead and the repeating ghost: here we have the root of two directions in hauntology. As Mark Fischer notes, this non-linear logic embraces 'that which is (in actuality is) *no longer*, but which is still effective as a virtuality (the traumatic "compulsion to repeat" [...]), and also 'that which (in actuality) has *not yet* happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behaviour)'.¹⁹⁷

Hauntology, grounded in this sense of non-linearity, is 'a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations'.¹⁹⁸ Derrida's ghosts are to be found 'persisting in texts, memory and uneasy silences rather than spirit, located 'inside the consciousness of those they "visit" [...]''.¹⁹⁹ We must 'learn to live with ghosts', to recognise their difference while in their company.²⁰⁰ This requires us to make room for them, what Derrida calls "hospitality". Spectral hospitality enables us to seek *justice*, which 'comes in the form of responsibility to the other as difference'. The 'other' embraces the living and the dead: Derrida calls for us to be 'acutely aware of the socius, the *with* of the being-with'²⁰¹, to seek justice where ethics or politics 'does not recognise in its principles the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born.'²⁰² Hauntology thus becomes a means for addressing racial injustice, gender violence, political and social trauma; the inequities of the past that manifest and endure in the present, that continue to haunt the living, and will come to effect future generations.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10.

¹⁹⁷ Mark Fisher, "What is Hauntology?," *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 19.

¹⁹⁸ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, xviii.

¹⁹⁹ Lincoln and Lincoln, "Toward a Critical Hauntology", 196.

²⁰⁰ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, xvii.

²⁰¹ Powell and Shaffer, "On the Haunting of Performance Studies", 2.

²⁰² Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, xvii.

Given the performative nature of this thesis, let us turn to the adoption of hauntology within performance studies. In their 2009 essay *On the Haunting of Performance Studies*, Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer 'advocate Derrida's notion of haunting as an orientation toward written and performed work'.²⁰³ They suggest that hospitality is crucial to 'play hauntologically': 'to purposefully create spaces in our work where [multiple perspectives] might emerge and/or insert themselves.'²⁰⁴ They argue that Derrida's ethics of difference extends to performance: '[...] the audience and performers call each other into an ethical relationship that transforms the notion of "responsibility to the audience" from understanding to experience.'²⁰⁵ Such a 'Derridean ethics [...] grounds itself in the *with* of co-experiencing each other as a multiplicity of difference.'²⁰⁶ Embracing the tension between performance practice and theory, 'haunting imagines performance as never disappearing but continually producing systems, sites, and modes of critical inquiry.'²⁰⁷

I have applied hauntology to autoethnographic material on a more localised scale than the global reach of Derrida's conception, and more in line with its adoption by performance studies. My use of haunting is deliberately scaled down, a mechanism for moving between the most intimate of spectres and different operatic communities (including audiences and production collectives, to be explored below). Powell and Shaffer name 'the ghost, temporality, and an ethics of hospitality as the main characteristics of haunting. Taken together, they create a new, or different mode of experiencing performance'.²⁰⁸ I have taken to heart their call to approach each event as a singular event, 'repeating again for the first time in its performativity'.²⁰⁹ Like them, I 'embrace the logic of the ghost in order to find a productive, open-ended, and experiential experimental mode of research and practice [...]'.²¹⁰ This has been crucial to approaching creative practice as unfolding in a complex web of events that are deeply connected, yet non-linear by nature, where

²⁰³ Powell and Shaffer, "On the Haunting of Performance Studies": 1.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 17.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

performer and artist agency is unsettled and complicated. In particular, I have been influenced by Powell and Shaffer's subsuming of 'the work of mourning' within their hauntological performance methodology, where

[...] mourning is not a process that ends after a set period of time. Performance can be mourned in such a way. Experiencing a performance does not end once the lights come up and the audience leaves; the performance has not disappeared. We necessarily wrestle with our experience and allow it to produce new places to engage, create, and critique future performances. We argue for a mourning of performance in its spectrality, rather than an interpretation of performance in its finality [...].²¹¹

I have also sought to relocate haunting as a bodily, embodied process, an idea already explored in performance theory. Emily Brennan-Moran writes of how the 'constant condition of haunting materializes in the body', which she names 'the *performative dawn* of the ghost in the body'.²¹² Brennan-Moran situates large-scale social trauma - the trauma of the transatlantic slave trade and its legacy, how this trauma manifests in individuals - as the haunting agent in this performative moment. Again taking a more modest and fluid approach to the application of theory, I move from more personal moments of haunting involving individuals both dead and alive, to a more strictly hauntological view of the work of opera reconfigured by COVID-19 (see chapter three). Nonetheless, this does involve a 'hauntological orientation to memory' where 'the agency of the ghost [takes] precedence over our own agency in performances of remembering'.²¹³ In truth, my use of hauntology is so fluid and personalised as to morph into a 'haunting semantic framework' rather than hauntology *per se*. This is part of my autoethnographical project of created a layered account, where the evocative is considered just as important as the analytical in forming the emergent identity of the researcher's voice. I have been particularly influenced by Andrew F. Herrmann's conception of the undead as autoethnographic bridges:

'Doing autoethnography is not only evocative, but like a Clive Barker novel, it can be damned scary. To write autoethnographically means bringing our ghosts into the present where they can produce both material and emotional effects.

²¹¹ Ibid., 14.

²¹² Emily Brennan-Moran, "Ghosted (I went looking for a haunting)," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2019): 269.

²¹³ Ibid., 281.

They bridge the visible and invisible, the heard and the unheard, the seen and the unseen.²¹⁴

The ghost as bodily *and* textual bridge can generate epiphanies, which in turn ‘can also be a bridge to healing’.²¹⁵ The conjuring of ghosts has indeed led me to epiphanies about creative process, which have been a healing part of the bereavement process, and will be brought to light by the time our curtain falls at the end of this thesis.

Relational ethics returns: CMR status requires self-safeguarding when dealing with intimate and personal subjects. Hauntology - though really appearing more as a haunting semantic framework - has allowed me to deal with writing of bereavement as a researcher through the metaphorical and the elusive. I have avoided other analytic options, such as the ‘continuing bonds’ theory, which would place focus on the ways relationships with the deceased are maintained and reformed on the part of survivors, involving the ‘construction of an inner representation of the deceased [...]’.²¹⁶ Particularly in examining the literature on how memorial tattoos ‘are embodied representation[s] of an ongoing relationship’, I could see the value of applying a similar lens to the way creative work could also embody continuing bonds.²¹⁷ However, I wanted to avoid such an intense focus on my own interiority in this way, since it would necessarily implicate ‘concepts such as post-traumatic growth, which allows for the possibility of ongoing distress in the midst of wisdom and growth’.²¹⁸ It was important to me to find a more organic and evocative way to include the experience of grief and memory of the deceased as part of the opera world, such as that offered by autoethnography, which could at the same time offer a healing or transformative journey without overtly rigorous analysis of the grieving process. Writing the memory of my mother through the grain of text, a returning and always reconfigured (and *reconfiguring*) presence, has been a painful, though transformative, experience. In pursuing an

²¹⁴ Andrew F. Herrmann, “Ghosts, Vampires, Zombies, and Us: The Undead as Autoethnographic Bridges,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 7, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 334.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Phyllis R. Silverman and Dennis Klass, “Introduction: What’s the Problem?” in *Continuing Bonds: new understandings of grief*, eds. Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman, and Steven L. Nickman (New York and Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 18.

²¹⁷ Susan Cadell, Melissa Reid Lambert, Deborah Davidson, Carly Greco, and Mary Ellen Macdonald, “Memorial tattoos: Advancing continuing bonds theory,” *Death Studies* 46, no. 1 (2022): 138.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

autoethnographical journey through the opera world, I have aimed to create a space for the most personal memories and presences, showing how these visitations reinforce the embodied, collaborative work of opera. As Ellis writes, 'the self and other are intertwined and [...] you can't know one without the other.'²¹⁹ The ever-returning presence of the other, the spectral collaborator(s) of the OCN, must be acknowledged if we are to truly understand the complexity of embodied creative processes. More rigorous sociological analysis of how continuing bonds are effected - and maintained - through creative work must wait for another time, for a study focused more acutely on the work of an individual artist, rather than the broader collaborative work of the opera world.

2.6 Writing Together

For now let us return to writing implements. A curious juxtaposition of approaches to the creative act of writing emerges in our assemblage of interview and mystery texts: the common need for fluidity and tactility shared by myself and Pamela, but expressed through different mediums. Especially where dialogue is concerned, Pamela needs to feel a keyboard under her fingers, to give the feeling of 'shaping something.' She explicitly connects the actions of 'thinking and feeling something under my fingers.' This is further connected to the fluid process of editing and erasing text on a computer, where there is no 'commitment to the screen.' Just as I specify particular types of pen as essential to an optimal writing session, Pamela specifies desktop over laptop, essential for minimising back pain, relegating mental faculties away from the distraction of embodied pain to the physical and mental process of creative writing. Although revealing similar requirements, my writing process pivots between two tactile mediums: the piano keyboard, and (very specific!) pen on paper. There is a great deal of mobility involved, a constant movement between piano-playing position and writing position, which takes a myriad of forms: always pen on manuscript paper, but by turns leaning against the piano stand, leaning on my legs while seated, resting the paper on my right arm while standing. I too have the background threat of physical pain, principally from tendonitis, which guides my playing-to-writing ratio: I try to minimise the amount of time I play continuously. Material actors both mediate pain, such as the act of repetitively pressing piano keys triggering tendonitis, and *are mediated* by pain, the rituals in which they are engaged circumscribed or altered to mitigate discomfort.

²¹⁹ Carolyn Ellis, "Fighting Back or Moving On," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 2, no. 3 (November 2009): 379.

What of our shared creative process where we are physically in the same place? I immediately conjure memories of discussions in cafés in London and Glasgow, sitting in the Weir Hall of Scottish Opera, notebooks on the table. As Pamela recalls, ‘We’ve often sat together and sort of like drawn shapes and drawn out sort of blocks [...] that’s definitely when I need my notebook and a pencil to hand.’ Pamela states her preference for pencil over pens, for ease of editing just as with her preference for working on the computer. The notebook for her also allows for an ease of spatial conceptualisation, a way to visualise and hold the image of the theatre space in her mind, a space ‘with bodies in it.’ The development of dialogue becomes an extension of imagining physical bodies in a performance space. The medium of notebook and pencil allows Pamela to close her eyes and ‘still be kind of poised [...] to be able to sort of *play*.’ Here Pamela expresses the essential performativity of the creative act, where the human actor and the nonhuman actors of our chosen mediums are connected at a deep level. Specific nonhuman actors allow us to more easily achieve a desired mental state for conceptualising creative ideas which themselves are not abstract but projections of other actors and their interactions, both human and non-human (theatre actors, stage space, acoustic effects produced through musical instruments, etc.).

In perceiving of creative acts as embodied and bound in a network of actors, I am reminded of Latour’s discussion of the training of ‘noses’ for the perfume industry through the use of the odour kit, or *malettes d’odeurs*.²²⁰ He writes:

‘bodies are our common destiny because there is no meaning in saying that without my body I could smell better, that without the kit I could become a better nose, that without a laboratory analytical chemists could do better chemistry, or that without plants better fragrances could be industrially produced... A direct and unmediated access to the primary qualities of odours could only be detected by a bodiless nose. But the opposite of embodied is dead, not omniscient.’²²¹

Likewise, creative processes are only ever embodied processes; there is no idealised abstracted version despite what we see time and again in the annals of musicology. To describe a creative process without taking into account the embodied reality required to

²²⁰ Bruno Latour, “How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies,” *Body & Society* 10, nos. 2-3 (2004): 206.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

carry out that process is to cut it dead. The creative thoughts Pamela and I have on a shared project are mediated by non-human and other human actors: computer, pen or pencil on paper, singers with specific vocal requirements and the dimensions of a theatre space, to name but a few.

Even in those shared creative sessions described above, I almost always worked in pen, as though maintaining a single medium across my works allows for a linearity of thought between different documents. Perhaps it was simply the ingrained memory of pen lectures from my mum, to the extent that the medium of pen is now an automatic choice.

I only ever remember mum writing in pen, a panoply of notes secreted around the kitchen: notes on work matters to be attended to, fragments of poems usually in her favourite form of the Haiku, shopping lists, or lists of bird species spotted in the garden...

There is a deep connection here between memory and utilitarian function: the point at which a non-human actor becomes a haunted object. In the times I have been forced by circumstance to use a writing implement not to my usual specifications, there is a rift in my creative process - a vague feeling of annoyance which affects the usual fluidity of writing. The haunted object also does its haunting through its absence. All of this may seem to belabour a fairly obvious point about writing tool preferences, but my observations are intended to show that there is nothing inconsequential about even the smallest non-human actor within a traced network. Its consequence may only grow if we apply the emotionality of an autoethnographical filter to this actor.

Continuing the subject of writing tools, I will introduce the next character in our autoethnographical opera, this time an actual opera singer: mezzo-soprano Katie Grosset. A dear friend of many years, Katie has sung in two of my operas, both parts I wrote expressly for her: *The 8th Door* and *Fox-Tot!* Towards the end of our Skype interview for my PhD research, Katie spoke about the significance of vocal scores from her history of working on operatic productions:

Excerpt 1 from a Skype interview with Katie Grosset: 22/11/2020

Katie Grosset [KG]: It's so important to me to have my [vocal] scores with all the markings, because I have - like all my markings are so vivid and I know exactly what they all mean. [...] In *The 8th Door* right now, chances are the more colours on it, the more stressed out I was about it. So it'll start with blue, and rests will be in a different colour - but generally, if I make a mistake more than once it'll go in a different colour. And so *The 8th door* [laughs] will probably be - I mean, my *Romeo* - my *Capuletti* score, I had to buy a new score, because I'd marked up in so many different colours that I couldn't read the music anymore.²²² *Fox-Tot!*: I can picture it now; there's just one bit where [name removed]²²³ wasn't ever counting properly, and so I marked it in big red marker because I just had to cover him. I know exactly what my score looks like, I know exactly what the markings on it look like, and I really hope I get it back one day because these things are such important parts of history for me. I can remember - I've got quite a good memory - like I can remember exactly when I made each marking. I could probably tell you the conversation I had in order to make that marking. Yeah, yeah, yeah... my memory's crystal clear.

Liam Paterson [LP]: So it's really like a proper record of the whole process is in those markings?

KG: Totally. I'll write down *everything*. And also if somebody's sort of getting a big long note, there'll be a game of knots and crosses somewhere. Do you know what I mean? And I think it's important to have all of these markings. [...] So if I were to look at my score for *Fox-Tot!* and then compare that with my score for something five years previously, you can see my signature marking-up develop, because I've got my own little signs for everything, you know.

LP: So it actually changes over time the more work you did?

²²² Here Katie refers to *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* by Vincenzo Bellini.

²²³ Name removed in accordance with relational ethics.

KG: Yeah, I've kept some stuff, I've lost some stuff. So maybe at Guildhall, I'll have written down words really studiously because Susie Stranders²²⁴ will have been saying: "yes, this is how you've gotta do it". And then, you know, Eugene Asti²²⁵ will have said "di di di" but I honestly, because it was all so like this: [*makes a raspberry sound while making the 'over my head' hand gesture*], I won't know when those words were mentioned or who they were mentioned by, because I was just sort of doing lip service. Whereas if *I* mean the notes and *I* put them down from me to me....

LP: So it's kind of a record of you becoming a master of your own process.

KG: Yes, exactly. Exactly right. And I think it was at National Opera Studio was when I really learned when to pretend to write notes, and when to actually write notes. Or when to write notes *in my way*. That's really important. That's why I really hope my *Fox-Tot!* score finds its way back to me.

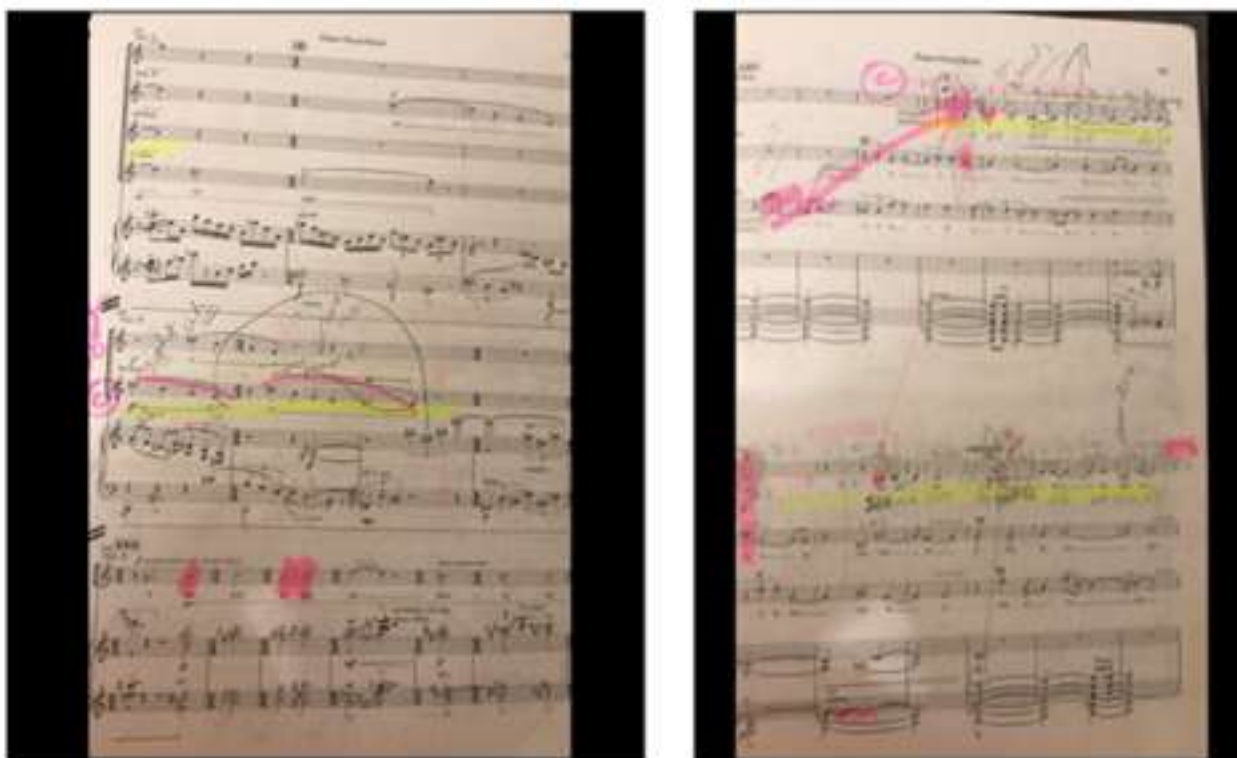


Figure 13. Marked-up pages from Katie's vocal score for *The 8th Door*.

²²⁴ Susie [Susanna] Stranders is a vocal coach and répétiteur coach at the Guildhall, and a member of music staff at the Royal Opera House.

²²⁵ Eugene Asti is a vocal accompanist and recording artist, who leads postgraduate German *Lieder* classes at the Guildhall. He was my piano teacher during my Master's studies.

.....

Katie creates a vivid description of how much vocal scores mean to her within the history of her life: they are her haunted objects. An arrow marked in pink highlighter pen, or an arching loop drawn in pencil can prompt the recollection of a conversation or event within the rehearsal room. Beyond this, Katie's collected vocal scores across many productions reveal not only the evolution of her musical-calligraphic style, but through these markings her evolution as a musical artist is signified. Her marking style becomes more highly specific and refined as her role as an opera singer moves from a studious absorber of new information to a discerning interpreter. We see how a nonhuman actor (or combination of actors given the interaction of vocal score and writing medium) can *enact* artistic transformation, as the refinement of an embodied performance practice is *worked through* on the page. This enmeshes with the singer-actor giving agency to the material actors, while interfacing between personal artistic process and the collaborative process of the rehearsal room. Katie reveals how this interfacing between the OCN and embodied process is performed by singers, much the same way as the composer must interface between the processes of the composition studio and the wider OCN.

The vocal score is an actor which undertakes a series of translations. Firstly and most obviously it is a functional learning tool, produced by the composer or associated musician to allow the musical team on a production to learn and rehearse the music. By extension, it allows for ease of direction on the part of the Production Team (Director, Assistant Director(s), Stage Managers, etc.). The second translation involves the vocal score moving from an actor designed for learning and planning, to a blueprint of an interpretation which existed in the past and may be reproduced in the future. It becomes an actor with a relationship to past and future which can be said to embody Husserlian notions of 'retentions - memories or traces of the past - and protensions - projections or anticipations.'²²⁶ Although speaking of genre, I will borrow Mads Krogh's designation of the 'spatiotemporal object' to apply to the vocal score in this second translation: it is an actor which may 'map out retentions and protensions in a temporal perspective involving

²²⁶ Georgina Born, "Making Time: Temporality, History, and the Cultural Object," *New Literary History* 46, no. 3 (2015): 368.

the relations of various actors' work, that is, beyond any singular act of artistic creation.'²²⁷ Katie's *Fox-Tot!* vocal score contains traces of the past - conversations had during rehearsals, musical passages where attention was needed, the mapping out of physical movements - yet is also an actor which anticipates different futures: a blueprint for doing a revival of the same premiere production; a musical prompt for Katie in a new, different production; a learning tool for another singer unfamiliar with the role to step in. As Katie says, 'these things are such important parts of history for me': actions from her life as an artist are preserved in amber, still full of possibilities for the present and future.

2.7 Performing Spectral Hospitality

Returning to our Skype interview, Katie evokes Derrida's notion of spectral hospitality (though on a localised scale), as she connects her experiences of embodied performance and pregnancy:

Skype Interview Excerpt 2:

KG: It might be quite interesting to talk about the fact that I was pregnant during *Fox-Tot!* [...] Is it useful for me to talk about that [**LP:** Yes, that's great!], like how useful it was for me as a performer to be suddenly performing with and for babies, and my reactions and my... apart from sort of needing to throw up quite a lot, but not, so it was fine. [**LP:** *laughing*]... The fact that I was suddenly much more emotionally connected to it, because... I was envisioning, sort of, my own life ahead of time, and I was learning about how to work with children, and how to sing - like how to sing to them and get a reaction that wasn't, you know - how to be very careful with my dynamic, how to be very careful with how I... directed my voice, and how I expressed what was written on the page to include everybody, but also to help engage parents; like everybody just seemed to matter. I didn't think it was possible, but everybody seemed to matter so much more, because I then realised "oh my goodness, this is - this is - how would I want this to go?" Rather than just being like "great, everybody'll clap, and it'll be nice", it was - it was: "how would I want

²²⁷ Kroggs, "A Beat is a Hybrid: Mediation," 540.

this to go for *my child*”; possibly their first experience of live music, you know... [LP: Yeah!]. So, it was really cool, like that was really amazing. And, em... Yeah, the connection there was pretty massive.

.....

Here Katie reveals that the intersection of two embodied realities - that of being pregnant and that of being a singer working on an opera for babies - transformed her approach to performance practice, and created a new locus of meaning-making. Katie projected her own life as a mother through both the narrative of the opera and the act of performing for an audience of children and parents. Later in the interview, Katie emphasises this experiential aspect:

[...] I wanted to turn my character into [...] a really *defined* and concise person...because...rather than just being this person who sings these words, I wanted to think about who I was. So the relationship between mother and fox... was really important [...]. I had a relationship in character with everybody, not just Fox, so I had to have a way of *being* with parents, as she would, rather than just being with Fox all the time.’

This concern for authenticity as a mother character went beyond actor-characterisation to affect the technical aspects of vocal production: how best to control dynamic range, how to direct the voice, how to be as inclusive as possible in the performance of the score blueprint (‘what was written on the page’).

Katie was anticipating and also *performing* motherhood, and in this performance she was hospitable to futurity-spectres: herself as mother, her daughter, and future audiences (both in anticipation during rehearsal ideation, and anticipating each unique audience). That this performance reflected a blurring of deeply personal, life-changing (and -giving) experience, and the professional, embodied yet always technical work of an opera singer resonates with Derrida’s description of hospitality as ‘an example of deconstruction.’²²⁸ Judith Still notes that

²²⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality,” in *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anijar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 364.

'[h]ospitality in theory and practice relates to crossing boundaries [...] or thresholds [...], including those between self and other, private and public, inside and outside, individual and collective [...].'²²⁹

Is this not a perfect description of haunting deconstructing the work of opera, so that performance is relocated to a liminal place where lived experience and performer ideation are inseparable? The process of opera-making changed Katie's perception of mothering, just as the reality of pregnancy changed Katie's approach to opera-making and performance. And in the midst of this deconstruction, the physical transformation and daily bodily acts of pregnancy are ongoing, on which Katie is hilariously frank. Speaking about a university composers' workshop, Katie shared that badly informed vocal writing, where 'they'd just stuck me up top A all the time', almost led to an accident: 'I was so pregnant that I thought I was going to wet myself [...].' Katie's refreshing honesty situates the embodied, *bodily* reality of the singer centre-stage.

The discussion of connection to the audience - and creating space for the future child as a way to connect to that audience - invokes the idea of hospitality as 'a structure of *reciprocity* [...], as an exchange *between peers*, [in which] *non-reciprocity* and *inequality* are at least as important.'²³⁰ Here I am getting creative with theory once again: I have relocated reciprocal hospitality to a local scale, within a specific performative context. While I could have situated this discussion as symbolic interactionism, a Derridean angle seemed more appropriate: *Fox-tot!* was designed for audiences who would be unfamiliar with opera, and possibly with theatre-going in general. Therefore I was interested in how the concept of hospitality also invokes *justice*: opening access to opera for those previously without access, focusing the work of opera on a demographic - carer and baby - who are frequently excluded from access to 'ambitious' artistic work. In forging a performative connection to the audience, the hospitality of performer towards children and parents may be reciprocated: in attention and interaction with the children, and encouragement to interact on the part of the parent (as well as more conventionally operatic appreciation through applause and laughter). It is indeed an exchange between peers: between the performative mother, the mother-to-be, and the audience-parents. There may be non-reciprocity from members of the audience, but the reasons for this may

²²⁹ Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 4.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

also define a kind of peerage: parental anxiety over child-performer interaction; nervousness on the part of the child, or simply a performance time ill-fitting with feeding or sleep schedules. There is the spectre of the anxieties and daily realities of parentage, part of Katie's projected journey alongside the desire for connection.



Figure 14. Emma Belli's costume design for Katie/ Mother Vixen.

2.8 Scene 2: The 'Production Collective'

To invoke the audience is to move towards a new mode of tracing the OCN. Suddenly we are referring to a collective group of people within the art world, no longer the embodied realities of individual actors. We move towards a different notion of collective if we turn towards costume alteration as a response to Katie's changing shape during pregnancy. As Katie noted, 'they sort of just put elastic everywhere [...].' The tracing of who 'they' are leads us towards this new mode of actor network interaction.

So far we have resisted the 'abrupt alteration between micro and macro, actor and system [...]', instead invoking haunting as an analogue for Latour's 'second move' which transforms

'every site into the provisional endpoint of some other sites distributed in time and space; each site becomes the result of the action at a distance of some other agency.'²³¹

A discussion of penmanship in Ellon during the early 2000s organises the material tools of composition in Glasgow in 2020; highlighter and pencil markings on a vocal score during a specific rehearsal time period pretend towards future productions, where interpretative and vocal-technical decisions hold retentions of those same markings as markers of artistic development. The matter of costume alteration invokes a network of human actors radiating out from Katie: costume designer (Emma Belli), the Costume Department of Scottish Opera with its attendant actors (Head of Costume, Wardrobe Mistress, Costume Makers and Wardrobe Cutter among them), the suppliers of costume materials. Our tracing of the embodied, the personal, of enmeshed working practices between individual artists, begins to open out towards a collective, a 'shared definition of a common world.'²³² We will name this world the 'production collective'.

To define this common world, we must 'engage in the reassembling of the collective', through 'localizing the global and distributing the local - *together* [...].'²³³ The production network is dispersed across disparate locations and temporalities, yet at its centre is the

²³¹ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 219.

²³² *Ibid.*, 247.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 219-247.

simultaneously physical and imaginary space of the rehearsal room, a membrane through which we can enact these ‘two gestures’ of localisation and distribution. We will see how there is a constant ‘*connectedness*’ between the microsocialities of the rehearsal room, and the macrosociality of opera production as a process.²³⁴ Global process is made local by the actors of the rehearsal room through ideation, while this local ideation is distributed, creating localised processes which comprise the collective as a whole. The global becomes nothing more than tracing between the sites of individualised processes and their actors, as we strive to bridge the gap ‘between ‘interaction’ and ‘context’’, which would otherwise ‘hide the complex machinery establishing continuous connections between the sites, none of which is either big or small.’²³⁵

The tracing of our production collective involves another type of translation: ‘form’ as ‘a displacement from ideal to material [...]’²³⁶ Latour notes that

‘the notion of form takes a very concrete and practical sense: a form is simply something which allows something else to be transported from one site to another. [...] To provide a piece of information is the action of putting something into a form. But now the word takes a very mundane, practical meaning; it can be a paper slip, a document, a report, an account, a map, whatever succeeds in practicing the incredible feat of transporting a site into another one without deformation through massive transformations.’²³⁷

In the production collective, there is a constant translation from ideal to material, a formal displacement where creative ideation - and the information contained therein - is put into a material form. A hypothetical example based on a process I saw repeated many times throughout *The Angel Esmeralda* rehearsal period: an idea co-created in the rehearsal room between Director and singer, around, say, the use of a prop, is notated by the Stage Manager, stored as information in vocal score, notebook, or digital device/ email. The Stage Manager disperses this information as a verbal and materially notated trace to the Assistant Stage Managers, who must source the prop. Once found and bought with the prop budget allocated by the Stage Manager, the prop once again comes under the provision of the Stage Manager herself, who ensures it is supplied to the rehearsal room

²³⁴ Ibid., 222.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., 223.

²³⁷ Ibid.

as soon as possible. The prop becomes integrated into the rehearsal ideation process, as a material component in further ideation, which is an elaboration and refinement of the original idea which called for the prop.

The description of this process of translation might seem to evoke Becker's description of the 'conventional art world view' of those 'people who cooperate in the production of art works as "personnel."' ²³⁸ He suggests it is

'even useful to carry the dehumanization of artistic support personnel one step further and think of them as resources, assembled in resource pools like material resources, and ask how such pools are assembled and how the people in them get connected to particular art projects in a support role.' ²³⁹

Although bringing material, nonhuman actors and human actors to the same level is a crucial aspect of our ANT-inspired opera (to be explored more expansively in the next chapter), our autoethnographic lens demands that we resist the impersonal and find meaning in embodied experience. Like Becker, 'I do not accept the view of the relative importance of the "personnel" involved that the term connotes [...].'²⁴⁰ The embodied experience and material agency of "support personnel" in translating - and transforming - ideation into material form(s) means their functional - and interpersonal - importance is on a par with the actors usually given hierarchical preference in opera studies (composer, conductor, Director, etc.). By rejecting assumed hierarchies, we return to our two gestures of localisation and distribution, which together *perform* a flattening of the social world of the production collective:

'[i]t is only by making flatness the default position of the observer that the activity necessary to generate some difference in size can be detected and registered.'²⁴¹

²³⁸ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 77.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 220.

Through this ‘metaphor of a flatland’, our actors ‘have been given enough space to deploy their own contradictory gerunds: scaling, zooming, embedding, ‘panoraming’, individualizing, and so on.’²⁴²

Let us pause to engage in a moment of individualising: across the flatland, May Howard-Shigeno comes into view, one of the two Assistant Directors for *The Angel Esmeralda*. The most compelling way to reject the reductive and hierarchically-inclined terminology of “support personnel” is to turn towards the individual actor, and their embodied experience as a member of the production collective. I spent many hours talking to May over the course of the production period, and interviewed her several months after the performances: firstly, I sent May a list of questions via email about production matters, and latterly we had a reflexive dyadic interview over Skype. May’s answers to the former, as well as my observing production and technical teams during the production period, served as my basis for exploring the production collective as it relates to *The Angel Esmeralda*. I decided to focus on May’s perspective as her role of Assistant Director is crucial within the process of translations that enact the production collective: it is a role that moves between administrative, ideation, and performative functions. Nonetheless, it is discussion of the Director that dominates in opera studies. It is symptomatic of this hierarchical thinking that even in a tome such as Evan Baker’s *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging*, the evolution of the Assistant Director (AD) role, or any mention of it, is absent. This absence is particularly telling, when his ‘single principle’ in researching and writing was to ask: ‘*What or who played a significant part in the continuing evolution of opera production and staging?*’²⁴³

We can say that May played a *significant part* in the *Esmeralda* production collective, in collaboration with the other AD, Emily Coppola: organising the daily/ weekly schedule (to be passed on to company management and stage management for implementation); keeping a record of the ‘blocking’ in a vocal score, a notated trace of movement ideation in the performance space; walking roles when singers were absent for rehearsals, infrequent during *Esmeralda* production; supporting the Director during chorus rehearsals with detailed knowledge of the chorus music and members. May’s perspective was unique,

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Evan Baker, *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), xvii.

because she comes from a stage management background; bringing this specialised knowledge to the AD role, as well as her familiarity with the production students working on *Esmeralda*, she was able to facilitate reciprocal hospitality between the Director Martin and the production team.²⁴⁴ As May commented in our Skype interview:

‘[...] I felt that I was uniquely positioned to communicate with the production students in a way that’s much [...] more *intense* than a normal Assistant Director would. I felt like I was very strongly connected to them. [...] I think [Martin] likes that there’s something that links him to the production team.’

Here we see the importance of individualising within the OCN: if we tried to describe the production collective as a notional social framework *without* tracing the social through the translations of the collective, we would view the AD as a static, fixed role. By working outward from the site of May’s embodied knowledge, we see how her personal history brings a different dimension to the role, and facilitates reciprocal hospitality between different actors. May emphasises the fluidity and changeability of the AD role between productions: ‘[...] even having done Assisting, I think that the role really varies depending on who you’re working with and what level of involvement they want you to have.’ The work of the AD can be traced as the interaction with the Director and other members of the collective; yet that work can form disparate functions, as we explored above, in a possible combination of performativity (walking roles), sociality (collective member interaction), reproduction (ideation note-taking), administration (scheduling and liaising over departmental timeframes) and ideation (leading rehearsals with covers or chorus). These functions are in a state of flux, and as May revealed, they may be influenced by the personal history of the AD.

As we turn toward music ringing out in the flatland, let us consider May’s motivation for working in opera. She spoke about working on stage plays during her Stage Management studies at Guildhall:

‘[...] I really don’t like listening to dramas over and over again, because I find that [...] talking is a natural thing to do, and it’s meant to sound somewhat natural on stage, but when you hear it repeated like ten times when you’re working on a show, it starts sounding really fake, and I found that *really* grating, in a way that I don’t experience that on *music*-based productions, so opera or ballet, I don’t find it annoying if I see or hear the same thing over and over [...].’

²⁴⁴ May’s stage management experience is outlined in our Skype interview transcript: see Appendix E, p. 170.

May's embodied experience as part of the stage management team confirmed for her that 'I think I've always known that I want to work in opera or ballet, or some kind of music-related production-type activity.' Her work in opera's production collective holds retentions of a transformative trip to see *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at the Royal Opera House [ROH] aged fifteen, after which she started sneaking out of boarding school to attend ROH shows. It is opera's very artificiality in its modes of expression that captivated - and captivates - May. We can view this through Georgina Born's description of

'the interaction between the third and second planes [of music's social mediation]: between wider social relations and systems of musical genre, where genre is taken to be the primary mechanism for the mutual articulation of musically imagined communities and social identities - communities that are often taken to derive from those social identities.'²⁴⁵

Here I am narrowing the scope of Born's perspective, resituating 'social relations' as an exchange between an individual and a 'musically imagined' community. If we recast musical genre as theatrical form, Born's mediation speaks to the way May connected to the form of opera, through becoming part of the opera audience, an *operatically* imagined community, projecting forward to her (shifting) social identity within the production collective, another community traceable through the social machinations of opera, and enmeshed entirely with the operatically imagined community. This adds another dimension of embodied meaning-making to the tracing of the social, where the music and materialism of opera is individualised and personalised.

²⁴⁵ Georgina Born, "Music and the materialization of identities," *Journal of Material Culture* 16, no. 4 (2011): 383.



Figure 15. May (far left) on the set of *The Angel Esmeralda* at the Silk Street Theatre.

2.9 Music in the flatland

Born asks:

'how to move beyond the tendency, derived from interactionist sociology, to take the observable micro-social patterns of musical experience and behaviour as the privileged locus for an analysis of musical meaning, and as amounting to the entire socio-musical reality.'²⁴⁶

Within the art world of opera, we answer this question by deploying our flatland metaphor: the 'privileged locus' of inquiry is dispersed, since the microsocial is distributed, the global nothing more than a tracing of this distribution; the global is thus always situated in the local. 'Musical meaning' becomes inseparable from the networks in which music circulates, since the ontologically flattened score becomes one more actor to trace. Operatic musical meaning becomes inseparably intertwined with the membranous translations of the production collective. Our network tracing is itself a performance, a form of mediation through which we are 'transcending idealist ontologies of music [...]' in our pursuit of the

²⁴⁶ Georgina Born, "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity," *Twentieth-Century Music* 2, no. 1 (2005): 14.

OCN.²⁴⁷ Musical meaning is endlessly subjective, with objectively discernible elements, yet the explanation of which still leaves an unbridgeable chasm between textual descriptors and embodied - emotive - experience. Attempting to situate 'composer's intentions' or 'musical meaning' in a fabricated socio-musical reality leads us to a dead-end where meaning-making is circumscribed. We can describe *possible* meanings but never *the* meaning. Instead, our applied autoethnographic lens refuses closure and the notion of objective finality and meaning, just as our application of ANT rejects hierarchical social explanation. We refuse to accept a fabricated dichotomy between the 'literary-musical art works' of opera and the art world in which they are produced and circulate as one of many actors. We reject too the rigid social construction of opera described throughout opera studies. As Latour writes,

'abandoning social explanation is like abandoning the ether; nothing is lost except an artifact that made impossible the development of a science by forcing observers to invent entities with contradictory features, blinding them to the real ones. [...] No amateur ever alternated between 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity', so why force the whole sociology of art into this artificial quandary?'²⁴⁸

Our tracing of the production collective disregards notions of artistic subjectivity and objectivity as a false dichotomy, although it prizes subjective and intersubjective *experience*. We are disinterested in abstract musical meaning as a locus of analysis, since musical meaning is always mediated on an individual level, and therefore endlessly multifaceted, and indefinable in any meaningfully analytical sense beyond textual description; in the production collective, musical meaning is co-produced between actors, material and human. Operatic musical meaning can only be fully realised after tracing a multilayered array of actors: the acoustic materialisation of the composer-librettist's markings, the grain of the singer's voice and their expressive quality, the physical acting and embodied characterisation of the singer(s), interaction with costume, material props and lighting (the outcome of creative ideation in the rehearsal room and its form-taking through acts of translation), the individual reaction of audience members and their intersubjective experience with other audience-actors. The score is a script, a blueprint which enmeshes with the membraneous rehearsal space, and the streams of translations that occur in giving material form to ideation.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁴⁸ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 240.

Anthropologist Vlado Kotnik refers to

'[s]igns in opera as elements of operatic machinery (e.g. operatic space, subject, figure, light, libretto, sound effects, stage, decor, gesticulation, mimicry, movement, mask, hairstyle, costumes, stage properties, scenery, stage management) and their contextual uses [...].'²⁴⁹

Here meanings are signified by the machinations of opera: signs are mutually co-constructed by elements of this machinery in combination, both human and nonhuman. Our autoethnographic lens leads us to 'new categories' of embodied and intersubjective meaning-making: signs are distributed throughout the production collective, as performative elements co-constructed by a network of actors. Let us take the example of the 'white sheet' in *The Angel Esmeralda*, the blank billboard saying only "Space Available". It is all that is left after the 'billboard miracle': the original Minute Maid orange juice advert (possibly) revealed the face of the murdered girl Esmeralda when train headlights passed by, until the advert is removed. The meaning of this symbol implied by the musico-textual score blueprint - a meaning co-constructed by the story's original author Don DeLillo, librettist Pamela Carter and myself as composer - is intentionally ambiguous. Is it a symbol of hope, on which people might project their own faith in miracles; a 'sign to stand against your doubt?'²⁵⁰ Or is it a sign of memory, and how it grows 'thin and bitter?'²⁵¹ There is the implication that Sister Edgar takes the billboard advert as a miraculous sign, despite its removal. In other words, it is a sign of unstable meaning. The textual expression of this is clear in DeLillo and Pamela's texts. Tracing outward from narrative-textual context, the signification of this sign is made *performative* by the production collective, moving from imaginary-material form as written trace, to material-acoustic-embodied form, by means of our series of translations. Let us begin this translative tracing with an analysis of that other textual component: music.

I will resist pitch micro-analysis, although it is necessary to point out the connection between pitch and signification as it occurs through musical *gesture*. The means of textually expressing the move from certainty of belief in the billboard miracle to doubt among the People of the Bird is simple: several gestural and textural musical signs are

²⁴⁹ Vlado Kotnik, *Opera as Anthropology: Anthropologists in Lyrical Settings* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 17.

²⁵⁰ Pamela Carter, *The Angel Esmeralda* libretto (2019).

²⁵¹ Ibid.

used. The chorus (the People of the Bird) generally enact their text through full, luscious harmonies during their praising of the miracle. When the miracle-advert is removed, leaving the blank billboard, the chorus writing becomes sparse, largely in unison. Doubt is signified through a vocal-textural shift towards sparsity. Gestural use of motif is our other signifier: the motif which has acted as a musical symbol of the girl Esmeralda (figure 16) plays a crucial role at the moment the train headlights unveil the blank billboard. At the height of Sister Edgar's rapture, her vocal line takes the semi-tonal chromatic contours of the Esmeralda motif and transforms them (figure 17). For the billboard reveal, we hear this theme in the bass, but now highly dissonant and dominated by the timbre of electric guitar. Set between statements of this theme, the major third interval associated with the Esmeralda theme (and the previous arrivals of the train) is isolated and repeated aggressively, echoing the tuned percussion and harp timbre of the original theme (see figure 18). As the chorus finally reveal the new billboard text as 'Space Available', the orchestra obsesses over the same pitches all derived from the Esmeralda motif, marking an orchestral shift to sparsity in line with the chorus (see figure 19).



Figure 16. The Esmeralda motif.

93

VVV

1157

S.E. *Es - me - ral - da...*

Pno.

1159

S.H. *My vir - gin twin. My daugh - ter*

Pno.

Figure 17. Sister Edgar motif transformation.

Vin.

Clack.

Hr.

R. Pno. 1

R. Pno. 2

L. Clk.

Vc.

Db.

Figure 18. Billboard-reveal motif transformation.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Space Available'. It consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Chorus, with lyrics: 'The world is space. A - va - la - bi - le. Space. A - va - la - bi - le.' The second staff is for the Harp (Hr). The third staff is for the Electric Piano 1 (E. Pno. 1). The fourth staff is for the Electric Piano 2 (E. Pno. 2). The music is in a 4/4 time signature and features a complex, rhythmic melody in the piano parts and a vocal line in the chorus.

Figure 19. 'Space Available' motif transformation.

The signification at work in the text and music are enacted through the translation from ideal to material in the production collective, yet the latter's function is not merely realisation: in its continual passing through the rehearsal room membrane, this signification is both expanded upon and subverted. Through the confluence of lighting, choreography, props, and their attendant actors, the chorus enact a materialisation of doubt. Cast in a dusk (dark blue) lighting state by the Lighting Operator high up in the tech box, the chorus-actors produce LED tea lights from their pockets at bar 1307, where the Observers urge us to watch the train approaching, gradually turning them on until all are alight at bar 1330, the point where the blank billboard is revealed. Except that the Director, Designer and Lighting Designer have decided to keep the billboard as a black screen, as it has been from the beginning of Scene 4. The supposed miracle is kept ambiguous throughout: instead our attention is diverted to the singer-actors and their reactions. This has been highlighted by the lighting states focusing on the principal cast and chorus during Scenes 4 and 5, by turns blue, golden and green. As the chorus read the (imaginary) words 'Space Available', they turn their tea-lights off, plunged into the murkiness of the dark blue, dusk lighting state. In performance, the fracturing of community spirit and

certainty of belief is manifest visually within the performance space as an interaction of lighting (and Lighting Operator), props (provided by Assistant Stage Managers), and physical action from the singer-actors (holding retentions of the rehearsal sessions with the Director, and the textual fixing of the tea-light ideation in score-copies by the Assistant Directors and Stage Managers). We haven't even begun to trace the wider network of the production collective and how it interacts with this scene: the performance space itself as a material manifestation of design ideation from the designer Gregor Donnelly, implicating staff and Production Arts students who work in the scenic workshop, props workshop, design realisation studio and paintshop, who literally translate the ideal to the material. The chorus too in their 1970s costumes, sourced by the costume workshop, and managed by Head of Wardrobe and student dressers. The costume ideation involved a process of Gregor moving between the rehearsal room and costume workshop, gradually realising the different looks for the singers in discussion with the Director.

Let us keep this complex network of the production collective in mind as we return to the material signification of doubt. In the final scene of the opera, the production collective enacted a transformative moment which protended forward the ambiguous sign of the blank billboard from Scene 5, implying a transformation of doubt to belief in Sister Edgar. Below we see the interaction of Pamela's text and the production collective's staging from bar 1458, the former in bold, and the latter in bracketed italics:

'The face on a lighted billboard [*Sister Edgar begins to walk towards the billboard, singing in prayer; the lighting state is dark, but Edgar is spot-lit.*]

Stands against doubt. [*Black screen pulled into the flys by a production assistant flyman*]

Doubt, the disease. [*Back-lit white sheet revealed, lit by Lighting Operator*]

The image in her heart. [*Edgar directs the rest of her prayer directly towards the billboard*]

Esmeralda.

[*Edgar raises her arms towards the billboard, and exclaims*]

Amen.'

Musically, this section recalls the Esmeralda timbre of electric pianos, harp and tuned percussion, while being harmonically based on the minor and major thirds associated with the Esmeralda theme. The insistent major third motif that was so aggressive at the blank billboard unveiling is now a gentle, accompanying oscillation (see figure 20).

The image displays a musical score for a scene. It includes the following parts:

- S.S. (Soprano Soloist):** The top staff with lyrics: "no answer! She... O Lord... The green..."
- O.S. (Opera Soloist):** The second staff with lyrics: "Holds the stage in her heart... The face on a light-red hill bound..."
- O.S. (Opera Soloist):** The third staff with lyrics: "Holds the stage in her heart... The face on a light-red hill bound..."
- Vn. (Violin):** The fourth staff with the word "Ma" written below it.
- E. Pno. 1 (Electric Piano 1):** The fifth staff, featuring a dense, rhythmic accompaniment.
- E. Pno. 2 (Electric Piano 2):** The sixth staff, featuring a rhythmic accompaniment similar to the first piano part.

Figure 20. Motif as accompanying oscillation.

Together, the material-performance, text and music signify Edgar's belief in the billboard miracle. Yet the material aspects of set, lighting and production-actors, the form that translates the rehearsal room ideation of this signification into materiality, creates a deeper site of meaning around doubt and belief. The delaying of the billboard-reveal suggests that Edgar is seeing a private vision, a physical manifestation of her belief, and a sign to stand against her doubt in her faith. The billboard was not revealed to the chorus, and only at this late stage do we see why: this denial stopped the audience seeing a concrete vision, as to see a crowd witness the same thing implies a shared reality. The visual denial until Edgar is alone maintains the ambiguity at the heart of the opera, as to whether the miracle was real. A miracle becomes an intimate vision; the blank sheet becomes a sign of hope. This site of meaning was constructed by the production collective; every actor involved co-created this site that exists outwith of - but enmeshes with - the blueprint score and its acoustic, embodied realisation.



Figure 21. Sister Edgar (mezzo-soprano Elsa Roux) sings towards the blank billboard from *The Angel Esmeralda* (dress rehearsal).

This last scene of the opera also contains a personal sign for me, one that I did not disclose to the actors of the production collective. It is a haunting; a symbolic moment from my mother's life, projected through the music of the opera alone. Connecting to the idea of renewal of faith on a deeply personal level during the composition of the last scene, the embodied experience of writing became very emotional. Even in a heightened state of grief, my process was similar to what I described in the two mystory accounts above: moving between intense improvisation at the piano and hurried notation. Let us take a moment to consider the improvisational act as part of this ritualistic *performance* in the composer's studio. This performance focused on improvising the connecting passage between parts A and B of Edgar's last aria (figure 22). Liora Bresler notes that '[i]mprovisation [...] is not about complete freedom but is rather based on pre-existing structures that guide an improvisational performance.'²⁵² Riffing on the same theme, Becker writes:

²⁵² Bresler, "Research education shaped by musical sensibilities," 16.

'[c]onventions become embodied in physical routines, so that artists literally feel what is right for them to do [...]. [I]n those moments of simultaneous feeling and thinking what is being thought consists of a continual dialogue with the world relevant to the choices being made. The editorial and creative moment fuse in a dialogue with an art world.'²⁵³

Amid a moment of haunting, my improvisational acts were in dialogue with the opera world: my years playing arias as a répétiteur were retained in my attempts to improvise both texturally in the use of sustained supportive bass, accompanying figuration, and prominent melodic line, and structurally in seeking to link a bipartite aria with recourse to recognisable thematic material from earlier in the opera. My improvisations suddenly landed on an adaption of the “baptism theme” from Act I, Scene 4 (figure 23). This moment felt like an epiphany: an image materialised in my mind, of Sister Edgar alone in her room but feeling the power of a metaphorical rebaptism on contemplating the billboard miracle; superimposed, or threaded *through* this image was that of my mother being baptised as an adult. It came unbidden, an overwhelming moment where the musical and textual symbology of the work connected deeply to a moment of my mother’s life, passed on to me as a story in childhood. Here sign and signification are themselves haunted.



Figure 22. Connecting passage of Edgar’s last aria.

²⁵³ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 203-4.



Figure 23. Baptism theme.

Detouring to this act of musical signification is itself an improvisation, an urge to share the moment a site of embodied knowledge and meaning-making was invoked. This site spins in the space between the tracing of the production collective and the search for personal, embodied forms of knowledge, a bridge between ANT and autoethnography. Brydie-Leigh Bartleet observes that '[i]mprovisatory modes of inquiry allow autoethnographers to explore open spaces where the unplanned and unexpected emerge as central to the research process.'²⁵⁴ She notes how this

'entails interplay between a self and others. [...] an interplay between people, musical ideas, and cultural contexts resonates with autoethnography, which also involves a shifting of perspectives between the personal and contextual, the intuitive and structured, the evocative and analytical, and the descriptive and theoretical [...]. This moving back and forth results in a blurring of perspectives and genres.'²⁵⁵

Such a blurring is created by our shifting between ANT and autoethnography; between a traced material-ideation network in the production collective, and the embodied knowledge produced by a moment of haunting. As Barleet continues,

'[...] improvisatory processes thus move us away from a world of order and clearly defined things whose individual permanence is taken for granted, to a world where our certainty breaks down and new insights can emerge.'²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Bartleet, "Artful and Embodied Methods," 451.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 452.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The improvisatory comes to highlight the impermanence of the OCN: improvisation as site of epiphanic, embodied meaning in fleeting moments that continue to haunt production processes; rehearsal ideation as improvisation, translating to materialised form that lasts only as long as a production and performance period. Even the acoustic materialisation of the textual opera-blueprint is the result of improvisatory processes: the music rehearsals before production involve ‘moving back-and-forth between script and exploration’, testing different vocal timbres, tempi, articulations and modes of expression.²⁵⁷ In other words, the locus of embodied vocality in opera, ever shifting, a transient performative state that is different in every rehearsal and every performance.

The question of embodied vocality reminds us that ‘when non-linear and improvisatory modes of inquiry are used, the body is often the epistemological and ontological nexus from which these new insights emerge.’²⁵⁸ We have come full circle in connecting creative process and bodily sites of knowledge. Let us probe this locus of interactive meaning further by considering the relationship between the composer’s creative process and the concept - and realities of - *Fach*. As Joy H. Calico explains,

‘The German word ‘Fach’ literally means ‘speciality’, and in the world of opera that term refers to vocal categories. [...] [Fach] connote[s] much more specific information than range and tessitura: each Fach has associated qualities of vocal timbre, size, and agility, often manifested in a particular physiology and body type, and correlated to types of operatic characters grouped primarily by age and seriousness.’²⁵⁹

Fächer are a useful communicative shorthand for singers to express their performative range, and useful for composers in thinking about the capabilities of a voice, especially when there is limited contact with a singer during composition, or the casting of a role is unknown during writing. I began to draft *Esmeralda* before I met the Guildhall cast of singers, so the use of *Fächer* as a conceptual device was essential in creating roles that were feasible from a vocal-technical perspective. I usually work *between Fächer*, since many individual voices have attributes of more than one category (reflected in many operatic roles created for specific singers, such as *Die Königin der Nacht*, which is simultaneously for the dramatic soprano and coloratura soprano *Fächer*, or *Le Prince*

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Joy H. Calico, “Composing Clémence in *L’amour de loin*,” 409-410.

Charmant, which exemplifies the French voice type *Falcon*, a hybrid of soprano-mezzo-soprano attributes due to its very large range).²⁶⁰ Contrast between the two lead roles of *The Angel Esmeralda* was essential, to convey their polarities in terms of age and belief systems: the elderly Sister Edgar was initially conceived as lying between the dramatic mezzo-soprano and lyric mezzo-soprano voice types, while youthful Sister Grace was positioned between lyric and coloratura soprano *Fächer*. So far, so abstract.

When Steven Gietzen, the Opera Manager at Guildhall, organised ‘Opera composer coaching’ sessions with the future cast of *Esmeralda*, the experience of projecting abstract vocality (albeit within an imagined embodied framework) ceased. It was replaced by creative projection within the delimits of specific *person’s* voice type. The singer-actor defined the vocal space - and energy - of the composer’s ideation. As Dawn Upshaw noted on collaborating with Kaija Saariaho on *L’amour de loin*, ‘[...] the colours of an individual singer’s voice are most important for creating a role [...].’²⁶¹ The composer must be *hospitable* towards the singer-actor, the future embodiment of the role mapped out by librettist and composer. They must make room for the singer as a collaborator, to bring their unique tonal colours, timbral effects and acting abilities to bear on creative process, even before the ideation of the production collective begins. Crafting the creative process specifically to the individual voice engenders *reciprocal hospitality* in the singer-actor, who is not only more likely to find personal resonance with the role, but also willingly invests in role-learning, nuanced interpretative tactics, and strategies for managing tessitura issues. Calico situates the working relationship of Upshaw and Saariaho as a process of reciprocal hospitality, noting it

‘sits quite comfortably within an operatic tradition of composer-singer collaboration in which the artists act as co-creators. Saariaho shared material with the singer as she composed the opera, made changes to better suit her during the reality check of rehearsals, and when the role still proved to be an uncomfortable fit, reworked the tessitura to make it even more idiomatic for the singer.’²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Here I refer to the roles of ‘Queen of the Night’ in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, and ‘Prince Charming’ in Jules Massenet’s *Cendrillon*.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 407.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 409.

This shows how the process of composer-singer reciprocal hospitality itself becomes a form of improvisation. It often requires moving back and forth to achieve a suitable final form of vocality, in which the composer's material is mediated and reconstituted by the singer's body: a series of editorial moments which enact a large scale improvisational process. For *The Angel Esmeralda*, this process began with the aforementioned coaching sessions, in which I listened to the singers perform, questioned them about their voices and made notes as a record of range and salient vocal features, such as their most comfortable tessitura (see figure 24). After completing the vocal score as a projection of specific *vocalities*, feedback from the singers and their teachers via email led to revisions of tessitura in several sections of the score: editorial moments mediated by the digital domain. Reciprocal hospitality as improvisational act culminated in the music rehearsals, situating this co-creative act within the production collective. Expanding our oscillation between script and exploration, I co-created new vocal lines with the singers in rehearsals at various points. For Act II, Scene 3, this included creating *ossia* vocal lines for Elsa Roux (Sister Edgar) and Eline Vandenheede (Sister Grace), reflecting the nuanced differences in vocality between them and the other double-cast principle singers, Ema Nikolovska and Harriet Burns (see figure 25). If a notated passage was causing difficulties, they indicated whether a lower or higher tessitura would aid their sound production and text enunciation. I would immediately improvise an optional vocal line on the piano and notate it in my vocal score, as the Music Director Dominic Wheeler gave notes to the singers. I would play and read out the pitches of the new vocal lines to Dominic and the singers, who would notate them in their own scores. We then rehearsed the new version.

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on a four-line staff. The notation is organized into four systems, each with a title and specific annotations:

- System 1:** Titled "ANSELMO HAMILTON" and "PAC TETAO". It features a single staff with several notes and stems, some with arrows pointing to them.
- System 2:** Titled "SUGETAN TUMBAJ" and "SANTHER PIAB". It includes a circled note with the annotation "COLD RATURA" below it. Other notes have arrows and the word "heat" written nearby.
- System 3:** Titled "COLLIN SHAY" and "TOVA GUIDE". It shows a staff with notes and stems, with a circled note and the word "heat" written below it.
- System 4:** Titled "ROBERT (LOW)". It features a staff with notes and stems, including a circled note and the word "heat" written below it.

Figure 24. Record of salient vocal features.

745 **QQ**

S.G. for the poor, ...

S.E. Don't pa-tro-nize... the peo-ple you love

Pno.

770

S.G. pic-tures

S.E. Ges-sie, I have in

Pno.

Figure 25. *Ossia* vocal lines for Sister Edgar and Sister Grace, marked in my rehearsal vocal score.

This process speaks to Calico's observation that

'[b]ecause composers have always written for specific performers, an opera score can be read as a palimpsest. The timbre, agility, power, sweet spots, tessituras, strengths and weaknesses of those singers, many of whom are now lost to history, determined the shape and style of vocal lines within parameters of style and convention, thereby defining those characters.'²⁶³

²⁶³ Ibid., 408.

This is a different form of palimpsest from Katie's temporally-distributed vocal score: this renders the score as the blueprint of a malleable creative process where individual vocality is inscribed into the work at a deep level. Such a palimpsest protends forward to the wider production collective and its translative process of ideation: there is a direct correlation between 'blocking' (movement direction) and tessitura, including prop interaction, physical gesture, and use of the performance-acoustic space. For instance, in Act I, Scene 5, Collin Shay (the Tour Guide) used a virtuosic trill to open up a flamboyant American flag umbrella (figure 26). As his tessitura assumes a lower position and he takes on a more matter-of-fact tone, he closes the umbrella.

During music rehearsals, I moved large portions of Collin's role to a high tessitura. At the climax of their aria, Collin encouraged a considerable elevation of tessitura to achieve a much greater sense of virtuosity and display (figure 27). Collin ended up singing this atop the set's graffiti wall tower, where their physical elevation and blocking with umbrella prop emphasised this sense of extroversion (figure 28). I followed their advice on the most powerful parts of their voice for projecting over the orchestra, and for conjuring the playfully virtuosic tone I hoped to achieve. Collin's hospitality co-created the role through sharing a site of embodied knowledge (the singer's body); this site was then projected through the translations of the production collective, as we see with the umbrella and graffiti tower examples.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal part (O.3) and piano accompaniment (Pno.). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 152. The vocal line starts at measure 1285 with a complex trill. The lyrics "Spit of land, Out - side the" are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment is marked "sub. mp".

Figure 26. Collin's virtuosic trill.

Reciprocal hospitality as improvisation also extended to the work of Music Director (Dominic), composer and orchestra. At the point where sirens begin blaring in Act 1, Scene 5, I had written a soprano saxophone glissando gesture from C5 to C6 to represent the siren. It went against the mechanism of the instrument: the upward glissando was possible, but the descending was not. In Stage and Orchestra rehearsals, we came to a standstill when the soprano saxophonist flagged the impossibility of these bars; she had checked them with her tutor (the Guildhall tutors across music and theatre departments being crucial actors in the production collective). Dominic, Martin and I pondered whether a pre-recorded sound effect might be necessary. I wondered about the suitability of an over-exaggerated glissando in the strings, to the same pitches. Dominic suggested a glissando in the cellos at twice the speed of the original saxophone effect, from C4 to C5, played on the A string (figure 29). The two cellists experimented until they came upon the intended effect, which was notated by them, myself, Dominic and the Assistant Musical Director. We then rehearsed it in its orchestral context. The ease with which we sorted this section was due to the hospitality of the instrumentalists, and a process of rapid ideation between Dominic, Martin and myself, translated to acoustic-material form. This suggests that the score as palimpsest contains traces of the translative process of the production collective; through the tracing of the social we find a collaborative, translative model for the OCN inscribed into the musical score itself. To paraphrase Born: through tracing the socialites of operatic performance and practice, we find the subversion of 'hierarchical and stratified social relations'; 'performed contradictions that can contribute powerfully to the nature of socio-musical experience' by privileging the interrelatedness of the human actors roaming the flatland.²⁶⁴ Once again, I am localising Born's perspective within a small-scale performative context. The 'hierarchical and stratified social relations' are here those that often exist within more conventional operatic productions: the 'authority' of Music Director and Director over other actors. The example of collaboration above contradicts this top-down view of operatic protocols, reinscribing the experiential nature of collaborative process in the rehearsal room within opera studies.

²⁶⁴ Born, "Music and the materialization of identities," 381.

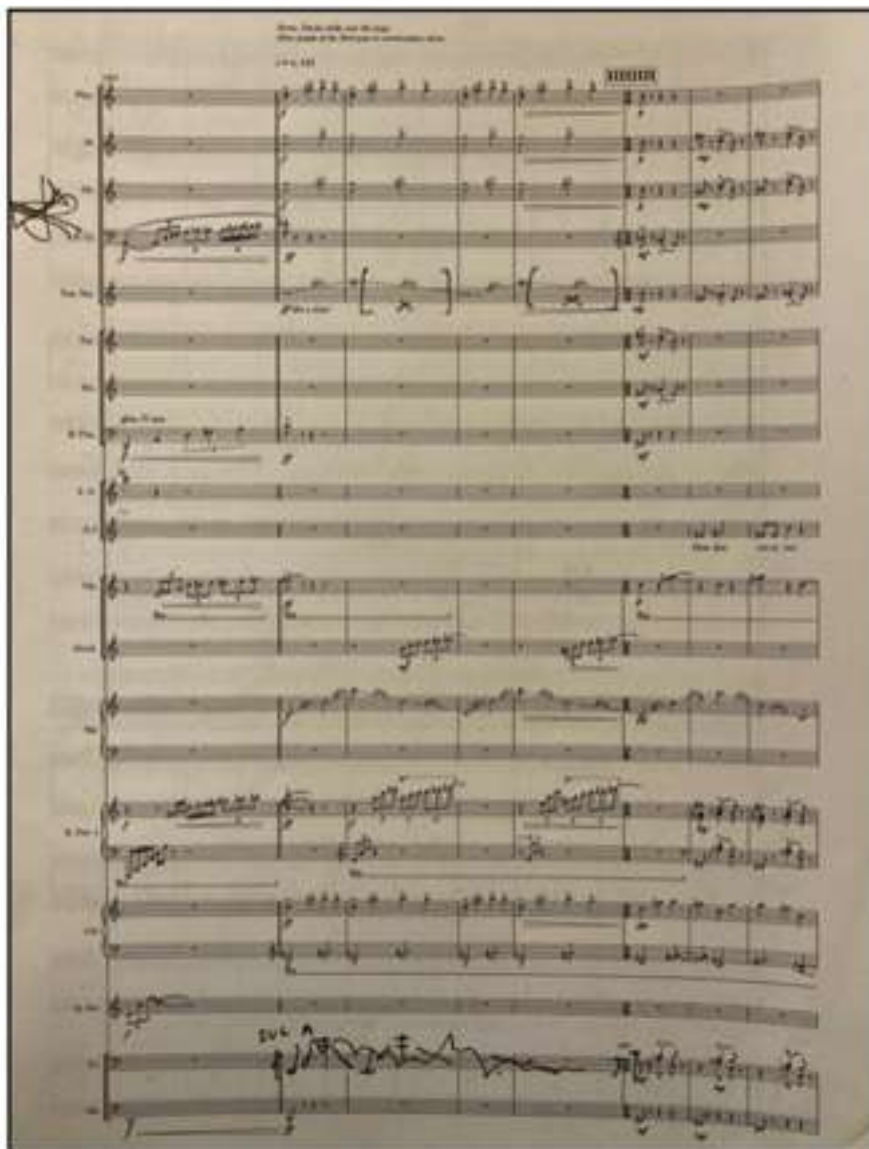


Figure 29. Siren cello effect, marked in my rehearsal orchestral score.

2.10 Scene-change

High up above the flatland, we hear the roar of a dragon (in a metaphorical world, anything can happen). In *Catriona and the Dragon*, the titular beast is a metaphor for climate change, beginning as a symbol of its effects, yet evolving into a symbol for victims of anthropogenic climate change, displaced from their homes. This symbolic evolution was the ingenious idea of Laura Attridge, the project's librettist and future director. As we walked along the coast in Dunbar deep in conversation, Laura subverted my more simplistic ideation of the destructive dragon, turning it into a scapegoat for man's actions. We walked with Sue Baxendale, the project coordinator for the opera, who would shortly

drive us to the Bridge to Nowhere, the symbol that originally inspired the opera and appeared at the beginning of this chapter. In the narrative Laura and I co-created, *Catriona* must cross the Bridge to Nowhere to face the Dragon; she ends up facing the reality of humankind's effect on the natural world.

This reckoning also faces the opera world, just as it touches every aspect of our lives. Drawing on Félix Guattari's three ecologies (environmental, social, and mental), Simon Hatab poses three questions for opera in the face of climate change:

'how can a real or symbolic territory be reconstituted around an opera house? What links can be forged between the institution and its audiences? Can reflection on the ecological crisis we are going through produce new forms and generate new stories?'²⁶⁵

Catriona and the Dragon suggests some answers: combining environmental and social ecologies, opera is resituated away from the opera house, in the heart of a community using a non-theatre site. *Catriona* will be performed in the Haddington Corn Exchange at the Lammermuir Festival in 2022; Laura and Sue will work with local people in East Lothian to develop community involvement with set and costume design, with a focus on using environmentally-sustainable materials. Community musicians will come together as chorus and orchestra, from beginner instrumentalists to advanced youth players; from primary school singers to the Dunbar Voices. A different sort of operatically imagined community: a production collective traced across local spaces and people, extending out to a locally-situated audience with personal connections to the actors on stage, the 'symbolic territory' of the opera's narrative, and the real territory of the reconstituted operatic space.

Perhaps community opera is one answer to opera's ecological questions, a response to opera's emergent haunting by climate change. We return to the haunted concepts of justice and hospitality: in an age of demands for 'climate justice', it is the ethical duty of actors within the OCN to consider how their art form relates to ecology; to be hospitable to the spectres of future generations, and to take action now in the hope that opera can remain a part of that future. As Sophie Lanoote and Nathalie Moine write, we must

²⁶⁵ Simon Hatab, "Réparer un territoire, imaginer de nouveaux récits Comment la question écologique travaille les maisons d'opéra," trans. Anon, *Alternatives théâtrales*, September 29, 2021, <https://blog.alternativestheatrales.be/reparer-un-territoire-imaginer-de-nouveaux-recits-comment-la-question-ecologique-travaille-les-maisons-dopera/> (accessed October 27, 2021).

‘Reconcile the spectacle and the living [...]. [I]n the Anthropocene era, the notion of *live* performance takes on an unexplored dimension: the living performance of the spectacle is no longer an inexhaustible resource, we perceive its vulnerability.’²⁶⁶

It is the very resources of opera, its material world, that we must (re)consider. Through the imaginative we can reconfigure the material: this is the challenge for the production collective. This call-to-action can be met by diverse actors from different perspectives within the OCN. *Catriona and the Dragon* joins a web of works where creative ideation is shaped by this haunting: *Plant Opera* (2019), co-created as an ‘interdisciplinary science-art project’ with director-designer Kapitolina Tcvetkova, seeks to give voice to nature through ‘a system of sensors allowing us to translate the real-time data expression from plants into sounds, texts and visuals’; it is both an installation and an opera, in indoor and open-air settings, where a singer, dancer, and two performers ‘lead a fragile dialogue with the plant performers [...]’.²⁶⁷ Composer Sivan Eldar and librettist Cordelia Lynn also give voice to nature in a reinterpretation of Ovid, *Like Flesh* (to premiere in 2022 at Opéra de Lille): a relationship is complicated when a woman metamorphoses into a tree, the authors drawing ‘on modern environmental science to create a radical and passionate new myth about our broken relationship with an environment in crisis.’²⁶⁸ Material reconfiguration can also be enacted on an institutional level: there are sustainability policies at La Monnaie, Festival d’Aix-en-Provence, Opéra National de Lyon and Opéra national de Paris, in the form of eco-design (*l’écoconception*) productions, set retrieval and recycling of materials.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Sophie Lanoote and Nathalie Moine, “Le Spectacle et le Vivant,” trans. Anon, *Alternatives théâtrales*, July 12, 2021, <https://blog.alternativestheatrales.be/le-spectacle-et-le-vivant/> (accessed October 28, 2021).

²⁶⁷ “About the Plant Opera,” *Plant Opera Team*, [n.d.], <https://www.plant-opera.com/en/about.php> (accessed October 28, 2021).

²⁶⁸ “Like Flesh,” *Sivan Eldar*, [n.d.], <https://www.sivaneldar.com/like-flesh> (accessed October 28, 2021).

²⁶⁹ Sylvie Martin-Lahmani and Caroline Godart, “Décors et matériaux. Impact environnemental, conception et fabrication, montage, conservation, déplacements, recyclage,” *Alternatives théâtrales*, September 23, 2021, <https://blog.alternativestheatrales.be/decors-et-materiaux-impact-environnemental-conception-et-fabrication-montage-conservation-deplacements-recyclage/> (accessed October 28, 2021).

Carolyn Abbate speaks of

‘opera’s “facts of life” - live performance, grounded and intensely material, with its labouring singers, breathing that becomes singing, staging, interpretation, and mortality.’²⁷⁰

The notion of breath invokes *air*: breath displacing air, drawing it into a performative act; breathing the atmosphere of the stage, the opera house, the city, the Earth. Through Latour, we reposition the opera singer within environmental ecology:

‘If the composition of the air we breathe depends on living beings, the atmosphere is no longer simply the environment in which living beings are located and in which they evolve; it is, in part, a result of their actions. In other words, there are not organisms on one side and an environment on the other, but a coproduction by both. *Agencies* are redistributed.’²⁷¹

The singer is implicated as an agent of air composition quality, just as we all are: all actors of the OCN, all opera institutions. All materials, all actors - human and nonhuman - have their agencies distributed through the OCN; they circulate in - and alter - the very atmosphere in which the machinations of the opera world unfold. If we want this air to continue to be implicated in - and to *allow* - the performative breathing of opera, we must ask some difficult questions: can we justify the decision to fly in the international *diva* or *divo*? Can we justify tours overseas, for the sake of prestige? Can we reject ingrained hierarchies, to recognise local talent, local communities, and local ecologies? The spectre of climate justice will continue to haunt the OCN, as the scene changes for a new world.

²⁷⁰ Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, vii.

²⁷¹ Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2018), 67-68.

Chapter 3: Dream World

3.1 Phantoms amid a pandemic

In the previous chapter we traced the OCN through its human and non-human actors; through bodily, technological, and material mediations. We have seen how the OCN enmeshes embodied and emotive subjectivities besides intersubjective experience, and how the material world intercuts with these personal realities through the lens of hauntology. Here we move into a new - albeit temporary -world, where an invisible actor disrupts and reconfigures the OCN: the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The old world of enclosed theatres, opera singers' exhaled aerosols arcing through the air towards performer and audience alike, is suspended. Yet that suspension of business-as-usual brings dreams of the past and of futurity: new modes of creative practice open up when circumstances force your hand. More on dreaming later...

Mary Elizabeth Luka writes '[i]n the time of COVID-19, the virus acts as a material configuration around which our individual experiences [...] take place.'²⁷² She contemplates the 'ever-more material implications of the disease we are trying to resist as a global society. This is not the end of the world. It is a shift.'²⁷³ In this shifting of the world - the material world - we see 'materiality writ large and small': during national lockdowns, on an institutional level we see opera houses close, with their attendant human actors either cast out of the network through which they previously could be traced, or re-situated within a domestic environment; many non-human actors cease to circulate, and are placed in hibernation; new non-human actors increase technological mediation as performativity must find outlets online. The virus as disruptive material configuration evokes Avery F. Gordon's use of the term haunting

'to describe those singular and yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction [...], when what's been in your blind field comes into view.'²⁷⁴

²⁷² Mary Elizabeth Luka, "Making Video Glitter in the Time of COVID-19," *Qualitative Inquiry* 27, no. 7 (2021): 884.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 885.

²⁷⁴ Avery F. Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity," *Borderlands* 10, no. 2 (2011): 2.

The virus-actor exposed the circulating chains of actors at work pre-pandemic, haunting us through their absence.

The Angel Esmeralda was one of the earliest operas to be cancelled in the UK as COVID-19 spread: the final performance on 2nd March 2020 never took place. On the same day, The Guardian published an email sent by the principal of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama to staff and students:

'We regret to inform you that a member of teaching staff has tested positive for Coronavirus [...]. As a precautionary measure, the school will be closed for up to 14 days from today [...].'²⁷⁵

The final performance of *The Angel Esmeralda* was made into a phantom by the virus: the performers, creative team and technical crew haunted by the non-event with its absent rituals of closure; the promised emotive and social processes marking the finality of a performance run; the application and removal of make-up for the final time; the custom exchange of cards and hugs farewell. The virus not only disrupted these traces of the OCN: it altered our bodily performances and embodied experience on the most intimate level, stopping the daily rituals of hand-shakes, hugs, quiet conversations with heads held close together. Continuing this thread of bodily disruption, the virus furthered our transformation into one of Donna Haraway's 'cyborgs':

'The machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment [...] we are they.'²⁷⁶

Computers, smart phones, our Wi-fi enabled communicative abilities: in lockdown these became more intensely embedded within our navigation of the world. As Thorndahl and Frandsen write,

²⁷⁵ Jedidajah Otte et al., "Coronavirus Live," *The Guardian*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2020/mar/02/coronavirus-live-updates-china-latest-news-us-australia-deaths-markets-italy-iran-update-cases?page=with:block-5e5d46b18f086a28115b6369#block-5e5d46b18f086a28115b6369> (accessed September 4, 2021).

²⁷⁶ Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), 179.

'[...] digital technologies are not merely seen as neural transmitters of information but rather as performative infrastructures [...], they become *mediating* agents in their own right that not only facilitate sense making but also shape the performance of social acts [...].'²⁷⁷

For performing artists this digital and technological mediation takes on an especially intense and radical role, as we shall see in this chapter's case study of an R&D process reimagining *BambinO* for the COVID-era world.

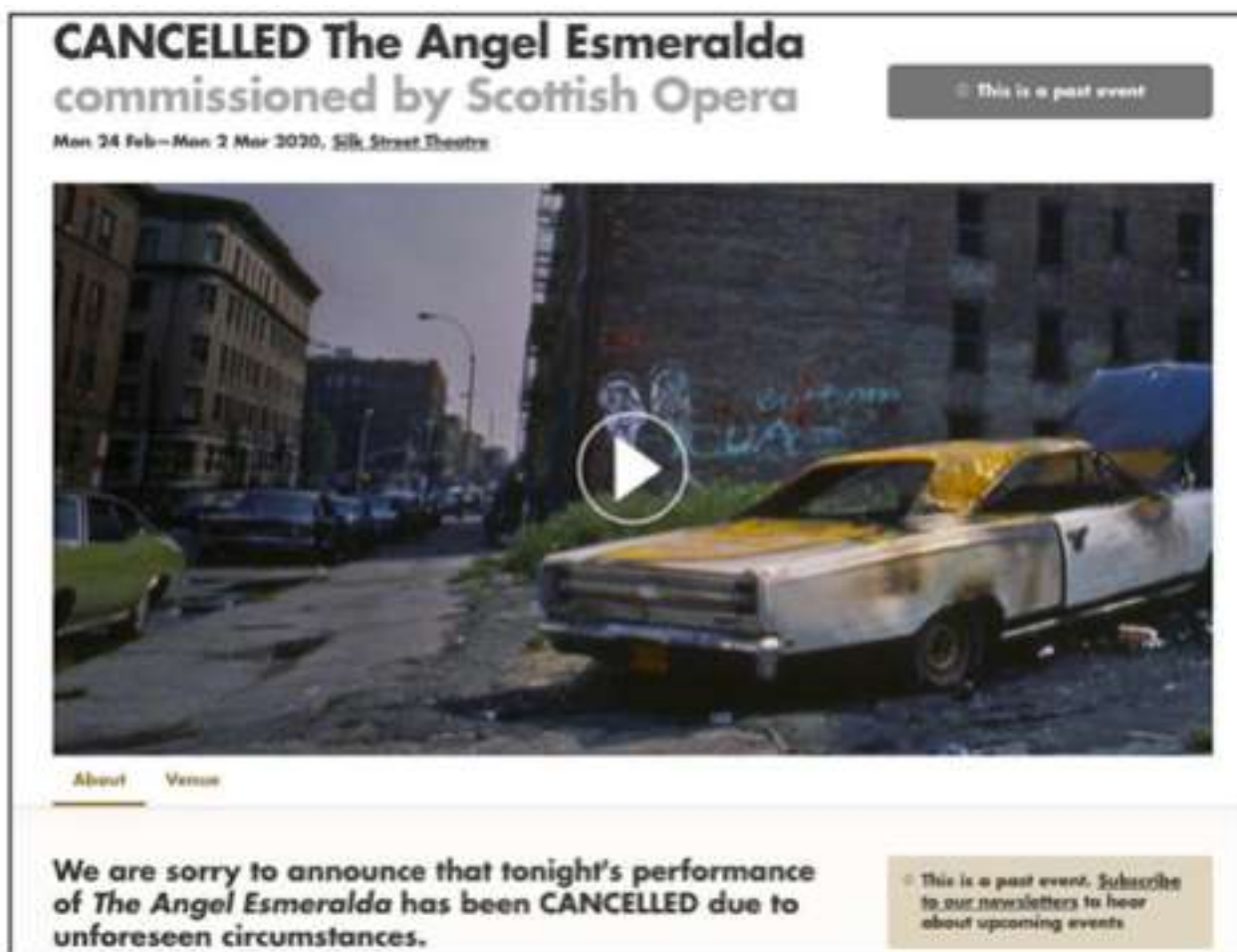


Figure 30. *The Angel Esmeralda* cancellation notice.

The many previous performances of *BambinO* haunted our R&D process, memories of embodied performance and performative interactions between the cast and audience of babies and carers; a different perspective of haunting from that created by the 'phantom performance' of *The Angel Esmeralda*. Both ghosts of loss from alternate perspectives: one evoking the loss of intimate and tactile performance; the other the loss of the promised

²⁷⁷ Kathrine Liedtke Thorndahl and Lasse Nørgaard Frandsen, "Logged in While Locked Down: Exploring the Influence of Digital Technologies in the Time of Corona," *Qualitative Inquiry* 27, no. 7 (2021): 870.

yet never-to-be. The haunting that is of most interest in our analysis of the *Bambino* R&D, however, concerns the future. Namely, the future of opera performance in the age of COVID-19. As Gordon notes,

‘[...] to the extent that a something-to-be-done is characteristic of haunting, one can say that futurity is imbricated or interwoven into the very scene of haunting itself.’²⁷⁸

Although Gordon explores ghostly futurity in relation to addressing social violence, her thoughts are very relevant in thinking about the way haunting functioned during the *Bambino* R&D:

‘[...] haunting is an emergent state: the ghost arises, carrying the signs and portents of a repression in the past or the present that’s no longer working. The ghost demands your attention. The present wavers. Something will happen [...]. [T]his emergent state is also the critical analytic moment. That’s to say, when the repression isn’t working anymore the trouble that results creates conditions that demand re-narrativization [...] [and] also invite action. [...] The something-to-be-done is something you have to try/do for yourself: while it can be shared, it can’t be imposed [...].’²⁷⁹

The team who came together for the *Bambino* R&D shared ideas for the future in order to enact a change within opera-making; a ‘re-narrativization’ of opera processes. This attempt to recontextualise existing practices was made with the hope of finding new methods of performance demanded by the effects of COVID-19 and the pandemic. Live opera performance was in crisis, a spectre carrying the decimated livelihoods of performing artists and other actors within the OCN. This ghost demanded action because it tore at the very fabric of our lives.

²⁷⁸ Gordon, “Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity,” 3.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

3.2 Dreaming through ghosts

The spectres created by our virus-actor can induce dreaming. Dreams of the past and of futurity. Our ghost demanded our attention, and our shared ‘something-to-be-done’ took the form of dreaming, as both individual and collective action. We can only move *through* our futurity-ghosts by dreaming of creative possibilities, pushing through their dense ectoplasm to reform their shape in a form we have dreamed into being. This ‘moving through’ became the main dream-work of the *BambinO* R&D. Before presenting an assemblage based around the R&D field notes and their analysis, it is necessary to define the ways in which I will engage ‘dream metaphors and rhetorics’ as an analogue for individual and collaborative creative process.²⁸⁰

Dreaming may seem a counterintuitive rhetorical framework for a thesis claiming to be grounded in ANT: dreams are after all immaterial and ethereal, are they not? Yet it is possible to ground dreams as a facet of materiality, an aspect of a human-actor’s embodied experience. Neuroscientist Erik Hoel explains that we

‘have an experiential worldline, which is a tracking of your experience through the space of possible experiences. Imagine a vast abstract space wherein the different degrees of freedom are sensations: hot to cold, distant to close, bright to dark; and also proprioception, smells and tastes, even representations. All manner of things which you can feel, classify, perceive. Every conscious experience you have is some point in this vast statespace of possible experiences [...]. A single day forms a particular collection of points in it, a trajectory. Your whole life will unfold as an exploration of this space, moving through a cathedral so multitudinous in its dimensions it would require transfinite mathematics to even begin to define.’²⁸¹

Crucially for our discussion of dream materiality, Hoel notes that ‘[t]here is some material mirror to all this - a neural statespace that matches the experiential statespace point for point in its dimensions and trajectory.’²⁸² These statespaces, while abstract, are embedded within the very fabric of our brain matter. These abstract spaces lead us to the function of dreaming:

²⁸⁰ Heinz-Günter Vester, “Sex, Sacredness, and Structure Contributions to the Sociology of Collective Dreams,” *Symbolic Interaction* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 105.

²⁸¹ Erik Hoel, “Enter the Supersensorium,” *The Baffler*, no. 45 (May-June 2019): 124-125.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 125.

'Dreams are like random walks of experiences - a form of exploration. To frame dreams this way makes it more obvious why they matter: dreaming allows us to explore the experiential statespace in ways that deviate from waking life [...]. The utility of dreams is that they do exactly this. The purpose of dreams is the dreams themselves.'²⁸³

This brings us to the first aspect of our dream metaphor: creativity or the creative act can function as an exploration of such an experiential statespace, wherein lines of inquiry deviate from the mundane, while being unavoidably grounded in it. Creative acts are inseparable from the social world within which their human actors circulate. Similarly (though without the element of conscious control),

'[d]reams are emergent "experiences" that reflect, in unsolicited and uncontrollable fashion, the interaction of self, culture, and structure, as people test and rehearse strategies for stability. Just as culture mediates action in waking life, it mediates action within the dream world. Dream discourse exposes the subtle reinstrumentation of the cultural tool-kit in response to and prior to structural change.'²⁸⁴

In our forthcoming 'creative-dream discourse' on the *Bambino* R&D, we will see such a reinstrumentation in response to the structural change wrought by COVID-19. Related to the idea of dreams as emergent experiential explorations is Hoel's suggestion that

'dreams are the exercise of consciousness [...]. [A] necessary technique for ensuring a healthy waking consciousness, one that can navigate possible experiences.'²⁸⁵

In a sense, creativity as a performative act seeks and requires a conscious reflexivity about the social and material world the artist is situated within, an exercise of consciousness (reflexivity) as a technique to ensure a mindful and embodied creative process. This technique guides the wide array of artistic contexts or challenges the artist might face.

Before continuing, I must note that my use of the designation 'artist' could be applied to any of the human-actors who participated in the *Bambino* R&D, whether or not they would

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Gary Alan Fine and Laura Fischer Leighton, "Nocturnal Omissions: Steps Toward a Sociology of Dreams," *Symbolic Interaction* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 96.

²⁸⁵ Hoel, "Enter the Supersensorium," 126.

be traditionally viewed as such. Each actor had full creative agency within the context of the R&D, due to the creative dream-work we used as a guiding principle, and which will be explored later in this chapter. Moving beyond the role of the individual artist, my thoughts on creativity as they relate to the R&D process align with Katie Glaskin's:

'In referring to creativity, it is not my intention to presume an individual (in contrast to a relational) form of personhood. Rather, I follow Hughes-Freeland in seeing creativity as something which 'may be applied to two kinds of action: innovations that mark a change in direction from previous practice; and ongoing problem-solving.'²⁸⁶

The R&D specifically focused on group work seeking to innovate opera-making practice (both generally and in relation to the previous collective practice of a certain number of our group), and to solve problems around the production of live and digital opera in the age of COVID-19.

The second aspect of dream rhetoric relevant to exploring collaborative creative process involves the act of dream-telling. Writing about dream-work as part of psychotherapeutic Group Analysis, Robi Friedman notes that

'[d]ream-telling is an event connected to a complex relationship between relater and audience. We should differentiate clearly between a dream as a private event during sleep and dream-telling as an interpersonal event. Not only are dreams not restricted to the representational/ diagnostic, but dream-telling can also be considered a first effort to influence an external relational world. Relational and intersubjective variables may play an even more important role than the dreamt material itself.'²⁸⁷

It is precisely relational and intersubjective processes of meaning-making and performativity which were so crucial to the *Bambino* R&D. We engaged in creative dream-telling to explore ideas from many perspectives, collectively shaping something - our futurity-ghosts, jointly moulding the ectoplasm into new forms. This collective action reflects the idea that dreams 'register the shared social experience of epochal

²⁸⁶ Katie Glaskin, "Dreams, memory, and the ancestors: creativity, culture, and the science of sleep," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 44-45.

²⁸⁷ Robi Friedman, "Dream-telling as a Request for Containment - Reconsidering the Group-Analytic Approach to the Work with Dreams," *Group Analysis* 37, no. 4 (2004): 510.

transformations.²⁸⁸ Our dream-ideas - and indeed the very format and context of the R&D itself - were deeply shaped by our experience of moving into the pandemic epoch, with the virus-actor COVID-19 driving shifting societal transformations. It is also in the telling of our dream-ideas that their true value emerges: the act of telling and sharing takes on greater importance and meaning than the individual value of our singular dream-ideas. This is the unique benefit of a collaborative creative process: ideas are moulded and shaped collectively in an iterative process, that is as bound to relational, intersubjective process as it is to the imagination.

Dream-telling also invokes questions of the relationship between dreaming and memory, which forms the third aspect of our dream rhetoric framework. Glaskin notes that

‘in recalling dreams, the autogenerative, creative, and autonomous aspect of dreams combines with the conscious narration, construction, and elaboration of these dream experiences upon waking.’²⁸⁹

She quotes Jeanette Mageo’s theory of ‘the ‘fragmentary nature’ of remembered dreams as being ‘holographic’, arguing that ‘partial memories trigger attempts to reconstruct the missing part of the image’, such that the whole of the recalled dreamt image is produced from ‘part of it’ [...] In addition, there is also the more conscious elaboration of the dreamt material to facilitate its integration into existing ritual forms [...].²⁹⁰ In the R&D process, there is a holographic quality to creative ideas which are shared with the group: often ideas are like fragments, haunted by past experience or conjuring the ghosts of actor networks; our futurity-spectre perpetually haunts every idea. Sharing ideas often triggers group attempts to create a more fully-realised image, creating a whole from the part. There is a process of elaboration where the partial idea is refined or expanded to integrate within the ectoplasm of the futurity-spectre. The dream of the individual transforms into a collective dream. Furthering the encapsulation of this process within our dream metaphor, Vester notes

‘by means of this collective ritual of mutual dream talk and dream listening, the dream becomes a collective dream. Because dreaming as well as telling and

²⁸⁸ Ann Marie Plane and Leslie Tuttle, “Review Essay: Dreams and Dreaming in the Early Modern World,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 920.

²⁸⁹ Glaskin, “Dreams, memory, and the ancestors,” 58.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

interpreting dreams is an ongoing process, it can be said that this collective dream does not have its origin in an individual's particular dream; rather, the dream of an individual derives from a collectively shared stock of knowledge. Thus, an individual's dream can be related to the collective conscious in the same manner as a particular author's poem can be understood as a social product. Both in poetry and in dreaming, the structure and meaning of words, metaphors, or images stem from collective representations. In addition, objects appearing in dreams, the situations in which these objects are embedded, and the emotions associated with the situations and objects are also derived from collective representations.²⁹¹

Freud mused on the connection between memory and day-dreaming (what he calls 'phantasying') in relation to creative writers. He suggested the

'relation of a phantasy to time is in general very important. We may say that it hovers, as it were, between three times - the three moments of time which our ideation involves. Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day-dream or phantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the memory. Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them.'²⁹²

This tripartite temporality strung on a single thread can be related to the dream-work of creative ideation: the artist-actor dreams an idea in the present prompted by the desire to explore a creative issue or to innovate; the artist-actor's practice is engaged, encoded with the memory of previous practice, previous innovations; practice and innovation are haunted by the futurity-spectre, striving for fulfilment of the dream-work in the future, the yet-to-be.

Freud's rumination on memory and day-dreaming in turn raises the question of the connection between dreaming and day-dreaming (or "mind wandering").²⁹³

'Psychological research into the subjective content of these states has revealed an intriguing [...] picture of dreaming and mind wandering (MW) as complex

²⁹¹ Vester, "Sex, Sacredness, and Structure," 111.

²⁹² Sigmund Freud, "Creative writers and day-dreaming," *Standard Edn.* 9 (1908): 147-8.

²⁹³ Kieran C. R. Fox et al., "Dreaming as mind wandering: evidence from functional neuroimaging and first-person content reports," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (July 2013): 1.

integrations of sensorimotor imagery, emotions, memories, and future planning, in which problem-solving can also occur [...].²⁹⁴

These mental states are ‘simultaneously mundane and exceptional’, which could also be said of ideation through creative day-dreaming: this state can be as fantastical and imaginative as it is grounded in the mundane realities of circulating networks of human and non-human actors.²⁹⁵

‘The broadest similarity between dreaming and MW is perhaps also the most basic: the sensory building blocks of spontaneous thought in both waking and dreaming are overwhelmingly visual and auditory (though experiences in other sensory modalities are by no means precluded).²⁹⁶

Interestingly for several examples arising in the *Bambino* case study, ‘the next most prominent modality after vision and audition [in Schredl’s 2010 review of dream content] was the vestibular sense: [...] flying, floating, acceleration, etc. [...].²⁹⁷

Returning to memory,

‘[b]oth dreaming and MW draw on episodic memory [consisting of ‘general facts’²⁹⁸] and semantic memory sources [‘auto-biographical information readily available to the subject’²⁹⁹] as building blocks for novel subjective experiences [...]. It is now well documented that dream content borrows from both temporally proximal and distal memories.³⁰⁰

Proximal memories from the previous day are generally known as “day residue”, while

‘the recurrence of elements 5-7 days following an experience is referred to as the “dream-lag” effect [...]. Personally relevant and emotionally salient events appear to manifest themselves in dream content as day residue and dream lag effects, but can also surface many years after initial encoding [...]. The

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Glaskin, “Dreams, memory, and the ancestors,” 49.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 49.

³⁰⁰ Fox et al., “Dreaming as mind wandering,” 5.

presence of [these] events in dreams may be related to the fact that emotional and impactful events are preferentially consolidated in memory.³⁰¹

The concepts of day residue and dream lag events are useful for our dream rhetoric network: individual and group ideation in an R&D context can move between the processing of creative work from the previous day (as will be seen in the ‘check in’/ ‘check out’ process in the *Bambino* case study); and the return and cycling through ideas from earlier in the R&D process itself. Emotionality and personal histories are woven through these day residue and dream lag events, sometimes reflective of immediate emotional responses to current events, sometimes reaching further back into personal lived experience. This emotionality invokes Michele Stephen’s proposal of two different memory ‘registers’: a verbal and semantic register usually available in waking consciousness, and an emotional memory register which is outside consciousness, connected to the ‘autonomous imagination.’³⁰² Stephen suggests that during REM [rapid eye movement] sleep, the day’s ‘sensory input’ is encoded within the ‘emotional memory system’, causing a form of memory consolidation.³⁰³ Such an encoding is similarly enacted on an individual and group level within artistic collaboration: ideas formulated and shared are discussed and worked through as acts of dream-telling; those ideas often trigger emotional responses which lead to further creative ideation and elaboration, resulting in an idea which is stored and reinforced within the collective ‘creative memory’ of the group. It is important to note that here I am using an abstract, generalised concept that is in tension (and fundamentally incompatible) with ANT. This is again part of my project of setting theory in tension; of extending ANT’s flatland as a basis for superimposing an evocative, autoethnographic approach, so that the creative breaks through the limitations of the theoretical. The cultivation of collective creative memory is the main mechanism through which our futurity-spectre is reshaped into an artistic response to haunting’s call-to-action: the means through which re-narrativisation can occur. As with the two memory registers, one verbal and semantic and the other emotional, this reshaping involves moving across different registers of cognitive control, from logistical planning around human and non-human actor networks to instinctive emotional reaction. This suggests why the use of day-

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Michele Stephen, “Memory, emotion and the imaginal mind,” in *Dreaming and the self: new perspectives on subjectivity, identity, and emotion*, ed. J. M. Mageo (Albany: State University of New York Press), 97-8.

³⁰³ Ibid., 98.

dreaming and ‘dreaming proper’ are useful within our rhetorical device, if we imagine ‘an uninterrupted continuum between very focused waking thought, waking MW, and fully immersive dreaming [...]’.³⁰⁴

Dreaming through ghosts; haunted dreams. We have already established the materiality of dreaming and haunting as an essential component of their inclusion in an ANT reading of opera-making. Yet as a rhetorical framework, we can also view dreaming as a different sort of network: one with its basis in creative idea-sharing through collaboration. A relational network that is a sort of flip-side equivalent of a material actor network, tracing the imaginative, intersubjective network that exists between material-actors. In this imaginative network, this dream world, even material actors can be transformed into other actors, changing form and function. The tracing of the imaginative network below will reveal how one of its crucial elements is the notion of ‘play’: as Freud writes,

‘[t]he creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously - that is, in which he invests with large amounts of emotion - while separating it sharply from reality.’³⁰⁵

The artist ‘builds castles in the air and creates what are called *daydreams*’, becoming a ‘dreamer in broad daylight [*Der Träumer am hellichten Tag*].’³⁰⁶ Let us see what dreams were had during the *Bambino* R&D.

³⁰⁴ Fox et al., “Dreaming as mind wandering,” 9.

³⁰⁵ Freud, “Creative writers and day-dreaming,” 144.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 145-9.

3.3 BambinO R&D: A Dreamer Space (Dreaming through materials)

Setting:

London: St. Andrew's, Waterloo, Upper Meeting Room.

Cast

Phelim McDermott: Director and Artistic Director of *Improbable*

Liam Paterson: Composer

Giuseppe Belli: Designer

Emma Belli: Designer

Charlotte Hoather: Soprano

Kieran Rayner: Baritone

Michael Clark: Percussionist

Laura Sergeant: Cellist

Julian Hanby: Technical Production Manager (TPM)

Tingying Dong: Sound Technician

Kathryn Bilyard: Executive Producer at *Improbable*

Ben Qasim Monks: Executive Director at *Improbable*



Figure 31. The 'wall matrix.'

Here begins the tracing of our two networks which exist simultaneously and are inseparably interwoven: the material network and the imaginative dream network. Immediately we can see how the virus-actor COVID-19 haunts the materiality of the R&D process. Its material configuration can be traced through the increase and regulation of non-human actors: chairs are labelled with our names to avoid cross-contamination of potential virus particles, changing function from merely a chair to an object of regulation, prevention and precaution. The same can be said of the floor space with the addition of tape, creating regulated space for social distancing: a metre apart at all times, four metres square in front of singers during the act of singing. Our bodily performances, whether in conversation or in the act of operatic performance, are modified with the ubiquitous actor of the pandemic: the face-mask. There is a source of tension here: the expansion of the material network signifies strict control measures, while the creative collaborative process and its attendant dream network requires freedom to play. This is a tension that is unresolvable due to the virus-actor and its haunting presence: haunting in its absent invisibility, yet also in its potential presence. Our dreaming always had the looming threat of insomnia: the weight of the invisible virus-actor altered our emotional, embodied experience of artistic collaboration. As Laura and Michael both noted, they felt sadness through the haunting ghosts of the past and futurity: the R&D experience was a reminder of the way the pandemic had ceased their live music making for the past year, while the return to this same state after the R&D also haunted them- life as an artist without the outlet for rituals of performativity.

The rituals of the R&D process begin before most of the team of human actors have entered the room. Julian, our TPM, and Ting, our Sound Technician, had already spent some time in the morning loading audio and video equipment into the Upper Meeting Room at St. Andrew's. These material actors - including a Yamaha mixing desk, camera with tripod, a digital screen, portable cameras and a network of cables - enabled us to turn our dream-telling into taking action towards answering the futurity-spectre's call to change operatic practice. The set design elements which were present in the room - low benches, instrumentalists' stage area - were actors haunted by the ghosts of past performances, and in turn our old operatic practice. This relates to the emergent nature of haunting, which is enacted on a material level just as much as an imaginative one: to dream through our ghosts to achieve re-narrativisation of operatic practice, the material network of the past must be expanded to include new actors. These new actors are both a product of earlier dreaming processes - where Phelim, Giuseppe, Emma, Ting, Kathryn and I imagined

creative possibilities over Zoom relating to technological mediation of *BambinO* - but also a prerequisite for the enacting of our dream processes in the material world.

Play is a crucial aspect of imaginative and day-dreaming processes, as Freud observed above. In our first R&D activity - also the first of our daily check-ins - Phelim as Director introduced an element of play: changing the nature and function of a material object through imagination. In turning a large bottle of hand sanitiser into a 'talking object' required to speak during check-in time, we collectively imagined a bridge between the virus-actor, the material reality of life in a pandemic, and the creative work of dream-telling. The hand sanitiser retained its original function as we disinfected our hands when the bottle reached each person in turn; it also fulfilled a new function in putting our minds in a shared imaginative space from the outset of the first working day.

If creative dreams are emergent experiential explorations, then how do we create a sense of coherence across explorations of our individual experiential statespaces within a group collaborative process? Phelim created a framework for our shared imaginative space by explaining the principles of his R&D method, which are based upon Open Space Technology [OST]. OST was created by Harrison Owen, who began with the question '[w]as it possible to combine the level of synergy and excitement present in a good coffee break with the substantive activity and results characteristic of a good meeting?'³⁰⁷ In seeking to 'identify certain basic mechanisms of meetings, or human gatherings [...]', Owen came to the conclusion that 'the circle is the fundamental geometry of open human communication.'³⁰⁸ Openness of communication is the fundamental concept powering OST. Beyond that, it can be reduced to a simple formula: 'Come to a circle, take a deep breath, create a bulletin board, open a marketplace, and go to work.'³⁰⁹ Drawing on this, Phelim outlined his principles which effectively encourage and define personal freedom and responsibly within the R&D space, as can be seen in the field notes (see Appendix F, p. 186). In writing these principles on paper and attaching them to the wall (our 'bulletin board'), and subsequently asking us to notate ideas and stick them to the same wall,

³⁰⁷ Harrison Owen, *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2008), 3.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

Phelim created a material space for the mapping out of our dream-work. This wall became the interface between the material and imaginative networks.

The circle - our bodies arranged on labelled chairs and the low benches of the *Bambino* set - also became an interface, between dream-telling, imaginative work, and the practical realities of the rehearsal room; between the dreaming space and the actor network of COVID-19. This was signified by Julian explaining the layout of the room, designed to allow social distancing, and Kathryn explaining mask protocols and discussing the lateral flow testing we had all undergone earlier in the day as a prerequisite for attendance at the R&D. The wall and circle as interface were both defined from the beginning of the R&D process, so that there was a seamless interweaving between materiality and dreaming processes. Thus we had the form of our collective experiential statespace externalised and physicalised, moving from the purely abstract to something with material form which can be more readily manipulated and reshaped. The beauty of Phelim's rehearsal method is the simplicity through which this is achieved: the materials are simple - pen and paper for ideation, a circle of chairs with attendant human actors, a wall space where ideas are placed and then arranged in categories. There is a process of elaboration and refinement, a dream-telling building outward from a fragment of an idea. The wall interface facilitates connections between similar ideas and questions; the circle interface is where these elaborations and connections find embodied, material form through imaginative play.

Let us analyse an example of the circle interface in action. After the musicians ran through the opera - an event itself haunted by the absence of such close-proximity live music-making over the last year - the R&D team shared their thoughts, sitting in the circle formation. The presence of a virus-adjacent actor, the face mask, changed Giuseppe's perception of the opera in performance: his attention was directed to the expressivity of the singers' eyes due to the masks obscuring their mouths. This triggered both Kieran and Charlotte to speak about the embodied experience of singing in masks: the ubiquitous cloth face masks of the pandemic were restrictive of jaw movement and also moved below their noses, so designed costume masks would need to take account of this. Charlotte continued the design thread, dreaming of masks shaped like bird beaks, leading Phelim to elaborate further on design ideas: could the mask-beaks open with the singers' jaws, a tongue appearing to waggle through their exhaled breaths? This conversation also reflected an idea Charlotte had written on the wall matrix earlier: 'Singer masks how? Unsub Chin [:] *Alice in Wonderland*.' She had explained her interest in exploring masks

that allow the operatic voice to project, as with Nina Weitzner's mask designs for the 2007 Bayerischen Staatsoper production of *Alice in Wonderland*. Here the collective creative memory is already undergoing consolidation: Charlotte's ideation returns, prompted by the emotionality of Giuseppe's response as audience-participant, undergoing elaboration in the process of dream-telling: the elaboration comprises perspectives on functionality in design process, the introduction of playful imaginative ideation on design form, and further more detailed elaboration on design form, with questions of functionality once again reintroduced.

This example reveals how the collective dreaming process interweaves and blurs the role of different human-actors. Musical performance provokes a response from Giuseppe (designer), which leads to the two singers and Phelim (Director) elaborating on design processes: their ideas will return later in the R&D, to be more fully elaborated through material design exploration (see day three of the field notes). The pandemic-caused call-to-action means close proximity performance will require mask-wearing, so this line of inquiry already dreams of a new context for operatic performance. Ideation around design is here closely linked to musical performance: the artist-dreamers respond to the physicality of embodied performance; Phelim even imagines singers' breath activating design elements. The mask dream-work sees the intercutting of the circle and wall interfaces, contributing to the consolidation of the collective creative memory.



Figure 32. Sally Matthews as Alice, wearing a mask designed by Nina Weitzner.

The consolidation of the collective creative memory is an emergent process: as we have seen from the example above, there is a gradual assemblage of idea fragments, a ‘continual flow of traces’ through which our imaginary dream network takes shape.³¹⁰ Dream traces and material traces are bound together through layered temporal mediations. Referring back to Mads Kroghs concept of the ‘spatiotemporal object’, we can envisage how retentions and protensions are at play in this emergent process. The ideation network of the wall interface creates a material dream network, each written question or idea holding the potential for future discussion and experimentation through the circle interface. A discussion such as that around the mask ideation contains multiple retentions: it refers back to the act of attaching an idea to the wall interface, fulfilling the call for action contained in this act; it refers to the performance of music in the immediate past, which itself holds the memory traces of previous performances of *BambinO*. This is where further protensions come in: the discussion of mask design carries the promise of future performances and different material embodiment of the same music haunted by the futurity-spectre; it also refers to the past (and current) experience of mask-wearing and its effect on the performative act.

The temporal complexities of our collaborative material-imaginative process also extend to actor-relationships in the rehearsal room. There are retentions of previous R&D processes, such as that shared by Phelim, Laura, Giuseppe, Emma, Charlotte and myself in 2016 at Scottish Opera, through which personal and artistic relationships were forged and retained across the years; there is the haunting by absent actors who were crucial to the original creation of the opera. There are the new relationships emerging on the first day of the COVID-era R&D, within which there is the flickering holographic protensions of future collaboration, artistic exploration, performance and personal friendship. Bringing our autoethnographic lens to the fore for a moment, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet notes that in her work as a researcher,

‘a lot of my deepest thinking about conducting does *not* revolve around scores and supposed musical issues. It’s much more about the relationships that I have built with people through our music-making over the years. I think this also gets to the heart of what autoethnographers try to do. When I think about the work of Ellis, Bochner, Behar, and all the others, it moves people and engages them in a relationship, whether real or imagined. Relationships are at the heart

³¹⁰ Latour and Hermant, “Paris: Invisible City,” 11.

of what autoethnographers and musicians do. They unlock and reveal the complexities of our work.’³¹¹

Bartleet’s perspective reinforces the fruitful link between tracing the OCN and invoking the lens of autoethnography: relationships, whether discussed on a personal, emotive level, or conceptualised as actors in a network, are fundamental to the opera creation process. This is intensified in an R&D process, since the number of creative voices contributing to ideation is greater than in more traditional director-composer-librettist collaborative formations; it also brings a lot of conceptual work into simultaneous alignment which would otherwise occur in temporally and geographically disparate places (i.e. music and design conceptualisation; the devising of directorial technological mediation; approaches to singer movement in performance, etc.). In using a rehearsal method based upon Open Space Technology, Phelim created a creative network predicated upon the wall and circle interfaces, facilitating the creation of artistic relationships. As a researcher, I have tried to capture these relationships in my field notes, and examine the sociological and artistic implications these relationships reveal; through invoking autoethnography, like Bartleet I aim to ‘unlock and reveal the complexities of our work’ in my practice-based writing.

Relationships also return us to dreaming. Human-actor relationships are crucial for a collective creative memory to emerge through collaboration; Glaskin argues that

‘an important aspect of the creativity that comes from dreams is the encultured work of memory. Memory is both biological and cultural, so culture is implicated in how dreams are imaginatively shaped, remembered, reported, and experienced.’³¹²

We have already observed how memory is implicated in the retentions at work in the emergence of a collective creative memory. Culture(s) form a multi-layered part of this emergent process: many actors in the OCN have a shared operatic culture, whether through participation as a performer, director, designer, instrumentalist, audience member, etc. A shared operatic cultural memory is inseparable from ideation in creating new operatic work, and is also implicated in the collective formulation of new operatic practices

³¹¹ Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, “Behind the Baton: Exploring Autoethnographic Writing in a Musical Context,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38, no. 6 (2009): 729.

³¹² Glaskin, “Dreams, memory, and the ancestors,” 46.

(such as the development of designed masks which mediate the medical, preventative and protectionist function of masks with operatic costume design). In subsequent days of the R&D process, there are many examples of memories shared in creative ideation which reveal shared cultural attitudes to illness and disease, and also a shared culture of dream-telling. The most basic yet crucial culture imbricated with the OCN is that of creative play: artists in collaborative processes engage in a culture of play where dreaming is ‘serious’ work; to paraphrase Freud, perhaps the artist ‘can look back on the intense seriousness with which he [or she] once carried on [their] games in childhood’, a time when we linked our ‘imagined objects and situations to the tangible and visible things of the real world.’³¹³ The play culture of the *Bambino* R&D linked the imaginary with the material reality of the pandemic-stricken world. Only through play were we able to collectively dream a new life and context for an opera which had existed as a blueprint score and material production for four years already. In this way, it is clear how the actors of the OCN can reshape the material and imaginative networks of a microcosmic opera world, subverting any notion of a composer’s supposed creative dominance in that world.

Bartleet’s discussion of autoethnographic relationships also invites a moment of reflection on my role as researcher and how it connects to this subversion. In this chapter, my relationship with you, the reader, is characterised by a sort of meta-dream-telling: I move between ‘telling’ the dreams of the artists in the rehearsal room and elaborating on these dreams in a search for meaning-making through writing a meta-narrative analysis. My role as composer-researcher is itself subversive, as I am trying to re-narrativise the fiction of the dominant composer. This re-narrativisation is performative, in the sense that

‘[p]erformative autoethnography is performative due to its attempt to critically interrupt dominant narratives by offering a performance that breaks normative patterned behaviours and remakes a transgressive copformance with others in sociocultural contexts and histories.’³¹⁴

As Tami Spry writes,

‘[t]he story comes from a critically reflexive location where the autoethnographer seeks to construct a plural sense of self, a dialectic of copresence with others in

³¹³ Freud, “Creative writers and day-dreaming,” 144-5.

³¹⁴ Spry, “Bodies of/ as Evidence in Autoethnography,” 604.

the field of study concerning how bodies are read in various contexts of culture and power.³¹⁵

I take a critically reflexive stance in being both a participant of the sociocultural context of the R&D opera world, and one of the bodies mediated through performative textual analysis. My copresence with the other actors of the OCN is of much greater interest to me as a researcher-writer than detailing aspects of personal creative process devoid of intersubjective processes. Instead, through writing I dream of musicological discourse where the composer is dethroned, and creative, material agency among a complex network is prized over individualism. In this dream, materiality matters. The material network and the imaginary network are dependant on each other for the creation of art.

In listening to my own dreams and those of my fellow OCN actors in the age of COVID-19, I am reminded of Christopher Poulos' words:

'Dreams, if you listen to them, if you read them carefully, can cut through all the hubbub and haze and shadowy ambiguity of everyday life.'³¹⁶

When everyday life as an artist is changed inexorably, listening to dreams in the copresence of others can tell you something about the way art worlds adapt to crisis, and how artists responsively imagine a different, more hopeful future.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Christopher N. Poulos, "The Ties That Bind Us, the Shadows That Separate Us," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (February 2006): 113.

3.4 Analogue dreams; Digital dreams



Figure 33. Ting shows Charlotte how to fit her radio mic.

The multiplicity of voices expands greatly in day three of the field notes, as our collective dreaming comes into sharper focus: the dreams are more vivid, detailed and nuanced. This invites another meta-moment, a moment of researcher-reflexivity. My method of recording field notes across the five days of the R&D resonates with Barbara Tedlock’s definition of autoethnography as

‘the use of personal knowledge and membership to explore cultural practice [...], combin[ing] participation with memory using artfully embodied qualitative methods.’³¹⁷

Yet it is precisely in the relation of participation and memory that a small crisis in field work was created: how to be fully present “in the moment” of the rehearsal room as a participant

³¹⁷ Barbara Tedlock, “Braiding Evocative with Analytic Autoethnography,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 358.

while memorising and recording meaningful interactions and conversations, to be conjured up as field notes after the fact? I had already decided not to employ video or audio recording for data collection during the R&D for two reasons: to avoid any disruption of the performative actions at play in the rehearsal process, since as a performer I have been subjected to recording devices altering my sense of performativity in the past; and to mitigate any sense that “off-the-cuff” comments and personal opinions might be recorded for posterity. The latter proved to be a wise choice due to the number of times participants would half-jokingly say “off the record” before sharing a comment or reaction where their honesty and frankness about an issue was clearly sign-posted as an opinion shared only among friends and close colleagues. The former issue of performativity relates to the self-consciousness of an artist who is aware of their ongoing mediation by digital recording technologies: where this mediation is not planned as an artistic experiment or task, it can be fundamentally disruptive to the sort of non-judgmental play mentality required for an R&D process. There was much trepidation from participants when the idea was floated of Scottish Opera staff watching part of our rehearsal day as a livestream or optionally as a recorded document, again suggesting that my researcher instincts had been correctly led by my performer-artist instincts in this case.

So if video and audio recording are ruled out as a method of data-gathering, how then to build a bridge between participation and memory? For days one and two of the R&D, I only made a few brief notes and took photographs to provoke my memory, writing up field notes upon my return to our hotel on Waterloo Road. Here there was tension between the researcher role and that of bodily artist: the embodied experience of being a participant in the rehearsal room, dreaming with my colleagues all day, was an exhausting one. This was something we noted multiple times as a group during the second day, and indeed Ting evoked the haunting of our virus-actor when she suggested such exhaustion was probably due to reduced stamina from lockdown. During my write-up time, I quickly realised it was mentally draining to assume the reflexive position of the researcher after a long day of creative work, to maintain ‘spinning in the correlative space’ between the researcher’s “self” and “others.”³¹⁸

For the remaining three days of the R&D I resolved to put a different method into practice: to take very detailed field notes in my notebook during the working day, and

³¹⁸ Keith Barry, “Spinning Autoethnographic Reflexivity, Cultural Critique, and Negotiating Selves,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 212.

produce a written-up version upon my return to Glasgow. This involved almost constant note-taking, whereby I would try to look down at my notebook as little as possible, to remain facially and physically 'open' to the group. If I felt a conversation take a particularly sensitive turn, I would pause writing until the moment had passed. Here my practice as researcher changed the embodied experience of being a rehearsal participant: I became hyper-aware of the nuances of our dream-telling, while being engaged in a different sort of performative act, which signified the physical presence of 'the researcher.' Yet I felt no barrier with the rest of those actors in our circle-interface: if anything I was able to be more present, as the anxiety of trying to retain the salient creative discussions of the day was gone.

The memory of dream-telling could be traced through the notebook as non-human actor, that tracing extending through the haunted actor of the *Pilot* pen. Retentions and protensions of the compositional, creative act are enacted by that pen marking the notebook, carrying too the memories of childhood we witnessed in the second chapter. It turns out the performative rituals of the researcher are also haunted, and dreaming in synchrony with the spectres of our creative endeavour. This realisation brings us into tension with ANT: our haunted pen-actor moves beyond ANT's consideration of material agency, to become a signifying object stimulating memory.



Figure 34. An excerpt from my R&D field notes.

And so we return to the dreams of the rehearsal room. In fact, the rehearsal room itself is where the idea of creating a dream rhetoric framework originated: Phelim introduced the concept of the ‘Disney Process’ on the third day, partly to define the role of the ‘Dreamer’, and to posit that our shared space was a ‘dreamer space.’ This began a proliferation of dream rhetoric for the remainder of our rehearsal process: a semantic network became embedded within our imaginary dreamer network. I will untangle this most meta of conceptual frameworks in the meta-narrative below. For now, let us pause and explore the Disney Process.

Welcome Robert B. Dilts and Walt Disney as two more absent actors, unknowingly traced through the OCN by our collective dreaming. Dilts defined the Disney Process in his book *Strategies of Genius*, which had its origins in an anecdote from an unnamed Disney animator. As Dilts explains,

[o]ne of the major elements of Disney’s unique genius was his ability to explore something from a number of different **perceptual positions**. An important insight into this key part of Disney’s strategy comes from the comment made by one of his animators that “...*there were actually three different Walt: the **dreamer**, the **realist**, and the **spoiler**. You never knew which one was coming into your meeting* [Italics and bold font in Dilts’ text].”³¹⁹

Dilts extrapolates from this an insight ‘into the structure of creativity’:

‘Creativity as a total process involves the coordination of these three subprocesses: dreamer, realist and critic [...]. The dreamer is necessary for creativity in order to form new ideas and goals. The Realist is necessary for creativity as a means to transform ideas into concrete expressions. The Critic is necessary for creativity as a filter and as a stimulus for refinement.’³²⁰

This tripartite view of creativity resonates with the process of elaboration and refinement crucial to the emergent state of collective creative memory consolidation. However, when Phelim designated the rehearsal room a ‘dreamer space’, he signposted an intended focus on imaginative possibilities, emphasising the Dreamer above the Realist and Critic. It is only through freely dreaming that the other two roles can effectively come into play, without being constrained too early in the process of creative ideation.

³¹⁹ Robert B. Dilts, *Strategies of Genius* (Capitola, California: Meta Publications, 1994), 163.

³²⁰ Ibid.

The last aspect of the Disney Process is the Meta position. Phelim defines this as positioning yourself ‘outside the roles’ between each change of perceptual position, so that you can ‘see them with clarity.’ The purpose of this is to create a dialogue between your internal Dreamer, Realist and Critic, and to prevent the latter from becoming a destructive force. This definition resonates with Dilts’ discussion of ‘meta program’ patterns, which are ‘descriptions of the different ways in which a ‘problem space’, or elements of a problem space, may be approached’ within Neuro-Linguistic Programming [NLP].³²¹ Conceptually, NLP

‘provides a structure and a language to be able to put into a set of chunks or steps the relevant mental processes used by creative and innovative people so that those mental processes can be communicated about, stimulated and managed in a systematic way.’³²²

Dilts outlines various meta program patterns in relation to approaching a problem: moving *toward* something (‘proactivity’) or moving *away from* something (‘reactivity’); dividing a problem space into degrees of detail (‘micro chunks of information’) or generalities (‘macro chunks of information’); reference to long, medium and short timeframes; relating the problem to ‘the achievement of the *task*’ or ‘issues involving *relationship*’ (e.g. ‘power’ and ‘affiliation’); comparing similarities (‘*matching*’) or differences (‘*mismatching*’) of problem elements.³²³ Dilts also names a ‘neutral location or ‘Meta Position’ as a method to ‘make sure the physiological state associated with each state stays ‘pure.’³²⁴ The ‘physiological state’ refers to the rather dubious conclusions Dilts draws about modelling generalised ‘key patterns of physiology’ for each perceptual state based on descriptions of Disney’s behaviour (e.g. the Dreamer position requires ‘Head and eyes up. Posture symmetrical and relaxed.’).³²⁵

³²¹ Dilts, *Strategies of Genius*, 186.

³²² Robert B. Dilts, Todd Epstein and Robert W. Dilts, *Tools for Dreamers: Strategies for Creativity and the Structure of Innovation* (Scotts Valley, California: Dilts Strategy Group, 1991), 11.

³²³ Dilts, *Strategies of Genius*, 186-88.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

It may seem as though I have thoroughly detoured into explanation of a method which, after all, the actors of the R&D spent little time discussing. Yet it in some ways helps to define the usefulness of our dream rhetoric in analysing creative collaboration, which is always in the service of tracing our twin material and imaginative networks. It is not a framework or strategy to be superimposed on our view of creative collaboration after-the-fact: we are tracing the very networks that comprise creative work, which are contradictorily the social substance of art works, yet which works of art cannot be reduced to. For the analysis of embodied artistic experience and the actual embodied experience of art are two distinct yet intertwined realities, irreducible to each other: we can use ‘corporeality as a source of knowledge’ as long as we acknowledge that corporeality is embodied and experienced differently by each actor in our art world under discussion.³²⁶ My collaboration with other actors within the OCN gives me privileged access as artist-researcher to what we might describe as the commonalities of artistic collaboration, yet I cannot speak for the lived experience of, say, other opera composers.

This is one point where the attitude to sources of knowledge between autoethnography and ANT are irreconcilable; paradoxically this tension is why a combined methodology drawing on both is so useful for analysing art worlds. Autoethnography specifically moves outward from the researcher’s corporeality while complicating and destabilising it: it seeks to

‘connect the personal to the cultural and to locate both “self” - however shifting and fragmentary - and others within a social context. The researcher, in social interaction with others, is thus the subject of the research, traversing and blurring distinctions of the personal and the social, and of self and other [...].’³²⁷

ANT, however, does not privilege face-to-face interactions, but is built on the principle that ‘our own relativistic frame of reference should be indifferent to scale.’³²⁸ Latour reminds us that

‘interactions are not *synoptic*. Very few of the participants in a given course of action are simultaneously visible at any given point. The lecturer might believe

³²⁶ Cobussen, “The Trojan Horse,” 20.

³²⁷ Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, “Autoethnography as the Engagement of Self/ Other, Self/ Culture, Self/ Politics, and Selves/ Futures,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 283.

³²⁸ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 199.

she is centre stage, but that does not mean that many others are not acting as well, only that there is no way to sum them up. The wooden desk was not part of the lecture before she pointed it out as an example of design, and yet it does something; it is one of the ingredients that helps put it into shape, allowing interaction to be framed.³²⁹

Furthermore, interactions are not *isotopic* ('[w]hat is acting at the same moment in any place is coming from many other places, many distant materials, and many faraway actors'), nor are they *synchronic* ('[t]he desk might be made of a tree seeded in the 1950s that was felled two years ago; the cloth of the teacher's dress was woven five years ago, while the firing of neurons in her head might be a millisecond old [...]); nor *homogenous* ('the relays through which action is carried out do not have the same material quality all along. How many successive shifts in agencies should we have to detect if we wanted to move from the architect's cabinet, fifteen years ago, to the lecture hall?').³³⁰ There is a conceptual fracturing of a different kind shared by both autoethnography and ANT: the former fractures and fragments the self, the nominative "I", while the latter dismantles the assumed 'social world' and its attendant hierarchies. Together they allow art worlds to be dismantled and analysed, not just through actors human and non-human, but with the inclusion of autoethnography, the emotive, the subjective as well as the inter-subjective: the networks only traceable through memory and imagination.

Dilts' Disney Process functions in a way that is not entirely compatible with our mixed methodology: it is a strategy, a blueprint for stimulating creativity based on a simplified reduction of Disney's creative work. In our dreaming framework we have seen how there is a process of ideation, elaboration and refinement, through imaginative and material networks. The idea of Dreamer, Realist and Critic as the three defining roles of creativity is too reductionist, too easy. In effect, a case of creative ideation may involve thought processes which enact the Dreamer and Realist simultaneously; a creative idea may begin in reaction to the criticism of another idea (perhaps by another artist-actor or network of actors not present in the reactive ideation process). Here the Dreamer and Critic roles would act simultaneously. Ultimately artists cannot simply extrapolate the template of another artist's ideation processes if they hope to develop their own practices and innovate. Phelim framed his discussion of the Disney Process as an invitation to stop our internal critic from becoming a destructive force, rather trusting that 'this is a dreamer

³²⁹ Ibid., 201.

³³⁰ Ibid., 200-201.

space.’ Where OST was of fundamental conceptual importance in creating the wall and circle interfaces that aided the development of our collective creative memory consolidation, the Disney Process was mainly significant as a talking-point which turned our attention towards the state of creative dreaming (or day-dreaming), and shifted the semantics of our conversation towards explicit dream(ing) references. The magic of Phelim’s rehearsal room method is taking disparate elements such as OST and the Disney Process and loosening them up, only retaining certain concepts which aid creative dreaming processes.



Figure 35. Emma conceptualises the Disney framework.

Suddenly ghosts materialise in the body of the researcher. The following is not quite Breenan-Moran’s ‘performative dawn of the ghost in the body’, for this performative materialisation is intensely personal. It is an evocative haunting; autoethnographical spectres rather than agents of hauntology. Yet it is bound up with the haunting of our

futurity spectre, embroiled in the work of mourning for the old world (of opera), and the call-to-action of the new, reconfigured world.

.....

Day-Dreamstory

The name of Disney is loaded with retentions; a ubiquitous ghost haunting many of our childhoods. I remember wandering around a *Hercules*³³¹ exhibit in London, my first trip to the capital with my mum and sister, Lily. It is 1998 and I am seven years old. Concept art reveals the making of the film, a deconstruction of the final shiny Disney product I had never considered before. Mum is nearby, and between bouts of awed fixation on artists' sketches I anxiously seek the reassurance of her presence. Of course, *her* eyes are fixed on Lily and I. It was mum who bought the VHS of *Hercules* for us earlier in the year. It was mum who sought out exhibitions for her children to discover artworks, and the crystallised historical moments of museum displays. Dippy the Diplodocus towered over us in the Natural History Museum; Adam reached out to God in Tate Britain, where I stepped over the barrier rope to try and reach God too; Hercules and Hades fought through their pencil line-drawing forms. Mum opened up art worlds for me and sis; our minds opened to the possibilities of belonging to an art world of our own.

.....

It is 2013 and I am back in London, sitting in The Coliseum with my friend Jonathan (another soon-to-be opera composer). We are mid-performance in English National Opera's production of *The Perfect American*. The staging is mesmerising: throughout we have seen video projections by 59 Productions showing 'what is behind the process of animation [...] cells, blue-pencil drawings, unfinished storyboards.'³³² Now Lucy the Owl is leading the ghost of Walt Disney offstage. It is the first time I have been more interested in

³³¹ *Hercules*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker (Burbank, California: Buena Vista Pictures, distributor, 1997), VHS.

³³² Phelim McDermott, "Making it Work: Adrian Mourby meets director Phelim McDermott," pp. 20-23 in the programme booklet for *The Perfect American* (2012) by Philip Glass and Rudy Wurlitzer. Directed by Phelim McDermott. [English National Opera, The Coliseum, London, June 6, 2013.], 22.

- and captivated by - the work of a Director and his artistic collaborators than the music or libretto content of an opera. Recalling this realisation, with Disney's ghost still at my shoulder, I am transported back to the rehearsal room in 2021, in London once again. The same director, Phelim, is musing on the Disney Process, with a different group of artistic collaborators sitting in a circle.



Figure 36. Soprano Rosie Lomas as Lucy the Owl.

.....

As I write this autoethnographic mystery (or *day-dreamstory*), I wonder if textual opera is like actual opera, in its relationship to boredom. Not that I am suggesting an intent to induce boredom with my writing, but rather the idea of significant, transformative moments - like the mystery sketch above, or an aria - emerging from passages which require a certain amount of perseverance to remain attentive (and indeed to write). Reams of recitative, analysis through a theoretical lens, or, perhaps worst of all, Wagnerian narration! In a discussion on boredom in opera curated by John Grace for *The Guardian* in 2013, Jude Kelly - then Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre - compared the experience of the proto-opera audience to lived reality:

'We've all had moments when we've dozed off. But there is also a sense that the best art is like life. Some of it is a bit dull, but you need the boring parts to appreciate the climaxes. Reaching the end of a Wagner opera is like climbing a mountain: part of the achievement is in the struggle to get there.'³³³

As a researcher-writer - and as reader upon surveying my freshly minted words with a critical eye - I feel this sense of satisfaction at having earned the *day-dreamstory* moment. This invocation of memory and emotionality could only have been born from the journey through theory and ethnographic data preceding it. We see how moments of emotionality emerge from our communal dream-telling.

Let us turn for a moment to an opera audience of the distant past, described by Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker in *A History of Opera: The Last 400 Years*. They set the scene of 'the operatic milieu so meticulously reconstructed in [the film] *Farinelli il castrato*':

'The theatre is dimly lit by candles, the spectators primarily pay attention to each other - flirting, signalling, eating - anything but attending to the drama onstage, which unfolds amid acres of musically uninteresting recitative. The only moments of relative attention are those in which a virtuoso singer comes to the footlights to beguile everyone with a beautiful aria.'³³⁴

Following the journey of our autoethnographical opera, we can choose to direct our attention to others, both material actors and ghosts, lifting up what might otherwise become bogged down in theory and analysis. Sometimes actors do indeed come to the footlights for an artful, emotive moment. Perhaps our textual opera has more in common with the audiences of the age of *opera seria* than the post-Wagner world of darkness and silence (with coughing of course). Abbate and Parker note the incongruity of performance event and operatic texts that is now the norm in major opera houses:

'[w]e now ask all operas to sustain our focused, unwavering attention, even though most operatic works were not designed to bear this burden.'³³⁵

³³³ John Grace, "Why there's nothing wrong with being bored by opera," *The Guardian*, December 1, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/dec/01/nothing-wrong-bored-by-opera> (accessed on September 25, 2021).

³³⁴ Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera*, 76.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

Yet step outside the mainstage performance of canonical works, and you will find a great diversity of contemporary operatic events: just look at the work of Kamala Sankaram, who has co-created both virtual reality opera³³⁶ and 'site-specific multimedia' opera using a 'standalone personal AR [Augmented Reality] app' to draw the audience-participant into 'augmented/ mixed reality'.³³⁷ Beyond the creative work of the rehearsal room, audience too are drawn into increasingly complex collaboration with technological actors.

The day-dreamstory is a moment where voices of ghosts sing in harmony with voices of the OCN. It is an amalgamation of the involuntary memory of opera-going I experienced when Phelim spoke of the Disney Process, and the day-dreaming of childhood memories which flooded back during the act of writing. It is a nexus between the retentions within our process of collective dream-telling, and the protentions projected forward in turning to the past to find new ways of making opera. A nexus too between ANT and autoethnography; between intersubjective collaboration and personal, embodied, emotional experience. It is also a dialogue with the voice of another scholar, Christopher N. Poulos, who coined the term *Dreamstory*. Writing of the ethnographic 'nexus of observation-evocation-imagination-story-heart', he proposes adding *Dreamstory* as another dimension of this 'growing ethnographic nexus of possibility [...]'.³³⁸ He invites us to

'attend to our dreams, for they can be the key that opens the door to a new story [...]. For writers and readers of ethnography, the writing of dream blending into story - of the unconscious enriching our consciousness - is a rich, textured nexus of evocative possibility. Dreamstory takes us toward a liminal, shimmering space - a place where, when shadow fades in the mists of dawn, we find new clues to enrich our understanding of this human journey.'³³⁹

Although I have taken this idea into day-dreaming, or involuntary memory recollection, we reach the same liminal space, where a door is opened between personal history and group collaborative processes. This liminal space contains unexpected retentions, with moments from other art worlds - Disney Studio production and gallery curatorship - embedded within the art world of the OCN and its actors' dream-telling.

³³⁶ See: "The Parkville Murders: The World's First VR Opera," *Opera on Tap*, [n.d], <https://operaontap.org/the-parkville-murders-2/> (accessed October 31, 2021).

³³⁷ "Joan of the City: Interactive Opera Meets AR," *Opera on Tap*, [n.d], <https://operaontap.org/joan-of-the-city/> (accessed October 31, 2021).

³³⁸ Poulos, "The Ties That Bind Us, the Shadows That Separate Us," 114.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

Thus a door has been opened for us to step back into tracing creative dream ideation. We began to dream collectively through technological mediation on the second day of the R&D. Recalling Latour, we must note that our cyborg dreams are neither synoptic nor synchronic. We can trace the material actors of this cybernetic dream network to a Zoom call held the previous month, between Kathryn (Executive Producer), Julian (TPM), Ting (Sound Designer) and myself (composer). Under Ting's guidance, we compiled a list of sound-kit necessary for our exploration: two radio microphones (henceforth 'mics') or ear-hanger mics for singers; separate mics for instruments (one each for cello, Schoenhut toy piano, cellist singing and egg shaking, the Korg tinyPIANO speaker and percussionist singing); a condenser mic for percussion instruments, for which Ting would adjust the level on the fader; four active speakers to avoid amps (small but powerful, and easy to move around the room); speaker stands with tall and short options; multi-core and twenty metres of cabling; sub-woofers for the speakers; a sound desk of up to sixteen channels. Julian made a list of visual equipment we would need: two hand-held cameras; camera stand; two digital screens; cabling; MacBooks for online mixing of footage; GoPro cameras. Ting agreed to organise hire of the equipment from audio visual equipment rental service Autograph Sound Ltd.

Our foray into technological mediation carries retentions of this conversation, itself digitally mediated, our faces and voices, our work stations in the background, bounced instantaneously between Glasgow, Nottingham and London. Just as Zoom as digital actor has a tendency to foreground disembodied heads, our cybernetic dreaming began with the stereo recording of the first chunk of *BambinO*, subsequently relayed through speakers. This was triggered by a materially manifested session idea on our wall matrix: 'recording technique for rehearsal exploration.' Phelim uses his 'recording technique' with all the operatic casts he works with: a section of the score is recorded, then physical movement and acting principles are explored as the recording is played back. The circle matrix becomes a space for play: the session idea becomes physically embodied in a game of reaction, each singer-actor using Phelim's acting principles as the rule of the game: to move towards each other, move away, or stay where you are. Stereo recreation of the operatic voice enables a crucial stage of our creative ideation network: physical improvisation where the ability to 'touch' through intensity of connection no matter the distance between two bodies is enmeshed with the singer-actor's connection to their own disembodied voices.

Disembodied Zoom heads and voices: this invokes Abbate's musings on Orpheus' decapitation, creating a 'split between singing voice and human body [...]'.³⁴⁰ Connected to our cybernetic dreaming is Abbate's notion of a different but related operatic dream:

'The head represents singing that travels far from the body in which it originated, as a physical object that is cousin to a classic poetic image, the echo. Post-mortem resonance suggests as well an immense original sonic force, so huge that it continues in a body part. Thus one could see the head as an expression of an opera singer's dream: sing at such volume, with such power, that the voice travels distances and is heard everywhere. Listening ears are unable to escape. This dream unites mechanics (volume, resonance, and sound transmission) with the metaphysical (song's mythic capacity to "move" human thoughts and passions).'³⁴¹

This 'juxtaposition of metaphysics with the material' in our case allows the singer to be in the unique position of reacting emotionally and physically to their own voice, a disembodiment that paradoxically allows greater freedom for the body.³⁴² As Phelim noted, 'it means you start acting straight away and get the script out of your hands. You're being changed by what the other actor does.' Here we cannot say that 'Orpheus's singing head could stand for a musical work as a transcendent object [...]'; this disembodied act of singing removes the material musical-object of the score, instead connecting sound to bodily malleability.³⁴³ Indeed, the music's sole function is as an enabler of expressive movement, of creative play.

This was only the beginning of our operatic-cybernetic dreaming: attaching GoPros to Charlotte and Kieran in our exploration of how video would help move through our futurity-spectre, we tapped into Haraway's notion that 'in imagination and other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves.'³⁴⁴ This dream of singers' digital prosthetics holds retentions of the initial Zoom discussions Phelim, Giuseppe, Emma, Kathryn and I had around expanding *Bambino* with digital technology in a large space such as the Camden Roundhouse. We wondered if GoPros attached to singers

³⁴⁰ Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 1.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 178.

could create captivating footage of *BambinO*'s baby audience to be projected on digital screens. Part of the collective creative ideation process involves knowing when a dream turns into a nightmare, or perhaps acknowledging when a dream becomes an insomniac state. Just so with the GoPro experiment: the footage was largely incoherent, since it was near impossible for the singers to visualise what the GoPro cameras were actually picking up. It was a musician-cyborg - Michael with hand-held camera in place of beaters - who produced the most interesting results: baby's-eye view footage and close-ups of instruments.

I have used the image of insomnia in passing before; yet what if it is subsumed into our dream rhetoric framework not as a state of otiosity or failure, but as a meaningful mechanism for assisting collective creative memory consolidation? Insomnia can be a time of unexpected creative ideation: I think of Louise Bourgeois' *Insomnia Drawings* - 'images in line and word - [...] the means by which she gave form to the dark hours.'³⁴⁵ The dark *moments* of insomnia, of failure, are transformed within the circle matrix into a collective impetus to focus on fruitful creative avenues. Our collective dream-telling shifted from examining the malfunctioning cyborg-singer to the question of why we were having cybernetic dreams at all. An important dream was formed through this circle sharing: that the tactile quality of *BambinO* must be preserved, even as its analog nature embraced digital technologies.

On the third day, our 'day residue' dreaming effect was in evidence, as exploring this tension between analog and digital dreams was projected forward from the previous day. This juxtaposition of dreaming in material terms and through technology became a dream lag effect that defined the R&D as a whole. Indeed, this is especially apparent from the very final set of materially-notated ideations Phelim asked us to affix to the wall matrix (see page 201). The collective wish to preserve tactility tempered our cybernetic dreams, lest they turn into cold, indifferent cyborgs, digital tin-men without a heart. The dialogical juxtaposition still enacted a process of elaboration and refinement: the technological dreaming became increasingly sophisticated, both in terms of our material experiments, and the specificity and complexity of our questioning within the circle matrix. Let us trace the experimental technological aspect through to the last day of the R&D: physical reaction game to recorded music (a chunk of the opera); GoPro and hand-held camera exploration;

³⁴⁵ Frances Morris and Philip Larratt-Smith, *has the day invaded the night or the night invaded the day? Insomnia in the Work of Louise Bourgeois* (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2013), 22.

recording of the whole opera where Phelim held up Disney Process signs ('Dreamer', 'Realist', 'Critic'); performance of opera chunk with added piano improvisation, with singers amplified through speakers using radio mics; outdoor park performance with performers filmed from multiple angles on phones, with microphone for audio recording; a 'Zoom livestream test' using five video streams (four phones and one MacBook) and one phone microphone. Our experiments amounted to explorations of conceptualising space and visual language. Where we amplified sound, the combined acoustic and stereo force of the operatic voice and instruments materialised in sonic form our questions around a 'scaled-up' *Bambino*, inhabiting a large performance space and incorporating more vocal and instrumental forces. The park performance held retentions of our discussions around outdoor performance alongside nature, while filming it on phones created a digital trace of our dreaming on video visual language. Likewise, the Zoom test carried retentions and protensions of questions around livestream visual language already had *and stimulated by* the test, as well as questions of retaining intimacy and tactility through digital mediation.



Figure 37. Giuseppe films Kieran, and Emma films Charlotte for our Zoom experiment.

Our collective dream of cybernetic tactility, tracing elaboration-refinement through the material and imaginative networks, found expression in four nested dreams: the film of an outdoor/ woods version, including natural sounds such as leaves crunching under foot and birdsong within the sound design; a Zoom livestream version; a ‘concert performance’ livestream version; and an animated film. The matter of animation connected the last dream and the Zoom livestream: Phelim wondered about a livestream with live drawing. Protending forward to a Zoom discussion between Phelim, Kathryn, Giuseppe, Emma, myself and the artist Viviane Schwarz in September 2021, this dream-amalgamation held our response to, and reshaping of, the futurity-spectre. The *BambinO* team, at the time of writing, plan to hold another exploratory process followed by three days of pilot livestream performances in December 2021. We will explore the relationship of live drawing to operatic performance, and involve a film company to play with techniques for streaming and vision mixing (selecting between different live video sources). Phelim noted this would be a step towards a fully animated version. Here we see a large-scale refinement enacting our collective memory consolidation, as we increasingly specify the technological, digital aspects of our material network, while also clarifying the vision of the imaginative network, which repositions the material - the embodied artist-at-work [*at-play*] - as a focal point for digital mediation. This consolidation could not have happened without the myriad tracings of the twin networks enmeshing the wall and circle matrices.

The realisation that the imaginative network came to reposition analog materials as the locus of digital mediation returns us to the beginning of this chapter, where the virus-actor reconfigured our relationship with digital media and the online world. As Robert W. Sweeney notes,

[m]uch of contemporary life is lived in and through machinic networks. Depending upon where, how, and to whom one is born, individuals in varying degrees grow up in, mature through, and pass away while being connected to digital devices and processes.³⁴⁶

The virus-actor COVID-19 can be traced through an intensification of the degree to which our digital connectivity dominated our lived realities: video calls with loved ones taking over interpersonal intimacy; Zoom redefining working and collaborative practices; art galleries’ curated collections refracted through digital interfaces; musicians’ concerts unfolding

³⁴⁶ Robert W. Sweeney, “Ghosts in the Machinic,” *Visual Arts Research* 43, no. 1 (Summer 2017): 50.

through individualised or collective streaming; anxious checking of pandemic-related news as a ubiquitous ritual in time of plague. Our collective dreaming sought to bridge ‘the distance between the hand of the artist and the product that appears on screen’, a distance that ‘speaks to a technological nostalgia’ that haunted our collaborative process.³⁴⁷ ‘It speaks to the ghost in the machinic.’³⁴⁸ Our disembodied Orphic song was - and continues to be - haunted by its phantom limbs, seeking the touch of pen on paper, the vibrations of bow on string, the texture of paint on a golden egg.

This haunting accounts for the dialogical juxtaposition between the material and digital I invoked above, which can be projected onto another juxtaposition: that between a spectre re-shaping digital *BambinO*, and call-for-action in the shape of brand new operas yet to be written. From the moment Kathryn offered a dream-telling of her grandmother, who suffered from Alzheimer’s, watching and loving *BambinO*, our imaginative network began to trace dreams of opera for those with Alzheimer’s; Emma began a related ideation trace of an opera about bird-watching, *TwitcherO*, a possible second act to *BambinO*. These futurity-operas were grounded in material, analog reality: Kieran envisaged care homes as a setting for the Alzheimer’s opera; Phelim pondered on the Wetlands Centre in Barnes as a place to perform *TwitcherO*. Envisaging materials recurred within the circle matrix: Giuseppe’s hilarious image of cushions causing a ‘granny pile-on’; Emma thinking about the textures and fabrics of twitcher outfits. While the Alzheimer’s opera remained a futurity-spectre itself, only existing materially as notated ideations within the wall matrix and otherwise haunting the circle matrix as a potential future collaborative process, *TwitterO* fully enmeshed the material and imaginative networks. Emma sketched set and costume ideas; some of these ideas are positioned next to sketched representations of the Disney Process roles of Dreamer, Realist, Critic and Meta (figure 35, page 139). These images show how the imaginative network projects the dream rhetoric Phelim introduced into the material process of sketching, enacting the imaginative *through* the material network, with its non-human actors of pencil and paper, guided by the artist-actor Emma.

Although I criticised the Disney Process itself earlier, it served an important function by introducing explicit dream rhetoric into our collective ideation. Phelim introduced a ‘dream semantic network’, which I have traced in bold font from day three of the field notes (page

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 54.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

191 onwards). By invoking the mechanism of dream metaphor, our ‘dreamer space’ became a broader experiential statespace, its conceptual delimits removed as a space specific to reimagining *Bambino*. Instead, we could dream of other forms in which to mould the futurity-spectre, other operas tethered more to the protensions emanating from our collaboration than the retentions-heavy *Bambino*. As Vester writes in his paraphrasing of Ricoeur, ‘metaphor is the rhetorical device by which reality can be described anew.’³⁴⁹

Phelim further integrated the dream semantic network into our imaginative network when he spoke of end-of-life processes reaching back to childhood memory and dreaming. This continued on from the dream-telling of our human-actors about their deeply personal experiences with Alzheimer sufferers, bringing a different form of haunting - poignant but joyful - to the circle matrix. The idea of end-of-life dreams built a bridge between our human-actors’ memories, their embodied experience of loved ones’ late-life processes, and dreaming through and beyond death.³⁵⁰ Our collective dream connected lost family members to the cycle of creative ideation, bringing to our circle matrix the idea of emotive, embodied memory shaping our futurity-spectre.



Figure 38. An image from the *Improbable* show *Coma* (1999), exploring the ‘big dreaming processes’ occurring during a comatose state.

³⁴⁹ Vester, “Sex, Sacredness, and Structure,” 106.

³⁵⁰ In their study on end-of-life dreams and visions [ELDVs], Nosek et al. write: ‘People nearing the end of life often experience increasingly vivid and memorable dreams. This observation is consistent with the hypothesis that dreams and visions are intrinsic to the transition from life to death. [...] The ELDVs are often described as existential phenomena, associated with a strong spiritual connection and sensitivity, which allows the patient to experience images of previously dead friends and relatives.’

See: Cheryl L. Nosek, et al., “End-of-Life Dreams and Visions: A Qualitative Perspective From Hospice Patients,” *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine* 32, No.3 (2014): 269.

The imaginative was also enacted through the material network during the ‘accuracy recording’ of *Bambino*, when Phelim wrote down signs bearing the Disney Process perceptual positions and placed them in front of the singers. His performative action of holding up the Dreamer sign (and not the others) brought the dream metaphor directly into the embodied and performative experience of the singer-actors. Charlotte noted that the sign for her caused a feeling of ‘release’, subverting the pressure she usually feels during the recording process. Kieran noted that the sign resulted in him ‘enjoying dreaming’ while recording. Here we see material actors as symbols can express the metaphorical, inducing an altered state in the singer-actor. It seems our metaphor can indeed describe reality anew. Perhaps it also frees us from

‘the tyranny of the dichotomy between humans and nonhumans’[, from the] ‘boring alternation between two different substances, one made of objects and matter and the other of subjects and symbols.’³⁵¹

In his ‘pragmatogony’, Latour posits that artefacts

‘deserve to be housed in our intellectual culture as so many fully fledged social actors. They mediate our social action? No, they are *us*.’³⁵²

In our dreaming network, material objects are indeed *us*: actors human and material work together and *through* each other to enmesh the material and imaginative networks. The symbolic and metaphorical is enacted jointly by the human and nonhuman actors in synchrony, such that human actors require material actors for dreaming, and material actors require humans to change function into dream-objects. Just so with Phelim’s Disney Process signs: Dilts’ material book is subsumed into Phelim’s dream metaphorical network, which requires reciprocal ideation in the circle matrix from multiple human-actors, the circle formed by their bodies folded into dreaming positions by name-labelled chairs (virus-adjacent actors); a semantic dream network unfolds through human ideation and through reinforcement in material terms (Phelim’s signs, enacted through the material actors of pen and paper), which, as noted above, alter the singer-actors’ embodied experience of performance and recording, this process itself requiring musical scores

³⁵¹ Bruno Latour, “Pragmatogonies: A Mythical Account of How Humans and Nonhumans Swap Properties,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 37, no. 6 (May 1994): 795-805.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 807.

(displayed on iPads through their attendant software), a microphone, the dimensions of the room as an acoustic space, cabling, Ting operating the sound desk as hybrid cyborg-actor (the trace continuing to electricity provider, and on and on). It is only in tracing the most seemingly mundane details that we see how dreaming as embodied creative process requires a fluidity of movement between the human and nonhuman, where the two are inseparable. Our image of the cybernetic-actor is a perfect example of this need for unity, the human body and the components of digital hardware and software fused together as a hybrid actor, each altering the others' function. This discussion, and the following, once again blurs ANT into symbolic interactionism, but I nonetheless keep ANT as a frame for recognising the complex entanglement of human and material agency.

The levelling of human and nonhuman actors is crucial for another aspect of creative dreaming: play. The imaginative act of transforming one object into another can only be dreamt through a change of function collaboratively enacted by the human and nonhuman actors. Thus when *BambinO* was performed in the park, Charlotte's shoe was transformed into a golden egg: a change of performative tactility and reactivity to the object from our singer-actor; the shoe-object-actor displaced from its usual position and function and re-contextualised as an object that both *is* an egg within our shared dreaming, and is a *symbol* of an egg within our shared understanding of the opera's narrative. Another metamorphosis occurred when Michael used a wooden bench struck with beaters as both wood blocks and drums: the aural result both confirmed the bench-object's new actor-status as a percussion instrument, and represented a greater array of timbres in sonic make-believe than the reality of its actual timbre. This is all possible when our circle matrix is explicitly reframed within the dream metaphor of our semantic network: extending Ting's observation that people in ancient times would have sat talking around a fire, Phelim used the metaphorical to reaffirm our 'dreamer space' when he said 'we're sitting around a fire made of sky.' Metaphor as a form of creative play allows our exploration of our individual and collective experiential statespace(s) to become more fluid, and to equate objects with their dreamed equivalents.

Emma's ideation of the *TwitcherO* opera began with a continuation of the dream semantic network, when she began her dream-telling by requesting 'permission to dream.' This too suggests that the semantics of creative discussion are far from inconsequential: as we noted above, the decision to introduce a metaphorical framework and the subsequent reciprocal and collective development of the metaphorical can change the

terms of the shared creative space. Tracing the *TwitcheRO* ideation through to the final day, we can see how this reciprocity found expression in physical movement and music through the act of improvisation. As Phelim noted, ‘you see the offers that are coming from the other person; you have to say yes to other ideas.’ The instrumentalists, co-actors with their instruments, reacted to one another, developing musical ideations collectively; they also reacted to the singer-actors, either to vocal or physical-gestural stimulæ; the singer-actors responded to each other in their improvisation of dramatic vignettes, reacted to object-actors (such as the snack Charlotte pulled out), imaginary, co-constructed object-actors (Phelim’s ‘bird cage’), and to the musicians and their collaboratively improvised music. Emma and Giuseppe also dreamed as part of a silent improvisation alongside the physically and sonically enacted one, imagining costumes. Earlier, Phelim had specifically framed improvisation within the dream semantic network, likening it to ‘waking up inside a dream.’ He further extended the metaphor: you are ‘trying to get lucid in the improvisation thing.’ This positions improvisation as a form of creative hyper-reality, where dreaming really does reshape reality, at least within a delimited performative statespace. Metaphor, traceable through a semantic network, becomes an actor in its own right: a semantic-actor which interacts with and reshapes our emergent process of collective creative memory consolidation.



Figure 39. Emma’s sketches for *TwitcheRO*.

3.5 Dreaming through closure

We now turn away from the dreams of the field notes; the human actors embodied in text have left the rehearsal room. Yet their textual equivalents remain as haunted actors, as retentions of a collaborative process; as a symbol of hope in time of plague, protending forward to post-lockdown performances, existing ‘between an immaterial, globally spatialized internet form and a localised corporeal form’, digital opera ‘shift[ing] between deterritorialization and reterritorialization [...]’.³⁵³ Soon babies and their carers will watch *BambinO* in their homes or in a crèche, while musician-actors are dispersed across space at the ‘mercurial speed at which [opera] circulates on the internet [...]’.³⁵⁴ This operatic event is suspended in time, yet to happen at the time of writing, but in the past by the time you, the reader, come to read these words. The OCN will have expanded to embrace a new audience of babies, *BambinO* protending forward as a traceable operatic event in their lifetime of artistic consumption.

Yet what of that other baby opera? What is *Fox-Tot!*'s place in the work of the futurity-spectre? Here we see once again how the reconfiguring COVID-19 virus can create phantoms of performances that never-were: a planned tour of Scotland in 2020 was cancelled due to the pandemic. *BambinO* has found a place in the new world of opera, yet *Fox-Tot!* has yet to find a similar foothold in the active reimagining of opera's future(s), if indeed it ever will. Yet superficially - at first glance materially and musically - the two operas appear to share much in common. They involved the same composer, designers and the same instrumentalists; there is a certain commonality of aesthetic approach: a reinvention of Renaissance and Baroque sensibilities in *BambinO* versus a reinvention of French Baroque and Romantic opera in *Fox-Tot!* We can also say that the composer and designers of *Fox-Tot!* were having the same dreams, since the marriage of music and design reflects a similarly symbiotic relationship in both operas. This suggests that, at least as a musico-visual art work, *Fox-Tot!* can join *BambinO* in being ‘portions of a *distributed object* corresponding to all the artworks’ jointly conceived by the same composer-design team, ‘distributed in time and space.’³⁵⁵ This exemplifies Alfred Gell's ‘notion of a “corpus”

³⁵³ Georgina Born, “On Musical Mediation,” 30.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁵⁵ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 220.

of artworks as a kind of spatio-temporally dispersed “population.”³⁵⁶ Georgina Born summarises Gell’s proposal that ‘such a corpus is a product of [...] the ‘extended mind’ - that is, externalised and collectivized processes.’³⁵⁷ As a music-design team, our collectivised process was manifest as dreaming through a correlated network of musical and visual references: for example in *BambinO*, set-costume-music references to Italian Renaissance and Baroque forms (including Mantegna’s *Camera deli Sposi*, Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* and Handelian *opera seria*), and costume-music allusions to *The Magic Flute*. *Fox-Tot!* took set-costume-music references from Rameau’s *opéra-ballets*, Romantic-era opera in the guise of Massenet and Bizet, and operatic constructs of French ‘country peasant’ representations.



Figure 40. *Fox-Tot!* set model.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 221.

³⁵⁷ Born, “On Musical Mediation,” 20.



Figure 41. Counter-tenor costume design for Daniel Keating-Roberts.

Fox-Tot! was intended as a trilogy of operas to be commissioned by Scottish Opera, with *BambinO* aimed at the earliest age group (six to eighteen months), *Fox-Tot!* the middle age group (twelve to twenty-four months), and yet another phantom opera, the unwritten, immaterial third opera for the eldest age group (twenty-four to thirty-six months). The intention was to maintain the same core creative team between all three operas: Phelim as Director, Emma and Giuseppe as designers, and myself as librettist-composer. This would have invoked Gell's notion of *œuvre*, which Born summarises as 'an object distributed in time, where the relations between individual artworks map out a web of retentions and protensions.'³⁵⁸ Indeed, this *œuvre* would have protended back to the previous trilogy of operas for similar age groups commissioned and produced by Scottish Opera: *BabyO*, *SensoryO* and *KidO*. The key to this *œuvre* is the composer-director team

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

of Rachel Drury and Katherine Morley, who took a pitch for a baby opera to Scottish Opera.³⁵⁹

In fact, we could expand this *œuvre* outward from *BabyO* and *SensoryO*, which appeared in 2010 and 2012 respectively, to include other baby operas which appeared independently. *Korall Koral - A Baby Opera* premiered in 2009 at the Operahuset Oslo, and appears to be the earliest opera created specifically for babies. It displays a highly collaborative model, with concept, production, and direction by Hanne Dieserud and Christina Lindgren (the latter also the set and costume designer), and music by Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje. Concept and sound design seamlessly interact in the use of sea creatures which are also ‘sound instruments.’³⁶⁰ The same team created another baby opera, *Up In The Mountains*, in 2011. Moving to the UK, *Musical Rumpus* was an interactive, multi-sensory opera series, created by director-librettist Zoë Palmer and composer-cellist Sam Glazer for Spitalfields Music from 2013 to 2018.³⁶¹ Their operas have a digital afterlife through video recordings and audio resources for parents/ carers to play musical games with their children: a cybernetic continuation enacting digital opera’s ‘agentive movement between and mediation of both a globally dispersed, virtual community’ in the present, and ‘a localized, co-present public’ in the past.³⁶² *Fox-Tot!* has a similar afterlife in *Fox-Tot! Online*, a digital response to the pandemic forcing a planned tour to be cancelled.³⁶³ To trace this expanded *œuvre* we must also cross the Atlantic: Zoë Palmer reappears as librettist-actor for the operas *Otoyotoy!* (2017) and *Nooma* (2019), with music co-created through an experimental rehearsal and composition process by vocal ensemble Morning Star.³⁶⁴ Although we only have time to briefly trace the infantile *œuvre* of the OCN (of which there are many more examples), it is important to highlight

³⁵⁹ “An Interview with: Rachel Drury of *BabyO*,” *The Two Moors Festival*, April 22, 2014, <https://2mfblog.wordpress.com/2014/04/22/an-interview-with-rachel-drury-of-babyo/> (accessed October 7, 2021).

³⁶⁰ “Babyopera: Baby Opera and music theatre for children 0-3 years,” *Babyopera*, [n.d.], <http://www.babyopera.no/images/> (accessed on October 7, 2021).

³⁶¹ “Musical Rumpus,” *Spitalfields Music*, [n.d.], <https://spitalfieldsmusic.org.uk/musical-rumpus-resources/> (accessed October 7, 2021).

³⁶² Born, “On Musical Mediation,” 29.

³⁶³ “FOX-TOT! ONLINE,” *Scottish Opera*, [n.d.], <https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/fox-tot-online/> (accessed October 7, 2021).

³⁶⁴ “Moving Star creates immersive, interactive musical experiences,” *Moving Star Voices*, [n.d.], <https://www.movingstarvoices.com/about> (accessed October 7, 2021).

Palmer as an opera practitioner who speaks to why an actor-network reading de-centring the fiction of the dominant opera composer is essential. On her artist website, Palmer's first self-description is 'co-creator': we see an emphasis on collaboration in her work, as well as shifting roles as an OCN actor: librettist, director, performer.³⁶⁵ She is a crucial actor within the network of baby opera, in the creation of work mindful of audience involvement and impact. We have collaborated fruitfully in the past, yet our creative paths have not crossed within the baby opera network: two artist-actors circulating within the same network, the same temporally dispersed *œuvre*. Composer-librettist and librettist-director-performer, but crucially, both *co-creators*. I belabour this point because it both points to how individual actors can be connected while being temporally and geographically dispersed, but also because it emphasises how the composer is only ever functionally equivalent to other creative actors in the OCN.

Our opera is almost at an end, but the actors traced throughout will continue to dream through the futurity-spectre. Thus we reject closure despite the curtain falling; a moment returns from our opening chapter, a ghost of methodology-past:

'resistance to finality and closure reflects a conception of the self (and society) as relational and processual, mutably written in a moment that opens onto a panoramic, albeit not unlimited, future of possibilities.'³⁶⁶

Our tracing may be over, but the OCN will continue to expand and shift after the opera house is closed, shimmering in a multitude of mediations: cybernetic, human, material, imaginative. Even the virus-actor cannot curtail future operatic possibilities, instead initiating new circulations of actors caught in a web of relational processes radiating out from the virus-actor's material configuration. As Deirdre Heddon suggests, 'collective memory is perpetually open to flux and revision.'³⁶⁷ The collective memory processes of our artist-actors will be continually reconfigured as they move onto other projects, carrying traces and retentions of past collective processes into new ones, dispersing *œuvres* across space and time. As noted before, this notion of collective memory marks the point where our autoethnographic lens overwhelms ANT: such a notion is impossible within the

³⁶⁵ "co-creator; writer; human ecologist," *Zoe Laureen Palmer*, [n.d.], <https://zoelaureenpalmer.com/about/> (accessed October 7, 2021).

³⁶⁶ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, "*I Learn by Going*," 78-79.

³⁶⁷ Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 63.

tracing of a 'sociology of associations'. Yet this theoretical limitation must be pushed past, as a 'collective memory' - a shared experiential context of creative and material ideation - is crucial to the way collaborative artists disseminate shared artistic goals.

Our finale returns to the ultimate operatic dream: the power of voice. Nick Prior observes that 'voices are neither fixed nor stable. They can move us but they also move, comfort but also haunt us, entertain but also trick us, connect but also disperse us.'³⁶⁸ The voice displays an 'ontological plasticity [...] an abundantly mediated object embedded in distinct socio-historical constellations.'³⁶⁹ Prior proposes characterising the voice as

'an assemblage in the sense suggested by Deleuzian theoretical currents and actor network theory: hybrid, multi-scalar, human-non-human events that emerge through nested constellations.'³⁷⁰

This is voice as hybrid object, by turns acousmatic, embodied, performative and mediated. What of the haunted voice-object? Abbate has thought of opera itself as

'a response to an outlandish question - how does the dead object continue to sing? [...] [I]t is a medium that, though dead, always has the capacity to be brought back to life: an instrument, or a performer.'³⁷¹

Operatic performers spin in 'a chimerical state between aliveness and deadness [...].'³⁷² The voices of our OCN move the operatic dream beyond performers, where voices of other human actors spin in the spaces between memory and embodiment, reality and imagination, life and death.

³⁶⁸ Nick Prior, "On Vocal Assemblages: From Edison to Miku," *Contemporary Music Review* 37, nos. 5-6 (2018), 489.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 489-490.

³⁷¹ Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 6.

³⁷² Ibid., 18.

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Voice-dream

I can't remember mum's voice.

I can't talk to her because she's no longer here.

We were talking on the phone. What did she say?

I know the gist, but I want the words to be etched on my brain.

She asked how composing 'Fox-Tot!' was going.

I turned on my phone's loud speaker, it perched on the piano stand.

I played 'Little Fox's Aria of Playfulness.' The words 'blue sky' repeated over and over...

But what were her words?

She enjoyed the little phone performance; she was excited to hear the finished opera.

There is no precision, no exactness in my mind.

Just the gist.

Months have passed since her voice disappeared.

I remember...

I remember walking at Cruden Bay.

Mum calling out to the sea.

Her voice met the waves, travelled leagues.

But what were her words?

There is no precision, no exactness in my mind.

Only a voiceless memory,

with roaring waves

and seagull cries.

There is despair in silence.

Mouths move

but words evaporate.

I sing the words

of Mother Vixen and Little Fox,

but when composing stops,

silence reigns.

Silence...

And then a dream:
 Mum is in a dark room.
 All I can see is her mouth,
 phone pressed close.
 And finally she speaks:
 'Liam.'
 And I remember.

The image shows the first page of a musical score for '2. Little Fox's Aria of Playfulness'. The score is written for three parts: L.F. (Lead Female), Perc. (Percussion), and Vc. (Violoncello). The tempo is marked 'Lyrical, ♩ = c. 72' and the mood is 'softly expressive'. The score is divided into three systems by double bar lines. The first system (measures 1-8) features the L.F. part with lyrics 'Mum', 'dark', and 'room'. The second system (measures 9-16) features the L.F. part with lyrics 'All', 'I', 'can', 'see', 'is', 'her', 'mouth', and 'phone'. The third system (measures 17-24) features the L.F. part with lyrics 'pressed', 'close', 'And', 'finally', 'she', 'speaks', and 'Liam'. The Perc. part consists of a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth and sixteenth notes. The Vc. part provides a harmonic and rhythmic foundation with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Figure 42. The first page of Little Fox's Aria of Playfulness.

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Even in our dreams the voice can be technologically mediated. For so long, a relationship between mother and son becomes cybernetically augmented, our voices ‘distributed and composed’ through our smart phones, that this mediation continues beyond death and into memory.³⁷³ This memory becomes a continuing bond, not static but reshaping the internal relationship with the intimate dead. As Haraway reminds us, ‘[t]here is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic.’³⁷⁴ The revelation of this voice-dream is not cybernetic mediation, but rather the power of the voice: to become a connective force between temporal states, the past and present, to re-connect us with the dead and heal our grief. Mum’s voice was an operatic one: passionate, performative, carrying the childhood dream of being an opera singer, thwarted by circumstance, yet lived through her love of music, and her son. Her voice resonates through my music, acousmatic to others, perhaps, but not to me.

We trace the power of voice outward from this dream, to the other actors of the OCN who have appeared in this textual opera, and now make their curtain-call. The voices of Pamela, Katie and May, the connective force between embodied writing practice, operatic performance and management of operatic production’s myriad interconnected material and human actors. Their voices resonate, literally and metaphorically, through time and space, working to shatter ‘sentimental assumptions about classical music as the realm where great works, and great performances, invariably ennoble human spirits.’³⁷⁵ Instead, their voices speak to empower the so-called ‘mundane’ realities of the opera world, where dreaming is inseparably bound to the embodied and material, where writing implement, vocal score marking or rehearsal schedule spreadsheet both enable and enact dreaming. Creativity moves through their material and imaginative realities. They speak and sing between the retentions of our shared operatic experience, and the performative, cybernetic, mediated state of our Skype interviews, recast as textual traces of voice. Each of their voices is ‘a multiply constituted object that emerges and re-emerges through the modulating forces of the socio-technical and material.’³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Prior, “On Vocal Assemblages,” 503.

³⁷⁴ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 178.

³⁷⁵ Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, 11.

³⁷⁶ Prior, “On Vocal Assemblages,” 503.

Now we trace outward once again to the voices of the *Bambino* R&D. The power of these voices emanates from their temporal distribution, moving between the old world of opera, and the new, virus-reconfigured world, towards a reimagining of intimate performance dynamics in the future. They speak to the power of dreaming, of collaboration as an emergent state that can describe the realities of opera anew. Each voice speaks to their own creative practice, but together our voices become one multi-faceted, multi-dimensional object, spinning ideation networks towards the future.

These voices dream-tell, they haunt *and* are haunted. Through dialogue in face-to-face interaction and through cybernetic disembodiment, they weave a vocal tapestry that forms the fabric of the OCN. In this operatic art world, our vocal vibrations run through and animate nonhuman actors, just as those nonhuman actors stimulate our singing. I have largely treated my own opera scores - object-traces of my compositional voice - as ontologically flat, so that those voices usually denied attention in opera studies can sing out. As composer and researcher, my voice is co-constructed with our myriad actors of the OCN. Together we sing as a chorus, yet the vibrant, vibrating sound is so much more than music alone: it is the world in which operas unfold.



Figure 43. Flora Paterson's painting *Accidental Rainbow*.

3.6 EPILOGUE: The Curtain Falls

As the curtain falls, we are left to draw together the strands that ran through this textual opera, and to consider what they might mean for opera studies. Our tracing of the OCN has revealed the workings of different collaborative processes: the ever present (though not *bodily* present) human actors in the composer's studio, bound up with materials and technological mediation; the collaborative work of the performer, with composer, material objects, opera colleagues, and the audience; the work of the 'production collective' during rehearsals and in performance, an amorphous process of refinement through human and material collaboration; and the experimental, generative work of a R&D room, where material and ideation networks enmesh in the pursuit of a shared operatic project, a shared future. Through twin semantic networks - of haunting and dreaming - space has been made for the most personal of embodiments: the presence of the dead as a continuing bond in memory, an absent yet intensely present actor. This space revealed the emotionality and unpredictable nature of the composer's creative process; revealed too the extent to which the creative mind - of composer and researcher - is subject to visitations unbidden and unexpected, how the body can divert any creative agenda. If metaphor can describe reality anew, then we have seen how it serves a part in redefining the composer-researcher's voice, as a way of 'incorporating loss into a vision of the future'.³⁷⁷ This unsettles the composer's agency as the primary force behind creating operatic texts: agency is mediated even in the most private moments of the creative process. All of these strands, now woven together, enact the political commitment of my thesis: to democratise the critical view of the creative work of opera through revealing how agency is distributed.

What can these revelations offer to opera studies? Their main contribution is to deconstruct the notion of "opera text", situating the agency of a wide array of human and material actors in its construction, their work embedded in its signifying systems, while also extending the notion of "performance text" to include a more radical analysis of collaborative processes and performativity during the rehearsal period prior to public performance. Analytical rigour and insight can be enhanced if researchers explore this view of creative and performance processes as existing on a spectrum of bodily, material performativity. This would undoubtedly ground opera scholarship more thoroughly in the workings, machinations, processes and rituals of contemporary operatic practice, as

³⁷⁷ Carolyn Ellis, "On the Demands of Truthfulness in Writing Personal Loss Narratives," *Journal of Personal and Interpersonal Loss* 1 (1996): 157.

practised by artists in the opera world today. It may be possible for scholars focusing on historical work to retroactively reimagine their approaches to opera historiography and historical practices, through more acutely observing contemporary practice. After all, it is standard for opera performers to have a fluid and deeply creative relationship to opera's past; there is much to be gained by opera scholarship observing this relationship closely. The revelations of our textual opera also offer a useful directive on different collaborative contexts. This is of worth to composers seeking to enter the opera world: many composers specialising in concert works are accustomed to viewing themselves as the controlling agency behind a creative vision, something I have observed often in unsuccessful opera projects. This thesis may offer insight into the forms collaboration can take, and how it is not only beneficial but essential for the work of opera to take place through collaboration to ensure that the agency of its actors is not stifled.

Our hybrid methodologies have assisted this project, yet also revealed limitations to their application. ANT enabled the perceptual stance of a flat ontology in recognising material agency, yet offered little as a way of tracing the complexity of human agency in creative acts, embroiled as they are in non-linear temporality, memory, performativity and abstract ideation. To overcome this limitation, it was necessary to apply ANT fluidly, extending the idea of traceable networks beyond the material to embrace imaginative networks as the basis for collaborative ideation, as well as a shared creative collective memory. Thus I used generalised concepts at odds with the principles of ANT, opting to push past its strictures in a creative way. In a similar way, I introduced hauntology, only to meld it into a haunting semantic framework more in line with 'how autoethnographers create connections and community through the metaphor of the undead in their various forms'.³⁷⁸ This was to allow an evocative way to discuss the role of passed actors and grief within the work of opera, without diverting too much analytical and emotional energy into a more rigorous theoretical discussion along the lines of continuing bonds theory. There were some fundamental hauntology concepts that I found useful to adapt to a more personalised and localised scale, as a lens for discussing certain modes of collaborative work: hospitality creating space for future opera audiences, and future-orientated haunting worked through collaboration towards a reconfigured operatic practice in the wake of COVID-19. Since hauntology is ultimately more directly applicable in the exploration of mourning and trauma on a larger societal scale, it may be of more use to opera studies if

³⁷⁸ Herrmann, "Ghosts, Vampires, Zombies, and Us", 327.

employed as a way to study the colonial (and post-colonial) history of opera, or the recurrent themes of gender violence and war in historical (and contemporary) operatic works. The framework that guided the creative retooling of ANT and hauntology was autoethnography, which proved to be the most valuable methodology for opera studies in this context. Autoethnography fully recognises emotionality and embodiment as valid sites of knowledge, and thus was ideally suited for the study of bodily and material performativity. It also foregrounds CMR status, which was crucial in observing the work of collaboration from composer's studio to rehearsal room and stage. This feature could encourage opera researchers to redefine their authorial voice to more explicitly recognise their own embodiment within the opera world. The comparative lack of theoretical strictures within autoethnography also allowed for an experimental approach to opera studies, assisting in the exploration and deconstruction of existing paradigms within opera research (such as the focus on performance text in contemporary opera studies rather than the work of the rehearsal room). This experimentality also allowed the freedom to move between the personal and the collective, to recognise the work of mourning amidst professional contexts.

Now it is time to leave the theatre. As I leave the breathy rituals of opera behind, I hope that this textual opera might inspire other opera researchers to explore autoethnography. As a lens for conducting practice-led research, it might just bring some of the opera industry's less explored performative rituals to light.

Appendix A

PORTFOLIO OPERAS: SYNOPSES

The three operas that comprise my PhD portfolio are also central to the textual journey of *The Fox, the Nun and the Dragon*. I wanted to avoid hampering the exploratory nature of the thesis-opera with explanations of commissioning history and plot details, so here I present the background and synopsis for each of the three operas. This also allows readers to orientate themselves within the experimental structure of the thesis-opera, even without access to the scores or recordings of the portfolio works.

FOX-TOT!

An opera for toddlers age 16 to 24 months, commissioned by Scottish Opera and the Royal and Derngate Theatres, Northampton. Based upon an original story with libretto by the composer.

Synopsis:

This synopsis was written by me, and appeared in the title pages of the score produced by Scottish Opera.

Little Fox is playing alone. Mother Vixen arrives with a message: it is time to grow up and learn the ways of the world. Fox must experience the world through the eyes of others.

Firstly, Fox transforms into a cat, and bathes in the warm sun. Suddenly it rains, so Fox - hating water in cat form - becomes a water-loving frog. (Cue frog chorus).

The sky clears and Fox longs to soar in the beautiful sky. Fox becomes a butterfly. Mother Vixen appears and begins playing with the butterfly.

Mother Vixen calls Little Fox back to earth, her cub now wiser and ready to face the world!

THE ANGEL ESMERALDA

An opera originally commissioned by Scottish Opera, but produced and premiered by the Opera School of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Based on the short story of the same name by Don DeLillo, with libretto by Pamela Carter.

Synopsis:

This synopsis was written by Pamela Carter, and appeared in the programme book for the opera's premiere performances.

Set in the South Bronx, NYC, sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

ACT I

The Convent

Sister Edgar, an elderly Carmelite nun, prepares herself for the day. She stores faith in the rituals of the Catholic church to keep the world of doubt at bay. A younger nun, Sister Grace, arrives and they both leave to minister to the poor and needy.

The Bird

The Observers tell us about The Bird, an area of extreme poverty and urban decay in the South Bronx. The Sisters arrive at a squatted tenement and discuss the wall of graffiti, painted by the local Crew to commemorate the deaths of any children in The Bird: angels with the children's names and details of their deaths. The Sisters see Brother Mike, a Franciscan friar who also works in The Bird, and who has a day off to look at wild plant species growing in the vacant parking lots. He asks the Sisters to look out for a young homeless girl he has seen in the area, who runs away when he tries to approach her. They agree they must save her.

The Tenement: Ismael's HQ

The Sisters enter the tenement and make their way to the top floor where the graffiti crew live; a group of young boys and girls, led by Ismael. Sister Grace has a list of abandoned cars she has spotted on her travels, which she gives to Ismael in exchange for cash. The Sisters buy groceries to distribute to the needy and Ismael will sell the cars for scrap; although today he delays payment as he has plans to upgrade the facilities in the Crew's squat. Through the window, Sister Edgar sees a young girl outside and is struck by her grace and beauty. Ismael tells them her name is Esmeralda.

The Housing Projects

The Sisters, helped by members of Ismael's Crew, go to addresses in the housing projects to distribute the groceries. They travel up and down the huge blocks visiting different apartments. They discuss the pros and cons of giving groceries to someone addicted to heroin. They meet a pregnant woman and Sister Edgar teaches her how to baptise her own baby so if the baby dies in childbirth, the mother can make sure it goes to heaven and avoids purgatory.

The South Bronx Surreal

Driving back to the convent, the Sisters see a group of tourists on a guided tour of the South Bronx. This infuriates Sister Grace whilst Sister Edgar understands how desperation and dereliction might be compelling. Spotting Esmeralda in the street, Sister Grace runs after her. There is a fire in the subway and Sister Edgar and the tourists watch as the street fills with smoke, and commuters make their way above ground. Sister Edgar identifies herself with Esmeralda believing they both belong to this apocalyptic landscape. She is convinced Esmeralda will be saved.

ACT II

The Wall

The Sisters arrive in The Bird to feed the needy. Another angel has been painted on the tenement wall; Esmeralda has been murdered. The legend detailing her death has been misspelled by the graffiti writer. Ismael arrives to help with the groceries. Sister Grace goes to work but Sister Edgar decides to stay behind, overcome with doubt.

The Expressway

The Observers tell us of people beginning to collect at the bottom of an Expressway as rumours of a miracle spread through The Bird. They watch a giant billboard selling Minute Maid orange juice and wait for darkness.

The Refectory

Sister Grace tries to stop Sister Edgar going to the Expressway to see if the rumours are true.

The Angel Esmeralda

Back at the Expressway more people congregate to witness the miracle. Sister Edgar arrives. People find reassurance in her presence as a representative of the church. She is told to watch the billboard and as the lights from a passing train illuminate the image look for Esmeralda's face in the cascading orange juice. Sister Edgar sees Esmeralda.

Space Available

As news of the miracle spreads crowds of people arrive along with TV news crews, people selling refreshments and souvenirs, and Esmeralda's absent mother. Then without warning the advert is removed.

Temporal Advantage

We find Sister Edgar as she was at the beginning of the opera: in prayer.

CATRIONA AND THE DRAGON

A community opera commissioned by the Lammermuir Festival. Based upon an original story developed with the project's librettist and director Laura Attridge.

Synopsis:

This synopsis is a minimally altered version of that written by Laura Attridge, and appearing in her 'libretto structure breakdown' early in the creative process.

The cast and audience sing the Community Anthem: a hymn to nature.

Scene 1: At Court

The court processes in, and Queen Catriona takes her seat on the throne.

Citizens of Beagland approach the throne with gifts and petitions for help. The Two Courtiers respond on behalf of Catriona, while the Queen herself appears distant and bored. Business as usual at court.

Suddenly, they are interrupted by the sound of protesters outside. The Courtiers explain to Catriona that some of the citizens are protesting a dragon who is destroying the kingdom: the protestors, they say, are calling for Catriona to do something about it!

Catriona, panicked, decides that going to school is preferable to facing the protesters... As the singing grows louder outside, and the crowd seems about to break in, she flees the

court, leaving the Courtiers to deal with the mess.

Travelling Duet 1

Catriona runs to school, while the Two Courtiers narrate.

Scene 2: At School

Catriona arrives at her class in the middle of a lesson about the Kings and Queens of Beagland.

The first lesson over, Catriona slinks into her seat as the teacher introduces the next lesson. To Catriona's horror, it's a lesson about dragons, and focuses in on the dragon who is terrorising the kingdom: we learn that this one lives across the mysterious Bridge to Nowhere, and anyone who has crossed the bridge and tried to defeat the dragon has never returned. Catriona refuses to join in, disrupting the class and angering the teacher, who is about to send her to detention when the children run to the window: the dragon is flying overhead! The class erupts into chaos. While everyone is distracted, Catriona makes her escape.

The Courtiers arrive into the classroom, panting: they've just missed her but not the mess she's left behind.

Travelling Duet 2

Catriona runs to the theatre, while the Courtiers narrate.

Scene 3: At the Theatre

Catriona arrives at the Beagland Opera House in the middle of a matinee performance. She slips into the stalls to watch. It turns out to be a performance of *Stoorver the Ice Dragon*. The dragon sings a lullaby sending the nearby villagers to sleep, before breathing her icy breath across the village to freeze all of the inhabitants to death!

Catriona is incensed: she jumps onstage, interrupting the Diva's aria, grabs a prop sword, and 'slays' the puppet dragon while the other performers desperately try to improvise around her. The opera descends into chaos as the audience boo and hiss, and Catriona makes a hasty exit.

The Courtiers arrive at the theatre, even more out of breath than last time: they've missed her again, but are left to clear up the devastation she's left behind!

Scene 3a: Running from the Theatre

Catriona runs, but doesn't know where she's running to; as she runs the Dragon is heard overhead again, closer than ever.

Catriona takes cover as she waits for the Dragon to pass. She hears the protesters in the distance, and realises they must be at City Hall, not too far away. She decides she should go and listen to what they have to say: she can't keep running, and she can't escape the dragon forever.

Scene 4: At City Hall

Catriona arrives at City Hall, where the protest is taking place. We hear some accounts of how the dragon has affected individuals/families, and Catriona is moved to tears by an extended story from some small children about their house being burned down.

The Courtiers finally catch up to her, and find her deeply moved. They ask her what she is doing, and what she intends to do: 'What I should have done all along', she says. Catriona gets the attention of the crowd, reveals who she is, and declares that she is finally taking responsibility as a ruler: she will go and cross the Bridge to Nowhere, and face the dragon.

Scene 4a: Journey to the Bridge to Nowhere

Catriona runs to the Bridge to Nowhere, calling for her armour. The Dragon is heard overhead as she runs; this only makes her more determined.

Scene 5: At the Bridge

Catriona and the Courtiers arrive at the Bridge to Nowhere. Catriona puts on her armour, picks up her sword, and crosses the bridge.

The Courtiers try to imagine what's going on on the other side, ending with the expectation of Catriona's death, since she hasn't come back.

Suddenly, Catriona appears across the bridge, much to the Courtiers' relief. She tells them there is no time to lose: they must summon the whole kingdom to the Court, and she will tell everyone what has happened.

Scene 6: Back at Court

The Court processes in, and Queen Catriona takes her place by the throne, her courtiers at her side.

When everyone is quiet, she tells them what has happened: because of the behaviour of the humans across the kingdom, the Dragon has been turned out of its habitat and become sick. It has essentially had no choice but to behave as it has; it hasn't meant to destroy anything – it just wants to live a peaceful life across the Bridge to Nowhere. It has asked for Queen Catriona's help.

Catriona makes a rousing speech, declaring that, as of today, she will be taking responsibility and making changes across the land to respect the earth, and to avoid any more dragons coming to the kingdom. Nervous, she asks her citizens if they will help her...

Everyone erupts into cheers and applause. Together, they – and the audience – sing the Congregational Anthem: a hymn to nature. The Voice of the Dragon is heard overhead, in perfect harmony with the chorus.

Appendix B

Excerpts from a Skype Interview with Pamela Carter: 30/07/2020

Excerpt 1.

Pamela Carter [PC]: [...] At the moment I'm talking to you on my desktop. So I'm either here at my desk, or if I... less and less so I do it on a laptop now. The terrible thing is age: I have a bad back. [*Laughs*]. It's quite difficult. So I don't know if you can - I've got myself a really nice chair, it's got sheep skin on it, you know [*laughs*] for comfort, my desk I can wind up and stand at it. So there's all these sort of [...], you know kind of creature comforts in order to give myself no excuse other than to just get on with it.

Excerpt 2.

PC: [...] I can't really write without feeling a keyboard under my fingers. [...] I carry a notebook around and I might write you know sort of little scraps of ideas or little half sentences. But genuinely I can't write dialogue [...] into a notebook... [...] it just doesn't feel right, it doesn't feel like I'm shaping something. And I think, so I've got used to thinking and feeling something under my fingers. And I think maybe it's also about the commitment to the screen, that you can - you know, I might do this for hours: I'll type a line out and then I'll just erase it. And then I'll type some words out and then I'll just spend half an hour just rearranging them on the page, or I'll just *blurch* and then I'll sort of make it look more shapely on the page [...].

So there's something about that seeing it set out very clearly in front of me, being able to sort of manipulate it, and also being able to.. to think quite reasonably freely and not [*mimes writing with head down in notebook*] sort of focus... you know not sort of.. to be able to look up and look out and imagine things in my head, rather than trying to sort of stare at a piece of paper.

Excerpt 3.

PC: [...] We've often sat together and sort of like drawn shapes out and drawn sort of blocks [...] that's definitely when I need my notebook and a pencil to hand. And it always has to be a pencil; I don't like using pens. Something about being able to change something. But there's something about being able to sort of conceive of things spatially.. and I think what it is is: sitting at a screen I can sort of zone out from it, and so what I'm trying to do - in a sense you're trying to sort of feel depth - there's a spacial analogy sort of there. What I'm trying to do also is then imagine in my head a theatre space. And people - bodies in it. And then going: okay, well what that person might say at that point. So like - so something about sort of lifting away from the.... away from the keyboard and the book - you know the notebook, that allows me to sort of you know close my eyes and then still be kind of poised, you know, to be able to sort of *play*. I mean I guess its as close as I'm going to get to [*laughs*] you know to just sort of [...] playing a piano.

But [...] I think for both of us the process of writing is so partial.. because you can never know what it is that... you know, you're having to really powerfully imagine something that doesn't exist. And then give slight indications as to how that thing you imagine might come into existence.

Excerpt 4.

LP: My point was: in terms of when you're writing - cos I think this is something that I do - I sort of pivot between almost seeing - trying to actually imagine almost like the blocking of

the actors - of the singers - when they're on stage, but also kind of being in the audience and then seeing it from that view. So do you also kind of move between those points?

PC: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. And I think it may be because I'm not a performer, I think I always start out in the seats. And that's sort of - that's where it begins, that I start to sort of look around and sort of set out space. And I think that's the POV that I always return to. [**LP:** Yeah.] And so I might have to sort of - I think more so in writing a play, in more sort of naturalistic mode - it's really useful to try and imagine your way into the POV of each character. So you then go "oh, well okay, so I'm Sister Edgar and I'm now looking at Sister Gracie. And Gracie's saying all this stuff. What's my response to her?" You know, what do I feel at this moment? What seems like the - So you sort of calibrate the spaces between characters on stage. But I think ultimately I'm always sort of sitting back and going "what does it mean to watch it all together? What's the shape of it? And what's that space between the spectator and the performers?"

LP: Yeah. And is there - is there a kind of sense, you know in terms of that exchange between different characters on stage - because I think this is something I feel that when I'm composing I almost feel the emotion which they're feeling, or I'm sort of trying to get to that point that I actually feel it. Do you find that where it's almost like an embodied thing?

PC: - I do. But I think I maybe come at it slightly differently. I do because I find something going "oh - what am I -" (*motions with hands*) You know, I start to gesticulate. So I'm sat at my - this is also why it's good being sat at the computer is that I start to sort of gesticulate about: "okay, you're there (*motions to left*), you're there (*motions to right*)." You know, and so sort - and then try and find the feeling, whatever the feeling is here (*motions to heart*).

But I think there's a process that also - the next process is to go: I may have a feeling as a character, but then what I say or do might not be a communication of that feeling but might be a way of stopping that feeling happening. So it's an action. And I think this comes from theatre, is that you try to avoid telling an actor the state. You ask actors: actors don't play a state. You don't say "be sad." You say "okay, well here you are trying to make this other character aware of your pain". You're doing something much more active. And I think I've taken that mode of actor training into writing. So I think it's a very different - so whilst you're feeling the emotion of it, I might be playing over the top of it. Someone can be incredibly sad or frightened, but they might then be telling a joke. You get - you know, so there's - it's subtext, isn't it. So I think there's a slightly different shaping.

LP: Yeah, is there almost you sense you're kind of - you're kind of thinking through the like performative *act* of the actual actor.

PC: Yeah - and the speech. Or the - you know, what does that dialogue do? What are they doing to each other by speaking to each other? Or they might be speaking to themselves. You know, so they might be sad, but they're trying to cheer themselves up, or you know or reassure themselves or something. So sometimes the distinctions might be quite fine, but I think it's between you know a state and an action.

Excerpt 5.

PC: I get annoyed when I'm in the theatre and what I'm doing is suddenly appreciating the writing. D' you know?[...] So I think it shouldn't get in the way. And you know, then you read Shakespeare or you go and see a Shakespeare thing (*laughs*) you are going "oh my

god, that was amazing.” And that seems to be fine. So I’m not sure I’m consistent in this. But it does feel... the more concise I can be, and the less - the fewer words I can use to arrive at a place that feels aesthetically satisfying as well, that has a nice shape to it, that it might be...sound nice in some way, that feels like a good thing. Yeah... Less is more.

Excerpt 6.

LP: When you’re writing opera, are you actually, are you almost hearing it sung in your head, or hearing music?

PC: Have I not told you this? I have this like really terrible sort of vibrato voice in my head that’s sort of singing in a slightly tuneless parody of opera singing. And if it just starts to mangle, I think well maybe that’s not a good sentence to try and sing, or word to try and sing. I mean I often find myself passing it to you going “d’you think it’s okay to sing that word, I don’t know’. So I’m not entirely convinced that the voice in my head is eh, em... the greatest measure of success. But it’s kind of all I’ve got.

Appendix C

Excerpts from a Skype interview with Katie Grosset: 22/11/2020

Excerpt 1

Katie Grosset [KG]: It's so important to me to have my [vocal] scores with all the markings, because I have - like all my markings are so vivid and I know exactly what they all mean. You can tell - in *The 8th Door* it's really funny - in *The 8th Door* right now, chances are the more colours on it, the more stressed out I was about it. So it'll start with blue, and rests will be in a different colour - but generally, if I make a mistake more than once it'll go in a different colour. And so *The 8th door* [laughs] will probably be - I mean, my *Romeo* - my *Capuletti* score, I had to buy a new score, because I'd marked up in so many different colours that I couldn't read the music anymore. *Fox-Tot!*: I can picture it now; there's just one bit where [name removed] wasn't ever counting properly, and so I marked it in big red marker because I just had to cover him. I know exactly what my score looks like, I know exactly what the markings on it look like, and I really hope I get it back one day because these things are such important parts of history for me. I can remember - I've got quite a good memory - like I can remember exactly when I made each marking. I could probably tell you the conversation I had in order to make that marking. Yeah, yeah, yeah... my memory's crystal clear.

Liam Paterson [LP]: So it's really like a proper record of the whole process is in those markings?

KG: Totally. I'll write down *everything*. And also if somebody's sort of getting a big long note, there'll be a game of knots and crosses somewhere. Do you know what I mean? And I think it's important to have all of these markings. So my dad published a - you know how he did all the *Maw Broon* cookbooks - he did *Maw Broon's cookbook* in a way, so he looked through my granny's old cookbook, and it had all of the stains. So I can remember there's a red wine stain in one of my recipe books: I know exactly where I was when that red wine stain happened. You know, and it's part of - it's the story I tell whenever I make that thing because I go: "Oh this red wine stain". And *So Maw Broon's Cookbook* had all the graffiti that Maw Brown's kids had done over the years, so I suppose it's just like Cec's³⁷⁹ wall by the fridge where she's got everybody's height, it's the same. So if I were to look at my score for *Fox-Tot!* and then compare that with my score for something five years previously, you can see my signature marking-up develop, because I've got my own little signs for everything, you know.

LP: So it actually changes over time the more work you did.

KG: Yeah, I've kept some stuff, I've lost some stuff. So maybe at Guildhall, I'll have written down words really studiously because Susie Stranders will have been saying: "yes, this is how you've gotta do it". And then, you know, Eugene Asti will have said "di di di" but I honestly, because it was all so like this: [makes a raspberry sound while making the 'over my head' hand gesture], I won't know when those words were mentioned or who they were mentioned by, because I was just sort of doing lip service. Whereas if I mean the notes and I put them down from me to me....

LP: So it's kind of a record of you becoming a master of your own process.

³⁷⁹ Cec refers to Cecilia Darker, in whose house in London Katie and I both lived and met.

KG: Yes, exactly. Exactly right. And I think it was at National Opera Studio was when I really learned when to pretend to write notes, and when to actually write notes. Or when to write notes *in my way*. That's really important. That's why I really hope my *Fox-Tot!* score finds its way back to me. I think the Education Department would probably keep it for me if they found it.

LP: Yeah, I think they would definitely have that somewhere. Because that's like traces of your life at that point.

Excerpt 2

KG: It might be quite interesting to talk about the fact that I was pregnant during *Fox-Tot!* [...] Is it useful for me to talk about that [**LP:** Yes, that's great!], like how useful it was for me as a performer to be suddenly performing with and for babies, and my reactions and my... apart from sort of needing to throw up quite a lot, but not, so it was fine. [**LP:** *laughing*]... The fact that I was suddenly much more emotionally connected to it, because... I was envisioning, sort of, my own life ahead of time, and I was learning about how to work with children, and how to sing - like how to sing to them and get a reaction that wasn't, you know - how to be very careful with my dynamic, how to be very careful with how I... directed my voice, and how I expressed what was written on the page to include everybody, but also to help engage parents; like everybody just seemed to matter. I didn't think it was possible, but everybody seemed to matter so much more, because I then realised "oh my goodness, this is - this is - how would I want this to go?" Rather than just being like "great, everybody'll clap, and it'll be nice", it was - it was: "how would I want this to go for *my child*"; possibly their first experience of live music, you know... [**LP:** Yeah!]. So, it was really cool, like that was really amazing. And, em... Yeah, the connection there was pretty massive.

And also the fact that em... I knew that it had been written by a friend... meant a huge amount... and actually, it was mainly a blessing, but there were moments where I just thought "oh god, if I don't do this bit the justice I want to do it", like "I want to make this as *beautiful* as I possibly can", because it means -again - it means much much more to me than just coming along and doing a job. It's - I very much knew what it meant to you at the time, and I knew exactly how and why you wrote it, and the circumstances in which you wrote them, and.. that had a lot of impact on how I wanted to see the piece and understand it...And I wanted to play...I wanted to define my character further, and make it slightly more...more person than abstract. So the last work I did of yours [*The 8th Door*], it was very abstract. You know, the words were very, very emotive. Em.. and that was a different kind of sensation and scenario, but I wanted really to turn my character into... like a really *defined* and concise person...because...rather than just being this person who sings these words, I wanted to think about who I was. So the relationship between mother and fox.. was really important...the relationship between...like I had a relationship in character with everybody, not just Fox, so I had to have a way of *being* with parents, as she would, rather than just being with Fox all the time.

LP: [...] During the process of working on the piece, there was quite a lot maybe to unpick... I guess like there's a whole gamut of life in it...cos there's the connection obviously to death, with my mum, and then -

KG: Well, d'you know, when you had that little Jelly Cat fox, [**LP:** Yeah!] I really saw her. There was a huge parallel there for me - I really saw the - you know, your mum had bought

that fox. There was a Mother Vixen - Little Fox scenario going on there [...]. There's lots of that.

LP: Yeah. Yeah, and then on the personal level there's the connection to birth, and new life-

KG: Absolutely! But that sort of came unexpectedly I guess, given the really awful, sad circumstances. But yeah, the connection - and the moon, and the sun - so many - so many things in there. Because you'd not finished writing *Fox-Tot!*, at the time?

LP: No, I'd kind of just started sketching stuff out. I hadn't written very much. I'm trying to think.. there's a bit... it's one of the bits you sing [...]. It's the bit where she calls Little Fox back to earth -

KG: Oh yes! Yes! Yes!

LP: I think that was the very last - [**KG:** - You mentioned that]. - yeah, that I played to mum over the phone.³⁸⁰ Em... so, yeah - and I guess -

KG: [*Singing*] "Come back to earth" - that bit?

LP: Yeah, that's it.

KG: Oh I loved that bit. And that was - you know, it'll make you laugh, that was the one bit where, by the end of the show, the kids were so joyously happy, that normally I'd have them like tugging on my skirt. And David and Callum [the Stage Managers] would be like in full like "Get off the stage!" And it would be this beautiful moment, and then - [*both laughing*].

Excerpt 3

KG: [...] and also my *Fox-Tot!* costume is in a museum at the moment for something; the Bellis have got an exhibition on.³⁸¹ And I'm just curious to know if they picked the one that was adapted for pregnancy, or the one that wasn't, cos I'm assuming they made two.

LP: It would be really nice to see both side by side, to see how they changed the costume.

KG: Yeah. Well I mean they sort of just put elastic everywhere and did a lot of this: [*closes eyes and exhales in mock exasperation before laughing*]. "No problem. How big do you think you'll get? [*Sighs again*]. No problem." [*Both laughing*]. Which is fine, you know, I felt really bad, because it's probably the worst time to tell them you're pregnant, when you

³⁸⁰ It was actually the near-identical musical number 'Little Fox's Aria of Playfulness' that I played over the phone. This shows the fallibility of memory on the part of the researcher, and the importance of triangulation of data.

³⁸¹ The exhibition in question was 'Staging Places: UK Design for Performance', which ran at the National Centre for Craft and Design in Sleaford, Lincolnshire, from 19th September 2020 to 31st January 2021. See Fiona Watt, "Staging Places: Making the Invisible, Visible," *The Society of British Theatre Designers*, September 30, 2020, <http://www.theatredesign.org.uk/blog/staging-places-making-the-invisible-visible/> (accessed October 12, 2021).

can't tell anybody else and they can't tell anybody else. They've just gotta whack a load of extra money onto the budget, no bother.

Excerpt 4

KG: [...] With *Fox-Tot!*, you were part of the team. [...] I think what you brought to the table was the experience that you'd had with Phelim [McDermott], which was very much "all together, workshopping all together", and doing this as one big exercise. "If you're not feeling great today, don't be here today", that sort of thing. [**LP:** Yeah]. And I think... Yeah, you'd written every single word and every single note and chosen every single voice, and the direction every single voice had gone in, because you cared, and because you could hear that sound being made by that individual, or that instrument, or whatever.

LP: Yeah! And it definitely... it made a huge difference knowing that you were going to be the Mother Vixen, knowing that Daniel [Keating-Roberts] was going to be [Little] Fox.

KG: Even the Bellis doing the design, right?

LP: Yeah! It means that you're - yeah, it's not an abstract process when you're writing it; like it's really kind of flesh and blood. [**KG:** Yeah]. Like it's *actually* real people who you personally know, and you really respect their work, and you really like them as people -

KG: Yeah - and I guess you trust them to do a good job, and to come ready to listen.

LP: Yeah! And it's also that thing of like... I knew you would all do a really brilliant job but also, as a composer, I had to - it was my job to give you something that you could really have [**KG:** Yes!] an *experience* with, and to connect to, so it's like meeting at the same level [**KG:** Yeah.] as composer and performer.

KG: I feel like [*The*] *8th Door* is a huge shining example of that as well, cos you actually took eight [*sic*] voices, and every single one had like a really kick-ass show moment, and as much as that's not what the brief was, you'd taken the time and the care to do it, and everybody got - you know, there was *this person* [*gesturing*], and then this person, and then this person, and then there was sort of the two top people doing a really high, twinkly thing, and then the tenor just went a bit mental, and then Martin did his - and it was great.

LP: Yeah! I guess even beyond the kind of personal connection thing, like on a personal level you want each singer - like if you know who's cast - you want them to be able to shine, and to show off, like display all the qualities of their voice - but also I always feel that opera is about - it's about singing, it's about singers. So -

KG: See, this was what made your work such a pleasure and an honour to do, because you really, really did go: "okay, so why would I write anything other than what makes this singer sound their best." Like, so you knew me, you knew I *could* sing here [*gesturing high*] and there [*gesturing low*], but you knew that I sang amazingly here [*gesturing*]; you picked this bit, and made that sort of the core of what I did. Whereas, I did a composers' workshop for [*name removed*] the other day - it wasn't the other day, it was *exactly* a year ago [*both laughing*] - and everybody - it was fucking awful, because - it was for University of [*name removed*] - and so all the composers had basically gone to their book, and gone: "okay, mezzo range between a bottom G and a top A", and - because they'd obviously

been instructed to use the whole range, they'd just stuck me up top A all the time. I was sitting in a chair, sight-reading terrible writing, because - you know, a lot of them were like first year, second year - one stage, a guy had written me no words [LP: Oh!]; no words, and he was like: "Oh, can you just sing words relating to traffic", and I was like: "Okay: Stop! Go! Biting Point!" [Both laughing]. [...] And so much of it was on top A, and I was so pregnant that I thought I was going to wet myself, so I did *so much* of it down the octave, because they paid me - for six hours work I got £100. It was all really, really badly written, and I couldn't sight-read it - and they said: "Oh, what about people with perfect pitch?", and I said: "Just add a zero to your cost, pal." [...]

So, having been a young composer that frankly did it cos they didn't want to do a dissertation [LP: *laughing*] - like that was me; like: seven thousand million words, or some tunes: "some tunes, thanks." So, having done the composing thing myself, pretended to care, I know how impactful and brilliant it is when one *does* actually care, and the difference it makes. SO, having been really lucky to work with an established composer *now*, I realise just how much the connection to the piece, the music, the singers - if you can do it. So Mozart, you know, wrote all his roles knowing the sopranos, or whatever. [Makes a face and imitates herself: "Or whatever"]. Knowing the singers that he was writing for, and you can tell. [LP: Yeah]. This is why we have the "Mozart singer" [making air quotes], isn't it? [LP: Yeah!]. This is why it's so - so when, so in fifty years time, we'll be like: the "Liam Paterson mezzo-soprano" [both laughing; LP: Fingers crossed!]. Which is actually based on his flat-mate [both laughing]... who used to sit at the kitchen table, with the weight of the world on her shoulders, and moan at Liam about life [both laughing]. That's how they got to work together. That'll be in the history books one day, or on the internet [LP: Or somewhere, yeah]. Just make sure you write it down somewhere so I don't lose it [both laughing]. Somewhere, in the ether... but this is why the connections really matter.

Appendix D

Email Questions for May Howard-Shigeno³⁸²

How would you describe the role of the assistant director(s)?

Gosh good question! It depends on the director and the production but broadly speaking in opera the assistant director is often in charge of organising the schedule (which is then handed on to company management/ stage management to implement), keeping track of the 'blocking' (all movement on stage), rehearsing covers, walking roles when people are missing from rehearsals and sometimes performances, and having a good knowledge of the chorus to support the director in chorus rehearsals. Some directors actually prefer their assistants to almost take over chorus rehearsals, particularly if it's a revival.

How does the Production Manager liaise between all the departments involved in the production from a logistical point of view? Is she in charge of this?

Again this depends on the production and more importantly, the company. A production manager would usually be expected to produce a production schedule and contact sheet towards the beginning of the process and then allocate budget to various departments once the design is roughly set in stone (in Guildhall a staff production manager is in charge of ensuring that the design is achievable within the budget set out - this is done in consultation with other departments eg. technical management, construction, lighting). Guildhall production managers usually hold weekly production progress meetings once rehearsals start, involving all production students that are involved and the creative team (designer, LD, director). They'll also set weekly deadlines for heads of departments to hand in their running expenditures so that they can keep an eye on budget spending. Other than this production management may pick up odd jobs that don't obviously fall to any one department (eg. organising rehearsal set and buying a car in the case of *Esmeralda*).

Once productions get to fit up the production manager sends out daily calls to all technical departments laying out a rough schedule for each day. A production manager is expected to know (and of course, this is in consultation with heads of departments and their are separate meetings to plan for this) how long each part of the fit up process should take (eg. how long it will take to rig lights, how long it will take to lay the floor, how many hours needed to paint each evening etc. etc.). They continue to send out daily calls to technical departments throughout technical rehearsals in accordance with notes that come out of rehearsals/unfinished jobs that can be completed outside of the singers' rehearsal time. This includes organising things like lighting sessions, paint sessions, other odd bits and bobs.

What specifically is the Stage Manager in charge of throughout the rehearsal process?

The stage manager is in charge of sending out daily rehearsal calls and reports, managing a team of assistant stage managers who source props and support the rehearsal room, making sure rehearsal props are available to the room at the earliest possible opportunity, arranging measurements/fitting times for the full cast, liaising with the opera manager about any scheduling issues, and keeping track of props expenditure. The deputy stage manager has a completely different role and the assistant stage managers also have odd jobs outside of propping but in Guildhall the main bulk of their work is in the propping and running wings once the production gets into technical rehearsals.

³⁸² Formatting and punctuation are retained precisely from May's original document.

Which members of the production team were present in most production rehearsals?

Deputy Stage Manager + 1/2 ASMs. The production manager and stage manager would pop in occasionally. I don't know if he counts as 'production team' but Gregor [Donnelly, the set and costume designer] and the lighting designer would also pop in from time to time.

During stage & piano + stage & orchestra rehearsals, who was generally present from production in: a) the rehearsal room; b) dressing rooms?

Sooooo okay. In tech almost all of the production team (excluding members of the workshop i.e. props/scenic art/construction) would be around either in the auditorium or the production office next door. They all need to be available in case anything goes wrong. There would only be a few dressers in the dressing rooms at most and even they are encouraged to be near the stage when they can.

Production team members stayed later beyond the end of production rehearsals. In general, who was present and what tasks were they fulfilling?

Most of the evening sessions were for lighting. A lighting session involves the lighting designer, production electrician, 2 lighting programmers, director (depending on the work that's being done), assistant director, and deputy stage manager. We'd also usually have a couple of crew members available to 'walk for lights'. This just means they stand where the lighting designer/directing team ask them to so that the LD can check how the light will look with someone in it. In *Esmeralda* we had quite a social team so the production manager and stage manager often stayed on but it isn't strictly necessary for them to be there.

During actual performances, who from production was present and what tasks were they carrying out?

- Production Manager - generally overseeing all departments/on hand for emergencies.
- Stage Manager - may have a show role but otherwise liaises with Front of House about opening time and clearance and relays that to the DSM. Also in charge of the safety of the stage so has to run a fire drill before every show. After the show the stage manager will write a show report with the deputy stage manager.
- Deputy Stage Manager - cues the show. This includes doing Front of House and Backstage Calls during the performance.
- Assistant Stage Managers - Move props/people and cue cast on from various entrance points using their own score if lighting levels allow but mainly through the deputy stage manager on headset in the case of *Esmeralda*. They also set the stage and do all pre-show checks.
- Head of wardrobe and dressers - jointly manage all costumes including all the maintenance (laundry, fixes, ironing etc).
- Production assistants - I can't remember if they had any jobs on this show but often they have little jobs like helping with scene changes.
- Production assistant (on flies so flyman) - flies scenery in and out (so for *Esmeralda* this was the billboard and the white sheet).
- Production electrician - checks the lighting rig with the operator before the show.
- Lighting operator - operates the lights from the tech box.
- Sound operator - same vibes
- Video operator - again, same vibes. Video and sound operator are sometimes the same in Guildhall [...]

Appendix E

Excerpts from a Skype Interview with May Howard-Shigeno: 05/08/2020

Excerpt 1

May Howard-Shigeno (MHS): My friend's father took me to see *Meistersinger* in a dress rehearsal at the [Royal] Opera House once, when I was fifteen. And it was not the first opera I'd seen, but the first opera I'd seen by choice [LP: Right!]. And I really, really loved it; like loved it so much that I started regularly sneaking out of secondary school to see shows at the Opera House [...]. I say "sneaking out of" because obviously I went to boarding school, so I had to leave the school to go [*laughing*]. [...] So I went to see theatre a lot, specifically opera a lot, between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, and I left school, didn't really know what I wanted to study, so took a gap year, where I was working, and just seeing loads and loads of shows, and in that time, an advertisement came up on the Opera House site for a work experience placement for ballet stage management. So, I thought "no harm in applying", and I got it. I loved it so much that I ended up like - I had offers from universities to study linguistics, but they told me that if I wanted to do this job, I should study stage management, so I just sort of turned down all my offers at that point, and decided to take *another* gap year, in which time I did a few fringe operas, as an Assistant Stage Manager, and sort of kept up my connection with the ballet, unofficially.³⁸³ Em... and then I went to Guildhall! And studied stage management for three years. So yeah, that's how I got involved in opera.

LP: So it was kind of always like opera and ballet theatre, that was the starting point?

MHS: Yeah, yeah definitely. I do enjoy watching dramas, but I'm not drawn to it in the same way. I found this especially after I worked on some in Guildhall. I really don't like listening to dramas over and over again, because I find that, like, talking is a natural thing to do, and it's meant to sound somewhat natural on stage, but when you hear it repeated like ten times when you're working on a show, it starts sounding really fake, and I found that *really* grating, in a way that I don't experience that on *music*-based productions, so opera or ballet, I don't find it annoying if I see or hear the same thing over and over [...]. I think I've always known that I want to work in opera or ballet, or some kind of music-related production-type activity.

Excerpt 2

LP: When you got to Guildhall, were you immediately doing opera?

MHS: No, first year you don't really work on shows. Yeah - [*Phone rings and May asks her sister to answer the phone in Japanese*]. First year you don't really work on shows: I did crew - I did hair and make-up on... what was the new opera in my first year? [LP: Oh...] Sorry [*laughing*].

LP: [*Laughing*]. Would that have been 2017?

³⁸³ Later in the interview, May revealed that during her gap years, she had worked on: *Oliva Tweest* (an Afrobeats musical at Hackney Empire); *Swan Lake* (ROH); *Onegin* (ROH); *Wolf Works* (ROH); *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* (ROH); *Falstaff* (Fulham Opera); Opera Scenes at Morley College (as Stage Manager).

MHS: Yes!

LP: Was it the Julian Philips opera? Em -

MHS: [*The Tale of Januarie!* **LP:** Yes!, *both laughing*]. So I did hair and make-up as my first allocation on *Tale of Januarie* at Guildhall.

LP: So is the kind of entryway into then being an Assistant Director and a Fellow [at Guildhall] is that you start in the production team with those kind of roles?

MHS: No, not at all! Not necessarily. So the [Assistant Directing] Fellowship didn't exist when I started at Guildhall. Yeah. I worked quite closely with Martin and Dominic in my second year, and I think they noticed that I was weird, because I had like a book of Mozart librettos on my desk, and could answer questions about the operas, which they were directing to the singers. Which obviously a Stage Manager is not meant to do. I was mighty out of my place - I thought I was being helpful [*both laughing*]. And so they noticed I was a little bit strange, and then at the pub one evening, Dominic [Wheeler] was like: "Oh May, we are thinking of starting an Assistant Directing Fellowship, and I think that you should apply." And so I did.

So I think the Fellowship isn't at all aimed at people who've been through other production roles. It's aimed at anyone who's interested. So the other Fellow [Emily Coppola] who worked on *Esmeralda*, she just finished studying English Lit.

LP: Oh yeah, she was at York, right? **MHS:** Yeah]. And then came to the Guildhall.

MHS: Yeah. So I don't think mine is a standard entry route, although it's not unheard of at all. Like I know that the Senior Staff Director at the Opera House used to be a Stage Manager.

LP: Oh right! Yeah, so it is a route that some people take, but it's less of a common pathway.

MHS: Yeah, yeah, I think so. Definitely not everyone who becomes an Assistant has done production roles in the past.

LP: Yeah. I mean like I guess that kind of production background, it must - does it kind of impact on how you think of yourself as an Assistant Director, and the way you view other people in the room?

MHS: UMMMM I don't know! [*Both laughing*]. It's difficult to tell in Guildhall, because obviously I had the advantage in the way that I *knew* all the production students, because I'd already worked with them. And so I felt that I was uniquely positioned to communicate with the production students in a way that's much - I don't know - much more *intense* than a normal Assistant Director would. I felt like I was very strongly connected to them. Yeah, I think that's something that Martin [Lloyd-Evans] recognises as well. I think he likes that there's something that links him to the production team.

LP: Yeah. I guess often in productions, the relationship between Director and at least certain parts of the production team can feel quite sort of far off; it's quite a distant thing.

MHS: Yeah. Yeah, it definitely depends on the Director. I feel like Martin overall is really good at communicating with production teams, because he used to do a bit of ‘flying’ himself, or quite a lot of flying even maybe? [**LP:** Oh really?] Yeah, he was a ‘flyman’ at some point in his career. [**LP:** Oh wow!]. Yeah, and so I think he also feels that connection to technical teams, more than other Directors. But yeah, definitely some Directors don't communicate so much with technical teams.

LP: Yeah! That's just got me thinking about how much I was seeing Martin with a lot of the technical team - like you're very conscious that he's sort of always there, always chatting to people.

MHS: Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, it's tricky, because I feel like on *Esmeralda*, a lot of things were abnormal, right, from a production perspective, in that Martin is resident at the School, and so a lot of the students have already worked with him; same with Dominic. He knows a lot of the students. I was in a really odd position where I knew most of the technical students and the Opera Department really quite well - but with most shows you don't get that, so I feel like *Esmeralda* was quite a social production, in many ways. I mean like obviously it does feel like “work” - I'm doing that [*repeats air quotes gesture*] because I realise I'm not paid - but it does feel like work, but it also doesn't feel like normal work where you go to an office and have sort of work relationships with people. It definitely felt like: you go into rehearsals and you hang out with friends for a day... [**LP:** yeah! **MHS:** *laughing*] which is quite nice.

Excerpt 3

MHS: I feel like as an Assistant, ideally, you want to be on good terms with everyone, else you might not be so useful. [*Both laughing*]. Oh gosh... Assistant Directing is a weird role though. Cos it's obviously not one I'd really done before the [Assistant Directing] Fellowship, I really came straight in from Stage Management. And it was one of those roles where I didn't really understand what they did, because it's not always clear. And actually even having done Assisting, I think that the role really varies depending on who you're working with and what level of involvement they want you to have. And the circumstances of the production. So like on [Opera] *Scenes* [at Guildhall], I was covering roles and walking a lot. And that was completely different to *Esmeralda*, where I didn't need to do much of that and suddenly I found I had a lot more... I don't know, time or space. Also sharing with a second Assistant Director I found really strange, cos it's... cos you're sort of doubling up on stuff all the time.

LP: I was quite curious - I don't think I ever asked how that actually worked. Because of course that's not something you would usually find.³⁸⁴

MHS: Well, I know like at the Opera House, it's quite common to have two or three Assistants. [**LP:** *Oh right!*]. Yeah, but there's usually a sort of hierarchy that exists within the Assistants. So it's slightly better defined how they work. And also sometimes the Director will bring along his or her own Assistant, and then they'll be Staff Directors who are like the Assistants from the Opera House who take on a slightly different role from the primary Assistant who's been brought in. Yeah - but on *Esmeralda*, Martin had already worked with me, so I think he was not necessarily looking to push me much as an

³⁸⁴ This presumption reflects my working experience as a répétiteur and opera composer, since I have only worked for smaller opera houses like Scottish Opera and Garsington Opera.

Assistant. And then it was also very important to him that Emily and I had the same amount of responsibility. But obviously that just meant kind of doing the same job.

LP: So would you just kind of take turns, like different days doing the same part of the role?

MHS: So in technical rehearsals we split it, so that I was in charge of Act I and she was in charge of Act II. Or maybe it was the other way around, I can't remember at this point. And then... but during rehearsals we would both take notes and we would take turns to do scheduling. And then Martin would sometimes allocate us things to do. Like he knew that I had a strong connection to the Technical Department, so he wanted Emily to take on all the communication roles with Technical Departments. Yeah... which was boring for me, cos I really wanted to do it [*laughing*]. So I think it is common to have more than one Assistant, but it's usually a little more structured.

Appendix F

BambinO R&D: Field Notes

Setting

London: St. Andrew's, Waterloo, Upper Meeting Room.

Cast

Phelim McDermott: Director and Artistic Director of *Improbable*
 Lliam Paterson: Composer
 Giuseppe Belli: Designer
 Emma Belli: Designer
 Charlotte Hoather: Soprano
 Kieran Rayner: Baritone
 Michael Clark: Percussionist
 Laura Sergeant: Cellist
 Julian Hanby: Technical Production Manager (TPM)
 Tingying Dong: Sound Technician
 Kathryn Bilyard: Executive Producer at *Improbable*
 Ben Qasim Monks: Executive Director at *Improbable*

BambinO Synopsis

This synopsis was written by me, and appeared in the title pages of the BambinO score produced by Scottish Opera.

The following synopsis is only what I had in mind while composing the opera: it can be interpreted in any way and as abstractly as desired, as long as the concepts of a pair of birds and the egg are retained.

BambinO follows a bird - Uccellina - who discovers an egg. It hatches, revealing a baby bird - Pulcino - who takes Uccellina for his mother. He explores the world: Uccellina is initially overjoyed and only passingly annoyed at his hyper-active behaviour! The pair reconcile quickly, elated to have found each other.

There is a short pause in the story for 'Intermission Music', representing the sounds of the operatic interval. Here the singers are able to respond directly to the babies in the audience and improvise.

Back to the opera: the birds realise that Pulcino must learn to take flight and make his way in the world. Although saddened at the thought of being separated, Uccellina and Pulcino are soon caught up in the excitement of his first flight and finding the perfect place to launch. Ready to take to the skies, the birds sing a final duet of farewell. Pulcino disappears among the stars and Uccellina ponders his journey.

Day 1: 06/04/2021

In gathering field notes for days one and two of the R&D, I made sparing notes on points likely to elude my memory, and wrote up my field report after the working day had ended. From day three to day five, I constantly made notes during the working day as our development of ideas became more complex.

The *BambinO* team met in the upper meeting room of St. Andrew's Waterloo shortly before 2pm. I met three new team members I had only encountered through Zoom meetings: Kathryn - *Improbable's* new Executive Producer, Ting - our Sound Designer, and Julian - the Production Manager. Also present were the designers Giuseppe and Emma and their two children Vito and Eva, the singers Kieran (baritone) and Charlotte (soprano), cellist Laura and percussionist Michael.

The room had been set up earlier under Julian's guidance: part of the *BambinO* set was at the back of the room with instruments in place, behind which was a large digital screen, and beside which was an upright piano. At the opposite end of the room was a series of tables with Ting's sound equipment, including a large Yamaha mixing desk. To the side of this was a camera on a tripod, with video feed connected to the digital screen. At either side of the room sat the low benches making up part of the *BambinO* set, between which was a circle of chairs labelled with our names, and appropriately spaced apart for Covid regulations. The floor was divided with tape into sections of one metre squared.

We sat in our positions, and Phelim began the session by taking a large bottle of hand sanitiser and informing us that this was our talking object: whoever is holding the object has their turn to speak. Usually it would be a stone, but the hand sanitiser bottle allowed us to pass the object around while also disinfecting our hands. Phelim explained the series of principles comprising his 'Open Space Technology' which were written on paper and stuck to the wall: whenever it [the rehearsal/ session] starts is the right time; wherever it happens is the right place; whatever happens is the only thing that could have; when it's over it's over. He also outlined the 'law of two feet/ mobility': wherever people were, or felt they needed to be, was the right place; if someone felt they had contributed all they could or that they would be better served being elsewhere, they were free to leave without question. Phelim noted that cast members in productions usually questioned whether he truly meant this, and he had to reassure them he was sincere about the law of two feet principles.

Also stuck to the wall were two drawings, of a bee and a butterfly. Phelim noted these are essentially the two types of people in any rehearsal room. Bees busily go between different creative groups, cross-pollinating ideas and discussions. Butterflies stand around looking beautiful. They are often found near the tea and coffee, gossiping, but the ideas arising in this gossip can be very useful for creative discussion if viewed with critical distance.

The wall was presented as the space where we would position the ideas we write on bits of paper with felt pens (these materials were placed in the middle of the circle). We were to write anything that came to mind, and read them aloud to the group as we stuck them on the wall. After Phelim had finished, we went round the circle sharing our thoughts. Most expressed joy at simply being back in the room with other people being creative again. Julian explained the Covid-conscious layout of the room: we were to remain a metre apart at all times, and when singers were singing, they required four metres square of space in

front of them. The tape floor-grid was to assist with these regulations. Kathryn also outlined some Covid regulations: masks are to be worn in the room, but we may eat provided we are distanced enough from others. The lateral flow tests everyone took at St John's Waterloo earlier in the day all came back negative.

With the introductory sharing done, writing began. We generated a great many ideas, then rearranged them according to theme: logistics of space, musical forces, preserving the tactility of the original opera on a much larger scale. I was particularly struck by one of Emma's points: how do we engage parents of 'lockdown babies', who may be anxious of the kind of 'free-range baby' approach we had in the original production of *Bambino*? I thought how different our new audiences would be, becoming parents/ being born in a world that would have seemed totally alien only last year. It also reaffirmed the reason for redesigning *Bambino* for new times, preserving the magic of the original but in a new context, not simply presenting the opera in a socially-distanced format.

This method of writing down ideas and reading them aloud generates a constantly evolving creative discussion immediately. No one needs to find their feet as a contributing and creative team member, as Phelim creates an environment that is safe, trusting, and charged with creative energy from the outset.

Phelim expressed how glad he was to have his ideas out of his head and on the wall. Exhaustion was setting in, so after confirming our mutual desire to hear some music, we took a short break. I caught up with Charlotte, and reminisced about cello and piano duetting with Laura. As always, the break was a flurry of tea-making activity.

The performers ran through the opera, omitting the opening 'Solo Bird 1' music. This was an opportunity for Kieran to sing through the opera for the first time, having only had the score and a recording of the opera for two weeks before the R&D. He did a magnificent job, establishing secure ensemble rapport with the other performers and going beyond pitch accuracy to explore different vocal colours throughout. Phelim had encouraged the run-through to be relaxed and without any pressure, and this showed in the good humour of every performer, with chuckling at the small moments where things went slightly off-kilter. Music finished, we shared our thoughts. It was particularly interesting to hear from Kathryn and Ting who had just experienced the opera live for the first time.

Giuseppe noted how he realised how expressive the singers' eyes were due to the masks obscuring their mouths. Kieran and Charlotte commented on how a specially designed costume mask would have to account for the movement of their jaws, as their current masks were restrictive and also moved below their noses. Charlotte mentioned the idea of masks shaped like bird beaks; Phelim wondered about beaks that could actually open with their jaws, with a 'tongue' inside which might waggle through the force of their air expulsion.

Our discussion turned back to reconceptualising the show for larger venues. Phelim spoke about how he could envisage the opera at The Coliseum, the original set with babies (plus carers) on stage, then with large digital screens for capturing live video generated during the show. Kathryn noted that English National Opera (ENO) had already shown interest in a scaled-up *Bambino*. Imagining the space of The Coliseum, we all contributed to a free-flowing discussion of what the opera could become there: the ENO chorus joining in at special moments, but hidden from the audience; *Bambino* performed on the set of another opera to be performed later in the day, with chorus members in costume seated among the auditorium audience; the cushion 'launch pad' for Pulcino taking flight expanded down over

the orchestra pit into the auditorium; many singing soft toy birds for each audience member, so they can contribute to the sound world of the show. With Ting we discussed ideas of expanding sound design: how this should be imperceptible, the idea of projecting an aural image of intimate sound with speakers around the auditorium versus keeping most of the sound coming from the stage but amplified, using surround sound at special moments like in the Solo Bird sections. We imagined many soft toy birds taking flight attached to large balloons; riffing on ENO's current illustrated 'decoy audience' and replacing them with bird figures; dancers dressed identically to the singers who could appear in the auditorium space. Our conversation closed with reaffirming the need to maintain the simplicity of the original opera, but opening out into a much larger scale for magical moments.

Passing the hand sanitiser around once more, we shared our thoughts on our first day. Laura and Michael noted a certain sadness to the fact that this was their first experience of shared live music-making in this manner since early 2020, and the fact that after this R&D process it would stop again - it is no longer normal life for an artist; Phelim also expressed this feeling alongside the happiness of being back in the room with everyone. With that we disbanded for the evening.

Day 2: 07/04/2021

Today our first session began at 10am with another circle sharing. Most of us commented how tiring yesterday had been despite the session only lasting four hours. Ting noted this was probably down to reduced stamina from lockdown. Conjuring once again the feeling of happiness tinged with sadness that Laura and Michael mentioned the previous day, Phelim informed us the word for this is "merry-go-sorry" (Susie Dent's word of the day on Twitter). He also shared that actor Paul Ritter had died, and how that led him to think how he wasn't able to do his life's work in the final year of his life because of Covid, and how lucky we are to have the opportunity to do what we're doing this week.

Phelim asked us to move any session questions we wanted to explore from their current position to the back wall. During this time Emma discussed images she was consulting and designs she was drafting for a bird beak mask. She noted the danger that it end up looking like a plague doctor mask! To counter-act this she was considering the use of some transparent materials for parts of the mask.

We decided to begin with 'recording technique for rehearsal exploration.' Ting set up and tested a microphone, and the cast recorded the opening through to the end of page 19 of the score. This gave us a recorded template for the singers exploring physical movement and acting. Phelim set out his principles for acting. All actors do three things: move towards each other; move away from each other; stay where they are. To play the game (of exploring to the play-back music), it was essential to follow your impulses and radiate your energy to each other. Phelim explained he used this game with actors as it means you start acting straight away and get the script out of your hands. You're being changed by what the other actor does. He noted that in a show, 'if there's not a random element it's not creative.'

Charlotte and Kieran played the game, and very expressively explored the three principles of movement. Phelim discussed qualities of movement further with them, including the

idea that you can be ‘touching’ through intensity of connection and movement while your hands are actually far apart.

After a short tea break, we rehearsed the sections of the Solo Bird 1 where all four cast members sing strictly notated music (from ‘Piro, piro...’). I encouraged greater articulation and energy, and maintaining intensity through to the end of the phrase. After this we recorded through to the end of Act I. We collaboratively tackled another wall-session: ‘talking through the story for Kieran.’ Charlotte wrote each story beat down and laid them out on the floor. Transferring them to the wall, Charlotte and Kieran once again played the game, or rather this time a series of connected games which enact the story.

After lunch we turned to the question of video and how this would work. Julian attached a GoPro to Charlotte and Kieran, while Michael took charge of the cabled hand-held camera. Once again using the playback, all three explored with the cameras. The GoPro footage appeared on the right screen in split-screen, both video feeds side by side, while the hand-held footage appeared on the left screen. Discussing the session afterwards, we all reflected that the hand-held footage generated the most interesting results, especially when Michael focused on the instruments. Several of the team voiced that they found the GoPro footage incoherent except for a few small moments. Kieran noted that the chest-positioning of the cameras made it difficult for them to be aware of what they were actually capturing. Phelim recalled an interesting moment when Michael captured footage from just behind the toy reindeer standing in as a baby, suggesting a baby’s-eye view. Michael recreated the moment for everyone to see.

Our discussion circled around the question of why use video footage. Ting said that in several online shows she had witnessed, the thing she found frustrating was how the view of stage events was chosen for her, and constrained to that view. Phelim, Julian and others felt that the screens would be best positioned downstage, so that the performers can’t see the footage themselves. Alluding to the spirit in which the original R&D took place, Phelim said that it was the analogue nature of the show that was so integral to the original *Bambino*; this was raising questions as to why use video at all. We needed to find a way to keep the show very tactile even if digital elements were involved. I offered an idea I’d been mulling over: that two contrasting positions seemed very interesting for the visual language of the video: baby’s-eye view and bird’s-eye view. Later I wondered about making the use of screens and video more mobile, rather than static projection. Ting thought this could be explored through projection rather than fixed screens. Phelim noted that the most successful use of video he had seen in shows was where it was essentially invisible to the audience as a separate element and totally integrated into the show.

After another tea break (where my conversation with Michael and Phelim turned to *Fox-Tot!*) we decided to watch the film of *Bambino* performed by the original cast. There was much gentle laughter as we reacted to the interaction of babies and performers. Eva made a grand nest from all the production pillows and placed two soft toy birds on top. Some shared their thoughts on watching the film afterwards, with Kieran noticing various aspects of baritone Tim Connor's physicality in his performance. Guiseppe shared that every time he sees the show it reveals new aspects of itself to him that he hadn’t noticed before.

We had a final circle sharing, most of us noting again how draining the day had been. Phelim said the video exploration had raised thoughts about it potentially not working but also opened up new avenues for exploration. We all departed in good spirits.

Day 3: 08/04/2021

Here I have highlighted dream rhetoric used by our human-actors in bold, a process I will continue for the remainder of the field notes. This is to trace the dream semantic network discussed in the main text of the thesis.

At our daily check-in, Phelim spoke about the 'Disney Process' as a means of sustaining a creative process. In this process there are three roles: **the Dreamer**, the Realist, and the Critic; another position, the Meta, observes the other three roles more objectively. **The Dreamer looks up to the clouds, dreaming without limitations**; the Realist is symmetrical, observing the limitations of what is practical; the Critic is asymmetrical, deconstructing ideas and dreams and judging their worth. As an artist you cycle through all three roles, but between each you go to the Meta, so that you're outside the roles and can see them with clarity. In this way you can stop the Critic from being destructive, and teach the three roles how to have a conversation. **Phelim affirmed that 'this is a dreamer space.'**

Giuseppe said the designer role is the Realist. To a design concept he might respond "That's great, but we've only got eight steel decks." Emma suggested that children don't really go through this process, and it's something we learn as we progress into adulthood. Explaining the background to the Disney Process, Phelim explained it is based upon the creative spaces within the Disney Studios: **each project would go through a Dreaming room**, Realist room, and finally a Screening room, where those present were encouraged to be ruthless and tear ideas to shreds. This process was repeated as necessary.

Michael briefly reflected that being in London he realised how far things are from being normal: the emptiness of the city.

Giuseppe and Emma began to share insights into their creative processes in the studio. **Giuseppe said he was imagining the 'ginormous, multi-million pound version' of *Bambino*, 'in Dreamland.'** When he began working on the original set model for *Bambino*, he used a vibrant, surreal blue. When Emma saw this, she commented 'it's a bit blue', confirming to Giuseppe that the set was both too blue and the wrong shade. Going further into the specifics of process, Emma suggested there are essentially two ways to work as a designer: start from the most massive vision, then bring it down to a purer version; or start very practically, such as "we need two chairs, start there." The two conversations meet.

Giuseppe and Emma share "shit drawings" at the start of their process, as a way of allowing chaos and other unexpected things to come in. This allows a very fast process, and as Emma commented, it stops her being too safe. It counteracts a tendency of thinking: "I won't be able to achieve that." Contrasting their approaches, Emma said she thinks practically, while Giuseppe thinks technically. However, he won't talk about the technical at the beginning of the process.

Giuseppe discussed that when told he can't do something (from a design point of view), his impulse is to do it. While working with a Director at Welsh National Opera, said Director expressed his dislike of red and steps. So Giuseppe and Emma's designs largely used red and had loads of steps. The Director loved it, and it led him to understand he could be a bit riskier; his initial ideas were very traditional, something Giuseppe attributed to the early stage of his career development and hence a greater sense of risk when making artistic decisions.

Kathryn described how she does a lot of mapping out on paper for money allocation. In *Improbable* meetings, the initial version is usually thrown out so that it becomes loose enough in its parameters for funding applications, but the core remains the same as Kathryn's original. This led Phelim to speak about 'intention.' Intention is not a plan; it's like a ball that floats above you and pulls you towards your final vision; it's soft but clear. Discussing what it isn't makes you very clear about what it is.

Our conversation turned to conceptualising *BambinO* in a much larger performance space. Phelim remarked that what was most important about *BambinO* was the quality of those interactions between babies, performers and carers. If we don't have that it's like taking a circuit apart: we have nothing. Michael felt that lighting has to be for artistic reasons, not just because it's taking place in a larger space. Charlotte reflected on the Metropolitan Opera House performances where there were banks of seating overlooking the performance area: except in the opening Solo Bird music, rather than 'singing out' she focused on 'radiation', instead of directing energy with her eyes. As Phelim noted, with more people you'd think you should aim out more, but his impulse is to do the opposite. He referenced a Japanese show he had seen created for Covid times, using a peep show style. Charlotte responded: 'It's bird watching.' Kieran imagined the audience in little nests, on little nest platforms. Phelim imagined the audience with binoculars in The Coliseum. Giuseppe noted that the strength of *BambinO* was in it being observed. He and Phelim remembered their idea of putting *BambinO* in a glass box in Manchester in a public square. Emma said that parents have to feel safe with babies being watched.

I wondered if we could mic baby sounds from the performance area for the larger audience. Ting responded that we can mic the general ambience.

Phelim reminisced on the origins of *BambinO*: the 'academic' *BabyO*, created with the aim of being safe for the babies, etc. Thinking of Giuseppe and Emma's red/ stairs experience, Phelim recalled that he wanted to try a huge aria; after all, one of the loudest sounds a baby experiences is the cry of another baby. Charlotte remembered that when we performed the score for a test audience, the babies were all fine, but one of the mums wanted ear defenders, a safety net, etc. Giuseppe felt we had pushed the boundaries of what a children's show could be. Connecting this to a mindset of innovation, Giuseppe said if you want a fifty-foot skyscraper design on stage, you draw the fifty-foot skyscraper, realise you can only get two layers on stage, then go from there. Emma and Giuseppe recalled their design process for *BambinO*: in their studio they sat on boxes to test the height and sightlines of the audience benches; they used tape measures to estimate the height of babies. It was important to them to create the illusion of freedom, yet create a space where the parents were a protective barrier. The bench rims were the ideal walking/ holding-on height for babies. The stage was at holding-on height, but intentionally too high for climbing height. I witnessed how effective these parameters were many times in performances.

Emma put her 'dreamer head on', imagining a box that encloses the performance space, like clouds/ sky. The audience are looking in, creating a viewer-participant distinction. She also imagined an outdoor version with 'bird watching.' Both her and Giuseppe are engaged in an ongoing RSPB project also using outdoor space.

Everyone began to offer suggestions for different performance spaces: amphitheater spaces (Laura and Kieran; Charlotte described such a space in Chester); the Minack Theatre (Julian); Kieran suggested you could just discover *BambinO* performances

happening at a venue/ site, with the aim of attracting wider audiences. Giuseppe and Emma suggested using the wild as a barrier, for example mowing a spot in wild grass for the *BambinO* set, made of wood. They noted the set would have to fulfil another purpose after performances ended in this context (sustainability is an important factor in their RSPB project). Charlotte felt *BambinO* could exist anywhere.

Kieran wondered how to create something translatable, for performance in a field, in a theatre, outdoors. Ben said flexibility is very important: he thought of a toolkit, like a Meccano set of *BambinO* with components that suit different venues and settings. Julian recalled the challenges of an outdoor show where he had to risk-assess swans. In that situation, the RSPB were lovely, and said to go ahead and do the play. Kieran inputted that he loved hearing about the three persona Disney Process. He does a lot of writing, and sends drafts to friends to critique; he had never thought of using such a three persona framing process.

Phelim noted that the Dreamer had really come back in our group sharing this morning.

Continuing Ben's analogy, Charlotte thought an adaptable *BambinO* was like a bento box. She loved that it went to spaces where people didn't expect to see theatre, but also went to actual theatres. Charlotte recalled her experience of seeing a Russian ballet company perform in a community space where she grew up as a child. This performance led to her taking up ballet lessons; she was able to stand right at the front of the stage due to the relaxed atmosphere and audience in such a venue. Due to inner ear issues on her left side, Charlotte had been told she would have difficulty walking in a straight line, but she went on to dance regardless, inspired by the Russian ballet performance.

Kathryn wondered how older people would react to *BambinO*. She thought of her grandmother who had Alzheimer's and would have loved the opera. Kathryn imagined a version where older people are the babies, free to roam around on the cushions; her grandmother loved soft toys. She babbled a lot, so her family took her to relaxed performances; they were always looking for spaces where they'd be fine with this. Kathryn really felt *BambinO* was such a space.

Phelim proposed creating a show specifically for those with Alzheimer's, focusing on end-of-life processes. Kieran recounted that his grandmother ('nanna') lived a long time with severe Alzheimer's. She retained a love of music: she would sing along, beat and clap along, reacting to rhythm. Music was the way they could reach her.

Phelim wondered if the next show we create shouldn't be the next age group up from *BambinO*, but the opposite end of the spectrum. Giuseppe joked his grandmother would have been in those cushions (imagining a 'granny pile-on'). Phelim felt the thing we got right with *BambinO* was the making process. Turning this thought towards this new project idea, **he commented that processes around end-of-life go back to childhood and dreaming.** Ting recalled that her partner did a music project with those with Alzheimer's, where they found that using past music people could connect to their own personal histories had an amazing effect.

Phelim recalled his show *Coma*, which dealt with the extreme states and altered states near death. There was a post-show discussion after every show to allow for personal sharing. **The show explored the big dreaming processes going on during a coma; it is possible to support those processes to happen.** He recounted a post-show

discussion where a doctor reacted angrily to the show, claiming there was no medical basis for it. A man subsequently shared his experience of being in a coma for two years, and how that experience of living ‘big extraordinary stories’ was exactly encapsulated by the show. Phelim reasserted that near end-of-life, people go through these mythic processes, but that they must be supported; people in comas are often treated as not being present. He reflected that this is what art’s for: ‘it’s for all these parts that don’t get attention.’

Giuseppe realised we’re on the set talking, and we’ve forgotten we’re on a set. Referencing the shape of the set, he said being in a circle brings discussion, and we need to preserve that; in the original R&D we also sat in a circle formation. Ting mused that in ancient times people would have sat talking around a fire. She felt we should preserve the circle shape even if it’s a larger theatre setting. Phelim noted ‘we’re sitting around a fire made of sky.’ He realised we’d gone from talking about this show (*BambinO*) to creating another show.

Emma proposed a separate chapter: we should talk about the next scale. Phelim retrieved my session from the wall - ‘Opera on a larger scale: more instruments? Chorus?’ - and put it in the middle of the circle. He spoke of earning the right to open out the show aurally. Ting suggested three layers of chorus, opening up the sound world gradually. I imagined this as Pulcino flying towards a flock of birds. Charlotte and Kieran both enthused about reaching out to the audience to bring them into the singing too. Phelim pictured huge surtitles or a song sheet flying in on stage, as a sign that it’s okay to do some ‘rubbish singing.’

I returned to Ben’s Meccano image, suggesting the idea of a musical toolbox with the components for different venues: Laura could use loop pedals in a version for small venues to expand the musical sound; to bridge the gap with larger venues or companies like ENO, a large in-house chorus could be involved. Charlotte spoke about the possibility of community involvement: people could self-record via Zoom, learning the music through an online video of the composer teaching the sung content. Charlotte had seen an example of this kind of community involvement which had worked very well, where people pre-recorded crowd noises. Giuseppe returned to the idea of gradually building the musical sound world, and felt that the sound has to dissipate back to silence. Charlotte recalled that putting a soft toy bird back in the nest in *BambinO* signalled the move towards silence at the end of the show.

Laura asked if we could try out the loop pedals. Ting said her partner had some, and she would bring them in tomorrow. With that we took a tea break.

We decided to make a recording of the whole opera, both singers seated and viewing the score on their iPads. Kieran asked if the focus of the recording session was accuracy or freedom. Phelim replied the aim was accuracy: don’t leave the score; this was our last visit to really nail things.

During the recording, Phelim wrote down ‘Dreamer’ on a piece of paper and held it up. He then set out this sign with further signs saying ‘Realist’ and ‘Critic’ on the floor facing the singers. After the recording finished, we had a feedback session. Charlotte could sense she was able to do things vocally that she wasn’t able to do a couple of years ago. Giuseppe was more aware of the sense of repetition in the score.

Phelim imagined a concert hall setting with formal wear. He mused that in a recital you think “I’m just here to hear” - ‘you really focus on hearing.’ You could create a concert version online on Zoom, where you see performers in their different boxes. There would be looping, creating lots of voices. He also imagined a really contained puppet version: puppets centre-stage, performers either side as the voices of the puppets. This is a whole other version of the show that’s very presentational, with beautiful detailed puppets.

Phelim continued that at the beginning when he was hearing the concert version, it was with an audience with Alzheimer’s. He saw performers in the space doing very mundane things like brushing hair; taking a cardigan out of a wardrobe. He invented a story: Charlotte took out a jacket in her room, and Kieran was her husband who wasn’t here anymore. What made this work was the nonsense words of *BambinO*, where it’s about sound.

Kieran was enjoying dreaming after Phelim held up the sign: he said the whole piece is dreamy but with an earthbound element too. Ting imagined a ballet version, and could even see the movement. **With the dream sign, Charlotte felt a release: everything felt clear, ‘like an eject button but gentle.’** She noted that the presence of recording equipment usually exerts pressure, and she would have to consciously suppress that feeling.

Phelim felt touched by the sense that we haven’t been allowed to do this in Covid times. **Emma started to picture a new direction: ‘with permission to dream’, she imagined that *BambinO* was Act 1, and a second act was to do with twitchers.** She looked at the costumes twitchers wear. The opera ends and we’re now going to shift focus to the observers. She could feel the shift of dynamic; a change of music with the shift of perspective. Phelim wondered about the Wetlands Centre in Barnes as a space where we could do this twitcher opera.

Shifting focus back to an online version, Phelim asked how is it to make an online live recording, through the musicians recording remotely: ‘a very simple version online.’ Charlotte responded that she has done a lot of livestreaming, that it’s easier than you think. She had always had guidance from a sound designer on improving sound quality. She felt that being part of a performance that was live while being alone was of great benefit to the audience.

Phelim wondered if the moment had passed for online shows. Charlotte said it’s a new audience; Michael thought this kind of performance was a new platform that was here to stay. He noted that during the pandemic, the digital literacy of older people has shot through the roof. Emma agreed that this is ‘because they had to.’ Giuseppe wondered what’s kept from the digital experience when you go back to live performance. He mused on how football broadcasts have made use of pre-recorded crowd sounds during the pandemic. Phelim said this all reminded him of the early days of sitcom, where a reaction machine was used with different laughter sounds (the ‘Laff Box’).

After lunch, we decided to explore Ting’s session idea ‘Can we create masks that’s [sic] like beaks?’ As Julian set up a table in the centre of the room, and Giuseppe and Emma sorted various art materials (card, scissors, tape, pens), Kieran asked about the circles above certain notes in his part. I explained they indicated *falsetto*, but that the previous baritones to sing the role had used different solutions to create special vocal colours on these notes. I had imagined *falsetto* as I always sing vocal lines as I compose, and my untrained baritone voice has a sudden break into strong *falsetto* around D4. I said a

blended/ mixed sound would work well on the notes, and what Kieran was doing already was ideal.

We created a variety of beak masks, most using our actual face masks as a foundation. Emma and Giuseppe offered advice to various team members on creating a structure which could retain a solid shape. I held Laura's impressively long beak in place and applied tape to hold it together. Giuseppe took artful black and white photos of us all separately modelling our masks against the white brick walls of the room. Sharing thoughts after the making session, Emma noted that beak shapes gave a sense of hierarchy; it also meant the focus of the viewer becomes about the beak rather than eye-contact.

We decided to test mic-ing up the performers after the tea break. Ting set up the microphones for the two seated musicians during the break; I asked Julian to search for *La Prêche aux oiseaux* from Messiaen's opera *Saint François d'Assise*, on one of the MacBooks connected to the digital screens and speakers. I wanted to share an extreme example of a large-scale birdsong sound-world in opera as we moved into experimenting with a scaled-up sound. Most of the team felt it was 'overwhelming' (Kieran), and Emma suggested it almost went beyond being music; it was almost impossible to distinguish the individual bird songs in their cacophonous state.

Ting tested the sound levels and quality with Michael and Laura, before fitting Charlotte and Kieran with radio mics. The singers had separate mic tests. Phelim mused that this made him think of a performance in a park; he proposed we should try this during the R&D week, to much agreement. He wondered about using orchestral forces in an expanded *BambinO*, or pre-recorded parts, or looping. Then he wondered if we should perhaps just introduce piano. There was a lot of enthusiasm for the piano idea, so we decided to perform from the 'BambinO Duet', and I would improvise a piano part when we arrived at the 'Flight Aria.' Reactions to this expanded version were very positive; Emma shared that she was moved. Laura and Michael felt that the trio combination of cello, percussion and piano worked well musically. Phelim pondered that amplification in *BambinO* should essentially be used for the purpose of making sure everyone can hear; if you've done it in a contained way and people don't realise it's not acoustic, you've earned the right to pull it out of the bag. I wondered about using a synthesiser or digital piano instead of an acoustic instrument, so that we could have different sounds and timbres just like the Korg tinyPIANO.

We had a brief check-out and departed for the day.

Day 4: 09/04/2021

At check-in, Emma said that 'we need to find the direction we want to follow.' Phelim felt 'we've done what we set out to do - to find something; it's no longer theoretical.' He said an idea had been floated to do a live stream so that Scottish Opera could observe our session, as well as Kathryn who was working remotely. We decided to return to this later. Phelim asked us to take any session from the wall we'd like to explore, anything we hadn't been able to try yet, and also put paper and pens in the centre of the circle for new session ideas.

Phelim returned to the idea of Zoom performance: he imagined an audience of babies on laptops on chairs. Kathryn video-called into the room, and Phelim suggested we put the Macbook displaying her video feed on a chair as though she were here. Phelim, Julian, Emma and Michael had a discussion about using software to arrange Zoom into a more aesthetic presentation: clouds/ sky background; picture frames for each viewer, etc.

We went to a nearby park to experiment with an outdoor performance of *BambinO*. Ting set up a microphone, and Giuseppe and Phelim filmed parts of the performance on their phones. Laura played as much of the toy piano part as possible on her cello, as the Schoenhut piano remained in the R&D room. Michael performed the percussion part using the Korg tinyPIANO and by playing on the wooden bench in the middle of the park with beaters. Both Kieran and Charlotte used found objects during their performance: twigs, a feather lying on the ground, stones, and one of Charlotte's trainers.

Emma had informed a couple of parents in the park about the performance, and invited them to come over with their children if they wished. While the parents stayed away, a couple of children ran around and through the performance, one of the boys interacting a little with Charlotte and then attempting to rival the musical sound levels with his walkie-talkie. Some people who lived in the houses opposite the park briefly emerged to see what was going on before disappearing indoors again. A woman with a young girl stood timidly at the entrance to the park for a few minutes. One cyclist seemed to have deliberately gone around the block twice to get a better look. A woman in a pink coat stayed longest, beaming and recording everything on her phone.

Discussing the park performance back at St. Andrew's, Kieran and Charlotte noted the difficulty of running around singing in masks. We pondered the legal requirements of singers wearing masks. Laura shared that in her work as an ABRSM examiner, singers must be three metres away from her. Phelim enjoyed the fact the performance was like 'birds in the city'; birds have to deal with noise pollution from traffic and construction just as we did in the park. He felt the robustness of the piece meant it can withstand anything. Regarding the performance, Phelim said there is only playing the game with each other; there are no other games. He wanted to hear the opera amplified in the park, so that those passing *have* to listen. Emma had the sense that people passing were maybe too spooked by hearing something special happening after a year without that; some looked terrified. Phelim imagined people thinking "Oh it's opera", their heads exploding a bit; a hunger and then "Oh, that's not what I thought it would be!"

Emma said she could now envisage a version embracing outdoor, online and in-theatre *BambinO*; she posited that outdoor *BambinO* might be the step towards a larger scale version. Emma wondered if parents/ babies will come to *BambinO* in Covid times, and perhaps a version without babies is the answer. Phelim noted he had seen a lot of (spoken) children's shows outside - but singing makes it more interesting, magical. It reminded him of when a milkman would whistle outside, or someone on the street would suddenly sing opera.

We decided to visit 'TwitcherO' after lunch. For now, Julian showed us his design ideas for a Zoom version of *BambinO*, projected on the wall: images of soft toy birds, golden eggs, Uccellina's feather headdress, two picture frames for separate video feeds. Phelim proposed a third, central video feed, creating a puppet show framed by a singer either side; the singers would be like narrators. He was excited by the idea of two different versions on Zoom in one day: a morning show just with singers, and an afternoon show with the puppets.

Giuseppe reflected on the experiment with added piano we tried the previous day; he felt that the extra sound results in focus on the visual show being more intense.

Phelim wondered about the possibility of just trying the show as it is, in spaces like the Barbican and The Coliseum. Giuseppe noted this would tell us a lot of things we need to answer. Phelim envisaged us in the auditorium, working out what we're looking at and hearing. He said we should make a list of potential spaces. As he noted, as soon as you talk about theatre spaces you have to have a Covid discussion. 'We're even moving away from that today with exploring outdoor spaces.'

Phelim spoke about funding: the models we'd been discussing don't make money, so you would have to look at a wealthy donor covering the costs involved (as happened at The Metropolitan Opera House), or go to the Arts Council and say where we want to take it. Ideally you also want to find a way to create shows that make some money. Julian noted there was a lack of good quality children's projects among the Arts Council's endeavours. He told us of a current project taking place across several estates, with impact being tracked for twenty-five years. With that we took a lunch break.

After lunch, Emma returned to the *TwitcherO* idea she discussed the previous day: she imagined *BambinO* as Act I, with a second act that expands into a second perspective; people outside, twitchers. The crucial questions were: what is the story?; is the second act for babies? Perhaps the second half was for twitchers; Phelim replied that the first half is for the birds. Emma moved onto discussing design ideas: perhaps after *BambinO* the twitchers were suddenly visible, excited. Twitchers often have wives in tow, also dressed in camouflage.

Phelim affirmed that here we have an open process so everyone is included. He spoke of Open Space Technology: its founder said the good news is it works; the bad news is it works; all issues are revealed. Phelim suggested that trouble occurs where people are attached to roles - and attached to hierarchies. As he noted, 'you're gonna hit that in opera.' Emma shared her experience of assisting well-known designers: often their response to a powerful production company telling them what it should be is "that's not how I work." She wondered why producers react against the way designers work when they have employed someone known for a particular style. These situations collapse; Emma had seen the same problem perpetuated over and over. Phelim said 'it's fear. The combination of fear, money, risk and whatever.'

Phelim wondered what it is about the current process we've shared that we value? He felt it was important to preserve this for the next project. The way we make it together has to be the same. He suggested we had an 'emergent process': an idea comes from between people; the resulting work will be the show that only those people could create. Michael expressed that this was 'one of the safest spaces I've been in creatively.'

Our conversation returned to *TwitcherO*. I suggested two ideas: the twitchers are observing the adult life of Pulcino; we could maintain the bird perspective, with humans speaking (singing) in nonsense sounds. Giuseppe thought of twitchers using birds calls and whistles. Michael suggested that he and Laura could play the bird calls while being dressed as twitchers. Phelim wondered about exploring the life of Uccellina now that she's alone. Laura said perhaps Uccellina could die. Ting proposed a dichotomy of perspectives: the *BambinO* audience are observing birds; in the second act, the birds are observing humans/ the audience.

Phelim pondered whether *TwitcherO* would be performed on the same set as *BambinO*. Emma thought an expansion of the set. She was interested in using vignettes: small conversations which shut down whenever a bird appears. Phelim suggested visiting different types of operatic duet, which might determine the language(s) used. Emma noted how she (and Giuseppe) had visited different well-known operas in the design for *BambinO*, such as *The Magic Flute*. She asked herself 'how would you define it, stepping into the critic role?' She felt 'it's a space to be playful - for adults.' Emma shared a Picasso quote: "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up."

After the tea break, we did a Zoom test to see what form an online version might take, using the music from the *BambinO* duet through to the end. Julian set up a Zoom session and sent an invite link to us all via email. Laura and Michael filmed themselves with their phones, while Emma and Giuseppe filmed Charlotte and Kieran. A fifth video stream used the Zoom hub MacBook's inbuilt camera. There was one phone only doing audio. Much of the performer interaction with the cameras focused on uses of the soft toy birds, and close-ups of Michael and Laura playing.

After Julian converted the footage, we watched our Zoom experiment and had a feedback session. Phelim thought 'it wasn't as mad as I thought it was going to be.' Giuseppe noted this was probably because the process of filming means that it's like 'you've just got six [sic] camera men.' Phelim felt that 'when you do a concert version, and it's simpler, people really love it.' Responding again to the Zoom footage, he said 'they work best when they're still - partly because we know how to read it as we've been on Zoom all lockdown.' This was more relatable than using camera movements.

Emma noticed a theme of our discussion was 'talking about making it look more professional' - and using static camera, moving camera, lighting, etc. 'It's a whole production in itself.' Kieran noted 'one benefit [of Zoom] is you wouldn't have to wear a mask.' Giuseppe suggested we could form a bubble then film together. Emma responded that a Zoom version wouldn't take a long time to create. There could be improved costume, some make-up, a blue sky screen as background, use of the golden eggs. Phelim felt a Zoom version would have to be live: it wouldn't matter so much if it was scrappy.

Returning to camera usage, Kieran wondered if 'for each bit we pick a camera.' Phelim agreed: 'you know what a really good shot is; so basically it's more like the early days of TV.' He suggested we could set up a little studio and do it six times: a cheap live broadcast that keeps it alive in people's minds. It's a bit like being invited into the first showings in your rehearsal room.

Thinking of the technical aspects of broadcasting, Ting noted that Zoom only has a mono feed, no stereo. Through editing she could create a stereo feed, which would get rid of video-audio lagging (this was partly caused in our experiment due to internet buffering and wireless connectivity issues). She would edit on a MacBook Pro - sending one stream of internet out to the world. Phelim shared that he wasn't interested in something like NT [National Theatre] Live, where the first show is live then the footage is repeated again and again. Only livestream was an option.

Giuseppe shared his feeling that 'it dies for me when performers are wearing ballgowns or tuxedos.' Phelim responded that 'it's about the formality of it. They're doing what they're doing but without babies present.' He wanted to see a version of our Zoom version but with

an extra screen, for pictures, creating a 'lo-tech story board': sliding in pictures of birds, etc. Kieran proposed using chapter names, such as 'The Egg begins to crack.' Michael thought of intertitles in the manner of silent films. Phelim said we could do a live drawing of the opera: cracking of an egg, etc. The most important thing he felt about the Zoom version was to keep it simple. He noted we would easily have created this version during the R&D week if we'd known we were going to explore livestreaming this week.

Michael wondered about scaling up a livestream version, using orchestra. Phelim suggested also exploring animation. He explained that animation takes a long time, so a shadow-puppet animation version could be quicker.

We transitioned into our check-out, although this time our discussion of new ideas continued for some time. Julian asked if we would be exploring tech tomorrow. Phelim responded: 'I think we'll be collating, no big tech stuff.' We could leave the mics, but we wouldn't be exploring video anymore. Emma asked for some sort of evaluation/consideration of everything we've done. Phelim thought we might do a video of us talking about that, just on a phone. Kieran felt we should work out what is required and how much time is needed for each different version. Emma said we need a code, and Phelim said that we should name all the versions, creating a matrix with designations like: 'easy', 'cheap', 'hard', 'expensive', etc. Giuseppe suggested we could perform *BambinO* simply in the Albert Hall.

There was a general expression of interest from most in the group to see my field notes once they were finished; I agreed to send them around. Phelim said we should make sure to share all our ideas with Kathryn. Returning to the idea of outdoor performance, Giuseppe thought that if performed in a park, everyone passing through would experience it; crowds would grow bigger.

Phelim explained that *Improbable* applied and received funding from Arts Council England's Culture Recovery Fund; part of this funding was for the *BambinO* R&D week. He felt that from what we had achieved this week, from the Council's point of view it would be money well spent. 'We've done more than what we said we'd do': we've thought about this piece; we've also thought about the 'next iteration of this process collaboratively.'

We turned our attention to the day's check-out, passing the anti-bac bottle around once again. Speaking of our ideas development, Michael said 'we're distilling.' Phelim shared that he was most excited about the Alzheimer's project; this is probably a research project, so we would go speak to scientists, people with Alzheimer's, etc. He imagined that although the opera would have a 'new core' musically, it could touch on different styles/eras of music from people's lives; it could be something totally new but contain/ allude to these styles. He had lots of ideas about this. Emma said that she had done her graduate project with those with Alzheimer's, and the response was amazing.

Phelim returned to a *BambinO* expansion: he wondered in an outdoor version if there were instruments outside to be played, such as playing trees. Emma recalled the snapping twigs in our earlier outdoor performance. Charlotte thought of Merce Cunningham's *RainForest*.

Giuseppe was thinking of the Alzheimer's project. He remembered something from a documentary: an old ballet dancer in a wheelchair connecting to the memory of movement. Phelim thought of the Las Vegas burlesque convention, where there are 'eighty-year old burlesque dancers doing their acts, doing extraordinary sexy things with their crinkly bodies.' He felt that with the Alzheimer's project, there's probably something to do with

people who were opera singers. Kieran wondered about also creating the show for people in care homes without Alzheimer's.

We finished for the day.

Day 5: 10/04/2021

At check-in, a few of our team expressed the merry-go-sorry sentiment we had discussed earlier in the week. Charlotte, Ting and Michael were all apprehensive about going back to the 'new normal' once the R&D week was over. Phelim noted that 'looking around the room, it's a strange world.' Emma said we had a lot of distilling to do of our ideas; we should think of next steps to avoid a sense of this ending. Kieran expressed that he was grateful for everyone's positivity: he said the room had been a 'positive, joyful space to be in.' Giuseppe said this week had felt like 'show-making rehab'. Since Covid started, he and Emma had been trying to keep bits of projects going, 'like paragraphs in a big book.'

Julian said that 'being creative in a room has been a dream.' Kieran really felt like he was part of it; he was really happy this had been his re-introduction to rehearsing again. Phelim shared that at a World Open Space conference, they had used an Indigenous talking stick, where keeping it connected with the ground was supposed to connect you to the earth. He had a fantasy of making an amazing talking stick with hand sanitiser on top.

Phelim described the structure of a World Open Space event: two days of creative idea development; a third day - Open Space - where ideas are shared with a wider group; a fourth day - Convergence. This last day Phelim described as being 'like strands'; he took out one of the braided key chains Eva had been making throughout the R&D. It re-opens a space for anything that's alive from the ideas generated; it also stimulates action, what's going to be taken forward; it is an ending but also creates a sense of continuing.

Phelim put paper and pens in the middle of the space, and asked us to write down new sessions, read them out and put them on the wall, just as we'd done at the beginning of the R&D. The following is a list of all the session titles in the order they were put on the wall, with author noted:

Phelim: All the different versions... and putting them on a matrix.

Phelim: *MemoryO*.

Charlotte: Social Media Discussion R&D.

Ting: Do we want to have some play around with the music/ improv before we finish today?

Emma: *Fox-Tot!* performers might help expand the sound? [Referring to mezzo-soprano Katie Grosset and counter-tenor Daniel Keating-Roberts].

Michael: *BambinO/ MemoryOh*... explore the idea of gifts/ easter eggs [Referring to use of QR codes, etc.).

Kathryn: What is the equivalent of end of week trip to the pub?

Charlotte: Future check-ins: is it possible to stay in the loop before it happening.

Phelim: List of potential partners.

Phelim: What happens tomorrow? What next? What first?

Liam: *Alzheimer'sO*: How do we explore? Where do we go next?

Laura: Is there a need for speed? (What if we plan the Zoom/ Covid appropriate version but the world has moved on before it is done...)

Ting: Levels of technical involvement for each version?

We settled back into our circle once the sessions were all affixed to the wall. **Giuseppe shared a dream he had the previous night: a dirty, rat-like version of one of the soft toy birds emerged from a drain and chased him. He woke up and started thinking about what the different focus would be for each version of *Bambino*.**

Phelim told us of his morning walk to Richmond station, during which he heard loud birdsong, possibly a wren. Phelim recounted that when his mum was in hospital, the most important thing to her were birds; she had a little window where she could be with them. Phelim wondered about connecting the Alzheimer's opera/ *MemoryO* to birds: he used the beautiful expression 'birds as carriers of memory.' **He felt the reason for going from 'babyO' to 'end-of-lifeO' was that what becomes important in late life are our earliest memories and early dreaming. Phelim explained that in Jungian theory, your early dreams carry your life myth. This made him think of a bird going through someone's life: a bird present at birth then flies off at death. We could connect dreams to *TwitcheRO*, our 'intermediate' show. Returning to vignettes, he wondered what are the dreams of the people watching the birds? 'If you don't just talk about a dream but go into it - step back into it to work out what it means.' Phelim spoke of dreams being like little windows you can open up, like what we did with *Bambino*: 'we grew the show from a soft toy bird, from an egg.'**

Giuseppe said that his mother kept budgies; the blue budgies were calmer than the others. Thinking of *TwitcheRO*, he wondered if colour could reflect the character of those observing. Emma mused that when your children can first walk, one of the first things you do is go feed the ducks; it's often the first independent thing a child does. When Emma's grandmother had Alzheimer's, they did the same thing.

Charlotte was concerned about getting too attached to titles early on. She noticed that *MemoryO* was too close a title to Scottish Opera's *Memory Spinners*. Phelim noted this was 'like a pebble among the breadcrumbs.' **Charlotte wondered if anyone had had flight dreams. Emma said she'd had one in her life. Ting had had a dream in the Harry Potter world, where she was trying to take off on a broomstick. Phelim had dreamt of half floating down a flight of stairs - he connected this to his vertigo. He also had a flying dream where he was on a magnificent contraption, and had to pedal it; there was a combination of the freedom of flying but the really hard work of pedalling. Kathryn had dreams about 'low level superhero activities', during which she would stop being able to fly and start running instead. Phelim shared what all this made him think about: 'there is dream logic.' He felt there was something exciting about exploring less linear connections of what things are about. 'Say you saw *Bambino*, then a piece about flying, people would make all kinds of connections.' Charlotte mused 'like babies learning to walk; adults learning to fly.'**

Laura said that the final movement of Sibelius' Fifth Symphony made her feel as though she was flying; she asked me if I could write something with the same feeling. **Giuseppe said *DreamO* should go on the wall. We kept sharing dreams and thoughts on dreaming**, and turned to Kathryn's session title: 'If you could take *Bambino* to audiences in the new world right now, would you? How would you?'

Giuseppe said that he loves the idea of physicalising dreams. Phelim spoke of the importance of dreaming: 'you're dreaming all the time. Dreaming is the base level of reality. One of the reasons music is important is it connects to that.' He posed the question 'why are the arts important, etc.?' You need to connect to dreaming in your

life. If you stop dreaming you go mad - the same would happen if you took away art. 'Dreams are just as essential as eating.' Yet 'we tend to marginalise dreaming.'

Speaking to the performers, Phelim said that when we went to the park, 'what you're doing all the way through that performance is dreaming. When you come out of it, it's like destroying something.' He felt all of this was important to our future projects.

Kieran asked if anyone had experienced lucid dreaming. Phelim explained that you can practice lucid dreaming in the daytime: write on a piece of paper or playing card "I'm dreaming", put it in your hand and look at it throughout the day. If the letters stay the same, you're not dreaming; if the letters distort, you are. They might say "time to fly!" Phelim said improvisation is like waking up inside a dream: you are 'trying to get lucid in the improvisation thing.' Kieran shared that when he and Charlotte made the nest with twigs in the park, 'we just did it, we didn't think about it. Everyone was creating the world we were in and wanted to exist.' Phelim said 'we were all dreaming.' Charlotte said 'when I took off my shoe, it was no longer a shoe. It was a golden egg.' Phelim wrote down *DreamO* and put it on the wall.

Phelim said 'we should thank *BambinO* for helping heal us in reconnecting to music.'

Most of our group expressed a desire to hear improv music. Emma suggested improv music for the *TwitcherO* vignettes. All the performers and myself on piano transitioned from the 'BambinO Duet' through to *TwitcherO* improv. At first I was very focused on passing musical fragments and rhythms to Michael and Laura, and responding to theirs; then I opened up my focus to Charlotte and Kieran, trying to sense the shifting energy of their dramatic vignettes. At one point Charlotte started to dance, which triggered a sensual, rhythmical dance from the musicians. Throughout there was a smattering of birdsong-like fragments; these formed the basis of the atmosphere at the opening and close of the *TwitcherO* improv. Michael struck individual chimes on the wind chimes with a beater, something I had never seen before.

We had a session discussing the improv. Emma admired the 'powerful dramatic technique' Charlotte had used of acting as though Kieran couldn't hear her. **Phelim noted that when Charlotte took out a real snack, 'the dream thing becomes really epic.'** 'It's opera but it's funny.' Phelim pondered how you let the audience know they're allowed to laugh. He recalled that when he did *Così fan tutte*, critics got annoyed that his production made the audience laugh. He noted the improv was 'funny because you're making it up; it's also funny because opera is an odd form.' Kieran shared that Mozart, Britten (in particular *Albert Herring*) and Rossini can make him laugh. I shared that the *Opera Highlights* scenes I had written for Scottish Opera were created with the purpose of seeing how much I could make the audience laugh; in all three scenes the audience laughed out loud throughout.

Ting said 'physical movement added to the whole thing'; she felt it was 'just a really good performance.' 'I saw a point that the bird became a metaphor for the female bird watcher.' The bird was in a cage, and the female bird watcher was trapped.

During the improv, Phelim told the performers 'bring out the cage.' Kieran said he had no idea it would go there, but as soon as it was said it was there. Emma was imagining the very unsexy clothes they would be wearing, such as a wooly hat. For her this made it even

funnier. Giuseppe imagined a coat you could open up that's vibrant inside. Phelim noted that music also adds to the improv, and reflects what's happening.

Phelim said that in improv you have to slow down. You see the offers that are coming from the other person; you have to say yes to other ideas. The only problem is when there are too many ideas flying around. You also have to listen and respond to the music. Emma noted that 'when it went dream-like with the singers, it went melodic in the music.' She recalled the environmental sound of the musical improv, with bird sounds mixed in.

Michael wondered about the potential of using technology in a creative way: using the distance of instruments from stereo mics; 'sound design is an instrument in itself.'

Phelim felt the improv had a 'dream logic of its own.' Kieran recalled seeing David Attenborough footage of the Western parotia bird of paradise dancing in front of its nest; Phelim remembered we had looked at that same footage in the original *Bambino* R&D. Emma explained to Kieran where the *Twitcho* idea came from: thinking of The Met performances of *Bambino* with audience on seating banks, what would happen if you expand that outward? Phelim noted this was about taking a 'small idea and amplifying.' Emma said 'in my head, the image was: a murmuration of starlings across the theatre.'

Returning to our improv, Phelim said it was 'Impropera', recalling the name of David Pearl's group. He felt that where you usually start from the improv end, it was more interesting to grow improv out from orchestral music. Kieran shared that he had been involved in improv theatre at university. During the tea break, he told a funny story of a new addition to the improv group who if confronted with an imaginary object he wasn't expecting, would say 'no it's not!'

After the break, the team created a matrix of different versions of *Bambino* on the floor. The versions were: *Twitcho*, *Memory/Alzo*, *Outdoor Bambino*, *Zoom Bambino*, *Animation Bambino*, *Bambino in the woods (film)*, *Concert version Bambino* (Phelim noted we would need a venue to agree to let us do this). ***Dream* was also included, with Phelim saying this was a separate exploration but could become the same show.** The matrix was arranged according to cost, relative difficulty of production and time (to be created now or later). Phelim expressed that it would be valuable to have an afternoon in a big space and sit at the back of the auditorium with *Bambino* on the main stage, to see if you can see it/ what you can see.

Phelim said he wasn't that excited before this R&D week about *Zoom Bambino*, but could now see it might create traction for other versions. We ended up in a humorous diversion about KitKat adverts: Julian spoke about his favourite advert being the Panda KitKat advert from 1989. Phelim then revealed he had been in the 1995 Duck Hunters KitKat advert. Julian played them both for us on his MacBook. Phelim recalled that doing this advert funded his first four years of theatre work.

We moved into our final check-out. Ting said she was really moved by the connection of musicians improvising; it made her realise she loves her job. Phelim thanked Vito and Eva for being in the room and changing the atmosphere. He spoke about theatre needing to change and adapt to the new world: 'change happens here.' People were having discussions about changing theatre in the old spaces; there were closed Zoom meetings where only certain people get to speak. He thinks a space such as the one we shared this week is where change happens, where everyone has the opportunity to contribute. His words were a fitting ending to an inspiring and productive week.

We all said our farewells. There was a sense of new beginnings as Kathryn noted she would contact Phelim, Giuseppe, Emma and myself about a follow-up meeting in the next couple weeks.

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