UNIVERSITY OF FORWARD THINKING WESTMINSTER⌗

Re-envisioning female operatic roles in contemporary performance from a feminist perspective

Castrey, Madeline

This is a PhD thesis awarded by the University of Westminster.

Re-envisioning female operatic roles in contemporary performance from a feminist perspective

Madeline Grace Castrey

ABSTRACT

This research will examine the presentation of female roles in works from the opera canon, focusing on how their compositional and narratological construction aligns or misaligns with the evolution of feminism through its numerous waves. The ideas of some of the leading scholars in musicology and specifically the gender-centric field include Susan McClary, Wendy Heller, Suzanne Cusick and Carolyn Abbate. Works of these academics will be synthesised alongside theorists working in the field of identity including Maurice Hamington and Judith Butler to establish a clear picture of why women were so frequently presented in an oppressive and subordinating way, and how new practice can re-envision these characters to improve accessibility and ultimately, achieve depictions of equality.

With opera itself being at a crucial juncture in terms of its increasing need for evolution to align to the changing and expanding identities of contemporary audiences, it is all the more necessary to establish and propose research-informed ways of working which facilitate the elevation of the female role in works from the canon. The aim of this is to create a greater sense of equality in an art form that, as a product of its historical longevity, can often appear dualistic in its representation of gender. Building on this detailed understanding of female presentation arising from theoretical analysis, this investigation will then compare and contrast traditionally staged and specifically feminist productions of works from the canon, which will be constructed into case studies to propose new fixed methods of elevating the female role by approaching re-envisioning from different perspectives. These proposed perspectives are finding closeness, detachment and encouraging performativity for uniqueness.

Each of these proposed approaches arise from the work of established practitioners including Stanislavsky, Brecht and Judith Butler and are explored in this research through the lens of re-envisioning the female role in opera by the means of newly proposed theory-informed exercises and musical analysis. Such methods are implemented in a workshop environment with a diverse group of singers and amalgamated with primary insights from both leading and up-and-coming practitioners to ensure the effectiveness of these strategies and the detailed reflection of present creative exploration and experience.

This research sets out to answer the question of how female roles in works from the canon can be adequately re-envisioned to both preserve the integrity of the original composition and remain agile and responsive to the changing sociocultural environment of today. Thereby, the genre itself is able to remain continually accessible and celebrated for many years to come.

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Carmen's *Habanera* with Gestus annotation

Appendix 2: Workshop pictures

Appendix 3: Biographies of consenting interviewees

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Only those closest to me will know the true personal journey I have endured alongside undertaking this research – and only those closest to me will appreciate the true meaning of this journey. These people are my partner Ben and my Mum Jacqueline. Thank you for understanding me when I have not even understood myself. Thank you for keeping me focused, motivated and inspired - and above all, thank you for loving me when I haven't always been able to love myself. Ben, you are my rock. I would be lost without you. Thank you for never clipping my wings. Instead, you are my rocket fuel and every little thing you do helps me to fly. Mum, there aren't enough words to say how grateful I am for your love, support and everything in between. I quite simply would not be on this, or any other journey without you! I know it sounds cliché, but I hope this makes you proud.

Thank you to my Director of Studies, Professor Dr. Shirley Thompson OBE for your insights and advice over the course of this journey.

I don't mean to sound over-philosophical or holistic here…but thank you **life**. Thank you for showing me the best bits of living, but also showing me the worst. Thank you for all the knockbacks, the negativity, the pain and everything in between. At times, you've given me a real beating – but I can thank you for that now. I've been taught integrity, resilience, and above all – who I really am. This work epitomises a lot of that for me.

I know who I am.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

1. Introduction: Opera in the modern age – A feminist re-envisioning

This investigation centres around re-envisioning female roles in the opera canon through the lens of multi-wave feminism to empower women in opera. This study will examine the work of key feminist scholars and amalgamate this with the work and insights of feminist theatre practitioners and musicologists. Such will consider the context and rationale of female roles as they appear, and how these may be newly presented through a contemporary lens. This research will also be amalgamated with primary data in the form of a specially organised workshop and interviews with a cross-section of practitioners whose demographics are outlined in the ensuing methodology. The aim of this investigation is to propose ways in which the female role may be re-envisioned in a contemporary environment by amalgamating theory and new practice to re-frame and empower women in opera as they appear within the canon.

Insights from post-gender and post-humanist theorists will also be considered to provide a balanced synthesis of gender as a spectrum and to rationalise my decision to prioritise feminism as a means of re-envisioning to empower female roles.

This work will examine case studies of key works from different periods to provide a chronological synthesis of the female role in response to changing mores and environments. From this examination, propositions of possible methods and steps to achieve a feminist re-envisioning of a work from the canon will be made. Each case study will explore a different proposed method of possible feminist re-envisioning, informed by research to derive potential methods of success from theory and practice. Case studies will compare and contrast a traditional and specifically feminist performance of the work in question to examine the differences in presentations of women. Following this, each possible method of re-envisioning will be explored in a workshop devised for this study and set out in the below methodology to explore its potential for success. This will then be amalgamated with further primary insights gathered from practitioners whose demographics are again outlined below, to determine if, and how these methods may be applied to contemporary creative practice. This will culminate in the synthesis of a successful feminist production to provide a practical example of how new methods could manifest onstage.

The first area of consideration is what is meant by the term "re-envisioning." For the purposes of this study, re-envisioning will be defined as reconceptualisation in line with contemporary

visions of feminism and identity. This differs from the term "revisioning," which implies an element of correction and adaptation to achieve a superior result. This particular study suggests possible modifications in line with changing sociocultural environments. These results are not measurably more correct, rather, arguably more accessible to contemporary audiences and reflective of the sociocultural landscape. Hence, a stance of re-envisioning is sought.

1.1 Methodology

This thesis will firstly examine the conventional presentation of female roles within the opera canon to identify the central issues within their appearance and performance. Following this, I will propose three potential methods of feminist re-envisioning which will be applied to case studies and examined in both theory and practice. Possible steps creatives may take to work with the method in question will be suggested, with primary data in the form of a workshop demonstrating how these steps may be applied with success. I have selected four case studies from different periods of music to consider the presentation of women in line with the patriarchal environments and sociocultural mores that frame the works. To increase the relevance and application of this investigation, I have also selected works of key figures in the opera canon whose pieces remain frequently performed today. Whilst focusing specifically on Western Classical music, I have also chosen works deriving from different geographical locations to again provide a detailed cross-section of Western opera as it appears within the canon. The works I have selected are Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte*, Bizet's *Carmen* and Morgan Lloyd-Malcolm's *Emilia*.

The case studies on the three selected works from the canon will commence with a contextual and theoretical analysis of the troublesome presentations of women as it originally appears. This will identify some of the central feminist challenges present and consider the alignment of these issues with existing theory. Each chapter will then compare and contrast how these challenges are navigated within three productions: a traditional staging of the work in question, a specifically feminist version, and a contemporary re-setting. Productions aligning to these oppositional methodologies have been deliberately selected for this exercise in order to examine a greater variation of approaches. As part of this, I will consider some of the successes and areas of difficulty experienced within these selected productions and how these could be integrated within propositions for contemporary feminist re-envisionings.

Each method will then be explored through application to the work in question within the context of devised workshop. To explore each theme in detail, a workshop with integrated interviews[1] was held on Sunday 25th September 2022 at ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ and conducted under ethics clearance code ETH1819-0781. Eight singers were specially selected and invited to attend based on their personal identifications, voice type and performance experience:

Singer A: A non-binary identifying soprano under 40

Singer B: A heterosexual male, tenor, over 40

Singer C: A heterosexual female, soprano, over 40

Singer D: Gender-fluid, female sex, mezzo-soprano, under 40

Singer E: A homosexual male, baritone, over 40

Singer F: A heterosexual female, soprano under 40

Singer G: A heterosexual male, bass-baritone

Singer H: A bisexual female, mezzo-soprano, over 40

This unique group of singers worked through each proposed method under my direction to trial proposed methodologies outlined over the course of this thesis. Through the facilitation of round-table discussions before and after each work-through, singers also provided their own first-hand, immediate insights on both the proposed process and their own experience. To further support this exploration, primary insights have also been gathered from both industry-leading and upcoming creatives to provide further outlines of experience and propositions for potential re-envisioning. Some contributors to this project include international director Rodula Gaitanou, non-binary director P Burton-Morgan, upcoming director Rebecca Meltzer, international sopranos Lauren Fagan and Alison Langer and a wealth of upcoming and gender-diverse talent. The amalgamation of this combines theoretical and practical insights with cutting edge research and synthesis of established scholarship to propose potential methods of feminist re-envisioning in a considered and contemporary manner.

The final case study of Lloyd-Malcolm's *Emilia* will take an observational approach, working backwards from the manifestation of this feminist production onstage to suggest how this the methods proposed in this study could have been applied to the process of staging this highly successful production. This will conclude the investigation from an opposing perspective to provide a rounded insight into how feminist re-envisionings may be achieved.

---

[1] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

The final chapter of this investigation will further engage with working practitioners to propose additional methods of achieving feminist re-envisioning within the rehearsal space. Reading will also be recommended to performers and creatives, with this concluding chapter providing a forward-facing and practically applicable synthesis of research and its development into practice.

1.2 Literature Review

The core objective of this thesis is to examine how the female role is presented within operatic works from the canon and to propose ways in which the approach to exploring and performing these may be re-envisioned from a feminist perspective.

As both a researcher, professional performer and creative, I have witnessed first-hand the dualism with which opposing gendered roles are commonly presented within operatic works from the canon. This is more troublesome when presenting such works to the increasingly feminist and gender-diverse contemporary audience.

There is no shortage of literature examining how the female role is presented within opera as an art form. Equally, feminist movements of the past and present have outlined the problematic areas of society which prove restrictive of the female voice. However, with an increasing ideological disparity between gendered mores of the sociocultural origins of operatic works from the canon and our contemporary way of life, methods for re-imagining troubling, and yet normalised, presentations of the female role in opera are lacking. Whilst every creative may have their own unique approach to synthesising and staging works from the canon, this research aims to fill the methodological gap by providing proposed processes for contemporary productions and practitioners to follow. Such aims to construct feminist re-envisionings of canonical operatic works which consider the theories and ideologies of multi-wave feminism, as well as the ideas of both established and up-and-coming practitioners. Ultimately, this research aims to provide forward-facing and research-informed processes to be applied to the process of staging opera from the canon.

1.2.1   The gender problem in opera from the canon

The feminist re-envisionings constructed as part of this study will be grounded in a theoretical understanding of the gender issues within operatic works from the canon as they traditionally appear. With this in mind, one considers the two fundamental contributors to such a visible gender binary: male preference and the consequentially legitimised female subordination.

Masculine theorists Connell and Messerschmidt discuss the term hegemonic masculinity and its position as a social institution within which men both consciously and unconsciously perpetuate the ideals of masculine hierarchy. Such legitimises the inferiority of the female as a result of inherited cultural conditioning.[2] The classification of masculinity as hegemonic is identified by Connell as a concept that arose from a 'conceptual discussion of the making of masculinities and the experience of men's bodies.'[3] This publication is particularly effective in its discussion on the disparities of power between the genders. Connell and Messerschmidt propose that the term hegemonic masculinity is a relatively new description. Utilising empirical research, they identify that masculine domination in the workplace, in society, and in other cultural and social manifestations of the gender hierarchy have fuelled a continuous relationship between males and patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue.'[4] Such remains somewhat prevalent within the contemporary environment, where both material matters like the gender pay gap and the sociological effects of pluralised masculinity between heterosexual and homosexual men remains present.

Connell and Messerschmidt argue that the manifestation of hegemonic masculinity within society was not directly and consciously perpetuated by a majority, rather it became a normalised social trend that few would purposefully enact. Yet despite the possibility of unconscious patriarchy, it is also suggested that the normalisation of males in positions of power 'ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.'[5] It is from this

---

[2] Connell, R (1983) cited in Connell, R & Messerschmidt, J. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*. 19 (6), 830.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

legitimisation of female oppression that gender hierarchy arguably became a pattern of practice.

Applying this to scholarship, classicist Marilyn Katz 'take[s] up the theory of the constitution of woman as a separate race, based on eighteenth-century re-evaluations of ancient medical theory…of separate discourse on sexual pathology.'[6] Looking at this classification of women as a separate 'category,'[7] a theme of "otherness" appears to legitimise both female oppression itself and the male behaviour that enacts it. Such further reinforces the observations of Connell and Messerschmidt and offers a further insight into the female position that remains evident in the contemporary environment.

With many of our theatrical art forms today bearing roots in Greek theatre, it is interesting to note its foundation of female otherness, which in turn appears as a common denominator in many resulting art forms. Opera is no exception and offers many strong examples of narratological and musical content which depict both the active and passive enforcement of male dominance over females. In terms of the enacting minority referred to by Connell and Messerschmidt, characters like Don Alfonso from *Così fan tutte*, the titular character of Don Giovanni, *Carmen*'s Don José and even *Rigoletto*'s Duke of Mantua stand out. Yet, from a contemporary standpoint, a male persona that appears as a womaniser or authoritarian appears increasingly removed from contemporary audience expectation.

In their ground-breaking essay *Opera-ting on inequality*: gender representation in creative roles at The Royal Opera, Vincent et al observe that 'recent industry initiatives and discussion papers suggest that the issue of gender inequality in opera is gaining traction'[8] Despite influential literature such as Vincent et al's *Opera or the Undoing of Women* finding 'that women are under-represented as characters compared to men'[9] there appears little 'gender-based analysis'[10] within creative working. In addition, the state of 'artistic leadership in opera [is

---

[6] Katz, M. (1992). Ideology and "The Status of Women" in Ancient Greece. *History and Theory*. 31(4), p.71.

[7] Ibid. 72.

[8] Vincent et al. (2022). Opera-ting on inequality: gender representation in creative roles at The Royal Opera. *Cultural Trends*. 31(3).

[9] ibid.

[10] ibid.

frequently] male dominated.'[11] Moreover, the scope of which the contemporary sociocultural landscape is being integrated into present-day productions also appears limited. In her influential paper *Analyzing Gender Inequality in Contemporary Opera,* Hillary LaBonte observes that 'of the most popular operas in the standard canon of repertoire, only a few pass the Bechdel test, let alone feature complex female roles that defy voice part stereotypes.'[12] Such not only points to a lack of female integration within repertoire from the canon, but also infers that the expressive scope of these roles is additionally limited. Alongside reduced emotional complexity is also the difficulties associated with defying vocal stereotypes, particularly within a genre that can be so specific in terms of voice type and timbre. This also generates further questions as to how this rigidness can reflect the changing non-binary and gender-fluid landscape of contemporary society.

With the study of Vincent et al providing a wealth of quantitative evidence pointing to the continued state of male domination both on and off of the stage[13], it is apparent that elevation of the female role is much needed. With The Royal Opera House, The English National Opera and Opera North enrolling onto the Keychange initiative in 2019 to 'address gender imbalance in performer line-ups at partnering music festivals,'[14] one suggests that there is an ever-expanding landscape for more comprehensive feminist re-envisioning both onstage and as part of offstage practice. It is therefore the contention of this thesis that using a feminist foundation to construct new methods of feminist re-envisionings will create an increasingly equalist environment within works from the canon.

1.2.2   Key texts and the starting point of existing insights

Feminism itself is a movement, an ideology, and a legacy, which is referred to in its third wave by R. Claire Snyder as a practice which 'foregrounds personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism.'[15] The central observation is the

[11] ibid.

[12] LaBonte, H. (2019). *Analyzing Gender Inequality in Contemporary Opera*. [Online]. . Available at: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1562758176443906&disposition= [Accessed 10 April 2023].

[13] Vincent et al. (2022). Opera-ting on inequality: gender representation in creative roles at The Royal Opera. *Cultural Trends*. 31(3).
Vincent et al present empirical data in their case study on The Royal Opera, Covent Garden.

[14] Keychange, cited in ibid.
[15] Snyder, R C. (2008). What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs*. 34(1), p.175.

potential objective of feminism in practice as a rebellion against 'feminist mothers.'[16] Here, the idea of inherited ideological legacy is synthesised with a negative connotation. In Snyder's view, third-wave feminism facilitates an empowered, contemporary response which moves away from these inherited incentives and towards more diverse perspectives. This seems particularly applicable to opera as a genre, wherein the inherited ideology appears to be the legitimisation of male preference and normalisation of female subordination in works from the canon.

From a contemporary perspective, the presentation of gendered roles and indeed the gender binary itself within society is undergoing dramatic transformation. Donna Haraway's appreciation of post-humanism[17], observes that the essentialism of dualistic binaries is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the Contemporary era. This is not just limited to the male-female binary, but also the binary between human and animal and God and man. The latter of which also appears as a staple feature of operatic works from the canon, particularly those of the pre-Enlightenment era. In such times, it is notable that this primary dualism of God(s) over man transcends several operatic works from Handel's *Orlando* to Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, within which the dualism of gender appears as a secondary polarity.

With the aim of this investigation being to propose new ways of realising feminist re-envisionings of operas from the canon, this research bears its roots in feminist theory and musicology. The intersection of such will provide an understanding of the female position within legacy opera, utilising multi-wave feminist thought to create feminist-centric re-envisionings.

Looking at the musicological and feminist literature, scholars including Carolyn Abbate, Mary Ann Smart, Catherine Clément, Suzanne Cusick, Clair Rowden, and Rachel Cowgill all provide valuable syntheses of feminist theory and identifications of how canonical characters align or misalign to multi-wave appreciations of feminism. Whilst the work of these, and other esteemed theorists will be examined over the course of this research, there are several key texts which effectively signpost the journey of this research enquiry; from understanding the context

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge. 149-181.

of the operatic female, the presentation of women within works, and points of which methods of re-envisioning could consider.

Commencing with Karin Pendle's *Women and Music: A History*, the author provides research which transcends vast periods of time; from the Middle Ages, through the 15th-18th centuries, into the Romantic era and beyond into the 20th century. An asset of this publication is its inclusion of non-Western musical perspectives where early feminist theory is rather more exclusive of such. Though broad in its approach to inclusion and chronology, it is interesting to read Pendle's belief that the 60s and 70s were 'the driving force behind the emergence of a wide range of studies and theories focusing on the lives, position and contributions of women in society through the ages.'[18] However, there is little acknowledgement of the limitations of second-wave feminist thought as applied to both a woman's role in music and presentation onstage. Indeed, Pendle's classification of racial otherness as simply 'white and non-white'[19] is presented as rationale for subordination again without expansion of other interwoven discriminants. This dualistic approach to the racial binary is especially problematic, particularly given that the non-white demographic is not examined in detail amidst comprehensive synthesis of the sociocultural influence of the female position in late 18th century Vienna. With the influence of Enlightenment being particularly transformative to opera during this time, this lack of distinction in terms of racial representation appears somewhat exclusive.

Expanding the work of Pendle, Ford's *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas* is a highly effective amalgamation of acoustical and ethnological musicology which proposes the idea of gendered identity within the compositions of Mozart. In addition, this work considers the impact of the sociological construction of Mozartian opera narratives and their surrounding environment on the legitimised presentation of gendered roles. Ford proposes the idea of feminine and masculine compositional identities wherein feminine weakness is 'expressed through the blurred rhythmic foreground, the lack of a directed and unified middleground melodic structure, and the overall harmonic tendency to be drawn towards the 'natural' gravitational pull of the subdominant.'[20] Such infers a dualistic relationship between the male

---

[18] Pendle, K. (2001). *Woman and Music: A History*. 2nd ed. USA: Indiana University Press. Vii.

[19] Ibid. 315.

[20] Ford, C. (1991). *Cosi?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.111.

and female binaries and suggests a polaristic approach to the gendered writing of Mozart. It is interesting to note the extent of which Ford points to gendered difference between the male roles of Ferrando, Guglielmo and Don Alfonso, wherein he observes Guglielmo's cadences as 'dull compared to Ferrando's.'[21] He continues; 'Alfonso's solo contribution to the *terzetto* comprises [of] the exceptionally brief dominant modulation…in which he ascertains whether the strength of his friendship with the officers is sufficient to contain their disagreement…Alfonso alienates his own viewpoint by placing his inquiry within the context of Ferrando and Guglielmo's understanding of the outcome…such alienation rests on the Enlightenment's empirical presupposition of an ability to suspend self-interest for the sake of science.'[22]

Again, Enlightenment is brought into consideration, and on this topic Ford makes clear the difference between Rousseau and Locke's principals of Enlightenment when applied to the schools of feminist thought. His extensive references to 'natural law'[23] which Ford states 'united Enlightenment Christians and scientists against the more incredible, mythological and dogmatic aspects of traditional belief systems'[24] do much to signpost the evolution of the canon itself from theological reconstructions, through to explorations of the human condition. This evolution continues into the Romantic gothic resurgence and into the contemporary age. One can synthesise this process of transitioning through the lens of feminism in practice to construct performances which substitute "natural law" with an inclusive identity spectrum. Whilst this paper insinuates that transition should occur, there is little methodology included to suggest how this could be realised. This notwithstanding, Ford is influential in his musicological synthesis of Mozartian writing, which effortlessly works within in the intersection between compositional and social construction.

One of the central challenges to this investigation is considering the female role with enough scope to sufficiently re-envision their original portrayal. At this point, I highlight Carolyn Abbate's publication *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, wherein she stresses the importance of considering which "voice" is presented to us, the

---

[21] Ibid. 114.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid. 111.

[24] Ibid. 11.

audience, in the 18th century music she explores. Abbate states 'exploring musical narration means thinking about voices in a broader sense as well, about their masks of identity and how such voices are projected by music.'[25] This appears to amalgamate the musicological work of Ford with the visual synthesis of Laura Mulvey, whose output on the alignment of the spectator to the male gaze is expansive. In her influential publication *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey famously states that 'in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active male and passive female.'[26] These active and passive identities once again contribute to the dualistic state of the gender binary which so many operas from the canon depict and legitimise onstage.

Leading into the formulation of contemporary feminist re-envisionings of works from the canon, one also draws attention to Wendy Heller's *Reforming Achilles: Gender, "opera seria" and the Rhetoric of the Enlightened Hero.* Whilst Heller's work will be examined in greater detail during the ensuing investigation, this central insights of this paper suggest that the identities of defence and defeat are unmoveable constructions of male identity. These are so intrinsically linked to the male state of being, that even the outcomes of a male en travesti would be different, specifically superior, to biological females. This both links with, and contests Connell and Messerschmidt's theory of hegemonic masculinity, wherein whilst the male sex is preferred, the question arises as to how one rationalises preferential male behaviour. Thus, how can opera from the canon differentiate the state of being male from being masculine and what impact would/does this have on the constructions of female identity? In answer to this, this research will propose methods of performance informed by a performer's own individual identity by both linking, detaching, and grounding a specific performer in the context, content, and chronology of the work in question.

This process furthers the work of Amanda Eubanks Winkler and her insightful appreciations of "intermedial dramaturgy." This term is outlined as 'the existence of the theatrical medium as between socially constructed categories.'[27] Again, this insight will be further examined, but

[25] Abbate, C. (1996). *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century:*. USA: Princeton University Press. 28.

[26] Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*. 16(3), p.808.

[27] Winkler, A E. (2018). The Intermedial Dramaturgy of Dramatick Opera: Understanding Genre through Performance. *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*. 42(2), p.2.

as a starting point to this investigation and the alignment of contemporary feminist reform to works from the canon, one considers this idea of intermediacy as a foundation of re-envisionings. In this instance, the concept of intermediacy acts as starting point of the work of this thesis to deconstruct the male-masculine interaction and its ability to oppress female characters. It is this perspective, that is, existing between categories that will ground my proposed re-envisionist methods.

1.2.3 Multi-wave feminism

As a starting point to feminism in theory and its relationship with opera, Linda Martín Alcoff observes that 'early feminist historical and sociological analyses…tended to strip sexual violence of its social and historical context and to view it as a cross-cultural, raceless universal, a feature of "patriarchy."'[28] Commencing an investigation which aims to overcome problematic presentations of women within suppressive sociocultural compositional environments, the idea that early theory appears misaligned to the theatrical experience of performing and viewing female roles is both alarming and yet unsurprising. One does not have to look far to witness female subordination in canonical roles. With the legitimisation of this being apparent through both the frequency of its occurrence and its widespread expectation and application, it is not entirely unexpected that patriarchy should be appreciated as the singular oppressing institution. Whilst patriarchy alone may well have been, and continue to be, the prevailing oppressor of women, I would hesitate to use the term "patriarchy" as a rationale for their continued subordination. Rather, I would describe this institution as the catalyst which triggered active and passive behaviours of both men and women that in turn construct a dualistic relationship between the gender binary. One could also argue that, from a contemporary standpoint, patriarchy as both a term and an institution is becoming increasingly obsolete in its exclusively cisgender application.

Referring back to the roots of early feminism, first-wave feminist thought did not enjoy the expanded scope of female individualism seen in modern materialist feminism in practice. Transferring this to the stage, this too appears embodied within varying approaches to creative and dramatic practice. Indeed, practitioners such as Brecht and Stanislavsky whose methods will be synthesised and shaped over the course of this thesis transcended what we would now

---

[28] Alcoff, L M. (2012). Feminism: Then and Now. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. 26(2), p.271.

call first wave feminism, yet it is noteworthy that, in the case of female roles, the level of experimentation relating to the validation of the female identity is limited.

In her influential paper *Women in Brecht's Works*, Sara Lennox identifies that the female position in Brechtian theatre places women as 'demonstration objects.'[29] This appears somewhat ironic in an arena which seeks to challenge audience expectation and social norms. In characters such as Marie in *In the Jungle of Cities* and Anna in *Drums in the Night*, one could suggest that feminism itself is removed from view given the extent of which the presence of these characters causes frustration and obstruction to their male partners. However, Lennox concludes that 'women in his work exert a subversive potential, pointing in directions qualitatively different from the position Brecht consciously represented in his theoretical writings. Brecht's woman figures will thus be shown as double-edged. On the one hand they demonstrate both his blindness to women themselves and to a whole range of issues which women have been taken to represent. But simultaneously they call forth a potentially utopian dimension which might be elaborated in contemporary reutilizations of his works.'[30] Looking at opera from the canon through this lens of subversion, several female characters appear to present some subversive potential. To briefly suggest a few examples; the nobility of Violetta's sacrifice in *La traviata* could be foregrounded over her tragic demise, Zerlina's liaison with Don Giovanni could be reverse engineered to present her less as a conquest and more as a sexually advanced woman experiencing desire, and Carmen, who will be examined in greater detail in the ensuing investigation, could be completely reframed to move away from danger and towards liberation.

Looking forward to second-wave feminism, the idea of collective action is particularly interesting. This draws several parallels with the increased incentive for diverse and inclusive working within contemporary production houses. Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman observe that 'the essentialist "we" or "sisterhood" of the second wave was ostensibly meant to unify the women's movement, instead it proved to be a painful source of factionalization.'[31] Indeed, the problems of factionalisation appear to be mirrored within many operatic works

---

[29] Lennox, S. (1978). Women in Brecht's Works. *New German Critique*. 14(1), p.84.

[30] ibid.

[31] Archer Mann, S & Huffman, D. (2005). The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave. *Science & Society*. 69(1), p.59.

from the canon. As an example, I refer to Mozart's *Don Giovanni* wherein Donnas Anna and Elvira and Zerlina unify against the titular character and *Le nozze di Figaro*, where the Countess and Susanna achieve a similar feat. However, when aligning these examples to theory, there does not appear provision for the empowerment of this factionalisation. Moreover, questions of whether the concept of sisterhood is unifying or divisive arise.

In the first instance, there appears similar alignments to early salon culture, where liberalism in practice arose from the differentiation between the debates of the private and public spheres that were intrinsically linked with gendered roles. Conversely, the contemporary feminist movements of TimesUp and MeToo actively encourage female unification and the broadcast of female insight to the public. The key contemporary difference is the inclusivity of broader female identification as opposed to exclusively cisgender individuals. This is an important consideration when working in the contemporary arts domain, where representation is of paramount importance and the inclusion of diverse demographics is facilitated and maintained. Specifically, contemporary appreciation of female unification which facilitates a positive environment rather than a segregated one appears to lie in the different persona of "feminist." Where the feminist identity appeared exclusive in both its inception within a segregated environment and alignment to cisgender women, feminism as a movement has diversified in the contemporary age. Now, the arts and indeed broader social environment present feminism as a more inclusive concept which celebrates and strives towards the empowerment of all identifications of women by all genders.

Expanding on previous insights relating to this paper, a work especially influential on this investigation was R. Claire Snyder's *What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay*. When considering the transition of theory into research-informed practice, Snyder references 'the collapse of the category of women…multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification…[and] an inclusive and non-judgemental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political.'[32] In this sense, one considers third-wave feminism to embody a more contemporary transition of feminist theory into practice. Interestingly, Snyder's inference of the collapsing of the categorisation of womanhood does much to decentre the notion of sisterhood prevalent in the second-wave movement. Here, the exclusions of "sisterhood" as an institution are abandoned in favour of an inclusive female identity, and whilst the sociological framework of the

---

[32] Snyder, R C. (2008). What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs*. 34(1), p.175.

90s and 00s may not have been as gender diverse as the present day, here there is certainly provision for the identification of "woman" to extend beyond cisgender individuals. This is particularly relevant to contemporary working in the diverse and inclusive environments of the present industry. In companionship to this work, I also reference Snyder's *Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of "Choice"* wherein the author cites Betty Friedan and her observation that 'the human being has an essential desire to exercise self-determination.'[33] Friedan observes that 'this will to power, self-assertion, dominance, or autonomy as it is variously called…is the individual affirming his existence and his potentialities as a being in his own right…Due to the cultural norms of feminism at the time, however, women were denied the opportunity to self-determine and were reduced to being their husbands' helpmates.'[34] Whilst this insight is framed around the limitations and subsequent deconstruction of second-wave feminism, the position of female reduction is something easily identifiable in opera from the canon. Moreover, whilst compositional conventions change, the female position of inferiority appears transcendent of musical periods. It is therefore interesting that Snyder once again cites Friedan and her observation that 'contrary to popular belief, gender equality would not erode women's femininity, happiness, or sexual fulfilment.'[35] In opera from the canon, it is this femininity and the spectrum of coquettishness to promiscuity that constructs femininity as something exclusively perceivable by men. Contemporary film and feminist theorists including Laura Mulvey and Peggy Phelan rationalise this as a pre-Oedipal, moving state where actions translate into language whilst remaining separate to the narrative influence.[36] Such is overtly identifiable in opera from the canon. Consequently, third-wave feminism and its inclusive approach to the female identity, multiperspectival and multivocal rationale appears most ideologically transferrable to contemporary creative working and the foundation upon which proposed methods of re-envisioning will be constructed.

Another paper central to this research is Amber E. Kinser's *Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism.* Kinser perceives the first wave as feminist "work" and the second as

---

[33] Snyder-Hall, R C. (2010). Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of "Choice". *Perspectives on Politics*. 8(1), p.256.

[34] ibid.

[35] ibid.

[36] Barba, E as cited in Phelan, P. (1988). Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance. *The Drama Review*. 32 (1), 108.

"liberation" She states, 'the second-wave attention to women's rights, and more importantly to women's liberation…linked the two periods of feminist movement [and] was a rhetorical strategy that helped give clout to '60s women's activism.'[37] However, it is also interesting to note Kinser's frequent identifications of the inclusive limitations of feminism. She identifies the intersection of racial and cultural identity and the extent of feminist voice, stating that 'minority [feminist] leaders rarely receive the attribution they deserve.'[38] Following on from the ideological journey from work to liberation is Kinser's perception of third-wave feminism as 'a second-wave consequence, but also as part of a postfeminsm outcome. That is, young women and girls are attempting to paint a place for themselves in a feminist landscape even as that landscape is coloured and textured by a postfeminist ideology, which asserts that there is no longer any need to "be a feminist"'[39]

Now, in the midst of fourth-wave feminism, there is understandably a heightened level of diversity and inclusion to consider, which disassociates with the dualism of the gender binary and engages with the female identity as accessible beyond cisgender females. Through the lens of creating frameworks to facilitate contemporary feminist re-envisionings of opera from the canon, the multivocality and multiperspectival incentives of third-wave feminism appear very applicable to establishing new feminist performance and creative practice. Referring to Kinser's paper, one considers contemporary post-feminism and whether this may be a more appropriate discourse to inform new practice. Kinser states that 'post-feminism very well may be a voice that is currently rising above the din for many young women. It is seductive, It co-opts the motivating discourse of feminism but accepts a sense of empowerment as a substitute for the work toward and evidence of authentic empowerment.'[40] However, in response to this, this research will suggest that the translation of feminist theory into practice is more effective in the process of re-envisioning opera from the canon, wherein the elevation of the female perspective where it is so blatantly reduced is a more realistic approach to realising an empowered female position. From this, a heightened state of gender equality could then be achieved as a by-product.

---

[37] Kinser, A E. (2004). Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism. *NWSA Journal*. 16(3), p.129.

[38] ibid. 130.

[39] ibid.

[40] ibid. 134.

Having established an understanding of the journey of feminist theory and its application in practice, this thesis will apply the most relevant schools of feminist thought to the selected case study works. It is the intention of this investigation to further the application of these feminist ideologies by proposing explorative methods of performance which take a multi-wave approach to re-envisioning.

1.2.4 Multi-discipline approaches

Learning from literature and the different processes of practitioners which both support and challenge the actor and their relationship to the work in question, one suggests two central approaches to dramatic depiction: closeness and distance. Considering the work of acclaimed and up-and-coming directors which will be examined over the course of this thesis, I propose that these two opposing approaches can be constructed into functioning methods for feminist re-envisioning of opera. Focusing on the idea of closeness, the Stanislavsky toolkit does much to align a performer's own experiences to that of their characters. His techniques of "what if?" and "emotion memory" are widely employed by actors to increase personal alignment to characters, however, what remains a fundamental constant of such realisations is the integration of the directors' interpretation. In his influential paper *The Actor: Work on Oneself*, Stanislavsky states:

In complex plays a huge number of possible 'ifs,' created by the author and others, are intertwined, so as to justify this or that line of behaviour in the principal characters. In such cases, we are dealing not with single-story but with multi-story 'ifs,' that is, with a considerable number of hypotheses and the ideas attendant upon them, all of which are cleverly intertwined. In a case such as this, the author, who has created the play says: if the action takes place in such and such a period, in such and such a country, in such and such a place or house; if such and such people live there, with such and such a cast of mind, with such and such ideas and feelings; if they come into conflict in such and such circumstances, and so on.. The director who is staging the play supplements the author's concepts with his own 'ifs' and says: if there were such and such interrelationships among the characters, if their particular habits were such and such, if they lived in such a setting and so on, how would the actor react if placed in these circumstances?[41]

---

[41] Stanislavsky, K, Benedetti, J & Carnicke, S M. (1993). The Actor: Work on Oneself. *TDR*. 37(1), p.41.

Such asks for additional consideration of the role of lighting, costume and sound designers, alongside any profession which contributes to how a role appears onstage. If achieved successfully, a role will appear highly individual to one performer, when it is actually the result of several professionals working collaboratively. The performer themselves is also asked to look beyond the singular character and consider a vast range of different circumstances which may contribute to how that character performs.

Specifically, a performer's realisation of a role appears as an amalgamation of a broad network of circumstances to construct a performed identity. This is also mirrored by Uta Hagen whose 9 questions consider a similar all-encompassing approach to closeness and the creation of performed naturalism. As the previous insight of Stanislavsky attests, creatives are asked to consider location, environment, relationships, conflict and then their own feelings to build a rounded picture of the identity of the character. In the realm of opera, where many works from the canon can be up to four centuries old, this detailed manifestation of closeness derived from increasingly disparate environments is fast becoming challenging or even implausible to realise. This then poses the question of whether any closeness derived from this method is superficial through its origin in environments unable to be related to from a contemporary standpoint. As such, whilst I seek to take influence from this practice in the creation of a suggested methodology for feminist re-envisioning, I propose to refine these broad considerations of closeness to a singular focus specifically centred on performed gender identity. Such deliberately removes location and time period from the foreground of gender construction, allowing characters to exist as individuals outside of any restrictive social mores that may have been present at the time of composition and as part of a canonical work's performance convention.

Taking this observation further, I propose the method of "conjured memory" as a focused approach to restructuring personal identity and one which builds upon the established Stanislavsky method. This aims to further the work of the existing scholarship and expand its application by facilitating the diversity of contemporary self-representation and applying this to works from the canon to increase their relatability. This will be expanded upon and shaped into possible methods of application in ensuing chapters.

Contrasting to the practice of achieving dramatic closeness is the position of distance from the source material, and in this field, Brecht is the most relevant practitioner. There is much research on Brechtian theatre as it applies to the political arena. Whilst opera was Brecht's bête noire, the diversification of the contemporary environment where creatives are increasingly led to ask poststructuralist questions, links the genre with his practices. Such intersection is specifically referred to in Marc Silberman's influential paper *Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy* as 'seeking to re-establish the comic as a tool for blowing open what he saw as the paralyzed consciousness of the masses.'[42] Applying this specifically to gender theory and its application to opera, this paralysed consciousness appears to draw a direct parallel with Connell and Messerschmidt's definition of hegemonic masculinity, wherein this static state of being and specifically, performing, appears to embody a continually perpetuated state of male dominance and female subordination. Again, this rationale appears specifically relevant to opera as a genre wherein Silberman observes that 'Brecht's choice of comic elements has to be seen within the context of the author's own historical position; that is, where he stands in the historical process.'[43] This observation outlines a specific gap in the existing scholarship; namely, the disparity between the context of the present day and the gendered environments of many operatic works from the canon. Considering this, I propose to utilise Silberman's Brechtian synthesis as a starting point to outline a methodology which places the performer within the present contemporary environment whilst performing a female role from the canon though a lens of "detachment."

One also looks to the contemporary environment and the work of practicing creatives to inform and inspire how methodological frameworks may be devised and applied to opera. To highlight this, I refer to Susan McClary's respected book *Feminine Endings* wherein she identifies a 'defensive slippage among the "feminine," the racial Other, and popular culture [which] remains prevalent well into the twentieth century and frequently informs modernist attacks on pop music.'[44] Yet, having inferred that discriminatory institutions are easily maladjusted, there is little within the text that provides a methodological solution. If this is indeed the case, then with the changing social mores of the modern age, the inherent misappropriation of such

---

[42] Silberman, M. (2012). Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy. *Social Research*. 79(1), p.172.

[43] ibid.

[44] McClary, S (1994). *Feminine Endings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 65.

institutions could pose a real threat to the extent of accessibility of modern audiences to operatic productions.

Speaking specifically of opera, McClary stresses that opera and the wider arts act as a forum within which politics and culture integrate numerous times. Going as far as stating that 'music is always a political activity,'[45] the rationale behind the lack of differentiation between discriminating factors within society certainly appears to be politically motivated. This insight is reminiscent of Brechtian alienation whereby the audience is challenged to subvert their perception of normalcy and where theatre is utilised as a mechanism to drive forward broader social reform. Linking this to the fundamentals of feminist theory, one considers Gayle Austin's appreciation of Jill Dolan's radical and materialist feminism:

Radical Feminism (also known as 'cultural feminism')
• Stresses the superiority of female attributes and difference between male and female modes (i.e., alludes to the fact that woman's power comes from her body)
• Again, the individual takes precedence over the group.

Materialist Feminism
Minimises biological differences between men and women.
Stresses the notion that material conditions of production (such as history, race, class, gender) affect woman's subordination
The group is more important than the individual.[46]

With McClary's inference of the politicism associated with music and the extent of female subordination within works from the canon, it is tempting for any method of re-envisioning to take a more radical approach. However, Dolan's materialist perspective of minimising the biological differences between men and women appears to construct the most convincing ideological basis of new contemporary methods of feminist re-envisioning. Indeed, the idea of reduced gender difference and the third-wave feminist concept of multivocality and multiperspectival insight suggest that perhaps individuality would be one of the more effective concepts upon which to construct new frameworks. In terms of diversifying and empowering

---

[45] ibid. 26.

[46] Austin, G (1990). Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism. United States of America: University of Michigan Press. 6.

female roles in oppressing narratological circumstances, being "individual" would go some way towards facilitating a broader inclusive state. However without a suggested methodological framework to achieve this, such may be very challenging to realise in works which embody such disparate social mores to the contemporary environment. There is also the additional challenge of how other discriminating institutions affect woman's subordination to consider.

Speaking of where the gender difference and its associated discriminations originate, Susan McClary suggests that the source of gender inequality as it is presented within Western opera from the canon is the biblical event of the seduction of Adam by Eve. This is a familiar suggestion also made by Judith Butler which makes a strong case for the perpetuation of patriarchal oppression and female subordination extending back to a time before Christ. Not only this, the inequality between who the Bible depicts as the first man and woman is proposed as being the catalyst for the wider network of discriminants still present in the Western world today. From the inequality between Adam and Eve and parallelly, men and women, there began a culture of imbalance; with differentiating factors like class, race and ethnicity becoming grounds for a different social treatment. One then refers back to dualism as a concept, where Donna Haraway observes the most pronounced dualisms between God and man, man and beast and man and woman.[47] With such pronounced gender binaries within opera from the canon, this dualistic environment becomes particularly problematic. Additionally, such pronounced binaries and associated behaviours and outcomes present further problems for the inclusive and diverse environment of the present day. Perhaps then, the key to disrupting the legitimisation of female subordination as it appears in opera from the canon is to deconstruct the performed behaviours which perpetuate the enforcement of male dominance and female inferiority.

Over the course of her first three essays, McClary uses the operatic works of Monteverdi and Bizet to highlight the extent of gender disparity and the correlation between the incidences of gender discrimination with the presence of other discriminatory factors. Using *Carmen*'s Don José as an example, McClary highlights his strong alignment with patriarchy as simultaneous to his identification as a white member of the bourgeois. This correlation is applied broadly to operatic works wherein the 'specific content of each composition casts many possible shades

---

[47] Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge. 149-181.

on this paradigm: some are gleefully affirmative, demonstrating quite straight-forwardly the triumph of the "masculine" over the "feminine" principle.'[48] Again, the straightforward preference of both the male sex and the masculine behaviour is identified. In answer to this, McClary speaks of how the implementation of the perspective of female sexuality can manifest. McClary uses the pop star Madonna as an example of a successful case of challenging gendered conventions to critical acclaim. She proposes that Madonna's inversion of the convention of women either denying the presence of a gender disparity or underrepresenting their femininity should be exemplified. McClary suggests that the success of Madonna as a female artist, stems from her strong depiction of female heterosexual desire.[49]

This contemporary artistry and embodied individualism links back with Eubanks Winker's idea of intermediacy, which this investigation will use a foundation for constructing proposed methods of feminist re-envisioning. In this case, the individualism of Madonna and her existence in performance between the categories of both male, female, masculine and feminine behaviour constitutes intermediacy in practice achieved almost exclusively through the individualism of a particular performer.

At this point I consider the final proposed method of feminist re-envisioning as "constructing and facilitating performativity." Performativity itself is a theoretical concept developed by the renowned Judith Butler. Butler proposes that gender itself is a "performed" construct. She states, 'within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names.'[50] Namely, the perception of gender is constructed through communicative acts that constitute a physical state of a particular identification. Theorist Moya Lloyd builds upon this idea by offering the example of one being in 'a condition of "doing straightness" or "doing queerness"'[51] as opposed to identifying with the expected personas of such fixed categories. Butler argues that such elements that are both verbal and non-verbal can be vividly rehearsed and constructed away from the expected physicalisation of fixed

---

[48] McClary, S (1994). *Feminine Endings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 69.

[49] ibid. 152, 165.

[50] Butler, J. (1993). Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex. Oxon: Routledge. 13.

[51] Lloyd, M. (1999). Performativity, Parody, Politics. Theory, Culture & Society. 16 (2), 195-213.

identifications.[52] In the present day, this performativity is all the more applicable to the gender spectrum, which, in its diverse application, appears to bear roots in this concept. The gender spectrum and its embodied diversity 'enacts...that which it names'[53] and as such, offers the potential to be approached in a manner that facilitates gendered representation coming from the individual, as opposed to the context, narrative, or composition. However, there appears limited methodology for applying this to opera and in its associated space of creative working.

Upon synthesising key musicological texts alongside broader appreciations of multi-wave feminist thought, it is apparent that the contemporary age presents the exciting challenge of realising diversity and representation to an extent never before seen. With spectrum-centric identity being a disparate concept from the dualistic binaries witnessed so frequently in opera from the canon, it appears that constructing feminist identities based around the idea of individuality could be a possible method of realising heightened relatability. By moving away from legitimised and expected depictions of gender and towards a greater level of performer individualism, it is possible that a more profound state of accessibility could be established. Possible methods of achieving this will be examined over the course of this work and suggested as a third possible method of realising a contemporary feminist re-envisioning.

1.3 Commencing the process of constructing feminist re-envisioning

This investigation aims to respond to the theoretical, compositional and dramatic implementation of the female as object, or "other" within opera from the canon. This appears one of the central misalignments to feminism as an ideology and identity, wherein a lack of the female perspective initiates a state of dualism. Whilst dualism itself points to a broader post-humanist stance of the irrelevance of human difference, within the parameters of the male and female binary, it appears a plausible rationale for the perpetual assertion of one gender's control over another. This is also apparent within the realm of critical appreciation of portrayed gender binary as it appears to spectators, where synthesis of theory and existing practice identifies that the male gaze of both onstage roles and audiences alike supersedes any alignment to the female perspective. Laura Mulvey highlights that the presentation of the archetypal woman in film has

---

[52] Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. Theatre Journal. 40 (4), 519-531.

[53] Butler, J. (1993). Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex. Oxon: Routledge. 13.

been created to satisfy erotic needs of males in a hegemonically masculine society[54] whilst feminist critic Sue-Ellen Case argues that the appreciation of the direction of male gaze is an essential component of performance practice. She offers the example of the ingénue making her entrance, observing that the way the audiences see and perceive her directly aligns to the view of the male protagonist.[55]

In the medium of opera, such is further attested by Heather Hadlock, who, in *Return of the Repressed: The prima donna from Hoffman's Tales to Offenbach's Contes* comments that 'the throats of female singers…serve as conduits for music… available to the male listener only through the sound of their singing voices…The women's submission to her role brings about her death; she, not the listener, becomes the "willing victim" of her siren song.'[56] In all of these realisations of the female role, a state of male spectatorship is created, that is, an alignment of the audience's appreciation to the perception of the male protagonist.

Whilst framed through the lens of the Romantic period, this insight can just as easily be applied to other canonical works of different periods. The identification of the female role being limited to "conduit" rather than "spectator and receiver" could be perceived as a rationalisation of many of the reductive female appearances and subsequently learned performance conventions associated with the opera canon. Perhaps then, the key to re-envisioning and ultimately empowering female roles in opera from the canon lies in constructing the female as "spectator and receiver." In a truly equalist environment, one also considers how both male and female spectatorship can co-exist and even transition between one another within the performance of a single work. However, considering the extensive and normalised female subordination present in many canonical works, this research suggests that the foundation for this future equalist stance lies in facilitating the integration of a female critical spectator alongside the existing male state of viewership. Specifically, it is feminist-centric re-envisionings which will

---

[54] Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*. 16 (3), 6-18.

[55] Case, Sue-Ellen. Feminism in Theatre. New York: Methuen, 1988. 119.

[56] Hadlock H. (1994). Return of the Repressed: The prima donna from Hoffmann's "Tales" to Offenbach's "Contes". *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 6 (3), 223.

empower the female role to establish a heighted state of equality against a male-preferential backdrop.

With an identifiable issue and a proposed ideal form of spectatorship, this chapter will put forward outlines of new, refined methodological processes for the creative to achieve this final state of both "viewing" and "being." Such processes will provide guidance on creating feminist re-envisionings of works from the canon through different methods and from contrasting ideological perspectives in order to achieve the similar result of a newly empowered female role.

The proposed methods are as follows:

i)   Finding attachment: Conjured memory as a method of relation
        Creating "somewhere close"
ii)   Considering detachment: Moving away from convention and subject matter
iii)   Structuring performativity for uniqueness: Constructing variable revisions with interpretive fluency

One commences this revision to creative process at the point of intersection between female psychology and feminist identity as it manifests onstage. Beth Watkins states in *The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education* that actors have been 'nurtured on realism and Stanislavsky'[57] and as such, performers have been restricted to portraying "realness" within the confines of narratological context and not in a manner truly applicable to their sense of self. Yet, I would argue that realism is a challenging concept when applied to the gendered ideologies of opera from the canon. This is particularly apparent when to construct narratological and performative realism within the context of canonical works is often to construct a state of normalised female subjugation and objectivity.

In terms of depicting gendered roles onstage, there is also the key difference between the terms "realism" and "naturalism." Where realism 'seeks only to describe subjects as they really

---

[57] Watkins, B. (2005). The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education. *Theatre Topics*. 15 (2), 187.

are,'[58] naturalism aims to interpret other forces, often underlying, subconscious and institutional which influence the behaviours of narratological subjects. 'Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, disease, prostitution and fifth.'[59] Consequently, one suggests that methods of feminist re-envisionings in the Contemporary age could be structured on a greater distinction between these two creative approaches. In the case of staging works from the canon, one proposes that realism as a concept could be abandoned in favour of a greater focus on naturalistic depictions which portray the reality of gender difference and hegemonic male preference in context, whilst offering scope for visible distancing between work, performer and spectator.

Examining this in greater detail, it may be suggested that abandoning realism as a concept could have a substantial impact on the creation of feminist spectatorship. Indeed, this concept is addressed in the dramaturgical sense by Rhonda Blair in *Reconstructing Stanislavsky: Feeling, Feminism and the Actor*. Blair argues that 'the power of feeling, imagination, and narrative, and the way that these and pseudo-scientific constructions of sex and race in biological bodies have historically been manipulated to oppress women.'[60] Blair implies that the feminist response as seen in second wave feminism of the 1980s is to take an "antiessentialist" stance.[61] It is this sate of antiessentialism which further implies a move away from "performed" realisations of gender in line with behaviours which have been legitimised by patriarchal legacy.

I suggest that whilst this methodology of unique physical action is highly effective in its application as part of rehearsal strategy, this idea does not provide a detailed enough framework to fully guide creatives through performances of works more disparate to the contemporary Western world. Ultimately, the malleability of Butler's performativity provides only part of a possible structure for approaching works where both binary dualism through hegemonic masculinity and an overarching environment of gender and sexual dimorphism is normalised.

---

[58] Theatre Crafts. (Date Unknown). *Theatrical Style and Form.* Available: https://www.theatrecrafts.com/pages/home/topics/stage-management/theatrical-style/. Last accessed 21st July 2022.

[59] ibid.

[60] Blair, R. (2002). Reconsidering Stanislavsky: Feeling, Feminism, and the Actor. *Theatre Topics*. 12 (2), 177.

[61] ibid.

Intermediacy and incoherency

How does one commence the process of feminist re-envisioning in the face of such challenging normalcies relating to the treatment of female characters within canonical works? Amanda Eubanks Winkler proposes that dramatic opera should be approached as multimedia. In this instance, Erik Vos's formulation of intermedial as 'artistic phenomena that appear[s] either to fall between established categories or fuse their criteria'[62] and Lisa Gitelman's definition of media as 'socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is cultural practice'[63] are used to point to the tapestry of mediums entrenched within dramatic opera from the canon, which Winkler argues 'do not fully cohere.'[64]

Whilst the coherency of musical and dramatic devices in canonical works is another area of study entirely, there appears to be a case for the intermedial dramaturgy of such works creating incoherency from a feminist perspective. Such is especially evident in works such as Bizet's *Carmen,* where the spectacle of gypsy dance, Cuban musical influences and the alluring visibility of Carmen construct a sense of "otherness" within the leading female character that arguably exaggerates her separation from female convention and expectation more than the music alone. Here, the coherency of musical and dramatic devices constitutes what Judith Butler describes as 'the habitual blurring of discriminants.'[65] In the case of *Carmen*, the discriminants of gender, sex, class, and race are integrated within her character presentation to separate her from the behavioural normalcies of 19th century women. Plainly, she is a female,

---

[62] Vos, E quoted in Eubanks Winkler, A. (2018). The Intermedial Dramaturgy of Dramatick Opera: Understanding Genre through Performance. *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*. 42 (2), 2.

[63] Gitelman, L quoted in Eubanks Winkler, A. (2018). The Intermedial Dramaturgy of Dramatick Opera: Understanding Genre through Performance. *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*. 42 (2).

[64] Eubanks Winkler, A. (2018). The Intermedial Dramaturgy of Dramatick Opera: Understanding Genre through Performance. *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*. 42 (2).

[65] Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. USA: Routledge. 22.

sexually promiscuous gypsy presented as ethnically exotic. There appears no single factor which affords conventionality; hence, the discriminants are blurred.

Considering this, one may be led to question whether it is indeed the male-female axis which acts as the main point of discrimination. Whilst the Contemporary age does not always present the ability to decipher the composer's true intentions, many comparable discriminants can be witnessed throughout the opera canon, wherein male otherness is presented as desirable. In the case of sexuality and speaking specifically of male promiscuity, the womanising male is a common feature of canonical works. Whether or not their morality is questioned as seen in the case of Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, The Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto,* and the titular character Don Giovanni, this is indeed a behavioural normalcy which appears attributable to the state of being male and its associated masculine characteristics. The desirability and heroism of ethnically "other" males is also visible in characters such as Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas* and Otello in Verdi's opera of the same name. Taking this into consideration, one can witness the increased number of "other" females meeting negative outcomes compared to their male counterparts. Such exemplifies Winkler's idea of operatic intermediacy in terms of how the presentation of females and indeed broader gender relies on 'fuse[ing] their criteria.'[66] However, one considers how the first part of this definition of intermediacy: 'falling between established categories'[67] could in turn be reframed from a contemporary perspective to allow for the abandonment of limiting parameters and in turn facilitate more radical creative reform.

Looking across to contemporaries in film, Yvonne Rainer's 1985 picture *The Man Who Envied Women* aims to disrupt the coherency of this intermediacy by removing the entire visibility of the female role. Trisha, the leading character in the film exists entirely off-camera to inhibit the visibility of fused discriminants from becoming fundamental constructs of her character. Through this strategy, Rainer suggests that the relationship between the visible and the invisible; and in the case of film and theatre, the character and the audience is the key to reconstructions of gendered dynamics.

---

[66] Vos, E quoted in Eubanks Winkler, A. (2018). The Intermedial Dramaturgy of Dramatick Opera: Understanding Genre through Performance. *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*. 42 (2), 2.

[67] ibid.

Ultimately, the intermediacy of opera as fusing categories, appears to create plausible incoherency with contemporary feminist ideologies and identity. However, I propose that reversing the habitual fusing of discriminating criteria through the increased facilitation of non-categorical performance could in turn enable the reconstruction of female visibility from all angles to create a state of female spectatorship.

Whose responsibility?

Again citing *The Feminist Director in Rehearsal,* Beth Watkins states 'the structure of authority [is] so often naturalised as a one way power dynamic between director and actors.'[68] Such aligns to Harold Cluman's observation in *On Directing* that '[a] director make[s] his own "law" depending not only on his own temperament or artistic inclination, but on the circumstances of the production.'[69] With the vast subjectivity of artistic inclination, the variables of creative interpretation are infinite. However, two limitations arise within Cluman's artistic freedoms that appear specific to opera from the canon; the first; the "law" that directors may create which is in essence, the limitations on visible female identity that varying historical works present if being staged in their original form. The second; the circumstantial position of works so ideologically disparate in gender identity being performed in the diverse and inclusive Contemporary age. With such a consideration, it may not be appropriate for one autocratic voice of artistic interpretation in the rehearsal room, rather in the case of gendered identity in the age of diversity, perhaps a truly radical approach to feminist and indeed broader re-envisioning is to replace directorial authority with collaborative working to construct intermedial realisations of identity. Such could aim to preserve compositional integrity whilst making room for the artistic and indeed personal inclination of the creatives and performers themselves. This facilitates the malleability of Judith Butler's performativity whilst preserving the composition itself in a structured and collaborative environment.

Speaking of breaking down directorial autocracy, Cece McFarland comments in *Becoming A Feminist Director in the Academy*; 'I focused on collective character development as one means of sidestepping actors focusing on what I, as the director, wanted of them, instead of

---

[68] Watkins, B. (2005). The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education. *Theatre Topics*. 15 (2), 187.

[69] Cluman, H (1997). *On Directing*. USA: Simon & Schuster. x.

focusing on what the show needed from their character.'[70] This insight poses unique questions in the case of canonical opera where if true alignment to the original material is sought, the performance requires the depiction of female "otherness." Such consequently appears counter-complementary to the state of feminist spectatorship. In context, McFarland implements John Lutterbie's approach outlined in *Codirecting: A Model for Men Directing Feminist Plays* as 'the principle [of]…locate[ing] in the performer the authority to make choices about the performance of the character.'[71]

Whilst the methods creatives may implement to create a collaborative expressive environment will be examined over the course of this thesis, this research is grounded in the belief that presentational performance decisions should be the realisation of the whole creative team and thus break down the autocracy of directorial vision. In a personal interview with international soprano Alison Langer, she stated 'the way we present gender should always be part of the directorial discussion right at the start of the process. We as performers need to understand why directorial decisions have been made, so we can effectively embody those decisions into our own performance.'[72] Whilst this alludes to the need for communication during the staging and blocking process, I propose that with a suggested methodology for encouraging collaborative working in line with contemporary feminist ideologies, embodiments of female characters will be all the more accessible to present and future audiences.

1.3.1   Finding attachment: Conjured memory as a method of relation: Creating "somewhere close"

Considering McFarland's approaches once more, she highlights her 'desire to de-center [her] power by deliberately not predetermine[ing] how the idea of conjured memory would influence a production.'[73] Rather, McFarland suggests that the process of utilising a specific, or

---

[70] McFarland, C. 2013. *Becoming a Feminist Director in the Academy*. PhD Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia. 135.

[71] Lutterbie, J quoted in McFarland, C. 2013. Becoming a Feminist Director in the Academy. PhD Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia. 135.

[72] Castrey, M. *Interview with Alison Langer.* June 2019.

[73] McFarland, C. 2013. *Becoming a Feminist Director in the Academy*. PhD Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia. 133.

"conjured" memory should come with the freedom to implement a method of personal relation to any given work. The aim of such is to enhance artistic potential by utilising the personal experiences of a performer. This appears similar to Stanislavsky's techniques of "what it?" and "emotion memory," yet, I suggest is more expansive in its scope of personal influence. Whilst emotion memory requires recalled feeling of lived experiences by the performer, and "what if" asks how that performer would emotionally react if they had not previously experienced the given dramatic situation, conjured memory considers wider reaction. Stepping outside of a singular emotional response, I suggest that this new method of conjured memory encourages awareness of other stimuli; namely surroundings and people, to educate an artistic realisation.

With Stanislavsky later abandoning his technique of emotion memory for its ability to induce hysteria in actors, the differences between these two techniques are important. I propose that conjured memory constitutes a complete picture of amalgamated emotional and sensory response. This is not solely limited to re-establishing psychological stimulus, rather, utilises the original awareness of a chosen point of focus as decided by the performer to achieve characterisation. For performers, the fundamental benefit of conjured memory is its ability to be tangible. In the spirit of championing a collaborative approach; memories and the sensual components of these are able to be shared through visuals, sounds, smells, tastes and touch as well as through technology and multimedia to build a collective realisation between all creatives. The success of this approach is acknowledged by McFarland wherein she states 'the comments from other cast members and the stage management crew served to make everyone in the room responsible for the body of knowledge we were gathering, or creating, about each character, which helped to de-center the director's role as the only one with the correct character interpretation.'[74] Such is further affirmed by director Rodula Gaitanou, who, in a Live Q & A stated 'what we all have to work on is to give creatives an opportunity, but also creatives in general who try to shed new light on the stories and [who] try to find a way to make these people [the operatic characters] relate to us today. I think it's very important that no matter what the historic frame that you might set the action [in], we have to see them [the

---

[74] McFarland, C. 2013. *Becoming a Feminist Director in the Academy*. PhD Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia. 137.

characters] as people who, yes, have this heightened set of emotions, but ultimately the starting place is somewhere which is very close to us.'[75]

With obvious benefits to the ease of achieving characterisation, this approach also holds potential to improve accessibility and relatability within contemporary audiences. Such is attested in the work of Juslin and Västfjäll, who investigated the link between emotional responses to music and cognitive appraisal. Juslin and Västfjäll set out six mechanisms that trigger emotional responses from a musical stimulus; '(a) automatic brain-stem reflexes to musical events such as loud, unexpected, or dissonant sounds, (b) evaluative conditioning— certain pieces are associated with pleasurable or negative events and evoke the same emotion as the original event, (c) emotional contagion—the emotion perceived by the listener is also experienced, (d) visual imagery associated with music, (e) associations between a piece and emotionally charged episodic memories, and (f) violation or fulfilment of musical expectations.'[76] This suggests a link between musical stimulus and a proportionate emotional response, and an emotional response that can be made even more complex through a stimulus that triggers either an emotional memory or what the perceived emotional response should be.

Such links back to the earlier suggestion of a greater distinction between the approaches of naturalism and realism. By prioritising naturalistic over realistic approaches, creatives are able to build a deeper understanding of not simply characters in isolation, rather, broader contextual mores which influence narratological action. This encompasses the broader dualism of the male-female binary which hegemonically prefers both male sex and masculine characteristics.

Looking to the work of a renowned contemporary practitioner, naturalistic focus is also a preference of director Katie Mitchell, whose aims are defined as creating 'life-like and life-sized acting.'[77] Mitchell encourages performers to answer six questions which mirror the work

[75] Gaitanou, R as quoted in Opera Holland Park. (2020) Live Q&A: Meet the Directors. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHbjWzYYNc0. Last accessed 7th August 2020.

[76] Juslin, PN & Västfjäll, D (2008) as cited in Swaminathan, S. Ed. Schellenberg, G. (2014). Current Emotion Research in Music Psychology. *Emotion Review*. 7 (2), 191.

[77] National Theatre. (Date Unknown). *Katie Mitchell Masterclass.* Available: https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/sites/default/files/katie_mitchell_masterclass_-_dtc_notes.pdf. Last accessed 21st July 2022.

of Stanislavsky; 'Who am I? Where am I? What time is it? What's just happened? What are the changes in the scene? What am I playing between the changes?' [78] Such is definable by 'biography, place, time, immediate circumstances, events and intentions.'[79] Consequently, by working from the perspectives of cognitive audience response and naturalistic performative action, the ability to 'shift the emphasis from the interiority of the male characters to that of the female characters'[80] arises.

Ultimately, both cognitive audience response and naturalism within the creative process help to establish a state of "closeness" between performer, role and work. Moreover, the intention to create this state facilitates the ability to share and understand influences which drive both narratological action and emotional response. Taking this into consideration, I suggest that collaborative approaches to constructing conjured memory could be a highly effective method to achieving and maintaining relatability in both performers and audiences alike.

1.3.2 Considering detachment: Moving away from convention and subject matter

A practice implemented by Brecht, defamiliarization, detachment, alienation and ultimately Verfremdungseffekt, or V-effekt, is described as 'a technique of writing and performance that makes the everyday appear surprising in order to enable a spectator to interrogate each dramatic event rather than regard it as part of a 'natural' order. By exposing the existing social system with its injustice, inequality and corruption as arbitrary rather than normal, the *V-effekt* demonstrates that it can be changed.'[81]

This idea of natural order is intriguing when applied to feminist theory and the overall female identity. Referring to Judith Butler's citations within *Gender Trouble*, attention is drawn to the work of de Beauvoir who believes that "woman" as a concept is inherently male. Woman is the "other" because male is the "seer" and as such the meaning of woman is given by man.[82]

---

[78] ibid.

[79] ibid.

[80] ibid.

[81] Gordon, R. (2017). *Brecht, interruptions and epic theatre.* Available: https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/brecht-interruptions-and-epic-theatre. Last accessed 20th July 2022.

[82] Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge. 8-12.

This belief is recognisable in opera from the canon, wherein the common position of the male as "seer" creates female characters who are often objectified, subjugated and meet unfortunate demises. In terms of reconstructing this pattern of behaviour and perception, Butler identifies the rejection of the male symbolic order by Irigaray, wherein women can only become subjects if they align to male subjectivity.[83] The idea of a male symbolic order not only attests to the male identity of the spectator but also alludes to a larger oppressive social system. Whilst canonical opera in its original form may have opposed the poststructuralist elements of Brechtian practice, our changing contemporary environment could effectively employ the ideologies behind this work to challenge oppressing institutions in a similar way.

Considering the reformist elements of the "intermediacy" of opera, that is existing between two states, the most contrasting realms within which predominantly canonical works exist is the times of context and contemporary. Embodied within these two different backgrounds is the opposing gendered ideologies brought about by the surrounding sociocultural mores of each period. As important as relatability is to the naturalism and the quality of the overall performance is the acknowledgement of the disparity between the embodied male hegemony of the original composition and equality and inclusion within the Contemporary age.

It may be considered that such enforced hegemony runs deep within works from the canon, to the point where narratives often depend on the depiction of the binary difference between the male and female genders. *Così fan tutte* is an excellent example wherein the construction of the predisposed unfaithful female constitutes the foundation upon which the entire narrative is built. It is not just the female identity that fuels legitimised patriarchal oppression, rather, the perception of conditioned female behaviour. Violetta in *La traviata* and the titular characters in *Tosca* and *Carmen* are just some of the many females who see tragic outcomes as a result of both their gender and their behaviour – most notably their sexuality being a theme of the legitimisation of their subjugation. Creating a link between female sexual transgression and tragic outcome is not an infrequent occurrence within opera from the canon. In *Verdi and the undoing of women*, Joseph Kerman synthesises Catherine Cléments's *Opera, or the undoing of women* and states; 'Clement contends women in opera are victimised, humiliated, and usually killed, seldom quickly. The patriarchal spectacle that is opera entails the ritual sacrifice of

---

[83] Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge. 13.

women.'[84] Kerman further suggests that 'the reasons women are destroyed in opera can almost always be traced to their sexuality.'[85] He proposes that this pre-determined negative outcome remains intact regardless of whether they struggle with infatuation as seen in Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera* or revel in it as seen in *Rigoletto*'s Gilda.

This brings two cross-disciplinary contemporaries to mind. The first, Gerry Folbré and his study on the etymology of the world "female" and how this transpires into established social treatment. Folbré reveals that the 'Aramaic New Hebrew term for "female" is nequébah, which is derived from the verb naqab, meaning "to curse."[86] This enforces the theory that females were viewed and treated as inferior versions of men. In linguistics, this extends to the word "female" where in Middle English, spoken from c.1150 to c. 1470 the 'syllable fe...fee, fa, feoh, Anglo Saxon feoh: cattle, money, property. Thus, "female" is equivalent to meaning, "property" of a "male."'[87] The second, Peggy Phelan's analysis of Yvonne Rainer's aforementioned *The Man Who Envied Women*, wherein visual ties between the male identity of the spectator and its intrinsic link with the appreciation of the leading female by the male protagonist are broken down.

In terms of how this transpires onstage, Peggy Phelan compares the presentation of women in this way to Freud's theory of fetish.[88] In other words, the surface perception of feminine behaviour inhibits the integration of meaningful female characters within narratives. It appears that sexuality is indeed the dominant mark of fetish and consequently, most attributable to female characters within the opera canon. Promiscuous or virginal, this behaviour becomes a fundamental construct of their character and consequently the broader female identity and outcome.

---

[84] Kerman, J. (2006). Verdi and the Undoing of Women. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 18 (1), 21.

[85] Kerman, J. (2006). Verdi and the Undoing of Women. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 18 (1), 22.

[86] Folbré, G, L. (2004) *The Eden Proverb*. Available at:
http://edenproverb.com/pdfs/partI/studyaids/3_Greco_RomanFableofAdam&Eve.pdf. Last accessed: 5th March 2021.

[87] ibid.

[88] Phelan, P. (1988). Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance. *The Drama Review*. 32 (1), 111

Whilst this idea of sexuality being the original female sin is more evident in works such as *Carmen*, *La traviata* embodies this idea in a manner that is arguably even more profound. It could be deduced that the initial status of Violetta as dying from consumption is because of her sexual transgression through her career as a prostitute. Any nobility she exhibits through her decision to leave Alfredo at the request of his father to prevent damage to the prospects of his daughter appears as a consequence of the original sin of her sexual promiscuity through prostitution. This in turn is presented as the source of her consumption, which ultimately constitutes her demise. Whether or not Verdi intended Violetta to be presented in this way or whether the nobility of her sacrifice was always intended to be the theme of her characterisation, the possibility of her sexual transgression constructing her outcome remains present. Perhaps to this end, Verdi was not condoning the occupation of Violetta, rather, suggesting that she found redemption in her sacrifice.

As the intersection of gender and sexuality creates a hegemonic preference of not just the male sex but also the masculine behaviour, many more demographics arising from the Contemporary age of diversity and inclusion are either marginalised or altogether excluded from canonical works. More plainly, our contemporary age affords many more creative considerations which have the capacity to appear unconventional and possibly even inappropriate against traditional productions of works from the opera canon. One such consideration is outlined in Judith Halberstam's theory of the "butch woman," namely, a person of female sex exhibiting masculine characteristics. Is this a consideration that could perceivably disrupt the axes of hegemonic male and masculine preference through Brechtian detachment from convention?

In personal interviews with Alison Langer and director Rebecca Meltzer concerning Opera Holland Park's 2019 production of *Un ballo in maschera*, the presentation and visible gender and sexual disruption in the breeches role of Oscar was discussed.

On approaching her performance of the role, Langer stated 'There are many things directors can do, for instance, it was decided that [Oscar] was to be androgynous. We actively decided not to describe their gender as binary – I didn't even have to decide myself. With that in mind, I addressed my walk, stance, speed of movement, and many other things to make this character as non-binary as possible. In a way, this made the music and characterisations both complimentary of each other and able to stand alone in their own right. Certainly, more needs

to be done to explore the new ways in which gender can be presented and these discoveries need to appear on a larger scale.'[89]

Meltzer added 'Gender was deliberately not discussed in the rehearsal room. If traditional works are being presented, the characters need to be viewed as individuals, and for any kind of operatic production, be it traditional or not, you can always find an angle that isn't generalised from a directorial point of view.'[90] She continued There is a lot of room for discovering new ways to cast the right way, be it transgender, gender inverted, or simply viewing each voice case by case to discover who is right for the part. All of this can still be achieved whilst maintaining the integrity of the composer's wishes.'[91]

Brechtian principles of detachment are grounded in alienating the audience away from preconceived notions and challenging their ideologies in a manner that may not be entirely visibly comfortable. However, from a contemporary standpoint, I propose that "detachment" does not always have to mean "alienation." Rather, this proposed framework will centre around the idea of detaching from convention to achieve a contemporary realisation. Indeed, there are many areas in which this detachment may take place. In her previous insight, Meltzer alludes to the power of casting to both disrupt excluding conventions and in turn integrate diversity and a greater variety of expressive parameters within opera. In addition, a 2019 article by opera creator Aiden Feltkamp asked the question of whether opera needs gendered voices. As a transgender singer, Feltkamp has experienced first-hand the difficulties of navigating his vocal position in works which are based on outdated gendered mores. He summarises, 'in the end, the onus should be on the system to support and correctly describe the artists within it, not on the artists to fit within its established parameters. A system that no longer serves its purpose, or that cannot expand to meet its purpose, must be redesigned.[92] Consequently, loosening convention by expanding the parameters of casting could be just one method of detachment in

---

[89] Castrey, M. *Interview with Alison Langer.* June 2019.

[90] Castrey, M. *Interview with Rebecca Meltzer.* July 2019.

[91] ibid.

[92] Feltkamp, A. (2019). *Does Opera Need Gendered Voice Types?*. Available: https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/does-opera- need-gendered-voice-types/. Last accessed 7th April 2020.

the Contemporary age. Such breaks the conventions of the performance itself and the logistical structures around it to heighten the extent of diversity, inclusion and representation.

Another such method of detachment could centre around rehearsal and broader creative practice to break the relationship between contemporary performer and canonical character. To highlight this further, one refers to the earlier suggestion of differentiating naturalism from realism, namely, abandoning the concept of creating a fixed environment of "realness" and instead creating a naturalistic environment that depicts the harshness of an opposing reality. Through performed reactions, staging and more, the performers themselves can be removed from their problematic environments through the reconstruction of visible identity. Whilst this chapter has shown how removing a female character from view prevents the alignment of such a character to the conditioned male identity of the audience gaze, feminist theorist and dramaturge Gayle Austin highlights how integrating the female perspective where the source material removes it can subvert audience appreciation and make way for new perceptions. This again appears grounded in detachment and facilitates a similar challenge of expectation and acceptance for the spectator.

Using Eugene O'Neill's play *The Iceman Cometh* as an example, Austin proposes three possible ways of working that elevate the female identity within the work.[93] The first option is the use of an all-female cast to shine the spotlight on the gender issues present within the piece, and the second is the use of a cross-gender cast where male and female roles are inverted. Such aims to distort the ability for the male gaze and the audience perception attached to it to reflect poorly on the female roles. Additionally, the possibility to include several Brechtian practices including satirisation, parody and caricature also arise to further break the apparent legitimisation of an inferior female position. However, whilst these first two propositions may indeed be viable in the theatre discipline, their application to opera proves more troublesome. The first evident issue concerns the practicalities associated with the male and female voice types swapping roles. If this were to be the case, it is likely that operatic scores would require substantial modification, which in turn jeopardises the compositional integrity of the piece. The second issue is with operatic works themselves and their frequent omission of a meaningful

---

[93] Austin, G (1990). *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. United States of America: University of Michigan Press. 36- 37.

female perspective altogether. Austin's third option speaks to this; she suggests the representation of missing women within narratives perhaps through actors playing such roles, the use of multimedia, voiceovers and more. The use of multimedia draws a parallel with the perception of intermediacy as demonstrated by Winkler, and further facilitates the ability for contemporary productions to exist between fixed or singular parameters of expression. This again suggests that a contemporary perception of appreciating canonical works as existing between two states, namely embodied gendered ideologies and spectator expectation, could restructure gendered convention.

The final option remains the more radical Brechtian process of alienation; that is making the normal seem abnormal. Whilst the perception of normalcy and the method of individual alienation is of course subjective, an effective example of Brechtian alienation is seen in Charlie Chaplin's performance in the 1926 play *Man Equals Man* wherein Chaplin questions the human identity and purpose within authoritarian social order by portraying objects and differing levels of power from comrade to commander to demonstrate the malleability of the human condition. Whilst the scope for the integration of complete alienation may be limited within canonical works, associated methods such as direct address to the audience or breaking the fourth wall, "standing beside the character" by reacting as performer to the situation faced by a character or even using illustrations and prompt cards to trigger a desired audience response may be a more experimental method of disrupting conditioned reaction and consequently triggering audiences to re-establish the inherently male identity of their spectatorship.

1.3.3 Applying the method of performativity to integrate the individual identities of performers: Constructing variable revisions with interpretive fluency

Structuring the ability for gendered characteristics to be approached with "performativity" depends on the rehearsal environment. With an autocratic director, there appears little room for interpretive fluency, however, if a collaborative environment is created, I suggest that a more relatable realisation may be achieved.

Performativity is centred around the belief that 'gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be…gender is always a doing, though not a doing by

a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.'[94] In this sense, gender is constituted by both language and physical action, yet no gender identity exists prior to the exhibition of physical characteristics that attest to any given identity. This appears as an amalgamation of the naturalistic approach of perceiving and understanding both intentional and non-intentional forces of influence which trigger visible action and reaction. Consequently, the process of engaging with performativity in practice reverses the idea that the identity of a person dictates their actions; rather actions, behaviours, gestures and other physical acts are both the result of the identity of an individual and a source that contributes to the physicalisation of this. For the purposes of this investigation, an act that is intentionally applied to constitute a desired identity shall therefore be referred to as "performative." With performative acts being appreciated as constructing personal identity, it is again apparent that performativity as a sole methodology may provide too much of a scope to make for coherent re-envisionings in line with the diverse spectrum of contemporary identity. With this in mind, structuring performativity in practice through a lens of targeting performer uniqueness offers performers the opportunity to add personal depth to characterisation already built within a collaborative setting.

From a theoretical perspective, Professor Albert Mehrabian whose research into methods of communication suggests that 'we overwhelmingly deduce our feelings, attitudes and beliefs about what someone says not by the actual words spoken, but by the speaker's body language and tone of voice.'[95] Three categories are employed within this theory; words, tone of voice and body language, which 'respectively account for 7%, 38%, and 55% of personal communication.'[96] Within the discipline of opera, words and tone of voice are largely restricted by the content of the libretto and the singing techniques applied to a particular role and passage of music. This leaves body language as the key focus of characterisation able to be unique to a particular performer. It is also this area of focus which affords the most possibility to convey dramatic intent with new and/or revised approaches including, but not limited to, Stanislavskian naturalism and Brechtian parody and V-effekt. Cece McFarland alludes to the

---

[94] Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge. 25.

[95] Mehrabian, A. Quoted in Patrick Rau, P. (2019). Attempts to Leverage Interaction Design to Mimic Emotional Care. In: *Cross-Cultural Design*. Switzerland: Springer. 355.

[96] Belludi, N. (2008). *Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55 Rule of Personal Communication.* Available: https://www.rightattitudes.com/2008/10/04/7-38-55-rule-personal-communication/. Last accessed 28th January 2021.

formation of uniqueness as being an additional means of exploration within the rehearsal room through her "living room" exercise. McFarland asks 'where do these characters spend their time? How does their space reflect them? What is important?'[97] Such encourages performers to create a tangible space which may be shared with visual stimulus to influence not just their own body language but the language of other performers and their characters who interact onstage. Such also facilitates the process of maintaining uniqueness to become collaborative and in turn, potentially more cohesive within a company.

With gesture being a central tenet of body language, one considers the discussions that could possibility take place to facilitate a coherent depiction of character onstage, reflective of the individual personality and identity of a performer. Specifically, one evaluates the extent of which the physical bodies of performers contribute to their visible characterisation. Indeed, the influence of such physicality is referenced again by Alison Langer in a personal interview on her characterisation of Oscar, wherein she stated 'I addressed my walk, stance, speed of movement, and many other things to make this character as non-binary as possible. In a way, this made the music and characterisations both complimentary of each other and able to stand alone in their own right.'[98]

Highlighting the influence of physicality further is the ability for movement alone to tell a story. In 2016 renowned choreographer Mark Morris devised a reimagined *Dido and Aeneas,* presented through the medium of dance. The aim of this production was to '[take] the focus off gender politics [highlighting] the beauty of the choral choreography – it's thunderclap simplicity, sometimes suggesting the flattened shapes of classical friezes, sometimes English court dancing, sometimes folkdance or a sailor's hornpipe.'[99] Of this production, critic Kyle MacMillan stated 'Morris deftly matches the opera's formal, structured style with his hybrid brand of formalized, ritualistic movement that draws on a surprising range of sources, including

[97] McFarland, C. 2013. *Becoming a Feminist Director in the Academy*. PhD Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia. 139.

[98] Castrey, M. *Interview with Alison Langer.* June 2019.

[99] Molzahn, L. (2015). *Dido and Aeneas' reworked and richer.* Available: http://digitaledition.chicagotribune.com/tribune/article_popover.aspx?guid=2d0dbf41-bdb1-403a-8fb1-12826b28e2a5.Last accessed 7th April 2020.

South and South-eastern Asian dance and even American sign language. At the same time, it is impossible to look at this choreography without thinking of the stylized figurative depictions on Greek pottery.'[100] Here, the intersection of the original unaltered composition and reimagined physical movement suggest that performativity can indeed be a useful tool to strengthen the visible and experienced connection between the performer and their character. Moreover, this suggests that narratological coherency is able to be maintained without a strict performance of the original libretto. Such may prove to be an essential observation when considering the possible strategies of achieving effective and coherent feminist re-envisionings.

1.4 Commencing investigation

Having considered both the issues facing the contemporary performance of opera from the canon and ways in which the re-envisioning of female presentation may be realised, I propose that feminist re-envisionings could be approached with three possible strands of creative exploration. Such are not the only possible approaches, rather are devised and explored as part of this study as proposed strategies to ultimately achieve a state of female and feminist spectatorship from a multi-wave perspective.

The three possible focuses of feminist re-envisioning proposed by this study are as follows:

   i)   Finding attachment: Conjured memory as a method of relation
           Creating "somewhere close"
   ii)   Considering detachment: Moving away from convention and subject matter
   iii)   Structuring performativity for uniqueness: Constructing variable revisions with
           interpretive fluency

This framework itself is inspired by Rodula Gaitanou's statement that 'the starting place is somewhere…is very close to us.'[101] By creating this accessibility between performer, creative,

[100] MacMillan, K. (2016). *In music and movement, Mark Morris troupe touchesAga tangled hearts of 'Dido and Aeneas'.* Available: https://chicagoontheaisle.com/2016/04/07/review-of-dido-and-aeneas-by-mark-morris-dance-group-at- harris-theater/. Last accessed 7th April 2020.

[101] Gaitanou, R as quoted in Opera Holland Park. (2020) Live Q&A: Meet the Directors. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHbjWzYYNc0. Last accessed 7th August 2020.

character and work, conventional performance and perceived expectation relating to the treatment of female roles may be meaningfully reconstructed in the Contemporary age. The aim of these three processes is to provide a proposed structure within the environment of collaborative creative working, whilst enabling the simultaneous realisation of a performance of the original composition and uniqueness for contemporary performers.

To preserve the integrity of the study, the same process and methodology will be applied to three different works, culminating in a reverse application of how a Contemporary production specifically written with a feminist incentive can be traced back to opportunities for the application of these three possible methods. Each work will be from a different period to widen the challenges and scope of exploration of this study. The investigation of each of these works will begin with a brief contextual exploration of the piece, outlining any specific gender issues that inhibit the female voice. This will then lead into a compare and contrast of Contemporary productions of this work, both feminist and traditional, to examine what decisions are being made in practice and how these align to changing feminist incentive. Following this, I will synthesise existing theory, the work of current practitioners and explore the proposed focus of re-envisioning in workshop 1[102] to outline how this given method of potential feminist re-envisioning may be applied in practice. This process will examine a range of different sources, from publications in the field of gender and performance theory to the insights of practitioners and the application of my own creative ideas. The ultimate aim of such is to empower creatives to implement, adapt and diversify these processes to achieve an inclusive and representative production.

The methods examined within this study have been selected for their different approaches to offer a diverse scope of potential working. With this in mind, it is intended that, in practice, one of these proposed methods is selected by creative practitioners in line with their favoured approach and applied to their performances. Whilst multiple methods may be used within a particular production, it is the intention of this investigation that these strategies be applied intentionally to a scene, role or work in order to avoid entanglement and/or contradiction of different strategies.

---

[102] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ██████████, 25th September 2022.

2. Dido and Aeneas: Conjured memory as a method of relation

2.1 Understanding the issues at hand: the feminine/masculine contradiction

In *The Cultural Politics of Dido and Aeneas*, Anthony Welch states that 'when theatres were re-established after 1660, artists and audiences found themselves facing fundamental questions. What is art? What is its role in the state? Who owns high culture? Whose interests does it serve?'[103] This post-structuralist question of which voice dictates truth and convention is reminiscent of the questions of relevance, method and representation facing contemporary productions of opera from the canon. Today, questions of relevance, accessibility and convention remain applicable; yet the considerations extend to the broader question of identity and relatability between work, performer, and spectator.

Welch further observes that Stuart Britain divided opinion on Purcell and Tate's work, questioning whether 'Dido and Aeneas [was] a coded commentary on James II's growing authoritarianism…[or] a warning…not to mistreat his English queen and her people'[104] The idea of Dido as an English queen is an intriguing consideration and highlights the tendency for imperialist art to become a conduit for 'political myth-making [where] those writers who chafed against the Stuarts Augustan myth reactivated ancient grievances against Virgil's artistry'[105] Despite this, 'his defenders lavished praise on Aeneas' civic heroism, his filial piety, his marital prowess and his concern for his people'[106] It is interesting that both Virgil's text and Purcell and Tate's opera should share similar regard for the treatment of the character Aeneas. The presentation of Aeneas as an honourable Trojan Prince within the source material of Virgil is mirrored in Purcell's composition wherein the differences in melodic treatment of the characters Dido and Aeneas is easily uncovered. Musically, Dido's weakness is represented through compositional methods including heightened melisma, imperfect and interrupted cadences and downward leaning chromaticism, whilst the writing of Aeneas opposes this greatly. Perhaps then, the key to new interpretations of this work lie in the ideological move to

---

[103] Welch, A. (2009). The cultural politics of Dido and Aeneas. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 21 (1), 2.

[104] ibid.

[105] Welch, A. (2009). The cultural politics of Dido and Aeneas. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 21 (1), 3.

[106] ibid.

the Restoration period where 'critics found Aeneas' abandonment unsettling'[107] and where the broader question of the identity of Dido as a queen, lover, powerful and yet powerless woman is more profoundly considered.

Broadly, Welch suggests that the character presentation of Dido encompassing her status of regency, position as *dux femina,* and intrinsic womanhood is a cost of political mythmaking. Such seeks to answer questions on the intersection of politics and art, the creative construction of depictions of history and the conventional state of nobility and social hierarchy. *Dido and Aeneas,* in this instance 'was concerned with just these questions about art and ideology, about the triangular relationship among the artist, political authority and cultural past.'[108] Perhaps then the high level of conflict in the characterisation of Dido is entirely intentional and designed to act as a mechanism for post-structuralist questions to be asked, if not answered.

Indeed, this rich tapestry of influences to construct a relationship between politics, culture and any resulting art is evident within the score itself. Purcell amalgamates several international styles to construct a sense of fusion that can enrich both the performance and the audience experience. Conductor Avi Stein stated, 'the narrative parts for the soloists reflect the theatrical style of singing that comes from Italy, which he infuses with this spicy, jagged, beautiful harmony such that every word becomes expressive…the famous arias…reflect the aesthetic of Italian opera…but the composer infuses it with unprecedented poignancy [whilst] the extensive choral and dance-instrumental sections show the influence of French style.'[109] Consequently, one can surmise that the influence of multiple origins construct multiple opportunities for drawing new parallels to strengthen the relationship between work, performer and receiver in the Contemporary age. Such is attested by arts writer Thomas May who states that 'Dido and Aeneas is an exceptionally malleable opera. These uncertainties of origins, purpose and even content open the door for creative interpretive choices with regard to almost every parameter: not only decisions about vocal casting, instrumentation, chorus size, articulation, and similar matters, but satisfying ways to fill the missing gaps with complementary material.'[110] When

---

[107] ibid.

[108] ibid.

[109] Dido and Aeneas (2019) by Henry Purcell. Directed by Mary Birnbaum [Julliard, New York. 20th-22nd February 2019], 6.

[110] Dido and Aeneas (2019) by Henry Purcell. Directed by Mary Birnbaum [Julliard, New York. 20th-22nd February 2019], 8.

referring to the music itself, it could be suggested that the word "uncertainties" seen in this insight could be replaced with "diversity." Without any clear origins, there are less performance traditions that creatives may seek to be faithful to. Such has the potentially to substantially expand the options available to creatives and performers in the contemporary age.

It is especially notable that struggle of Dido forms the central construction of the narrative. In her influential essay *In Search of Dido*, Janet Schmalfeldt observes 'her plight is not completely clear. Since Tate suppresses all references to a slain husband for whom Dido might be grieving, and since his libretto never once suggests that Venus and Cupid have impassioned Dido, we must at first guess why Dido supressed with torment not to be confessed.'[111] Such is indeed the case that the grief experienced by Dido is never really expanded upon. Consequently, one may contend that her depression is never really legitimised and as such, her depressive state becomes entangled with the apparent fragility of her female gender. Schmalfeldt suggests that the self-described pity of Aeneas by Dido could 'mean that she fears she loves him too much.'[112] Simultaneously to this, 'Purcell himself seems to undercut the integrity of Aeneas…drawing forth…melodramatic bravado, if not slickness.'[113] In essence, Schmalfeldt contends that in the time of Purcell and Tate, Virgil's *Aeneid* would have been a seminal piece of literature expected to be read. However, it is perhaps the broader sociocultural mores of the time which suppress Dido and reduce the extent of the development of Aeneas in favour of heightened bravado and limited substance within his character. Despite substantially pre-dating Purcell's opera, Virgil's Dido shows a little more strength of character, yet without adequate framing of her circumstances, her emotional fragility appears to become entangled with foregrounded discriminants, namely her female gender.

Hilary LaBonte observes that 'the opera was embedded with "morals"'[114] regarding the role of women in imperialist enterprises and the "negative" influence of men and passion on the actions of women. The performance of such would have helped in the inculcation of respectable

[111] In Search of Dido. (2001). Schmalfeldt, J. *The Journal of Musicology*. 18(4), p.597.

[112] ibid. 598.

[113] ibid.

[114] LaBonte, H. (2019). *Analyzing Gender Inequality in Contemporary Opera*. [Online]. . Available at: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1562758176443906&disposition= [Accessed 10 April 2023].

and expected feminine virtues. In the context of the earliest documented performances of the work by educational establishments for girls, the socioculturally expected proper feminine virtues may indeed have aligned to the depiction of Dido's fragility by Purcell and Tate. However, it is perhaps more fitting that contemporary work should reframe "femi**nine** virtues" to "femi**nist** virtues." This suggestion of enhancing the female voice in line with changing mores is developed and expanded upon in the ensuing chapter, and further considers the proposal of Dido's entanglement with gender discriminants being utilised as a potential mechanism for meaningful re-envisioning.

Another key feature of this work is the presence of mythical elements; namely the sorcerer/sorceress, witches and spirit, who in turn have a substantial influence on the narratological action. Being a work of Baroque origin, the identity of these as more sinister beings removed from the natural world as opposed to the holy deities seen in the likes of Gluck's *Orpheus ed Euridice* is notable. In the Contemporary environment, this unnatural characterisation affords greater dramatic freedom for performers and creatives. In turn, this also facilities the possibility of increased diversity through the opportunity to imagine non-human characters who are created with a sense of closeness to the originating performer.

As a starting point for this idea of finding "somewhere close," Wendy Heller observes that 'for well-read humanists such as Nahum Tate, the debate about women provided ample opportunity to demonstrate one's erudition, breadth of knowledge, and familiarity…or to prove one's skill in logic and rhetoric.'[115] To this end, contemporary consideration poses the question of whether a similar methodology of "finding closeness" was indeed followed by Purcell and Tate in their interpretation of the source material by Virgil. This goes some way to validate contemporary working following the same or similar methodology. With the possibility of female sexuality and more specifically the lack of resistance to temptation being derived as the original sin for which the continued punishment of women is legitimised, it is interesting to note Heller's observation that Tate omits 'the usual pro-female defence of Eve's encounter with the serpent.'[116] Tate considers that Eve maintained and carried with her the beauty of The Garden of Eden in her looks, whilst Adam 'complains of Paradise without his Eve, but never after

---

[115] Heller, W. (2003). 'A Present for the Ladies': Ovid, Montaigne, and the Redemption of Purcell's Dido. *Music & Letters.* 84(2), 191.

[116] ibid.

exile, of his Eve without Paradise.'[117] A clear link between the perception of the visible attributes of females and the male identity of the spectator is evident here. In this instance, the sentiment of Adam's appreciation of Eve outside of Paradise may indeed appear to encapsulate a pro-female sentiment, however the entanglement of Eve's visibility as carrying the beauty of Eden with her questions the extent of which her identity beyond what is visible is considered.

Yet, the synthesis of Tate's interpretation of the events within *Genesis* by Heller considers that Eve is not a sinner. Rather, the focus is on Adam's changed perception of Eve when his circumstances are reframed. Moreover, Eve as "object" is perceived through the eyes of Adam in a manner reminiscent of gaze theory as one who carries beauty with her. It is through the lens of male appreciation that her beauty is constructed and considered. Could it therefore be perceivable that behind the possible proto-feminist position of Dido as power and provider is actually an interpretation of Dido as "object?" In this sense, Aeneas is truly the "seer" and Dido, like Eve, is perceivably stronger or weaker depending on the movement and circumstances of the males around her.

Linking the perception of Adam by Tate with the characterisation of Aeneas; altered visible perception because of circumstantial triggers appears a key theme. However, within Purcell and Tate's work, the circumstantial change appears to frame Dido with the conflicted presentation of both feminine and masculine characteristics. I suggest that it is highly plausible that this inherent contradiction constructs her demise at the hands of the male spectator. Consequently, reconstructing the roles of "doer" and "seer" through the suggested method of establishing closeness could be a viable and effective focus of exploration in contemporary work.

Grace Starry West observes in her paper *Caeneus and Dido* that 'if we view Dido's story under the aspect of her changing sexual roles…she does embrace a heroic destiny, but she also finds that she desires a man's love. [She is] Aeneas' lover and the ruler of Carthage: her desires for love and her heroic ambition bind her to two conflicting ways of life'[118] Here, the dualism of the male and female binary can be reflected upon, yet this is a challenging concept to apply to

---

[117] Tate, N quoted in Heller, W. (2003). 'A Present for the Ladies': Ovid, Montaigne, and the Redemption of Purcell's Dido. *Music & Letters.* 84(2), 191.

[118] West, G. (1980). Caeneus and Dido. *Transactions of the American Philological Association. 10(1), 318.*

the role of Dido. With embedded dualism initiating a state of one axis dominating another, the extent of the identity conflict within Dido is especially apparent. As dux femina, Dido takes on a masculine position of strength and control. Therefore, her position of weakness in love that ultimately constructs her demise is depicted as the opposing feminine position. It is interesting to note that, upon his departure to follow Jove's command, Aeneas appears to appeal to the masculine role of ruler and regent which Dido seems to have rejected. In an apparent switching of gendered roles, Aeneas asks Dido "what shall lost Aeneas do? How, Royal Fair, shall I impart the God's decree, and tell you we must part?" However, Dido rejects this emotional plea by accusing Aeneas of deceit, in turn attesting to her own insecurities relating to whether she could ever have been truly loved; "thus on the fatal bank of Nile, weeps the deceitful crocodile.' To Dido, Aeneas' emotion is tantamount to "crocodile tears" yet, contrasting to social expectation, she is not hysterical. However, the dualism between stoicism and turmoil: outer and inner persona quickly becomes apparent in her libretto "to your promis'd empire fly and let forsaken Dido die." Such points to the state of female victimhood often associated with this character. Aeneas nobly proclaims in a manner that again affirms both political and emotional strength; "In spite of Jove's command, I'll stay. Offend the Gods, and Love obey." Following this, the answer of Dido "to death I'll fly if longer you delay," coupled with melisma and rapid tempo do little to enforce any kind of masculine strength that may have been previously perceivable. Thus, the potential for the reversal of apparent gendered roles is never fully realised, and rather, Dido and Aeneas are embedded in positions of respective weakness and strength pursuant to their genders. Reinforcing this further, West observes 'she [Dido] has just implied that she is incapable of protecting Carthage or herself and so cannot rule.'[119]

2.1.1 Summarising the patriarchal environment at play

When this work was composed, patriarchy as an institution was greatly restrictive to the female role within the arts and broader society. An effective summary of the female position can be found in Caroline Davidson's *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles* wherein she states that analysis of a female's work from 1650 to the pre-Industrial period highlights 'the sheer physical drudgery involved in carting water, collecting and drying turds for fuel, and servicing at the most basic of levels a family's culinary needs.'[120] Whilst the

---

[119] West, G. (1980). Caeneus and Dido. *Transactions of the American Philological Association. 10(1), 320.*

[120] Davidson, C. (1986). *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles*. London: Chatto & Windus.

word "drudgery" does much to summarise this position, the insight into house-based work reinforces the segregating institutions of salon culture, which not only create a dualistic binary between the roles of women and men but also further removes the female from public view. This makes the timing of Purcell's work all the more intriguing, where Dido, as dux femina appears to, at least on the surface, transcend this position of drudgery and appear so visible in her position of regency. However, I would propose that the broader contention of Dido's outcome feeds into the idea that a female in this position does not fit with the natural order, and as such, will always produce a negative end.

2.2 Comparing and contrasting contemporary productions

In this exercise, I will compare and contrast three productions of *Dido and Aeneas*: one taking on a performance closer to the original setting, one staged by a specifically feminist opera company and the last a reimaged setting of the work. For the purposes of this study, the three productions I will be examining are the Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti, Moderna's more traditional 2020 realisation, the Better Strangers Feminist Opera Collective's 2012 staging and the 2017 performance project undertaken by King's College retitled as *Dido and Belinda*. By examining three very different approaches, I hope to present a greater understanding of the strengths and limitations in each approach to overcoming patriarchal problems embodied within the work, which will in turn inform how a proposed approach to re-envisioning may be achieved in the Contemporary age.

Profiles and incentives of each work

Dido and Aeneas (2020) – Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti – Director: Stefano Monti

This production was performed at the time of theatres reopening in Italy after the pandemic and in the face of several logistical restrictions. Of this production, director Stefano Monti stated, 'the staging had to be elastic and adapt to a fluid situation dictated by regulations, epidemiological trends, and above all emotional perception.'[121] Monti set out to present

[121] Monti, S. (Date unknown). *his Sunday, OperaStreaming broadcasts Dido and Aeneas with director Stefano Monti live from the Teatro Comunale di Moden*. [Online]. Opera Streaming. Last Updated: Date unknown. Available at: http://nickythomasmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/OperaStreaming-Dido-Aeneas-press-release.pdf [Accessed 4 May 2023].

Purcell's opera in its original style, whilst maintaining an emotional connection with the audience despite restrictions of distance. This production was selected for analysis given its relevance to the contemporary post-pandemic environment and the fact that, even in light of this, the presentation of gender is not documented as being a specific consideration. As such, analysis of this production makes clear the extent of which a lack of gender-specific exploration may actually increase distance between work and audience.

Dido and Aeneas (2012) – Better Strangers Feminist Opera Collective – Director: Jessie Holder and Claudia Guastella

This production aimed to specifically invert the way in which Dido was perceived by audiences. Taking on a more radical approach, it is notable that this production focused this change on the simultaneous elevation of Dido and reduction of Aeneas. Thus, it is suggested that a state of female supremacy is preferred over a state of gender equality. Here, the Better Strangers Feminist Opera Collective also employed other media to provide heightened narratological coherency of their re-framed characters and, for a specifically feminist production, took an especially second wave stance.

Dido and Belinda (2017) – Kings College – Director: Ella Marchment

Marchment's staging of this work took an incredibly radical journey of reframing the piece as *Dido and Belinda* to focus on the relationship between these two female characters. Diversity and representation was a central incentive, yet it is noteworthy that no specific female elevation was centralised. Rather, the reframed perspective of the two central female characters was presented as the core theme of the work over any inference of Dido's decline. Aeneas was therefore not a catalyst to this, rather, he was an obstructor of her freedom that was removed through Dido and Belinda's own doing. This was an incredibly feminist production, though achieved from an angle of legitimising individuality rather than elevating position.

In order to provide a systematic and detailed analysis, this comparison will be constructed upon the same variables applied to each performance. Considering the context of the work and the viewpoints of theorists and practitioners previously synthesised, I propose that the fundamental barrier to a feminist perspective being realised in this work is the changing gendered roles of Dido and her amalgamated political position. Additionally, the heroism of Aeneas compared

to the femininity of Dido creates a heightened sense of gender dualism, whilst the binaries of the human-spirit comparison further point to human fallibility. I will examine how these productions present such problems and subsequently propose how an approach of "conjured memory" could be utilised to achieve an elevated female perspective.

2.2.1 Dido's changing gendered roles

i)   Better Strangers Opera Collective

The belief at the centre of Better Strangers' feminist take on *Dido and Aeneas* is that Dido's death does not correlate to her position of power, and as such, any power displayed by this female role is undermined in the closing stages of the work. In an interview, producer/director Jessie Holder stated 'the main question I want to ask of the work is why Dido dies. That's what's ultimately led me personally to [this] staging. I don't believe that people die of a broken heart…and I don't believe that the Queen of Carthage has the kind of emotional pallor that lends itself to dying of a hissy fit after the bloke you've known for a couple of days decides it's time to move on…I [also] want to know what it is about the witches that gives them so much power over Dido.'[122] Whilst the link between the presentation of Dido and the correlation with the spiritual characters speaks to a further potential barrier to achieving a feminist re-envisioning, the controversy surrounding Dido's death and how this contextualises her position of power is used by the Better Strangers Opera Collective as a catalyst for development.

A tool used by this group was the highlighting of is the application of newspapers to integrate a contemporary re-imagining of additional context with the original compositional and narratological material. One such example highlighted a negative public opinion of Aeneas and his impact on the stability of the kingdom. Holder stated that the idea behind this was the transmission of 'the idea that Dido's story runs deeper than [what] the text of the opera implies. I think we're helping the audience along there with the addition of newspapers, which help to flesh out what might be going on beyond the confines of Dido's palace and what kind of impact her dalliances might be having outside. In the mythology, Dido is a really great ruler who is

---

[122] Bad Reputation. (2012). *The Return of Better Strangers Feminist Opera Collective!*. [Online]. Bad Reputation: A Feminist Pop Culture Adventure. Available at: https://badreputation.org.uk/2012/07/24/the-return-of-better-strangers-feminist-opera-collective/ [Accessed 3rd November 2022].

essentially completely derailed by Aeneas' arrival on the scene. I want the audience to get a sense of that…I also want to transmit the idea that Dido's death, to me, seems impossible with the impulse towards self-destruction.'[123]

Considering a theoretical viewpoint, this practice appears reminiscent of both second and third wave feminist thought. In one instance, the negative press associated with Aeneas seems reminiscent of Dolan's radical feminism, wherein the female attributes are presented as superior to the male. Here, the reduction of the public acceptance of Aeneas is used to create simultaneously elevate the position of Dido. Yet, within this particular practice, I would suggest that the core function is not to reduce the credibility of Aeneas, rather, to present Dido with a heightened level of control and respect.

Ethnomusicologist Katherine Meizel surmises multivocality as 'the negotiation of sound and Self, individual and culture, medium and meaning, ontology and embodiment.'[124] The addition of newspapers to deepen the connection of the audience with the story and the closeness that they are able to establish with Dido utilises a contemporary cultural medium to enhance meaning. This also considers the idea of mixed media as a method of transmitting contemporary feminist incentive. Indeed, with enhanced forms of media and production capability, the ability to implement a method such as this is even more feasible in the present age and could perhaps be further utilised to create meaningful re-envisionings.

It is also interesting to note the BSOC's approach to the female gendered identity as a whole within this production. Jessie Holder states: 'if we go by the letter of the Aeneid, Belinda is probably Dido's sister, but here she could be anything - a sister, a mother, a cousin, a friend, a maidservant. Second Woman is still worse…[in this production] we've actually merged these two roles - that's how indistinct these characters are.'[125] The amalgamation of Belinda and the Second Woman into one singular role is an intriguing method of adding value to female characters who frequently appear insignificant within the central narrative. The role of Belinda often appears so underdeveloped considering her closeness with the titular character of Dido,

---

[123] ibid.

[124] Meizel, K. (2020). *Multivocality: Singing on the Borders of Identity*. London: Oxford University Press. p.1.

[125] Better Strangers Opera Collective. (2011). *Dead heroines: Dido*. [Online]. Better Strangers Opera. Available at: http://betterstrangersopera.blogspot.com/2011/10/dead-heroines-dido.html#more On perfectionism and performance [Accessed 3 November 2022].

yet in this production, two more substantial female roles as opposed to three diluted parts facilitated a deeper understanding of the female insights and position within Carthage. By Belinda performing the aria *Oft she visits this lov'd mountain*, the construction of a teasing and cunning side of this character emerges in a manner that suggests her extensive influence over the union of Dido and Aeneas. Such provides greater scope for the performer to develop an enhanced characterisation of this frequently overlooked role. In turn, this creative decision making enhances the female contribution to the narratological action and mirrors contemporary relationships much more effectively to expand the extent of closeness between work, character and spectator. In turn, by enhancing the position of the characters around Dido, they too appear to have more of a part to play in her decline. Consequently, her ultimate demise is presented as less a product of her own hysteria and rather, a circumstantial reaction to her treatment by other individuals and the influence of wider socio-cultural forces.

ii)   Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti

Whilst the BSOC's presentation of Dido's changing gendered roles occurs from a position of contemporary reaction, the Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti (TCLP's) production appears to take a stance of presentation over reformation. It is unclear whether the presentation of gendered mores as they originally appear within the work occurs from a position of defiance or vision of protest, or whether the chosen mechanisms for depicting the gender difference are simply a statement of fact. The first decision of note is the exterior costume cage around the female characters of Dido, Belinda and the Second Woman. In addition, the golden costume of Dido compared with the darker colours of the attire of her female counterparts appears strikingly metaphorical of a gilded cage, wherein Dido appears to live a life of luxury without freedom. Conversely, Dido visibly removes her golden crown and cage prior to her final lament, which not only enforces her vulnerability, but in the context of this apparent metaphor, appears to suggest that her true freedom is in death. This appears problematic when considering that one of the fundamental challenges of presenting this work in the Contemporary age is the changing identity of the leading female role from embodying stronger masculine and weaker feminine characteristics. It is noteworthy that she appears to bow to Aeneas upon accepting him. This appears to place the position of her gender identity as of higher importance than her elevated political rank over the Trojan Prince. Such reinforces this chapter's earlier synthesis of the surrounding patriarchy of this period which appreciates the position of Dido as against the natural order and therefore predetermined to produce a negative outcome.

Perhaps a feminist reading of this concept may be to avoid Dido bowing to Aeneas and perhaps even reverse this to enforce her regency. Following this, Dido could be seen to remove her crown at the point of the commencement of her relationship with Aeneas, to frame the ensuing union as a very human interaction, rather than being politically motivated. There is then the potential for Dido to put on her crown back when she orders Aeneas away, or even discard it altogether to deconstruct any amalgamation between power and gender. Here, the crown could be used as a metaphor for the entanglement of politicism with gendered and personal identity.

The vocal performances too appear to prioritise the vulnerability of Dido over her strength. In her opening aria, Michaela Antenucci as Dido utilises increased ornamentation than is typically performed including some unexpected angular leaps. Whilst this is effective in showcasing Antenucci's ease of register transition, in the context of how the gendered role of Dido is perceived, this constructs even more uncertainty within her character. Over the course of the performance, this does not appear coincidental, with Antenucci's increased use of portamento contrasting to the assertive performance Mauro Borgioni gives as Aeneas. Conversely, Borgioni utilises the full extent of his lower resonance and minimal physical movement to provide an even greater sense of authority to this character than is expected. It is unclear whether this was an intentional dramatic choice or the individualism of each performer, however, in the latter instance, one considers how the casting of these two singers creates a very dualistic depiction of the two titular roles within this work and, if a more balanced gender presentation is desired, perhaps different casting or creative decisions could be made.

Perhaps, considering the extent of which this production has made visible her lack of freedom and feminine vulnerability, a more stoic performance of Dido's arias would have elevated her strength and dignity. A feminist re-imaging of this production could also suggest a change of the ending, which in its original form shows Dido drowning in a visible sea whilst Belinda looks on. Whilst the presence of Belinda at this moment may seek to elevate her position as a sister and confidante, it is, as Jessie Holder suggests, problematic to show Dido's death from a contemporary perspective. Her demise appears too entangled with the atypical nature of her position as a female in power, and it could therefore be suggested that this ending would be best deconstructed. Perhaps a feminist re-envisioning of this ending would see Belinda reaching out to Dido in a manner of implied salvation. In this sense, her demise becomes unclear in favour of a female-led resolution.

iii)   King's College

The first thing to note about this production is its contemporary setting which reframes Dido's position as leader of her family fashion label in the context of London Fashion week. The re-envisioning of Dido and Belinda's central characterisation does much to re-mark the changing gendered roles in the presentation of Dido. In this staging, her position as CEO is presented as second to her desire to escape the restricting parameters of the lack of family and social acceptance afforded to her same sex relationship with Belinda. Upon commencing work on this production, director Ella Marchment stated that 'we wanted something that felt very contemporary and relevant to modern audiences.'[126] Indeed, the same sex relationship of the two leading characters diversifies this work and the demographics and communities that this production is able to represent. However, it is also noteworthy how Dido's position of dux femina in the original setting is deconstructed in favour of a duel elevation of both female roles.

Marchment cites a mix of influences in terms of the presentation of these characters; cabaret, punk and avant-garde fashion, all of which heighten the degree of free female love and choice. It is however also possible that the new backdrop of London Fashion Week could infer the extent of which the female position is often "on display" in both the environment of the original setting and arguably the contemporary environment of today.

Considering Dido's restructured priority of escaping restriction over leading her business, she is not visually presented in a manner that would connote the stereotypical CEO. She wears high stilettos, jeans and sparkly tops and any kind of inference of her position as a businesswoman and a heterosexual bride is presented somewhat satirically. For example, Dido is humorously presented with an ill-fitting veil upon the arrival of Aeneas and in the latter stages of the work, wears a Tudor-like collar as if to parody her position of leadership. Here, it appears that accessibility is the key incentive, with the proposed method of "finding closeness" between performers and audiences alike being of particular relevance.

---

[126] Marchment, E. (2017). *Dido And Aeneas reimagined as Dido & Belinda - A Performance Project From King's College London*. [Online]. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h38DMVBi9IM [Accessed 9 April 2023].

With contemporary accessibility being a key theme of this work, Marchment's production also engaged with musical modifications to reinforce the new setting and stylise the score in this manner. In this sense, it is notable how the frequently accented emotional fragility of Dido in the original composition is inverted from a construction of her instability to a show of strength. Of this work, musical director Leo Geyer stated that 'the purpose of this project is to make sure that all performers have the opportunity to engage creatively. We're changing sometimes subtle things like articulation, dynamics and texture to then much more extreme things [like] changing the performance style, implanting rhythms and creating a really very different sound.'[127] Such musical alterations further speak to the gender inequalities depicted within the original music and the extent of which these oppress female characters. In this updated production, jazz-infused rhythm, re-orchestration, the change of texture and increased vocal decorations and musical freedom remove much of the hesitancy which compositionally constructs the role of Dido, allowing it to be brought closer to the identity of the performer. Mezzo-soprano Camilla Bull, who played the role of Dido in this production observed that this work aims to 'turn stereotype on its head and show women as strong characters.'[128] She further stated, 'there's a lot of strong decisions [about] how the women move and how the women communicate themselves [in this production.]…I did an audition just this week and the use of my body is much freer since this project started.'[129]

One of the most powerful examples of this increased freedom is Dido's timbral change to sing "thy hand, Belinda" in a sotto voce, conversational manner, then leading into an over-embellished "darkness shades me." Such reframes this despair-ridden recitative as the playful construction of a fake suicide note which would enable Dido and Belinda to run away together.

Consequently, this production inverts the idea of the flawed dux femina and instead sees Dido actively retaliate against that concept. In terms of the theoretical feminist alignment, this again appears as a more contemporary idea whereby Dido does not adapt her persona in order to elevate herself within her oppressing social context, rather, she refuses her place in it altogether.

---

[127] Geyer, L. (2017). *Dido And Aeneas reimagined as Dido & Belinda - A Performance Project From King's College London*. [Online]. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h38DMVBi9IM [Accessed 9 April 2023].

[128] Bull, C. (2017). *Dido And Aeneas reimagined as Dido & Belinda - A Performance Project From King's College London*. [Online]. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h38DMVBi9IM [Accessed 9 April 2023].

[129] ibid.

2.2.2 Aeneas's heroism

    i)   Better Strangers Opera Collective

In her approach to creating a feminist imaging of *Dido and Aeneas*, Jessie Holder is inspired by her opinion on how Aeneas appears within Purcell and Tate's opera and Virgil's original text. Referring to the latter in an interview, Holder states 'In the grip of a fearful storm, when better heroes…would set to reassuring their crew or taking an 'all hands-on deck' approach, Aeneas leans over the side and whines about how his mummy is never there when he needs her. This pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the poem.'[130] She compares this appreciation of Aeneas to his presentation within the opera, suggesting 'we can't argue that he gets more effective characterisation than Dido does. He barely even has an aria to himself. He's as much a pawn in the witches' game as she is… He doesn't seem to command authority the way Dido does, and though she talks about him a lot, the audience is never really shown what the fuss is about.'[131] This offers two interesting observations; the difference in character depiction between Virgil and Purcell and the possibility of his underdeveloped character being a potential catalyst for the elevation of the female perspective within productions of the work.

One could argue that the weakened presentation of Aeneas in the Virgil does not proportionally equate to the level of heroism he is afforded in Purcell and Tate's work. Looking then through the lens of contemporary feminism, one considers how multivocality may also be applied to Aeneas to deconstruct the preferential position of not only the male sex but the masculine behaviour. Considering the difference in the presentation of Aeneas between the two works, the operatic piece appears more fully reflective of the patriarchal environment surrounding it, which itself can be greater deconstructed with contemporary work.

In this production, it seemed that Aeneas' conventional appearance was inverted. Opposing his status as a Trojan Prince, he was not physically a "warrior," rather, embodied a much more accessible physique representative of a male of average build. It could even be suggested that this production treated Aeneas in a manner not dissimilar to Jill Dolan's radical feminism,

---

[130] Better Strangers Opera Collective. (2011). *Dead heroines: Dido*. [Online]. Better Strangers Opera. Available at: On perfectionism and performance [Accessed 3 November 2022].

[131] ibid.

wherein the female perspective is deliberately elevated above the male through enforced superiority. However, the contemporary point of difference here was the framing of how this took place. Dido does indeed appear elevated in this feminist production, but this is not realised by deliberately weakening Aeneas. Rather, the heighted exploration of her emotional state moves away from a focus on irrationality and fragility. Amalgamating this with the lack of over-heroism within the character of Aeneas, it is arguable that both gendered characters appear more accessible. Aeneas did not move in a god-like manner, nor access a particularly assertive resonance, rather, he became humanised. Alongside this exploration strengthening the character of Dido, I would suggest that this process also liberates the character of Aeneas and provides the performer with a wider range of expressive opportunity to make this easily superficial role relatable to their individual identity. Referring back to the method of conjured memory to provide closeness, Aeneas as a role is able to be much more easily accessed by modern performers. Not only does the deconstruction of over-heroism give the female counterpart space for heightened development, but so too does the male character become much more accessible and diverse through closeness that is feasible and realistic to all identities.

One considers whether the villianisation of Aeneas is an appropriate way to achieve a feminist performance. Whilst this production did not overtly align to this rationale, the gendered positions were somewhat rebalanced through a reduction in Aeneas' original persona. I would argue that a truly feminist re-envisioning is achieved through positive reconstruction of all gender. To this end, I propose that, rather than intentionally stripping him of his power and validity, exploring and physicalising vulnerability in the role of Aeneas is an essential way of achieving greater depth both of the titular roles. Thus, his departure is a point of careful consideration and a part of the work where one suggests physicalised turmoil in Aeneas could be most carefully considered. Whilst this production executes gendered re-envisioning well, perhaps with a heightened exploration of Aeneas' turmoil upon his departure, a more sincere deconstruction of his heroism could be achieved without consciously perpetuating weakness. This in turn could frame the later emotional outpouring of Dido as more accessible and less irrational.

ii)   Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti

The identity of Aeneas as a hero appears very consciously enforced in this production, yet there also appear subtle indications of potential for feminist development.

The first point of note is the musical identity of this character. Having previously identified Mauro Borgioni's vocal assertiveness in this role, it is significant that the increased presence of percussion should be employed to highlight this even more. The blocking also fuels this sense of domination, with a particular area of note being the staging of the start of the second act, where Dido and Belinda are seated, mimicking playfighting whilst Aeneas walks about the stage with arms outstretched. Musically, this leads into Aeneas' recitative *Behold, Upon My Bending Spear*, which frames this blocking as an incarnation of the male hunt. In this instance, Dido and Belinda are the prey, and Aeneas the hunter.

Yet, there are subtle elements of Aeneas' visual characterisation which appear to embody feminist thought. Most notably, there is a visible chain on Aeneas' costume, which further points to Jessie Holder's observation of Aeneas also being a pawn in the witch's game. Amalgamating this with gender theory, one can draw a comparison with Sue-Ellen Case's observation of the importance of technical disciplines on the construction of perceivable gender.[132] In this case, costume appears to directly demonstrate a degree of restriction in both characters. Here, Aeneas wears the regalia of a warrior, yet the placement of a small chain at the centre of his costume across his chest appears to physicalise both the restrictions of his union for the sake of duty and indeed his manipulated position engineered by the witches. With this small but significant visual element pointing to a subtle disruption of the heroic masculine identity, one considers how this element could be foregrounded and extended to construct a fuller realisation of feminism within this concept.

With this chapter proposing that the act of Dido removing her crown could take place earlier to symbolically disrupt the intersection between political and personal identity, perhaps a similar re-focus could be given to the element of costume. To this end, Aeneas could remove his chain at the same earlier point where Dido could remove her crown, perhaps at the commencement of their union. Such could treat the representation of each gender equally and frame the union of the two titular characters in a manner that appears willing and freely entered

---

[132] Case, Sue-Ellen. Feminism in Theatre. New York: Methuen, 1988. 119.

into by both parties. Again, this disrupts the entanglement of politicism within the narrative and, from a contemporary perspective, facilitates the exploration of performed relationships between the two titular characters in a manner increasingly liberated from the burden of expected performance.

Having drawn attention to the assertiveness Borgioni brings to the role of Aeneas, one considers whether he sufficiently contrasts this with the performance of vulnerability. Perhaps the most vulnerable moment within the narrative of Aeneas occurs during the Spirit's *Stay, Prince and hear great Jove's command* and Aeneas' ensuing *Jove's commands shall be obeyed*, where he is ordered away from Carthage. During the aria of the Spirit, the physical performance of Borgioni appears to present a state of turmoil, with facial expression indicating profound emotional suffering. However, it is noteworthy that his physicality does not conform to this. Again, it is not expressly clear whether this was a deliberate directorial juxtaposition, however, if such a disparate depiction of authority and turmoil was the intention, perhaps this could have been more consistently explored and even mirrored by the character of Dido. If her performed vulnerability was balanced with a degree of assertiveness, perhaps a more convincing state of equality could have been established between these two roles. It is also possible that this idea could be further explored in contemporary practice to provide a greater balance between these two gendered identities.

This production makes clear the extent of which the heroism embodied within Aeneas disrupts a feminist incentive within this work. Whilst there are elements of plausible feminist thought within this production, there appears little development of these into a broader sense of gender equality. Considering the nature of this production and how contemporary work may be applied to this, this research suggests that it is highly possible that an elevated female position can be achieved by re-envisioning areas of the characterisation of Aeneas. Such could ensure that both the vocal and physical performance allow for a sense of vulnerability. This could go some way towards deconstructing the over-heroic tendencies of the work and provide new moments within the creative setting for Aeneas to be shown as both part of a larger plan by the witches and entering a union with Dido out of love, not politics. Such may also create greater space for the enhanced characterisation of both Dido and Aeneas, whilst encouraging greater diversity, representation and closeness in contemporary productions.

iii)   King's College

Having observed the contemporary feminist idea of the rejection, by Dido, of the societal structure that she lives within, the presentation of Aeneas appears much more aligned to earlier feminist theory. Dr. Jill Dolan's radical feminism wherein the female is elevated above the male is somewhat evident here. However, it is noteworthy how the focus of this performed dualism occurs less from the perspective of elevating Dido, rather, reducing the position of Aeneas. The first notable feature of his presentation is his description as a "Trojan guest" as opposed to "Trojan prince." By removing this initial high-born social status, the position of Dido as a female businessowner is indirectly further elevated. It is also apparent how his arrogant demeanour is then further mocked through the jazz influence injected into the score, which, in this case, utilises dotted rhythms, modified timbre and reimagined harmony to construct a sense of sarcasm in Dido and Belinda's description of his qualities. This increased level of ornamentation is then further applied to Aeneas himself, whose opening vocal line is so heavily embellished that he appears to mimic a bird or animalistic mating call. Whilst this satirisation seems to align to the second proposed angle of feminist re-envisioning proposed by this investigation, that is, harnessing the style of Brecht, the focus here is how the deconstruction of Aeneas' heroism highlights the closeness between Dido and Belinda. The heightened connection between these two female roles does much to elevate the power and position of the female voice and perhaps argues the case for a more second-wave approach to feminist re-envisionings.

The performance of Aeneas also works hard to align to the stereotypes inherent within works of the canon, such as male boisterousness and promiscuity without consequence. His choreography is highly sexualised towards Dido, who in this instance, appears somewhat objectified as a possible conquest. Simultaneous to this, the re-imagined positioning of a small male chorus surrounding Aeneas appears to further enforce the institution of male hegemony and makes the objectification of Dido even more compounded. Whilst in isolation, this presentation could serve the purpose of highlighting toxic masculinity through performed absurdism, the swooning reactions of the surrounding female chorus and Dido and Belinda's subsequent elaborate plan to escape this could be interpreted as further normalising this behaviour. The catalyst to his departure is later presented in the form of Dido and Belinda in disguise, the latter seducing him whilst the former films the encounter. In the context of this work as a whole, this presentation is curious given that this does not facilitate equality through elevation of the female to align to the male. Ultimately, Aeneas is humiliated, and the women

result to deceit and manipulation in order to achieve this. Consequently, perhaps a more holistic theme of the overarching flaws of the human condition is foregrounded. Perhaps then, the idea of facilitating "closeness" as a method of re-envisioning could be applied to this dramatic rationale, wherein all characters are humanised through their failings. Here, all characters are presented as fallible, thereby suggestibly becoming much more relatable.

2.2.3 The human-spirit identity

i)   Better Strangers Opera Collective

The human-spirit contradiction of identity is closely considered in this contemporary production. It is particularly interesting how these identities have been reconstructed to achieve increased relatability to the central characters. Indeed, this appears a preliminary step towards the suggested approach in the chapter of "conjured memory" to achieve a heightened sense of closeness.

What is initially intriguing is the closeness of the BSOC's approach to characterisation to Wendy Heller's appreciation of Tate's practice of writing women who can demonstrate their 'erudition, breadth of knowledge, and familiarity.'[133] Considering the earlier observation of the physicality of Eve from the view of Adam, one considers Tate's practice to be of much greater feminist relevance. From the viewpoint of re-envisioning such female roles, the presentation of females in this way could be where successful reform is most effectively situated. Through a contemporary lens, Jessie Holder views 'Tate's Dido [as] not controlling, masochistic, or even particularly bold.'[134] Indeed, this interpretation may represent erudition, knowledge and familiarity, but her lack of position compared with the outward heroism of Aeneas causes her to break away from a feminist position and rather, move towards subjugation. As an answer to the dualistic nature of gender and identity constructed within the original work, the BSOC's production capitalises on the ambiguity of the identity of the spiritual characters, which in turn adds further weight to their contribution to the narratological function. Holder states that in

---

[133] Heller, W. (2003). 'A Present for the Ladies': Ovid, Montaigne, and the Redemption of Purcell's Dido. *Music & Letters.* 84(2), 191.

[134] Better Strangers Opera Collective. (2011). *Dead heroines: Dido.* [Online]. Better Strangers Opera. Available at: On perfectionism and performance [Accessed 3 November 2022].

'our telling of the story – the recasting of the witches as the shadow selves of the named characters – is intended to help to fill in the blanks.'[135] With Holder not perceiving Dido as particularly bold, 'that is why Dido's shadow self – and, by extension, the witches – have so much power. The impulse is there and is all the more irresistible for going unrecognised.'[136] Aligning this to the explorative method of establishing closeness, this method of the redeployment of minor characters to act as shadow selves facilitates a heightened sense of closeness to the central character, thus deepening the understanding of the originating role and providing broader expressive scope. Indeed, the extensive influence of the witches within the plot and the lack of clarity as to their specific identity can present challenges when striving for coherency within performances. However, I propose that furthering this creative treatment offers greater possibility for both feminist and indeed more diverse re-envisionings.

This choice by the BSOC appears reminiscent of Snyder's synthesis of third-wave feminism, most specifically; the collapse of gendered categories, the addition of multivocality and the lack of adherence to perceived boundaries of identification.[137] The presence of non-human counterparts may be utilised to deepen the understanding of the human qualities of central roles through opposition and obstruction of fixed characteristics. However, I also suggest that as much as characteristics and conventional behaviours can be disrupted, so too can fixed gendered identity. The presence of the witches presents an opportunity for diverse representations of gender which extend beyond dualistic binary depictions, and in turn demonstrate how characteristics of goodness and evil, cunning and ignorance can be exhibited beyond the behavioural expectations of fixed genders.

Whilst the treatment of the supernatural roles as shadow selves of the central characters presents the opportunity to show opposing characteristics, the oppositional viewpoint of this practice considers whether this constructs a greater sense of internal struggle within Dido that ultimately constructs her downfall. In this sense, her shadow self is the one conspiring against her, and in a framing such as this, it is highly perceivable that it is again Dido's mental health which constructs her end. Whilst Holder observes the feminist sentiment within this by constructing Aeneas' irrelevance to Dido's story and seeing her seek help from Belinda at the

---

[135] ibid.

[136] ibid.

[137] Snyder, R C. (2008). What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs*. 34(1), p.175.

end of the work, one is still able to attribute weakness and fragility to this female role. This is all the more amplified by the comparative lack of emotional exploration in Aeneas. Considering this, perhaps a feminist re-envisioning of this concept would be to radically employ two "shadow selves" to balance confident and reserved manifestations of the central characters. In addition, and perhaps even alongside this, more diverse gender representations could be realised within the arguably non-binary supernatural roles. Such could facilitate a deeper realisation of behavioural qualities becoming increasingly irrelevant to gender identification and in turn enhance the level of diversity within casts and characters of contemporary productions.

ii)   Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti

The Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti appears to utilise a similar approach to the BSOC in their treatment of the Sorceress and the First and Second Witch. Whilst portrayed by different performers, one cannot ignore the dramatic similarity between these three characters and the appearance of Dido, Belinda and the Second Woman. Here, there appears a similar sense of these supernatural characters appearing as shadow selves of the central roles; however, it is particularly obvious how allure and a sense of exoticism are blurred with these female identities to construct a sense of otherworldliness.

Commenting on this production, director Stefano Monti stated, 'now is not the time for sumptuous staging, these times require simplicity.'[138] Whilst in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, this speaks to a practical consideration as well as a creative one, it is interesting to note how "sumptuous" as a concept is achieved through physical and vocal performance, and in turn how this perpetuates the conventional behavioural qualities of gendered roles. Indeed, this perception of "sumptuous" appears most acutely applied to the female characters within Monti's production. This is most apparent in the supernatural characters, where increased portamento, over-exaggerated smooth movement of the head and body and the use of darker vocal resonances create a sense of seduction that appears deeply rooted in performed femininity. This is also apparent in the role of the Spirit, who appears to Aeneas as a siren,

---

[138] Online Emilia Romangna Opera House. *Dido and Aeneas with director Stefano Monti live from the Teatro Comunale di Modena*. Last accessed 3rd November 2022.

luring him into leaving Carthage with a sense of foreboding allure. Such draws a direct parallel between female displays of sexuality and the ultimate negative outcome constructed by such a display.

Given the pre-Enlightenment setting of this work, one could suggest that to embody such sexualised characteristics points to a contemporary mindset. The performance of allure and eroticism is ultimately not overtly indicative of the conventions and social expectations of the pre-Enlightenment age. However, the way they are presented appears to both weaponise female seduction and yet present an opportunity for greater diversity. One remains mindful that the supernatural characters within the work are not intended to be human; their magical abilities separating them from human attachments to emotion. In line with the earlier suggestion to diversify the production through the medium of these characters, one is presented with the opportunity to enhance physical and vocal expressive scope, and as such, individuality. In addition, there is further potential to expand the spectrum of gender identity represented onstage, and in turn foreground the idea of multivocality seen in the theory of third-wave feminism. In this instance, this approach could facilitate a reduction in the performance of expected gender characteristics and instead prioritise a heighted perception of individuality.

What should have happened?

It would be remiss to exclude how the BSOC modify the end of the opera in line with what they believe should have happened. In their production blog, Jessie Holder and Claudia Guastella state their revised ending in line with how they believe a feminist production of the opera in the Contemporary age should end:

"Ah! Forget my fate," she cried, and no sooner had the words flown from her lips than the light around her started to fade. She almost felt a pair of arms catching her, clasping her, easing her landing, almost heard the gasps of her courtiers around her. Then there was nothing but blackness in her eyes. The final sound she heard was the rattle of her own breath; a cadence, oddly musical, then slowed in time with the beat of her failing heart.

She was not aware of the courtiers chanting a mourning prayer around her, or of the silence that fell afterwards, punctuated by gentle sobs from her one remaining companion. The feeling that enveloped her as she came to, however, was one she knew well. She was surrounded by

love - even now, now that he was gone. It seemed to her to be stronger than ever.

Dido awoke from her dead faint to gaze at the one person whose constant love and devotion had never, would never desert her. Her lips turned up at the corners, almost imperceptibly, as Belinda sobbed with relief and wiped fresh tears from her own and Dido's cheeks.

Perhaps there was still hope after all.[139]

This re-envisioning does much to elevate the female perspective. With Dido's contradiction between her emotions and political position easily being summarised as instability, there is much within this production which physically explores her personal motivations and position in more detail. This in turn facilitates an enhanced context for her actions within the narrative, which further rationalise her emotivity.

Building an understanding of the narratological treatment of Dido in Tate's seemingly male-focused visibility, she appears a construct of her own weakness. Her narrative arc appears a perpetual cycle of heartbreak and an inherent inability to rule on her own. Perhaps then, the earlier observation of Welch that the work could have been constructed as 'a warning…not to mistreat his English queen and her people'[140] appears less a mark of respect and more, a statement of the perception of female fragility. To upset an English queen is therefore to upset the stability of the kingdom.

However, the normalisation of the emotional side of Dido further reinforces the idea that creating and physicalising closeness between the character and work, and indeed performer and character, can create successful and accessible contemporary re-envisionings. Such may enhance relevance to performers and audiences, widen individual performance scope and reframe narrative action in a naturalistic and perhaps even relatable way.

iii)   King's College

---

[139] Better Strangers Opera Collective. (2011). *Dead heroines: Dido*. [Online]. Better Strangers Opera. Available at: On perfectionism and performance [Accessed 3 November 2022].

[140] Welch, A. (2009). The cultural politics of Dido and Aeneas. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 21 (1), 2.

In this production, the supernatural roles of the witches and the Sorceress are entirely reimagined as a punk-gothic underground community who conspire with Dido and Belinda to assist the former in faking her own death for freedom. This underground environment is physically presented with heightened freedoms, namely self-identification and relationships. Here, avant-garde costume, the heighted jazz influence on harmony, texture and instrumentation and increasingly sexualised physical performance assist in the construction of this liberating environment. However, in aligning to a feminist incentive, it is interesting how the real female reform, that is, the transformation of Dido from a heterosexual relationship alongside her high-level career to a liberated woman in a same-sex partnership should occur in a performed environment that is comparatively hidden from view.

Considering this alongside the ethereal spirit identity in the original setting, it is also noteworthy how these roles should be kept as a comparatively marginalised community. Whilst the feminist incentive to liberate Dido is evident, the association of her new identity with sexualisation, minority culture and lack of mainstream acceptance could again appear to be indirectly heteronormative and subordinating of females. It is not especially clear whether shining a light on minority culture was the intent in this production. However, perhaps another way of showing this could have been to remove the "underground" connotation and show the Sorceress visiting Dido in her own environment. Aeneas could be refused at the end of the work whilst all others remain freely and in public view.

2.2.4 Critical responses to the productions

Comparing the critical response to the first of the two productions, one can witness how the work of the BSOC appeared much more accessible and emotive when compared to the work of the TCLP. Of the BSCO production, Timeout stated '[this was] an ambitious three-woman staging of Purcell's most famous opera. They present 'Dido and Aeneas' as a courtly drama with a twist, asking: how can the most powerful woman in Carthage survive when her worst enemies lie within?...[it] returns to the start of operatic history, examining and re-imagining its stories and stereotypes more closely.'[141] It is interesting that the central area of appreciation of this particular reframing is its new appreciation of Dido. Her position of victimhood is

---

[141] Timeout. (2012). *Ah! Forget My Fate (Part II): Dido and Aeneas*. [Online]. Timeout. Available at: https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/ah-forget-my-fate-part-ii-dido-and-aeneas [Accessed 13 February 2023].

frequently problematic in productions of this work which remain true to the original performance conventions. Specifically, her negative outcome endorses the normalisation of both perceived female weakness and the resultant controversy of women in positions of power. In essence, Dido breaks convention as a female monarch, and perception of female inability to exercise power and dominance is ultimately proven to be right. Indeed, reviews of the TCLP production appear to affirm the idea that greater exploration of the role of Dido presents heightened abilities for audiences to relate to this work. Of this production, Robert Tanitch of The British Theatre Guide states 'I never felt I was watching a great tragic love story. I remained uninvolved and unmoved.'[142] It is also interesting to highlight how the inflated heroism of Aeneas was negatively perceived by an additional source. Robert Levine from the Opera Gazet states 'Borgioni sings many lines of his role [Aeneas] as if they were composed by Verdi…I'm stumped by the lack of grandeur for the Queen of Carthage.'[143] Whilst such insights speak to specific elements of the TCLP production, I also suggest that they further foreground the need for the enhanced development of Dido. Specifically, from a contemporary standpoint, it is the evolution and subsequent elevation of the female role that is increasingly becoming expectation, and as such, productions risk becoming inaccessible if work to achieve this is not undertaken.

As part of the production by King's College, a questionnaire was issued to every person in attendance relating to their responses to the new themes of the work and their broader opinion of this re-envisioning. One audience member wrote that 'opera is 100% the key to unlocking the door which will let us escape our current aesthetic prison we find ourselves in.'[144] Indeed, there is a strong case to be made for Marchment's production effectively re-directing the ideological legacies interwoven within the history of opera. Such demonstrates that contemporary re-working is able to be achieved even in works so disparate to the sociocultural mores of today's western world. However, it is also notable that one 36–45-year-old male

---

[142] Tanitch, R. (2020). *Dido and Aeneas*. [Online]. British Theatre Guide. Available at: https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/dido-and-aeneas-teatro-comunale-20740 [Accessed 13 February 2023].

[143] Levine, R. (2021). *Dido and Aeneas*. [Online]. Opera Gazet. Available at: https://operagazet.com/dido-and-aeneas-quite-moving/ [Accessed 13 February 2023].

[144] Challenging Performance. (Date unknown). *24.4 'Dido & Belinda': what the audiences thought*. [Online]. Challenging Performance. Available at: https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-24-4/ [Accessed 9 April 2023].

stated that they 'felt no need for this tampering.'[145] When compared to an insight from another younger woman who branded the production 'extremely effective…revitalising, engaging, exciting, interesting, rejuvenating, refreshing'[146] there appears to be a statistical significance arising wherein younger audiences, particularly females, are more likely to align to contemporary re-envisioning centred around gender. This becomes all the more pronounced when compared to the level of objections occurring in response to the new feminist and lesbian themes explored within this production. It was observed that four objections were raised, 'three from older men, the fourth from an older woman.'[147] Whilst it is significant that older demographics are less likely to relate to this kind of work, it is also noteworthy that the direction of travel, that is, younger audiences engaging with the genre, are far more likely to respond to productions if they re-frame troubling gender themes in a feminist manner. In summary, the survey organised by King's College determined that '57% think that classical music performances would very much benefit from more performer creativity, with professional musicians among the audience [being] the clearest that they would like to hear more creative freedom.'[148] Despite the adaptation to the original music being a more radical response to feminist re-envisioning, it is still apparent that over half of the audience, including professional musicians, view this controversial approach as positive. Such infers the extent of scope available for contemporary productions to engage with meaningful reform.

2.3 Commencing conjured memory: workshopping conflicted identity to achieve a feminist re-envisioning.

Having considered theoretical standpoints on the patriarchal problems within *Dido and Aeneas* alongside the successes and limitations of how these are presented by contemporary productions, I propose that the running theme embodied within the characterisation of Dido is that of conflicted identity.

Synthesis of existing literature has highlighted both the distinction between a naturalistic and realistic approach to performance and dramatic working, and indeed the potential for increased

---

[145] ibid.

[146] ibid.

[147] ibid.

[148] ibid.

accessibility when using the personal lived experiences of a performer as a starting point for reconstruction. Indeed, the closeness between identity and the memory of personal experience is pronounced, and consequently, in this circumstance, I propose an approach of utilising a personal "conjured memory" of a performer to find closeness with the narrative and to enhance relatability.

2.3.1 Commencing re-envisioning in practice

In workshop 1[149] to implement this method, I commenced with a reading of Maurice Hamington's *Care Ethics and Engaging Intersectional Difference through the Body* which constructs an understanding of the process of "reflective acting." Hamington observes that the process of dramatic reflection 'shift[s] the moral landscape to include a relational corporeal identity and its caring ability [which] implies rethinking how we view moral education'[150]

Consequently, I propose that conjured memory could set its roots in what Hamington describes as "care theory," that is, 'reflective character acting that can contribute to caring development in [an] inclusive sense of dramatic participation.' Indeed, this is reminiscent of earlier suggestions of collaboration and could become the foundation upon which constructions of conjured memory are created.

Having already established the difference between creating conjured memory and the Stanislavskian techniques of "what if?" and "emotion memory," this exploration of feminist re-envisioning began with a discussion of what the theme of conflicted identity embodied within this work meant to performers. One performer outlined their own experience of conflicted identity stating 'I remember feeling pulled in lots of different directions during my school years; feeling like I was pretending to be someone I wasn't to fit in and then resenting myself for changing my personality and compromising my beliefs just so I could fit a particular profile that I thought was desirable at the time.'[151] An immediate parallel is apparent here

---

[149] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ◼◼◼◼◼◼◼ 25th September 2022.

[150] Hamington, M. (2015). Care Ethics and Engaging Intersectional Difference through the Body. *Critical Philosophy of Race*. 3(1), 92.

[151] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ◼◼◼◼◼◼◼ 25th September 2022.

between this personal account and the earlier synthesis of Dido as being constructed on both masculine and feminine identities. One can interpret the initial femininity of Dido during her opening aria *Ah! Belinda* as an outpouring of her true vulnerability. Upon the entrance of Aeneas and chorus *Cupid Only Throws the Dart*, she transitions into her masculine persona, which she remains in until the point of her death. Her rejection of the feminine identity is especially apparent in her later duet *Your Counsel All Is Urg'd in* Vain wherein she commands Aeneas "away, away!" rather than make visible her heartbreak and desire for him to stay. It is interesting that, whilst the music of Purcell still points to this position of vulnerability, the libretto of Dido and its embodied "masculine" action opposes this.

I found the process of collaboratively sharing conjured memories relating to the work in question to be a rewarding process. Members of the company were not only able to develop a rapport with the central themes of the work but also with each other. In turn, by building upon memories examined as a collective, the company was best placed to approach the manifestation of this onstage with a greater sense of cohesion. Following on from this discussion, members of the company each considered how this personal experience could manifest physically. A particularly interesting parallel that formed the foundation of the ensuing exercise was drawn from the principals of movement for storytelling as found in traditional Malay dance. In her article *The Blossom Falling: Movement and Allusion in a Malay Dance*, Llyn de Danaan observes that 'Malay dance is a patterned set of manoeuvrers dictated by specific traditional rules. These movements serve to transform the ordinary human body into representations of heroic princes, swaying trees.'[152] She continues, 'gesture has meaning in itself and a discoverable relationship to the rest of the culture.'[153] By situating conjured memory at the transitionary point between work, character and contemporary artist, the principals of Malay dance facilitate the appreciation of gesture as a conduit for this triangular contemporary relationship. It is also noteworthy that in this theatrical medium, all of the main roles are played by women, with the exception of musicians and comedic characters who are performed by male counterparts. The key point of comparison between conjured memory and Malay dance is its application of story to influence gesture. Specifically, I point to the Mengadap Rehab which sets out several actions and positions; sitting, kneeling, squatting, standing and walking, which

---

[152] de Danaan, L. (1986). The Blossom Falling: Movement and Allusion in a Malay Dance. *Asian Theatre Journal*. 3(1), 110.

[153] ibid. 111.

are in turn accompanied by fixed props including wooden daggers and scarves to depict stories and characters. In this case, and as an alternative to traditional stories, this particular conjured memory as it relates to the character of Dido formed the basis of workshopping how physical movement depicts gendered characteristics.

Inspired by Hamington's "care theory" and using empathy to form a collective picture of the uncovered theme of conflicted identity, workshop 1[154] then continued with Katie Mitchell's six questions. With focus on the sense of self underpinning the work of both Mitchell and Stanislavsky, the former's well-established set of questions were applied to align performer and identity from a contemporary standpoint. These were specifically related to the role of Dido at the point of her introduction to Aeneas during the chorus *Cupid Only Throws the Dart.* In this instance, as answered within the workshop setting:

Who am I? Dido, Queen of Carthage

Where am I? Dido's palace in Carthage

What time is it? The morning, to reflect the newness of the relationship

What's just happened? Aeneas, the Trojan Prince has just arrived

What are the changes in the scene? Dido's authority is being undermined by the arrival of a Trojan Prince, yet she is also feeling desperate to being in love. This brings about uncertainty and vulnerability.

What am I playing between the changes? Dido's common feeling of foreboding as it relates to the vulnerability of both her political position and emotional state.[155]

I then encouraged each performer to enter the "memory" of their counterparts. By using the stages of the Mengadap Rehab physicality, I instructed performers to sit, kneel, squat, stand and walk as they would personally relate to that character's scenario. By working in this collaborative way, the difference between the conjured memory approach and method acting arises as the shared ability to utilise hindsight and contemporary reflection. Such was a successful process that further deepened the connections between performers and work established in the previous exercise.

---

[154] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▰▰▰▰▰▰▰ 25th September 2022.

[155] Castrey, M. (2022). *Dido and Aeneas Workshop Journal.* [Unpublished].

Arising from this collective development and situation of identity in personal experience, the visible physicality of the interpretation of Dido by the company was not reductive and retiring in manner, but stoic and considered despite her inner conflict. This unlocked a new sense of power in her physicality. Contrastingly, it was Aeneas who appeared hesitant. The conjured memory the performer playing this role associated with his character was emasculation and imposition. In this case, the character of Aeneas was framed as a newcomer with the pressure of expectation. The performer in question conjured the memory of their experience as a younger sibling starting university after their elder sibling achieved excellence.[156] Following the same process of implementing physical position as inspired by the Mengadap Rehab, the company demonstrated visible hesitation in stance, walk and gesture. By drawing this character closer to the performer through shared experience, a more relatable Aeneas emerged.

Following on from this exercise, performers returned to focus on their original roles. Prior to any continued exploration, the company were read an excerpt from Suzanne Cusick's *Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem* which states that 'each of us speaks from a situation that is partly defined by our listeners and readers: every communication is the acting out of a relationship, in which our identity of movement is partly determined by the relationship we have or seek to have with others.'[157] When constructing visible communication out of the forging of relationships, one observes that feminist epistemology sets its roots in claims of knowledge that are only ever partial when singularly confined to the circumstances and opinion of the original "knower."[158] It is only through conversation between others that a full idea is constructed. Such, I propose, expresses the real impetus behind exercises related to conjured memory. The original claim of knowledge only perceivable to the "knower" constitutes the initial conjured memory as it relates to that particular individual, and conversation; that is, collective realisation in the rehearsal room, expands that original idea into a visible and accessible piece of performance.

Following on from these insights, performers were then introduced to the idea of a spectrogram and how this dramatic exercise can unify a conjured memory as a method of relation in

---

[156] Castrey, M. (2022). *Dido and Aeneas Workshop Journal.* [Unpublished].

[157] Cusick, S. (1994). Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem. *Perspectives of New Music.* 32(1), 8.

[158] ibid.

rehearsal through to the physicalisation of this onstage. Performers were informed that the left side of the room indicated an answer of "not at all" and the right side, "completely" and instructed to place themselves on that particular scale in answer to given questions as they interpret their character would respond. The questions asked were:

1) To what extent am I responsible for my own undoing?

2) To what extent do I suffer internally?

3) To what extent do I suffer externally?

4) To what extent do people comprehend my internal state of mind?

5) To what extent do I have a voice?

6) To what extent does the world around me care about my voice?

7) Would I change my position if I could?

8) Am I happy?

The visible differences in emotional response, power and suffering were particularly interesting, with all characters exhibiting a degree of suffering that impacts the extent of their power and control. Such may not be entirely apparent within the original context of the narrative. Workshop Singer D stated 'I knew Dido suffered quite a lot, but there appeared to be more substance behind this by thinking about her internal experience of this and how she displays it to the world. What also surprised me is how other characters had their own inner turmoil. Belinda, for example, always seems like a happy "on the surface" kind of character whose job is to encourage and rally everyone together – but she also had her burdens and in turn, more things to relate to as a modern woman looking at the role. Aeneas also suffers in his own way. All of these differences of emotional depth seemed to tie everyone and the production itself together in a new way.'[159]

It is interpretable that this process of both bringing narratological and character action closer to a performer constitutes a process of both centralisation and decentralisation. Approaching this process theoretically, I suggest a link between using a conjured memory as a method of relation to Clair Rowden's synthesis of physical caricature. Rowden notes the 'resurgence of subterranean memories, childhood or repressed desires'[160] which occurs in sleep. In fact, it is

---

[159] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[160] Rowden, C. (2009). Opera, Caricature and the Unconscious: Jules Massenet's Thaïs, a Case Study. *Music in Art*. 34(1/2), 275.

notable that a large connection between creative output and the emergence of subterranean memory is present in many contemporaries in music, art and literature: Carl Jung's *The Red Book*, Debussy's *Rêverie*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and even Christopher Nolan's acclaimed film *Inception* are inspired by occurrences in dreams. That is, the emergence of the subconscious and the idea that such subterranean memories can be constructed into a new reality. This is yet another manifestation of finding "closeness" which, in this case, expresses the importance of personal closeness and the extensive influence that this can have over relatability and accessibility between creative, individual and work. Relating this again to theory, Rowden observes the process of 'playing with the cultural capital,'[161] that is, using 'knowledge and experience that equips individuals with the tools to decipher cultural artifacts.'[162] This knowledge proved vital in assisting my own link between personal experiences and creative practice, which in turn deepened my understanding of "closeness" as a possible working concept. Such also makes clear the extent of which inspiration can be drawn from conscious and subconscious memories, so that "closeness" is able to be realised as a profound and sincere method of relating work to performer.

2.4 Proposing a possible approach to using conjured memory as a method of re-envisioning

This study will now amalgamate exercises undertaken in workshop 1[163] with primary insights gathered from practitioners and the synthesis of existing theory to suggest a possible approach of utilising conjured memory as an explorative method of feminist re-envisioning in the Contemporary age.

Working through the process

    i)   Collaboratively uncovering a common theme

---

[161] Rowden, C. (2009). Opera, Caricature and the Unconscious: Jules Massenet's Thaïs, a Case Study. *Music in Art*. 34(1/2), 276.

[162] ibid.

[163] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

To commence the process of constructing conjured memory as an explorative rehearsal process and feminist re-envisioning method, I suggest a reading to the company from Robert Lewis' journal article *Emotional Memory*, which states 'the first thing to achieve in performing an Emotional Memory exercise is complete physical relaxation. In order for feelings to flow properly it is important to be muscularly free. First, it is advisable to sit in a comfortable position. Then, aided by your will power, relax your muscles until all tensions disappear.'[164] I add at this point, the importance of situating muscular relaxation and subsequent physical character development is effective breath control. Not only does effective breathing facilitate an enhanced state of relaxation, but also underpins technical vocal function by way of projection, tonal clarity and timbral colour. Indeed, such is affirmed by both Herman Klein and Robert Russell, who respectively observe that 'correct diaphragmatic breath-pressure is unquestionably the surest guarantee of a steady tone and if every practicable graduation of tone-power'[165] and that 'breath control [is] the foundation for musical expression.'[166] Consequently, any expressive development undertaken during the practice of re-envisioning has the potential to be more successful if grounded in effective breath control.

The analysis of the work at hand and delineation of an emotional theme could be the next step in the methodological process. In the earlier examination of *Dido and Aeneas*, this was decided as "conflicted identity," yet this could equally be perceived as a broader theme such as "the condition of human nature" or indeed something very specific like "articulating sexual desire in women." Of course, it is important to note that each character may have their own unique themes embodied within their narratives, however, to be most effective, this central theme would ideally be linked to the principal character(s) and the core narrative of the work. This could be most effectively determined through collective analysis of the narrative, composition, and contextual setting of the work as a whole. Such can be seen in Figure 1 below.

---

[164] Lewis, R. (2011). Emotional Memory. *The Tulane Drama Review*. 6(4), 55.

[165] Klein, H. (1924). The 'Bel Canto'. *The Musical Times*. 65(974), 310.

[166] Russell, R. (1983). The Best Voice For Mozart. *The Choral Journal*. 23(5), 5.

Figure 1 – Appreciation of the narratological environment and Dido's relationship to it

Previously male-led

Established kingdom — Dido has pressure

Is it aware of supernatural powers?

Carthage

Some political unrest made even more unstable by Dido's gender

Desired commodity

Vulnerable

Is she a new solo regent?

Dido is the conduit

Grief stricken already

Was married before and widowed

Are they really there?

Dido

Obsessed with the hand of fate and the idea it's out to get her

Is she weary of the whole concept of love?

Extremely fatigued

Is she only joining with Aeneas because she feels she must?

Could she have an illness

Depression? Paranoia?

Answering the pressures of her environment

Are they figures of Dido's imagination?

Extremely competent and a very good leader - but her personal and surrounding environment prevent this from being seen.

To highlight this further, one refers back to Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Whilst the two titular characters embody themes of limitations of power and a quest for honour respectively, "conflicted identity" is interpretable as the common denominator between both characters. Indeed this can also be seen within secondary characters in this work. Singer A, who took on the role of Belinda in workshop 1[167] stated of this exercise that 'by talking through the narratives of all central characters and identifying how the score helps to embed these, it became clear that conflicted identity could be seen outside the roles of Dido and Aeneas. There is even an evident conflict in the role of Belinda wherein, aside from being Dido's sister, she

[167] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

takes on the role of her confidante whilst also balancing her own political identity as a Princess of Carthage and indeed her identity as a woman who most likely suffered from limitations because of her sex. Even the Sorceress can be framed as striving for a position of leadership alongside her comparative exile.'[168] As a practitioner, having conversations such as this with creatives was vital in ensuring unification of the collective vision whilst developing relationships with performers which strengthened their connection to this contemporary realisation of the work. Such, I believe, is vital in creating not only the most cohesive productions, but also the most effective and collaborative companies.

Another example of this process of exploration is highlighted in Verdi's *La traviata*, where a theme of "limited time" is evident. At first, there is the obvious status of Violetta's illness which restricts the time she has left to live. This then translates into her relationship with Alfredo Germont and his father Georgio Germont, who seeks to part Violetta from his son before their relationship can negatively impact the prospects of his daughter. Whilst there are other themes embodied within subsidiary characters like fidelity and trust between Flora and the Marquis, greed and companionship in the Baron, and position and freedom in Gastone, there appears a hurried sense of urgency that underpins the work as a whole. Indeed, the effervescence of act one, with the *Brindisi* leading into stately dances and the vocally and dramatically dizzying *Sempre libera* is paralleled with a heightening intensity later in the work. The gypsy and matador dances mark the presence of impending darkness, which, by the time of the somewhat nonsensical *Bachanalle*, appear to mark the start of Violetta's delirium brought about by her impending death. Indeed, with this apparent theme of haste, urgency and purpose, even the secondary roles which often struggle to find real significance in this work, could have the potential to be portrayed with a heightened sense of position. As such, these characters may deliver a more profound sense of meaning accessible by the performer and spectator alike.

ii)   Personal assignment to conjured memory

Having uncovered a common theme, I propose the next step in constructing collaborative conjured memory is "personal assignment." As seen in earlier workshopped examples of school-age isolation and emasculation, this step elaborates on Stanislavskian "emotion

---

[168] ibid.

memory" and asks performers to locate a particular time when their own experiences match that of the given theme of the work. This expands Stanislavskian method through the application of detailed multimedia to construct collective realisation and offers the ability for a given theme to unite all members of the company in a manner pursuant to Hamington's "care theory."

Whilst emotion memory ties character to performer, the collaborative and indeed collective framework of conjured memory facilitates a triangular relationship between performer, work and company. This then becomes quadrilateral with the addition of an audience. Such is particularly useful in the case of canonical operas with large choruses, where this particular practice could assist the creative team and chorus performers in constructing individual identities for these company members. This in turn could unify onstage action through the implementation of either sympathy or empathy as it relates to the appreciation of the specified theme by an individual performer. Having previously performed in several opera choruses myself, finding uniqueness and avoiding isolation when lacking individual character identity is a notable challenge. When performing in the female opera chorus of Opera Holland Park's 2018 production of *La traviata*, my own performance journal noted 'be aware of your onstage behaviour becoming a carbon copy of what you have previously seen or a realisation of how you think you should be moving/reacting/interacting. Be sure to always have a character backstory/identity in mind. Interact with the other courtesans and make it clear through physicalisation who has what kind of personality/how they got to this point. Let this influence who you approach/interact with in chorus scenes.'[169] Now with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been very useful if themes that unite all members of the company with a collective vision located in a personal experience had been applied to such performances. Such would have assisted me in developing my own connection to the work without the benefit of a set dramatic identity.

    iii)   Creating and sharing sensory attribution to personal experiences

---

[169] Castrey, M. (2018). *La Traviata Performance Journal* [Unpublished].

Following the establishment of a narratological theme and the personal attachment to this through the sympathy and/or empathy of care theory, I suggest the next step in the process is "sensory attribution." Referring to Robert Lewis, 'we know that certain tastes, smells, etc., often bring back feelings experienced at some specific time when that same gustatory or olfactory sensation was present.'[170] The Contemporary age expands these possibilities even further through the potential use of technology and multimedia to construct collective sensory attributions which manifest a chosen "conjured memory" into collective realisation more profoundly through the application of sensory triggers. One refers to the cognitive emotional response theories of Juslin and Västfjäll, though in this instance, shared sensory attribution enables other company members to also take on the role of audience. Once again referring to workshop 1[171] on Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, the performer who recounted their school-age experiences shared photographs of their school building and themselves at the age in question to stimulate emotional response and sensory attribution through sight in other company members. At this point, one refers to the observation of Michael Hutcheon who observes that 'new technologies have the possibility of allowing people to see performance in some [new] way.'[172] Indeed, this was a highly effective process that facilitated sensory attachment to a description of the lived experiences of a performer. Subsequently, the level of connection felt between performers and the physical realisation of this was much more profound.

iv)   Physical realisation of emotions

The final step in this process, and perhaps the most expansive, is the process of translating these emotional explorations into physical realisations of both narratological action and vocal performance. Michael and Linda Hutcheon once more observe the roots of opera in Greek Theatre, suggesting that whilst narratives such as Orpheus, Dafne and Apollo have survived, their music has not. As such, early opera seeks inspiration from such sources, with its music serving as the missing element of these timeless narratives. Consequently, and further considering these origins in Greek Theatre, Michael Hutcheon suggests its construction upon

---

[170] Lewis, R. (2011). Emotional Memory. *The Tulane Drama Review.* 6(4), 56.

[171] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[172] Hutcheon, M quoted in McCance, D. (2001). "Bodily Charm": An Interview with Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal.* 34 (3), 160.

the balance of two contesting forces. He states that 'many people, Nietzsche being the most famous, have looked at opera as…contesting…Apollonian control, reason if you like, and Dionysian chaos, destruction, but also creation. Opera involves both of these – in its production and in its reception by the audience.'[173] I suggest that parallels can be drawn between the Apollonian and Dionysian in contemporary re-envisionings. In this case, Apollonian control represents the originality of the piece in question, that is, removal from modern way of life, whilst the Dionysian chaos represents more experimental re-envisioning. In this proposed method, conjured memory is the thread that links the originality of the work with contemporary relatability.

I propose that the starting point to practical working on this method of re-envisioning could be inspired by Katie Mitchell's six questions and Uta Hagen's nine questions to facilitate an understanding of location, identity, and characteristics as they physically manifest. I suggest that each performer answer the following in a group setting to enable collective understanding.

1) Who am I?
2) Am I perceived differently to the way I perceive myself by other people?
3) Where am I in time and place?
4) How do I feel in this location – what does it mean to me?
5) Would I change anything about who I am?
6) Would I change anything about the way I act?
7) Would others change things about me?
8) What do I think of the people around me?
9) What are my obstacles and how can I overcome these?

These questions are designed to integrate personal understanding with socio-political, cultural and wider contextual knowledge. By answering these questions within a group setting, the explorative process of re-envisioning works from the canon can become grounded in understanding, research and diversity. Such encourages the integration of self-awareness, relation to the personalities of performers and educated onstage reactions of others through a

---

[173] Hutcheon, M quoted in McCance, D. (2001). "Bodily Charm": An Interview with Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal.* 34 (3), 161.

unified understanding of intention. This, I suggest, will create a more coherent onstage realisation that is grounded in gender, care and performance theory.

The ensuing step is again inspired by Robert Lewis' influential article which outlines the process of substitution and imagination. Having determined a common emotional thread within the work in question, this process allows for the analysis of specific occurrences within the narrative and particular roles. These steps are of particular importance in opera from the canon wherein acts like murder and other attack are not matters which performers would have personally experienced, yet substitution allowed once more for the creation of personal attachment between act and performer to improve relatability. Lewis uses the example of swatting a bothersome mosquito, citing that many know something about killing and the compulsion and sensation that is attached to that particular motive and act. Within workshop 1[174], the death of Dido was utilised as a method of substitution. Whilst Singer F did not know anything of suicide, which is often shown as the cause of Dido's death at the end of the work, they did have personal experience of extreme tiredness and fatigue. Singer F stated 'whilst Dido's suicide is not something I can personally relate to, I considered the physical and emotional fatigue brought about by her underlying theme of conflicted identity and related this to my own feelings of complete exhaustion experienced in the past.'[175]

This process of substitution could then be enhanced by the integration of imagination, which Lewis observes is the 'combination of a real source plus the imagination.'[176] This concoction of what it may feel like to engage in the act in question may again be most effective when constructed in a collaborative setting with the full company. This in turn has the potential to produce unique responses between different casts, directors and other practitioners who all have different lived experiences. In this environment, staging, blocking, lighting and other technical disciplines can be influenced by the intention created by the originating performer. The onstage network of the wider cast may then relate to that particular action through the fundamental principles of care theory.

---

[174] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[175] ibid.

[176] Lewis, R. (2011). Emotional Memory. *The Tulane Drama Review*. 6(4), 57.

To establish physicalised performance out of personal intention, I suggest the implementation of Paul Hodgins' term 'choreomusical'[177] as the fundamental basis of this practice. In this instance, drama, music and physicality are interwoven and indeed interdependent on each other to construct a coherent and accessible production. To highlight how this may be realised, I refer again to Mark Morris' danced imagining of Purcell's opera. Director Mary Birnbaum observes that 'Morris' celebrated choreographic interpretation of the supernatural as a manifestation of a part of Dido herself has found widespread resonance among today's audiences.'[178] I suggest that such a process of relation points to two key areas; closeness; that is, the previously outlined process of finding attachment between work, performer and spectator, and dualism; the idea of independent relationships between two binaries including but not limited to gender and sex. In this particular production, it is awareness of this dualism and its treatment as a changeable rather than rigid state which enables Morris to reframe gendered dynamics within the work.

Morris insightfully amalgamates the dualism of the conflicted identity of Dido with the opposing gender and sexual positions of the two titular characters. Of this production, Stephanie Jordan highlights that 'Morris makes us understand Dido's early anxiety and sense of foreboding at least partly in terms of guilt: her awareness of the power of sex/love to lead her into trouble and to over-rule her rationality.'[179] The choreography of Morris makes this especially clear during Aeneas' *Behold Upon My Bending Spear*, where 'he holds open his sarong (his back to us)'[180] to which Dido 'stares with stony dignity, as if she were gazing at her death, which she is.'[181] Of this particular choice, Morris makes clear his influence drawn from the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, which, in a manner similar to the process of constructing conjured memory, attaches a contemporary thread of relation to the original context of the work. In this instance, Dido appears credited with dignity and stoicism brought about by her

---

[177] Jordan, S. (2011). Mark Morris Marks Purcell: "Dido and Aeneas" as Danced Opera. *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*. 9(2), 168.

[178] Dido and Aeneas (2019) by Henry Purcell. Directed by Mary Birnbaum [Julliard, New York. 20th-22nd February 2019], 7.

[179] Jordan, S. (2011). Mark Morris Marks Purcell: "Dido and Aeneas" as Danced Opera. *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*. 9(2), 169.

[180] ibid. 170.

[181] ibid.

awareness of her position. Such is all too easily constructed with an emphasis on victimhood, but here it is treated with intelligence and profound understanding.

This particular scene was explored in workshop 1[182] and approached by the performers of both Dido and Aeneas from the standpoint of their own conjured memories of conflicted identity. Having shared their personal experiences with each other, both were also well-equipped to respond with visible sympathy or empathy whilst embodying their own realisations. As a result of the previous methods explored, these performers also appeared to share a much deeper personal connection rooted in trust and honesty, which in turn positively impacted their dramatic work. In this work-through, Aeneas appeared somewhat over-eager, brandishing the head of the beast in a manner perceivable as a cry for attention. Singer G, the performer taking on the role of Aeneas within this workshop stated that 'it was a powerful experience for me. Aeneas always appears a little bit baseless – maybe a bit of a show-off until he is called away, so his later pleading with Dido can easily come across as somewhat insincere. By relating back to my own experiences of adjusting my personality to fit in, I found that my Aeneas had so much more vulnerability to the point that you could even perceive him as struggling to overcome his own personal battles. This is a really important cause for men in the modern world and this particular method really gave voice to that by actually deepening the male identity within a legacy work.'[183] Conversely, it was Dido who commanded the attention. Her intuition, stillness and acute observation appeared to entrench her in a position of power. From the standpoint of creating an effective feminist re-envisioning, I found the reframing of this scene in this way to be particularly compelling, emphasising both the vulnerabilities and strengths of both characters.

The potential for the emergence of an empowered Aeneas through the reframing of the leading female position was further commented on by Singer G, who stated 'ultimately what Purcell leads the audience to believe is that Aeneas may love Dido, but he loves his God-given duty more. In many ways, we see him as very shallow, which in turn contributes to the enhanced presentation of Dido as a victim – a status that, when attributed to female characters as it commonly is in opera, can leave quite a sour taste. Purcell's work shows little of any emotional

---

[182] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ██████████ 25th September 2022.

[183] ibid.

toil that occurs when he is presented with the dilemma to stay with Dido or leave Carthage forever to fulfil his divine duty. This leads us to believe that this is either happening behind the scenes, or simply isn't happening. Looking at the weakness that Dido's turmoil brings out in her, and how present this is in the music and narrative leading up to her death, I would suggest that it is the latter! The suggestion that there is much more that we can bring out in Aeneas emotion-wise is something that I find really intriguing.'[184]

This idea is affirmed by ▨▨▨▨▨ who, in a personal interview, stated 'there's no getting around the grandeur that Aeneas is presented with in Purcell's work, but if he is portrayed as needing this union just as much as Dido does, then not only does that reduce some of his power and make him more relatable to the audience, it also rebalances the scales and gives Dido back some leverage. It is really easy for Dido to look as though she is being usurped when Aeneas arrives in many ways it can look like an authorised invasion both on a personal and more professional level...for the Queen, who allows Aeneas to infiltrate her well-trained hardened persona and her kingdom – a deal which ultimately leaves her with nothing.'[185]

This process was then related to how the two roles appear within Purcell's composition. Though the binary dualism embodied within these two gendered roles is very apparent within the score, this reframed physical action was inspired by rethinking elements of the vocal performance. In this instance, the focus was *Behold Upon My Bending Spear* into Dido's ensuing recitative. Singer D observed 'it was very easy to fall into the breathlessness of Dido's melisma here, which seems almost panicked in the wider context of the story – but performing this with a sense of intuition and an almost dignified acceptance inspired me to access a much clearer resonance that came across more authoritative. It actually made both Dido within the story and me as a performer feel much more empowered.'[186] This chapter has examined how the production of *Dido and Belinda* directed by Ella Marchment engaged in more radical musical re-imagining, asking singers to explore how their vocal performance of the original unaltered material may reframe their character was an eye-opening process. Affirming the success of this approach, Singer D highlights that the altered application of resonance and

---

[184] ibid.

[185] Castrey, M. Interview with ▨▨▨▨ October 2020.

[186] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

breath brought out a much greater stoicism within her character, which in turn appeared to afford her greater strength.

Another character that often struggles to find real purpose within this work is the 2nd woman. Nameless in identity, this character is an integral member of the royal court and performs a solo aria in the second act. However, there is little within the narratological and compositional construction of this character which provides performers with much basis for development. Within her aria *Oft she visits this lov'd mountain*, there is extensive melisma and repetition often performed at an allegro tempo. There is also the frequent use of dotted rhythm and the rapid alteration between conjunct and angular passages as outlined in figure 2 below.

Figure 2 – Oft she visits this lov'd mountain
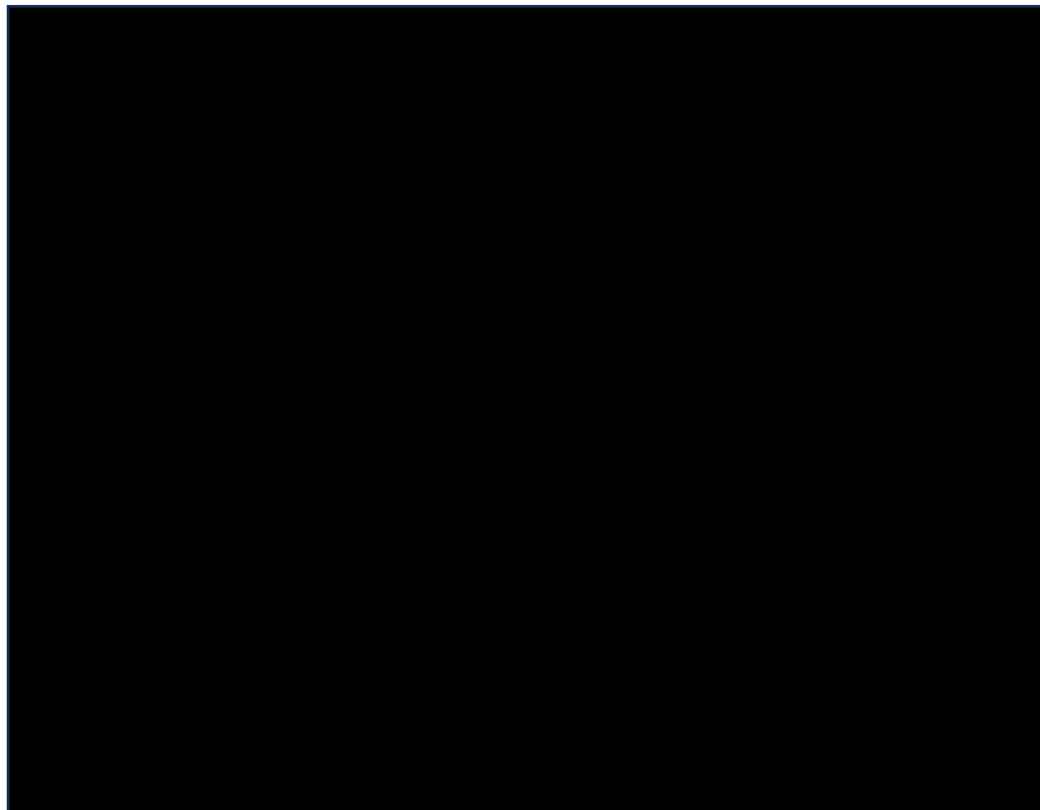
Again, this points to uncertainty within a musical setting, which in turn contributes to the perceivable lack of identity within this role. By following this process, the 2nd Woman is also able to relate to the given theme of conflicted identity and perform this aria accordingly. In workshop 1[187], the conjured memory selected by the performer was inspired by the 2nd

---

[187] ibid.

Woman's role as a storyteller during this scene. The approach of this performer involved the relation of a personal experience of relaying important information to a colleague in a high-pressured work environment. By attributing this aria to a lived, contemporary experience, it became much more relatable. Such also empowered this female role by enabling other performers onstage to take on the role of the "colleague," subsequently listening to this character with visible physical intent. Thus, the importance of her voice was both physically and vocally elevated by the performer and amongst the wider company. Her position onstage was central in the gaze of others around her, and her physical movement appeared authoritative. This also enabled the injection of a greater sense of purpose into this character, empowering both the performer themselves and the contribution of both artist and character to the wider production.

One refers to earlier insights from soprano Alison Langer who used physical movement to make the breeches role of Oscar appear androgynous and CeCe McFarland's process of building a complete sensory environment around the company to reconstruct dynamics of power. In both instances, the opportunities for re-envisioning presented by the application of physical movement is evident. Yet it is also vitally important that this is supported by other technical disciplines. The approaches explored in workshop 1[188] attest that musical performance and specific vocal execution also has a part to play in strengthening the ideological bond between performer and work, but so too does other areas of the production.

Theorist Sue-Ellen Case highlights the importance of other technical disciplines supporting the desired framework of the production, proposing that all technical disciplines including and not limited to staging, blocking, costume, make-up and lights immediately affirm that the female character is the object of the male desire, and the audience see her as such.[189] In the case of the earlier scene in question; *Behold Upon My Bending Spear,* perhaps lighting could have a vital part to play. Dido could be lit in a bright, ethereal manner that appears symbolic of her spiritual illumination. Conversely, Aeneas could be lit to cast substantial shadows representing the weight of his expectation as it reduces his resilience and own sense of identity. Such appears reminiscent of the film theory of Mulvey and again points to the importance of reconstructing

---

[188] ibid.

[189] Case, Sue-Ellen. Feminism in Theatre. New York: Methuen, 1988. 119.

the view of the spectator when the original performance itself constructs such pronounced gendered behaviours. Therefore, in establishing ideological commonalty between both the work and its performers, performers and creatives, and the production and audiences, technical decisions may be made as part of a broader methodology to reframe gendered characters. This in itself is unified with the interpretation of the wider company and complementary to both onstage action and audience expectation.

This chapter has outlined the extent of the potential for malleability embodied within this work and how this can be interpreted in the Contemporary age. Such cutting-edge work undertaken could achieve much success if focused on the practice of feminist re-envisioning to rebalance depictions of gendered roles and to elevate the female perspective to a stance of equality. Just as Yvonne Rainer's film *The Man Who Envied Woman* reconstructs spectator perception through reframed visibility of the leading female character and Gayle Austin's production of *The Iceman Cometh* newly presents the female perspective in an existing work, there are many possibilities for reform. This chapter has shown that these ends can be achieved whilst simultaneously heightening audience relatability. Gayle Austin amalgamated this link between the reframed female and the spectator experience through her production *A Doll House Show,* which segregated audience demographics to outline differing reactions as per gender and self-identification.[190] Consequently, Austin's work suggests that there is always a case to be made for different spectator demographics perceiving any kind of artistic work differently. However, with its grounding in theory and first-hand insights from practitioners and practical working, this particular proposed process refines the creative approach of subjective art to propose a methodological framework of possible feminist re-envisioning.

Speaking specifically of this work, Ellen Harris stated that 'the history of *Dido and Aeneas* has only grown richer as we have discussed how little we actually know.'[191] Whilst there is of course a historical tapestry to consider, this insight also infers the importance of embodying the artistic freedoms that come with the absence of fact. Indeed, the process of implementing conjured memory fills this inference of the unknown with a mentality, experience or attribution

---

[190] Austin, G. (1993). The Doll House Show: A Feminist Theory Play. *Journal of Copyright in Education and Librarianship.* 7(2), pp.203-207.

[191] Dido and Aeneas (2019) by Henry Purcell. Directed by Mary Birnbaum [Julliard, New York. 20th-22nd February 2019], 9.

"known" to a particular performer. As such, I propose that it holds the potential to replace the lack of verified account with personal truth.

This chapter has outlined the proposed process of implementing "conjured memory" as a possible methodology for contemporary feminist re-envisioning. Whilst the main incentive for this is to elevate female roles, it is clear that this process holds the potential to reframe exploratory creative working. Such may also inform new interpretations of works from the canon to improve accessibility and subsequent coherency between work and performer, performer and company and production and audience. With the aim of "finding closeness" being at the heart of this practice, this research and proposed new way of working has the potential to make canonical works relevant. By situating contemporary performance of opera from the canon in a place nearby to artists and their audiences; ideological, symbolic or otherwise, one sees the work not as it should be, but as it is relevant to that particular character and indeed contemporary individual. Referring back to previous suggestions, this once again champions the voice of naturalism over realism. By allowing these works space to be more broadly interpreted and applied to contemporary ideology and individualism, they may find increasing relevance in the environment of today. Perhaps then, when approached and presented in this way, these works from the canon may yet become a leading force for diversity and inclusion rather than a barrier to it.

3. Così fan tutte – Considering detachment: Alienation of subject matter

3.1 Understanding the issues at hand

In his influential article *The Sources of Così fan tutte: A Reappraisal*, Mozart scholar Andrew Steptoe attempts to delineate the true inspiration for this interesting and important Mozart-Da Ponte collaboration. Steptoe highlights the suggestion of Friedrich Heinse that this work was in some way based on a true story of two Viennese offices and their trials in relationships. Acknowledging the plausibility of this, as evidenced in Heinse's *Reise-und Lebens-Shizzen*, Steptoe attempts to deconstruct the popular belief that Da Ponte crafted the entire libretto to showcase his mistress at the time, the soprano Adriana Ferranesi. He states 'he [Da Ponte] neither claims the libretto is original nor specifies a source for an adaptation.'[192] consequently, it is his additional belief of the possible influence of the myth of Cephalus and Procris which is particularly interesting. Aligning this insight to this investigation, this possible influence also appears to point to plausible rationale for the presentation of gendered roles as they manifest within this work. Originally explored by Sir Ernt Gombrich in 1954,[193] the possibility of the influence of this myth on the narrative and compositional construction of *Così fan tutte* is initially apparent through evident parallels between the plot and the legend. Steptoe summarises that 'the basic theme concerns a husband, who, suspicious of his wife's fidelity, pretends to go on a journey, only to return in disguise to test her.'[194] According to Ovid, the Roman poet, 'Cephalus has recently married the beautiful Procris when his suspicions are aroused by Arora, and he is incited to prove his lady's virtue'[195]

The influence of Ovidian myth on the work of Da Ponte initially appears to draw a parallel with Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and its interpolation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Building on the work of this previous chapters, perhaps the original source material of works from the canon may be greater utilised to further understand and subsequently develop the appearance the characters depicted within these works in the Contemporary age.

---

[192] Steptoe, A. (1981). The Sources of 'Così fan tutte': A Reappraisal. *Music & Letters*. 62(3/4), p.282.

[193] ibid.

[194] ibid.

[195] ibid. 283.

Scholar Giuseppe Gazzola highlights that 'a sense of…anti feminism still lingers [within *Così fan tutte*]'[196] and to answer this, suggests that the secondary title of this work could be a more appropriate starting point for reformation. Where *La scola degli amanti* translates as *A School for Lovers,* one could propose a re-reading and subsequent reinterpretation of the masculine plural to a gender-neutral pronoun. In this instance, the subtitle and broader foundation of this work transitions from an education on the pitfalls of women to a broader understanding of the human condition and how it manifests in love. Such disregards gender identities and other discriminants and speaks to the characters as a collective of individuals separate to their depiction within the plot. As such, the collective as a whole has the potential to become more relatable to contemporary audiences.

Proposing a process

The idea of the gender binary being deconstructed in the medium of opera is not necessarily a specifically contemporary idea. Such is observed by Rachel Cowgill, who interprets another Mozart-Da Ponte opera *Don Giovanni* as 'a hothouse study in sexual tensions [which] has provoked a range of responses that reveals shifts in sexual mores and gender-formation over the last two centuries.'[197] The focus of this chapter is utilising the technique of detachment to inspire contemporary feminist re-envisionings. Whilst detachment as a concept will be synthesised in more detail, one first considers that the process of distancing a canonical work from its expected setting, ideological or otherwise, has indeed been a method of re-envisioning at grassroots level for far longer than one might anticipate. Cowgill offers the example of Lucy Elizabeth Vestris, whose role as a female Don Giovanni premiered at Drury Lane on 30th May 1820 became her most famous operatic appearance. Cowgill observes the individuality associated with the performance of Vestris, stating 'Giovanni in London was relatively fluid: new incidents, dialogue and 'clap traps' were interpolated by Vestris during performances'[198]

---

[196] Gazzola, G. (2015). Betting Against Themselves: Conflicting Conceptions of Love in "Così fan tutte, o: la scola degli amanti". *MLN*. 130(1), p.106.

[197] Cowgill, R. (1998). Re-Gendering the Libertine; Or, the Taming of the Rake: Lucy Vestris as Don Giovanni on the Early Nineteenth-Century Lon. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 10(1), p.45.

[198] ibid. 46.

Such not only enhanced the comedic element of this opera, but also pointed to the possibility of performing gender differently to how it is originally depicted by the work. Indeed, the reimagining of Don Giovanni performed by this particular female unlocked different elements of the character, which in turn transformed the sinister seduction embodied within the role into something wittier and more accessible.

I suggest that there are several postmodern conventions alluded to in this practice, and to highlight this, I draw a comparison between the performance identity of Lucy Vestris and the observations of Jeremy Tambling in his article *Towards a psychopathology of opera*. Citing the work and post-structuralist ideologies of Roland Barthes, Tambling outlines the process of counteracting "indifference" as we appreciate its stance in art, where everything perceivable is not individually distinguishable from other sources already available. He surmises that art which is truly removed from established convention is achieved by puncturing the state of optical and aural unconsciousness. Bartes specifically achieves this by identifying 'the punctum: any point of un-representability that will puncture or pierce the smoothness of the stadium (art marked by completeness, by total visibility.)'[199]

Tambling continues that the punctum should point to something outside the visible spectrum of realisation, yet in opera, the studium is not a static entity as it is in Bartes' photography. Rather, this central point of focus is influenced by performance conditions, material or ideological, the spectator and the wider environment surrounding the production. Yet what is not investigated is the point at which the studium is created. Tambling's observation implies that the studium encompasses the entire environment, that is, the audience appear as part of the "picture." However, I would suggest that, taking influence from the theatrical realisation of tableau, the perceivable picture is created onstage and the studium realised prior to the presentation to spectators. To this end, identifying the punctum amongst the studium is a process that could be undertaken in the rehearsal room as part of exploratory work. As such, this could be a highly effective starting point to creating contemporary detachment which elevates the female voice and perspective.

---

[199] Tambling, J. (1997). Towards a Psychopathology of Opera. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 9(3), p.263.

Working with this idea in more detail, one considers that the studium could be treated as the simultaneous manifestation of hegemonic masculinity and the objectification of the female within this environment. In many ways, female roles could be described as fetishised when presented to the audience as aligned to the male gaze. Considering this in line with Barthes' methodology, the viability of the puncturing of the studium being the conscious objection to female objectification and fetishisation is again suggested. Aligning this to the theme of this chapter, it is also possible that such could be achieved through methods of detachment. By employing such possible methods, the visible spectrum of realisation could yet be adjusted to become a much more equal gendered environment.

3.2. A Brechtian centre

In *Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism*, Elin Diamond identifies that the core Brechtian principle is to create '"literization" of the theatre space. This produces a spectator/reader who is not interpolated into ideology but is passionately and pleasurably engaged in observation and analysis.'[200] This appears reminiscent of the investigative intention of this study to achieve feminist re-envisionings of opera from the canon in the Contemporary age through specifically reframing spectatorship. Such is principally located in the way in which the presentation of female roles onstage encourages a conditioned perception of inferiority.

The idea of closeness as developed by Stanislavsky in relating a certain dramatic scenario to the individual experiences of a particular performer may be applied in a manner of prioritising naturalism over realism. Such is set out in the previous chapter to increase relatability of onstage action to performers and audiences alike. However, a possible opposing methodology to establish a similar state of critical and relatable spectatorship utilises Brechtian theory and practice to encourage the disruption of perceived normality by an audience. Whilst the work of Stanislavsky and Brecht do not complement each other in their approach, it is the contention of this research that their entirely different dramatic styles could achieve similarly elevated female positions, with the ability for contemporary creatives to implement either method in line with their own artistic style.

---

[200] Diamond, E. (1988). Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism. *TDR*. 32(1), p.83.

Applying this to works from the opera canon, I have selected Mozart and Da Ponte's *Così fan tutte* as a mechanism for this exploration. In this particular work, the core function of the narrative seeks to prove the female condition of predisposed infidelity as inferior to male steadfastness. Whilst female objectification and subjugation is both actively and passively enforced by the male characters within the work, it is the central theme of social experiment to prove pre-determined gendered characteristics that is particularly troubling.

When asked in workshop 1[201] their opinion of male verses female depiction within the work, Singer G stated 'the word irony springs to mind. Don Alfonso and the two younger men want to prove that all women are destined to be unfaithful because that is always the nature of the female sex, but they try to prove this theory by being unfaithful themselves. They may well be coming up with new identities in order to seduce each other's partner, but as men, they are still being unfaithful.'[202] I consider this to be a very 21st century viewpoint which epitomises why the deconstruction of normality and the breaking down of visual perceptions has the potential to achieve feminist-centred reform.

Relating this back to the construction of gaze, performance conventions surrounding this work do not frame the visibility of both the male and female characters in a manner which challenges the stance of legitimised male preference. Mezzo soprano Kitty Whately played the role of Dorabella in Opera Holland Park's 2018 production of the work and stated the following in an interview regarding the approach of the production to the presentation of the work's sisters: 'we've been stuck at home for a long time [with] quite a sheltered existence, and have never really seen much of the world- and suddenly we're engaged and we have that ticket out, whether that means we love them or not is another question, but it's certainly a ticket to freedom.'[203] This insight, which was shared with participants at workshop 1[204], highlights many

[201] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[202] ibid.

[203] Opera Holland Park (2018). Così fan tutte. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLaddPzKo14. Last accessed 7th April 2020.

[204] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

considerations including the effect of salon culture on the female social position, the prospects of females within society and the female outlook on love and relationships – all of which will be used as a starting point for the ensuring creative exploration on this subject. Whilst they may not always be available, considering insights such as these when working with a canonical piece was particularly useful. By examining how interpretation has already informed creative working, one is able to deduce how different ideological beliefs informed dramatic action, and in turn, consider how one might align to, or move away from such realisations in new realisations of these pieces.

3.2.1   Summarising the patriarchal environment at play

Prior to commencing practical exploration, it is prudent to examine how patriarchy as an institution changed between the intervening Baroque to Classical period. The most prevailing factor within this transitionary period is the Enlightenment years, and in relating this to gender, the exploration of the human condition and the questioning of individual identity appeared a key sociocultural theme within this period. With the year of composition of *Così fan tutte* coinciding with the official end of the Enlightenment years, explorations of the human condition within arts, culture and wider society were not an entirely new concept. However, it is pertinent to note the patriarchal normalisations still inherited as a social legacy from the more restrictive years that came before. This is neatly exemplified by Barbara Matthews in her paper *Women, Education and History* wherein she identifies that 'in such a [pre-Enlightenment] climate, it was not surprising to find little evidence of literacy amongst the female sex…[women] had to make marks rather than sign their names. Mothers were expected to teach their daughters domestic skills, and fathers were commanded to teach them religion.'[205] Such insight not only speaks to the strong presence of religious influence still lingering in the Western world, but the continued subjugation of the female position. In short, whilst the conventional subject matter of artistic works may have indeed expanded into a greater position of metacognition, this was still from an almost exclusively male perspective.

3.3   Compare and contrasting contemporary productions

---

[205] Matthews, B. (1976). Women, Education and History. *Theory Into Practice*. 15(1), p.48.

Having explored the inspiration and rationale behind *Così fan tutte* in terms of its surrounding mores and original setting, it may be proposed that the central challenges facing feminist re-envisionings of this work involve navigating the depiction of desire and the inversion of power structures. Specifically, presenting the identity of each individual character and the way in which hierarchal expectation may be presented within an environment of increased diversity and an expanded scope of self-identity.

To investigate how these different challenges are presented, I will compare Glyndebourne's 2006 production of the work directed by Nicholas Hynter, Wild Arts' specifically feminist version staged in 2022 and directed by P. Burton-Morgan and The Royal Opera House's 2016 reimagining directed by Jann Philipp Gloger. This aims to provide practical inspiration relating to this work and others of its nature, focusing on how these may be able to be reframed. Such will in turn inform how a Brechtian approach of distancing and alienation could be applied to reframe female roles and achieve a less patriarchal state of spectatorship.

Profiles and incentives of each work

Così fan tutte (2006) – Glyndebourne – Director: Nicholas Hynter

Speaking specifically of the incentive behind his staging, director Nicholas Hynter stated that this production aims to explore the 'effect of the strength of desires [to demonstrate] how intensely desire can be felt.'[206] In terms of how this is realised, Hynter elects for a staging true to the original setting and presents the state of desire as something that everybody is affected by. In this sense, all of the lovers appear as victims. However, within the context of the work, the more oppressing social mores surrounding the original setting remain intact. As such, the effect of the desire-fuelled lovesickness that Hynter portrays does not appear to be felt evenly across genders. This is not specifically acknowledged in any commentary surrounding the production.

Così fan tutte (2022) – Wild Arts – Director: P. Burton-Morgan

---

[206] Hynter, N. (2006). *Così fan tutte in Glyndebourne*. [Online]. Medici.tv. Available at:
https://www.medici.tv/en/documentaries/cosi-fan-tutte-in-glyndebourne [Accessed 4 April 2023].

Wild Arts set out to turn this Mozart and Da Ponte work into a contemporary comedy. Its new setting in a university environment facilitated the appearance of mutual learning within an environment of exploration that was more socially accepting of free love. However, it is curious that in a contemporary production, the new setting should be selected as the 1970s, where only second wave feminism was ideologically implemented within society. Whilst this era provides a colourful visual aesthetic, it is unclear whether this decade was selected for its combination of feminist incentive and required ideological development. In this sense, the inequalities of gender are still spotlighted, though associated gender stereotypes are presented as much more fallible.

Così fan tutte (2016) – The Royal Opera – Director: Jann Philipp Gloger

This production appears to have a very Brechtian sentiment of making the theme of infidelity personally applicable to the audience. Gloger implements a metadramatic setting to facilitate a sense of transience in the characters spanning different environments. It is not especially clear whether this is meant to imply that all humans across time and location are flawed in the face of love and desire or whether this takes the more challenging position of stating that gender difference remains present in all environments. In either case, the central lovers enjoy changing personas whilst Don Alfonso remains unchanged throughout. His identity consequently becomes a symbolic mechanism used to represent objection and backwards thought in every setting.

3.3.1 The depiction of desire

i)   Glyndebourne

With desire being a fundamental theme of this work, this traditionally set performance is fairly conventional in its execution of this theme. The initial vision of Ferrando and Guglielmo in their military uniform establishes the usual identity of male heroism constructed on a sense of duty. Such has previously been visible in the character of Aeneas, whose sense of duty is what ultimately drives him to leave Dido with an outwardly self-sacrificing intent. Indeed, the young male characters from both *Così fan tutte* and *Dido and Aeneas* are called away to war with a similar coercion to fight for their country. To this end, perhaps a contemporary reading of this may consider framing such narratological action in a manner which distances the audience

from the idea of heroism. In this instance, the performed action could be reframed to encourage the audience to perceive a sense of victimhood, perhaps even triggering them to find some pity for the young men who are called away from their lovers. However, this is not the case in Hynter's production, where the male lovers depart heroically and return as 'a pair of glamorous Byronic brigands, whose sexuality is an unstoppable force.'[207] This presentation itself may be particularly troublesome in a contemporary production, wherein the weaponisation of sexuality again facilitates the dualism of male "presentation" and female objectivity, or at best, passive acceptance. Indeed, this production seems to follow the conventional path of presenting dualistic male-female relationships, where Ferrando and Guglielmo depart and return as highly sexualised foreigners. Fiordiligi and Dorabella fall quickly, and in line with their performed behavioural characteristics and the apparent predispositions associated with these, it is easy for the audience to see why this has happened. One could suggest that they appear so vulnerable and naive that the audience may perhaps even empathise with the young women who are drawn in by male charm and seduction. It is also interesting that this traditional setting by Hynter appears to naturally enforce the blurring of the race-gender discriminants, where the exoticism of the "Albanians" appears interpolated with the male gender and behavioural masculinity of the young male lovers to establish a broader sense of sex appeal.

With this being an evident flaw in its alignment to contemporary feminist re-envisioning, it is unsurprising that the perception of the interactions between singers Pisaroni and Vondung, and Persson and Lehtipuu appear dimorphic in their sexual chemistry. Indeed, the former pairing do much to display the heightened passion in this union, which in turn makes the dualism within the relationship even more apparent. Persson and Lehtipuu physicalise their relationship with a little more hesitation than their counterpart pairing, however Persson's Fiordiligi appears to contradict Mozart's music and Da Ponte's libretto by physicalising interest in Lehtipuu's Ferrando earlier than the work enacts. This appears to commit Fiordiligi to a characterisation not dissimilar to many Romantic women seen in the canon; namely *Un ballo in maschera*'s Amelia and even the title character in Madame Butterfly who resent their attraction to another male which causes them great emotional turmoil. In this instance, this production presents desire as a feminine weakness, with the vocal performance of Persson too embodying the timbral qualities of erraticism associated with this extent of emotional suffering. Perhaps a

---

[207] Ashley, T. (2006). *Cosi Fan Tutte*. [Online]. The Guardian. Last Updated: 22 May 2006. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2006/may/22/classicalmusicandopera [Accessed 3 November 2022].

contemporary feminist re-envisioning of this concept could involve integrating this female-felt desire as an expanded parameter of self-expression. Such appears reminiscent of the synthesis of the popular artist Madonna by Susan McClary, who is observed as inverting the convention of female behaviour through her strong depiction of female heterosexual desire. She uses her femininity to subvert oppression and even at times exerting dominance over men to oppose expectation and disrupt the identity of female coquettishness.[208] Indeed, such would appear an inherently Brechtian concept whereby the audience is alienated from the idea of woman as lovesick and introduced to the perspective of female lust. When applied to the operatic work in question, the presentation of female desire could be applied to intentionally misalign from the mores of the contextual environment of the work, thereby disrupting the manifestation of any pre-determined reductive female identities.

With an evident dualism constructed between the couples, one questions the portrayal of the character who encourages this initial experiment. In a review of Hynter's production, arts journalist Tim Ashley stated 'dramatically, you get little sense of either [Don Alfonso's] cynical cruelty or the ruthless charm that holds the other characters in thrall.'[209] Indeed, this production does not make the influence of Alfonso on all characters within the work especially apparent. Rather, he appears presented as an artistic philosopher who subtly puppeteers the younger characters to satisfy his own eccentric whim. I observe that this comparatively unconventional realisation of Don Alfonso is problematic when restructuring desire with an integrated feminist incentive. Given that this production affords no foregrounded rationale for the actions of the young couples, and no character outwardly assumes responsibility for the treatment of the sisters in this experiment, there appears little opportunity to spotlight a troubling catalyst. Indeed, without this scapegoat, the hegemonic masculinity embedded within the young males appears to transition from passive to active, and the "school for lovers" becomes student led. Such a persona is paralleled in Rivenq's vocal performance, which utilises a subtle, understated resonance and vocal colour when compared to Don Alfonso veteran Peter Coleman-Wright's frequently employed extensive dynamic range and depth of resonance in the lower tessitura.

---

[208] McClary, S (1994). *Feminine Endings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 152, 165.

[209] Ashley, T. (2006). *Cosi Fan Tutte*. [Online]. The Guardian. Last Updated: 22 May 2006. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2006/may/22/classicalmusicandopera [Accessed 3 November 2022].

This traditional presentation of the gender dynamics reveals a darker side to the engrained behaviours which construct the male-female binary. In turn, this appears to present the idea that desire is not felt equally across genders. Even the musical direction of Ivan Fischer appears to unearth the frenzy of desire as it is felt by women, bringing fretful woodwind lines to the forefront to evoke a sense of unease and breathlessness. Overall, it appears that the fundamental flaw in Hynter's setting is the way in which the social experiment embodied within the original narrative is enacted and in turn, felt by the opposing genders.

Comparing this to a traditional setting of this work directed by Olly Platt and staged in 2018, he stated '*Così fan tutte* is about many things…It is on the surface quite a light, frothy comedy, but then…you have a drama of in-depth psychological relationships and thought processes. It delves into the fickle nature of love, the differences between generations – how a fun, silly game can turn and go somewhere much darker.'[210] Indeed, Platt's production, complete with a modified ending that leaves the male lovers rejected for their part in the experiment is grounded in the forgivable nature of naiveté, and consequently the unforgivable behaviour of Don Alfonso. His older age and outdated values are foregrounded to construct the identity of one who should have known better. However, the absence of a villain in Hynter's production may not solely construct an anti-feminist sentiment, rather, this dramatic decision had a part to play in the depiction of the identities of surrounding characters. This ultimately caused desire to be felt unevenly across genders. Perhaps a feminist re-reading of this concept would be to facilitate a deeper understanding of Don Alfonso and utilise the role of Despina, which appears somewhat inconsequential in this production, to greater effect. Such could counteract Fiordiligi and Dorabella's outward adoration of their male lovers and offer an opposing female identity to the suppressed nature of the sisters. In addition to this, certain gestures and stances such as Dorabella kneeling at the feet of Guglielmo and expressions which construct a sense of instability or irrationality in the female roles should ideally be removed. In short, there appear several instances where a Brechtian step away from expectation and the establishment of a more neutral stance, critically and objectively viewable by the audience, could construct a successful feminist re-envisioning. This does not necessarily have to move entirely away from

[210] Opera Holland Park (2018). Così fan tutte. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLaddPzKoI4. Last accessed 7th April 2020.

the originality of the work. Rather, reframes the original narrative by removing troubling performance conventions and finding new elements of the drama to foreground.

ii)   Wild Arts

Wild Arts' updated setting to the 1970s provided a new context of sexual liberation and exploration, which reframed the hypothesis of the narrative as a mutual exploration of sex and relationships by the young men and women in the story. In a discussion with Director P Burton-Morgan, they stated, 'we really leaned into that [social setting] and Despina brought on a load of books like The Joy of Sex… They were students at Cambridge University, so it felt very much like a coming-of-age story…it made the decisions that everyone takes in it feel like people [the characters] made some mistakes, but they were essentially like kids falling in love and having sex in the first time and the context really changed the perspective on it.'[211]

Such appears to directly oppose the treatment of this work by Nicholas Hynter, who, as previously examined, creates a student-led experiment which discourages the audience from seeing the young men as any kind of victim. In this production, the concept of naiveté facilitates the integration of contemporary perspective whereby the audience are encouraged to accept the narrative action with the mitigation of characters experiencing their first relationships. Indeed, this transpires in the vocal performances of the central roles, where the dramatic use of breath and an expanded scope of resonances away from usual performance expectation are employed to reinforce the nature of experimentation. Such also facilitates a welcome sense of diversity and individuality for the principal artists. By treating these gendered roles as a blank canvas removed from restrictions of dramatic expectation, performers appear more freely able to reimagine these characters in a manner which foregrounds the reshaping of their identity.

Arising from this updated setting, desire indeed became a central theme. Yet, the infidelity in the narrative is reframed to present relationships in a healthy, modern way, which re-explores the human condition from a contemporary perspective. With such exploration being a core tenet of the narratological rationale of the work, the reframing of these themes proved to be

---

[211] Castrey, M. *Interview with P. Burton-Morgan.* October 2022.

particularly effective from the standpoint of gendered re-envisioning. This is also entirely coherent within the updated setting and preserves compositional integrity whilst providing new points of relation for modern audiences. Such also heightens accessibility for contemporary spectators whilst facilitating a wider scope of expressive performance by the singers and the accompanying orchestra.

Comparing the presentation of Fiordiligi and Dorabella in this production to their appearance in Hynter's staging, there appears a reduced focus on the demure and feminine nature of these roles, and instead, an expanded scope of vocal delivery. The male characters are also reframed to deconstruct hyper-masculine performance conventions, with novelty disguises being used to disassociate gender with exoticism. Rather, the "Albanian's" became 80s fashion stereotypes to add a sense of satirisation and comedic value to their identities. Such draws away from hegemonically masculine representation and facilitates the ability for desire to be mutually felt and expressed across genders. This in turn manifested in the vocal performances of the central characters, with each singer being able to apply a heightened range of expressive devices to complement their contemporary realisations of their characters. Whilst Ella Taylor's Fiordiligi will be expanded upon in the ensuing subheading, it is noteworthy that Richard Dowling's Ferrando, Gareth Brynmor John's Guglielmo and Martha Jones' Dorabella were given equal opportunities for humour and vulnerability, further affirming the gender-neutral stance of this production and ensuring that no character emerged as overtly boisterous or fragile. Ultimately, in constructing a sense of mutual desire as it is felt by humankind rather than specific genders, Don Alfonso and his outdated hypothesis appeared all the more out of touch.

It is also noteworthy how Wild Arts' approach Mozart's music and Da Ponte's libretto depict desire in a healthy, contemporary way. This production was sung in English, and whilst subtitles bring meaning to the narrative for non-native audiences in typical productions of works from the canon, this provided a new opportunity for Jeremy Sams' 2022 translation to embody this modern perspective. Most notably, this production applies the earlier proposition of a re-reading of the secondary title and goes as far as to re-translate the main name of the work. "All women are like that" is amended to "that's human nature." With this decisive change, the connotation that behaviours are specific to a gender identification is removed.

In terms of the body of the text, Director Burton-Morgan stated, 'we did actually cut some of the text that seems more misogynistic'[212] with a view to shining a spotlight on the new context of the work. In addition to this, Sams adds much more humour to the translation, again appearing Brechtian through its satirisation of the original material. Coupled with this, the musical direction of Orlando Jopling also framed the composition in new ways. With a reduced chamber orchestra to suit the outdoor setting of the production, there was a much greater foregrounding of the brass instruments. This again added to the humorous nature of the new setting. Focus was also given to the bassoon and horns, which embodied the vulnerability of arias such as *Per pietà, ben mio perdona*, whilst adding gravity to Sams' reframed jokes within the libretto.

P Burton-Morgan stated that the production was rooted in third wave feminism.[213] One is reminded of R. Claire Snyder's observation that 'the third wave foregrounds personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism.'[214] Such was witnessed to a vast extent in this reimagining by Wild Arts. By deconstructing the conventional depictions of desire, the audience were indeed given a multiperspectival vision of not simply the individual narrative arcs of characters within the work but also how relationships are felt individualistically beyond the confines of behavioural expectation associated with different genders. It is also noteworthy how much of Wild Arts' approach appears to align with Brechtian practice, and consequently affirms confidence in the ability of this ensuing method to be applied to works of this nature.

iii)   The Royal Opera

The exploration of desire is a key theme in *Così fan tutte.* Having previously witnessed how Wild Arts' production re-situates this work into a university environment where stereotypically, personal exploration is frequently prioritised over morality, the extent of which a change of environment can reframe narratological action is evident. However Jan Philipp Gloger's 2016 production with The Royal Opera takes this one step further to expand the

---

[212] ibid.

[213] ibid.

[214] Snyder, R C. (2008). What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs*. 34(1), p.175.

concept of exploration entirely. The work is re-set in an experimental theatre workshop, with artists being seen to try out lots of different staged concepts. With these frequent changes come new sets, costumes and ultimately, personas for the characters. For instance, Fiordiligi and Dorabella transition from traumatised 1940s housewives, seeing their husbands off to war at a train station during *Soave sia il vento* to explorative thespians in a flamboyant boudoir. The performance ultimately utilises a "Garden of Eden" setting complete with visible key themes printed and displayed such as "love and fidelity?" to highlight the explorative nature of the piece and its associated themes. Considering this, it is suggestible that this performance centres around a Brechtian idea wherein the theme of human morality is openly explored to ask the audience to evaluate their own perceptions of normalities. Speaking of this explorative sentiment, Gloger himself stated in an interview that 'these four young people have their definition [of love] and that definition struggles - and they get shown how different love can be.'[215] With this in mind, there appears much within this incentive that moves away from the original aim of the narrative to prove that only women are pre-disposed to be unfaithful. This is further exemplified with a visible set change from lightbulbs spelling out 'Così fan tutte' being unscrewed and changed to 'Così fan tutti,' thus implying that the narrative applies to everybody, not just specifically aimed at the females within both the work and the audience. Speaking of this incentive, CEO of Bachtrack David Karlin stated 'Gloger's staging has a clear intent: to take everyone in the audience who is unfaithful…and make them feel uncomfortable. Gloger is hammering home the message that "this is an opera about you": it's classic Brechtian Verfremdingseffekt.'[216]

Indeed, the Brechtian framing of the depiction of desire is especially evident here, and very much in keeping with this proposed approach to feminist re-envisioning. Here, the explorative framing of the piece demonstrates the rigid hegemony that this work can all too easily align to. Additionally, there appears a sense of transcendence wherein the change of settings and their differing time periods imply that humans will always be fallible regardless of what mores surround them. More modernistic settings depict the lovers as restless and dissatisfied, whilst the Garden of Eden opposes the contemporary costume with a biblical display of a snake

[215] Gloger, J P. (2016). *Director Jan Philipp Gloger on his love of Mozart and Da Ponte's Così fan tutte.* [Online]. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq4p_z9BAQA [Accessed 4 April 2023].

[216] Karlin, D. (2016). *Well sung by charmless: The Royal Opera's new Così fan tutte.* [Online]. Backtrack. Available at: https://bachtrack.com/review-cosi-fan-tutte-bychkov-gloger-royal-opera-september-2016 [Accessed 4 April 2023].

wrapped around an apple tree. Here there appears a strong indication of continuance whereby love and temptation cause turmoil for all mankind. In this sense, it could be suggested that desire is depicted as a sickness that humans all fall victim to at some time or other. Thereby, the central issue of fidelity is removed from being female-specific and as such, extends the application of this sentiment from only applying to the female cast to being accessible to the entire audience.

For the performers, this facilitates a heightened level of creative exploration wherein each role is afforded expanded dramatic potential. By channelling new personas and reactions, each character, both male and female, is able to visibly establish their own place and morals within social structure and in turn decide whether to legitimise or to move away from this. With this interpretation in mind, the limitation of this staging is the inability to see an agreed conclusion and perhaps altered state of play. Rather, the audience is left to decide for themselves how humanity should construct and perceive love and relationships. This in itself puts Brechtian contention of normalcy at the heart of the work, where the audience are encouraged to look inside themselves for a moral and just resolution.

3.3.2 The inversion of power structures

i)   Glyndebourne

Traditional costume presents the two sisters as delicate, feminine and upstanding ladies of the time, whilst military uniform asserts their lovers as heroic and dominating. This desirability of the departing lovers is particularly apparent in *Di scrivermi ogni giorno*, where Fiordiligi clasps hold of Guglielmo's jacket begging him to write every day. Dorabella goes as far as to kneel at the feet of Ferrando, begging him to be faithful. Such not only affirms a position of inferiority, but also presents the idea of lovesickness as an affliction that the female characters suffer from most acutely.

Having previously introduced the presentation of Don Alfonso in this production, his appearance as an artist and philosopher has an interesting impact on the gender dynamics within the work. In a long trench coat and scarf, he appears more of a philosopher than an affluent gentleman. This adds a more ethereal element to his character which frames the younger men as if they have been drawn into his conspiracies. Alfonso appears almost

Rasputin-esque in identity, enthralling the younger men into their involvement with his experiment as opposed to their active and conscious participation. Within this context, the boys also appear as victims, though perhaps in this instance of their own naiveté and uncultured state.

Despite the troubling presentation of Don Alfonso in this production, some of the vocal performances do attest to a basic, if intermittent, feminist incentive. Fiordiligi's aria *Per pietà, ben mio perdona* is commonly utilised to depict her indecisiveness and emotional vulnerability in the face of her wavering faithfulness. However, contrasting to this, Miah Persson's characterisation appears authoritative and somewhat dominating. Whilst this appears contrary to what one may expect of Fiordiligi's disposition, it is noteworthy how the other surrounding characters are left onstage for purposes of reaction and who appear to somewhat undermine this proto-feminist performance. This includes Anke Vondung's Dorabella, who quickly rises from her seat after a series of melisma by Persson in a manner that appears to subdue her apparent outburst. Such appears to frame this as irrational and emotion driven rather than a display of uncensored passion. At the end of the aria, the sisters attempt to run away and are blocked by Don Alfonso and the Albanians in disguise. Such again appears to contradict any inversion of the behavioural expectation of female roles in a manner that restrains a frenzied woman and subdues her outpouring. Ultimately, it is regrettable that any new sense of empowerment realised in the vocal performance of Fiordiligi appears to be promptly deconstructed by the dramatic reaction of the surrounding characters.

It is also noteworthy to relate how the themes of gender and social status are once again amalgamated in the character of Despina, whose disguises as a doctor and notary take on a male identity. With Wild Arts' production of the same scene framing Despina as a "hippie healer" who uses the power of crystals to cure Ferrando and Guglielmo from their apparent poisoning, Glyndebourne's setting appears to miss an opportunity to avoid such a stringent perpetuation of binary dualism. In this instance, perhaps a feminist re-envisioning would maintain Despina's female identity even whilst the character is in disguise, to preserve the coherency of the narrative. Such deconstructs the idea that Despina would have to change her gender to appear convincing in the disguise of a professional occupation. Indeed, in *Eccovi il medico, Signore belle*, Ainhoa Garmendia's Despina disguises her voice to imitate a male. Whilst this may appear convincing in the context of the setting, it is regrettable that the masculinity she seeks to achieve in her performance compromises her resonance. In this

instance, the quality of the female performance is inhibited by mores which urge her to appear masculine. Re-envisioning this concept from a feminist perspective could indeed see Despina's female identity preserved in these disguises, or where a male identity is preferred for the presentation of complete deception, perhaps the orchestra could be used to greater effect to present these masculine characteristics rather than in the female voice itself. Putting the latter idea into practice, it is notable that throughout this scene, dynamic performance of the orchestra greatly favours the upper strings and woodwind. Perhaps through the lens of satirisation, foregrounding the lower instruments may have assisted in constructing this illusion without causing the depictions of gender embodied within the drama to appear unbalanced.

Hynter's staging is indeed a traditional production, presenting the themes of gender and power as intrinsically linked. In this version, coherency appears to rely upon the amalgamation of discriminants which creates the differentiations between the male and female genders, yet this is not convincing enough when applied to the generational difference between Don Alfonso and the young lovers. Consequently, an evident dualism between male and female is established and maintained, whilst a comparative lack of focus on the negative motives of Don Alfonso creates a palpable hegemonic environment. Such casts troublesome shadows when presenting this work to a contemporary audience. However, this is not to propose that a traditional staging cannot take on a feminist incentive. As this exploration proposes, there are consistent ways for the dramatic content to be reframed using the scope of performance and expression available in the contemporary environment.

ii)   Wild Arts

This feminist production does well to isolate the hierarchy of gender from the discriminant of social status. The reconstruction of Don Alfonso as a Professor of Philosophy immediately enforces his dominating status; however, it is intriguing how this dramatic reframing interpolates this with the Brechtian idea of *Gestus*. P Burton-Morgan stated 'Don Alfonso was not the villain, but there was a sense that he was of a different generation. Where they were young students in 70s, he was still in clothes from the 50s, and he was their professor teaching them the ways of love. There was a sense that he was kind of out of date, which meant that he could say the things he says and can feel like he was a product of his time. That was really

effective in terms of the concept to put the world in that made it be ok.'[217] In this production, Don Alfonso appearing removed from the contemporary environment becomes a fundamental construct of his character, and in this sense, he is able to be satirised and distanced from his original presentation without compromising compositional integrity. The idea of an eccentric professor appears reminiscent of Brecht's *Gestus* as it was applied to the fascists at the time of its inception. In this sense, Don Alfonso's character identity becomes parodic of outdated opinions and members of the upper class, detached from real-world problems.

Iris Smith observes that Brecht's *Gestus* provides many of the catalysts for visible reform realised onstage. During the rise of the fascists into power in the 1930s, Brecht would subvert the visible intricacies of displays of power with 'social gest-criticism, craftiness, irony, propaganda, etc-that breathes humanity into it.'[218] Smith states 'the pomp of the fascists taken at its face value, has a hollow gest.'[219] In terms of the physical manifestation of this Brechtian theory, this includes 'men strutting instead of walking, stiffness, a lot of colour, self-conscious sticking out of chests etc. All this could be gest…quite harmless, purely factual and therefore to be accepted.'[220] The idea of adjusted gait and puffed chests to create a sense of novelty is similarly applied to this reimagined characterisation of Don Alfonso, who appears the most removed from the contemporary social standards. Such also casts a more positive light on the younger male characters, where a sense of victimhood from exploitation is constructed.

Due to the nature of Don Alfonso and Despina appearing separate to the central game of romance, it is often the case that these two roles are paired together in a sense of mutual scheming. Yet, by reconstructing the identity of Don Alfonso in a manner that facilitates satire and parody, this production by Wild Arts indirectly empowers Despina. Despina is presented as a fellow student of Fiordiligi and Dorabella who 'moonlights as a chambermaid for the extra cash, [and] attempts to give them [Fiordiligi and Dorabella] a consciousness raising education into the infidelity of students and a healthy modern attitude to sex and relationships.'[221] Here, her status as a maid speaks to heightened work ethic and responsibility. Consequently, this

---

[217] Castrey, M. *Interview with P. Burton-Morgan.* October 2022.

[218] Smith, I. (1991). Brecht and the Mothers of Epic Theater. *Theatre Journal*. 43(4), p.492.

[219] ibid.

[220] ibid.

[221] Wild Arts. (2022). *Così fan tutte*. [Online]. Wild Arts. Available at: https://wildarts.org.uk/così-fan-tutte [Accessed 3 November 2022].

appears somewhat elevated over the original sisters, who, in this feminist version, are inspired by Despina to expand their self-exploration and attitude to relationships. As a result of this, they are later empowered to protest their disguised lovers away with student union placards.

In terms of the scope of performed expression that this affords when distancing from the original setting and performance convention, the physicality of Despina transitions from subtle nuances of empowerment to an outward performance of self-exploration and liberation. Burton-Morgan's construction of the "student" identity appears to align to the earlier re-reading of the work's secondary title, to create "a school for lovers" in a literal way. Such not only elevates Despina's role as a servant to a position of mutual studentship, but also obstructs the amalgamation of the gender and class discriminants. One therefore suggests that returning to a state of visible learning could remedy both the gender imbalances and the amalgamation of discriminants in other works of this nature.

With the re-structuring of power dynamics and consequent re-centring of equality, the parameters of vocal performance are too expanded. Wild Arts' Fiordiligi, Ella Taylor found a new sense of maturity and diversity in her performance of *Per pietà, ben mio perdona.* Taylor, herself a non-binary identifying artist, previously stated in an interview, 'I tried…to have those things separate – my trans identity and my singing – but I don't think one could exist without the other. I don't think I would be as good an artist if I wasn't living as a non-binary person.'[222] Indeed, Taylor's vocal performance embodies a step away from the embedded binary of the soprano identity. It is especially apparent how Taylor appears to restructure this area in a feminist manner. Looking through a contemporary lens, Taylor's vocal quality appears to align to the idea that the soprano identity no longer requires amalgamated displays of femininity and coquettishness. The lower notes are not performed sotto voce, rather are employed by Taylor to showcase their chest resonance and portray greater emotional strength. Equally, the use of Taylor's higher tessitura achieves the same open brightness that one may conventionally expect of a soprano, yet not in a manner that appears penetrating or boisterous. Taylor's middle range arguably presents their most vulnerable timbre but this vulnerability does not appear weak or frantic, particularly alongside the differing treatment of other parts of their register.

[222] Meet The Artist. (2018). *Ella Taylor*. [Online]. Meet The Artist. Available at: https://meettheartist.online/2018/11/10/ella-taylor-non-binary-soprano/ [Accessed 3 November 2022].

Overall, this vocal performance simultaneously achieves success in achieving textbook soprano characteristics, yet the application of such subverts expectation and disrupts the correlation between a soprano voice and a feminine performance. Indeed, Taylor's low tessitura is performed with an almost exaggerated strength that is equally realised in their upper range. Equally, the lightness in their mid-tessitura is frequently coupled with authoritative and more masculine gesture to again disrupt the correlation between aural vulnerability and weakness. Consequently, Taylor's advocation of a non-binary performance which is apparent in all areas of their characterisation could perhaps form the basis of a realisation of inverted or even equalised power dynamics within this, and broader works. Whilst it may not be realistic to expect all voices to possess these inherent characteristics and capabilities, a consideration of how vocal performance may obstruct, or indeed construct new gendered identities could be a rewarding path of exploration by contemporary artists.

iii)   The Royal Opera

Having previously examined how the lovers' persona changes in line with the explorative nature of this setting, it is noteworthy that the only character who does not undergo such a transition to nearly the same extent is Don Alfonso. In the original setting of the work, Don Alfonso acts as a puppet master, manipulating the two young men into making a bet to seduce the opposing female lover. However, despite the re-imagining of the young lovers to prioritise a theme of exploration over deception, Don Alfonso still retains his ideological stoicism.

From a critical perspective, such suggestibly constructs a sense of naïveté in the young lovers, thus disregarding their experiences in love and loss. If this is the case, then the discriminants of gender and age are blurred to demonstrate that a young male may socially outrank a young female, whilst an older male, in this case Don Alfonso, outranks everyone. However, such an amalgamation between gender and age appears increasing misaligned from contemporary mores. Additionally, Despina, whose occasional reframing as a barmaid as opposed to a housemaid sees her subtly add alcohol to Fiordiligi and Dorabella's drinks in order to encourage them to lose their control and inhibitions. When exploring the potential for power structures to be inverted, Despina is a common target of restructuring. Her worldly-wise nature sees her assist in facilitating the playing out of this experiment as if to teach the lovers a lesson. Ultimately, it is the servant who teachers the master. Such is also a theme of another Mozart

and Da Ponte collaboration, *Le nozze di Figaro,* and is arguably an area of contemporary reframing that could be given much greater focus in new productions of these works.

The metadramatic context selected by Gloger retains the air of trickery and mischief in Despina over a more subtle persona of explorative encouragement. Perhaps a possible new angle for the elevation of her level of power could see her encouraging the sisters to learn the same lessons in love that she has had to learn. It could possibly be achieved by showing Despina laughing off a picture or letter from a previous lover. More radically, new libretto could be introduced wherein she encourages the sisters to pursue new relationships as a lesson in love and fidelity. There appears plenty of scope for Despina to be re-imagined as an elevated and somewhat parental figure who uses her own experiences to guide those who are more naïve. Her treatment in this way also disrupts the correlation between class and gender and introduces a Brechtian concept wherein both the characters and audience are asked to consider new perceptions of normalcy. From this, audiences are then able to draw their own conclusions on what is right and just.

3.3.3. Critical responses to the productions

One of the most striking responses to Glyndebourne's production comes from critic Raymond Tuttle who states that this production 'reminds us…[that] almost everyone can be seduced. "That's what women do," is the opera's title, but "that's what men and women do" would be no less truthful.'[223] Considering this insight, one refers to the earlier consideration of the surrounding patriarchal environment of this work. Specifically, the normalisation of female inadequacy interpolated with a singular male-centred perspective. Again, from a contemporary standpoint, it is interesting to delineate the increased need for female empowerment which is fast becoming part of standard audience expectation. John Gilks adds that this production 'is about as traditional as it gets…The one thing one does get as insight from a performance as close to the libretto as written as this is just how cruel this opera is at its core.'[224] One again witnesses the increased expectation of gendered reform in addition to the enhanced relevance

---

[223] Tuttle, R. (2007). *Così fan tutte*. [Online]. ClassicalNet. Available at:
http://www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/o/opu00970dvda.php [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[224] Gilks, J. (2018). *Hytner's Così*. [Online]. OperaRamblings. Available at:
https://operaramblings.blog/2018/07/02/hytners-cosi/ [Accessed 16 February 2023].

of detachment as a concept. Such appears even more convincing as a method for achieving a traditional performance without endorsing the legitimisation of patriarchy which arises from the compositional environment.

Contrastingly, of the production by Wild Arts, The Guardian observes that this staging 'make(s) the problematic 18th century plot more relatable…It was all done with a knowing, cheeky sense of humour, while never detracting from Mozart's delectable score. An affordable and accessible production, attracting those who might be new to opera.'[225] Indeed, it is this accessibility and enhanced narratological relevance to contemporary audiences that offers the potential to satisfy changing expectation and attract new operagoers. The Cambridge Critique also observed that this production achieved 'a marvellously magisterial job of mastering the 18th century Mozart mix [to] make it into a Contemporary comedy.'[226] Relatability and the intersection of the original composition with contemporary re-structuring appears to be the key theme here. Wild Arts does well to rebalance presentations of gender without overtly reducing the male position. Rather, a modification of the central theme to prioritise exploration over malicious experiment facilitates the performance of individuals over characters inherently aligned to gender discrimination.

Mark Valencia gave detailed observations on Gloger's production, stating 'Did someone shout misogyny? A good many people have over the years, which is why modern productions of this opera tend to impose heavy-duty concepts on it in order to mask the sexism. Yet for the Royal Opera another house debutant, German director Jan Philipp Gloger deconstructs Così to an unprecedented extent.'[227] He continued 'Architecturally it's coherent; aesthetically it's unbearable…It's a novel approach but one that taxes the patience after a while, as do the posturingly nonchalant set-dressers and scene-shifters who interlope throughout the show.'[228]

[225] Pritchard, S. (2022). *Così fan tutte review – a cheeky 70s Mozart makeover*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jul/16/cosi-fan-tutte-review-layer-marney-tower-new-essex-sum [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[226] Garvey, A. (2022). *COSI FAN TUTTE AT CHILDERLEY HALL*. [Online]. The Cambridge Critique. Available at: https://www.thecambridgecritique.com/home/2022/7/16/cosi-fan-tutte-at-childerley-hall [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[227] Valencia, M. (2016). *Review: Così fan tutte (Royal Opera House)*. [Online]. WhatsOnStage. Available at: https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/review-cos-fan-tutte-royal-opera-house_41853.htm [Accessed 9 April 2023].

[228] ibid.

The meta theatrical approach of this production could be said to frame the troubling themes embedded within this work as experimental rather than factual. By removing the action from reality, one could infer that the embedded misogyny is placed in an unrealistic domain. However Richard Fairman observes that 'Gloger hops back and forth across the centuries as he tells his eternal story'[229] Opposing this, one may equally infer that the eternal approach to depictions of female fallibility further enforces the idea that the untrustworthiness of women is an inherent condition of their identity which transcends all humanity. Consequently, whilst Gloger's setting may remove some of the difficult connotations of the harsh reality of the experiment, there appears just as much potential for this re-framing to be perceived as troublesome.

Given the exploratory metatheatrical setting, it is also noteworthy that 'Gloger shows little interest, either, in exploring the character of Despina.'[230] This character has previously been observed as pivotal to constructing a greater sense of female empowerment within the productions by both Wild Arts and Glyndebourne. It is therefore anomalous that she should appear without a great degree of evolution in this new setting. Arising from the other productions examined in this investigation, it is evident that Despina taking a greater degree of direct control over the liberation of Fiordiligi and Dorabella could be a very convincing angle of feminist realisation. Subsequently, it could be suggested that a greater expansion of Despina's role within Gloger's production may have been a possible method of deconstructing some of the connotations of female inferiority transcending all periods of time.

Summarising the presentation of the work by Gloger, Richard Fairman observes 'the price to pay for Gloger's cleverness is an almost total detachment from the characters' psychological interplay.'[231] Indeed, one may argue that enhanced psychological interplay is precisely what is needed when attempting to make works from the canon and their characters more relatable to contemporary audiences and agile to their ideologies.

---

[229] Fairman, R. (2019). *Così fan tutte, Royal Opera House — highly intricate, overly fussy*. [Online]. Financial Times. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/b0edb336-3a84-11e9-b72b-2c7f526ca5d0 [Accessed 9 April 2023].

[230] ibid.

[231] ibid.

3.4   Commencing exploration

Having examined how a Brechtian process of distancing and alienation could be applied to *Così fan tutte* and other works of this nature, this chapter will now investigate how this may be explored in practice and propose a working method for the application of this style of re-envisioning.

Beginning the workshop process, the earlier insight from Kitty Whately was shared with participants who discussed its application to the process of contemporary feminist re-envisioning. The word "contradiction" was a key theme here, relating to the kind of female identity the Contemporary age should seek to construct. Singer A stated, 'It shows the extent of the naivete attributed to females at the time, and I think it's important to be aware of that so we can rationalise and understand why there is such a gender problem in these kinds of works.'[232] On the other hand Singer D observes that Whateley's approach 'comes across as a little bit like fighting fire with fire. Yes, there is an obvious gender imbalance in many works of this nature, but by having the females use the males in the same way that they're being treated - does that really fix the problem or does it just level the score sheet instead?'[233] Aligning this to existing theory, this appears reminiscent of radical feminism as theorised by Dolan, wherein the female position is elevated above that of their male counterparts. Whilst the depiction of the sisters by Whately as using their lovers as a ticket to freedom is not a direct stance of female superiority, it does, as Singer D suggests, appear to project the male condition as it often appears in works from the canon onto female characters without any consideration of how such depictions may be re-envisioned.

Starting the process of re-envisioning, insights from participants involved in workshop 1[234] point to the possible implementation of an underlying Brechtian concept of epic versus dramatic. In its original state of being "dramatic," Brecht observes that spectators are only focused on the outcome of a particular play. The alternative to this, "epic" theatre, encourages the audience to become the "observer" rather than the spectator, who is able to view the

---

[232] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[233] ibid.

[234] ibid.

narrative action objectively over the course of performed action rather than as a summary judgement. Perhaps transitioning focus away from "dramatic" performance and towards the creation of "epic" theatre could be a viable method of establishing feminist re-envisionings. In terms of how this may be realised, Brecht states that 'a representation that alienates is one that allows us to recognise its subject, but at the same time make it seem unfamiliar.'[235] Expanding further on the role of performers in achieving this as specific to feminism, Elin Diamond states that 'the actor "alienates" rather than impersonates her character: she "quotes" or demonstrates the character's behaviour instead of identifying with it.'[236] As an alternative to the previously explored method of creating closeness, this process enables the performer to remain outside of the characters feelings in a manner that frames the artist as narrator. As Diamond attests, with distance comes the heightened ability for the performer to remain engaged with the performed action whilst retaining a stance of objectivity relating to their character and its place within the work.

The first exercise for this piece in workshop 1[237] involved asking participants to "stand beside" their characters and outline an account of their feelings prior to the start of the work, over the course of the work, and once the story has concluded. Singer F, who took on the role of Fiordiligi stated: 'Before *Così* begins, she feels wishful that her strapping young man Guglielmo would sweep her off her feet. As the older sister, she is slightly more considered than Dorabella in this regard, and I imagine her to maybe have some confidence issues because she has been so sheltered and her sister is so exuberant by comparison. Over the course of the opera, her feelings for Guglielmo are very profound. I think she gives her heart easily initially, but maybe the more rational part of her kicks in and she starts to have some doubts. As a more sensitive being, I think she's actually more suited to Ferrando, and maybe she considers this during *Un aura amorosa*, but ultimately, I think she's left very hurt when the plan is all revealed. Again though, I think she buries her true feelings for an easy resolution, so maybe

---

[235] Diamond, E. (1988). Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism. *TDR*. 32(1), p.83.

[236] ibid. 84.

[237] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

her key theme is always hoping for more or settling because she doesn't think she will get better.'[238]

By considering the individual feelings of these characters in such a way, the potential for success in the transition from dramatic to epic is highlighted. In establishing a clear arc of intent for characters and how their perceptions evolve, such journeys are able to be foregrounded. This in turn replaces the need to perform the narrative with focus on the conclusion and encourages both performers and audiences to view the work as an evolving story with malleable interpretations. This also arguably extends the creative freedoms afforded to a director wherein variable interpretations can construct equally varying outcomes.

3.5 Adapting performance techniques

Having examined how gendered roles are constructed and presented within the libretto, the question is posed as to how such musicological presentations may be re-envisioned in the Contemporary age. I propose a possible foundation to this in Brecht's *Gestus,* specifically re-presenting roles physically onstage to reframe their visual appreciation. In terms of the application of *Gestus* in a contemporary setting, one refers to Iris Smith who speaks of the need to adapt this concept. Referring to the synthesis of liberal, cultural, and materialist feminism by Dolan, Smith highlights the problems in defining a set of characteristics applicable to all women. 'Gestus, according to Dolan, is useful only to those historicized, materialist projects which acknowledged differences among women even as they acknowledge other differences.'[239] Yet, perhaps a possible means of reform involves the gest associated with male and masculine hegemony rather than the female condition itself. Furthering Smith's first observation of a lack of differentiation within female roles, one can observe how the narratological action of *Così fan tutte* is dependent on a singular female identity. Indeed, the title of the work translates as "all women are like that," which is, in this instance, unfaithful. It is also observable that Mozart works harder to display a more inherent difference between the characters of Ferrando and Guglielmo than the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella.

Guglielmo appears to become all the more disillusioned with females as the work progresses. Rather than describing his specific relationship with Fiordiligi, his libretto focuses on

---

[238] ibid.
[239] Smith, I. (1991). Brecht and the Mothers of Epic Theater. *Theatre Journal*. 43(4), p.492.

generalised accounts of the behaviour of all women in a manner which perpetuates the ideas female inequality and an elevated male position. This is principally achieved through the description of his own attributes. His act one aria *Non siate ritrosi* states:

Non siate ritrosi,	*Be not wayward*
Occhietti vezzosi;	*Dear beguiling eyes*
Due lampi amorosi	*Let two lightning flashes*
Vibrate un po' qua	*Strike for a moment here*
Felici rendeteci,	*Make us happy*
Amate con noi;	*And love with us:*
E noi felicissime	*And we will make you in return*
Faremo anche voi	*The happiest of women.*
Guardate, Toccate,	*Look at us*
Il tutto osservate:	*Touch us*
Siam forti e ben fatti,	*Take stock of us*
E come ognun vede,	*We're crazy but we're charming*
Sia merto, sia caso,	*We're strong and well made*
Abbiamo bel piede,	*And as anyone can see*
Bell'occhio, bel naso;	*Whether or by merit or by chance*
Guardate, bel piede, osservate, bell'occhio,	*We've good feet, good eyes,*
Toccate, bel naso, il tutto osservate:	*Touch, good noses, take stock of us*
E questi mustacchi	*And these moustaches*
Chiamare si possono	*Could be called*
Trionfi degli uomini,	*Manly triumphs*

Pennacchi d'amor   *The plumage of love*

.

Whilst his first solo aria is far more emotionally placid than his later musical content, a strong belief of what the role of women should be within society is inherent within the characterisation of Guglielmo. Indeed, his latter *Donne mie, la fate a tanti,* states in a very general manner:

Ladies, you treat so many thus
That, if I must speak the truth
I begin to sympathise
When your lovers complain.
But thus, you treat so many
That it's difficult to believe
And if your lovers complain
They have good reason indeed.

Here, he speaks of the male perspective on male complexities. However, this is not sufficiently paralleled with an offering of the female perception by the women themselves. Rather, it is Guglielmo who outlines what women believe and how they act. Such aligns to the male gaze theory synthesised by Laura Mulvey and asserts the need for enhanced female voices to offer female insight.

Conversely, the depiction of love and relationships by Ferrando appears entirely different and is presented as more aware of consequence and impact, cause and effect. Yet, in the context of a traditional setting, such could be viewed as deceptive. His aria *Un aura amorosa* implies a preference of romantic attachment over a partnership of status, however his framing within the narrative and indeed traditional presentations of this, make the believability of this sensitivity challenging.

Un'aura amorosa   *A breath of love*

Del nostro Tesoro   *From our treasurer*

Un dolce ristoro   *Will afford our hearts*

Al cor porgerà;   *Sweet sustenance*

Al cor che, nudrito   *A heart nourished*

Da speme, da amore,   *On the hope of love*

Di un'esca migliore   *Has no need*

Bisogno non ha.   *Of greater inducement*

Considering this inherent difference between the male lovers and comparative lack of such in their female counterparts, perhaps the next point of feminist re-envisioning could be to use physical action to highlight the individuality of each character. Then, one may subsequently implement *Gestus* to physicalise the difference between that particular character, the performer taking on the role and the wider socio-cultural environment of the production.

Referring back to a previous interview with Soprano Alison Langer who sought to achieve a non-binary depiction of Oscar in *Un ballo in maschera*, one is reminded that she 'addressed [her] walk, stance, speed of movement, and many other things.'[240] Such infers the possibility of enhanced physical change being applied to reframe visible depictions of gender through detachment. Specifically, the usual state of audience expectation could be broken by a fundamental shift in physical performance.

After earlier consideration of Whateley's commencing insight, workshop 1[241] participants were first asked to move around the room with their own physicality to establish a sense of awareness of their natural state. Furthering the ideas of Katie Mitchell and Uta Hagen explored in the previous chapter, participants were asked to consider answers to the following questions:

- How do I walk? – What is my gait/stance/contact with the ground
- How do I engage with others? – Do I interact with others using body language or am I isolated and/or focused on my individual persona in the way I move?
- To what extent do I interact with my inner thoughts? – Am I thinking as I move? If so, what is this about, and does this relate to myself, others or the wider world around me?

Without vocalising the answers to such questions, participants were then asked to adjust their original state to that of their character. This grounded their performance in an understanding of

---

[240] Castrey, M. *Interview with Alison Langer.* June 2019.

[241] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

the point of difference between themselves as performers and the identity of their character. As a final step to this exercise, participants were asked to move as other characters within the work in line with their perception of them. This involved inverting genders, age and social status and exploring how this physically manifests. From this, a Brechtian state of satirisation and parody arose, where performers were encouraged to take on the stance of other characters as they themselves perceived those individuals.

Furthering this basis of physical understanding, participants were then asked to clearly identify the differences between the characters within this work by ranking them on a scale according to set characteristics; sincerity, cunning, romance, confidence and awareness. Collectively, the results were as follows:

Figure 3)

Response of participants in Workshop 1[242] to "sincerity":

1 (most)	Fiordiligi
2	Dorabella
3	Ferrando
4	Despina
5	Guglielmo
6 (least)	Don Alfonso

Interestingly, Ferrando has been interpreted as more sincere than Despina. This presents interesting opportunities for contemporary re-envisioning, where his characterisation can be detached from hegemonic masculinity. In doing this, sincerity can become a central tenet of his characterisation to disrupt audience expectation of an essential and over-masculine male. Conversely, Despina's mischief contrasts to the purity of Fiordiligi and Dorabella, which in turn can provide a greater sense of balance between physical depictions of gendered roles.

Figure 4)

---

[242] ibid.

Response of participants in Workshop 1[243] to "cunning":

1 (most)	Don Alfonso
2	Despina
3	Guglielmo
4	Dorabella
5	Ferrando
6 (least)	Fiordiligi

Again, Fiordiligi appears the most trustworthy here, yet the possible interpretation of Ferrando having been coerced into the experiment emerges. Both Despina and Dorabella also appear higher on this scale than some of the other male characters, again presenting the possibility of a Brechtian subversion of expectation to disrupt conventional gendered depictions.

Figure 5)

Response of participants in Workshop 1[244] to "romance":

1 (most)	Fiordiligi
2	Ferrando
3	Dorabella
4	Despina
5	Guglielmo
6 (least)	Don Alfonso

A similar response to "sincerity," Fiordiligi again appears the most romantic, interestingly just above Ferrando. The disruption of a linear male-female response to the appearance of romance appears a somewhat Brechtian mindset in itself and again presents opportunities for contemporary interpretations to inform the subversion of convention and expectation.

---

[243] ibid.

[244] ibid.

Figure 6)

Response of participants in Workshop 1[245] to "confidence":

1 (most)	Despina
2	Guglielmo
3	Don Alfonso
4	Ferrando
5	Dorabella
6 (least)	Fiordiligi

Interestingly, females appear at the top and bottom of this scale. Such suggests that, from a contemporary perspective, individuality and the extent of which outward character identity is interpretable appears to be much more spectrum-orientated than dualistic. Indeed, confidence appears central to the extent of which the female voice is present within works from the canon. Less confident females are depicted as fretful and tormented, whilst more confident women become femme fatales. Perhaps then, inverting this to empower the roles at the bottom end of this scale and presenting them with heightened confidence provides new opportunities for an elevated position of these characters.

Figure 7)

Response of participants in Workshop 1[246] to "awareness":

1 (most)	Despina
2	Fiordiligi
3	Dorabella
4	Ferrando
5	Guglielmo
6 (least)	Don Alfonso

---

[245] ibid.

[246] ibid.

It is particularly interesting that the female roles should be appreciated as the most aware of all characters by these contemporary artists.

Perhaps then, this could serve as a catalyst for feminist re-envisionings where the evidence of heightened female awareness as it appears in the original work could be the angle from which contemporary perspective is represented. This could also appear fundamentally Brechtian through the transition of the audience gaze from a male to a female identity. This exercise was perhaps one of the most useful undertaken during this explorative process. Not only did this encourage performances to centralise their perception of all characters from their contemporary perspective, it also made such interpretations visible to all members of the company. By amalgamating all individual perspectives into one centralised response, a greater level of coherency can be established and maintained. This was also vitally useful to myself as a practitioner in understanding the ideological viewpoints of the cast and encourage creativity, uniqueness and a comfortable working space around these.

Then, taking influence from Judith Butler's idea that gender, and more broadly, identity should be constructed by a series of physical actions, participants were asked to "move" as certain characters. The aim was to encourage awareness of how characters within the work physically manifest on stage. Not only did this deepen the understanding of what physical actions represented for that performer, but also highlighted the differences between the character and the artist. Of this, Singer C stated 'this was an eye-opening exercise which deepened my understanding of my own character interpretation and the performance intentions of others around me. This also really enabled the visible differences between male and female characters and showed how other characteristics like age are also points of difference in terms of how characters are audiences and interact with each other within the show.'[247] Once again, this was very useful in centralising interpretations of performers and ensuring coherency between all performers and their roles onstage.

---

[247] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

Having established a foundation of clear identity and dramatic intent, the next stage of exploration in workshop 1[248] involved implementing the selected point of contemporary re-envisioning. In this case, this was the Brechtian idea of *Gestus* to separate the narrative and musical action from the socio-cultural context. Engaging with participants in a round-table discussion, it was proposed that the starting point for contemporary re-envisioning to elevate the female position in the work could involve the visible questioning of the principle upon which the narrative is constructed. I refer to Singer G, who took on the role of Don Alfonso and who stated, 'I found myself puffing my chest and arching my head to look down on people. Not because I really thought about it but because that's how I always understood him to be.'[249]

In response to this, the idea of Don Alfonso appearing as an outcast philosopher was presented, yet opposing his presentation in the production at Glyndebourne, this philosopher was outspoken, dominating and passionate about his ideologies, relying on his generational difference to validate his claims. Singer G suggested 'perhaps by satirising Don Alfonso's beliefs and in turn, making him very vocal about his position, we can shake the foundation that all the characters are built upon.'[250] They further added 'The root cause of the sisters lack of strength is because they never perceived with any ability to appear strong in the first place post up in the very first scene, Don Alfonso tells the boys, and essentially the audience, what to think, and then we all watch it play out from there.'[251] In this instance, the fundamental cause of gender imbalance is perceived as Don Alfonso's "wisdom" which, in the context of the work, and by extension the sociocultural arena of the time, was taken as gospel. Today though, this kind of hypothesis is not pursuant to the contemporary environment, and as such, perhaps the satirisation of Don Alfonso in the manner of *Gestus* could become a possible catalyst for broader restructuring. The foundation of this is again strengthened by the earlier proposition of a reimagining of the subsidiary title, wherein a more gender-neutral reading of *A School for Lovers* facilitates the application of exploratory practise applied to all roles and identifications.

---

[248] ibid.

[249] ibid.

[250] ibid.

[251] ibid.

In terms of satirising the character of Don Alfonso, I propose a possible solution of utilising Laura Mulvey's idea of "lookingness" where the 'usual voyeuristic stance of [the] male spectator is replaced by a "lookingness" shared between actors and spectators of both genders.'[252] Such complements the intention of Brecht to make the spectator 'passionately and pleasurably engaged.'[253] Yet, feminist re-envisioning can augment this approach in the application of lookingness to break the link between the feminist spectator and passion. Indeed, as Iris Smith suggests, 'the pleasure of dialectic [and] of an appropriate synthesis [of physical realisations of gender in legacy works] do not do justice to the complexities of gender encountered in daily life.'[254] This insight very much aligns to several contemporary practitioners including Katie Mitchell, whose direct confrontation of misogynistic themes do much to break links between audience and character which facilitate female objectification. Such is something I seek to apply within this proposed method of practical working.

Previous exercises undertaken within workshop 1[255] helped to establish this state of "lookingness" as a stance of critical viewership between actors and individuals. Yet whilst this facilitates rehearsal practise in line with feminist incentive, this only becomes truly visible to audiences through the interaction between characters. This in turn further reinforces the fundamental Brechtian principle of alienation. In this case, I suggest that this method centres around the initial process of creating space between actor and character, which is then applied to audience and subject matter. The aim of such is to maintain compositional accessibility whilst encouraging relevance to the contemporary gendered environment.

To achieve this secondary act of distancing between characters and subject matter rooted in "lookingness," the next workshop activity involved creating tableaus, that is, "freeze frames" of certain visual states of "looking" encompassing various reactions. However, feminist-specific re-envisioning is facilitated through the instruction to create two versions of the same frame; one as it would conventionally appear, and one that attempts to deconstruct gender imbalances. Four themes were given to participants: male seduction, female seduction, male

---

[252] Smith, I. (1991). Brecht and the Mothers of Epic Theater. *Theatre Journal*. 43(4), p.495.

[253] ibid.

[254] ibid. 496.

[255] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

conversations about women, and female conversations about men. Aligning this to theory, this takes influence from the disruption of visibility and reintegrated feminist perspective implemented by Gayle Austin. One is reminded of her staging of *The Iceman Cometh* by Eugene O'Neill, wherein she observes that 'the women characters shown on stage are three stereotypical whores, whole the three wives and one mother who are constructed offstage through the men's dialogue are scapegoats, blamed for most of the men's problems.'[256] Interestingly, her proposed solutions for a successful feminist reading are; firstly, the foregrounding of gender by performing the play with an all-female or indeed inverted-gender cast. The visibility of men play female roles appears a very Brechtian disruption of audience expectation, whilst encouraging them to question the attachment of certain behaviours to gender identity. Secondly, Austin proposes that 'the women could play the roles as if they were men, or as if they were actresses trying the play on for size (and perhaps) rejecting it.'[257] Here, one is reminded of the earlier suggestion by Jessie Holder of a revised ending for *Dido and Aeneas*. In this instance, compositional integrity is maintained and yet interpolated with contemporary perspective to rebalance gender dynamics.

Thirdly, and perhaps most applicably to opera in cases where the potential for contemporary modification of content is restricted by the setting of the original material, Austin proposes to 'foreground the fact that the offstage women are not 'real,' but rather male constructs. This could be done in a number of ways, including the use of film images, slides, masks and puppets to represent the missing women…to [have] the effect of deconstructing the script and indicating contradictions within it.'[258] Indeed, the tableaux created here reflected this new sense of gender balance, moving away from visible male boisterousness, female coquettishness and a very evident dualism physically manifested on stage. Rather, this demonstrated a move towards presentations which align the original musical and narrative context to contemporary outlook and accessibility. Whilst this exercise was very useful, having already engaged in substantial collaborative work with the company, it may have been beneficial to undertake this earlier on in the process. Such may have helped to shape the formation of the collective

---

[256] Austin, G (1990). *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. United States of America: University of Michigan Press. 36- 37.

[257] ibid.

[258] ibid.

interpretation of the work rather than the tableaux being informed by a creative vision that had already been agreed. Nonetheless, this was useful in outlining the disparity between original presentation and feminist-centred re-envisioning to ensure dramatic cohesion and reflection on the importance of this work.

Having explored the physical side of performance, one then considers how the vocal demands of the score may be presented in line with this Brechtian method. Of course, when any dramatic meaning of a piece or work is re-interpreted, this leads to new expressive parameters employed to portray this vocally. Taking the opening duet, *A Guarda Sorella* sung by Fiordiligi and Dorabella as an example, this piece sees the sisters fanaticising about the kind of man who should sweep them off their feet. Specifically, their fantasies relate to physical traits over behavioural: the fire in his eyes, a face of a soldier and a lover and a noble face and sweeter mouth. Their dedication to this idea sees them proclaim "if ever my heart changes its affection, may love make me live in pain." Considering the narrative of the work, this appears very much as a precursor for what is to come, and indeed further transmits the idea of female fickleness which aligns to, and even endorses Don Alfonso's bitter experiment.

Viewing this through a contemporary lens and from the perspective of creating a feminist re-envisioning of this opening aria, two Brechtian areas of exploration appear directly applicable. The first is the idea of satirisation. If blatant humour is to be desired in a contemporary production, this duet presents a wealth of possibilities for the application of *Gestus* by Fiordiligi and Dorabella to deconstruct the masculine hegemony and normalised heroic behaviour which their own libretto actively applies to Ferrando and Guglielmo. To this end, the sisters could be seen over-exaggerating these desired soldier-like, passionate qualities in a satirical sense, which in turn, has the potential to make their lovers much more relatable when they do visibly appear. Alongside physicality, the vocal performance of this could involve changes of timbre and the application of dramatic breath to mimic heroism and desire, alongside performed dynamics and articulation to further enhance this idea in the voice.

If humour is not overly desired, a more subtle application of Brechtian principle could be to ground the performance of this duet in the idea of "standing beside" the characters. Several possibilities emerge here; to apply the idea of detachment in practice to present the sisters as contemporary women critically viewing their character from a present perspective, to follow this same practice but with the women critically observing their counterpart character, or to

keep the performers "attached" to the characters but to present them with much less frivolity. The application of dramatised breath will undoubtedly play a substantial part in the success of this re-envisioning. With less vocalised and subtler breathing, characters can appear much less frantic in favour of a considered and emotionally stable depiction. This in turn can be complemented by dynamics, articulation and phrasing and aligned to appropriate staging and blocking to detach Fiordiligi and Dorabella from the identity of a "frantic female" in favour of a much more considered and objective approach.

One remains mindful that "alienation" as a concept is individualistic; that is, social normality is in itself on a spectrum. However, the aim of the exploration of this piece in workshop 1[259] and its associated activities was to use *Così fan tutte* as an example of how techniques encouraging dramatic alienation and distancing may be applied within an exploratory environment. Such was a very rewarding and enlightening process and offered possible extensions to both the options available to creatives and performers on stage and their understanding of their characters. This in turn provides new ways for such roles and indeed broader works of this nature to become accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences.

3.6 Proposing a possible approach to using alienation as a method of re-envisioning

Following on from workshop exploration to investigate how Brechtian alienation may be implemented, this chapter will now propose a suggested method of implementing this process of re-envisioning within the rehearsal space to inform new productions.

i)   Synthesise existing insights

Where possible, directors and/or creatives should come prepared with insights gathered from either their own previous practice or other productions that were either particularly applicable to the current vision or very far removed from it. These could then be discussed in a round-table environment wherein reactions offered from a contemporary perspective can establish a collective incentive to achieve a particular appearance of the work and its characters. In the case of workshop 1[260], my own experience working within Opera Holland Park's 2018

---

[259] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[260] ibid.

production of *Così fan tutte* led me to discuss the angle from which Kitty Whately approached her characterisation. This then initiated a wider discussion of the contemporary appreciation of female roles and how the production itself can embody a heightened incentive of feminism within the original setting. It is noteworthy that any opinion, previous production or experience could be an effective starting point. The proposition here is that alienation is only effectively achieved when one's own stance is actively explored and understood.

ii) Stand beside characters

The purpose of this particular stage is to integrate personal insight from a contemporary perspective with the original appearance of the character to develop a deep understanding of where any disparities between the two positions are situated. It is suggested that this could be achieved most successfully by asking performers to narrate the thoughts and position of their character in a manner which sees them "look on" objectively. Depending on directorial decision, the scene in question could either be stopped at various points to allow for insights to be offered in real time or completed at the start and end of the scene in question. It is also suggested that the director formulates the same set of questions asked of each character depending on what they would like the performer to examine. Taking inspiration from workshop 1[261], suggested questions could be:

How am I feeling now?

How do I feel about the people in the room around me?

Am I contented or restless in my environment and circumstances?

What am I actively planning at this point?

Such aims to unearth; the true voice of the character underneath any socially conventionalised behaviour, intent towards other characters brought about by their own narratives and perceived performances, extent of happiness and broader intent. It is also noteworthy that any questions of intent provide the opportunity for further development where female characters can be made much more active in their deconstruction of legitimised patriarchy and suppression. For instance, this chapter has previously highlighted how the production of *Così fan tutte* by Wild

---

[261] ibid.

Arts showed Despina actively making Fiordiligi and Dorabella more aware of their own feelings of lust and sexual motivation. By a performer identifying the reaction of Despina to the suppression of Fiordiligi and Dorabella, intents such as this could be unearthed and made into a much more visible narrative construct.

iii) Graduate "standing beside" into satirisation

Having already facilitated the ability for performers to develop a deep understanding of both their own character and others surrounding them, the next stage aims to integrate any disparities between original depiction and contemporary perspective into performed physicality. In this instance, one refers to questions derived from the work of Beth Watkins and Uta Hagen:

How do I walk? – What is my gait/stance/contact with the ground

How do I engage with others? – Do I interact with others using body language or am I isolated/focused on my individual persona in the way I move?

To what extent do I interact with my inner thoughts? – Am I thinking as I move? If so, what is this about, and does this relate to myself, others or the wider world around me?

Directors may wish to invite performers to walk around the room as their character, encapsulating the newly devised intent brought about from the previous exercise. This could then be taken further by asking performers to take on the physicalised performance of other roles to develop a deeper understanding of the intricacies of other characters and their opposing view of the narratological environment.

Having constructed this detailed understanding of characters within the work in question, directors are then encouraged to allow for the formulation of a collective appreciation of gendered roles as they appear. This aims to facilitate a unified performance of satirisation and alienation. As part of this, a suggested method, again exemplified in workshop 1[262], is to invite performers to collectively rank characters as they relate to certain criteria. Whilst this criteria can be freely set by the director, suggested topics are; sincerity, cunning, romance, confidence and awareness. Such are intrinsically linked with gender identity and are often

---

[262] ibid.

conventionalised behaviours which provide the direct opportunity for the inversion of such appearances through performed alienation and satirisation.

iv)   Constructing "lookingness"

Having established a clear understanding of the collective appearance and appreciation of characters, the next suggested stage is to encourage a round-table discussion to decide any specific points of inversion. For example, in the case of workshop 1[263] performers ranked the awareness level of Ferrando as 4th of 6 (1 being most aware and 6 being least aware.) However, it could be decided that a specific area of interest may be to present Ferrando as much more aware than this, deconstructing his apparent ignorance by presenting him as more attuned to the emotional consequences of this experiment. This in turn could be physically achieved through the principals of alienation and detachment whereby the tomfoolery stereotypically embodied within these characters is actively challenged.

Additionally to this, there is the consideration of how the vocal performance could further support any changed physically. This would be a good opportunity to bring the musical director into active discussion to determine whether any changes to dynamic, tempo, phrasing, articulation or perhaps even more radically, instrumentation and texture could be used to highlight this re-envisioned concept. For instance, in *Un aura amorosa*, one proposes that the dynamics could be reduced and any doubling of the vocal line removed to construct a heightened sense of vulnerability in the character of Ferrando. It is prudent to note that, as seen in this example, re-envisioning of both male and female roles can have a positive impact on the visibility of women. By Ferrando appearing more emotionally attuned to the needs of his female lover, his position is also elevated. Thus, depictions of male hegemony and masculine bravado are too deconstructed.

The key element of this proposed method is the ability for directors to adapt this framework to align to their own vision. The lines of questioning suggested are just some of the ways in which this method may be applied; with the concept of alienation and detachment providing plentiful opportunities for new concepts and perspectives to be unearthed and subsequently performed.

---

[263] ibid.

4. Carmen: Structuring performativity for uniqueness and constructing variable revisions with interpretive fluency

4.1 Understanding the issues at hand: enchantment as a key theme

Mapping the trajectory of expression from Baroque to Romantic opera, one associates the latter genre with increased musical, dramatic and sociocultural freedoms which manifest onstage with indulgent grandeur. Yet, the first question of this chapter relates to the limitations of the time; namely, how Romantic opera conventionally handles its female roles. Musicologist Arnold Whittall observes that 'it is often claimed [that Wagner's works] are strong enough to survive and even prosper under shifts of perspective, and interpretation should not be constrained by the parameters of the kind of thinking that was current between 1813 and 1883.'[264] Yet Whittall also suggests that after two centuries 'the best way to do something fresh about Wagner is to do as much as possible to avoid the obvious.'[265] Whilst, in this case, this observation is specific to the works of Wager, I suggest that this approach has the potential for a much wider application. By expanding the parameters of expression to allow for the integration of contemporary perspective, oppressed women as they appear in Romantic works can be empowered.

In her influential paper *Interdisciplinary Opera Studies*, Linda Hutcheon observes that the difference between a libretto and a score portrays 'a belief in its [the libretto's] secondariness.'[266] However, in recent years, creatives are looking to the accompanying words of canonical works to bring 'new approaches to the music of opera through narratology.'[267] Indeed, Hutcheon advocates the work of theorists including Joseph Kerman and his restructuring of the role of the dramatist and the re-appreciation by Theodor Adorno of the art of listening as a method of paving the way for the integration of feminist and broader cultural studies within productions of works from the canon. Consequently, the observations of Catherine Clément, Susan McClary and Jeremy Tambling seen previously over the course of

---

[264] Whittall, A. (2013). "Lohengrin" and the constraints of romantic opera. *The Musical Times*. 154(1922), p.9.

[265] ibid.

[266] Hutcheon, L. (2006). Interdisciplinary Opera Studies. *PMLA*. 121(3), p.802.

[267] ibid.

this investigation are too employed by Hutcheon to point to the 'major concern'[268] that is the depiction of female sexuality within Romantic opera and broader opera studies.

In response, Hutcheon points to a necessary shift in focus in the role of opera critic to 'concentrate on performance, literacy and cultural theory, and history.'[269] I suggest that this approach outlines the process of theory educating performance, and consequently it may be beneficial to rebalance this to focus on literacy, cultural theory and history educating individual performance and expression within feminist re-envisionings of Romantic works.

As a starting point for this, I highlight Hutcheon's observation of the Romantic practice of 'enchantment'[270] which is an idea that appears across the works of other contemporary scholars synthesising Romantic operatic convention. Indeed, this term seems especially appropriate in its ability to encompass the mores of hypersexuality as it projects onto predominately female roles of the period. Additionally, this further represents the frequent supernatural presence within popular works of the time that came with the gothic resurgence arising from schools of enlightened thought. Linking this idea of enchantment with feminist theory, one considers the well-known insight of Simone de Beauvoir from her influential book *The Second Sex*, wherein she states, 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.'[271] Such attests to the element of aesthetic performance which frequently constructs the female identity, encompassing visual, behavioural and societal mores associated with conventional depiction of the female sex and the "coming of age" period which transitions a girl into a woman.

It is interesting that the conventionalised compositional and performance practice of enchantment as entertainment is observed by musicologist Mina Yang as 'the undoing of opera,'[272] where whilst 'feminist post structuralist and post-colonial theories… have begun to explore opera's darker side, interrogating issues of race, gender and sexuality… opera requires

---

[268] ibid. 803.

[269] ibid. 805.

[270] ibid.

[271] de Beauvoir, S. (1973). *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books. p.301.

[272] Yang, M. (2008). Moulin Rouge! and the Undoing of Opera. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 20(3), p.269.

a leap of faith on the part of the modern audience'[273] to accept new and more relevant realisations of canonical works. Yang uses Baz Luhrmann's film *Moulin Rouge* as a point of reference for how depictions of female sexuality may be executed in the Contemporary age. She recounts the start of the film where 'at first glance this scene reinforces Laura Mulvey's contention that women in film function solely as passive erotic objects, to be pleasurably looked at by the male audiences on either side of the screen. Yet we get the sense that Satine is more than mere eye candy. Flaunting her physical assets and playing the vixen in a parodic fashion.'[274] Here, the link between this piece of contemporary film and Romantic opera is pronounced. Aligning this with feminist theory, one is once again reminded of the synthesis of the popular artist Madonna by Susan McClary[275] and the root of her identity as a performer lying in her depiction of female desire. Yet Carolyn Abbate would argue that whilst female performance on stage may indeed temporarily construct a position of the male as object, the voice of a male composer ultimately dictates the outcome of the heroine.[276] Considering this, Yang's comparison between Christian and Satine from *Moulin Rouge* with Alfredo and Violetta from *La traviata* seems credibly grounded. Christian, a young writer is enamoured with the beautiful Satine who is dying of consumption and who herself is pursued by an older and wealthier Duke. Ultimately it is the male dominance of the composer and the surrounding social mores which dictate the position of those around Violetta and ultimately constructs her negative outcome. Whilst Verdi does indeed highlight some nobility within her character, it is regrettable that even this cannot deconstruct her seemingly predetermined outcome.

Indeed, the promiscuity of Satine could also compare with the identity of the femme fatale as it manifests in Romantic opera in characters such as Carmen. One considers the re-framing of Satine's visible femininity and how this is perceived by her male counterpart as a possible means of feminist re-envisioning canonical Romantic works. In this instance, re-envisioning relies on performance centred around individual identity to construct a particular depiction of a character. Namely, her physical confidence is utilised as a tool for empowerment as opposed to controversy and oppression. This in turn informs how such characters are perceived by both

---

[273] ibid. 271.

[274] ibid. 273.

[275] McClary, S (1994). *Feminine Endings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 152, 165.

[276] Abbate, C & Parker, R. (2012). *A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years*. London: Allen Lane.

on and off-stage spectators. Consequently, I suggest Yang's observation of enchantment as one of the most problematic themes when approaching productions of Romantic opera in the Contemporary age. In answer to this, I will examine how enacting "performativity" as a method of reconstruction can go some way towards deconstructing this by empowering the individual performer.

In terms of how this relates to gender, the original theoretical definition of this concept as set out by Judith Butler states that 'a performative [act]…enacts or produces that which it names.'[277] In this sense, the "act" both names and defines the entity; the entity does not dictate the act. Applying this to the presentation of gender onstage, this method would require actions to construct visible identity rather than the fixed expectation of identity determining which actions are appropriate. This study has highlighted how the latter observation appears commonplace within performances of canonical opera, where inherited realisations of characters informed by past sociocultural environments continue to perpetuate female subordination and a sense of otherness. Indeed, the deconstruction of inherited realisations appears in itself reminiscent of fourth wave contemporary feminism in practice, where an intersectional perspective is favoured over conventional practice. In breaking relationships between expected behaviour informing identity, such also enables the female identity to apply to a greater and more diverse demographic. Aligning this to canonical works, one considers how this practice may be applied to characters such as Despina and Carmen, whose enjoyment of their sexuality and femininity is frequently met with negative connotations.

Aligning this to *Carmen*

To follow the process of utilising the method of performativity to deconstruct enchantment, this chapter will use Bizet's *Carmen* as a case study to explore how this concept may be integrated during the rehearsal process and translated on stage. With Carmen appearing as one of the ultimate femme fatales of Romantic opera, her use of enchantment by way of seduction is especially evident. Aligning this to the observations of Abbate previously seen, it is in the convention and disposition of male composers of the time, that the danger associated with

---

[277] Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Oxon: Routledge. 13.

visible female sexuality ultimately constructs the downfall of the female.[278] With the ideas of influential theorists appearing as a common theme in numerous works of note, Professor H. Marshall Leister comments that Tambling, Poizat and Clément allow for 'a prior structure or structures – the systematic presence of male domination and its construction of women in society'[279] within their appreciation of the appearance of gendered roles. It is this observation of systematic domination which this chapter will directly challenge in practice.

Indeed, society appears broadly represented within Bizet's work; based on the short story of the same name by Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* presents several demographics and their inherent dualisms, namely the male-female binary, the hegemonic preference of masculine behaviour, the discriminants of both class and race, and the scale of order and defiance. In what Judith Butler observes as 'the habitual blurring of discriminants,'[280] the troublesome area of *Carmen* from the approach of the feminist re-envisionist is how the construction of enchantment interpolates discriminatory demographics to construct dualistic gendered identities. This is especially evident in the titular character, wherein her narrative and compositional treatment construct a pronounced sense of "otherness."

This existence beyond the perceived parameters of sociocultural normalcy appears to be exclusively applied to female roles. For example, Escamillo is a young matador whose desirability is not constructed through active and intentional depictions of different race and class. Rather, his position appears to have an embedded scope of possible physical performance in a manner which, from a contemporary outlook, appears reminiscent of Brecht's *Gestus*. Puffed chest, strutting instead of walking, and the general sense of bravado appear fundamental constructs of his role, which elevate his position within the narrative. Conversely, the same constructions of physical performance attributed to Carmen; her sexual teasing and deviance reduces her position and ultimately act as a catalyst to her downfall. This embodiment of female otherness is ultimately contextualised by the narratological arc of Don José, whose existence beyond law and order and overriding infatuation with Carmen appear to warn the audience

---

[278] Abbate, C & Parker, R. (2012). *A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years*. London: Allen Lane.

[279] Marshall Leicester, H. (1994). Discourse and the Film Text: Four Readings of "Carmen". *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 6(3), p.245.

[280] Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. USA: Routledge. 2-4.

away from individuals like her. In short, the onstage physical performance of Carmen when it is conventionally realised appears to exclusively construct her perceived personality and the existence of such as undesirable.

To this end, using performativity, that is, allowing physical performance to construct identity, as a method to construct various re-envisionings of female roles will be applied to Bizet's *Carmen.* This will be examined through the amalgamation of theoretical synthesis and a performance exploration in workshop 1,[281] with this work aiming to uncover possible methods of success and propose new ways of encouraging and realising re-envisioned versions of roles of this nature.

4.1.1   Summarising the patriarchal environment at play

The contextual positioning of *Carmen* within the Romantic period goes some way towards rationalising the extensive emotive themes present within this, and other works of a similar nature. Whilst the Romantic period did bring about heightened depictions of sexuality for women, it is interesting to note that virtuosity remined the desired female persona. Looking across to literary contemporaries, Cynthia Griffin Wolff's article *A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature* identifies that publications of this time still valued 'men and masculine pursuits over women and feminine hobbies, women's concerns seem devalued.'[282] Such establishes an understanding of the disdain associated with Carmen's overt displays of sexuality and the extent of which her character exists beyond convention. Sex and relationships are her hobby indulged in for enjoyment, which not only defies behavioural expectation, but also upsets the social hierarchy of the time. Women may have been expected to be seen and not heard, yet the voice of Carmen speaks loudly and with clear intent. Considering how disparate she appears from behavioural expectation; one could see this as an opportunity for enhanced exploration in contemporary productions. Given the expanded spectrum of identity in the contemporary age, coupled with Carmen's disregard of conventions, there arguably appears much greater ability to integrate a new scope for individuality into

---

[281] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[282] Wolff, C G. (1972). A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature. *The Massachusetts Review.* 13(1/2), p.205.

modern performances of this opera. Such could foreground new appreciations of how Carmen chooses to act individualistically, increasing relatability, accessibility and diversity as a result.

4.2 Comparing and contrasting contemporary productions

Having previously identified the central troublesome themes which disrupt the integration of a contemporary feminist incentive as enchantment and gendered performance, this study will now compare and contrast the treatment of these themes by three contrasting productions. The first, a traditional staging of the work directed by Francesca Zambello for The Royal Opera House in 2007, the second a modernised version again for the Royal Opera and directed by Barrie Kosky in 2017, and the final a re-set production for The Latvian National Opera directed by Andrejs Žagars in 2007.

Profiles and incentives of each work

Carmen (2007) – The Royal Opera – Director: Francesca Zambello

This was a traditionally staged production which was performed with lavish sets and a large ensemble. Staged to mark the 60th anniversary of The Royal Opera House, reviewer Tim Ashley observed Zambello's *Carmen* as 'a big, gaudy affair, awash with moments of gratuitous excess that threaten, on occasion, to swamp Bizet in camp.'[283] Such scale of performance is especially evident in this staging, and it is perhaps because of the grandiosity of this production that the central roles frequently appear "over-performed." Overall, this set out to be a highly traditional production, and as such, there was no traceable specific inference of treating the gendered roles in this piece in any new or re-envisioned way.

Carmen (2017) – The Royal Opera – Director: Barrie Kosky

This re-imagined production attempts to focus on constructing new character identities in an avant-garde environment. Central to the re-envisioned treatment of this work is the idea that this production is non-specific in terms of its location. Kosky himself stated in an interview

---

[283] Ashley, T. (2006). *Carmen*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at:
https://www.theguardian.com/music/2006/dec/11/classicalmusicandopera [Accessed 4 April 2023].

'we are not setting the production in any place. We don't need to worry about what country we are in; we can do whatever we bloody well like.'[284] He also observed that 'the piece is not a Spanish opera. It's a French opera…this is the mistake that people make. They assume that it's a doom-laden story of a Gypsy with black curly hair and gold earrings, and a story of love and sex and whatever. Well, it turns into that, but for the first two thirds of the evening…it's naughtiness, it's irony.'[285] Speaking from the perspective of feminist theory in practice, it is notable how this locationally non-specific approach does much to detangle the female identity from other discriminants, namely ethnicity and class. It is also evident that, simultaneous to this, Kosky utilises the full extent of the avant-garde, mixed influence setting to highlight the objectification that can become stereotypes in both male and female genders. Overall, this piece sets out to push dramatic and interpretational boundaries by removing oppressing parameters which prevent characters from acting as individuals.

Carmen (2007) – Latvian National Opera – Director: Andrejs Žagars

Contrasting to Kosky's approach of removing a specific location from the setting, this production sets out to re-envision the work by re-situating it in a new environment. The chosen setting is amidst the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s. Visually, the Cuban setting enjoys a similar appearance to the original Spanish setting, however, the updated time within which the action takes place could be said to remove some of the controversy of relating to the sexualisation of Carmen. This appears somewhat reminiscent of the effect of the re-imagining by Kosky, where removing the work from its original setting deconstructs some of the discriminating elements of the traditional context.

4.2.1. Enchantment

i)   The Royal Opera – 2007

This traditional production directed by Francesca Zambello portrays the role of Carmen in a conventional sense. Wearing typical gypsy attire, Anna Caterina Antonacci in the title role

---

[284] Kosky, B quoted in Anderson, M. (2018). *https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/arts/music/barrie-kosky-carmen-royal-opera-london.html*. [Online]. The New York Times. Available at:
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/arts/music/barrie-kosky-carmen-royal-opera-london.html [Accessed 4 April 2023].

[285] ibid.

utilises the full extent of performed sexuality; frequently striking provocative poses that sees her part her legs alongside various male onstage cast members and demonstrating a boisterous flippancy of gesture. One could suggest that this somewhat invalidates the emotional complexities of this role, with the cunning, approach to love and fear of death portrayed by Carmen often being framed with lens of carpe diem. It is noteworthy how this style of performance constructs a state of enchantment from the perspective of sexual allure, wherein her vulnerability is never really explored. Pursuant to this, the use of rope manipulated by Carmen to physically entrap her male suitors may indeed appear to elevate the physical strength of Carmen. However, the grounding of this action and treatment of this prop in her sexual identity and allure portrays the entrapment of her enchantment. Consequently, this creates a strong sense of sexual objectivity within her role, which she appears to consciously utilise and enjoy.

It could be suggested that the most vulnerable appearance of Carmen occurs during the card scene in act three, where she reads tarot cards that predict the deaths of both Don José and herself. During *En vain pour éviter*, Antonacci uses a heightened degree of chest resonance, giving her sound a brassiness which seems to deprive the aria of some of its emotional fragility. This particular Carmen appears much colder, unfeeling and somewhat detached from her own narrative arc, with her overarching emotion appearing to be the passion of anger. This appears a missed opportunity for meaningful exploration of Carmen and once again frames her role as a dangerous, addictive object of male amusement that will eventually break.

Indeed, the same lack of exploration of a female role can be seen in Norah Amsellem's Micaëla, whose fragility and purity are foregrounded contrary to any individuality that could come with the implementation of the concept of performativity. In the case of this role, Micaëla is presented without any enchantment, and it is notable that the context of this production facilitates a characterisation that could be perceived as tepid. One could subsequently infer that the theme of enchantment is therefore presented as both a gift and a curse. Without it, women appear ordinary and uninteresting, and with it they are dangerous and deadly. In summary, there is no positive outcome for women in the traditional context of this production.

Contrasting to this, the only real sincerity seen in this presentation of Carmen is in her moments with Escamillo. During *Si tu m'aimes, Carmen*, Antonacci's facial expression and use of resonance noticeably softens, which appears all the more oppositional to Ildebrando

D'Arcangelo's Escamillo, who maintains his sense of bravado and elaborate finesse in both his vocal resonance and physicality. Consequently, it could be implied that Carmen is made more docile once she is paired with a suitable male match. Without Escamillo she, much like the theory of the "butch woman," synthesised by Judith Halberstam, acts in a manner that is perceived as masculine. Once she is settled, she is able to enjoy the more typical softness of femininity. Overall, this production appears to present the theme of enchantment as a condition that is suffered from. It appears metaphoric of an alluring poison which causes temporary satisfaction but long-term suffering.

ii)   The Royal Opera – 2017

Barrie Kosky's production interprets the idea of female sexuality very differently, appearing to frame the practice of "female performance" metaphorically and from a critical perspective for the contemporary audience. During her infamous aria *Habanera,* Anna Goryachova's Carmen is shown wearing a monkey suit, gradually removing the headpiece and arms as the aria continues. The metaphor is clear here; that Carmen is a "performing monkey" to satisfy the whim of males, but there are two questions arising from this; whether this is a choice by Carmen or whether this behaviour is a necessary consequence of the environment around her. Certainly, Goryachova's physical performance constructs a sense of playfulness that would seem to imply Carmen's full awareness of her manipulation. This, coupled with male mime artists putting on her shoes towards the end of an aria in a highly sexualised manner certainly points to her stance of purposeful manipulation. However, whilst Carmen's knowledge and exploitation of her sexual appeal can indeed appear to empower the female role, I would suggest that the weaponisation of female sexuality from whichever gender it occurs is troublesome for contemporary feminist expectation. This being said, it is noteworthy that Carmen removes her monkey costume to reveal a sharply tailored suit, coupled with stilettos. Such greatly subverts the expectation of how she is seen within the original context of blurred discriminants. Contrary to Antonacci's traditional and highly sexualised costume, her appearance in a male suit convincingly points to the symbolism of Carmen existing in a male dominated world. Observationally, one could suggest that she is dressing and even behaving as a male would in order to get by, or perhaps even diversifying the female identity to extend beyond the conventional feminine identity.

From a theoretical perspective, one is reminded once again of the "the butch woman" theory from Judith Halberstam and how the female sex can be detached from feminine behaviour. In the intersection of theory and practice, one refers once more to the synthesis of Madonna by Susan McClary, in this case pointing to her 1988 video for *Express Yourself*, wherein the artist wears a suit alongside other very delicate and conventionally feminine dresses to highlight, in a third-wave feminist sense, the many perspectives and manifestations of the female identity. Perhaps then, one may consider costume as a fundamental component of feminist re-envisioning in the Contemporary age. Indeed, costume is one of the most apparent manifestations of visual character identity, and in line with calls from Sue-Ellen Case for the use of all technical disciplines to elevate the female perspective, it could be a discipline more carefully considered in the process of contemporary restructuring.

However, despite any apparent subversion in the appearance of Carmen, one considers whether highlighting the issue of an oversexualised female performing for male satisfaction is satisfactory in the Contemporary age. Is simply showing the disparities enough, or should Carmen make a more obvious stand against them? In keeping with this more radical proposition, perhaps the concept of performativity could be applied as a creative method to point to a stronger position of female defiance. Considering the Brechtian ideas of "standing beside" characters, satirisation and the direct challenge of audience expectation to restructure visibility examined in the previous chapter, Carmen could be seen to mock her depiction as a monkey in a "matter of fact" manner. This could point to unspoken dialogue such as "look at what I have to do," which in turn could provide the performer with a greater method of relating their own identity to that of the character. There is also a politicism associated with this, with inferences of this unspoken dialogue speaking to the legitimised inequalities of the surroundings. In a theoretical sense, this further breaks the fourth wall and challenges the audience to think beyond the objectification of the female. Ultimately, this process achieves a re-envisioned gaze by foregrounding the issue of necessary female "performance" and endearment to males to achieve any kind of reputation; positive or negative.

Again, focusing on this particular aria, it is noteworthy that Kosky elects to include music Bizet eliminated from the original score and which he specifically asked not to be performed. Opera critic David Salazer observes that 'the music feels completely out of place in the context of the opera; it feels as if it belonged to a different work and its waltzy character is a far cry from the more grounded habanera we know today…it create[s] a sense of unease for the viewer that

knows the opera intimately.'[286] Indeed, whilst this concept of disrupting spectator expectation appears central to the principles of Brechtian alienation, it is possible that the inclusion of new music furthers the potential to liberate performer and creative from what has gone before. With new music, comes new possibility without the pressure of adhering to restrictive conventions. Whilst it is not always the case that canonical works have unperformed material readily accessible, the consideration of this method where possible as a means of feminist reconstruction should perhaps not be disregarded.

    iii)   Latvian National Opera

This particular production is set amidst the background of the Cuban revolution. Carmen is presented as an American supporting revolutionary, who appears fearless in the face of the Cuban police. It is notable that this production does indeed construct Carmen with a sense of danger. She frequently wears bright, red, and USA paraphernalia and notably, enjoys being restrained with rope by Don Jose. In the original setting, the promiscuity of Carmen and her non-conformance to social mores may seem especially controversial, however, by setting this amidst a revolutionary backdrop, her presentation takes on a somewhat trailblazing image. It is therefore notable that this production by the LNO reframes the theme of enchantment to become positively associated with the spark of rebellion. In line with Carmen being presented as a trailblazer, it is also in keeping with her character that she is shown to take on activities, more daring in nature; mainly riding Don Jose's motorcycle. This daredevil personality also facilitates Elīna Garanča to be much freer in her vocal characterisation, with frequent playful changes of timbre and more vigorous than usual articulation helping to construct her defiant attitude. Yet, once again in the context of revolution, this behaviour appears rationalised. In the original setting of the work, Carmen is presented as an anomaly behaving in a way she should not, whereas when amalgamated with a context of political turbulence, other ensemble characters also appear inspired or even, to be inspiring her deviance.

It was particularly notable that female members of the chorus were able to be presented as confident and even boisterous as opposed to passive onlookers. It could therefore be suggested that reframing this central theme facilitated a more comprehensive depiction of the full cross-

---

[286] Salazar, D. (2019). *Royal Opera House 2018-19 Review: Carmen*. [Online]. OperaWire. Available at: https://operawire.com/royal-opera-house-2018-19-review-carmen/ [Accessed 4 November 2022].

section of social response when it comes to ideological change. With political turbulence and rebellion comes a spectrum of different responses, and in this sense, Carmen's identity as an apparent facilitator of this garners the same scope of reaction from those around her. Consequently, her persona became less focused on the approval or disapproval of her behaviour because of her gender, and more evidently centred around the extent of which she enacts change. Within this approach, other chorus performers within the work were also afforded much greater potential to establish clear identities. Such furthers the extent of which the production is convincing and grounded within its new setting and themes.

However, it is also apparent that this reframed enchantment appears somewhat undermined by the characterisation of Micaëla, whose virtuosity is continually reinforced. Her occupation as a nurse and perpetual white attire, appears a harsh contrast to Carmen's colour palette and further reinforces the sense of danger and fearlessness heavily established in the latter character. Perhaps it would have been beneficial to remove some of the more obvious virtuous inference associated with Micaëla to allow for her narratological purpose to extend beyond acting as an example of how women should behave. Additionally, it is ultimately virtuosity which triumphs over the theme of enchantment wherein Carmen uncharacteristically wears a white jeans and jacket combination in her final scene, making the stains of her blood on this attire and the surrounding white walls even more striking. It is consequently suggested that she is made pure in death and once again, her allure and non-conformance constructs her downfall. Whilst this new politicised context does much to widen the rebellious demographic Carmen is a part of, perhaps a more radical possible re-staging of this ending would be to keep Carmen in her typical appearance and see her escaping Don José, leaving him with his guilt. The arising subtext of Carmen starting a new life, aligns to the rebellious setting and prevents Carmen from appearing as either a political martyr dying for her cause, a victim of abuse or somebody who is made pure either through death or through her allegiance to a man.

4.2.2. Gendered performance

i)   The Royal Opera - 2007

Vocally, Antonacci's Carmen appears rather ruthless. There is a course nasality to her timbre which is particularly evident in her mid-range. Again, in *Habanera*, this seems to further perpetuate the idea of "dangerous love" as associated with this particular role, with Antonacci

actively building this into both her physical and vocal performance. Conversely, it appears Kaufman's Don José and D'Arcangelo's Escamillo embody similar open resonances to add a greater depth and command to their sound. Whilst this may indeed be the natural vocal state of these two singers, it is also worth regarding the heightened use of vibrato and particular elongation of phrases, which has the effect of adding to the showmanship qualities of these two hegemonically masculine characters. This is especially apparent in D'Arcangelo's *Toreador*, where the high level of male showboating is further compounded by the striking of flamenco poses by Escamillo. This is accompanied by a greatly exaggerated joyous and evocative reaction from the surrounding, predominantly female chorus. Perhaps this idea may appear with a heightened feminist perspective if there were an equal number of surrounding female chorus reacting disapprovingly to this boisterous bravado. Additionally, a greater number of male chorus members reacting in either of these possible ways may expand the scope of diversity and representation in this particular production.

In contrast to Antonacci's somewhat detached Carmen, Kaufman's Don José appears more delicate. His consistently warm resonance does not construct his character as any kind of villain, rather a man who is being slowly driven to insanity by his circumstances. This is further implied through the comparative lack of assertion in his physical performance. Such again constructs fragility in this role alongside Carmen's ruthlessness. On the other hand, the characterisation of Escamillo is firmly grounded in the heroic male identity. His famous *Toreador* is sung from horseback, constructing the identity of the valiant hero, riding in from battle in a very literal way. Opposing Kaufman's Don José, D'Arcangelo's Escamillo embodies a consistent characterisation of bravado and insincerity, which interestingly triggers spectator sympathy and alignment to Don José, the central villain of the story. Whether this characterisation intentionally causes this alignment is not clear, yet Francesca Zambello's decision making cannot be disregarded when viewing this production from a gendered perspective. The consequence of this is that Carmen, Micaëla and the other females within this story are underdeveloped at the expense of this profound appreciation of the male identity as it manifests in different forms. To this end, whilst the full spectrum of male and masculine identity appears represented, it is interesting that the dualism between these two central male roles is not foregrounded. Rather, it appears that both disparate male identities appear dualistically dominant against Carmen and her perception as an object of enchantment, whose sins are ultimately corrected by her demise.

Indeed, the absolution of sin appears as a central theme in this production. As a consistent theme throughout the performance, there is a large orange tree placed centre stage. Aligning this to the framing of Carmen in this staging, one quickly considers this as a metaphor for the presence of Eve in The Garden of Eden. In this sense, Carmen is perceived as "the forbidden fruit," a pleasure indulged in by male suitors, poisoning and sickening before eventually rotting away. Consequently, one then perceives this imagining of *Carmen* not as the story of this unconventional female, but rather the story of Don José. The narrative starts and ends with the turmoil of his relationships, and ultimately, he is afforded the closing moments where he laments his actions. This then seems to construct a state of sympathy in the spectator, wherein the audience sees a character who is manipulated into a relationship, forced down a path of crime and punishment and is ultimately left heartbroken by his own actions. In this scenario, it is Carmen herself who is perceived as the villain and Don José an unwitting victim of his own attachment. Referring back to the central theme, Carmen casts the spell of enchantment in which José becomes unwittingly trapped. Whilst it would be remiss not to acknowledge the way in which this dramatic intent breaks down male heroism and facilitates the stance of male vulnerability, this production appears to prioritise this over meaningful exploration of Carmen's individuality. Additionally, it does not appear that Antonacci has been given the creative license to explore Carmen from the perspective of her own identity and contemporary environment. She appears wholly as traditionally expected, and as a result, the gendered roles in this production are incredibly unbalanced.

Further affirming this evident symbolism between Carmen and the temptation of Eve, Carmen wears a visible cross necklace in the closing scenes of the work. Given her provocative costume, the presence of this sizable accessory alongside a grander and more substantial yellow gown in the moments leading up to her murder, paint the striking image that she dies in purity having been absolved of her sins. If Carmen's confidence and self-expression are to be interpreted as proto-feminist qualities in the original work, then the question is posed as to whether the presentation of her apparent conformance in a manner that sees her die as a martyr undermines any of this contemporary potential. Whilst the potential for a re-envisioned ending will be seen in the ensuing case study, perhaps a feminist-centred decision would be to present Carmen's identity in her death as unchanged from her original state. Thus, her behavioural qualities become detached from male expectation and influence. In line with the multiperspectival influence of third wave feminism, it would arguably be more fitting with this

ideology to present Carmen as unwavering in her identity, able to exist beyond sociocultural influence.

Ultimately, this traditional staging strongly implies that the narrative belongs to Don José. Carmen appears as a passing character on his journey from reputation to ruin, and indeed is the catalyst for his downfall. Without constructing her identity beyond this presentation as a conduit of chaos, Carmen ceases to be any kind of feminist icon, rather, an object of male enchantment whose longevity is always destined to be reduced.

ii)   The Royal Opera - 2017

In terms of gendered performance and the presentation of dualism to the audience, it is especially noteworthy to witness how this production appears to explore the complexities of the male characterisation more profoundly than the female roles. One refers specifically to Escamillo's *Toreador* performed in this production by Kostas Smoriginas. Whilst the bravado of Escamillo is again pronounced here, the inclusion of backing dancers performing a very contemporary routine appears to be designed to parody the way Escamillo views himself. This decision does much to satirise this hegemonic masculinity, mocking Escamillo from a contemporary perspective whilst allowing the preservation of how he appears within the original narrative. From a technical performance point of view, the use of dancers also assists the singer greatly by relieving them of a wide range of movements and yet still allowing such flamboyant personas to be present onstage. It is also noteworthy how Smoriginas joins in with some of the choreography, which again appears to frame this male role as less rigid in his masculinity and rather more fluid and expressive in his physicality. From a male perspective, this does much to deconstruct the perceivably toxic elements of over-masculine portrayal.

A fundamental element of this production is the inclusion of a voiceover, which breaks the fourth wall to directly address the audience and provide further details of the plot and context. One of the most noteworthy applications of this voiceover from the perceptive of contemporary feminist re-envisionings of canonical works occurs at the start of the production, in the middle of the prelude. Here, the audience are provided with a depiction of the sociocultural expectations of women within the time of which the work is set. Whilst this does of course align to a feminist incentive to highlight the misogynistic themes of this, and many other works

of this nature, one questions whether this both legitimises the presentation of Carmen as a highly sexualised femme fatale onstage and further transmits her depiction as an outsider.

Whilst this does appear to align to the multiperspectival identity of fourth-wave feminism in its application of multi-media to transmit a female perspective, it is questionable whether the central presentation of gender onstage by Kosky goes far enough. This study has suggested that the contemporary expectation of feminism in practice is to encompass diversity, inclusion and a spectrum-orientated scale of identity. Considering previously proposed methods and how feminism has transitioned from existing within social institutions to deconstructing them altogether, one questions whether contemporary productions should go further than pointing to the presence of discrimination. Rather, a more radical approach to feminist reframing could facilitate the deconstruction of the ability for discriminants to align to gender identity altogether. Perhaps the voiceover used in this production could be more vigorously applied to explain the strength of Carmen from a contemporary standpoint and how discriminating factors including class and ethnicity have been wrongly amalgamated to construct her identity and legitimise her objectification. Perhaps then, the way the production is conventionally viewed by the audience could be immediately subverted, and their state of spectatorship could become critical and analytical from the point of commencement.

It is the final moments of this production which suggest a feminist incentive; namely, Carmen coming back to life at the end of the work, shrugging off her apparent murder and walking offstage. Opera scholar and journalist Claire Seymour observes that 'in the final moments, she [Carmen] rises from the ground with an ironic shrug which is both Carmen and Kosky's last word...Carmen has acted her story, as she wants it told, and she is reborn to tell it again.'[287] It is unchallenging to see why the death of Carmen in the traditional work is one of the most troublesome elements of female character depiction within the opera. Tracing this all the way back to the outcome of Dido in Purcell's opera, the running theme of the price of female non-conformance runs deep within canonical output. With the removal of her death from the narrative, the action itself becomes much more insignificant. When the concept of mortality is brought into consideration in such a parodic manner, one views the complexities of Carmen's relationships with José and Escamillo as petty squabbling to be shrugged off. Whilst the

---

[287] Seymour, C. (2018). *Barrie Kosky's Carmen at Covent Garden*. [Online]. Opera Today. Available at: https://www.operatoday.com/content/2018/02/barrie_koskys_c.php [Accessed 4 November 2022].

feminist incentive is evident, perhaps a more successful framing of this modification would be to have Carmen simply get up and walk away, glancing back to José as he breaks down. In such a case, the expectation of which gendered role embodies emotivity and which acts with greater stoicism is subverted, and as such, both are empowered.

Another possible subversion could be to reframe who commits the murder at the end of the work. One considers a new production of *Car Man* by Matthew Bourne, who reimagined Bizet's work, resetting it in an Italian American community in the USA. Whilst the story itself is only based on *Carmen* as opposed to staying completely true to the original plot, it is interesting to note that it is Lana, Carmen's counterpart, who shoots her lover at the end of the work. His body is then covered up by friends in order to conceal the crime. In this instance, the society around Lana do not judge her to be guilty, and as such, establish a sense of "correctness" by allowing her the liberation that her crime affords. Such treatment offers another perhaps more radical feminist re-envisioning that could have been/be utilised in new productions of the opera. It is also worth highlighting how Bourne utilises a setting within an Italian American community to highlight the ethnical sensibilities contained within the piece. However, rather than presenting the counterpart to Don José as a member of the borgois, all characters are constructed within the same environment, thus removing "otherness" as a central enactor of social isolation.

iii)   Latvian National Opera

It is noteworthy that despite the updated setting of this production, the aesthetic within which this work is presented maintains a certain degree of entanglement between the "otherness" of Carmen and her gendered performance. This is all the more pronounced when this particular staging is viewed by audiences of a non-Mediterranean ethnicity. Through costume, set, lighting, casting and even the application of props to mimic castanets, the new Cuban setting bears striking similarities to the original Seville environment, and as such, the exoticism of Carmen remains emphasised. There are also several elements of the production which perpetuate her association with danger as seen in her presentation within the original work. Her red attire compared with Micaëla's white, her USA paraphernalia, her daring pursuits and her blatant disregard of law and order all construct the same rebellious persona which audiences are familiar with. One could also suggest a reductive approach to her gendered position is further emphasised in this staging through the choice of male cast. It is particularly evident that

Žagars selected a much older Escamillo for this role, and indeed emphasised the age disparity between these two characters. With this framing of casting, it appears that Carmen has sought out an older man to protect her, and perhaps she is only entering into a relationship with him owing to his power, prestige and wealth. The desirability of Escamillo is not particularly emphasised, rather, it is his stature and command which sees the females around him start to swoon. Not only does this reduce the individuality and strength associated with Carmen, but this also reinforces an environment of hegemonic masculinity wherein Escamillo's position of greater importance is much more respected than Don José's. As such, the latter appears even more psychologically unhinged in the presence of a higher-ranking male.

With the expanded parameters of self-expression in the Contemporary age, it is not uncharacteristic for people of all genders to be much more lucid in their sexual behaviour. Therefore, without the more restrictive social mores of the original setting, it appears entirely coherent for Carmen to move and interact in a highly sexualised and promiscuous manner. It is therefore a considerable flaw of this production that she should be made to stand out so overtly, despite the updated time setting. Perhaps then, a more radical feminist decision could have been to remove the outward promiscuity of Carmen by making her appear completely oppositional to how she is stereotypically portrayed. By disrupting her entanglement with other discriminating demographics, she could perhaps appear more individualistic, thereby expanding the scope of expressive performance afforded to contemporary performers.

4.2.3 Critical responses to the productions

Considering the inferred change in audience expectation evident in reviews previously examined as part of this investigation, it is interesting to note that the review of Zambello's production in The Guardian again appears to imply the need for a reframed female position. The performance of the titular role in this production is identified as vulgar and visually centred, with The Opera Tattler identifying that 'Antonacci flashed her undergarments several times during the course of the opera'[288] further adding to the vulgarity of this particular performance. Furthermore, Rupert Christiansen of The Telegraph branded the production

---

[288] The Opera Tattler. (2007). *Carmen at ROH*. [Online]. The Opera Tattler. Available at: https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/2007/01/carmen_at_rho.html [Accessed 16 February 2023].

'drearily conventional,'[289] with Zambello's lack of spectator challenge making for an unengaging setting. One can deduce that a conventionally promiscuous Carmen is becoming further removed from the audience expectation and it is in fact restructured approaches that newly empower this role which are becoming more favourable.

Conversely, the restructuring of the work by Kosky and its ability to deconstruct stereotypical performance did not go unnoticed. Critic David Salazar observes that 'the unease of this visual design (the creepy makeup and perilous set) is undeniably by design as Kosky's entire premise is to deconstruct "Carmen" of its clichés and present it in a way that people are not expecting.'[290] Here, one considers how such an insight aligns to both the application of technical disciplines by Sue-Ellen Case to construct a feminist spectator and the observation by Judith Butler of the habitual blurring of discriminants. It is interesting to note that, in this case, such differing visual forces were considered from a feminist standpoint to deconstruct the traditional visibility of Carmen. Critic Tim Ashley for The Guardian observes this as 'postmodern radicalism [where] Carmen is first seen, gamine and androgynous, in a pink toreador's outfit. José chillingly controls Carmen after her arrest by pulling her around with ropes from the top of the staircase, while she flails at the bottom. Later, his attempts to prevent her walking up it by standing on her train are the prelude to murder.'[291] One considers two elements of this insight; the first, the extent of which androgyny allows the interpretation of the performer to be informed by their own identity without the confines of expected gendered performance, and the second, how this post-modern radicalism foregrounds the issue of female subjugation within the narrative.

Salazar further observes that Kosky 'introduces music that was cut out from Bizet's original score…The music feels completely out of place in the context of the opera; it feels as if it belonged to a different work and its waltzy character is a far cry from the more grounded habanera we know today. But again, it works to create a sense of unease for the viewer that

---

[289] Christiansen R quoted in Sharp R. (2007). *'Carmen' Review Round-up*. [Online]. Robert Sharp. Available at: http://www.robertsharp.co.uk/2007/10/02/carmen-review-round-up/ [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[290] Salazar D. (2019). *Royal Opera House 2018-19 Review: Carmen*. [Online]. OperaWire. Available at: https://operawire.com/royal-opera-house-2018-19-review-carmen/ [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[291] Ashley, T. (2018). *Carmen review – Bizet meets Busby Berkeley*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/feb/07/carmen-review-royal-opera-house-london-bizet-meets-bus [Accessed 16 February 2023].

knows the opera intimately…A lot of music is also cut, which adds to the jarring effect.'[292] Synthesising these insights, there appears to be two focal points of changing audience expectation; the newly positioned spectator and the importance of utilising the concept of performativity as a method to facilitate enhanced individuality. It appears that allowing audiences to be challenged through the foregrounding of gender issues may be approached as an exciting prospect in contemporary productions, and it is this individualistic space where the ensuing proposed method of feminist re-envisioning will be located.

Reviews of the production by the LNO were extremely limited given reduced access to archive material, however some of the audience comments from the production stated that 'I can't stand these sets and costumes,'[293] and 'great opera with great singers, but the Cuban setting is pretty lame.'[294] Perhaps then, it is suggestible that the Cuban setting was not contrasting enough from the Spanish aesthetic to adequately detangle the production from the Mediterranean stereotypes relating to how women are presented. The similarities between the original setting and the re-imagining by Žagars present a comparable visual of Carmen wherein the same black curly hair, exotic heat and ethnic "otherness" retain much of her stereotypical characterisation. Whilst it could be observed that the political rebellion associated with the new Cuban setting does much to rationalise Carmen's feisty and defiant behaviour, perhaps it could have been an option to either completely adjust her appearance to remove her entanglement with the Mediterranean aesthetic and focus on her politicised identity. Alternatively, a setting further removed from this style could have been selected to place her closer to the audience in attendance. In either instance, this could deconstruct some of the ethic "otherness" inherent within her characterisation whereby her ethnicity matches the environment she is being performed in.

4.4 Commencing exploration

Perhaps the first question to consider prior to any creative exploration is whether the character of Carmen is a feminist. In an interview, mezzo-soprano Ginger Costa-Jackson who took on the title role for Nashville Opera in 2017 stated 'Carmen is an anti-hero. She is harder to like

---

[292] Salazar D. (2019). *Royal Opera House 2018-19 Review: Carmen*. [Online]. OperaWire. Available at: https://operawire.com/royal-opera-house-2018-19-review-carmen/ [Accessed 16 February 2023].

[293] Latvian National Opera. (2020). *Carmen | Bizet*. [Online]. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdCkMi-_ILQ [Accessed 9 April 2023].

[294] ibid.

because of her moral flaws and selfish motivations; however, she has a set of ethics she lives by that are good, her eternal truths, and freedom is at the pinnacle. Ultimately, she dies because she told a man, "no." She was a feminist, an advocate for equal rights before her time. Don José is our villain. He kills her, a woman he is obsessed with, because she refuses to take him back, and that drives him into desperation, but ultimately rage. In the story of *Carmen,* the true unadulterated hero is Micaëla. She is the selfless 'good girl' Don José should have married, who risks her life to try to save him from his poor life decisions.'[295] Conversely, the synthesis of this work given by the Welsh National Opera states 'Carmen's sexual freedom is what infuriated the original audience in 1875; her rejection of a man in turn for another is seen as unforgivable, although, through the lens of feminism today the double standards of male and female promiscuity are clearly evident.'[296]

Indeed, Carmen is one of the most notable femme fatales of the Romantic era. Her characterisation as a woman who uses her femininity to manipulate others speaks to the earlier notion of enchantment that appears centrally disruptive to contemporary feminist incentive. Whilst her lack of behavioural constraint may seem to align to the more liberative ideals of feminism in practice, the 'obscenity [and] immorality'[297] of her characterisation as it was appreciated at the premier of the work is not adequately contrasted by a celebration of her expressive freedom. Rather, I suggest that, from a contemporary perspective, the presence of any third wave inference of a 'multiperspectival version of feminism,'[298] which in this case manifests in a sexually confident and behaviourally unconstrained woman, is undermined by her death at the hands of Don José. Ultimately, this action appears to silence a woman who has spoken her mind.

When looking at the inference of multiperspectival third wave feminism from another angle, one considers the characterisation of Carmen and Micaëla as two different feminists acting in

[295] Simeonov, J. (2017). *Nashville Opera's Carmen: "She dies because she told a man, "no"'*. [Online]. Schmopra. Available at: https://www.schmopera.com/nashville-operas-carmen-she-dies-because-she-told-a-man-no/ [Accessed 4 November 2022].

[296] Welsh National Opera. (2019). *Carmen - tragic heroine or feminist icon?*. [Online]. Welsh National Opera. Available at: https://wno.org.uk/news/carmen-tragic-heroine-or-feminist-icon [Accessed 4 November 2022].

[297] Rizzi, S. (2018). *Did you know that Carmen had a completely DISASTROUS premiere?*. Available: https://www.classicfm.com/composers/bizet/carmen-bizet-disaster-premiere/. Last accessed 7th August 2020.

[298] Snyder, R C. (2008). What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs*. 34(1), p.175.

two contrasting fields of personality. Yet again it appears that the male voice dictates the female narrative arc, with the fundamental purpose and outcome of Micaëla again appearing to be dictated by Don José. In addition to this, there are the considerations of second wave feminism as theorised by Jill Dolan, most notably the rationale of materialist feminism which 'stresses the notion that material conditions of production (such as history, race, class, gender) affect woman's subordination,'[299] and which seeks to deconstruct the interpolation of these other areas of diversity with the female identity. Indeed, the identity of Carmen appears fundamentally grounded in her perception as an "other." Looking at the composition of Bizet with specific focus on Carmen's famous aria *Habanera,* the music takes influence from the Cuban contradanza, blending European and Latin American influences in a manner that appears reminiscent of Moorish culture. Such would certainly have been perceived as exotic by audiences of the time and indeed further constructs the perception of Carmen as "other." This in turn further amalgamates her gender with her behaviour and ethnicity and ultimately frames her identity as atypical.

This is of course paralleled by the male characteristics of Don José and Escamillo who are both constructed in line with the sociocultural perception of masculinity as it existed during the compositional time. Gender theorists Connell and Messerschmidt observe from a contemporary perspective that 'the concept of masculinity is flawed because it essentializes the character of men.'[300] The concept of the "essential male" presents three scales of identity particularly relevant to the increased expressive parameters of canonical Romantic opera: the first, an even further embedded dualism between the male and female role with increased consequence for non-conformance and/or weakness against male strength. This is not just seen in Carmen, but in so many other tragic heroines of the era; Gilda, Tosca, Madame Buttery to name a few. Yet conversely, there appears limited elevation of the opposing "good, honest female." Subsequently, a second scale of identity is that of female behaviour and outcome. Micaëla is an effective example of this. She behaves in the way society demands and remains committed to José, and yet is not afforded any kind of favourable or unfavourable outcome.

[299] Austin, G (1990). Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism. United States of America: University of Michigan Press. 6.

[300] Connell, R.W & Messerschmidt, J. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*. 19 (6), 828-859.

There is a neutrality to her character which prevents further narratological development. Such further highlights the underdevelopment of roles of this nature which have the potential to become explored in more detail through contemporary exploration. The final scale of note arising from the observations of Connell and Messerschmidt is the scale of the preference of male behaviour; that is, the masculine male being preferred over the effeminate or less dominant. Such appears present in the characters of Don José and Escamillo where the former's liaisons with Carmen cause him to descend into madness. Against Escamillo he appears much less of an exhibitionist and as such, appears weaker in the face of temptation. However, it is interesting to note that this scale of masculine behaviour still appears to elevate the male position above the female. Don José still murders Carmen, and though portrayed as weaker than Escamillo, his persona is still dominant over his female counterpart.

Given that the narrative arc of Carmen is so interpolated with and dependant on Don José, I do not think her interpretation as a feminist icon is entirely accurate in the Contemporary age. In addition to this, there is evident contradiction within her character, with her behavioural promiscuity simultaneously constructing elevated female expression alongside an essentialised male position of seeking and exercising control. I would however suggest that Carmen's freedom of expression can indeed be perceived as possessing elements of proto feminism. Such is the consideration upon which this proposed methodology of performativity for accessibility and individuality will be constructed.

4.5 Workshopping Performativity in Practice

Having previously established the roots of workshop activities in the work of established practitioners, one initially refers to Olenina, Amazeen, Eckard and Papenfuss' influential study *Embodied Cognition in Performance: The Impact of Michael Chekov's Acting Exercises on Affect and Height Perception.* Such employs the Chekovian psychology of working exercises to trigger desired realisations and reactions in performed characteristics. It is interesting that the techniques of Chekov take influence from Stanislavskian method which aims to cultivate 'a spatial appositional conceptualisation of experience.'[301] The aim of such is to help actors construct a stable field 'within which they [can] interact with each other and the environment

---

[301] Olenina et al. (2019). Embodied Cognition in Performance: The Impact of Michael Chekhov's Acting Exercises on Affect and Height Perception. *Frontiers In Psychology*. 10(3389), p.2.

during performance.'[302] Considering this insight, it was particularly useful as a practitioner to establish the environment within which the creative work is being undertaken. When centring such work around individualism, I was mindful that the performance environment will be different depending on the identities and experiences of the production and creatives. As such, commencing workshop activities with exercises that encouraged heightened self-awareness and interaction was a vitally important decision made even more apparent with hindsight.

It is interesting how Olenina et al employ Chekhovian rationale to perception of space. Examining the theory of this, it is observed that 'motor action frames spatial self-awareness, contributing both too are mental predictions about the outside world and our own perceived and unconsciously registered body schema.'[303] I suggest that the application of this exploration through the medium of physicalised dramatic performance creates substantial parallels with the way gender identity is visibly constructed. By considering how space is occupied and how a certain environment is "moved through" by a particular character, the characterisation embodied by a performer is not limited to an isolated physicalisation of a singular identity; rather how they interact, are placed within, and perceived by the world around them.

Additionally, when establishing a stable field and how the actor conveys their occupation of space to the audience, one considers the direction from which performativity can be utilised in practice. In his seminal publication *The Actor and the Target*, Declan Donnellan states that 'we can either show or see, but we can never do both, for the one must destroy the other. We sometimes imagine in performance that we have to show things as a sort of insurance policy to make sure that the audience will 'get' what we are feeling. This is an unmitigated disaster.'[304] Whilst the idea of demonstrable performance appears somewhat Brechtian upon first examination, showing or seeing latterly became vital to the process of achieving performativity in practice. By establishing a clear distinction between whether performers were demonstrating, or re-living allowed the company to remain engaged in coherent and cohesive performance. Such found balance between the original story and its links with contemporary experiences of individuals with their own identities.

---

[302] ibid.

[303] ibid.

[304] Donnellan. (2002). *The Actor and the Target*. UK: Nick Hern Books. p.45.

With this in mind, participants in workshop 1[305] were asked to consider how the central characters within *Carmen* are spatially self-aware within their surrounding environment and in turn how this may be demonstrated through either showing or seeing. Such both enacts and furthers the observation of Linda Hutcheon, reframed as part of this study, as cultural theory and history inspiring performance. Here, cultural theory and the surrounding environment not only encourages self-awareness, but also the consideration of how this spatial behaviour presents a hierarchy of physically constructed gender identity within works of this nature.

Taking the titular character of Carmen and considering how she is presented both compositionally and narratologically, this chapter has previously identified a fundamental theme of "otherness." Whilst this study has previously identified how the music of Bizet compositionally aligns to this theme, it is significant that, simultaneous to this perpetuated sense of difference, a sense of an impending ill-fated destiny that comes with her consistent breach of sociocultural mores is created.

La carte impitoyable	*The pitiless card*
Répétera: la mort!	*Again: death!*
Encor! Encor! Toujours la mort!	*Again! Again! Always death Again!*
Encore! De désespoir!	*Again! Despair!*
Toujours la mort!	*Always death*

Here, the libretto again constructs a sense of "otherness" in Carmen, even between herself and other female roles. Whilst Mercédès and Frasquita talk about meeting lovers who achieve fame and propose marriage, Carmen's repeated destiny is death. It is interesting that there should be such a difference between the outcomes of Carmen and her two gypsy friends. Whilst Mercédès and Frasquita are of course interlinked with the ethnical constructions of otherness in this piece, Carmen is the one who defies behavioural expectation most overtly. Such infers that conformance is the desired attitude in women. The unconventionality of Carmen's behaviour; her promiscuity, confidence, self-expression and assertive breach of social and behavioural expectation, is grounded in her female sex.

---

[305] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

Ultimately, Carmen is murdered at the hands of her jealous ex-lover, and this, I propose, points above all else to essentialistic male-female dualism and the perpetuated hegemony of both the male sex and masculine behaviour. I differentiate here between sex and behaviour to also indicate the preferred masculine male over the effeminate male. Considering this, I suggest that the observations of Chekov that spatial self-awareness as applied to performed character identity could be an effective starting point for re-envisioning in line with performativity in practice. In this instance, one considers how characters move through space both individually and as influenced by the environment around them. Consequently, the first workshop exercise exploring this piece combined Chekhovian method with the belief of Judith Butler that identity only exists from what is physically constructed by a performer, and that such elements which are both verbal and non-verbal can be vividly rehearsed and constructed away from the expected physicalisation of fixed identifications.[306]

Participants were asked to move through the space freely as their character, whilst responding to the paths of others portraying different roles, thus they were both "showing" and "seeing." Responses could be both physical and vocal, and performers were instructed to present their characters as they perceive them within the existing work prior to any re-envisioning. Here, not only was the male-female dualism especially evident, but so too was the hierarchy that constructs hegemony based on behavioural difference. Male characters looked on female characters with disdain, and female characters looked on other female characters with distrust and, specifically to Carmen, fear.

Carmen as a work highlights this well, wherein there are four central characters, two of each gender, whose narratological treatment highlights an evident difference. Indeed, one of the most prominent characteristic contrasts lies between Carmen and Micaëla, one a dangerous temptress and the other an honest country girl who is, in many ways, the embodiment of the behavioural expectation of women at the time. This workshop exercise on spatial self-awareness affirmed this, with the physicality of Carmen appearing fluid, confident, and grounded in her sexuality and appearance to those around her. By contrast, Micaëla appeared

---

[306] Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*. 40 (4), 519-531.

timid, subtle and apologetic in her occupation of space. The importance of spatial self-awareness and its influence on essentialistic dualism is all the more apparent when comparing these female roles to their male counterparts. For instance, it is especially clear how much Micaëla contrasts to Don José for whom her love is essentially unrequited. On the other hand, the assertiveness of Carmen observed within the exploration of the piece in workshop 1[307] and visible across examined productions is much more aligned to the expectation of male behaviour.

Contrasting to the evident difference between the two female identities of Carmen and Micaëla is the presentation of Don José and Escamillo. Both are male characters who are written to exert dominance, control, and perceivable "masculinity" outside of any specific narratological intention. This Chekhovian exercise in awareness to inform performed action highlighted just how similar these characters are when the hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal preference of their construction becomes a central theme of exploration. Perhaps then, one considers the limited scope of expressive performance available for application to male roles as a possible unconscious enactor of continued hegemonic male preference and female subjugation in contemporary productions. Consequently, the exploration and subsequent expansion of such parameters through performed physicality could be applied as a possible element of feminist re-envisionings. This exercise in moving through space was an incredibly useful starting point to inform the desired creative approach of the company and subsequent decision-making. Not only did this exercise facilitate the appreciation of how each character within the work is presented, but so too did it highlight how each cast member approaches their performed physicality and where evident disparities centred around dualistic gender dynamics can be deconstructed. It was also useful for me as a practitioner, to greater understand the cast as individuals. This in turn would enable me to tailor my approach to direction over the course of ensuing activities.

Having facilitated a grounding in the appreciation of the work and its characters by the cast, the re-envisioning began. The overriding aim of such was to create an environment where performativity can construct uniqueness in roles which are so frequently marginalised to conventional performance expectation. In this environment, Carmen is so often the

---

[307] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

promiscuous femme fatale, Escamillo a desirable stranger and Don José a jealous ex-lover, yet this process of constructing a method of expanding performativity aims to deconstruct these fixed identities. An effective starting point to exploration was a reading of an influential paper by Richard Hornby entitled *Understanding Acting*, wherein he takes influence from Stanislavsky method, re-synthesising his process to break down steps undertaken towards performance into relaxation, relating and objectives. Hornby seeks to forge a path grounded in action, specifically physical performance informing identity. He proposes that these steps are both processes which construct believable performances and core tenets of a successful performance informed by individual persona. The point of consideration which could be most fruitfully explored here is Hornby's revision of the Stanislavskian notion of "living the part" to "being alive in the part."[308] There are similarities between this insight and earlier notions of creating both closeness and difference. In essence, a performer is close enough to the part to live its reality, but one step removed from fully "becoming" the role. It is in this point of difference where the concept of performativity as a method exists most profoundly.

Reasserting the meaning of performativity as a theory, the next stage of exploration within workshop 1[309] involved a reading to participants of Judith Butler's definition of this practice. To Butler, performativity is 'that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names.'[310] Namely, the perception of gender is constructed through communicative acts which constitute a physical condition of a particular identification. Butler argues that such elements which are both verbal and non-verbal can be vividly rehearsed and constructed away from the expected physicalisation of fixed identifications.[311] Following this, participants were also introduced the furtherance of this idea by to theorist Moya Lloyd who offers the example of one being in 'a condition of "doing straightness" or "doing queerness"'[312] as opposed to identifying with the expected personas of such fixed categories. Aligning this to previous

---

[308] Hornby, R. (). Understanding Acting. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 17(3), p.28.

[309] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[310] Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Oxon: Routledge. 13.

[311] Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*. 40 (4), 519-531.

[312] Lloyd, M. (1999). Performativity, Parody, Politics. *Theory, Culture & Society*. 16 (2), 195-213.

observations, the immediate potential of performativity appears to be its ability to disrupt enchantment as it is constructed within Romantic works. Performers are no longer placed in a position of embodying the construction of a subordinated role by its surrounding environment, rather, they are empowered to act outside of such parameters of expectation.

Whilst the intent of Hornby's paper grounded in Stanislavsky method could be an effective starting point to practical workshopping, I propose to further its application by creating an additional path of inquiry, where his concepts of relaxation, relating, and objectives are applied to both performer and character to interpolate interpretation and individuality with critical character, narratological and musicological appreciation.

Harvard Health observes 'practicing breath focus'[313] as the central root of relaxation. This is of course additionally important to singers, where the movement and management of breath is an essential foundation of good technique. Yet breathing is also an essential construct of character, with director Joseph Chaikin observing playwright Samuel Beckett's common practice of breathing in a 'zone of being, but not *not* breathing, not being unable to breathe – but breathing. Finding breath.'[314] With this in mind, participants in workshop 1[315] were first instructed to find their natural pattern of breathing, observing the movement of their body, depth of their breath, any accompanying sound and character behind each inhalation and exhalation. They were then asked to breathe as they would imagine their characters to breathe, considering their identity, narrative, and surrounding environment. Singer H who took on the role of Carmen in workshop 1[316] observed 'my breath completely changed when I imagined her character. My natural state of breathing is quite light and shallow, yet Carmen's breath became deeper, more guttural, and emotionally charged. From a vocal perspective, this kind of

---

[313] Harvard Medical School. (2020). *Relaxation techniques: Breath control helps quell errant stress response.* [Online]. Harvard Health Publishing. Available at: https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/relaxation-techniques-breath-control-helps-quell-errant [Accessed 5 November 2022].

[314] Chaikin, J. (1981). Breathing in a Different Zone: Joseph Chaikin. *The Drama Review: TDR*. 25(3), p.17.

[315] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[316] ibid.

breathing prepares you well for the demands of the music, but dramatically it's interesting how you are pre-conditioned to become the femme fatale before you've even sung a note.'[317]

Whilst it is evident that this particular performer found breath work useful, it may not always be the case that a singer would feel comfortable altering their style of breathing for dramatic intent. Therefore, it is suggested that practitioners are open-minded to engaging in dramatic breathing exercises. For some performers, differentiating between a "character" breath and a "personal" breath may indeed be an empowering practice that elevates their quality of performance and attachment to their role. However, this is perhaps an area that cast members can be made aware of and encouraged to engage with in their own time as part of their personal preparation. This would also alleviate the time expense of these exercises which may not be equally fruitful to all cast members.

The next stage of Hornby's process of achieving uniqueness is entitled "relating." One questions what relatability truly means in line with the theory of performativity. Of course, relatability between the production and the audience is key, yet this investigation has also highlighted the importance of "relating" performer and role, content, and contemporary environment. Hornby states that 'the technique requires fairly lengthy analysis, [and] one must have an eye for small but significant details to be able to relate them to the overall effect.'[318]

The first devised exercise involved asking performers to create Venn diagrams of the points of comparison between their own identities and their perceived realisation of their character. The aim of this was to provide artists with a central understanding of the inherent similarities and differences between their roles and themselves, and where perhaps their contemporary perspective and identification can inform re-envisionings of these.

---

[317] ibid.

[318] Hornby, R. (). Understanding Acting. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 17(3), p.37.

Figure 8)

Venn diagrams of performer comparison

Diagram 1

MYSELF | ROLE

MYSELF: Quite shy; Loving and compassionate; Empathetic; Calm and slow to strong emotion

Overlap: Focused on objective; Socially aware

ROLE: Confident; Manipulative; Easily transitions between relationships; Quite reactive and able to retaliate quickly

Diagram 2

MYSELF | ROLE

MYSELF: Non-binary; Confident; Assertive when I need to be; Have quite a fiery personality when triggered

Overlap: Compassionate; Prioritises the needs of others; Patient and persistent

ROLE: Has a shy disposition; Seems a little bit desperate to impress; Able to swallow extreme emotional reaction without too much difficulty

Diagram 3

MYSELF | ROLE

MYSELF: A gay binary person; Confident; Have a kind and sensitive nature; Have had to overcome obstacles

Overlap: Confident; Will work hard to achieve results; Gives love easily

ROLE: Very much heterosexual to the point of seeming polyamorous; Over-confident and a show-boater; Doesn't appear to have ever suffered to any great extent

These observations present much opportunity for productions of canonical works to be informed by contemporary outlook. By differentiating and comparing between role and performer, one can clearly identify both elements of relation and elements where a different character identity is required. Through this addition of the personal perspective, heightened inclusivity and representation may also be realised. I refer to the personal identifications of

workshop 1[319] participants, namely the inclusion of a non-binary perspective. Such aligns with the observation of Dvorsky and Hughes in their influential *paper Postgenderism: Beyond The Gender Binary* that 'our Enlightenment values and emergent human potentials have come into conflict with the rigid gender binary. We have spent the last two hundred years in the West slowly dismantling the heritage of patriarchal power, culture and thought. Juridical equality, weapons and the police have reduced the determinative power of male physical coercion. Post-industrial production, contraception and abortion have eliminated most of the rationale for gendered social roles in work and the family, reducing the burden of patriarchal oppression on women.'[320] The advocation of these authors is for a reduced need for gender differentiation through its increasing irrelevance in a discrimination-free environment. Whilst this may be desirable in the contemporary sociocultural sphere, I suggest that in the case of canonical works where the difference between the treatment and presentation of male and female roles is so pronounced, an elevation of the female perspective is more befitting. Such elevation works alongside the ability for contemporary diversity to be integrated through performativity and together can deconstruct essentialistic gender dualism.

Considering the heighted sexualisation of gendered roles within works of this nature, coupled with the wider culture of heteronormality and gender dualism blurring with differentiations of gender, another area of exploration relates to how this intersection of gender and sex can be reconstructed in a positive way to empower female roles. I also refer to the observation of the performer of Micaëla in workshop 1[321] and the identification of their bisexuality. In this case, the personal identification of the performer informed a more profound depth of characterisation in this female role. Given that Micaëla frequently appears to pine after Don José in a manner that can sometimes appear to compromise her dignity whilst saving him from his own poor decisions, perhaps a feminist re-envisioning could see her conflicted in her feelings for both José and Carmen. Her consistent attempts to draw José away from Carmen could consequently

---

[319] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[320] Dvorsky, G & Hughes, J. (2008). *Postgenderism: Beyond the Gender Binary*. Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies. Hartford. USA

[321] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

be fuelled by the contemporary motive of either wanting to, or not being ready to, explore her own desire.

It is also noteworthy how even the exaggerated masculinity of Don José and Escamillo can be reframed by utilising this method of relation between performer and role. The Escamillo in workshop 1[322] was homosexual and observed that the essentialised masculinity of this, and indeed the majority of male roles in the opera canon causes problems for him when trying to make his interpretations personal. However, by integrating his personal identification with the demands of the role, other possible depictions aligning to a more contemporary perspective emerge.

The first refers back to the previously proposed process of Brechtian satirisation, with the possibility of performing Escamillo in a parodic fashion to mimic the unapologetic masculine hegemony embodied within this role. This could in turn encapsulate the sentiment of the performer "standing beside the character" as opposed to "becoming" the character. Such is especially appropriate when the original and conventional appearance of the role is so far removed from the personal identity of the performer. The second is to reframe the role of Escamillo as exhibiting such masculine performance as a smokescreen for greater vulnerability. In this instance, the performer in question used their moments of reaction and stillness to perform vulnerability and anxiety. This constructed an Escamillo whose masculinity and bravado compensated for profound insecurity. In addition to the initial benefit of deconstructing the dualism of binary gendered behaviour inherent within works of this nature, the specific deconstruction of the essentialised male also creates a greater amount of space for female development. Without strict adherence to the gender hierarchy as it manifests, the correlation between the spectator gaze and male visibility is deconstructed, and as such, characters may become individuals beyond the status that their gender and broader behaviour dictates.

One then considers how these physical interpretations manifest vocally. To further the previous work of this study to encompass the more challenging gender problems of Romantic works, I propose that performativity as a method could possess a deeper grounding in the Brechtian navigation of the singing-drama intersection, and indeed further its application to encompass

---

[322] ibid.

contemporary perspective. The paper *Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice* by Kim H. Kowalke is a very useful tool in developing a deeper understanding of *Gestus* and furthering its application to vocal performance. With Kowalke synthesising the observation of Kurt Weill that '*Gestus* [is] almost exclusively as a technical tool, with historical pre in the music of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Offenbach and Bizet,'[323] there appears obvious relatability between this Brechtian process and the original composition by Bizet. Indeed, *Gestus* as a practice holds specific relevance to the Romantic era of post-Enlightenment sociocultural change is through is ability to '[permit] poet and composer to pursue common goals, while gradually realising that aesthetic and sociological premises were insufficiently shared.'[324] When utilising this concept to unlock contemporary possibilities within works of this nature, Kowalke observes that Brecht believed 'text does not make explicit and thereby provide a subtext ready-made for the performer. The resulting 'play' between the music lyric could convey complicated layers of meaning and contradictory attitudes of overlapping personae.'[325] Such appears to advocate the integration of a specially constructed subtext to inform characterisation. Considering this, I propose to amalgamate the rationale of *Gestus* with Butler's concept of performativity to facilitate the transmission of new realisations and relevance of canonical works. Consequently, this could deconstruct the embedded hierarchy of gender whereby overlapping personae become individualistically appreciable.

Constructing a methodological process around this practice, performers were asked to select an aria or continuous piece of text/score within the piece and annotate this from the perspectives of both *Gestus* and personal relatability. Taking influence from Katie Mitchell's six questions seen previously in this investigation, the below proposes a newly devised set of six questions which encourage the amalgamation of these two rationales. Performers were asked to consider:

    i)   How would you describe your own personal identification and how does this align to your perceived interpretation of the role in question?

    ii)   Are there any possible subtexts that could emerge?

    iii)   What performative emotions can this contemporary subtext create?

    iv)   What is the fundamental aim or purpose of the aria in line with this new subtext?

---

[323] Kowalke, K H. (1993). Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 5(1), p.67.

[324] ibid. 65.

[325] ibid. 67.

v)   How can this manifest in vocal performance?

vi)   How can this manifest in physical performance?

Sharing answers to the exploration of Carmen and her Habanera, Singer H responded:

i)   How would you describe your own personal identification and how does this align to your perceived interpretation of the role in question?

I am a heterosexual, mixed race female, so considering Carmen's sexual freedom and her gypsy status, there seems quite a lot of alignment to Carmen's original identity. However, I am nowhere near as confident as Carmen and sometimes this can make her seem a bit beyond reach. Maybe this sometimes causes me to overplay Carmen's femininity and display the female behaviour that people would expect to see because I can't especially relate to or understand that myself.

ii)   Are there any possible subtexts that could emerge?

The idea of confidence is really interesting when applied to Carmen. I've never once considered her as lacking in confidence, but this is actually a really current consideration where mental health and self-awareness are big points of personal exploration. Perhaps the extent of Carmen's confidence could be a theme of questioning throughout a modern performance? *Habanera* always seems like such a sultry, seductive aria – and the music certainly enforces that. However, the idea that "love is a rebellious bird that no one can tame" suggests that Carmen herself can't tame this either. Even her ending statement that proclaims 'if I love you, you best beware" could be shown to be Carmen putting on an act. Maybe this is not the first time she has made these proclamations, and maybe this is in fact a carefully considered performance that hides some vulnerability or other fear of being alone or romantic failure?

iii)   What performative emotions can this contemporary subtext create?

This idea of hidden vulnerability creates many more possibilities in Carmen which add more depth to her character beyond the formidable temptress.

iv)   What is the fundamental aim or purpose of the aria in line with this new subtext?

Habanera becomes more than just an invitation for a relationship, it is able to embody a critical position of Carmen appearing very much away of her environment and where she sits in the world around her and can be interpreted with so much more variety as a celebration of who she is or a cry out against her environment.

v)   How can this manifest in vocal performance?

Vocally, I often find that *Habanera* is performed quite playfully. This is of course a method of seduction for Carmen, but the portamento, run-on phrases, sudden change of dynamics and of

course that leaning chromatic melody that really elongates the vowels and vocal line creates this sultry mood. If the physical performance is changed and Carmen's personality is approached from a new perspective, some of the phrases could become more regular, the dynamics and articulation could change and so could the use of timbre. As a mezzo, we often have to achieve the dark, rich sound – but this could also be inverted to achieve timbral brightness over seduction.

vi)   How can this manifest in physical performance?

Alongside the darkness of vocal timbre comes Carmen's physical performance. In line with her narrative, her physicality is often presented as somewhat ghastly and shocking. This is married together with her class and status as a gypsy where upper-class characters and onlookers perceive her with disgust, while others take a more voyeuristic stance of leering at her. Both make Carmen an object which encloses her position. Being able to play Carmen without this pressure to perform these traits could open the door to a greater depth in her characterisation and her perception by others onstage – which also extends the possibilities of other roles' characterisation to change their position from voyeur to individual.

Appendix 1 shows how the aria *Habanera* sung by Carmen followed this process within the setting of workshop 1[326], annotating the score to integrate moments of *Gestus* with personal relatability.

Such appears reminiscent of earlier propositions of how the characters Micaëla and Escamillo may be reframed to integrate appreciation of the material with contemporary perspectives of individual identity. Within this process, many waves of feminism appear represented. It is fundamentally grounded in a third wave multiperspectival approach, where the diversity of individualism is centralised as the core foundation of contemporary re-envisioning. However, I would also suggest that this exploration rooted in the concept of performativity bears roots in second wave materialist feminism theorised by Jill Dolan. Specifically, the amalgamation of discriminants and the extent of their impact on performativity is acknowledged and subsequently deconstructed. Complementing this, the intersectionality of the fourth wave of contemporary feminism appears the catalyst by which performativity and individualism is realised. In short, performativity in practice is fundamentally grounded in feminist theory to

---

[326] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

inspire new re-envisionings by empowering creatives to elevate female roles within canonical settings.

Returning to Hornby's process of achieving performativity, his final step involves exploring objective. Whilst the idea of "aim and purpose" has been examined as a step in the stage of "relating," this final stage amalgamates this into a broader realisation of the narrative arc of individual characters. He states, 'the objective is the organising principle of the performance of a role. Relating is neutral, reactive kind of behaviour…the pursuit of an objective, however, is active behaviour, the thing that connects the actor with his role. The actor who is relaxed and relating will always be easy to watch, but if he is pursuing the wrong objectives he will not be fulfilling the demands of the play, while if he is pursuing no objective at all, he will seem diffuse and tame.'[327]

Looking across to a modern re-imagining of another canonical Romantic work, I refer again to the work of P. Burton-Morgan, this time examining their staging of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Burton-Morgan stated, 'with Madam Butterfly, we sometimes had discussions that were women only, so the men involved in the production left.'[328] They continue that their production 'really condemned Pinkerton for the…problematic behaviour [which was constructed as] an individual within the opera seen through a contemporary lens…so it wasn't condoning it. [They also changed] small but also radical things: instead of the final words sung by Pinkerton, they were sung by Suzuki who in this show was Butterfly's sister. So that again really changed the dynamic of their relationship, but I really leaned into this idea that Butterfly had post-natal depression and psychological issues, which made those choice become a product of a woman in crisis because she was having a mental breakdown, rather than focused on the narrative being about Pinkerton deserting Butterfly.'[329] Burton-Morgan highlights two areas of note; the first a rehearsal strategy which enables the integration and elevation of the both the female role and performer and the second, the utilisation of creativity from a contemporary perspective to re-interpret the original material for feminist gain. Such appears a highly

---

[327] Hornby, R. (). Understanding Acting. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 17(3), p.32.

[328] Castrey, M. *Interview with P. Burton-Morgan.* October 2022.

[329] ibid.

successful amalgamation of different considerations which balance intimate personal experiences with broader contemporary perspectives.

One then considers how this could be applied to Bizet's *Carmen* both in terms of constructing a workshop process and broader contemporary feminist re-envisioning. With the central objectives of characters often being concealed to other onstage identities or even completely reframed in a contemporary setting, The female-only discussion instigated by Burton-Morgan seems an interesting starting point for this "objective" stage. Consequently, a female-only discussion with the roles of Carmen, Micaëla, Mercedes and Frasquita ensued within Workshop 1[330] to expose the true objective of each of these characters. Finding happiness, maintaining friendship and creating meaningful relationships were common objectives and indeed these are not solely dependent on the interaction with another man. However, in the case of Carmen and Micaëla, the intersection of their narrative with Don José in particular appears as a fundamental construct of their outcome. Micaëla longs to be in a relationship with him and takes it upon herself to try to get him to return to her. Carmen takes the role of his seducer, who is ultimately the catalyst for his descent into murderous madness. By detaching outcome from the male narratological arc and by facilitating a female-only environment within which to share objective, both performers and their roles are subsequently able to be approached individualistically. From this environment also comes an alignment to second wave materialist feminism in practice, wherein the 'group is more important than the individual.'[331] Here, female-only discussion and the sharing of objective makes the presentation of these themes a collaborative exercise, where performers can support each other and in turn elevate the feminist perspective through a shared state of doing and being. Not only was the process fruitful from a creative and ideological perspective, but this was also exceedingly empowering and something I would especially advocate in contemporary productions of any nature.

Having a detailed understanding of both their own identity and other female characters around them, the male performers were invited back into the room. Each performer then shared their central motivator behind their performance choices. This facilitates a unification of all onstage parties, where individual intention and the interpolation of actor-role incentive are actively

---

[330] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[331] Austin, G (1990). Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism. United States of America: University of Michigan Press. 6.

complemented. As an example, Singer H's *Carmen* decided to deconstruct the femme fatale persona by exploring the theme of hidden vulnerability and reduced confidence. With this in mind, and with the knowledge of this contemporary reframing, other onstage characters are able to provide her with both the space to construct her own physical reaction and in turn, the physicalised responses to this in their own characterisation. This process of sharing objective appears to align to Judith Butler's own commentary on her theory of performativity, wherein she stated in an interview that 'there is always a question of what I will become, even if I am living in such a way that seeks to refuse that question…This is not just a question of private struggle with the self, but of the social terms by which identities are supported and articulated.'[332] In this instance, the internal struggle of Carmen becomes an interpolated and relatable identity that strengthens the attachment of performer to character. However, I propose that the externalisation of such creates a supportive framework which acknowledges and subsequently deconstructs the social terms which dictate this initial position.

Furthering the work on "objective," the final step of this exploration of performativity aims to expand the idea of ego, devising exercises which unpack the key motivators and barriers to the objective of individual characters. Again, referring back to Judith Butler, she points to the work of Freud and his psychoanalytic appreciation of the development of ego, that is, the idea of 'the question of whose lives are regarded as worthy lives.'[333] In many ways, this appears the root of the gender issues within many canonical operatic works, wherein, if one refers back to the original etymology of the word "female," which is 'nequébah.. meaning "to curse,"[334] and 'fe...fee, fa, feoh, Anglo Saxon feoh: cattle, money, property…[consequently] "property" of a "male,"'[335] there is already a clear and embedded inference of the female being less worthy than the male.

To this end, ego as a concept appears as a fundamental construct of gendered identity and dramatically contributes to the dualistic male-female binary as it appears in many works from

---

[332] Reddy, V & Butler, J. (2004). Troubling Genders, Subverting Identities: Interview with Judith Butler. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity.* 62(2,1), p.116.

[333] ibid. 120.

[334] Folbré, G, L. (2004) *The Eden Proverb.* Available at: http://edenproverb.com/pdfs/partI/studyaids/3_Greco_RomanFableofAdam&Eve.pdf. Last accessed: 5th March 2021.

[335] ibid.

the canon. One then questions why this was so prevalent within the Romantic era. Considering the ideologies of Enlightenment, perhaps a plausible explanation could be the enhanced presence of self-exploration and the subsequent elevation of the individual identity. In the case of *Carmen*, this exploration of performativity to construct new re-envisionings of central characters unlocks the potential for ego as a concept to be reframed.

As a final step to achieving performativity and naturalism and to fundamentally establish a feminist perspective, workshop 1[336] participants were asked to consider the extent of ego within each of their characters in a round-table discussion. Singer A stated 'it is interesting that ego is so pronounced between genders and yet so easily flipped on its head. Of course, Escamillo and Don José have the biggest egos. Escamillo idolises himself and Don José kills Carmen because he can't deal with the dent in his pride.'[337] Perhaps it is then the case that, much like female desire being suppressed to align female roles to the male gaze, female ego is also subdued to further fuel the hegemony of masculine conquest. Considering this, participants were asked to consider the female ego, specifically of Carmen and Micaëla. Here, the ego of the former appears fundamentally aligned to the male whim, and in the latter, secondary to the wellbeing of Don José, with whom she is desperately in love.

To highlight the interesting opposition of ego embodied within the role of Carmen, performers were shown the rendition of *Habanera* performed by Antonacci and asked to consider the feminist and anti-feminist elements of this as they specifically align to the physically and individual ego of Carmen. Singer C observed that 'if any part of this performance is readable as feminist, it is Carmen's confidence. She doesn't hesitate to adopt provocative poses alongside male bodies in a public environment and it appears as though she is being deliberately disruptive to command attention – but this is not exactly healthy feminist inspiration.'[338] Furthering this, one considers the principles of second and third wave feminism, wherein the female perspective is elevated and re-integrated alongside the deconstruction of the male gaze. However, this appears fundamentally mismatched with Antonacci's performance, wherein her character appears solely constructed as a conduit of male attention and reaction. It is a

---

[336] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

[337] ibid.

[338] ibid.

performance for male viewership, specifically engineered to exhibit the feminine qualities perceived as the most desirable by men.

Within this framing, the confidence of Carmen appears somewhat anti-feminist. However, this research has shown that this appearance may be deconstructed with considered performative acts. Participants were then asked to consider the individual ego of Carmen as removed from male outcome, with Singer H suggesting 'seeking a meaningful connection in a manner that doesn't require her change of behaviour or personality'[339] as a possible contemporary reimaging of her egoic state. Such removes the identity of Carmen from male entanglement and has the potential to liberate the performer to explore ways in which performativity can have a heightened grounding in individual uniqueness.

Following the same line of questioning, the group were asked to consider the ego of Micaëla. Singer A observed 'you wouldn't think that Micaëla is a problematic character, but she has the potential to be seen as insipid. Everything she does is for the good of Don José, and on pretty much every occasion, he rebuffs her, and she keeps coming back.'[340] Without amending the plot so that Micaëla never returns to Don José after he leaves with Carmen, her narrative can be troublesome when elevating the female perspective. As her true personality and preferences are not altogether explored in the original work, perhaps the solution to this visible lack of self-respect is to utilise new reaction achieved through performativity and aligned to the perspective of the performer. This would appear in addition to her presentation within the work and offers the opportunity for re-imagined physical and, to a certain degree, vocal response. Such could encompass physicalised disdain and an inversion of her typically sweet and endearing vocal timbre to establish a more assertive element within her characterisation.

Considering performativity as a method, many ways to locate individualism and utilise this as a means of empowering female role appear. This chapter has identified the successes and comparative weaknesses in contemporary productions of *Carmen*, reframing the original source material as a starting point for exploration rather than a fixed set of parameters. Whilst performativity and the idea of constructing characters solely through performed action presents a vast scope of expressive possibility, this chapter has, through exploration in a workshop

---

[339] ibid.

[340] ibid.

environment, proposed possible ways of achieving this which amalgamate existing theory with interpretive scope. From a contemporary perspective, the vast spectrum of identities that this process creates facilitates exciting diversity and an expanded scope of self-expression which is needed to more widely integrate both feminism and broader equality in the contemporary environment.

4.6 Proposing a possible approach to using performativity as a method of re-envisioning

    i)   Occupying space

Taking influence from earlier examination of the work of Chekov, the first stage of this proposed method involves exploring how performers and their characters occupy space. As undertaken in workshop 1[341], performers could be asked to move freely around the space as themselves; giving their usual walk, stance and reactions as they would occur most naturally. Following on from this, the company could then be asked to transition into their character, performing the physicality of their role as per their own perception. They could be invited to react to characters around them to develop an understanding of the chosen visibilities of others, offering both vocalised and physical responses. In both instances, performers can develop an understanding of their own occupation of space and that of the broader company, as well as how the performed characteristics of all roles compare and/or contrast to their original and conventional presentation.

    ii)   Collective breathing

Having established an understanding of how space is occupied, the next stage involves taking a step towards the deeper inhabitation of a role as it relates to non-physical and specifically vocal performance. As a proposed method, performers could be asked to establish a collective sense of relaxation by breathing together. A possible method for this is "box breathing" where one inhales for a count of 4, holds for 4, exhales for 4 and holds for 4, though a director could implement any method of collective breathing to establish a sense of relaxation. Performers could then be invited to modify their breathing to that of their character, identifying how their breathing preparation and intensity changes depending on their perception of that particular role. At this point, the director may wish to invite the company to breathe as they imagine roles

---

[341] ibid.

different to their own, encouraging awareness of the physical inhabitation of contrasting characters. This may not necessarily be applied to their vocal performance but aims to encourage a greater sense of collective consciousness and comfort which helps performers to distinguish between themselves and their characters more convincingly.

iii)   Understanding points of difference and integrating individualism.

Workshop 1[342] previously highlighted how Venn diagrams could be utilised to invite performers to explore how their own individualism compares and contrasts to their perception and the broader appearance of their character. This could be a valuable method of encouraging performers to establish points of difference between themselves and their role and in turn identify where elements of their own personality could be effectively applied to their character performance. Such has the potential to elevate individualism and empower the character in focus.

Furthering this, directors could utilise either the questions set out in workshop 1[343] as inspired by Katie Mitchell's 6 questions or indeed formulate their own to determine the aims and purposes of characters within their narratological environments and to establish how these relate to the values of the performer. As an example of this in practice, I again refer to Singer H's appreciation of Carmen's confidence whereby her own extent of this is far removed from the appearance of the character. However, by identifying how this difference manifests between performer and role, the subtext of Carmen using performed bravado to exist as a woman in a male dominated world emerges. The power of this method is its ability to ensure that each realisation of the work onstage is not only unique but also deeply personal to a particular company. Such heightens the understanding of work and appearance of characters between cast members, whilst making the narratological events increasingly relevant through its integration with contemporary perspective and lived experience.

Having identified how these areas of re-envisioning roles both relate to and contrast to a particular performer, the director is then able to use their own creativity and preferred method

---

[342] ibid.

[343] ibid.

to assist the cast in blocking and physicalising this onstage. From my own experience of implementing this in workshop 1[344], this method was highly successful in both integrating contemporary and personal experience to elevate gendered perspective and encouraging a culture of respect, inclusion and self-expression in the creative space.

---

[344] ibid.

5. Emilia: Learning from a feminist production

When taking forward the legacy of canonical opera, one does not have to look far to witness the evident gender imbalances present as a consequence of the surrounding socio-cultural environments of many of these works.

Likely as a consequence of the gendered mores of the time that both inhibited the presence of empowered female characters and indeed female composers in general, there are very few operatic examples of works that are truly feminist. Perhaps the most effective example of such a work is *Le Dernier Sorcier* by Pauline Viardot. The narratological content of this opera is somewhat reminiscent of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, with a female sorcerer who draws parallels with The Queen of the Night guiding two young lovers. However, in Viardot's work, the queen is an unquestioned authority for good whose dominance is constructed and unquestioned by both her treatment within the narrative and the score itself. Any music sung by or sung about her character is consistently written in simple quadruple time that opposes the rhythmic irregularity of other characters. Such creates and maintains a sense of assurance and stability within her role. Whilst this construction of female assurance certainly perpetuates a feminist incentive, the problem with using this as a methodology for reform is the uniqueness of the narrative and its removal from "real- world" scenarios that are so commonly the narratological subject of canonical opera. This may be an example of how female characters can be compositionally constructed within new commissions, yet there are little grounds for a satisfactory methodology for how existing roles may be reshaped.

Whilst not an operatic work, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's *Emilia* serves as a highly effective example of feminist theatre. Striving to create a sense of empowerment for the female, both from the perspective of the genders of the creative team and the portrayal of women on the stage, the presentation of *Emilia* aligns greatly to the sense of inclusivity demonstrated in the work of feminist theorists engaged with so far. With a lack of operatic work created with a specifically feminist incentive, I have selected this piece of theatre as a point of examination to inform how gendered change within operatic productions could manifest.

To highlight the feminist incentive behind this work more specifically, I refer to the transcript of an interview with playwright Morgan Lloyd Malcolm on her reasons for writing this production. Lloyd Malcolm states: 'We read everything we could, but there's not much out in

the public domain about her. Yet starting from scratch means I've been able to draw on people's opinions and research, and Nicole [Charles, director] and I were full of questions for Dr. Will Tosh, an academic who works at the Globe – is it possible that Emilia was part of a scriptorium, what was women's position re property in the 16th century and so on. Then the #MeToo movement kicked in and the more I learned Emilia's story, the more the relevance of it, her courage and the modern parallels became clear. I knew we needed an all-female cast because it would be a woman's story told by women...The provocation from us it that we have seen one version in history for a very long time, but now, using these gaps in time when we have no record, we can fill in what we imagine our Emilia could have done. Emilia Bassano lived 400 years ago, but *Emilia* is very much a 21st century play.'[345]

In terms of how this piece embodies its feminist rationale, the opening moments of *Emilia* do much to set out the parallels between the dialogue employed and the ideologically emancipating incentive of contemporary feminism. Simultaneous to this, Lloyd Malcolm also recognises the presentation of women in the unenlightened age and beyond, affirming the relevance of such work to this investigation. Referring to *Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age – Simon Forman The Astrologer* by AL Rouse, the character Emilia 3 recites a description of her own identity; 'She is now very needy, in debt...[and] if I go to Larnier this night or tomorrow, whether she will receive me and whether I shall be welcome to "halek."'[346] Lloyd Malcolm then uses stage directions to state 'Emilia 3 looks up to acknowledge this word. She mouths the word 'f**k.'[347] The dialogue continues '...she is or will be a harlot...she was familiar and friendly...but only she would not "halek" ...she was a whore and dealt evil with him.'[348] Such not only constructs a heightened sense of awareness in this female character, but also points to a stance of defiance which has seldom been achieved by the re-envisioned productions examined over the course of this investigation. Here, Emilia is not simply providing a commentary on any disparities between the male and female binaries but is actively disagreeing with them.

---

[345] Lloyd-Malcolm, M quoted in Shakespeare's Globe. (2018). *SuchStuff s1 e1: The missing women*. [Online]. Shakespeare's Globe. Available at: https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2018/08/30/such-stuff-s1-e1/ [Accessed 5 November 2022].

[346] Lloyd Malcolm, M (2018). *Emilia*. London: Oberon Books. 1.

[347] ibid.

[348] ibid.

So, how is this acknowledgment of gender disparity relevant to the operatic focus of this investigation? The evident objectification of the female gender, which leads to the scrutiny of Emilia's demeanour and the perception of sexuality as one of her defining traits is immediately recognisable in this opening passage. In addition, there are also distinct parallels between this description of Emilia Larnier Bassano and many famous female roles in opera from the canon. This investigation has so far seen Dido, Fiordiligi, Dorabella, and Carmen objectified, scrutinised and silenced to various extents as a result of either their physical appearance, demeanour and more broadly, their gender. These are just some of the many ill-fated characters who, throughout history, have been depicted unfavourably and without scope to integrate their female and feminine perspective free from objectification and alignment to the male gaze. In response to the mores of the setting of the work, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's *Emilia* effectively acknowledges this conventional treatment of the female role in both society and the arts which is then used as a starting point for further development of these frequently underdeveloped female characters.

Furthering the work that this study has undertaken to present three possible approaches of feminist re-envisioning, it is interesting to note how *Emilia* seems to embody elements of these proposed strategies of this investigation at points within the play. This chapter will now examine how these processes appear in the work of Lloyd Malcom, which will in turn highlight how any one of the methods proposed within this study may be selected as a possible framework for achieving a feminist re-envisioning of an operatic work from the canon.

5.1 Conjured memory

Drawing immediate comparison between utilising conjured memory as a method of restructuring in practice and the production *Emilia*, I refer to an interview with playwright Morgan Lloyd-Malcolm who states 'I very much put myself in her place. And I've always said from the start that I don't believe that woman back then have any kind of different needs, wants, desires to the ones that we have now. And you know we have a very specific 'period costume' version of women that we're quite used to, but I think they were just like us. They were just under different restrictions to us. And I imagined her as myself and what that must have felt like, to know what you have all of this inside you to say creatively and just because of the world and the time you're living in, you're just unable to. How frustrating that would be, how

angry that would make you.'[349] This process of foregrounding relatability and using a contemporary lens to view women depicted in canonical works presents an instant foundation for meaningful re-envisionings.

In many ways, the construction of Emilia has a basis in conjured memory. The decision of Lloyd Malcom to have three "Emilia's" covering different periods of time, starting with the eldest Emilia 3, establishes an immediate sense of recall aligned to her female perspective. This takes the audience on a very personal journey and facilitates the connection of performers onstage. The visibility of the youth, middle age and senior years of the central character encapsulates both the journey of individuality and shared traits of performed identity within these three performers. Additionally, and perhaps most relevant to opera from the canon, this also foregrounds the changing socio-cultural environment around the journey of Emilia. From a theoretical perspective, such constitutes an evident alignment with *Defining Feminism* by Karen Offen wherein she notably recommends that the appreciation of contemporary feminism should focus on historical roots, ideological determinants and 'a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society.'[350] Indeed, Lloyd-Malcom's production foregrounds these historical roots and ideological determinants, but from the perspective of the contemporary critical spectator. There are a plentiful number of examples that demonstrate this in practice:

Emilia 1: This is what I have learnt. You see? I can be tamed. I know now that as I grow I must also shrink. I must not take up too much space. If I am to marry well I need to practice these tricks to hush my whole being so that I am only seen when needed. (p.5)

Susan: Also we must spruce you and pluck you, tighten and rouge you to within an inch of your pretty little lives...by the end of it you'll be in possession of the best bloody husbands the Court has to offer. (p.6)

Emilia 1: Suddenly I was no longer a court curiosity. I was currency. (p.14)

---

[349] Lloyd-Malcolm, M quoted in Shakespeare's Globe. (2018). *SuchStuff s1 e1: The missing women*. [Online]. Shakespeare's Globe. Available at: https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2018/08/30/such-stuff-s1-e1/ [Accessed 5 November 2022].

[350] Offen, K. (1988). Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach. *Signs*. 14 (1), 151.

Lord Carey: We can continue our meetings but for colour you will appear virtuous...He cares more for himself than for any woman. (p.20)

Emilia 1: Because I have heard all of this before. A thousand times from all the men who skulk past and sniff at me like dogs. (p.24)

Alphonso: Well she [daughter] is of no interest to me. (p.32)

Emilia 2: Even if I had the means to publish, women are only permitted by the censor to write of religion. (p.51)

Emilia 3: Men, who forgetting they were borne of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the means of women, they would be quite extinguished out of the world...doe like Vipers deface the wombes wherein they were bred. (p.66)

By foregrounding the disparities between the sociocultural settings of canonical works and the contemporary environment, the relationship between the characters and modern audience can be strengthened. In the case of Emilia, audiences are both sympathetic to her position and inspired by her defiance against it. This occurs simultaneously to Lloyd Malcolm's deconstruction and invalidation of the patriarchal system of oppression achieved within Emilia's dialogue. Indeed, this particular dialogue offers several scenarios which contemporary women may be able to relate to, with particular consideration of the more modern ideologies of fourth wave feminism. From a fourth-wave standpoint, the legacy of sharing and highlighting gender injustices given by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, has the tools to empower, integrate and diversify to a degree seldom seen before. In this sense, "closeness" as a concept may also be framed as "unity," where the foregrounding of gender issues can give rise to positive reform. Such a sense of unity is obvious in *Emilia*, with the shared struggle of women trying to achieve a meaningful social status and retaliating against oppressing systems becoming key themes of the work.

Whilst *Emilia* as a contemporary and specially written production can depict a feminist incentive much more easily, this previous chapter examining Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* has suggested ways in which the establishment of "conjured memory" can facilitate a stance of "closeness." Transferring this further onto *Carmen*, it is clear how the line 'a thousand times

from all the men who skulk past and sniff at me like dogs'[351] spoken by Emilia 1 aligns to the identity of Carmen as a femme fatale. Whilst the method of performativity was applied to Bizet's work in practice to facilitate heightened individualism, *Emilia* further suggests how the method of centring exploration in conjured memory may also be a viable method of re-structuring. As such, creatives staging this production in the contemporary environment can select a method most in-keeping with their desired approach, whilst keeping a feminist incentive at the heart of their work.

Indeed, the presentation of Carmen is entirely oppositional to how Emilia Bassano is portrayed. Carmen "performs" her sexuality, and yet within the context of the work, this opposes the sociocultural expectation of how women should behave. In this instance, it is Micaëla who appears as the embodiment of this expectation, with perhaps her underdeveloped identity being a consequence of the legitimised social parameters of the time. Exploring commonality between the roles of Carmen and Emilia, both exist beyond sociocultural expectation, and both suffer ill repute, subjugation, and negative outcome because of it. Therefore, the emerging point of difference between these roles is the extent of their alignment between performer and audience in terms of how they are performed and appreciated. Just as the performance of Dido has been explored from the perspective of conjured memory, one aligns this to the title role of Emilia to witness the commonality between the actor and her performance. This in turn restructures audience visibility allowing her to be seen as separate and critically objective to her narratological environment as opposed to being constructed by it. In short, by enabling the roles to exist beyond their conventional performance and legitimised oppression, contemporary creative interpretation is able to reshape how these characters are seen by their audiences.

In the case of Carmen, applying the Stanislavskian processes of "what if?" and "emotion memory" could create a unique intersection of the digital movements of fourth wave feminism to give an all-encompassing voice to the female perspectives of oppression and empowerment. For instance, a contemporary performer may be able to develop a deeper understanding of female oppression and objectification by following the social media trends including #MeToo and #TimesUp. The modern perspective of the performer and their own experiences could therefore be utilised to facilitate an easy alignment between performer, work and a re-interpretation of the role. Working in this way, any theme of the work, including but not limited

---

[351] Lloyd Malcolm, M (2018). *Emilia*. London: Oberon Books. 24.

to the otherness attributed to Carmen and her position as an outsider, can become catalysts for the heightened closeness between work and artist, and ultimately to audience. Exploring the identity of an "outsider," performers may either explore where they have felt or become an outsider in the past and align this to their portrayal of the character, or easily access accounts of those who have, through the connective nature of social media. The resulting visibility of the role is then grounded in a state of naturalism which moves away from the expected performance conventions and towards these characters appearing as objective, critical, self-aware. Such roles can then ultimately appear empowered within their environment – as indeed is the case with the presentation of Emilia Bassano onstage.

Taking this even further, one looks to the broader problem of violence against women as it is portrayed in *Carmen*. Alongside productions previously examined, one points to the staging of the work by the Teatro del Maggio Musicale in Florence which revises the ending to prevent the visibility of this profound issue. Of this production, the company's Head of Opera Christiano Chiarot stated 'at a time when our society is having to confront the murder of women, how can we dare to applaud the killing of a woman?'[352] Conversely, this Carmen non-fatally shoots her jealous ex-lover in an act of self-defence. To ensure that this depiction is truly feminist and does not give rise to further gender problems, Don José takes the gun from Carmen and shows it to the approaching police, indicating that he was the one to pull the trigger and leaving her free to live her life. Synthesising this alongside the processes proposed over the course of this investigation, I would again suggest that this can be approached and framed as a realisation of conjured memory. With her sexualised performance being framed not as a femme fatale, but as an objectified woman trying to elevate her voice in a male dominated society, this wounding of her ex-lover can be constructed as a desperation to survive rather than manipulate. Such a re-framing could create further potential for the creation of closeness within the triangular relationship of performer, role and audience, wherein adapting to survive as a concept manifesting in multiple different forms and conjured memories grounds this work in multi-wave feminism to make it more accessible.

A re-envisioned ending may not always be desired, and as such, subversion of gender depiction becomes a priority in deconstructing the legitimised subjugation of female roles onstage.

---

[352] Chiarot, C quoted in Classic FM. (2018). *Ending of 'Carmen' re-written to highlight violence against women*. [Online]. Classic Fm. Available at: https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/carmen-new-ending-violence-women/ [Accessed 5 November 2022].

Whilst Lloyd-Malcolm's *Emilia* achieves this consistently through the construction of original dialogue, the extent of which this is also realised through performed action presents potential for the successful application of this method to opera. By re-imagining the physical performance of canonical characters, they are able to appear re-envisioned without the express need for modification of the libretto or score. As such, the original surviving libretto can be utilised as a fundamental construct of the traditional foundation of the work, whilst the performed dramatic action surrounding it can become the catalyst by which the work is made more relevant.

This study proposes that grounding creative practice in conjured memory, that is, establishing and maintaining a connection between role and performer rooted in personal experience, can become a central catalyst for individualism, accessibility and relatability in canonical works. This in turn presents expanded options for self-expression and diversity, where the source of inspiration is informed by contemporary creatives from their own perspectives. The benefit of this is not simply limited to females, but also facilitates the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity in male performers and their roles by making these characters more relatable. This in turn will have a positive impact on the extent of the female voice, where the scale of gender hierarchy is deconstructed and female characters are able to exist beyond the limitations of their legitimised objectification and subjectivity.

5.2 Brechtian inspiration

Having previously outlined Lloyd Malcom's use of three "Emilia's" of different ages, the first Brechtian point of note is how this dramatic decision constructs a new state of viewership within the character of Emilia Bassano at different ages. The integration of this observational element presents the opportunity for the establishment of a critical spectator for both onstage and offstage personas. Emilia herself is able to consider sociocultural context and her place within it to explore feelings of regret, missed opportunity, and both an objective and actively opinionated reaction to the hegemony of those around her. Emilia 3 states: 'You don't need to be a woman to know what is coming. Because why have our stories been ignored? For so long? Ask yourself why...listen to us'[353] With Emilia 3 being the most senior of the three performers

---

[353] Lloyd Malcolm, M (2018). *Emilia*. London: Oberon Books. 37.

sharing this role, this very much constructs a critical state of "lookingness" wherein all narratological content is considered, evaluated and reacted to through a call to action. Indeed, in a Brechtian manner, the audience is asked to look beyond their perception of normalcy and rather, actively seek to deconstruct it.

Several possibilities appear relating to the application of this to performances of canonical opera; the first is reminiscent of the staging of Carmen by Kosky, wherein additional music was used to extend the ending and allow for the integration of a contemporary perspective. Perhaps if this were to be applied to *Così fan tutte*, an extended ending could see either additional music composed to show the women admonishing and walking away from their deceitful lovers. Conversely, and as an alternative to the composition of additional music, Fiordiligi and Dorabella's opening duet, *A guarda sorella* could be reprised and re-performed in a satirical sense. Rather than the sisters describing the details of how they imagine their lovers, this could be directed at Guglielmo and Ferrando and subverted to depict how a lover should not behave. Indeed, there are a wealth of creative options that may be constructed in this style and which in turn afford artistic freedom to creatives to integrate their own contemporary perspective.

It is also noteworthy to highlight how this state of viewership is also applied in Lloyd-Malcolm's libretto to other characters around her; with Emilia 2 observing of Shakespeare; 'he is laughing at me. He says with this; look what I do that you cannot. And he expects my silence.'[354] Such directly challenges social and gendered mores of the time, asking the audience to reconsider both their state of normalcy and their view of socially acceptable behaviour. This is particularly prevalent in the mise en abyme section, wherein Emilia 2 observes performances of *Othello* whilst sitting amongst the audience. She comments on the apparent plagiarism of her words and the use of her name for one of the leading characters in an observational manner. Such is removed from the narrative but aligned to the critical and objective position of the audience. Whilst historical discrepancies of truth are not always present within works and able to be dramatised in this way, it is noteworthy how female critical observation appears a key theme within *Emilia*. Indeed, Emilia 3 remains present onstage for much of the work, reacting to her younger self and her navigation of the world around her. Considering the fundamentals

---

[354] ibid. 41.

of Brechtian theatre examined over the course of this investigation, this production presents many successful applications of critical viewership, wherein social behaviour is actively challenged through direct address to the audience. Taking influence from *Emilia* and applying this, in principle, to *Così fan tutte*, perhaps a possible application of this method could be to place Fiordiligi and Dorabella onstage, out of view of Guglielmo and Ferrando as they make their bet with Don Alfonso prior to commencing their experiment. Physical reaction could be applied to infer that the sisters are going along with the experiment to ultimately highlight this subordinating behaviour. This could go some way towards subverting audience expectation of both the work as a canonical piece and the broader sociocultural mores presented within it.

It may not always be creatively and dramatically feasible to incorporate multiple realisations of a single character or re-blocked staging throughout the work to explore this avenue of reframing visibility. However, the establishment of multi-perspectives as aligned to the synthesis of third-wave feminism by Snyder presents lots of potential and opportunities for successful feminist re-envisionings to be achieved. Furthering this alignment to theory, one points to Nickolay Popov, who, in his paper *Feminism as a Political Ideology* suggests that to achieve a satisfactory manifestation of feminism, one must include the female perspective where it had otherwise been excluded.[355] Indeed, this appears reminiscent of the retelling of *The Iceman Cometh* by Gayle Austin, wherein one of her possible criteria of reform was to expand the female presence onstage. To this end, perhaps a reactional presence where females are privy to male discussions about women will provide greater opportunities for the re-envisioning and subversion of the gaze of the audience.

Appearing reminiscent of The Bechdel Test, which sets out three central feminist criteria in film, the principles of enhanced female presence could be applied broadly to opera from the canon to deconstruct the very moments which conspire the downfall of female characters. Looking back on works previously examined, perhaps Dido could appear onstage when Aeneas is called away by the Spirit on Jove's command. Physical reaction could be used to either subvert the depiction of the inherent heroism of Aeneas through either exasperation or, if desired, satirisation. Alternatively, she could react sympathetically to his plight, thus removing the fragility of Dido when her lover departs later. As previously suggested, *Così fan tutte* could present Fiordiligi and Dorabella onstage to overhear the bet being made by their lovers, and

---

[355] Popov, N. (2018). Feminism as a Political Ideology. *De Gruyter Open International Conference*. 24 (2), 374.

perhaps even Micaëla from *Carmen* could be seen to overhear some of the interactions between the titular character and Don José to extend the scope of her often-obliging demeanour. This presents an intersection with the method of performativity, wherein the desired physical depiction of a character is uniquely constructed by the performance of the individual artist. However, through this process of integrating the female perceptive, both an enhanced female voice and a greater depth of character is achieved. Such in turn fuels performance informed by individual identity from the perspective of a contemporary performer.

Furthering the work of this the previous application of Brechtian principles to re-envision canonical opera, one considers why satirisation as a practice appears so frequently in Brechtian theatre. Brecht scholar Professor Marc Silberman observes that 'Brecht's plays integrate a range of comic elements, from slapstick and *commedia dell'arte* exaggeration, to burlesque and stagey playfulness. Constructing paradoxical situations became his method for demonstrating the incongruities of capitalist social systems.'[356] Indeed, the creation of paradoxical situations appears a fundamental construct of Lloyd-Malcolm's *Emilia*, wherein an all-female cast, a consistent breaking of the fourth wall and a libretto which directly challenges convention and synthesises historical action from the perspective of contemporary feminism directly contradicts the setting of the work. It is also interesting that this practice is applied to all characters within the work, who appear to "stand beside" their place in history. Such further accentuates the disparities between Contemporary ideology and the Elizabethan/Jacobean sociocultural conventions which governed Emilia Bassano's life:

Emilia 1: It is by our virtues that we are judged not our heritage and my family have proved themselves tenfold. I don't need to answer to you. (p.6)

Lady Katherine: We need to level the playing field Cordelia; we're dying out here. (p.9)

Lord Carey: I watch how you suffer the attentions of men your age who find your looks exciting but don't quite know what to do with you. I feel you don't yet know what to do with yourself...Maybe what you seek is security enough to write and pursue your creative desires whilst also engaging in the careful passions of a man who has been in this game a long time? (p.13)

---

[356] Silberman, M. (2012). Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy. *Social Research*. 79(1), p.170.

Emilia 1: Must we continue these approaches until a match is made? Is it possible that perhaps a woman could choose never to match and instead live her life in pursuit of something greater? (p.12)

Emilia 1: Suddenly I was no longer a court curiosity. I was currency. (p.14)

Emilia 3: His hook in me digs deeper, burrows further into my flesh so that it can assert ownership over my body. (p.21)

Emilia 1: I am done dancing towards them. They will have to dance to me. (p.23)

Emilia 1: Make sure there is resistance from the women. I want there to be one who does not wish to marry. Who is being forced to marry. Let me be able to relate to someone. (p.29)

Lord Carey: But yours [work] is more of a hobby isn't it? (p.30)

Emilia 3: I thought that if I could bring up a daughter who was perhaps stronger than me. Perhaps would benefit from a changing landscape. (p.33)

Emilia 2: It is my whole existence in your shadow. It is women born to a status that dooms us to your ill will. That there be women that do abuse their husbands I am of no doubt but the balance is grossly tipped in your favour. That we must assume that everything we do is to be dismissed. That all talent and interest, all passion and sense is just a quirk of our sex that can be indulged but never validated. That we must instead sit quietly and patiently watch as you enjoy the fruits of your labours...And still your sex think we are less? (p.35)

Emilia 2: We do not ask for them to step aside and go without we merely ask them to let us join. (p.37)

Emilia 2: You are explaining what I already know? Why is it only men do this? (p.38)

Shakespeare: I will not be held at fault for the rules of our time. (p.39)

Lady Anne: Are there any women in Greek myths who don't get raped or brutally mutilated or killer?. Do women who get power have to be cruel as well? (p.49)

Lord Howard: Instead of giving thanks for the generous and kind disposition of all men she seems to suggest that men are to be ignored and discarded in favour of a new order in which women are seen as equal...for as long as time immemorial women have never been equal to men and instead must accept the natural order of things. Inferior...can you imagine if all women came to believe what she suggests? That women deserve more than they already generously are given? (p.53)

Emilia 3: Stifled, Ignored. Abused. (p.72)

The common theme of this libretto is the acknowledgement of the limitations for women of the time, amalgamated with a contemporary call to action. Whilst much of this libretto is very serious, there are noticeable elements of Brechtian satirisation which are applied to achieve a profound paradoxical visibility between contemporary feminist behaviour and the social mores of female subjectivity. Alphonso's flamboyant 'goodbye my love, I'm off to fight in a war'[357] and Eve's 'so your husband can't spend everything you own'[358] are more direct realisations of humour and satirisation in practice, however the extent this application is surprisingly broad. Perhaps then, the implementation of this inherently Brechtian method could be a fundamental construct of the transmission of detachment and alienation in contemporary performances of canonical opera. Having previously explored the possibilities of satirisation and "standing beside" one's character, Brechtian methods could be further applied in practice to encompass more profound depictions and subsequent deconstructions of troublesome gendered mores. Realisations of such could encompass direct breaking of the fourth wall as seen in Barrie Kosky's staging of *Carmen* through the use of voiceover, direct address and additional material. Perhaps in addition, a radical contemporary approach could even use multimedia to re-frame conventional identities. Such has been previously seen in the use of newspapers by the Better Strangers Opera Collective to re-empower Dido and deconstruct the heroism of Aeneas. Considering the fundamentals of Brechtian alienation and the evident links with this present in *Emilia*, the application of these methods of re-envisioning present exciting possibilities for how canonical works may newly re-frame female roles.

5.3 Performativity

---

[357] Lloyd Malcolm, M (2018). *Emilia*. London: Oberon Books. 28.

[358] ibid. 60.

Having previously commented on the performance of the character Emilia by three different actresses, it is prudent to note how the method of performativity in practice is such a key theme in this production. Here, performativity provides the underpinning environment which both unifies the individuals playing the role and yet allows them to construct their own individualistic version of Emilia. This helps to signpost her identities as both writer and woman. Speaking of the rationale behind this dramatic depiction, director Nicole Charles stated in an interview 'we just thought that might be really exciting, because we have all these women within us: we have the voices of our mothers and our grandmothers. And we have those selves within ourselves as well. And it's rather a kind of abstract notion, but it's so true.'[359] This appears to present a two-fold benefit. The first, an alignment to the more contemporary elements of fourth wave feminism, where ideological beliefs are passed down through generations and amalgamated with diversity and enhanced communication. The second, a grounding of performativity as a method in the feminist theory of integrating female perspective.

Lloyd-Malcolm's Emilia boasts an all-female cast. Indeed, this aligns to the first of Gayle Austin's three methods of re-envisioning seen in her production of *The Iceman Cometh*, where an all-female cast disrupts the alignment of spectator gaze with the male sex by foregrounding the female identity. Yet the arising question is the extent of which female characters perform characteristics which are perceivable as hegemonically masculine. Referring this to Judith Halberstam's "butch woman," one considers where the divide is between a woman self-identifying as masculine and a woman performing masculine characteristics onstage to construct or deconstruct expectation.

The concept of performativity in practice appears as a viable method of achieving presentations of gender beyond any such limiting parameters. In the case of the theory of the "butch woman," there is no single identity before what the individual in question is electing to show. This may be applied onstage to move beyond convention and the performance of characteristics conventionally aligned to gendered identities. In Lloyd-Malcolm's production, the females playing male roles achieve their character depiction through a mixture of satirisation and subversion of identity. In the case of the characters Alfonso and even Shakespeare, there is a

---

[359] Charles, N quoted in Shakespeare's Globe. (2018). *SuchStuff s1 e1: The missing women*. [Online]. Shakespeare's Globe. Available at: https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2018/08/30/such-stuff-s1-e1/ [Accessed 5 November 2022].

high level of satire embodied through exaggerated body language and vocal depth to foreground male hegemony and deconstruct its level of authority over their female counterparts. Through this performative satirisation, the view of the spectators becomes aligned to the females onstage, who collectively unearth the humour in hegemonic behaviour, thus undermining its authority.

The second element of performativity in the construction of male roles is present in the character Lord Carey, who actress Carolyn Pickles performs with contrasting sincerity. Pickles does not perform the role as if she were a male, rather, her body language and spoken vocal pitch appears reminiscent of Stanislavskian naturalism. Consequently, Lord Carey appears one of the most gender-neutral characters within this production, which, considering his romantic relationship with Emilia Bassano, further unearths possibilities for diversifying visible relationships onstage. Aligning this to canonical opera, one can compare the approach of Pickles and her performance of Lord Carey to the portrayal of trouser roles by female performers. As one of the most popular roles of this nature, Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* can easily be perceived and performed as a fretful, hormonal teenage boy who is further sexualised through his depiction by a young woman. In turn, the presentation of his romantic infatuation with the Countess frequently invalidates the resulting female-female attachment through the exaggerated performance of masculinity. Consequently, any inherent diversity is deconstructed by the expectation of a female performer to perform with masculine characteristics. By moving away from this expectation, many more possibilities for diverse performances onstage arise.

Moving into the Romantic period, female sexualisation through performed male characteristics is further pronounced in works such as Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* where Count Octavian Rofrano, portrayed by a woman en travesti is in a relationship with Marschallin, a much older female. Indeed, at the time of this work, this large age gap and same-sex pairing would have been controversial. However, when this same circumstance is presented between Emilia Bassano and Lord Carey from a contemporary standpoint, the use of individual performativity to move away from conventional depictions of gendered roles prevents any controversy from being foregrounded. Rather, diversity and elective self-expression is spotlighted as a result of this presentation.

This study suggests that moving away from conventional representations of gender through performativity focused on individual identity can indeed be a tool for gendered reform. Previous exploration of *Carmen* had highlighted how workshop exploration can reframe the central characters within the work to allow for a re-envisioned framing. Out of this, individualistic interpretation for contemporary performers is facilitated. The apparent application of such within Lloyd-Malcolm's *Emilia* suggests how this may be applied even more broadly. Once again referring to breeches roles which uniquely amalgamate the female sex with male behaviour, the process of performativity allows the removal of these roles from a dependence on physicalising masculinity by a female performer.

Extending beyond the application to breeches roles, other roles of both genders examined as part of this study could too be re-envisioned to take on a feminist identity. Applying this to Purcell's Dido, much of her perceived weakness is constructed to align to her the behavioural expectations of the female sex. If exercises in performativity were to be applied to her character exploration, perhaps contemporary performers could refocus her frequent yearning and vulnerability towards the depiction of her status as a strong and authoritative dux femina. In this same sense, performers of Aeneas could refocus his heroism towards a depiction of vulnerability, which in turn is very limited in the original work.

This is not to say that female vulnerability should be entirely removed. Once again using *Dido and Aeneas* as an example, the fragility of Dido is heavily embodied within Purcell's score. Indeed, the acknowledgement of female fragility is a fundamental theme of *Emilia*, however the difference is how this is performed and framed through a contemporary lens. Emilia 3 states 'this is what happens when we speak...When we do not stay silent. This is what they do.'[360] Such appears, as many other areas of the libretto do within this work, to reference the legitimisation of female subordination by normalised male behaviour. This is projected even more obviously through libretto such as 'this world works against us...We're born with it.'[361] Yet Lloyd-Malcolm does not always root her libretto in calls to action. There also appear plentiful examples of statements of vulnerability without an accompanying call for reform:

[360] Lloyd Malcolm, M (2018). *Emilia*. London: Oberon Books. 72.

[361] ibid. 68.

'Suddenly I was no longer a court curiosity. I was currency.'[362] 'I will never be at peace as long as I have no voice!'[363] Viewing the language of Dido from a contemporary perspective, there appear elements of dialogue interpretable in the same way: "Earth and heaven conspire my fall." "I languish til my grief is known." This libretto appears to construct the same acknowledgement of female reduction as seen in Lloyd-Malcom's words, yet the difference in their transmission appears to fundamentally rely on how the performer delivers such phrases.

One then considers how performativity as a practice, and the application of re-structured physical and vocal delivery may be utilised to differentiate between the subordinated and the empowered woman. Timbre is of course a dominant area of vocal reconstruction where assertion in place of subordination and softness and sincerity in the place of cunning and manipulation can reframe and add new perspectives to the sung elements of a role. Applying this to the application of vocal technique, resonance and the use of breath to achieve a greater depiction of either strength or vulnerability can also be valuable tools utilised by contemporary singers.

Physically, there is also much more scope to achieve substantial difference in re-envisionings. The differences in the visibility of Carmen and Emilia attest to just how much the physicality of a performer is linked to how their identity is perceived. However, it is also seems important to consider that lighting, sound, blocking and costume also continue to this. One is reminded of earlier synthesis of the production of *Dido and Aeneas* by the Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti, where Dido's costume appeared to mimic a cage. Contrasting to this, the use of costume within *Emilia* utilises period design but pairs this with bright and vibrant colours to add expression and freedom to the frequent subjugation of Emilia Bassano. Indeed, this could be applied to other canonical productions with Fiordiligi and Dorabella, for instance, being presented in vibrant, contrasting costumes to depict individuality over the frequent visual uniformity attached to these roles.

Taking an overarching perspective, I suggest that performativity in practice and the application of this proposed method in the staging of both new and existing works speaks very specifically

---

[362] ibid. 14.

[363] ibid. 25.

to the present environment. In an interview, *Emilia* director Nicole Charles stated 'in light of the…rise in feminism and in intersectional feminism and the #MeToo movement, actually Emilia felt incredibly important to sort of join that conversation really. But also, in terms of our production values, to really think about that in a contemporary way whilst keeping the original Renaissance meaning. So, we're trying to kind of reflect Stuart England in a contemporary mirror and tell that story in a really kind of vivid and if somewhat transgressive way.'[364] Indeed, amalgamating the traditions of an original work with contemporary perspective is very much the rationale of this study and it is interesting to note how just how much individualism in performance practice acts as the centre of creative exploration to establish a strong sense of feminism onstage.

Using *Emilia* as an example of a piece of specific feminist theatre, the appearances of processes resembling conjured memory, Brechtian alienation and applying performativity to construct uniqueness further affirm the viability of these proposed methods. Putting all of this into practice, perhaps then, the resulting position of canonical works becomes increasingly diverse in the self-expression and individualism of contemporary performers. This could be achieved whilst also embodying a heightened feminist incentive. Through a grounding in the multiperspectival and multivocal rationale of third wave feminism moving into fourth wave application of communicative and multimedia tools, the feminism achieved here appears highly contemporary in nature. Such builds upon existing ideology and furthers its application. Ultimately, this work takes a greater stance in the intersectionality of identity and presents exciting opportunities for feminist re-envisionings to have a broader and more profound impact on diversity and inclusion.

---

[364] Charles, N quoted in Shakespeare's Globe. (2018). *SuchStuff s1 e1: The missing women*. [Online]. Shakespeare's Globe. Available at: https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2018/08/30/such-stuff-s1-e1/ [Accessed 5 November 2022].

6. Further ideas for implementing proposed frameworks and final conclusions

As a starting point to suggesting further ideas for feminist re-envisioning, I highlight an insight from former director of Nevill Holt Opera and current Chief Executive of The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Orchestra Annie Lydford who states; Opera is so incredibly varied (more than 400 years of music and theatre, after all) that, if the industry is in a good place, an audience member should be able to hone in on their own preferences should they wish to do so.'[365] The idea of "honing preferences" neatly summarises the need for agility within the industry and its encapsulated creative practice to respond to changing levels of diverse expectation.

Over the course of this investigation, both new and longstanding musicological and feminist theory has been synthesised to facilitate the proposition of three possible methods of feminist re-envisionings of opera from the canon. Within each of these possible methods, the work of existing practitioners and theorists have been examined and furthered, with arising insights being shaped into proposed methods and explored within Workshop 1.[366] This concluding chapter aims to be forward-facing, diverse and practical; providing more extensive propositions for realising these re-envisionings through further engagements with working practitioners, both internationally established and up-and-coming. Such insights are suggested to be applied in addition to the previously outlined processes, or used in place of set exercises where they are more applicable to the chosen setting or cast members.

6.1 The central underpinning rationales

Having extensively reviewed multi-wave feminist thoughts and their application to productions of opera from the canon, this investigation proposes two fundamental feminist incentives to serve as the foundations of contemporary re-envisionings. The first; the third-wave concept of multi-vocality. Not only does this encompass the inclusive elements of feminism where the movement is accessible by demographics beyond cisgender women, but this also speaks to the broader diversity of being female. If multivocality is to be perceived as an institution, then it is an inclusive and diverse one which not only enables all individuals to be feminist but also to

---

[365] Castrey, M. *Interview with Annie Lydford.* July 2020.

[366] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨ 25th September 2022.

be female. Within the creative medium, this also triggers more diverse casting and increased representation of all identities within performance of traditional and indeed newly commissioned works. The second foundation is one of individualism. Whilst this idea has been examined as a working concept within the exploration of a methodology based on performativity, this consideration should ideally be taken further when approaching contemporary re-envisionings. In such a case, the individuality of performers should be championed regardless of which approach is being applied to creative working. Whilst performance convention arises from repeated practice becoming expectation, I propose that this concept of imitation should be abandoned as much as feasibly possible in the Contemporary age; where even traditional productions of canonical works are approached with open-mindedness, diversity, inclusion and representation. This ensures that reform and respect can be facilitated and maintained whatever the setting of a work.

6.2 Further practical methods

This chapter will now suggest further ways in which the methods of achieving feminist re-envisioning proposed as part of this study may be implemented, synthesising additional insights of practitioners and their relevant working methods. The aim of this is to further diversify the prospects of creative working, integrating additional perspectives for creatives to consider.

6.2.1 Conjured memory

Referring back to the steps previously outlined in this first method of proposed feminist re-envisioning, the implementation of "conjured memory" is a method is achieved by:

1) Collaboratively uncovering a common theme – encompassing the establishment of a state of comfort and collaborative discussion.
2) Personal assignment to conjured memory
3) Creating and sharing sensory attribution to personal experiences
4) Physical realisation of emotions.

Having previously outlined and implemented practical explorations of each of these steps, one now considers each stage with greater contemporary diversity. Referring to the core concept of the multiperspectival nature of modern feminism which differentiates the contemporary

alignment to this ideology from more longstanding methods, one considers how "comfort" as a concept differentiates in an age of greater diversity.

With feminism itself now not restricted to cisgender women, comfort as it relates to gender identity has greatly expanded parameters in the contemporary environment. Whilst breathing for relaxation was previously outlined, director and playwright Jacqueline White notes the importance of communal breathing. Outlining this process, White stated, 'I always get my cast to breathe together at the start of any rehearsal or performance. This is particularly important at the start of any kind of explorative journey where actors may be unknown to each other and about to step outside of their comfort zones. The director may provide some counts to inhale and exhale to if this helps – but this is a great way of getting everyone attuned to each other's rhythms and create a collective sense of acceptance, trust and understanding.'[367] Whilst this study questioned the usefulness of breathing as applied to real-world performances, this insight offers the activity of communal breathing as a warm-up activity to improve cohesion, connectivity and comfort.

In this insight the word "attunement" is particularly interesting. Affect attunement as a concept bears its roots in anthropology and is described as 'the sharing of emotional experiences through the matching of expressions during dyadic face-to-face interaction.'[368] This is particularly pronounced in the dualism of infants and their caregivers. However, the idea of synchronising bodily rhythms is also important in a creative space, particularly where the process of utilising conjured memory to increase relation to a character is being utilised. White's idea of using breath to facilitate the attunment of cast members to one another appears reminiscent of Kirsten Fink-Jensen's paper *Attunement and Bodily Dialogues in Music Education* wherein she suggests the notion of 'bodily dialogue'[369] arising from 'musical attunement.'[370] Fink-Jensen outlines the concept of all beings as living bodies and states that the consequences of these are:

---

[367] Castrey, M. *Interview with Jacqueline White.* January 2023.

[368] Little, E. (Date unknown). *INFANT-CAREGIVER AFFECT ATTUNEMENT*. [Online]. Center for Academic Research & Training in Anthropogeny. Available at: https://carta.anthropogeny.org/moca/topics/infant-caregiver-affect-attunement [Accessed 17 February 2023].

[369] Fink-Jensen, K. (2007). Attunement and Bodily Dialogues in Music Education. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*. 15(1), p.55.

[370] ibid.

- Each of us is an integrated unit in which all aspects of existence function together: the various senses, emotions, knowledge, and gender.

- A subject is intentionally interrelated with things, events, and other persons or is preoccupied with his/her own feelings and sensations.

- Our experiences always depend on our embodied earlier experiences and actual feelings.

- A subject is intertwined with the world and other people through his/her bodily existence; we live from a perspective based on perception.[371]

Perception is particularly interesting here and speaks to a central element of female visibility. The gendered roles in opera are all too often performed as one expects them to be performed, however, by integrating the contemporary perspective, the ability to reframe how such roles are perceived arises. If working through the process of conjured memory, it is suggested that these four points are read and considered by each cast member to offer some perspective as to how their own sense of being may be applied to their role to improve relatability. This could also ease the delivery of performance of more challenging characters.

The second and third points are of particular relevance to this method: the subject is interrelated with things, events and other persons and the idea that one's experiences depend on embodied earlier experiences and the emotional responses to these. This aligns very effectively to the second and third steps of this method, where personal assignment to conjured memory and the shared sensory attribution to these is explored. Speaking of the second idea of "personal attribution," ▨▨▨▨▨ who works as both a director and a psychotherapist outlined their approach of "introducing the embodiment of lived feelings" through their "school playground" technique. ▨▨▨ states: 'The school environment has always been something I've found really intriguing. In this particular space, we are all developed at different rates and yet all share a fundamental level of immaturity. This is a unique environment where lots of people, still learning and understanding social convention are forced together where they are still navigating the discovery of their own identity amidst very different normalised environments. That's why I love to apply it to drama. It's also really relevant to your [this study's] work from the feminist mindset because of its considerations of different normalities for people, different identities

---

[371] ibid. 56.

and the development of understanding and empathy towards all of these.'[372] Speaking of the specific process behind this method, ▨▨▨ continued; 'I ask all my performers to imagine that they are in a school playground, acting the way they would have done during their early school years. The bell goes and how would they react? Would they be very boisterous and zooming around or would they be the one to retire away? This recreates that very pure, infantile environment where self-discovery is at the centre of all activity. I then ask performers to recreate this, however this time as their characters. This way they are learning from their own personal experiences and applying that to develop an understanding of their character as well as the roles of others.'[373] Such a technique of achieving personal assignment could be yet another possible option for practicing creatives to integrate into their own working.

In creating an environment of acceptance and maintaining safe and diverse spaces, it is important to consider that the process of using a conjured memory to create closeness to a particular character may be challenging in certain situations. White proposes an answer for this through a method of "indirect sharing." Within this process and where a challenging past event, memory, identification or environment is being called upon to access a particular role, performers are asked to write down either details of the memory and/or their emotional response. This is then sealed and kept by the performer but brought to all rehearsals, regardless of whether or not this is ever shared with other cast members. The rationale behind this is the trust in the sharing and/or non sharing to unify the cast and the sensory attribution to the memory through the externalisation of the emotional response, even if only on paper. This is of particular relevance to the fourth stage of this process: "Creating and sharing sensory attribution to personal experiences" where, in this instance, greater consideration is given to more challenging methods of attribution which unify performer and role to cast member and broader company.

The final conjured memory stage of the physical realisation of emotions has been previously explored in detail with performers in Workshop 1.[374] Within this setting, performers were asked to engage with Katie Mitchell's six questions and Uta Hagen's nine questions to facilitate

---

[372] Castrey, M. *Interview with* ▨▨▨▨ January 2023.

[373] ibid.

[374] Castrey, M. (2022) 'Workshopping proposed feminist re-envisionings' [workshop], ▨▨▨▨▨▨
25th September 2022.

an understanding of location, identity, and characteristics as they manifest physically, as well as CeCe McFarland's creation of a complete sensory environment to facilitate physical performance. To further diversify these methods, I highlight the work of ▨▨▨▨, whose exercise in "fixed point physicality" is particularly interesting in its ability to amalgamate performer interpretation or "closeness" with a contemporary synthesis of the narrative in question and how the characters appear within it.

▨▨▨▨ states that 'physical energy in the room is something that's really important to establish and nurture from the off. It's also important to integrate this with personalisation and to encourage people to look at the story with their own eyes and not just through the eyes of the director or the view that's come to be expected through years – sometimes centuries, of performance. One of my favourite exercises with this is to get the cast to work together, or in smaller groups if it is particularly large, to tableau the three signposting moments of the piece. The performers can play their own characters initially and then swap to other characters who most oppose them to experience the opposing physicality being performed. It's often really challenging to streamline a full operatic work down to just three key points, however this forces the performers to think of where their character exists within the perspective of the work as a whole whilst centralising their own narrative arc.'[375] Whilst the idea of creating tableaus has been previously suggested to externalise the physical picture being perceived by the audience, the idea of collaborative cast working to centralise narrative arcs through the signposting of key moments does much to encourage considerations of personal association.

I suggest that this exercise could be further developed in explorative spaces to encourage performers to recreate the tableaus but through the lens of contemporary social mores; changing how characters would physicalise and react in line with changing ideologies of identity. Performers could also re-engage with the tableaus as "themselves" rather than their character, again amending their physicality in line with their own personalities and individuality. This is particularly relevant to the process of engaging with conjured memory as a framework to encourage closeness between the character and performer, even in more challenging cases.

---

[375] Castrey, M. *Interview with* ▨▨▨▨ January 2023.

As a final additional method of facilitating closeness in a broader sense, legacy work specialist Aili Huber states 'I sometimes will ask a person to come up with a "theme song" for their character, which occasionally ends up in the play – like when an actor chose "Wanna Be" by The Spice Girls for Mistress Ford from *Merry Wives*, we used it as a closing song! For other actors, I might ask if they have an image they associate with the character, or a time in their own life.'[376] This again reinforces the idea of conjured memory as a working approach, where closeness between role and performer is achieved and maintained. The idea of finding character theme songs is an interesting and useful addition to such working methods, where a contemporary perspective is offered through the lens of relatable modern music. Once more, an artifact, in this case a piece of modern music, is utilised by the performer as a means of creating closeness. Such could be even more profound if the song in question was of particular personal significance to them.

The idea of creating "closeness" through the channelling of a memory or personal circumstance is a process that I would suggest facilitates a heightened sense of diversity, inclusion and representation within a domain that may not always naturally provide such scope. Looking once again through the lens of contemporary feminism, no other mechanism is as multivocal and multiperspectival as individuality. If lived experiences can be used to deepen the link between performer and character, performer and work and performer and company, then not only is performances of troublesome narratives made easier, but so too is the application of a feminist perspective within a diverse and representational environment.

6.2.2. Detachment and alienation

As a concept completely disparate to creating "closeness," the idea of establishing distance is the opposing angle from which to approach contemporary feminist re-envisionings of opera from the canon. Within this practice, works and their associated characters are placed far away from a contemporary performer so as to reassert the different ideological mores of the work itself and the modern environment. Carrie Klewin Lawrence is a theatre director whose speciality involves conceiving performances 'through an ensemble driven process. Carrie specializes in movement-based storytelling, musicals, opera, and devises work developed from

---

[376] Castrey, M. *Interview with Aili Huber.* January 2023.

improvision, dance theatre and commedia dell'arte.'[377] Speaking specifically of working with detachment as a concept for character development, Lawrence states 'it's all about what's contained within the text – and all of the exercises are developed in relation to the text and the challenges the actor is having – perhaps there is a stronger use of "magic if," or a physical alteration, or a specific gesture that will help tell the story.'[378] The concept of the "magic if" appears somewhat Stanislavskian in nature, asking performers to consider what they would do "if" they were to find themselves in a particular situation or environment. However, it is interesting to note how Lawrence applies this "magic if" in reverse. Looking through the lens of detachment in practice, the "magic if" could be employed to further emphasise a dichotomy between performer and role, context and contemporary environment. That is, how could a performer parody an environment so far removed from their own "if" they were either to exist within it or be removed from it? It is also interesting to note that this additional method again affords potential for heightened individualism through the personalisation of each response and the ability for performers to shape their characterisation out of consideration of their natural environments.

Also offering further methods of exploring detachment as a concept, director ▨▨▨▨ uses an exercise of over-exaggeration. Speaking of this work in practice, she states 'over exaggerating action is a great way of unifying a company and making everyone feel confident and comfortable, but it's also a really effective method of framing elements of a character in a manner that makes you see things that may appear subtle and yet need exploring. Brecht has a great example of puffing the chest out and walking in such a broad manner to emulate an upper-class businessman or someone like that profile. Yes, it makes you want to laugh at that character, but it also shines a light on the ludicrousness of the profile and the problematic arrogance of their profile.'[379] Applying this to some of the canonical works explored over the course of this investigation, this could be very effectively applied to Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* whose stoicism in both his manner and beliefs could feasibly become a method of parody. His performance in this way could deconstruct his position of "correctness" and rather allow

---

[377] Lawrence, C K. (Date unknown). *Biography*. [Online]. Carrie Klewin Lawrence. Available at: http://www.carrieklewin.com [Accessed 17 February 2023].

[378] Castrey, M. *Interview with Carrie Klewin Lawrence.* January 2023.

[379] Castrey, M. *Interview with* ▨▨▨▨ January 2023.

the absurd nature of the experiment to become the fable foreground of the work, in place of proving conditioned female infidelity.

A further insight to add when discussing further ways to implement detachment as a method of feminist re-envisioning comes from Andrey V. Denisov's paper *The Parody Principle in Musical Art.* Denisov observes that 'in musicology, parody forms of music have been studied quite rarely'[380] and it is this which highlights the potential for musical performance newly supporting a realisation of dramatic detachment. Denisov identifies the 'parallel action of intra-textual and inter-textual relations…[where] sometimes the change in tone, tempo, dynamics and articulation alone is enough to create the effect of parody.'[381] Of course, the composition itself does much to realise the parodic capabilities of a piece. Below is an example of Saint-Saëns' *The Elephant* from *The Carnival of the Animals*, where the rising chromatic phrases doubled at octaves and the slowly resolving dissonances do much to embody the essence of this character.

Figure 9)
Saint-Saëns' *The Elephant* from *The Carnival of the Animals* to highlight how musical character is presented.
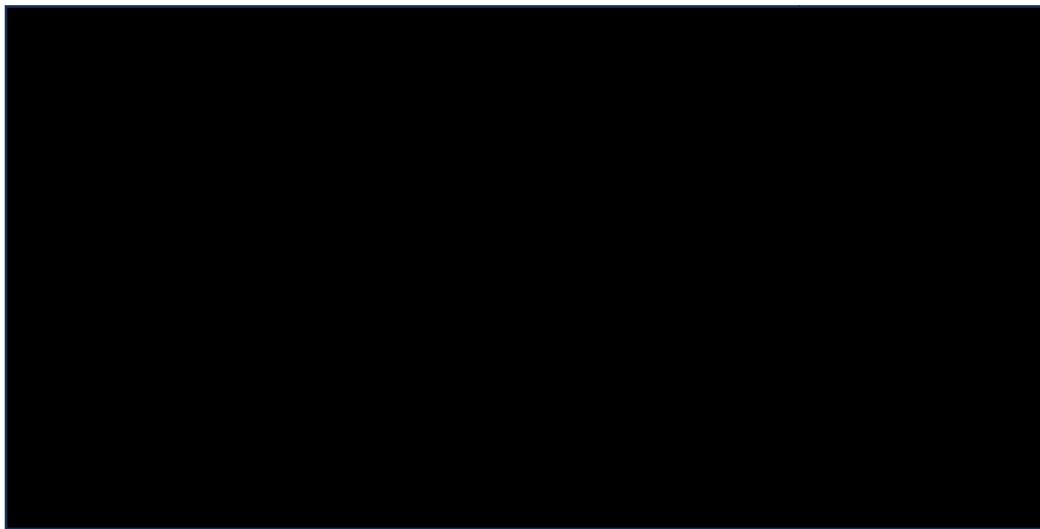
However, it is also interesting to note how the performance directions add to the creation of this image. Here, I propose that the performance directions of slow tempo, loud dynamic

---

[380] Denisov, A V. (2015). The Parody Principle in Musical Art. *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*. 46(1), p.55.

[381] ibid. 56.

leading to ebbing diminuendos and changes of ornamentation to give the effect of the gait of the elephant create just as much of a complex picture of identity as the composition in isolation. Could it therefore be the case that, in a more radical approach, performance directions such as tempo, dynamics, articulation, and perhaps even more controversially, instrumentation, are able to be re-considered to further satirise characters and support dramatic detachment?

Figure 10)

The figure below demonstrates possible revisions to Don Alfonso's *Tutti accusan le donne* to put this proposed additional method of detachment into practice. These were compiled as part of my own performance journal and there are proposed revisions to the dynamics, articulation and vocal performance in order to create a heightened sense of parody and satirisation.
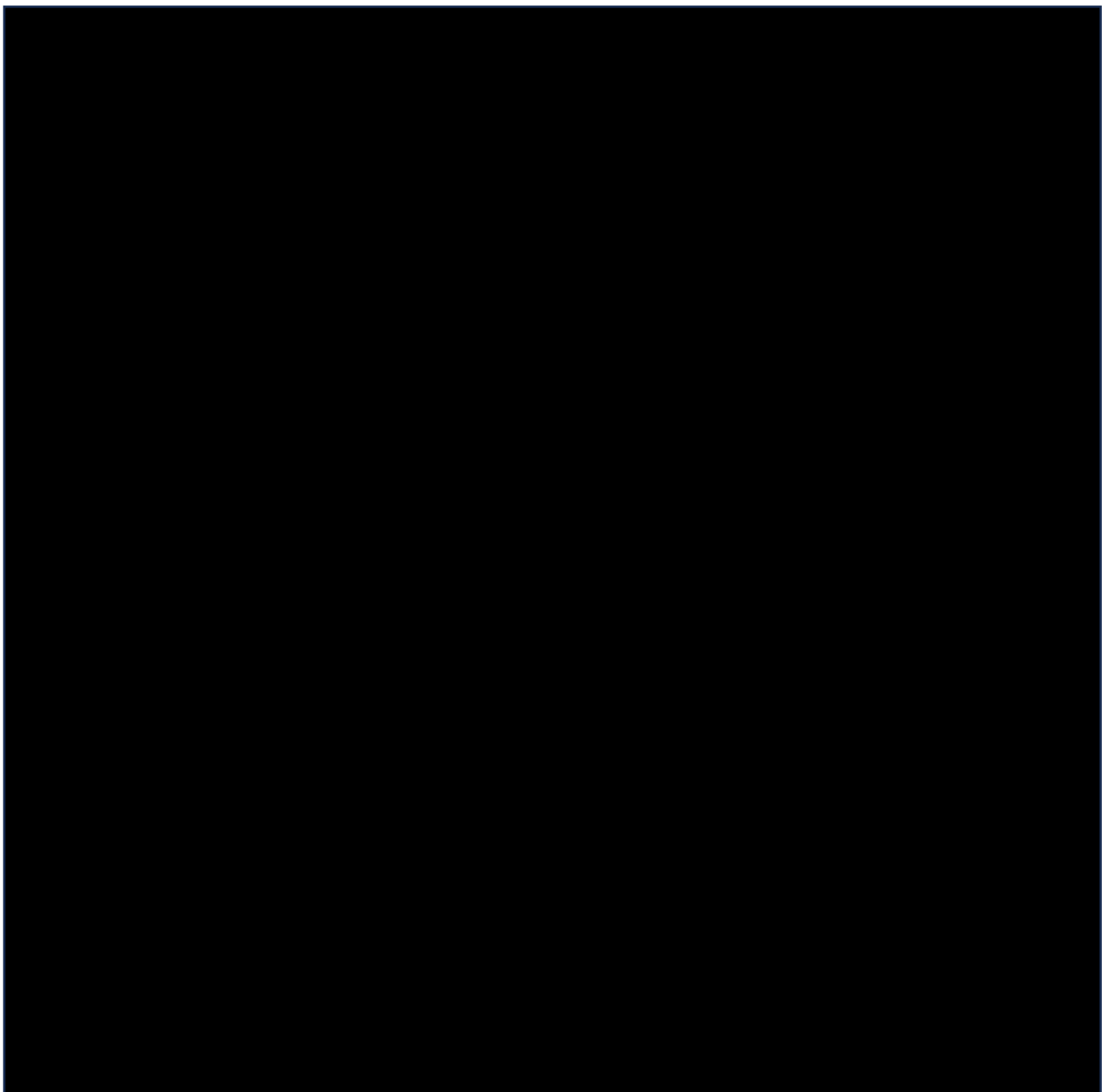
When taking the idea of detachment in practice even further, there remains the consideration of making changes to the original libretto and/or music to either greater facilitate a feminist incentive or to deconstruct more troublesome elements of the original work. Musical director and translator Lindsay Bramley offers some insights into how she approached the idea of modification in the production of Rossini's *Count Ory* by Opera Alegria. Bramley states 'We were very conscious of that plot which involves Ory trying to get it on with Adele, who is engaged to Isolier and not interested, and which culminates in a threesome trio where each character thinks there are only two of them in the bed. Adele thinks only Isolier is there, Ory thinks only Adele is there, and so does Isolier. We felt it wasn't acceptable to make a joke of Adele being duped into sleeping with Ory as it made him too much of a predator when the original presents him as charming as a louche but no worse. Preceding the trio is a duet between Ory and Adele where Ory has turned up disguised as a nun seeking refuge in her house in a storm, claiming to have been molested by Ory in the dark. In the original, this is a fairly standard conversation where she says she has no interest in Ory and Ory still hopes he can succeed with her. We changed the emphasis of her refusal to allow for the fact that she might have been interested, had she not been committed elsewhere. We also made use of Rossini's unashamedly lyrical music to suggest that there is a definite attraction there.'[382] Such provides evidence of many possibilities for making modifications which provide both a contemporary outlook on the work alongside narratological cohesion. Work such as this is yet another method of possible re-envisioning which deconstructs troubling depictions of gender whilst preserving the work itself.

Applying this back to feminist theory synthesised at the start of this investigation, one is reminded of the use of Madonna by Susan McClary as an example of how the inclusion of the perspective of female lust can subvert expectation and disrupt conventionalised male association with desire. Bramley's treatment of Adele achieved through amendments to the original libretto supported by dramatic action appears to do just this. Here, Adele is presented as a woman experiencing lust and attraction but is prevented from doing so not by the subordination of expected virtuosity, but through her choice to commit to Isolier. Bramley adds: 'When it came to the trio, we did make a slight change in when Adele realises that there are three people in the bed and finds it quite exciting. I felt it was important to change the

---

[382] Castrey, M. *Interview with Lindsay Bramley.* November 2022.

emphasis so that Adele was a willing participant in the sexual adventures rather than a dupe – and it seemed very suitable in conjunction with the music.'[383] Again, this reframed female perspective achieved through modification facilitates the integration of a new angle of gaze where the female is able to be "seer" rather than "do-er." The alignment to feminist theory synthesised previously is pronounced in this instance, and as such, one proposes that this additional method of detachment through modification may bear fruit in instances where new female perspectives are being sought.

Bramley also worked with Opera Alegria to stage *The Magic Flute*. It is interesting to note that her amendments to the libretto facilitated the creation of new perspectives for both the characters of Tamino and Pamina: 'When it came to *Flute*, there was no getting away from the fact that *Flute* is a very misogynistic opera! I felt it was important that Pamina had some agency in her story, so rather than Tamino declare that he was going to rescue her and then she would be his, I wanted to give her a choice. So, his first aria and recit in the act 1 finale allow him to have doubts that she would want him, and she genuinely falls for him when they meet – helped out by Papageno giving him a good write up when describing him to her! I also took out all the lines about not being able to trust women in general and replaced them with a very specific objection to the Queen of the Night, who is a thoroughly unreasonable person. I have always felt that *Flute* isn't a battle between good and evil but between reason and unreason, and I made the most of that.'[384]

In this instance, this detachment away from the original theme and malleable approach to the original composition to change perspectives facilitated an adjustment of the perception of Pamina by both other characters and the spectating audience. The same can be said of Tamino, whose misogynistic tendencies are also deconstructed because of this approach. Indeed, compositional additions and exclusions have been seen previously when examining Barrie Kosky's production of *Carmen* and afford much possibility for the creation of new and much more contemporary perspectives. This makes this somewhat radical approach to re-envisioning an increasingly less controversial additional option for new productions.

---

[383] ibid.

[384] ibid.

6.3.3 Performativity for individualism

Perhaps the most holistic of all the proposed methods within this study; performativity encompasses the identity of a performer to shape their characterisation. One is asked to apply their own essence to a "legacy" character in order to integrate contemporary perspective within canonical works. As a starting point to additional proposed methods of facilitating this, Aili Huber states that she tries to 'help the actor see the character's worldview. I think more often, the problem really is that the actor doesn't want other people to think that **they** are the bad person, and so they distance themselves from the character…When I did Richard III, the person playing Richard is one of the kindest people I have ever known. He was really close with all the people who were playing other roles, including his wife who played Queen Elizabeth. We talked a lot about resting on the safety of trust between characters. I also at some point had to sit this actor down and say "everyone here knows that you are playing a part. Nobody here thinks you would ever do even a fraction of the horrible things Richard does. It is fine to have fun being bad, because you are so good…[it was about] helping him be grounded and safe enough to be dangerous.'[385] This insight neatly highlights the importance of the creation of a safe and nurturing space to facilitate the appreciation of one's own central identity and how this can be considered when constructing roles which may either be oppressed or act as oppressor.

This investigation has previously suggested how the rehearsal space can facilitate the exploration of the physical elements of movement, stance and performed reaction to foreground contemporary identity. However, at this point one highlights once again the voice of ▨▨ whose psycho-analytical methods in helping performers understand the intricacies of their own performance of self are particularly intriguing. ▨▨ states 'In any creative space the centre of all my work is the belief that if a performer can't understand themselves then they can't play a character to the highest level of belief. To do this, I want performers to look inward and outward. That's why I ask all of my performers to journal for different periods of time depending on what the production schedule allows. They should tap into what they like and what they don't, how they reacted to that rude person or to that good deed. Did they do anything that benefited someone else and how did it make them feel? All of these speak to the person behind the performer and help them to see what they're bringing into the rehearsal room before

---

[385] Castrey, M. *Interview with Aili Huber.* January 2023.

they've even interacted with their character or other performers.'[386] ▨▨▨ continues, 'I then get performers to apply all of these insights to their character. Even when there is a real opposition, integrating that individuality can trigger a deeper understanding of the role and highlight how it is similar or different to the present environment.'[387]

The idea of journaling has been previously explored within this investigation; however, it is interesting to consider how this could be applied to inform the application of other methods. For instance, if, by engaging with self-exploration, one determines that a character is much more disparate from their own identity than first seen, then perhaps the framework of facilitating detachment could be applied to parody or satirise their character. In many ways, this particular technique could be utilised as a starting point to determine which method of exploration is most applicable, particularly in an instance where different frameworks are followed within the same company. For instance, a performer playing the role of Don Alfonso may wish to root their characterisation in detachment, whilst the characterisation of Fiordiligi or even Ferrando may be more effectively rooted in the methods of conjured memory or performativity.

An additional consideration one adds to the implementation of the performative method comes from a journal article by Keren Zaiontz entitled *Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-on-One Performance*. Zaiontz observes that 'as long as performance is an act of transmission that commands spectators to read, feel, analyse and identify with what they witness onstage through their own bodies, then spectatorship will remain a self-centred interpretive act.'[388] In many ways, this appears as the final frontier when engaging with any kind of newly structured creative work, where one is asked to consider how their actions are being "read" and perceived by spectators. At this point, I also bring in the work of Olivia Fuchs, who states that she 'always works with the performer to bring them away from cliches.'[389] She offered the example of a recent production she staged of Janáček's *The Makropulos Affair*,

---

[386] Castrey, M. *Interview with* ▨▨▨▨ January 2023.

[387] ibid.

[388] Zaiontz, K. (2014). Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-on-One Performance. *Theatre Journal*. 66(3), p.407.

[389] Castrey, M. *Interview with Olivia Fuchs.* February 2023.

which centres around the character Elina Makropulos, a celebrated singer who is 300 years of age. In Fuchs' production, she identifies that she took a 'very feminist approach where you can see the games that she's had to play because of the context. She is typically performed as world-weary, cool and distant. However, the performer I was working with was Spanish, passionate and the complete opposite of this. So, we worked together to frame her as very emancipated because she's done and lived it all.'[390] Here, the director and performer are working collaboratively to reframe a role in line with identity of the performer. This is a method which I believe has substantial value. In facilitating the ability for the identity of the performer to inform the depiction of their character, perhaps an additional element of the method of performativity could be to share the self-described biographies of each performer to determine how their personal profile could be uniquely applied to a given role. This could be an important asset to directors and performers alike, where any creative work undertaken is rooted in a deep understanding of the performing individuals. If this insight had been discovered earlier on in my process of research, this is undoubtedly something I would have implemented prior to any workshop activities. Such could have further informed my chosen processes and in turn maximised efficiency and effectiveness of my working time.

As a final addition to the perspectives on performativity, I highlight an insight from conductor and director Omar Shahryar who states 'I think that directors could benefit from being really specific about who has the responsibility for artistic decision making at what point. When a director, or anyone, consults someone for their opinion – or worse says they want to collaborate – but then dismisses the other person's opinion, that can be a negative experience for the person sharing. Being able to pick and choose when you, the director, decides and when you give or share that decision with others is a really important way of empowering people in any artistic process.'[391] There are two words here which neatly summarise the core of this entire body of research; collaborate and empowerment. Such not only epitomises the work of this investigation, but also effectively summarises the changing dynamic of the Contemporary age. The latter is especially relevant to the presentation of women in opera from the canon. With the changing social environment, female subordination, at least in the Western world, is no longer a legitimised position but the product of an outdated patriarchal institution which is being actively deconstructed. In environments where more outdated social mores of female

---

[390] ibid.

[391] Castrey, M. *Interview with Omar Shahryar.* January 2023.

suppression are normalised, this deconstruction requires a more conscious and active stance of reform. This research has provided possible methods of achieving this conscious state of re-envisioning, and it is the concepts of collaboration and empowerment which are essential elements of this new way of working.

6.4 Essential reading

Whilst this research proposes exercises and methods which realise different ways of achieving a similarly empowered female, further reading to understand the contextual female position, musicological appraisal and contemporary dramatic methods is actively encouraged in all frameworks. Below are some texts suggested as essential reading for all cast and creative company embarking on a process of devising a feminist re-envisioning of a work from the canon.

Feminine Endings – Susan McClary

This has been frequently cited over the course of the investigation, and as such, its value is clear. With an accessible blend of musicological appraisal with contemporary examples, this publication considers the challenges posed by the context of canonical works and how grounding performances in forward-facing syntheses of context and creativity can establish new levels of empowerment.

A History of Opera – Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker

This is an exhaustive publication, though one that creatives should undoubtedly develop a substantial understanding of. Not only does this book cover expansive periods of time, mapping the conventions of different musical periods, but also proffers a deeper understanding of the intrinsic influence of culture and socio-politics on operatic art. What is particularly impactful about this publication is its ability to reframe the real power of the composer. One considers the contemporary environment as lucid and diverse, yet here it is made clear the extent of which social parameters not only dictated performance conventions, but the creation of art itself. This is essential reading to broaden consideration of opera as a genre rather than just convention associated with works from the canon.

The Intermedial Dramaturgy of Dramatick Opera: Understanding Genre through Performance – Amanda Eubanks Winkler

This publication underpins the sentiment of re-envisioning placed at the heart of this work. The idea of dramatic intermediacy, that is, existing between two categories is the realm within which many contemporary productions now find themselves. This is all the more pronounced when staging canonical or other legacy operatic works, where their embedded social mores which subordinate the female gender are so deeply interwoven into the fabric of these stories. This journal article provides contemporary creatives and performers with an understanding of how they can turn this ambiguous space into a unique vantage point from which to amalgamate these classics with contemporary perspective.

Gender Trouble – Judith Butler

This ground-breaking book is a must-read for anyone practicing in the creative sphere. Not only does Butler outline what it means to be "performative," but she also offers a unique perspective on how gender is both constructed and understood by "do-ers and see-ers." This publication also offers the consideration of inverting these positions within onstage characters to reconstruct and re-mark the balances of power displayed between genders. *Gender Trouble* will undoubtedly assist performers in unlocking their own sense of being within a role, making for a more accessible and relatable production.

6.5 Concluding statement

At the commencement of this investigation, one considered how the re-positioning of the view of the spectator could deconstruct conventional alignment to the male gaze. This in turn could be used to view the female counterpart through a lens of either empowerment or oppression. However, the work of this research and subsequent propositions of new methods of approaching female characterisation has shown that perhaps the more effective angle of this re-envisioning is to allow for evolved creative process to trigger new reactions.

A common theme over the course of this research has been the development of greater understanding; of characters, work, compositional contexts, and the changing contemporary environment. As part of this, this investigation has not only considered the changing female role in the canon and how such presentations can be reimagined, but also the evolving face of feminism itself. From third and fourth wave insights, multi-perspectives appear as a central tenet of contemporary feminist incentives, and it is indeed multi-perspectives that can be seen in the wider world today. Diversity and inclusion are not isolated to theatrical companies,

rather, audiences, patrons and wider society are increasingly multi-perspectival. As such, it is enhanced representation which is at the core of all of the methods proposed as part of this research. Whilst specifically feminist, these methods are designed to further creative exploration and can also be used in productions which aim to diversity works even further. Such can also be applied to new commissions, where inclusive and performer-centric methods again facilitate a deeper understanding of the work at hand, and as such, a much more profound grounding of the performance of identity.

Research into these proposed methods from the synthesis of established theory and the work of renowned practitioners through to devising and completing a specially organised workshop unearthed many areas of performance convention and creative practice which this research seeks to address. As a professional mezzo soprano, I already had a detailed understanding of the different presentations of gender roles within operatic works from the canon, however this work made clear both the sociocultural triggers of such dualism and in turn many ways in which this may be overcome through contemporary working. Taking a critical perspective on the original contribution made by this study to the operatic and broader creative scholarship, I am confident that this work is grounded in an extensive and established variety of sources, practices, and methods from an equally comprehensive collection of scholars and practitioners. Taking on the role of practitioner myself as part of this research made clear the extent of which reformed creative practice should begin prior to the first day in the rehearsal room. In short, decision-making from the very start of the process can have a profound influence on how gendered roles appear and how accessible and relatable the production is to contemporary audiences. This is a particular area I would urge contemporary creatives to be mindful of when commencing work on re-envisioned productions. As part of this research I was fortunate to work with a very diverse group of performers, however it would have been equally useful to explore possible new ways of working with different demographics of people to ensure maximum benefit across all casts and companies.

All of the workshop activities I put together for the purposes of this work had merit and most yielded valuable contributions to this research. However, if I were to undertake this again, I would like to further the exploration of proposed methods from working on each in isolation to marrying together different possible approaches within the same piece. This study has suggested that creatives may work with multiple methods within the same work, however it would have been useful to examine this possibility more thoroughly in practice. This in many

ways is the next pursuit of my research and may inform future papers on extending the application of the methods proposed within this study. This being said, I am confident that this investigation and its proposed methods of feminist re envisioning have been thoroughly researched and sufficiently trialled so as to offer considered and feasible options for creatives working within the industry today. Such ensures that creating accessible and empowered identities which afford a broad scope of performance is no longer restricted by limiting parameters which may be present within works from the canon. Moreover, creatives and performers alike are equally empowered to make works from the canon a home for empowered and accessible characters.

This word "identity" brings the central work of this research into the foreground; that is, re-envisioning the female role to empower the female identity. The rich tapestry of sociocultural influences within opera which span several centuries of development make it unique in many ways. Such is also true that with such a myriad of different influences, the challenges of creating "identity" are far greater. What comes with this "legacy" art is the normalisation of female subordination – but that is simply not the Western ideology in the world today. It is my hope that these proposed methods devised through theoretical, musicological and practical research are just some of the ways in which this legitimised position of female oppression can be deconstructed. By consistently re-positioning and challenging the view of the spectator, the empowerment of female roles from the opera canon can become a normalised practice. Such deconstructs the binaries of gender and spectator positions as "do-er" and "see-er" and as such, much more accurately reflects the diverse and inclusive world we live in today. This research proposes some answers to how this normalisation can occur through evolving creative practice so that opera as a genre can continue to remain relevant, agile, accessible, and above all - loved, for many years to come.

APPENDIX 1 – CARMEN'S MUSICAL WRITING WITH GESTUS ANNOTATION
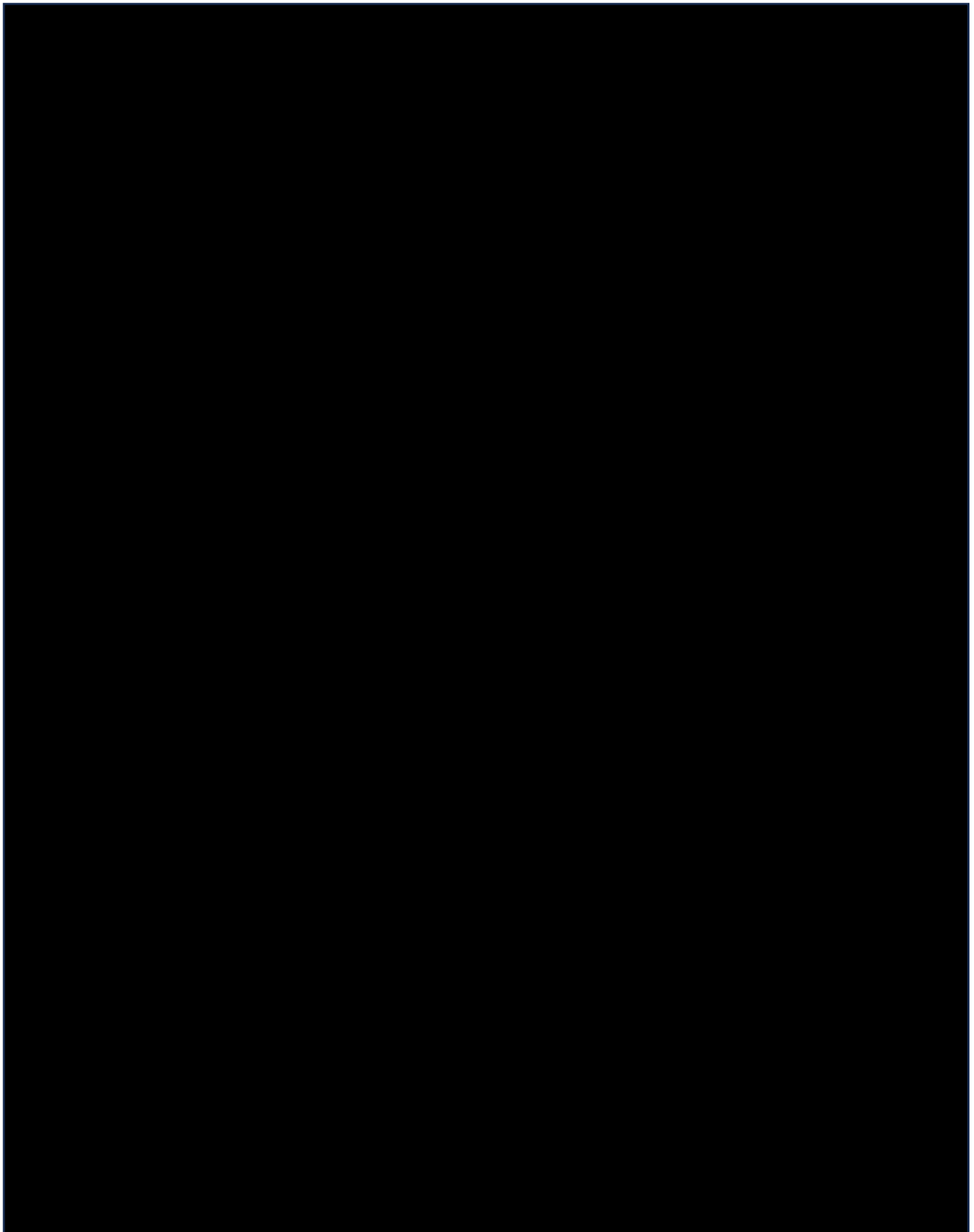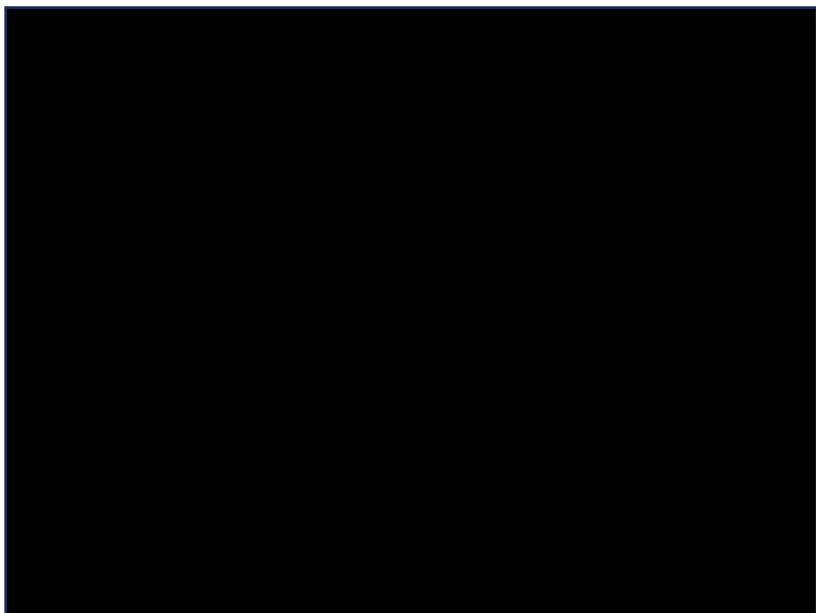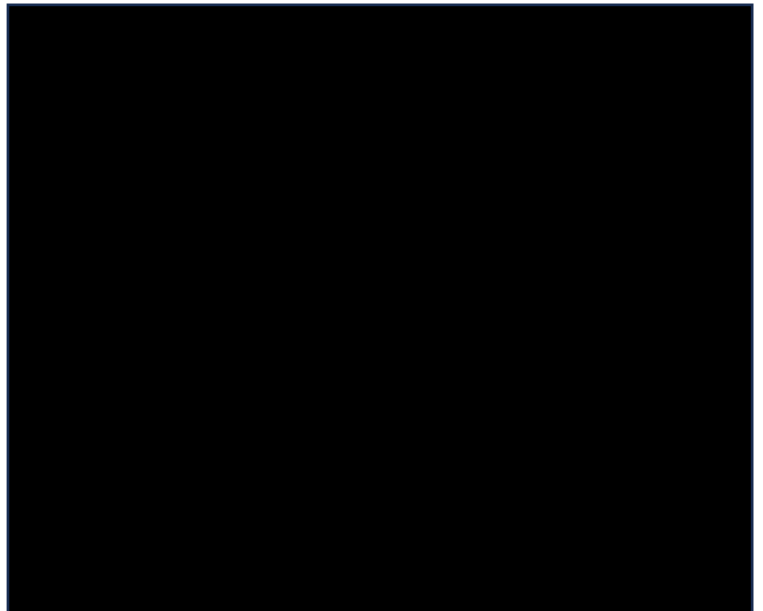
APPENDIX 2 - WORKSHOP IMAGES

Playing female challenge to male persona with increased confrontational stance

Reframing conversations between men with female response and background reaction
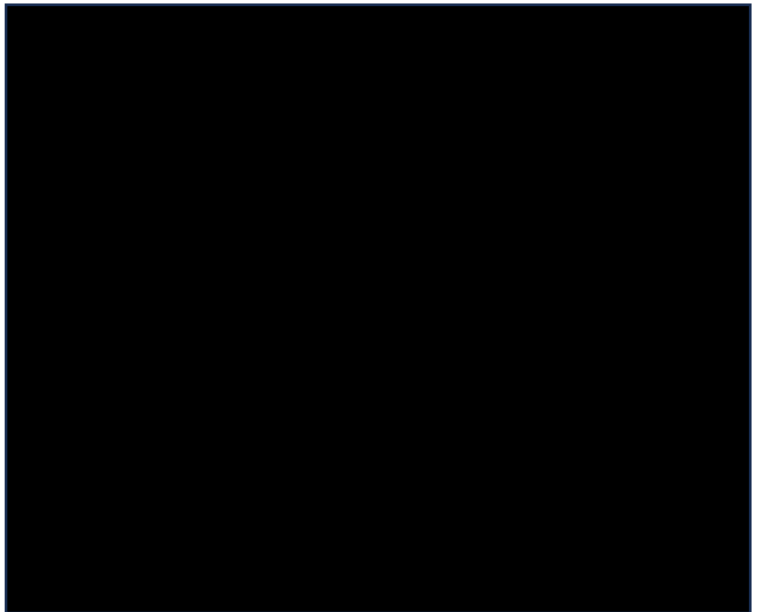

Satirising male conversation through direct address and parody.

Using blocking to re-establish the visible balances of power and encouraging the integration of female answer.

Encouraging female-round table discussion to understand performer perspective and how the presentation of female roles can be reframed.

APPENDIX 3 – BIOGRAPHIES

Lindsay Bramley

Lindsay read Music at Oxford as an academic scholar. Originally a pianist, she began singing at University and since then has performed across Europe and in Israel and Canada. She specialises in 20th/21st century music and has sung *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot* and *The Medium* (Maxwell Davies), *Stripsody,* Mere d'Iseut *Le Vin Herbe* (Ardente Opera), Theodora *The Judgement of Theodora* (ENO studio), Michael Howard/Tony Blair *Newsnight: The Opera* (Battersea Arts Centre) and new commission *Songs of Dickens* by Emily Howard.

Recent operatic roles include Florence *Albert Herring*, Mrs Grose *Turn of the Screw,* Countess *The Queen of Spades,* Fairy Queen *Iolanthe,* Ulrica *Un Ballo in Maschera,* Marcellina *The Marriage of Figaro*, Ragonde *Le Comte Ory* and Mrs Noye *Noyes Fludde*. She has sung Butterfly's Mother *Madama Butterfly,* La Nutrice *I Gioielli della Madonna* and La Vecchia *L'amore dei Tre Re* for Opera Holland Park, Baba *The Medium* for Opera Alegria and also created the role of Gertie in Mike Christie's *The Miller's Wife*. This year she sang in Fulham Opera's complete Ring Cycle as Flosshilde/Schwertleite/First Norn and as Mistress Quickly in their *Falstaff.*

Lindsay began working as a conductor in 2009 with Peak Opera at Buxton Opera House as part of the G&S festival, conducting their productions of Yeoman of the Guard and Patience. Since then she has conducted productions of *Madama Butterfly* and *La Traviata* for Park Opera and was assistant MD for *L'Elisir D'Amore* for Opera Up Close, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Co Opera and *Strekoza i Muravej* for Tête a Tête as well as acting as chorus master for Co Opera's production of *Don Giovanni*. She is musical co-director and resident librettist/translator for Opera Alegria.

Lauren Fagan

A graduate of Covent Garden's prestigious Jette Parker Young Artist Programme, Lauren Fagan has developed into one of today's most accomplished young sopranos and had the honour of representing her native Australia in the 2019 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. Plans for the 2022/23 brings Fagan's Australian operatic debut as Violetta at The State Opera, her Scottish Opera debut as Margarita Xirgu in Golijov's *Ainadamar* and her return to Glyndebourne Festival Opera as

Helena in Britten's A *Midsummer Night's Dream.* She also makes her debut as The Countess for Canadian Opera Company.

Olivia Fuchs

In all her opera-making Fuchs is interested in examining the complexities of our time through bold physical story-telling. She has developed a psychologically rigorous, physically expressive, and visually poetic style, through which she seeks to highlight the human condition, our relationships to ourselves, each other, and the natural world. Her collaborative approach and physical methodology explore the transformative power of opera to make change.

Fuchs' many productions and collaborations in the UK include main-house productions with English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North and Scottish Opera as well as acclaimed productions in the Linbury Studio (Royal Opera House). She has directed internationally for Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires; Opera Australia, Sydney; Opera Oviedo, Spain; Danish National Opera; and works regularly in Germany. In 2008 she was awarded both Helpmann and Green Room awards for 'Best Direction' and 'Best Production in Opera' for *Rusalka* at Sydney Opera House.

Rodula Gaitanou

Work includes: *Le Roi Arthus* (Tiroler Festspiele Erl), *Aida* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Opera Hedeland), *Carmen* (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Ariadne auf Naxos* (GöteborgsOperan), *La clemenza di Tito* (Bergen Nasjonale Opera), *Don Quichotte, Vanessa, L'oracolo* and *Mala vita* (Wexford Festival Opera) *Un ballo in maschera, La traviata* and *Queen of Spades*(Opera Holland Park), *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Oldenburgisches Staatstheater), *Guillaume Tell* (Victorian Opera, Australia), *Pagliacci*(Teatro Nacional São Carlos), *La cenerentola* (Teatro Verdi di Trieste), *Tosca* (Xi'an Concert Hall, China), *Cosi fan tutte* and *La Cenerentola* (Greek National Opera), *L'isola disabitata* (Royal Opera House - Linbury Studio and Hobart Baroque, Tasmania), *Le portrait de Manon, Fête galante, I due timidi*, *Ariane, Alexandre bis, San Giovanni Battista* and *The Cooper*(Guildhall School of Music and Drama),
Riders to the Sea, Savitri and The Bartered Bride (British Youth Opera), *Betrothal in a Monastery* (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Scottish Opera), a new version of *Carmen* (London's King's Head Theatre), *Dichterliebe* (Royal Opera House - Linbury Studio), a devised youth opera *Where is The Love* (Arcola Theatre).

Rodula was nominated "Director of the Year" in the 2019 International Opera Awards. Her Opera Hedeland production of Lucia di Lammermoor was nominated for "Best Opera Production" in the CPH Awards (Denmark 2019). Her productions of Massenet's Don Quichotte and Barber's Vanessa for the Wexford Festival Opera were both nominated in the Irish Times Theatre Awards in the "Best Opera" category (Ireland 2020 and 2017). She was nominated for two Helpmann Awards (Australia 2013) in the "Best Opera Director" and "Best Opera Production" categories for her production of L'isola disabitata presented at the Hobart Baroque Festival.

Aili Huber

I have been directing for over 25 years, and still have a lot to learn. I hold an MFA from Mary Baldwin College/American Shakespeare Center, so my work is heavily influenced by their focus on audience connection. I'm the co-author, with Toby Malone, of *Cutting Plays for Performance,* from Routledge Press.

My favorite directing credits include Sperm Donor Wanted (2020) with Slow Your Role Theater Co., Romeo and Juliet (2012), The Duchess of Malfi (2016), Antony and Cleopatra (2018), and Richard III (2019) with Pigeon Creek Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale (2013) at Bridgewater College, Noye's Fludde (2014) at Eastern Mennonite High School, and JB (2011) at Eastern Mennonite University. About three-quarters of my shows have toured, and I love the challenge of creating an adaptable piece that can go anywhere.

I'm the founder and artistic director of Silk Moth Stage, where we produce "new classics" in an outdoor setting, on the back corner of a dairy farm in Rockingham County, Virginia.

I'm an associate member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Shakespeare Theater Association, and a member of Directors Gathering. I'm certified in Mental Health First Aid.

Rebecca Meltzer

As a Director and Movement Director she has worked with companies and institutions including the *Royal Opera House, Garsington Opera, Scottish Opera, Opera Holland Park, English Touring Opera, Wexford Festival Opera, Bury Court Opera, Shadwell Opera, British Youth Opera, National Opera Studio* at *Welsh National Opera, Iford Arts, Dorset Opera*

Festival, The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Blackheath Halls Opera, Tête à Tête Festival and *Feral Productions.*

Rebecca is also a founding director of *Waterperry Opera Festival,* and now leads their acclaimed Young Artist Programme for emerging singers and directors. For WOF, Rebecca has directed productions of *Svadba* (Sokolović) *Mansfield Park, Ariel* (Dove) and *Hansel and Gretel* (Humperdinck).

Alison Langer

Alison is currently performing the role of Micaela in *Bizet's* Carmen at Opera Holland Park, after a successful run playing the same role for Opera North earlier this year. Later in the summer, she returns to Waterperry Opera Festival after her role and festival debut last year as Adina in L'elisir d'amore *Donizetti.* Alison will also be performing a world premiere of the song cycle 'Run with Me' *Clarkson* in 'Green Spaces: A celebration in Song' at the beginning of July. During the 20/21 season, Alison was due to make her Royal Opera House Main Stage debut as barena in Jenufa *Janacek* when the pandemic hit. She took on a new role as a mother to her beautiful son Ted and 10 weeks after giving birth, she was back in London singing the role of Violetta in Opera Holland Park's 5* production of La Traviata, directed by Rodula Gaitanou and conducted by Matthew Waldren. She then went on to sing Adina, L'elisir d'amore' *Donizetti* at Waterperry Opera Festival and then Micaela, Carmen *Bizet* for Opera North. Throughout this time, Alison returned to the Royal Opera House to cover the role of First Niece in Deborah Warner's critically acclaimed Peter Grimes *Britten.*

Annie Lydford

Lydford is currently the Chief Executive of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. Lydford's previous roles include Managing Director of Nevill Holt opera, director of communications and marketing at the Creative Industries Federation and head of communications at English National Opera. She currently serves on the board of Buxton International Festival and was a founding board member of SWAP'ra.

Jacqueline White

Jacqueline has written and directed over thirty original productions challenging gender stereotypes within physical performance. She also specialises in working with vulnerable people and diverse groups, writing specialised productions to cater to the needs of these individuals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books & Journals

Abbate, C. (1996). *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century:*. USA: Princeton University Press.

Abbate, C & Parker, R. (2012). *A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years*. London: Allen Lane.

Adorno, T. (1981). On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening. In:. (Ed). *The Culture Industry*. London: Routledge.

Alcoff, L M. (2012). Feminism: Then and Now. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. 26(2)

Allanbrook, W.J (1983). *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro and Don Giovanni*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Archer Mann, S & Huffman, D. (2005). The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave. *Science & Society*. 69(1).

Austin, G (1990). Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism. United States of America: University of Michigan Press.

Austin, G. (1993). The Doll House Show: A Feminist Theory Play. *Journal of Copyright in Education and Librarianship*. 7(2), pp.203-207.

Better Strangers Opera Collective. (2011). *Dead heroines: Dido*. [Online]. Better Strangers Opera. Available at: On perfectionism and performance.

Blair, R. (2002). Reconsidering Stanislavsky: Feeling, Feminism, and the Actor. *Theatre Topics*. 12 (2).

Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. USA: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex. Oxon: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. Theatre Journal. 40 (4),

Case, Sue-Ellen. Feminism in Theatre. New York: Methuen, 1988.

Chaikin, J. (1981). Breathing in a Different Zone: Joseph Chaikin. *The Drama Review: TDR*. 25(3).

Cluman, H (1997). *On Directing*. USA: Simon & Schuster.

Connell, R (1983) cited in Connell, R & Messerschmidt, J. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*. 19 (6).

Constantine, M. (2019). *The Opera Singer's Acting Toolkit: An Essential Guide to Creating A Role*. London: Methuen Drama.

Cowgill, R. (1998). Re-Gendering the Libertine; Or, the Taming of the Rake: Lucy Vestris as Don Giovanni on the Early Nineteenth-Century Lon. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 10(1).

Curtis, L. (2000). The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's "Don Giovanni". *NWSA Journal*. 12 (1).

Cusick, S. (1994). Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem. *Perspectives of New Music*. 32(1).

Davidson, C. (1986). *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles*. London: Chatto & Windus.

de Beauvoir, S. (1973). *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.

de Danaan, L. (1986). The Blossom Falling: Movement and Allusion in a Malay Dance. *Asian Theatre Journal*. 3(1).

DeNora, T (2016). *Music-in-action: Selected Essays in Sonic Ecology*. 2nd ed. Oxon: Routledge.

Dely, C. (2007). Jacques Derrida: The Perchance of a Coming of the Otherwoman The Deconstruction of 'Phallogocentrism' from Duel to Duo. *Sens Public*.

Diamond, E. (1988). Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism. *TDR*. 32(1).

Dido and Aeneas (2019) by Henry Purcell. Directed by Mary Birnbaum [Julliard, New York. 20th-22nd February 2019].

Dolan, J. (1988, 2012). *Ideology in Performance: Looking through the Male Gaze. In: The Feminist Spectator as Critic.* 2nd ed. United States of America: The University of Michigan Press.

Dolan, J. (1988,2012). *The Feminist Spectator as Critic.* 2nd ed. United States of America: The University of Michigan Press.

Duby, G & Perrot, M. (1994). *A History of Women in the West: Silences of the Middle Ages v. 2*. USA: Harvard University Press.

Dvorsky, G & Hughes, J. (2008). *Postgenderism: Beyond the Gender Binary*. Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies. Hartford. USA.

Fink-Jensen, K. (2007). Attunement and Bodily Dialogues in Music Education. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*. 15(1).

Ford, C. (1991). *Cosi?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Gazzola, G. (2015). Betting Against Themselves: Conflicting Conceptions of Love in "Così fan tutte, o: la scola degli amanti". *MLN*. 130(1).

Gilbart Read, M. 2004. Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera:* an approach through Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival. PhD. University of Southampton. Southampton.

Gossett, P (2008). *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Making Cuts:Recitative.

Hadlock H. (1994). Return of the Repressed: The prima donna from Hoffmann's "Tales" to Offenbach's "Contes". *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 6 (3).

Hagan, U (1973). *Respect for Acting*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
Halberstam, J (1988) cited in Paechter, C. (2006). Masculine femininities/feminine masculinities: power, identities and gender. *Gender & Education*. 18 (3).

Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Hamington, M. (2015). Care Ethics and Engaging Intersectional Difference through the Body. *Critical Philosophy of Race*. 3(1).

Hayles, N. K. (1997). The Posthuman Body: Inscription and Incorporation in Galatea 2.2 and Snow Crash. *Configurations*. 5 (2).

Heller, W. (2003). 'A Present for the Ladies': Ovid, Montaigne, and the Redemption of Purcell's Dido. *Music & Letters*. 84(2).

Holten, S S. (1994). To Educate Women into Rebellion": Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists. *The American Historical Review*.

Hornby, R. (). Understanding Acting. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 17(3).

Hutcheon, L. (2006). Interdisciplinary Opera Studies. *PMLA*. 121(3).

Juslin, PN & Västfjäll, D (2008) as cited in Swaminathan, S. Ed. Schellenberg, G. (2014). Current Emotion Researchin Music Psychology. *Emotion Review*. 7 (2).

Jordan, S. (2011). Mark Morris Marks Purcell: "Dido and Aeneas" as Danced Opera. *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*. 9(2).

Katz, M. (1992). Ideology and "The Status of Women" in Ancient Greece. *History and Theory*. 31(4),

Kerman, J. (2006). Verdi and the Undoing of Women. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 18 (1).

Kimmel, M (2000). *The Gendered Society*. UK: Oxford University Press.

Kinser, A E. (2004). Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism. *NWSA Journal*. 16(3).

Klein, H. (1924). The 'Bel Canto'. *The Musical Times*. 65(974)

Kowalke, K H. (1993). Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 5(1).

Lennox, S. (1978). Women in Brecht's Works. *New German Critique*. 14(1).

Levin, D. (2004). Opera out of Performance: Verdi's "Macbeth" at San Francisco Opera. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 16(3).

Lewis, R. (2011). Emotional Memory. *The Tulane Drama Review*. 6(4).

Lloyd, M. (1999). Performativity, Parody, Politics. Theory, Culture & Society. 16 (2).

Lloyd Malcolm, M (2018). *Emilia*. London: Oberon Books.

Locke, J (1823). *Two Treatises of Government*. 5th ed. London: McMaster University Archive of the History of Economic Thought.

Matthews, B. (1976). Women, Education and History. *Theory Into Practice*. 15(1).

Marshall Leicester, H. (1994). Discourse and the Film Text: Four Readings of "Carmen". *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 6(3).

McCance, D. (2001). "Bodily Charm": An Interview with Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*. 34 (3).

McClary, S (1994). *Feminine Endings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McFarland, C. 2013. *Becoming a Feminist Director in the Academy*. PhD Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia.

McManus, B. (1997). Transgendered Moments: Revisiting Virgil's Aeneid. In: *Classics & Feminism: Gendering the Classics*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc.

McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-Feminism and Popular Culture. *Feminist Media Studies*. 4 (3).

Mehrabian, A. Quoted in Patrick Rau, P. (2019). Attempts to Leverage Interaction Design to Mimic Emotional Care. In: *Cross-Cultural Design*. Switzerland: Springer.

Meizel, K. (2020). *Multivocality: Singing on the Borders of Identity*. London: Oxford University Press.

Morrissey, J. 1994. Materialist-Feminist Criticism and Selected Plays of Sarah Daniels, Liz Lochhead and Claire Dowie. PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.

Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*. 16(3).

Neelands, J (2004). *Beginning Drama*. 2nd ed. New York: David Fulton Publishers.

Offen, K. (1988). Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach. *Signs*. 14 (1).

Olenina et al. (2019). Embodied Cognition in Performance: The Impact of Michael Chekhov's Acting Exercises on Affect and Height Perception. *Frontiers In Psychology*. 10(3389).

Online Emilia Romangna Opera House. *Dido and Aeneas with director Stefano Monti live from the Teatro Comunale di Modena*.

Ostwald, D. (2005). *Acting for Singers: Creating Believable Singing Characters*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Paechter, C. (2006). Masculine femininities/feminine masculinities: power, identities and gender. *Gender & Education*. 18 (3).

Palmer, J. (1916). Gesture and Scenery in Modern Opera. *The Musical Quarterly*. 2 (2).

Peck, L. (2017). Katie Mitchell: feminist director as pedagogue. *Stanislavski Studies*. 5 (2).

Pendle, K. (2001). *Woman and Music: A History*. 2nd ed. USA: Indiana University Press.

Phelan, P. (1988). Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance. *The Drama Review*. 32 (1).

Popov, N. (2018). Feminism as a Political Ideology. *De Gruyter Open International Conference*. 24 (2).

Punt, J. (2018). Gender studies and biblical interpretation: (How) Does theory matter?. *The African Journal of Gender and Religion*.

Purvis, P (2013). *Masculinity in Opera*. UK: Routledge.

Reddy, V & Butler, J. (2004). Troubling Genders, Subverting Identities: Interview with Judith Butler. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*. 62(2,1).

Rousseau, JJ (1762) as cited in Wollstonecraft, M. (2008). The Rights of Women. In: *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. New York: Cosimo Classics.

Rowden, C. (2009). Opera, Caricature and the Unconscious: Jules Massenet's Thaïs, a Case Study. *Music in Art*. 34(1/2).

Russell, R. (1983). The Best Voice For Mozart. *The Choral Journal*. 23(5).

Rutherford, S. (2007). 'La cantante delle passioni': Giuditta Pasta and the Idea of Operatic Performance. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 19 (2).

Schmalfeldt, J. (2001) In Search of Dido. *The Journal of Musicology*. 18(4), p.597.

Shaver, S. (1996). Liberalism, Gender and Social Policy. *SPRC*. 68 (1).

Silberman, M. (2012). Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy. *Social Research*. 79(1).

Smart, M. (2000). *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*. USA: Princeton University Press.

Smith, I. (1991). Brecht and the Mothers of Epic Theater. *Theatre Journal*. 43(4),

Snyder-Hall, R C. (2010). Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of "Choice". *Perspectives on Politics*. 8(1)

Snyder, R C. (2008). What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs*. 34(1)

Stanislavsky, K, Benedetti, J & Carnicke, S M. (1993). The Actor: Work on Oneself. *TDR*. 37(1).

Steptoe, A. (1981). The Sources of 'Così fan tutte': A Reappraisal. *Music & Letters*. 62(3/4).

Subotnik, R R. (1991). Whose "Magic Flute?" Intimations of Reality at the Gates of the Enlightenment. *19th- Century Music*. 15 (2).

Tambling, J. (1997). Towards a Psychopathology of Opera. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 9(3).

Tate, N quoted in Heller, W. (2003). 'A Present for the Ladies': Ovid, Montaigne, and the Redemption of Purcell's Dido. *Music & Letters*. 84(2).

Travers Adams, H. (1929). The Rarity of the Soprano. *The Musical Times*. 70(1041).

Watkins, B. (2005). The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education. *Theatre Topics*. 15 (2).

Welch, A. (2009). The cultural politics of Dido and Aeneas. *Cambridge Opera Journal*. 21 (1).

West, G. (1980). Caeneus and Dido. *Transactions of the American Philological Association.* 10(1).

Whittaker, K. (2013). The Masculinities Discourse and The Feminist Dilemma. In: Purvis, P. *Masculinity in Opera*.UK: Routledge.

Whittall, A. (2013). "Lohengrin" and the constraints of romantic opera. *The Musical Times*. 154(1922).

Wilson, E A. (2000). Neurological Preference: LeVay's Study of Sexual Orientation. *SubStance*. 29 (1).

Winkler, A E. (2018). The Intermedial Dramaturgy of Dramatick Opera: Understanding Genre through Performance. *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700.* 42(2),

Wolff, C G. (1972). A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature. *The Massachusetts Review.* 13(1/2).

Wollstonecraft, M (1792). *A vindication of the rights of woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. London: J. Johnson.

Yang, M. (2008). Moulin Rouge! and the Undoing of Opera. *Cambridge Opera Journal.* 20(3).

Zaiontz, K. (2014). Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-on-One Performance. *Theatre Journal.* 66(3).

Websites, Videos & Online Media

Ashley, T. (2018). *Carmen review – Bizet meets Busby Berkeley*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/feb/07/carmen-review-royal-opera-house-london-bizet-meets-bus

Ashley, T. (2006). *Cosi Fan Tutte*. [Online]. The Guardian. Last Updated: 22 May 2006. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2006/may/22/classicalmusicandopera

Belludi, N. (2008). *Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55 Rule of Personal Communication.* Available: https://www.rightattitudes.com/2008/10/04/7-38-55-rule-personal-communication/.

Chiarot, C quoted in Classic FM. (2018). *Ending of 'Carmen' re-written to highlight violence against women*. [Online]. Classic Fm. Available at: https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/carmen-new-ending-violence-women/

Chapman, D. (2013). The 'one-man band' and entrepreneurial selfhood in neoliberal culture. *Popular Music*. 32(3), p.452. [Online]. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24736784.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A5516e22d1a846b93b1ba906ad39387b1&

Christiansen R quoted in Sharp R. (2007). *'Carmen' Review Round-up*. [Online]. Robert Sharp. Available at: http://www.robertsharp.co.uk/2007/10/02/carmen-review-round-up/

Collier, D. (2012). *Don Giovanni: The Project.* Available: http://www.dongiovannitheopera.com/Project.html

Feltkamp, A. (2019). *Does Opera Need Gendered Voice Types?*. Available: https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/does-opera- need-gendered-voice-types/

Folbré, G, L. (2004) *The Eden Proverb*. Available at: http://edenproverb.com/pdfs/partI/studyaids/3_Greco_RomanFableofAdam&Eve.pdf.

Gaitanou, R as quoted in Opera Holland Park. (2020) Live Q&A: Meet the Directors. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHbjWzYYNc0.

Garvey, A. (2022). *COSI FAN TUTTE AT CHILDERLEY HALL*. [Online]. The Cambridge Critique. Available at: https://www.thecambridgecritique.com/home/2022/7/16/cosi-fan-tutte-at-childerley-hall

Gilks, J. (2018). *Hytner's Così*. [Online]. OperaRamblings. Available at: https://operaramblings.blog/2018/07/02/hytners-cosi/

Gordon, R. (2017). *Brecht, interruptions and epic theatre.* Available: https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/brecht-interruptions-and-epic-theatre.

Harvard Medical School. (2020). *Relaxation techniques: Breath control helps quell errant stress response*. [Online]. Harvard Health Publishing. Available at: https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/relaxation-techniques-breath-control-helps-quell-errant

Levine, R. (2021). *Dido and Aeneas*. [Online]. Opera Gazet. Available at: https://operagazet.com/dido-and-aeneas-quite-moving/

Little, E. (Date unknown). *INFANT-CAREGIVER AFFECT ATTUNEMENT*. [Online]. Center for Academic Research & Training in Anthropogeny. Available at: https://carta.anthropogeny.org/moca/topics/infant-caregiver-affect-attunement

Lloyd-Malcolm, M quoted in Shakespeare's Globe. (2018). *SuchStuff s1 e1: The missing women*. [Online]. Shakespeare's Globe. Available at: https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2018/08/30/such-stuff-s1-e1/

MacMillan, K. (2016). *In music and movement, Mark Morris troupe touchesAga tangled hearts of 'Dido and Aeneas'.* Available: https://chicagoontheaisle.com/2016/04/07/review-of-dido-and-aeneas-by-mark-morris-dance-group-at- harris-theater/

McLeod, S. (2014). *Biological Theories of Gender.* Available: https://www.simplypsychology.org/gender-biology.html.

Meet The Artist. (2018). *Ella Taylor*. [Online]. Meet The Artist. Available at: https://meettheartist.online/2018/11/10/ella-taylor-non-binary-soprano/

Molzahn, L. (2015). *Dido and Aeneas' reworked and richer.* Available: http://digitaledition.chicagotribune.com/tribune/article_popover.aspx?guid=2d0dbf41-bdb1-403a-8fb1-12826b28e2a5.

National Theatre. (Date Unknown). *Katie Mitchell Masterclass.* Available: https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/sites/default/files/katie_mitchell_masterclass_-_dtc_notes.pdf.

Opera Holland Park (2018). Così fan tutte. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLaddPzKo14.

Pritchard, S. (2022). *Così fan tutte review – a cheeky 70s Mozart makeover*. [Online]. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jul/16/cosi-fan-tutte-review-layer-marney-tower-new-essex-sum

Rizzi, S. (2018). *Did you know that Carmen had a completely DISASTROUS premiere?*. Available: https://www.classicfm.com/composers/bizet/carmen-bizet-disaster-premiere/.

Salazar, D. (2019). *Royal Opera House 2018-19 Review: Carmen*. [Online]. OperaWire. Available at: https://operawire.com/royal-opera-house-2018-19-review-carmen/

Schiller, F. Translated by Sigerson, J & Chambless, J. (1785). *Theater Considered as A Moral Institution.* Available: https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/transl/schil_theatremoral.html

Seymour, C. (2018). *Barrie Kosky's Carmen at Covent Garden*. [Online]. Opera Today. Available at: https://www.operatoday.com/content/2018/02/barrie_koskys_c.php

Simeonov, J. (2017). *Nashville Opera's Carmen: "She dies because she told a man, "no"'*. [Online]. Schmopra. Available at: https://www.schmopera.com/nashville-operas-carmen-she-dies-because-she-told-a-man-no/

Tanitch, R. (2020). *Dido and Aeneas*. [Online]. British Theatre Guide. Available at: https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/dido-and-aeneas-teatro-comunale-20740

The Opera Tattler. (2007). *Carmen at ROH*. [Online]. The Opera Tattler. Available at: https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/2007/01/carmen_at_rho.html

Theatre Crafts. (Date Unknown). *Theatrical Style and Form.* Available: https://www.theatrecrafts.com/pages/home/topics/stage-management/theatrical-style/.

Timeout. (2012). *Ah! Forget My Fate (Part II): Dido and Aeneas*. [Online]. Timeout. Available at: https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/ah-forget-my-fate-part-ii-dido-and-aeneas

Tommasini, A. (2009). *Updating Opera? Halfway Won't Do.* Available: https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/04/arts/music/04tomm.html

Tuttle, R. (2007). *Così fan tutte*. [Online]. ClassicalNet. Available at: http://www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/o/opu00970dvda.php

Welsh National Opera. (2019). *Carmen - tragic heroine or feminist icon?*. [Online]. Welsh National Opera. Available at: https://wno.org.uk/news/carmen-tragic-heroine-or-feminist-icon