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Devising Music

Applying Creative Approaches from Dance and Theatre
to Music Composition

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DVD Track and Performers List

The supplementary material for this commentary can be accessed through three different media:

- three DVDs
- a USB flash drive
- online resources.

DVD 1: Submitted Works

Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred [16'20"]

A stage work for two percussionists - performed by Claire Sadler and Sam Wilson in the Pit Theatre of the Barbican Centre, London (9th February, 2011)

Carter Piece [6'30"]

A concert work for solo piano – performed by Jennifer Carter in the Music Hall of Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London (29th March 2010)

Apologetics 1 (2011) [31'00"]

a stage work for harp and bass clarinet – performed by Fontane Liang and Charlotte Webber in the Pit Theatre of the Barbican Centre, London (9th February, 2011)

Water Music (2012) [14'30"]

A concert work for trumpet, violin, voice and electronics – performed by Sonya Cullingford and myself and filmed on location in Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London (4th November 2012)

Apologetics 3 [16'00"]

A concert work for harp and bass clarinet – performed by Fontane Liang and Charlotte Webber and filmed on location in Essex (20th December 2012).

DVD 2: Examples from Chapters 2-4

2.1 An annotated video of *Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred* showing structural sections [16'09"]

3.1 A short clip from my work *Ame* (2007) for harp and electronics – used as a reference during the making of *The Carter Piece* (audio only) [0'15"]

3.2 A recording of *Carter Piece* in an open workshop (2010) (annotated audio) [6'25"]

3.3 A recording of *Carter Piece* in concert (2010) (annotated audio) [6'12"]

3.4 A recording of *Carter Piece* as part of a stage work (2011) (annotated audio) [7'16"]

3.5 A recording of *Carter Piece* as part of a lecture-recital (2011) (annotated audio) [2'13"]

3.6 A comparison between five performances of the Nausea 1 material from *Carter Piece* (annotated audio) [0'50"]

4.1 An example of character work in *Apologetics 1* [0'35"]

4.2 An example of a complicity exercise in *Apologetics 1* [1'37"]

- 4.3 The whispers exercise used as part of laboratory techniques in *Apologetics 1* [1'43"]
- 4.4 The Lullaby material from *Apologetics 1* [1'15"]

DVD 3: Examples from Chapters 5 and 6

- 5.1 An example of the Ritual Practice from *Water Music* [1'48"]
- 5.2 The Short Phrase from a *Water Music* rehearsal (audio only) [0'49"]
- 5.3 The Full Phrase from *Water Music* [1'28"]
- 5.4 The Impulses task from *Water Music* [0'35"]
- 5.5 The Face Painting practice from *Water Music* [1'31"]
- 6.1 A clip of *Apologetics 2 (sketches and Improvisations)* (2011) [1'03"]
- 6.2 A section of a rehearsal for *Repeat Indefinitely* (2012) [4'24"]
- 6.3 A rehearsal of the *Take Me Back* task from *Apologetics 3* [0'58"]
- 6.4 An annotated version of *Apologetics 3* showing structural sections [16'06"]
- 6.5 An alternative take from the *Apologetics 3* video recording session [17'19"]
- 6.6 *Apologetics 3* performed live (London, 2013) [13'14"]

USB Flash Drive and Internet-Based Media:

All submitted works and examples are also included on a USB memory stick and are available online at:

doctorate.michaelpicknett.com¹

¹ Please note that this web address is not discoverable through web-based search engines, and it does not use the www. prefix.

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p. 87-99 Appendix A, Liang-Webber Interview

Acknowledgements

Devising practices are based on long and intimate collaborations with performers. None of my research would have been possible without the generous contributions of the performers I have worked with: Sam Wilson, Claire Sadler, Jennifer Carter, Fontane Liang, Charlotte Webber and Sonya Cullingford.

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Author's Declaration

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Chapter 1

Devising

Overview, History and Terminology

I am not so interested in how they move as in what moves them

(Pina Bausch in Climenhaga: 2009, p.2)

In this chapter, I give a brief history and definition of devising. Although the approaches and techniques of devising are widely practiced in contemporary dance, and are widely known in theatrical circles, these techniques are by no means universal. Much contemporary dance and theatre does not use devising techniques in any form. It is therefore important to define devising in general, as well as the specific devising practice explored within my research.

This chapter is in five sections:

- The first is an outline of my research question,
- The second, a brief overview of devising.
- The third outlines a set of definitions I have derived from established devising practices.
- The fourth is a sketch of the three principal models of practice I have used in my research.
- The last is an overview of the role of the composer/director in devising processes.

1.1 Research Question:

My principal research question is:

How can the directed devising techniques and principles of practice found in contemporary dance and theatre be adapted to the composition of music?

To address this question I must first ask some subsidiary questions:

- What is devising?
- What are the techniques of devising?
- What are the common features of devising practice?
- What is the role of the composer in a devised music project?

These questions form the basis for the following chapter.

1.2 Overview of Devising:

I first encountered devising through working with contemporary dancers. My first contact with the concept of devised practice came through listening to performers talk about projects they had been involved in. I was immediately struck by the connection the performers felt to these projects. They were discussing issues and ideas linked with projects that had happened years previously, and these ideas still excited them as part of their artistic lives. As the dancers talked, I began to perceive a strong social aspect to the work. Performers were drawn together for intense working periods, forging social connections that it was often possible to perceive on stage. Later on, I began to see how the dancers viewed themselves as idiosyncratic performing artists, working in their spare time to develop skill sets that were not universal, but were skills that specifically interested them as creative-performers. I saw how choreographers chose performers because of these skill sets, their interests, their personalities and their connection to the ideas explored within projects. Gradually, I became aware of the creative mechanism which encouraged and thrived on these performer qualities. Later, as I started to also work with devising theatre practitioners, I began to associate the term 'devising' - which has become commonly used in contemporary dance circles - with this working process.

At the same time as I was discovering devising through dance, I was beginning to feel dissatisfied with my compositional practice. I wanted to work more socially with my performers. I wanted to work with performers who consider themselves idiosyncratic performing artists. I wanted to work with performers because of who they are, not what instrument they play. I began to investigate how I could adapt devising techniques and approaches from the theatrical and dance-based models to my own compositional practice.

Here it should be noted that 'Devising' is a particularly anglo-australian term. In the U.S.A. the practice is mostly commonly referred to as 'collaborative creation' (see Heddon and Milling: 2006, p.2). I chose to avoid using 'collaborative creation' as devising is by no means the only way of approaching collaborative performance creation. For this reason, and as my practice is based in a British context, I prefer the term 'devising' as a better description of my approach.

Devising in theatre and dance could be divided into two broad categories, which I will call 'group devising' and 'directed devising'. Group devising is where all the performers and collaborators take equal responsibility for directing the rehearsals and creating the project². Decisions on the topics and contents of a piece are usually agreed on by extended discussion and a show of hands. Directed devising is where one person takes on the role of director, with overall responsibility for the process and project. The director takes every decision on the project alone after extensive input from the performers. It is also possible for performers to devise works on their own. In order to narrow my research field, I have decided to explore only directed devising.

² In 'group devising' any major decisions on the work would be taken by the group as a whole. Group devising is rare in practice, and many such devising groups have a *de facto* director. Group devising is sometimes known as 'non-directed' devising. See Lou Coup (<http://loucope.com/research/phd-info/> - accessed 4th February 2014). I have however decided, for reasons of clarity and convenience, to refer to it as 'group devising'.

A devised project usually begins as a research topic, which is explored through a series of improvisation exercises or tasks set by a director. These topics could take a range of forms. A good example of a research topic is Pina Bausch's use of her company's experiences in specific cultures in her 'world cities' pieces.³ These exercises generate a range of improvised responses. The responses would then be discussed, and adjustments made with the aim of exploring those elements or ideas that are found to be most interesting. As the process continues, the focus of research may change or the project may acquire more research topics. In this initial period of exploration, the project usually has several tasks. These can take many forms, such as questions or rules to which the performers improvise responses (see section 1.3 for a more detailed definition of tasks). The tasks usually generate several strands of material. During a process, the performer's perspective can rapidly develop from improvising a response to a task, to performing material. In many cases the initial task can be forgotten by the time of performance, replaced by the material infused with the memories of the process that created it. This meaning within the material is created in a large part by the nature of the task set. But it is also informed by how the material is used and by subsequent discussions about the nature of the project. The material will then be combined to create longer structural sections – much of the material is normally discarded in this process. Performers are left with a clear and unambiguous idea of what is required to perform the piece including: the materials, the subject(s), the structure, and the relationships between the performers - as well as an understanding of the amount to which they can interact with the material, the audience and each other in performance. When a performer performs in a devised piece they rarely improvise, but perform material that was developed through a long and detailed process - adapting it to the performance situation. This adaptation should have no unforeseen dimensions for the creators, as the piece will have been rehearsed as a totality many times before a public performance. Projects normally continue to develop beyond their first performance.

Principles of Devising:

The principles of devising as used in my research could therefore be defined as:

A project created through task and responses - The core of the creative process of devising is the performers' improvised responses to tasks or questions. These tasks or questions are set by the composer/director. Material is created through continued exploration and refinement of these responses.

A project that is collaboratively created with performers - A devising project is created around a group of artists, some of whom may not perform⁴, but all add to the process through their feedback and ideas. These participants, and their interactions, form the basis for the project. This implies secondary characteristics of devising practices, namely:

- That the project is unique to the performers.
- That the performers have an especially intimate relationship to the material.

A work created through an investigative process – Devising “is a *process* of generating performance” (Heddon and Milling: 2006, p.3), whereby a work is created collaboratively with the performers in

³ *Ten Chi* (2004) is based on experiences in Japan, *Nur Du* (1996) on the west coast of the U.S.A, etc.

⁴ Such as the director (although some directors do perform), lighting designer, or costume designer.

workshop/rehearsals. Devising processes include performances; therefore devising performers ‘perform the process’. This means that performances are not presentations of a single fixed piece; rather, each performance is unique to its situation.

A project that has no prior script - Devising is a “mode of work in which *no* script - neither written play-text nor performance score - exists prior to the work’s creation by the company” (Heddon and Milling: 2006 p.3). That is to say, that the work is entirely created through the process. However in practice the relationship between process and script is more nuanced. Pre-existing scripts are occasionally used within a process. Nonetheless, the need for such scripts should arise from the process, rather than the process arising from the script. For example, The Wooster Group often uses texts taken from different sources, which are edited and re-ordered to fit the process they work on (See Champagne: 1981, p.23 and Savran, 1988).

Devising and Notation:

Although processes normally begin as an investigation into a particular subject, the resulting performances can be of a quite different nature from that which was originally proposed. This change of meaning and direction is a healthy part of a devising process. As Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment notes, devising is “a process which refuses to know, at the outset, what it is looking for. Remaining, rather, a journey undertaken, in which the territory unfolds, as much of a surprise to us as it may be to anyone else.” (Etchells: 1999, p.17). It is, therefore, important that projects do not have immutable, or inflexible elements within their initial conceptual framework - although, many projects do not deviate from their initial concepts. This can make projects difficult to define outside of the process, even for performers – although individual performances are often clearer in their intention. It is for this reason that I have avoided scoring my devising projects, either during the process or retrospectively.

Christopher Small asserts that the function of notation is:

twofold: first, to act as a surrogate memory so that the sequence of sounds can be fixed and its integrity preserved over multiple performances [...], and second, to enable those who may be remote in place or time from its origin to learn [...] and perform it.

Small: 1998, p.114

If this is the case, then devising in my practice needs no such fixing. Fluidity of material is for the most part integral to the process - a process that does not stop at performance. If a piece of material needs to be repeated exactly, it will have been set in rehearsal through repetition and understanding by the musicians. Equally the pieces do not need dissemination, as they are created by the participant performers and only performed by them. Any performer who wished to play these pieces would need to have shared the experiences that created the piece. It would therefore make more sense that a new role be created for each new musician.

1.3 Definitions of Terms as Used in this Research:

Task: Tasks are instructions or questions given to performers in order to inspire, provoke or define guidelines/rules for an improvised response. This process of task and response forms the basic technique of devising.

Response: A response is an improved exploration of a task or question. When devising performers give a response, they are not necessarily looking for performance material. It is often important that the performers do not focus on how a response can fit into a performance. Instead performers are encouraged to explore the task as fully as they can, irrespective of the technical quality of the material they are producing.

Material: Material refers to a performance idea (i.e. a section of music or choreography) as defined by explicit or tacit guidelines of production. Material can be drawn from the responses to one or several tasks. How the content of a particular piece of material is defined can vary through the process - from the very open to the very specific. Material can retain improvisatory elements in performance. However, as the context is a performance, not a creative exploration, the scope of these improvisations is generally clearly defined. Material forms the building blocks from which the piece is made, usually through collage or layering techniques.

Setting: Setting is a process by which material becomes defined to a performance standard. This process usually occurs near the end of a process as the materials are formed into a structure.

Process: Process refers to the creative process from conception through to performances, the process often continues through a piece's life until it is no longer changed, or no longer performed.

Piece / Work: Piece and work are synonyms indicating the product of the process. 'Piece' is a fluid term referring to a performance-object that may go through several radically different manifestations. In my research, each performance is considered to be as valid as any other, and each is only valid within the context of the situation in which it is performed (i.e. the performance is not 'repeated' in another venue, but created anew each time).

Project: The project refers to the process, performers, aesthetics, concepts, ideas and performances as a whole. Projects may include several different, but related pieces - such as *Apologetics*, which includes *Apologetics 1* and *Apologetics 3*, as well as several intermediate pieces (covered in Chapters 4 and 6). The project could be considered the totality of all performances and the process when considered together.

Workshop/Rehearsal: Devising rehearsals are both workshops and rehearsals. They are workshops, in that they are places for creation, exploration and process, and rehearsals in that they work towards creating a performance-ready piece. In this research I generally use the term rehearsal.

Practice: A practice is the creative approach and set of techniques favoured by a director, company, or a specific performer. A practice may develop and change over time.

Composer/Director: In my research, I have used the term composer/director where the subject could be applied equally to either a devising composer, or a devising director.

Creator/Performer: Performers take on a creative role in devising processes. In my research, reference to performers should be taken to include an aspect of creative input, unless explicitly stated otherwise. I have used the term performer as a general term to include devising musicians, devising dancers and devising actors. References to musicians should be taken to indicate devising musicians, and not musicians in general unless explicitly stated otherwise.

1.4 The Three Principal Models of Devising Used in My Research:

Within the broad framework of devising outlined above there are many radically different models of devising practice. I have chosen to focus on three well known devising practices as principal models for this discussion. These are not the only practices to which I have referred, but the three practices outlined here form the core of my practice models. I did not often use specific techniques from these practices (and where I have, I have endeavoured to make this explicit in the text) rather I used their ideas and aesthetics to form a starting point from which my practice could grow.

The first model I have chosen to examine is the Wooster Group, under the direction of Elizabeth LeCompte, an American devised theatre company with strong ties to the early devising scene in New York. My second model is Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, specifically the period when Pina Bausch was artistic director, a dance company whose work has influenced much contemporary dance-theatre. The third model I have used is Forced Entertainment, under the direction of Tim Etchells, an influential British theatre company a generation younger than both of the other primary models. These models are drawn from very established companies in order to have access to a good quantity and quality of reliable material about their creative practices. In this section I will give an overview of the history and working practices of each company.

1.4.1 The Wooster Group:

The origins of the Wooster Group are hard to understand without the context of Jerzy Grotowski's influence. Grotowski (1933-1999) was a Polish experimental theatre director and theoretician whose wide-ranging influence predates all of my devising models. Grotowski's theoretical interests and practice shifted over time from his early Theatre of Productions towards a focus on paratheatrical research (performance that seeks to erase distinctions between spectators and performers). Much of his theory is based around actor training, and methods of performance. Many of his theoretical ideas were rejected by the later devising companies - such as his 'Poor Theatre' where the theatre was stripped of its artifices, leaving the actors as the principal focus of the performance (see LeCompte in Dunkelberg: 2004, p.44). However, devising directors did absorb two important aspects of his thinking. The first was the precedence of the creative process over the text - texts were regularly adapted, or

occasionally completely replaced to fit the needs of the developing process (see Grotowski in Grotowski, Schechner and Chwat: 1968, p.36). The second was placing the director and actors at the creative centre of the project.

The origins of the Wooster Group are intimately tied up in the emergence of an American experimental theatre tradition that adapted Grotowski's Polish Laboratory Theatre practice -which was orientated towards theatre productions at this stage- to form an alternative to Stanislavski's Method (see Savran, 1988: p.2). Stanislavski's method was a dominant force in American theatre at the time. Director Richard Schechner was moved by his experience of Grotowski's first American workshop in 1967 to found his own company, the Performance Group based on exploring ideas from Grotowski's work (see Dunkelberg: 2005, p.42). The Performance Group were by no means the only American theatre practitioners that emerged following this alternative approach. David Savran notes that:

All [these companies] redefined the performer's responsibilities and altered the traditional relationship between actor and role. [...] All rejected, to some extent, the traditional division of labor and created a theatre in which the director is the central creative force [...]. All questioned the notion that the *mise en scene* must be subordinate to a previously written script.

Savran: 1988, p.2

In his Performance Group, Schechner created a "ritualistic theatre [that] was aimed at laying bare and transforming the psyche of all who participated in the theatrical event, both performers and spectators" (*ibid.* p.3). In 1968, the Performance Group bought the Performing Garage in Wooster Street, SoHo and in 1970 Elizabeth LeCompte joined the group as assistant director.

Although LeCompte would describe her time with Schechner as an "apprenticeship" (*ibid.* p.3), she became "increasingly critical of his methods" (*ibid.*). Gradually LeCompte began to produce her own work within the company in a very different direction from Schechner's. In 1980, she took over the Performing Garage and changed the name of the company to the Wooster Group.

As of 2014, the Wooster Group remains an active and influential company in experimental theatre worldwide. David Savran notes that: "of all the companies [that arose in the American experimental theatres of the late 1960s to early 1970s], the Wooster Group is the only one to retain its original organization and collaborative working practices. [...] [T]he Wooster Group has remained squarely within the experimental arena." (*ibid.* p.2)

Aside from the designers and other non-performing staff, The Wooster Group comprises the director, Elizabeth LeCompte, and a slowly changing core of performers. These performers have included: Ron Vawter, Spalding Gray, Kate Valk and Willem Dafoe. This core group often work alongside other performers, who are brought in for specific projects.

The Wooster Group are known for creating multi-layered performances that embrace technology and explore the "psychological subjectivity of the director and/or performers as subject matter"

(Dunkelberg: 2005 p.44). Their works often explore the act of acting, such as in *Nayatt School* (1978) where Spalding Gray and Joan Jonas break from their dialogue to discuss discrepancies in their editions of the text (see Savran: 1988 p.132). They often work with found texts or objects that might take the form of:

Recordings of private interviews or public events [occasionally secretly recorded as in *Poor Theater* (2004) - see Dunkelberg, 2005], previously written dramatic material [...], pre-recorded sound, music, film and video, [...] or the] performance space.

Savran: 1988, p.51

Previously created texts are often used in their work, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* (1949) in *Nayatt School* (1978), or a video of Grotowski's *Akropolis* (1965) in *Poor Theater* (2004). However, the Wooster Group's performances should not be seen as a straightforward production of these texts, as might be expected from more mainstream companies. Instead, the Wooster Group brings together a range of texts (often including other plays), creating their own script from the interrelationships they discover between the texts. For example, Susan Letzier Cole lists some fourteen texts used to create *Frank Dell's The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1989) (See Letzier Cole: 1992, pp.94-96). Using their "psychological subjectivity" (Dunkelberg: 2005, p.44) the group find meta-narratives that both comment on the texts used and renders them into tools for expressing the company's artistic vision. Although they use pre-created texts, the Wooster Group's process is a devising one - based on improvisation, tasking and discussion, using the texts as a starting point for their own creation. LeCompte described her process as:

everything comes out of physical tasks. Something has to satisfy me formally, psychologically, or in a larger architectural/choreographic construct. Everything is equally weighted. The language of the piece is as important as physical actions. I see the pieces as task-oriented, work-oriented, very verbal. I don't see them as visual imagery pieces.

LeCompte in Champagne: 1981, p.25

1.4.2 Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch

Pina Bausch's practice is intimately connected to the origins of Tanztheater through the works of "Rudolf von Laban (1878-1958) and his pupils Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss" (Fernandes: 2005, p.1). Laban first began to create dance pieces that "incorporated both everyday and pure movement in a narrative, pure, or more abstract form" (*ibid.* p.3). Mary "Wigman founded *Ausdruckstanz*" (*ibid.*) a practice which focused on "individual expression, and [...] establish[ing] strategies for creating movement that directly evoked feelings" (Climenhaga: 2009 p.4). Kurt Jooss created the Folkwang School in Essen "based on Laban's theories" (*ibid.* p.5) which Bausch attended from 1955. In 1960, Bausch went to study at the Juilliard School in New York where she was certainly influenced by the changes in performing arts including Happenings and a performance of the Living Theatre (see Climenhaga: 2009 pp.7-8). In 1962 she returned to Germany to become a soloist in Jooss's Folkwang Ballett, and in 1968, with Jooss's retirement, she began to direct the Folkwang Dance Studio. This allowed her to "experiment choreographically with the group for five years" (Partsch-Bergsohn in

Climenhaga: 2013 p.17). In 1973, Bausch took over the direction of the Ballet der Wuppertaler Bühnen, which changed its name first to Tanztheater Wuppertal, and eventually to Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch. Bausch directed the Tanztheater Wuppertal until her death in 2009.

Bausch's early works "present an overall group chaos under certain order, favoring process over product" (Fernandes: 2005, pp.4-5). After she arrived at Wuppertal, she began to create works "based on set structures" (Climenhaga: 2009 p.10). Specifically, these set works were operas and ballets, including Igor Stravinski's *Rite of Spring* (1913), which she adapted in 1975. She developed a collage technique, which became a feature of her practice, in order to "re-create the condition and mood of each story rather than telling it through a more conventional linear narrative" (*ibid.* p.10). In these early pieces she developed a second hallmark of her practice in her use of "her and her dancer's personal experiences [to create material as a] response to, rather than in the service of, formal story structures" (*ibid.* p.10).

However, Bausch's early work "was built on more traditional principles of dance construction, and the rehearsal period mirrored that as the dancers learned complicated series of movements handed down from the choreographer." (Climenhaga: 2009 p.51). In this sense, this early work cannot be considered devising under the definitions I am using for my research. Bausch's work underwent a radical change with the production of *Blaubart – Beim Anhören einer Tonbandaufnahme von Béla Bartóks Oper „Herzog Blaubarts Burg“* (1977) in which she developed a process which can be considered devising. This is often referred to as her mature style. The core of Bausch's new process was an approach to collaborative creation based on drawing material from her dancers through a process of asking questions. Royd Climenhaga noted that: "Bausch insists that all she does is ask questions, and watch." (Climenhaga: 2009, p.44). The dancers answer the questions through spoken dialogue or movement improvisations, from which Bausch selects material to work on. The performances are then constructed using the collage technique - probably derived from her New York experiences and developed in her early works. The key to Bausch's technique is "not what she asks, but who she is asking." (Climenhaga: 2009, p.44). This concept of the centrality of the performers to her work leads to her "career-defining statement" (*ibid.* p.42): "I'm not so interested in how they move as in what moves them" (Bausch in Climenhaga: 2009, p.42). For Bausch, the concept of content moved from the technical execution of "the ornate surface of classical ballet" (*ibid.* p.5) to the expression of an individual within a collective structure. This is a central idea within devised practices.

It is important to recognise that Bausch continued to give her performers small sections of pre-constructed movement throughout her career, however these movement sections were less creatively significant in the mature works than they had been in the early works.

Bausch worked within the structure of a dance company where a relatively large group⁵ of performers were permanent company members. Company members would join, leave and return throughout her career, but the core of the company remained fairly stable.

⁵ Compared to my other models: the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment

1.4.3 Forced Entertainment

Forced Entertainment were formed in Sheffield in 1984 around a core of recent graduates from the drama course at the university of Exeter. Unlike the previous two models who have changed their personnel gradually over the years, Forced Entertainment has only ever had eight creative members⁶ (two members left the group: Huw Chadbourn, and Susie Williams in 1986 and 1987 respectively, and two joined: Terry O'Connor (1986), and Claire Marshall (1989)). Patricia Benecke notes that one of the most significant early decisions was that: "Tim Etchells would no longer perform and would instead direct all of the pieces" (Benecke in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.30). Whilst Etchells does sometimes still appear on stage (such as in the 2013 performance of *Quizoola!*), generally he does not perform, leaving a core of five performers.

Forced Entertainment's output has covered many performance forms from conventional stage works, through to durational works of six, twelve or twenty-four hours, through to digital media and site-specific work. However, all of these performance forms were created through relatively similar processes. Like all the models discussed in this section, Forced Entertainment's process evolved gradually through many stages and manifestations, as outlined in Patricia Benecke's article in Helmer and Malzacher, 2004. Forced Entertainment were certainly influenced in the evolution of their process by the work of both Pina Bausch (Benecke in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.27) and The Wooster Group (*ibid.* p. 38). Tim Etchells describes their creative process as alternating periods of improvisation and interrogation (see Etchells: 1999, p.52) in what he refers to as a "nice cop / nasty cop" (*ibid.*) process. The improvisations are "relatively unstructured" (*ibid.*) and can last for several days of rehearsal. Etchells elsewhere notes that he gives "instructions for impro" (*ibid.* p.55) and often passes notes with ideas or text to the performers. This implies that the improvisations are not as unstructured as might have first been assumed, or that the relative structuring of the improvisations changes over the process. The interrogative phase of the process is characterised by watching videotapes of the improvisations (see Etchells: 1999, p.52) and "asking questions that were largely denied [to the actors] until [that] point" (*ibid.*). The questions include:

What is that doing there? What might that mean? What does this imply about structure?
Would this work be sustainable as a 'show'? What is missing from it? What does it remind
one of? ... and they'd [Forced Entertainment] make demands of the material - for more
sense (or less) for more joy (or less), for more pain (or less), for more intelligence (or less).

Etchells: 1999, p.52

After "a day or two of this kind of talk" (*ibid.*) the improvisation phase would begin again informed by, (or having half forgotten) the interrogation. The process would continue alternating between these two phases until the piece had settled. Etchells notes that they were: "only interested in 'what worked' (what worked for them, in this place in history, culture and time)" (Etchells: 1999, p.53). Maintaining that they live by the sign: "you know it when you see it" (*ibid.*).

⁶ There are also various support staff, including a general manager, administrator and production managers (see Helmer in Helmer and Malzacher, 2004, pp.58-9).

1.5 The role of the Composer/Director:

When talking about collaborative work it can be hard to see the role of the composer or director. In the case of this research, it is important to try to make clear as much as possible where my role as composer/director begins and ends in the process.

The three models of devising I have outlined above have superficially very different directorial styles to one another. However, it is possible to determine a commonality through an examination of their practices. This general role serves as a good definition of my own role within the processes.

The directorial styles of Bausch and LeCompte are more “autocratic” (Savran: 1988, p.115) than Etchells’. This, I believe, reflects the history of Forced Entertainment, beginning as they did as a collective organisation. Forced Entertainment still retain much of the “spirit of group-made and group-owned work” (Benecke in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.30), leaving Etchells in the position of being one of a group of artists, rather than a leader. For example, it is rare to hear a stage work by Forced Entertainment being referred to as ‘by Tim Etchells’, whereas it is common to hear the person of Pina Bausch used interchangeably with ‘Tanztheater Wuppertal’. Etchells’s role within the creative process consists of feeding in text and ideas to the improvisations, being an outside eye (which gives him a unique position when it comes to ordering the material), and planning the rehearsals (see *ibid.* p.33). Both Bausch and LeCompte take on these roles with more emphasis on creative control of the process. For example, LeCompte remarked that:

I like to have the final say, not so much because I want the power of it, but because otherwise, I lose my way. These workers bring this material to me, and I sift and syphon through it. It isn’t that some material is “better” than other material. I use it when it links up to something very particular within me, when it extends my vision slightly [...] it’s a slow process and it’s not democratic in any way.

LeCompte in Savran: 1998, pp.115-116

Note that LeCompte rejects any notion of democracy in her process, the process relies on input from the performers, but only LeCompte takes the final decisions. All the directors create their pieces through the process, where the process is as much creation as it is rehearsal.

The directorial and compositional role I have adopted for this research can be drawn from elements of all the practices outlined above. I initially tended towards the more autocratic style of directing, as this is closer to the relationship set up by pre-existing notions of ‘composer’ and ‘musician’. However, as my practice developed, I became less autocratic and more oriented towards notions of consent and leadership in the process and developing the idea of ‘risk’ in process and performance, alongside my sense of directorial responsibilities. The common responsibilities in my directorial model can be summarised into the following considerations⁷:

⁷ Although the director has a responsibility for the final decisions in these areas, decisions can be initiated by, or arrived at, after considerable input from the performers.

Planning the work through finding the subject or field in which the investigations and process will begin, and choosing the performers to work with.

Guiding the rehearsal process through planning the rehearsals and giving the tasks for the improvisations.

Finding the material often within the rehearsal, but also by sifting through rehearsal footage or by listening to audio recordings between rehearsals. The final decision on what materials to include normally takes place at a very late stage in the process, as materials often need time to develop. “Nothing should be finished too hastily; fragments remaining fluid for a long time, to be tested in diverse combinations” (Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.16)

Shaping the material through increasingly more defined task rules or through discussion

Guiding the performers through feedback, taking on and discussing their ideas, and open discussions and debate. The devising director will often encourage performers to take creative risks. It is also important to encourage the performers to take a proactive, responsible role in the process, especially if they have never taken part in a devised project before.

Setting what goes into a performance including structure and content (often through experimentation with the performers). This would also include lighting, costume, and other performative considerations.

Shaping the piece during a run, by giving notes and feedback between performances.

Chapter 2

Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred

Devising as a Musical Process / Music as a Physical Performance

[I don't] look for actors, but for people who have clear ideas of who they are, where they're going.

The work performers do has different requirements than acting. Performers have other qualities.

They must be full-bodied people.

(Elizabeth LeCompte in Champagne: 1981, p.25)

In this chapter I describe my initial approach to adapting physical and semantic practices from devised theatre and dance into a process that focuses on aural and musical aspects. The chapter will focus principally on how this issue affected the creation of a single project, *Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred*.

This chapter is in three sections:

- The first is an overview of the project idea.
- The second, a summary of the process - to place the theoretical discussion in the context of the whole project.
- The third is a discussion across five areas of theory that derive from issues related to adapting physical and semantic practices into music. These are issues that I continued to explore throughout my research: semantic communication, physicality in musical processes, individualisation, simultaneity and approaching tasks as investigations.

Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred is a staged music work for percussion duo, created with, and performed by, Sam Wilson and Claire Sadler.

2.1 Overview of the Project Idea:

I have attempted to describe the project *Alfred* in such a way that the reader may get a richer understanding of how the process of devising can create a musical piece. To achieve this, I have avoided delving too deeply into specifics of the project - leaving that for later chapters. This necessarily entails a generalisation of some aspects of the process. I have attempted to install enough detail in these first sections to be able to use this overview to put the theoretical discussion in part 2.3 (p.25) into the context of the project as a whole.

My initial framework was to create a staged work of between fifteen and twenty minutes that explored the relationship between players in a small group of musicians.

I had become interested in using number sequences as structuring devices after seeing a devised dance work (*Inventario*: J. Vidal, 2009) that utilised this very effectively. The device works as a repeating sequence of bars of differing durations over a regular beat. In *Inventario* this device was used to create a temporal grid within which actions took place. The action always took place on the 'down-beat' of each

irregular bar. This created a structure that is felt rather than revealed. The audience was aware of some device in operation on the dance, but the nature of the device is not immediately apparent. This created a strong sense of structural integrity within the piece, which was especially necessary as the dance material was very naturalistic.

I decided that this approach to structuring could be explored even further in a musical project. Such a structuring device lends itself easily to devising in music, as musical material can be formed around the temporal grid - with the grid taking on a similar function to bars in notated music. Initially I wanted to push the nature of the structuring idea even further and use mathematical functions to evolve the bar structure slowly. However, I abandoned this idea before the first rehearsal, as the effect of the structural device is subtle and reliant on repetition. I decided that instead I would explore the sequence in different contexts. I planned that the different contexts would fit together as long as the structural device was present on some level. I was always aware that an explicit awareness of the number sequence should not be a necessary condition for understanding the piece. I decided on a sequence using the numbers: 3,4,7,2,5. This progression of numbers had a discernible movement between the long seven beat bar and the short 2 beat bar, which I hoped would allow an audience to recognise the sequence as it repeated.

The number sequence idea lent itself to percussion music. I was already interested in creating a new project with a percussion duo that I had worked with previously, creating music for a dance piece (*King's Cross: Codigo Dance Project*, 2008-9). The musicians were asked to bring at least five percussion instruments that interested them, each of a different musical character. This instruction was vague enough to induce the musicians to begin a creative interaction with the project before the first rehearsal. The project was originally created in five four-hour rehearsals, with a dress rehearsal on the day of the first performance - making it by far the shortest process in my research.

I also decided to invite the physical theatre actress Vanio Papadelli onto this project as an outside eye. Papadelli is an experienced performer and lecturer in both dance and theatre. She also has some experience of creating music as part of a theatrical process. Papadelli's main role was to observe some of the rehearsals, then act as a sounding board outside of rehearsals. Papadelli also assisted with exploring some staging and physical aspects of the project.

The title of the piece is taken from a quote by the French mathematician Évariste Galois (1811-1832). This was chosen when I was still considering a more complex mathematical approach to the structuring process. The title stuck, even though the piece changed.

When I began my research for *Alfred*, I was looking for specific techniques and tasks described by established devising companies. I would then try to work out how these techniques could be applied to creating music. I quickly abandoned this approach, however, when it became apparent that a naïve translation of physical techniques did not create a musical process. For example, Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett (artistic directors of Frantic Assembly) describe a typical exercise they call 'Stockholm Bed' (see Graham and Hoggett: 2009, pp.160-3). This exercise begins with a task: in pairs, one performer (A) manipulates the supine body of the other (B). "B keeps their eyes closed and allows

themselves to be moved wherever A wishes” (*ibid.* p.160). This is a simple physical task, which can produce interesting results and relations within a group. It allows one performer to perform using both bodies through altering the physical relations between the bodies. However, it would be difficult to translate this exercise into a meaningful musical task - where one musician controls the combined performance of both. This is because emitting a sound does not restrict the sonic possibilities of another musician in the same way that physical contact restricts a physical performer’s movement possibilities. A less literal version of the task could work musically: where one performer physically manipulates the other’s mechanism of performance (for instance holding down their finger on a clarinet key). However, this approach has already altered the intention of the original task - where the manipulator is in control of the combined output - as the performing musician still controls most of the generation of the sound.

I realised that I was confusing adapting the general approach the companies followed with adapting specific process used to create specific pieces. Adapting a specific task used by a company would not work for my projects, as I was looking for a different kind of outcome. I decided a more fruitful approach would be to strip the physical techniques and practices down to a basic set of principles, then build my own tasks and techniques using established companies’ practices as guides to finding an approach - rather than blueprints to be specifically adapted. All the devising companies I studied used the same basic ground structure for their devising which can be described as: a workshop based practice where performance material is generated in rehearsal by the performer’s engagement with tasks or questions, where a director/composer guides the process, sets the tasks and questions and composes the material into a performance.

The process of creating *Alfred* became the initial basis for developing a way of approaching physical and semantic practices from a musical perspective.

2.2 Summary of the Creative Process to the First Performance

This section is an overview of the creative process rehearsal by rehearsal. This could never be a complete description of the rehearsals, as devising rehearsals are multifaceted by nature with many aspects being dropped or absorbed unconsciously into other materials. Pina Bausch, for example, guessed that she only ever used 5 per cent of the material that was created (see Climenhaga: 2009, p.55). Devising processes have very organic developments, which are notoriously hard to document (see Tim Etchells ‘On Documentation and Performance’ in Etchells: 1999, pp.71-5). Therefore, in this summary I have left out many aspects that were not directly included in the performances. In the later chapters, I concentrate on picking out themes and highlighting the development of specific materials. However in this chapter, I wanted to give the reader a feel for the rehearsal-by-rehearsal development of the project. All musical sections referenced in this text are labelled with visual subtitles in example 2.1 - an annotated video of the submitted performance⁸. It must be noted, however, that example 2.1 represents a finished performance, and the substance of these sections would have been significantly different in rehearsal (particularly early rehearsals).

⁸ Given on DVD 2, and also available to view online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_2.html

First Rehearsal

This rehearsal was mainly concerned with exploring materials and ideas for the project. The first half of the rehearsal consisted of long improvisations using a number sequence: 3,4,7,2,5. The most prominent idea from this rehearsal was that of marking the first beat of each number in the sequence, leaving the other beats either silent or filled with quieter sounds. Other prominent materials were: an early version of the opening ‘can solo’, the ‘unison’ material (a version of the number sequence played in unison with silence between the beats), the ‘chaos’ material (a version of the number sequence with the performers playing at different tempi) and an early version of the ‘clock’ material.

In the second half of the rehearsal we developed an exercise based on the rhythms of nursery rhymes. I also asked the performers to remember a spoken phrase from their childhood and perform the rhythms of this. Although these exercises did not produce material that would be used in the final performance, they helped to develop a working practice within the group and to shape the project’s aesthetics. Elements of the spoken phrase exercise remained within the can solo as isolated spoken words and rhythmic ideas. In this rehearsal we experimented with many instruments. Only in later rehearsals did I decide on the instruments we would use in the performances.

Second Rehearsal

This rehearsal was with Sadler only and mostly dedicated to developing the ‘clock’ and ‘phasing’ materials. In the ‘phasing’ task, I asked Sadler to play three pulses of differing tempi simultaneously. Later I changed the pulse to the number sequence, increasing the complexity. The idea was not to achieve a phase in the sense that a composer such as Steve Reich might use it, but to explore the sound and feeling of attempting to play such a phase. This material would lead to Sadler’s ‘phasing’ material, and also to the development of Wilson’s ‘interjection’ material in the third rehearsal.

Third rehearsal

In this rehearsal I introduced the idea of tuned percussion giving each performer a set of seven pitches to use.

Wilson used:



figure 2.1 Wilson’s Pitch Material

and Sadler used:



figure 2.2 Sadler’s Pitch Material

Using these pitches and the ‘phasing’ exercise I developed Wilson’s ‘interjection’ material. This was a series of short ‘phasing’ extracts played with three pitches extremely fast, which then gradually slowed down acquiring new notes as it decelerated. This was played twice with different sets of pitches, and layered over Sadler’s ‘clock’ and ‘phasing’ materials.

We also experimented with cymbals played on the floor, developing a material for Wilson from the idea of accelerating the number pattern to the fastest he could play - we named this the 'alarm' section. We also developed the 'three calls' section from the 'interjection' material. I created a solo for Sadler using dyads, the number pattern and her pitch set. I also set a physical stage gesture, which was to have Sadler look at Wilson to signal the end of the piece. By the end of this rehearsal we had sketched out a structure for the materials: 'clock' with 'interjections', then 'phasing' with 'interjections', 'three calls', 'chaos' going to 'unison', 'number sequence' with Wilson's *accelerando* leading to 'alarm' section, Sadler's 'dyad' section to finish.

Fourth Rehearsal

In this rehearsal we cleaned and set the structure we had developed in the previous rehearsal. I also set Wilson's 'can' solo and added it as the opening section. Papadelli attended this rehearsal and led an exercise developed from theatre techniques – this exercise was used to increase the performers' awareness of their physicality. The material developed a great deal over this rehearsal as we set both the details of the material and also the intention within the material.

Fifth Rehearsal

This final rehearsal was mainly used to set and embody the material. The piece was played and filmed several times over, with notes and discussions between runs.

Performances and After

The piece was performed twice with an interval of two months between the performances. Due to unforeseen complications, we were unable to rehearse and develop the project between performances. Despite the lack of rehearsals, the performers had no trouble remembering the piece down to the fine details in the second performance, describing it as: "instinctive" and "inside my body".

2.3 Theoretical Discussion

In this section I outline five areas of research that derived from this initial exploration of the development of musical devising from physical models. I continued to explore these areas throughout the research. My development of these ideas is outlined in later chapters where appropriate.

2.3.1 Semantic communication

Written or spoken communication often forms a basis for many devising companies' tasks and performances. Where language-based communication is based on the meanings of the words, I have called this semantic communication. Pina Bausch often asked her dancers to speak as part of their initial improvisations to tasks - for example, dancer Dominique Mercy remembers being asked in a process: "tell me what you ate last night" (Mercy in Climenhaga: 2009, p.55) which invited a spoken response. Equally, Bausch often had her dancers speak as part of the performance - for example, dancer Julie Shanahan talks about speaking on stage in an interview with Ciane Fernandes (see Fernandes: 2005, p.119).

As we use this form of communication in our everyday lives, it is an extremely flexible, accurate and powerful tool in both the devising process and performance. Semantic communication in rehearsal is an effective way of bringing the performers' personal history, thoughts and personality into a project. Therefore, spoken and written communication is almost always at the heart of the devising process. In my early research, I wanted to minimise the amount of semantic communication I used in the performances, as I wanted to avoid becoming distracted away from a musical approach to a more familiar theatrical one. However, I did use a very small amount of spoken dialogue in *Alfred* (Wilson says: "these things are..." during the 'can solo').

2.3.2 Physicality in Musical Processes

As the work of practitioners such as Pina Bausch brought together the worlds of dance and theatre, so each art form drew on the aesthetics and techniques of the others - dancers speaking on stage, actors dancing etc.. The performers usually adapt such aesthetics and techniques to suit their own background. For example, dancers will usually have a different approach to speaking and characterisation than actors. In my research, I wanted to explore aspects of physicality and theatricality in terms of musicians and musical performance.

As *Alfred* is a duet for two percussionists, the performers were more able to express with their bodies than other instrumentalists may be. For example, woodwind and brass players are limited in their use of facial expressions by the mechanics of playing their instruments. However, as neither of my two performers were trained actors or dancers and I am not a choreographer, I was reluctant to work on creating elaborate physical material. Instead I focussed on exploring aspects of their natural physicality.

In the early rehearsals I explored spatial relationships between the performers - especially looking at lines of sight and proximity. The two musicians reacted differently to this exploration. Sadler seemed less affected by her physical isolation than Wilson, whereas Wilson always seemed to be searching for a communicative contact. The characterisation of the performers developed from this observation. Sadler would develop a static character that performed tasks in isolation, whereas Wilson would develop an energetic character whose musical material was influenced by and responded to Sadler's.

To increase the performers' confidence with the physicality of the piece, I asked Papadelli to come into a rehearsal and run a short workshop on physicality. This workshop was designed to increase the performers' awareness of their body in the space and our ability to use their physicality in the piece.

I wanted to explore aspects of physicality as part of the musical, as well as theatrical, material of the project, so I began to mix physical gestures and musical sounds into the tasks. This was mostly evident in the can solo that opens the work. Initially I worked with Wilson using only sounds generated from the tin can. As the improvisations went on, Wilson began to use the can on his body and various objects in the room. I was drawn by the physical aspect of his movement around the room, and by the musical possibilities in his movement. I experimented with asking him to replace an auditory beat with a physical movement to see if the number sequence would still be effective. I liked the result of this improvisation, and began to include physical gestures into the can solo material.

I began to look at other aspects of physicality in Wilson's material. In particular I worked on the physicality of the alarm section. In this section I asked Wilson to play the number sequence as fast as he could for an extended period of time. This caused a great deal of physical exertion, which left Wilson obviously drained. In this case the musical material caused the physicality of a theatrical moment. This added to the drama of his exit and added to the auditory impact of the 'Alarm' material's absence.

The use of physical aspects in the creation of *Alfred* moved me to explore other ideas drawn from the physical models of devising - including: presence, complicity and physicality in musical performance. These ideas were predominantly explored in *Apologetics 1*, *Water Music* and *Apologetics 3* (outlined in chapters 4-6 respectively).

2.3.3 Individualisation

Devising relies on performers expressing themselves as completely as possible, both in the creative rehearsal and in performance. This engenders performances in which certain performers are recognisable through their particular approach to the creative process. This is usually expressed in their physicality, their voice and the content of their semantic communication. The idea of individualisation of performers is intimately tied up in the concept of the performer-as-project - where performers are regarded as the sum of their unique combination of traits, interests and training, as well as the level of technique in their skills.

It takes a long time for performers to develop both the confidence and understanding to explore their individuality in a rehearsal space. This is especially true of performers trained in a single tradition. Even with performers who are experienced with performing in many styles, the idea of individualising their sound or aesthetic can be problematic. A devising project ideally has elements of creative discovery for the performers, alongside the creation of a new work.

Alfred was the shortest process of all my projects in this research, and as such I had to consider ways of focussing my use of individuation within the process. After the initial exploration of materials, I quickly sought to reduce the number of materials we worked on. I asked performers to re-visit material from different angles, looking to involve their creativity in different ways. I sought to challenge the performers' notion of a creative process, by engaging them in creating physical and emotional aspects of the work. I invited the performers to participate in discussions concerning the process, performance, costume and instrumentation. However, the process was perhaps too short for the performers to engage in the process as fully as I had hoped. On the other hand, the performers did develop a sense of shared ownership over the project and materials. They also developed strong characterisations and individual narratives, all of which are important indicators of an emerging sense of individualisation within the project.

2.3.4 Simultaneity

It is a trope of many devising companies to have a stage full of overlaid activity of which the audience can take in but a single part at any one time. This trope is particularly noticeable in works by Forced Entertainment⁹ or the Wooster Group.¹⁰ This stage technique is associated with devising companies, but is not a necessary condition of the process, as can be seen in the many counter-examples - such as Pina Bausch's work where often only a single performer is on stage. However, this trope serves to highlight an interesting difference between the worlds of physical theatre and of music. Musical sounds originating from any point in the stage will have a simultaneous effect on the entire stage, whereas physical movement - and to some extent spoken text - can occur both simultaneously and isolated from each other. For example, a physical stage work can have two events occurring at the same time with no relationship to each other - where it is sometimes possible for the audience to perceive one and not the other. Two musical events happening in the same location and at the same time will necessarily have an effect on each other. This effect I have labelled 'simultaneity'.

Simultaneity is not a new aspect of musical composition. The musical output of a devising process could be considered in terms of counterpoint or harmony. However, I believe that to do so exclusively would be to misunderstand the performative processes. Counterpoint could be considered as the art of fitting simultaneous musical lines into an overarching harmonic structure. In contrast, devised music explores the effect of the musicians performing their tasks simultaneously with an awareness of each other's musical content. The individual characters of the musicians are discernable and crucial to understanding the performative output. Percussive music is particularly effective at seeming homogenous if the sound sources are sufficiently similar, so it was important to me to find strong characters for each of my performers to highlight their musical lines in individualistic sections.

During the process of making *Alfred*, I worked on three approaches to explore the individualisation of the musicians in simultaneous performance. The first approach was to use the performer's physical presence. The performers' position on stage and the presence of their instruments - notably the can and cymbals - serve to highlight the source of their musical lines, and the sense that a particular sound being played belongs to the character performing it. The visual aspect is therefore crucial to the performance of *Alfred*.

The second approach was to use the musical material to explore the gradual appearance of individuality from a seemingly homogenous sound. In the 'Chaos' section both musicians perform the same material, but at independent tempos. In their tempos they mark the number sequence, adding aleatoric sounds within the beats. Here the musicians are playing individualistically - but the effect is one of homogeneity, as the individual lines cannot be discerned. The musicians then gradually reduce the dynamic of the aleatoric sounds until only the number sequence beats remained. The effect is complete when Wilson gradually adjusts his tempo to fit Sadler's and they enter the 'Unison' section. Here the musicians are rhythmically homogenous (but not instrumentally). Wilson then gradually increases his tempo (the

⁹ "the well-crafted chaos of [...] *Hidden J* or *Club of No Regrets*" (Helmer in Helmer and Malzacher, 2004, p.53)

¹⁰ "You can become absorbed in the arcana and minutiae that eventually recombine to form the densely layered textures of their [the Wooster Group's] pieces" (Peter Sellars in Savran, 1986, p.xv).

acceleration section) until his number sequence becomes a single sound-object - the Alarm. As the Alarm dies away, Sadler's dyads are exposed. Here the musician's individuality is highlighted in terms of material, dynamics and physical spacing.

The third approach was to use the instrumentation to explore their individualisation. For example, the performers begin on very disparate sounding instruments - the tin can and the skinned percussion - and play non-simultaneously. This highlights the performer's different characterisations. During the first simultaneous section, the performers gradually come together to finally play simultaneous (although different) material on the metallophones in the 'Three Calls' section. Here their sound is homogenous, and their individual identities difficult to discern aurally. This is the only time in which the musicians play such similar instruments. The musicians finish by again playing acoustically distinct instruments, this time simultaneously. For example, in the 'Unison' section, the performers play exactly the same material at the same time. However, their individuality is highlighted by their different instrumentation - Wilson on cymbals and Sadler on skinned drums.

The issue of simultaneity is one that I explored throughout my research, but *Alfred* offers an interesting range of responses to it. I was drawn to the idea of textures created by more than one musician performing the same (basic) task at different tempi (the 'Chaos' section) as a way of creating material that was both defined and controlled by the musicians, and yet unpredictable in performance. As well as using the structural device of having only one musician performing in certain moments to highlight their effect on the stage-space - Wilson highlighting his appearance in the opening and Sadler highlighting her isolation at the conclusion.

2.3.5 Approaching Tasks as Investigations

Devising is a creative process through which materials and ideas are discovered. It would be easy for a composer/director to use tasks that are known to produce predictable ideas or sounds - in a sense pre-determining the sounds you would like and setting the tasks to create them. However, this would result in less of a creative process, than an exercise in rehearsing a verbal score. This does intermittently happen in any devising process - usually at a late stage where it has become clear that certain materials are needed to complement or complete the process. Pina Bausch, for instance, would occasionally demonstrate specific material for her dancers to learn, bypassing the task-based process altogether. However, the core of devising is an investigation into the performer's responses. To facilitate this practice, I have tried mostly to set tasks that do not dictate specific outcomes. In many cases I do not know what I am searching for until I see a response that moves me.

This investigative approach is a practice that both performers and directors must develop. It is equally as natural for performers to rely on techniques they know they can achieve, as it is for directors to ask for material they know they can use. The importance of a safe exploratory workshop environment is central to developing this approach. The workshop should not be seen as a form of performance: attempts, mistakes and misunderstandings are central to the process.

The development of an investigative approach to tasks allows the practitioners to start by considering why they play a certain material, and not what the details of the material are - thereby stressing meaning over content. This leads to Bausch's famous quote referred to in chapter 1: "I am not so interested in how they move as in what moves them" (Bausch in Climenhaga: 2009 p.2).

The investigative approach allows the director to explore aspects of task setting that are not only concerned with achieving new material, but are equally concerned with the mind-set or personality of the performer. For example, this approach allows the director to set tasks that are physically exhausting or impossible to achieve. Achieving the task is not always the focus of the exercise, as the outcome can be interesting in itself. This can be seen in the durational performances of Forced Entertainment, where the performers would engage with a limited set of tasks for extended durations (*Quizoola!* (2013) was twenty-four hours long). The duration, combined with exhaustion, changes the performer's approach to the task over the course of the performance. Robin Arthur, a member of Forced Entertainment, notes that: "you are on stage all the time, you do the thing all the time, you get very tired, you get very frustrated in a way with the rules and that makes you do different interesting things" (Arthur in Helmer in Helmer and Malzacher: 2012, pp.52-3). Jerzy Grotowski once wrote: "If one learns *how to do*, one does not reveal oneself; one only reveals the skill for doing" (Grotowski: 1973, p117). The flexibility of the investigative approach allows the director and performers to reveal themselves in the process.

In *Alfred* I explored this most obviously through the physically demanding 'alarm' section with Wilson, and the 'phasing' material with Sadler. Of these two the phasing task is more emotionally demanding, as it exposes the performer to a greater extent. I chose to work only with Sadler on this task as I had known and worked with her before on previous projects, and we had built up a level of trust and understanding necessary to approach this kind of work. I was always aware that working this way leaves the performer exposed in performance. Therefore, I thought it was necessary to monitor her reaction to the process carefully and to make sure the aim of the approach - i.e. the non-completion of the task - was explicit to her throughout the rehearsal and performance period. The 'phasing' task was to play the number sequence at three different tempi simultaneously. Of course, Sadler never achieved the phasing task, but she was well aware that that was never the point. I was always more interested in the sound world of her attempt than in any perfection of performance.

2.4 Summary

It is difficult to summarise, or even recall, all of the myriad interactions and ideas that went into the creation of even a single section of a devised performance. Some interactions are fleeting, unmemorable, un-memorised, and seemingly inconsequential, but can subtly change or set an important aspect of the material. I hope this study of five important issues in the creation of *Alfred* can give the reader an insight into the various natures of these tasks, ideas and interactions, how they relate to physical and semantic devising practices, and how they combine to create the pieces.

In relating physical models to musical ones, I have found it important not to confuse product with process. My research is concerned, not with adapting specific works from existing companies, but

specifically with developing musical approaches from a general model of devising found in theatre and dance. This model was developed in physical-semantic performance media (dance and theatre). Therefore across my research, I have been interested in adapting some specifics of the physicality and aesthetics of these principle models in my work. However, there is nothing inherent in the basic method of devising that demands physicality or semantic communication in creation or performance beyond that which is common across all musical paradigms.

Chapter 3

Carter Piece

Performance and Context

My work is like a colored liquid; it keeps changing [...]. Sometimes it freezes into a shape for a certain time and space; then it has a name: it is called a piece [...]. Then when that is over, it vaporizes, turns into gas, then back into liquid and flows on and on again.

(Meredith Monk in Jowett: 1997, p.30)

In this chapter I examine how the process of collaborative creation with performer(s) can be used to alter the relationship between the project and its performances. This change is driven by the exclusivity of the project to its performers, which can be highlighted by the devising process. Exclusivity of this kind has both disadvantages and benefits - which will be explored in this chapter. One of the principal benefits is to enable a sufficiently rich relationship between the performer and project as to allow the piece to adapt to the context of a performance. I was especially interested in exploring this issue through the creation and performances of *The Carter Piece*.

The chapter is given in four sections:

- The first is an overview of the theoretical structures within devising that can allow contextual differentiation between performances.
- The second is an exploration of the mechanism by which I built performance flexibility into *The Carter Piece* through the creative process.
- The third is a description of how performances of *The Carter Piece* changed in four different environments: a workshop, a concert hall, a theatrical stage, and in a lecture-piece.
- The final section is a brief discussion of two further ideas derived from the process of creating works that react to changes in performance: 'performers as score' and 'projects that age and expire'.

The Carter Piece is a work for piano solo - created with, and performed by, Jennifer Carter.

3.1 Overview of the Theory

Devising in theatre developed as part of a wider theatrical movement in the 1950's and 60's that was reacting to the arrival of film and especially television as widely available sources of performance media. Film and television (when it became pre-recorded) provided easily accessible and flawless performances that were endlessly repeatable. Theatre could not compete in these areas. Practitioners of live performance reacted by searching for other aesthetic criteria where film and pre-recorded television did not have advantage over the stage. Theatre director Jerzy Grotowski summed up the pervading attitude of this movement when he wrote:

Theatre seek[s] out how it is different from other categories of performance, especially television and film. The outcome of this questioning is [...] grounded in the belief that the personal and scenic technique of the actor is the core of theatre art.

Slowiak and Cuesta: 2007, p.58

Directors like Grotowski sought to create a theatre that focused on the 'live' aspect of the relationship between performer and audience. Devising developed later within this more general movement as a specific way of changing the relationship between audience and performer by changing the relationship between the performers, the project, the director, and the material. The relationship between live and broadcast arts is still a driving issue in contemporary devising practice (see Heddon and Milling: 2006, p.159).

Many devising companies began as collectives with the members either rotating roles between projects or voting on major creative and administrative decisions. Some devising companies have still retained their collective structures; the People Show, for example, take decisions "collectively and on the basis of a shared understanding of the piece" (Behrndt in Mermikides and Smart: 2010, p.31). However, many companies found that they worked better with a single creative director; DV8 Physical Theatre is an example of this (see Mermikides and Smart: 2010, p.17). In my research, I have concentrated on devising as practised by the latter group - devising with director - as the practices are closer to the composer - musician model I am familiar with than those of the group devising companies. Devising in particular focuses on the actor as creator as well as performer, seeking to give the actor ownership of the material through investment in the process. Ownership and investment are the key concepts devising uses to allow a performer to take risks with the material in performance; ownership gives the performer permission to take risks in both creation and performance, and investment provides limits to those risks. Ownership and investment are integral to generating the liveness of devised performance, as Tim Etchells notes in his article 'On Risk and Investment':

at a recent event [...] someone asked the performer what was going on in a certain part of the piece he was in - the performer replied, "I don't know about that, ask the writer..." that answer shouldn't be allowed.

Etchells: 1999, p.48

Taking risks allows the devising performers to react to the situation and context of their performance. As Bogart and Landau note: "Although the form is more or less repeated night to night, the 'how it is filled' certainly changes" (Bogart and Landau: 2005, p.135). Ron Vawter of the Wooster Group explained the importance of risk taking in emphasizing the live aspect of performance saying:

It's exactly like surfboarding and you've got this board which is your character or the play that you're doing and you're riding these waves coming at you from the audience and from the play itself. Of course when you surfboard you are extraordinarily sensitive to the motion of those waves and of course you know I'm a show off, I'm an actor so I try to do little tricks [...] As far as the energy feels that's exactly what it feels like. And I've learnt how to ride the waves. I've done it a long time [...] I've learnt the little tricks of the

waves and the back currents and how to stay up. Sometimes I really feel like quite a champion surfboarder... [...] And sometimes I fall flat on my face in the water. That's the risk of surfboarding.

Ron Vawter in Etchells: 1999, p.87

Throughout all my research projects I wanted to incorporate the freedom to take risks and react to the situation of the performance. I began to explore this in the 'Can Solo' of *Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred*, where the performer had the freedom to choose a sound from a range we had developed in rehearsal, but he was restricted in when he would play the sound. In making *The Carter Piece* I wanted to build the freedom, for the performer to adjust the piece in performance, into the project, from the tasks upwards.

3.2 *Carter Piece*: Creative Process

The focus of my research in creating *The Carter Piece* was to explore techniques through which I could set tasks that allowed the performer to engage creatively with the process in such a way that they took ownership of the material that was created. At the same time, I wanted to explore tasks that involved my presence in the process. To achieve this I began the process with a non-musical dialogue that established a working practice between the performer, Jennifer Carter, and myself. From the dialogue emerged a method of creating material that used musical interpretations of verbal descriptions to form the basis of the tasks. This allowed Carter to invest her own ideas in the material through a shared experience with myself.

The central task we used to create *The Carter Piece* started with a verbal description of a phenomenon or object I would give to Carter. She would then explore ways of describing the phenomenon or object acoustically using only the piano. I was inspired by Iannis Xenakis's representation of natural phenomena through music and maths, particularly his representation of the stochastic mechanics of gases in *Pithoprakta* (1956). In *The Carter Piece*, we began with objects/phenomena that were familiar to Carter and proceeded to explore ones that were increasingly unknown. The objective of the task was always for Carter to interpret my descriptions, rather than for her to seek to depict accurately the object/phenomenon herself. The materials that appeared in the final piece were:

- Nausea: The first material we developed. Nausea was derived from Carter's attempt to emulate the feeling of nausea as described by myself.
- Rain: This material was based on a description of raindrops sliding down a window.
- Flowers: based on a description of a bifurcation diagram. See figure 3.1 below:

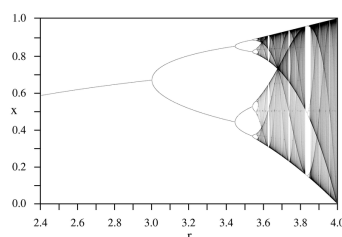


Figure 3.1: a bifurcation diagram created using the formula:

$$x_{n+1} = rx_n(1-x_n)^{11}$$

¹¹ source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LogisticMap_BifurcationDiagram.png

To interpret this diagram we designated the r axis as time and the x-axis as pitch. During the process Carter did not see this diagram, her interpretation is based solely on my verbal description.

- Kottos: This section was based on a verbal description of my recollection of the effect bars 86-93 of Xenakis's 'cello work *Kottos* (1977) had on me during a concert I had heard given by Rohan de Saram.
- Ame: This section was based on a fleeting electro-acoustic moment from my 2007 work *Ame* for harp and electronics. The moment in question is given as audio example 3.1¹².

The material as it appears in the piece was developed from these initial interpretative tasks by defining parameters of interpretation, setting technical details such as the use of the middle pedals to sustain a single pitch from a chord cluster, and two pitch sets. Elements of the 'kottos' and 'rain' sections were also allowed to bleed into other sections. Pitch was defined and controlled by two pitch sets:



Fig. 3.2: Pitch Material 1 for *The Carter Piece*

Used for the 'Flowers' and 'Rain' sections

and

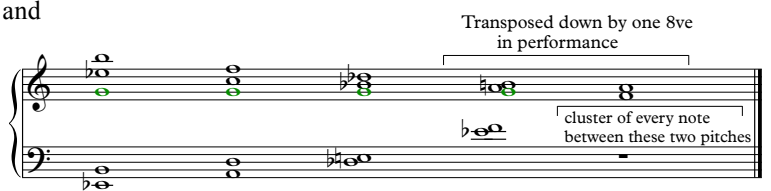


Fig. 3.3: Pitch Material 2 for *The Carter Piece*

Used for the 'Ame' section only

These two pitch materials were composed away from the workshop. They are symmetrical around the pitches 'c' and 'g' respectively (given in green). The last two chords of pitch material 2 were later transposed down by an octave during the process. Specifying the pitch material linked the three sections for which it is used and acts as an element of stability and cohesion in the piece. This allows the other elements of timbre, tempo, articulation, technique and rhythm to be explored within the performances with greater freedom.

The pitch material and performance of the 'Kottos' and 'Nausea' sections were derived from first setting the textural palette through an initial exploration of a series of notated chords. Then, using ear and memory as a guide, we found a way of playing that created chords within the textural palette we had developed. Only the initial pitch was determined, although it is occasionally transposed by an octave in performance. Using an approach to creating chords rather than specific chords allowed us to focus on the timbral interactions of the piece that were specific to the venue and piano. This technique is explored in more detail in section 3.3.3 below.

¹² Audio only. Given on DVD 2, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_3.html

In all performances of *The Carter Piece* the sections were performed in the same order:

‘Nausea’ / ‘Kottos’ / ‘Flowers’ / ‘Rain’ / ‘Nausea’ / ‘Ame’

3.3 Comparison of Performances:

The Carter Piece was publicly performed in three different performance contexts over the duration of the research period. These were: as a concert work (2010 - G.S.M.D.), as part of a theatrical work (2011 - Barbican Pit Theatre), and as part of a lecture-performance (2012 - G.S.M.D.).¹³ On each occasion the work was minimally revisited and reworked prior to being performed. Because the general structure and basic nature of the sections remained the same, *The Carter Piece* is in many respects a fixed work. However, there were several interesting variations in the performances that demonstrate how the performer was able to adapt the piece in reaction to the performance environment.

The concert performance was performed as part of a relatively typical contemporary music concert, where the environment was aurally focused with a single performer on stage dressed in low-key concert blacks.

The stage performance was presented as a prelude to *Apologetics I* on stage with three dancers. The performer, Carter, performed the work as a character in costume and make-up. *Apologetics I* is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

The lecture-piece performance was incomplete due to the nature of the wider lecture-performance - the lecturer character interrupted the performance after the first two sections. However, this performance is included in this study as the first two sections were performed in a comparable manner to those of the concert and stage versions. The lecture-performance is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.1.3.

A run-through taken from a late-stage creation workshop (2010) is also included as a comparison to the three public performances.

This comparison is intended to demonstrate the extent and nature of the variations between the four performances. The four performances are given as audio examples (3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5).¹⁴ (The stage performance was recorded from the technician’s box - therefore the communications and sounds of the technicians during the performance can be heard in the recording, where they would not be heard by the audience.)

Figure 3.4 below gives a side-by-side overview of the four performances as waveforms, with the x-axis representing time. The positions of the sections within each piece are highlighted.

¹³ The dates and venues given in brackets refer to the specific performance being analysed.

¹⁴ All annotated audio. Given on DVD 2, and are also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_3.html

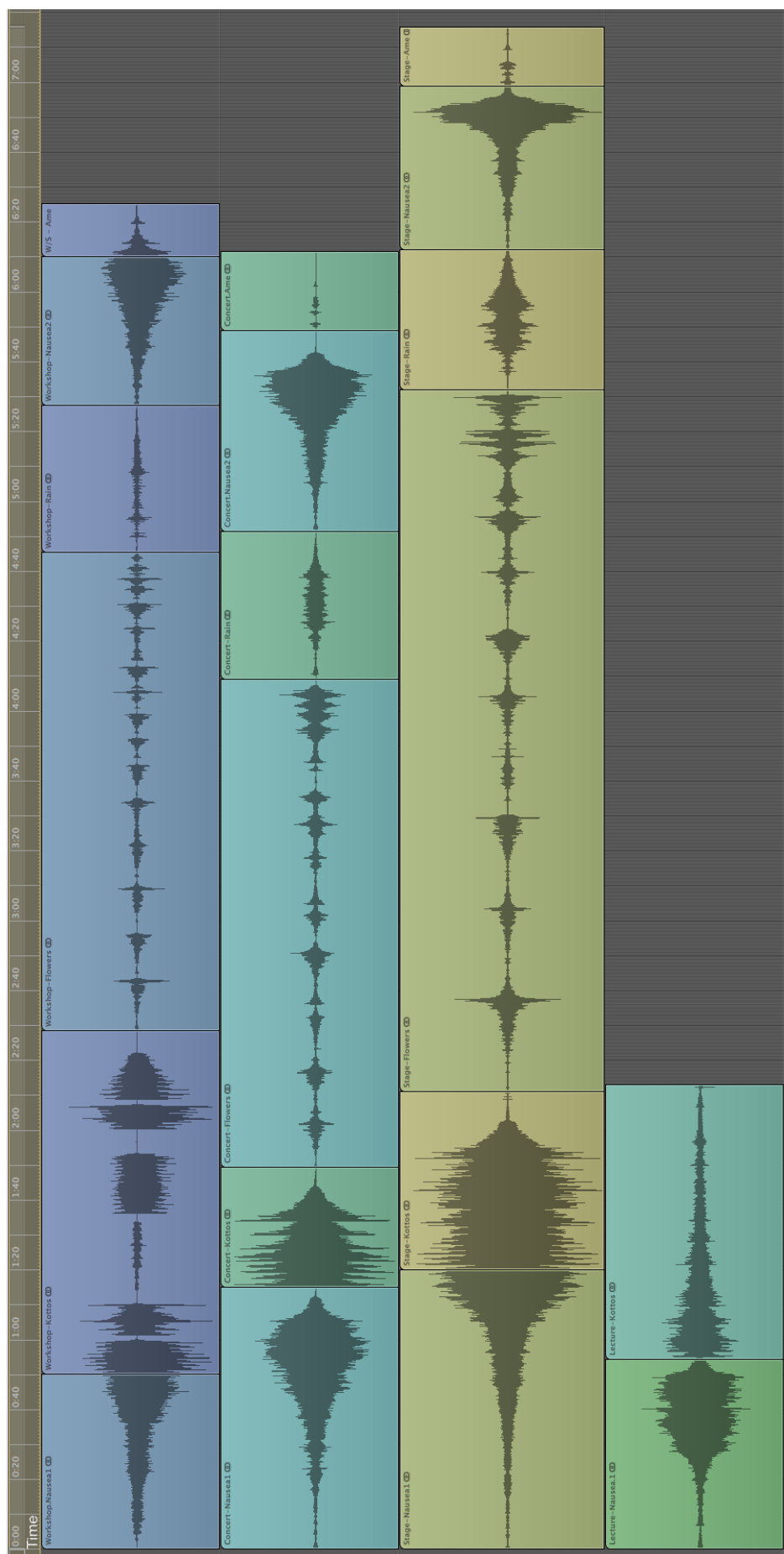


Fig. 3.4: a side-by-side comparison of four performances of *The Carter Piece*

3.3.1 Durations

As can be seen from figure 3.4 (above) the three complete performances vary widely in duration of both individual sections and in total length. The longest total length (the stage version) is just over a minute longer than the shortest (the concert version). There are three contextual factors that may have a bearing on this. Firstly, the presence of the dancers allowed Carter to interact with their performance, creating spaces within her playing for their reactions. Secondly, the stage version is supported by visual performances (both Carter herself as a character on stage, and those of the dancers). The presence of the visual aspect allows the aural aspect to decompress slightly. Thirdly, the stage version acts as an overture for a forty-minute stage work, meaning that the expansion of the Carter Piece could be partially in response to the larger scale of the performance as a whole.

The 'Kottos' section of the workshop version is considerably different both in content and duration from that of the stage or concert versions. As this performance took place in a public rehearsal, Carter is exploring the ideas of the Kottos task, finding new ways of performing the ideas and experimenting with dynamics and the contrast between the silence and the 'Kottos' material. Although this performance was given in front of a select audience, in the workshop environment Carter is more concerned with exploration in the moment than the shape of the work in general as she would be in later performances.

3.3.2 Transitions

As we developed the project, I began to find certain moments in improvisations that I was interested in developing. I isolated these moments and 'fixed' them as floating transitional points - able to be used or not at the performer's discretion. The most prevalent of these was a technique in which Carter could isolate a single note using the central pedal of a grand piano in order to allow a pitch to continue ringing into an otherwise suddenly silent moment in the music. An example of this technique in use can be heard in the concert version of the performance (audio example 3.3) at 1'11". These ideas were not attached to a specific moment in the piece, but were developed to be used as transition ideas throughout the piece. Of the five transitions in the piece, two were of a fixed nature: between 'flowers' and 'rain', and between 'rain' and the second 'nausea'. These transitions were always performed in the same manner. The other three were more fluid and flexible where the floating transitional ideas could be employed.

The use of the floating transitional ideas and the overall nature of the transitions form an interesting area of flexibility within the piece for the performer. For instance, in the workshop and stage performances, there is no break in the music between the first 'nausea' and 'kottos' sections. This is not indicative of a permanent change in the structure of the music as these performances are chronologically alternated with the concert and lecture-piece performances, where the pedal technique was used to create a break in the sound. However, it is difficult to relate these decisions to any one contextual factor. In reality, it is likely that the decision to allow the music to breathe using the pedal technique at these transitions was made by the performer in the moment of performance, where she was responding to her perception of the audience.

3.3.3: Textural qualities

In making *The Carter Piece*, I was particularly interested in viewing the performance as an experiential process. One where the ‘right’ way to perform a piece of music is by finding the right balance of elements in the sound, rather than by playing any specific pitches. This idea was explored explicitly in the ‘nausea’ sections. These sections were defined by the performer’s pursuit of certain textural ideas rather than specific pitch, melodic or durational ideas. The textural ideas were initially explored and identified within improvisations. In performance, Carter would try to recreate her memories of these ideas through a live exploration of the sonorities she could produce on the particular piano she was playing in the particular environment she was in.

This can be compared to the approach used by some composers using graphic scores, where the performer is asked to: “Take the initiative, to consider possibilities, to be alert and creative in the performance moment” (Thomas in Chase and Thomas: 2010, p.212).¹⁵ In both cases the performer is responding to the situation of the performance through being an “active, critical listener during performance” (Clemens in *ibid.* p.204). However, whereas the performer in the graphic score example is creating musical content that fits both the nature of the performance and the instructions of the score, Carter is looking to re-create a specific previously experienced musical memory, responding to the characteristics of the performance context and environment to re-create it.

The flexibility of the ‘Nausea’ sections of *The Carter Piece* in performance was therefore conditional on three principal factors: Carter’s impression of the sound she was searching for, the piano and acoustic environment, and the flow of the music. The third factor is particularly interesting compositionally. As Carter performs the ‘Nausea’ sections she listens for textural nuances, such as interference patterns between pitches. Once she has found such a nuance she will then try to develop this sound further within the global texture. This necessarily entails a freedom and un-repeatability in performance that forms the heart of the idea of performance flexibility in my music.

Example 3.6¹⁶ gives five short samples from comparable areas in ‘Nausea I’ taken from one each of the performances examined within this study, and one from a dress rehearsal of the stage performance. It is possible to hear the difference in texture achieved between these five performances.

3.3.4 Internal repetitions

There are three musical ideas in *The Carter Piece* that are repeated internally - i.e. within a single performance: the Nausea section, the Flowers, and the Kottos and Rain echoes. These ideas are useful to examine how the piece is adapting within a single performance.

The two ‘nausea’ sections perform quite different functions within the performance. The first is the opening auditory experience occurring when the audience is most responsive to details in performance.

¹⁵ This is in specific reference to the work of Christian Wolff, but is equally applicable to a number of other composers’ approaches.

¹⁶ Annotated audio. Given on DVD 2, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_3.html

The second is a deliberate reiteration of the first occurring near the end of the performance. Both Carter and I found our experience of time was more compressed by the second iteration. Therefore, the first 'nausea' section is much longer in duration and more nuanced in performance than the second, as can be seen in figure 3.4 above. I found it interesting to note that in the creative process I asked Carter to repeat precisely the first Nausea task to create the second 'Nausea' section. The differences between the two sections could well be due to how she experiences performing the second in the context of having performed the first.

The Flowers section was created by asking Carter to create several musical 'flowers' based on the verbal description of the bifurcation diagram (see figure 3.1 above). Each of these flowers begins on a pitch selected from the pitch material (see figure 3.2) and uses only pitches drawn from this set. The material begins on a low pitch and moved upwards through the material. Carter is allowed to repeat and skip pitches, but not to choose a lower pitch than the previous flower had began on. Therefore, the number of 'flowers' is flexible, which allows Carter to control the rate of acceleration through the section. The 'flowers' section in the stage performance contains the least number of iterations (eleven) and is the longest in duration (3'20"). At the other end of the scale, the workshop performance has the most number of flowers (sixteen) and is the shortest in duration (2'19"). Here we can see another example of how the workshop performance was adapted to exploration of the material through a greater number of iterations over a shorter duration, and the stage version was adapted to leave more space for the visual aspects of the performance, the presence of the performer and dancers.

The 'Kottos' and 'Rain' echoes both principally occur within the 'flowers' sections and both provide the same function - that of breaking up the inevitability of process in the 'flowers' section. Originally, only the 'Kottos' material was used for this function - in the form of a single chord. However, by the stage performance, the 'Rain' material was also being used. Therefore, for the purposes of this comparison, I will consider the combined iterations of both these materials. The performance with the least iterations is the workshop (two), this is largely because the workshop was exploring the flower material as a whole in itself; i.e. the performance was not concerned with considering the performance as a whole, but with an exploration of the task of the Flowers section. The concert and stage performances contained similar numbers of iterations of echoes (four and five respectively). In these performances this material is being used both to break up the process and to connect the 'flowers' section to the sections either side - looking both backwards to what has happened (Kottos), and forwards to what will happen (Rain).

3.4 Connotations:

In this section I will outline two further connotations derived from creating a work that is able to react to performance situations through the process outlined in this chapter. I have included these discussions in a separate section of this chapter because they go beyond the scope of *The Carter Piece* in that they concern long-term aspects of projects that go beyond the four years of this research. In the first I explore the concept of 'performers as score', and in the second the idea of 'projects that age and expire'. The related subjects of replacing performers and the possibility of a performer's absence or illness are covered in more detail in chapter four.

3.4.1 Performers as Carriers of the Piece / Performers as Score

Memories of process are also unreliable [...]. Even with video recordings or notation in the studio or workshop, the narrative does not accumulate to an explanation of how the work was made, since the process is continually forgotten.

Heddon and Milling: 2006 p.23

The process of devising is one of being present in the moment, responding to the task with the materials that are foremost in the mind at that time. As alluded to by Heddon and Milling above, the audio-visual output is only the surface appearance of a task. The driving mechanism of the process is the engagement of the person of the performer - with all their memories, concerns and experiences - to the exploration of the task at hand.

In the devising process I researched, there was no physical score object between director and performer. Instead the project was built up slowly from a fluid understanding of tasks in flux towards a concrete idea of what is to be performed at every stage of the piece. Therefore, what might be regarded as the score or script in this kind of devising work is inexorably related to the performer's memory and their understanding of what the piece is. In a real sense the performers are the score of the piece. Performances are iterations of what the piece can be, but not of what the piece is. The score as memory and understanding is carefully generated through the rehearsal process, but is nonetheless a subjective and externally inaccessible viewpoint. Because the performer's understanding of the piece is bound to change as the performers themselves change, the piece can develop and change across multiple performances. Jackie Smart highlights this aspect of the devising process in relation to the work of Gecko, a devising physical theatre company, when she writes: "as is often the case with devised work, the company [Gecko] never considers any production to be finally finished, so as they continue to tour it internationally it continues to develop" (Smart in Mermikides and Smart: 2010, p.168). "[P]roductions are in continual development [...] early versions of a show can be very different from later ones" (Smart in Mermikides and Smart: 2010, p.166).

It should be understood that the nature of these changes is dependent on a consensus from the group as a whole, and not from the actions of a single performer. Although individual performers may take risks in specific performances, for a project to develop fundamentally all performers and the director must agree on changes. The role of the director in this process is central as changes in the direction of a project are often instigated by the director responding to the group-score-performances as a whole.

3.4.2 Projects that age and expire

As the musicians become the score, the carriers for the piece, then the piece exists as an extension of the performer, affected by the performer's changing experiences and abilities. This effect is more pronounced in works that rely on the recognisable persons of the performers in their performance. For example, in Pina Bausch's *como el mosquito en la piedra ay si si si* (2009), an older male dancer carries a younger female dancer on his back, after a few steps they reverse roles and she carries him - there is a tangible sense of struggle in both dancers' attempt to carry the other. This is a compelling

piece of choreography on its own, however, if one overlays the knowledge that the male dancer is Dominique Mercy in his 60's and the female figure is his daughter Thusnelda in her 30's, the scene begins to take on new and deeper meanings. If one were to see that same scene 15 years ago (hypothetically only, as this would be before it was choreographed) Dominique would be in his mid 40's and Thusnelda in her teens. The choreography and meaning would be very different. Conversely, if one were to see the scene performed 15 years in the future, the physicality of the action would have necessarily changed. The scene is linked to the performers - it would not make sense for another couple to portray this moment. As the performers change, so too must the performance.

If the project is linked to the performers, dependent on them, then inevitably there must come a time when the project will no longer be performed. The performers will no longer want to or be able to perform that role, or they may simply feel too greatly disconnected from the project to adapt it to their current condition. This may initially seem to be a tragic drawback to the symbiosis of project and performer, but devising has always been part of a performing culture that confronted the ephemerality of its own existence. Mike Pearson, writing about devised performance in Wales in the 1970's noted:

these performances [...] rarely become part of a published record. They have their document in the endlessly elaborated (and increasingly fictionalised) reminiscences and anecdotes of its practitioners, in a discourse akin to an oral culture.

Pearson: 1997, p.85

The principle of devising is intended to give performers a greater stake in the work. This inevitably leads to questions as to how pieces could be re-performed without the original performers present. If a devised project is intimately based on specific performers, it necessarily has a limited life expectancy. In 1999 the theatre group Stan's Cafe remade a performance of *The Carrier Frequency* (1984) by the Impact Theatre Cooperative. Stan's Cafe copied the performance from documentary evidence of the performance including a video. It is interesting that Heddon and Milling note:

Both more and less than repetition and revision, this second performance represented what is always at stake with devised performance, not only the forgetting of its performance, but the forgetting of its making. The second performance was pieced together by quite different means from the first, from a visual and verbal score *without*¹⁷ devising. In this example, then, the process had become distinctly divorced from the product.

Heddon and Milling: 2006, pp. 23-4

The BBC radio documentary *After a Dancemaker Dies* (2010) discusses this issue in relation to the work of Merce Cunningham and Pina Bausch after their deaths in 2009. The documentary noted that, although the pieces can continue to be performed for a while, they will inevitably be changed and eventually disappear, as the dancers performing them were no longer able to perform the pieces. As Nancy Umanoff of the Mark Morris Dance Group says: "Dance is an activity, unless it is done, unless it is dealt with, it does not exist." (Umanoff in Byrnes: 2010). Transience allows projects to adapt to

¹⁷ Original italics

changing environments and always to have the ability to engage with contemporary concerns (these may be concerns of society in general, or merely the current concerns of the practitioners). Tim Etchells writes that Forced Entertainment were trying to “discuss the concerns of the times, in a language born out of them” (Etchells: 1999, p.17), implying that as the society changed, so must the projects or the company. Christopher Small notes that when there is no “Stable “authentic” version” (Small: 1998, p.114) of a piece:

The piece is valued to the extent that it makes [enhanced human encounters with the music] possible, and when it ceases to do so, it is discarded without qualms. When it falls out of the repertory, it is dead forever, and there is no way in which it can be resurrected. That is not necessarily to be felt as a loss, since it leaves room for new creative work to take place.

Small: 1997, p.114

It should be noted that devising is not the only creative practice that can insist on such a close relationship between performer and performance, but it is one that relies specifically on this relationship as a creative process.

3.5 Summary

As a musical work that responds to its environment, *The Carter Piece* has certain antecedents, such as Alvin Lucier’s *Vespers* (1968) - (see Lucier: 2005, pp.304-6). In *Vespers*, Lucier asks the performers (or players) to use echolocation devices to navigate the performance area. The music is created through the unintentional interaction of the sounds of their echolocation devices. Here the work specifically responds and adapts to the environment it is placed within. However, like the graphic notation example in section 3.3.3, the difference between *Vespers* and *The Carter Piece* is in the intention of the performer. Carter is searching for an acoustic situation similar to those we had found in rehearsal - the environment of the performance conditions her exploration and determines how this situation might arise. In Lucier’s work, the musical performance arises from the performers’ intention to explore the space through acoustic means. This exploration is created through decisions made in the moment by the performers - which are not pre-determined. The musical intention is therefore not a search for a remembered acoustic situation, but an un-determined confluence of non-musical decisions that have acoustic outcomes.

Flexibility of performance is not an inherent consequence of devising processes, nor is it an attitude towards performance that is exclusive to devising. However, devising offers an approach to generating and experimenting with flexibility in performance that is quite different from that of improvisation, graphically scored music and standard western musical notation. It is an aspect of devising that deserves some consideration in a contemporary performing context where recordings are widely disseminated. The over-exposure of materials impacts on many performing arts where audiences can be led to expect a certain performance, trapping performers into a form of re-creation rather than interpretation. This effect is especially prevalent in performance arts such as theatre, dance and stand-up comedy, but is in many

respects equally applicable to most forms of music. Flexible and reactive performances are one way of keeping the 'liveness' of a performance at the centre of the live performance experience.

Apologetics 1

Laboratory Work in Devised Processes

Sometimes it is not easy at all, especially for the new people who enter the company. I still haven't left the hard phase. Perhaps in the next piece it will become easier.

(Ruth Amarante¹⁸ in Fernandes: 2005, p.113)

In this chapter I explore laboratory work - an aspect of some devising practices in which I had become increasingly interested as my research progressed. I began to develop my laboratory practices during the process of *Apologetics 1*.

- In the first section I outline the theory of laboratory practices in theatre and dance, and how this was applied to the process of *Apologetics 1*. I also examine how *Apologetics 1* relates to its source material, and explore the precedents for this in theatrical practice.
- In the second section I explore the creative process of *Apologetics 1* - giving an overview of the creative process, and relating this process to the laboratory work.
- In the third section I explore aspects of the staging and performance of *Apologetics 1*, and how these relate to the laboratory work. In this section I also explore the issues of performers being absent from performances, and how a more permanent change of performers can be accommodated within the devising paradigm.

Apologetics 1 is a stage work for bass clarinet and pedal harp, with three dancers. Principally created in collaboration with Charlotte Webber and Fontane Liang, with Heather Roche - it was performed by Charlotte Webber and Fontane Liang, with Ralph Lane.

4.1 Laboratory work in *Apologetics 1*

The idea of Laboratory Theatre evolved from Constantin Stanislavski's studio work and developed through the practice of Jerzy Grotowski (see Schino, 2009, p.8).¹⁹ Generally the term has come to mean "all those theatres in which the preparation of performances is not the only activity that goes on" (*ibid.*). This is a good general description of the principle of Laboratory Theatre that covers a broad range of practices beyond that of Grotowski - with whom the term is irrevocably linked. Grotowski's laboratory work had an emphasis on investigating "the nature of acting" (Brook in Grotowski, 1968, p.11). My own use of the term is on a smaller scale: to investigate what we as a company do, and how we can achieve it.

¹⁸ a dancer with Tanztheater Wuppertal

¹⁹ Neither the practices of Stanislavski or Grotowski can be considered devising as I have defined it for this research. However, their ideas and practices form important antecedents for the development of devising (see Dunkelberg, 2005)

The laboratory practice took place in tandem with the creative work for *Apologetics 1*. I initially dedicated the rehearsals with both musicians to laboratory practice, and developed performance material in one-on-one sessions with them individually. Later, I used the joint rehearsals to develop both laboratory work and the duet materials (see section 4.2.3). Both practices informed each other, but I was interested in retaining the idea that when we were engaged in laboratory work, we were not expecting to make material for performance.

This section is in two parts. The first is an outline of how the project is related to the original play text *Apologetics* (2009). The second outlines the laboratory practices we explored throughout the project.

4.1.1 Relationship to the Text

I began with a desire to work with a pre-existing text in my next project as I had become interested in how devised theatre groups approach using such texts. The Wooster Group are particularly noted for their approach to text. Their use of T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* (1949) in their *Nayatt School* (1978) is a good example. The group took Eliot's existing text and created a new work using only fragments and ideas from the original text. The text was deconstructed and layered with other found text and devised material to create a new play. "*The Cocktail Party*, once it is incorporated into *Nayatt School*, stands as both far more and far less than a pretext for the latter work. [...] the Eliot play [...] is not used to center the piece" (Savran, 1988, p.52). The approach adopted by the Wooster Group is to treat the text as material in the process, to be used, edited and adapted as is needed. I wanted to use such an approach to text in *Apologetics 1*. Initially I thought about using a pre-existing musical score and treating it in the same manner as the Wooster Group treat pre-existing plays. There were significant problems with this approach, however, as musical scores do not contain semantic content (characters, situations). This makes the process of abstracting meaning whilst changing the content problematic. Further to this, it is extremely difficult to remove individual moments in musical works from their context whilst still retaining their meaning - as it is possible to do with dramatic situations in plays. I believe that these problems might be overcome with sufficient experience and resources, but in this research I wanted to concentrate on a simpler correlation between my practice and theatrical devising. Ultimately, I decided to use a semantic text that I knew well and felt confident in deconstructing - my own play *Apologetics*.

The play *Apologetics* was written in 2009 as part of a theatrical project that had not developed beyond creating the text. The text explores the confusion and terror experienced by three young sisters caught in a situation they cannot understand. To explore this idea, the play is deliberately surreal and illogical, with no clear explanations for the events that happen to them. The title, which refers to the oratorical art of explanation, is a comment on the lack of logical causation within the play. The principal characters are three sisters who are initially completely immobile and silent. They communicate with the world through disassociated voices located in a military radio, a public address system and a speaking lizard. The play is structured into several scenes, each introduced by a baroque description of time passing.

Within each section, secondary characters enter the space and interact around the sisters. As the play progresses the sisters gradually regain their mobility and one-by-one they leave the stage.²⁰

In adapting the play to music, I worked on the idea that the play was an aesthetic focus for the process, rather than a score to be realised. Much of the narrative and characters were discarded or amalgamated into new characters. The sisters became the musicians, and the secondary characters became the dancers. A completely new narrative was developed through the process.

Although much of the play was discarded or radically adapted for *Apologetics 1*, I used many devices and concepts from the play to develop musical material. The most important characterisation I used was the idea of the sisters waiting and being locked inside their bodies. This was a central aesthetic idea in the process to which we constantly returned. Screaming and breathing are prominent devices in the play - these became the fundamental themes behind the bass clarinet material. The harp material was developed from the concept of fragmentation as found in the play. The disembodied communication of the play was adapted into the idea of communicating through the musical instruments and projected text. The red sand of the staging, and the minimal lighting were also derived from aspects of the play.

Despite using some direct ideas (such as the red sand) and adapting other details (such as the screams or disembodied communication), the play primarily functioned as an aesthetic tool. In making *Apologetics 1*, I was not interested in staging the play. Like the Wooster Group's *Nayatt School* (1978), I was interested in the text becoming "dismembered and its "traces" inserted into a larger, open-ended network" (Savran, 1988, p.52).

4.1.2 Laboratory Practice in *Apologetics 1*

The laboratory practice in *Apologetics 1* was focused on developing the musicians' devising skills and their relationship, both with each other and with the material. For this chapter, I have grouped the exercises we used into three general areas: stage work, devising technique, and aesthetics. Material we generated in the laboratory sessions was not intended for performance - this is fairly typical in laboratory practices.

Stage work covers a large variety of different ideas, including: presence, physical character work, audience interaction, and complicity. The presence exercises explored the musicians' physical presence on stage, using topics such as: how they related physically with each other, how their stage position affected their performance, and how they could change their stage effect through posture and projection. The physical character work examined how the musician's physical or mental characterisations could influence the musical output. We explored this, both through the effect on content, and on performance. Example 4.1²¹ shows a close-up of the musicians during a dress rehearsal where details of dress, posture and character work can be seen. Presence and physical character work exercises were essential for the staged nature of this project. However, as the project progressed, I became more interested in audience interaction and complicity as the central concepts of our laboratory work.

²⁰ The full text of the play can be read at: <http://michaelpicknett.com/AT.html>

²¹ given on DVD 2, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_4.html

The complicity exercises explored how the musicians play together and their sense of group identity. Many of these exercises were designed to encourage the musicians to express themselves freely within a safe environment, to try out ideas, and to create social bonds. However, these exercises also explored complicity in performance - aiming to make each performer aware of the other's presence and intentions. Example 4.2²² is an extract of a complicity exercise exploring complicity in performance. The performers sit with one part of their bodies touching (in this case their backs). With their eyes closed, they try to play simultaneously. Ideally, neither of the performers would lead in this exercise and they would try to keep physical indicators of when they are about to play to a minimum. The nature of the music played was improvised and irrelevant to the principle explored in the task.

I wanted to explore exercises that investigated an element of audience interaction. Audience interaction is a central idea in many devising practices, and I felt that it was important to investigate this in our work. Although there is very little audience interaction in the final performance of *Apologetics I*, it was a key idea in our complicity and laboratory work. Example 4.3²³ is an extract of an audience interaction / complicity exercise we developed called 'whispers'. Here one musician would whisper a series of questions on a personal subject matter to the other. The second would then reply, also in a whisper. These answers would inform a short improvisation from the first to the second. Later we invited friends into laboratory rehearsals to practise this exercise on general members of the public (see section 6.1.3 p.72). The intention was to investigate the creation of a strong bond between performer and audience, and to explore methods of performance within this relationship.

As outlined in chapter 2, I felt that I needed to work on how both the musicians and I approached devising exercises. To explore this, we worked on setting very open questions and exploring how we could explore responding to them. During this strand of laboratory work we began working on adapting lullabies from the musicians' childhoods. We specifically looked at different ways of abstracting the music until it had become only a general shape. We improvised within the general shape trying to retain the idea of the original lullaby without specifically playing it. This material developed into the lullaby material we used in the performance (see section 4.2.1). The primary technique we applied in our laboratory work was to use an open and detailed discussion to interrogate how the tasks and responses worked both for us as both performers and audience members.

Aesthetics were explored through exercises similar to the devising exercises outlined above. We worked through a number of general tasks and free improvisations based around the source text. These tasks and improvisations were designed to explore the general aesthetic of the piece. The performers would first put forward their ideas and interpretations through these exercises. Then I would lead a discussion refining which aspects I liked, with the musicians contributing their ideas and experiences. Through this method, we gradually built a consistent musical language through which we could explore the creative process.

²² given on DVD 2, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_4.html

²³ given on DVD 2, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_4.html

4.2 *Apologetics 1: Creative Process*

This section explores how the laboratory and creative practices worked to inform each other during the process of *Apologetics 1*. I begin with a brief overview of the creative process as it relates to the laboratory techniques I was exploring. Figure 4.1 is a diagram of *Apologetics 1* as it was performed in February 2011, using the names for musical materials as used in this paper.²⁴

Piece	Section	Stage	Music	Dance	Film	Approximate Duration	
Audience Enters		-	-	-	-	-	
Prelude	Waiting	Webber sits	-	-	-	2' 30'	
		Picknett sweeps and exits			-		
		Dancers enter still / edge of stage			Titles		
Carter Piece	Carter Piece	Carter enters	Carter Piece (piano)	-	-	8' 00"	
				Imitation			
				Move to spot			
		Dancers exit		Tableau 1 (disappear)			
Apologetics 1	Stabat Soror (bass clarinet)	Carter drags chair to centre and leaves	Opening notes (starts very quietly)	-	Warehouse film	0' 30"	
		Dancers re-enter	Ghost notes	Tableaux 1-9		2' 00"	
			Chorale			2' 00"	
			Lullaby I			2' 00"	
		Dancers exit	Soror Fragments	-		2' 00"	
		Liang enters in time with the film	Rhythmic Section			2' 00"	
	Four Duets	Dancer 1 enters	Waves		2' 00"		
			The Mother	Mother Solo	1' 30"		
		Dancers 2 and 3 enter	Game	Duet	5' 00"		
			Lullaby II	Tableaux 1-6	-	1' 30"	
	Stillness Solo (harp)	Dancers 1 and 2 leave. Dancer 3 takes the clarinet and leaves. Webber slumps on her seat and the light fades on her.	Morphing	-	Park film	1' 15"	
				Fragmenting		-	2' 45"
				Stillness Fragments		-	1' 00"
		light fades on Liang to blackout	Lullaby III	-	-	1' 00"	
	END						37' 00"

figure 4.1 - *Apologetics 1* Structure

The initial creation of performance material through one-on-one sessions with the individual musicians resulted in two distinct sets of material. I began to work these sets of material into solos for the musicians, which became *Stabat Soror* (for bass clarinet) that begins *Apologetics 1*, and the 'Stillness Solo' (for harp), which ends the performance. Neither of these solos was conceived with the idea of being in these positions. Later in the process I began to use the full rehearsals to develop duet material alongside our laboratory work. The laboratory practice continued intermittently right through until the completion of *Apologetics 3* (2012).

4.2.1 *Stabat Soror*

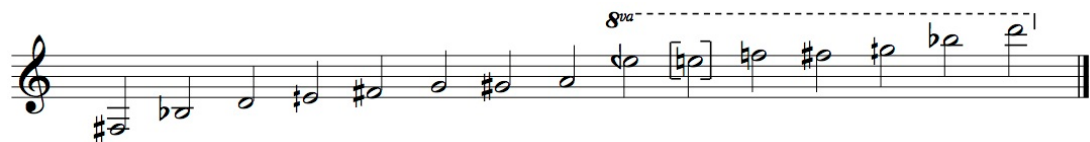
The bass clarinet solo *Stabat Soror* was generated through two principal investigative stands: breathing and screaming ideas from the play, and the lullaby exercise from the laboratory work. The breathing ideas focussed on investigating abstracted ideas of a scream. This created three basic sets of material. The first was two extended notes separated by a pronounced in-breath - the 'opening notes' material that begins the solo. The task I set was to play the first note using all the air possible, with a *crescendo* from *niente*. Then to take an audible in-breath before playing a pitch that resolves the figure. For us, this material encapsulated the character arc that we were developing. The second was a

²⁴ The names given to the various materials evolved during the process, as we developed our understanding of what we wanted the materials to say or do. For example, the Mother Section during the Four Duets was initially referred to as the 'crazy' section in the creative process - due to the frenetic movements of the dancer.

collection of techniques we called ‘ghost notes’ - named after the principal technique we used: playing pitches with faint multiphonic overtones. Other techniques included: cycling through alternative fingering on a single note, pitch bending and reverse slap tongue articulation. The third material was a chorale made of full multiphonics.

The second investigative strand began from the lullaby tasks we had explored in the laboratory practice (see section 4.1.2), and developed them into new melodic material. Here we used only one lullaby shape, which contained three basic features: a low opening note, a mordent figure, and a falling cadence. Webber would play with different ways of creating a lullaby within this basic shape. This material was not fixed in performance, but the parameters of performance were so defined and investigated in rehearsal that the outcome was predictable, even if it was never exactly the same twice. This technique was explored more in *Apologetics 3* where I called it ‘fields of possibility’ (see chapter 6.2.4). Later in the process I added a second material into the lullaby, using the high register of the bass clarinet. Audio example 4.4²⁵ is a version of the lullaby as played within *Stabat Soror* - this version contains some ghost notes.

The *Stabat Soror* solo was shaped to allow the character a narrative arc from a still, withdrawn silence at the opening to a more active open expression by the end. The materials are generally repeated within a planned structure, to explore the same material from different points within the character arc. To give the solo internal coherence I created the pitch set given as figure 4.2.



The title *Stabat Soror* is a reference to the *Stabat Mater* - a traditional Catholic hymn. *Stabat Mater* is a shortened form of the first line of the hymn: *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* - which roughly translates as ‘the mother was standing in pain’. *Stabat Soror*, from the same derivation, would translate as ‘the sister was standing in pain’. This title is also used as the original play’s subtitle. The solo was conceived as part of *Apologetics I*, but it has also been performed separately as a concert solo (see Chapter 6.1.1). Some structural changes were made when it was performed as a stand-alone solo.

4.2.2 Stillness Solo

The Stillness Solo is based primarily on the concept of fragmentation. After trying several different tasks, I settled on the idea of using a simple repeating pitch sequence that is gradually altered with each repetition. The simplicity and repetition of the pitch sequence suited Liang’s character, which we had developed as the youngest and most naïve of the sisters. Figure 4.3 shows the initial pitch sequence.

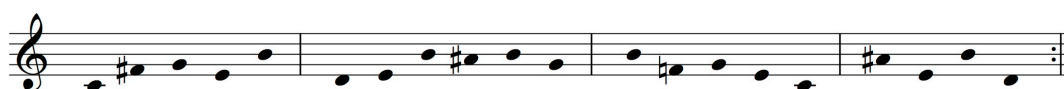


figure 4.3: Stillness Solo pitch sequence

The first task we explored was to alter the rhythm gradually with each new repetition. We named this the morphing task. The final form of this task saw the rhythm change from that given in figure 4.4 to that given in figure 4.5.

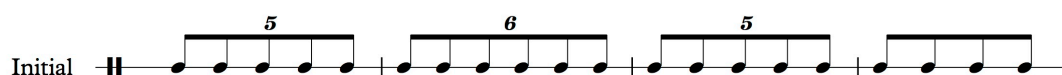


figure 4.4: morphing material initial rhythm



figure 4.5: morphing material final rhythm

The second material was an exploration of coalescence as fragmentation. I began by setting tasks that asked Liang to find ways of spinning the pitches into each other to gradually form chords. The task we used in the performance was based on the image of each pitch having a gravitational pull to the others. As the task progressed, the pitches would be pulled rhythmically closer to each other until they formed a sequence of chords. At this point, I wanted to return to the concept of morphing using the pedal harp’s idiosyncratic approach to accidentals. I set some tasks that explored how the use of pedal changes would affect the chord sequence. Without changing which strings she was playing Liang would gradually change the pedal settings until all of the original pitches had been altered. The chord formation and pitch shifting together became the ‘fragmenting’ material.

At this point I felt that the flow of the music needed to be broken up. We worked on the idea of creating fragments of material that could arrive and disappear without developing. This material went through many stages of development as we experimented with very set material and more improvisational approaches. The final material was somewhere in between these two approaches. I set the fragments of material within a sea of regular harp slaps, which gave me the feeling that the fragments existed in a disjointed sense of time.

Finally I wanted to add some common material between Webber's *Stabat Soror* and Liang's Stillness Solo, so we created a harp version of Webber's lullaby material. This was achieved through a task that asked Webber to describe her material to Liang and for Liang to then make her own version of what she had understood of Webber's description. We then worked on Liang's Lullaby, developing it as a new material independent of Webber's version. The harp lullaby does not use the quartertones of the original and is much more simple in construction. This reflects both its place at the end of the performance and Liang's childlike characterisation as developed in the laboratory work.

4.2.3 Four Duets

The duet section was developed late in the process. Many of the ideas began either as part of the solo work, or as laboratory practice. The duets are in four sections: Waves, The Mother, The Game, and Lullaby II. I was interested in using a game between the performers as the basic approach for the duet work. This had been an aspect of our laboratory practice - particularly that which explored complicity and stage work. The first game tasks investigated ways of leading and following in improvised responses. This is a common concern in improvisation across all of the performing arts. I wanted to create a game where the performers would mutually decide who was leading and who was following during their response. As this game developed, I asked the players to find ways of swapping roles within a continuous improvisation. This proved to be a difficult task to perform reliably, so we fixed a sequence of roles and a key aesthetic word for each section within the improvisation. Gradually, the use of the keywords allowed the nature of the material to become more fixed and predictable. As the material became more set, I added the game material to the duet section of the performance.

As we began to work more with the dancers (see section 4.3.1 below), I adapted a game task to include a dancer. Here the musicians take turns to change material using physical cues from the dancer. As we explored this idea, I set the movement material of the dancer, and gave the section an acceleration that culminated in the dancer's eventual collapse. Once the dancer's material was set, I could shape the material of the musicians. We called this section 'The Mother' after a character in the play.

I wanted to tie the duets into the solo materials, so we developed several tasks based on material from the solos. I was particularly drawn to a task that combined Webber's long 'Opening Notes' material (this time played as a sequence of nine multiphonics) with dyads drawn from the chords in Liang's Stillness Fragments. This task became the Waves section.

The final section was another iteration of the Lullaby material. This linked all three sections of the work through a single recurring material. Here both musicians play their Lullaby material in their own time,

concentrating on the combined harmonic and melodic effects. This is different from a similar task used in *Alfred* for the ‘chaos’ material - where the musicians concentrated only on their own line, to create as much chaos in the total effect as possible (see Chapter 2.3.4).

4.3 Performances

I created *Apologetics I* to be performed on stage. This meant considering several different elements of staging during the creative process. These are outlined in the first part of this section. During the creation and performance of *Apologetics I* I also encountered two common problems associated with long-term collaborations and laboratory style work: replacing performer/creators and working with injury or illness in performers. These issues are explored in the second part.

4.3.1 Elements of Staging

Creating work for stage necessarily entails considering physical aspects of the performance during creation. Both my principal performers used instruments that required a fixed position whilst playing: bass clarinet and pedal harp. I used this aspect of their instruments to create fixed stage points, which their characters occupy. I wanted these stage points to retain echoes of the performers even when they were not present. To highlight this I used distinctive chairs for each of the musicians, and lighting effects to outline their stage space. Through the laboratory work we developed the performer’s physicality within the stage space. Working from the text, we created a characterisation that focused on the characters’ desolation and frailty. I wanted to emphasise this aspect in Liang’s character in particular, so I developed the idea of Liang dragging her harp into the space. I invited the filmmaker Inês von Bonhorst to help me develop this idea spatially within the piece. I asked Bonhorst to create a film of Liang to be projected on to the back wall of the stage. This allowed the character to have a presence during the first section of the piece and highlighted the sense of waiting that is so central to the script. This is noted in the score (figure 4.1 above) as the ‘warehouse film’.

To help with the sense of physicality on the stage, I began to work with some dancers. This had two principal benefits: firstly, it allowed me to work with performers who were very experienced in devising processes, an idea I would later develop in *Water Music* - chapter 5. Secondly, the dancers gave the musicians’ space a sense of being bounded by unseen forces emphasising the sense of incomprehension and dislocation that is a central theme of the text. By dressing the dancers in black and keeping them in the shadows, I intended to create a sense of unseen events happening beyond the stage. The dancers are only fully revealed in the form of a second projected film in the last act - the ‘park film’ also created by Bonhorst. The dancers who appear in the film are unintentionally different from those on the stage, but this sense of dislocation only adds to the effect of dislocation created by the film itself.

The lighting, costume, make-up and stage properties were created after the material and structure of the piece were set. This is not unusual in such stage productions. The lighting was created in collaboration with lighting designer Yuri Pirondi. The stage properties were drawn from the source text and were deliberately minimal: the red dust, the chair, the seat made from books and the broom. The costume,

make-up and stage properties were created in collaboration with the performers (including Carter²⁶) and Bonhorst. For example, the musicians were given their costumes and asked to distress them; Bonhorst assisted me in this process. It was important to me that the performers felt connected to their costumes, that their costumes did not interfere with their playing, and that they felt that the costumes reflected the characters they had created.

4.3.2 Changing Performers

Within any devising process the practice of linking the performer to the project, as outlined in chapter 3, has one key drawback - that of performers either becoming unavailable to perform at short notice (for such reasons as illness or injury) or even dropping out of the project altogether. I chose to write about this aspect of the process in the current chapter as I have had relevant experience of both of these problems though the process and performance of *Apologetics I*. Equally, these problems have arguably greater weight in laboratory work, than in shorter term devising processes. I write about the related issues of ownership and the ethics involved with replacing performers in chapter 6.4.3.

When I initially began the process of creating *Apologetics I*, I worked with the clarinettist Heather Roche, alongside harpist Fontane Liang. During a three-month period we worked on creating laboratory practices, developing approaches to the text and some characterisation work. After this period, Roche had to leave the project amicably for personal reasons so I brought in clarinettist Charlotte Webber to continue the work. I began work with Webber by asking her to respond to the same ideas and tasks that I had been working on with Roche. It was interesting to note the differences between Webber's responses to the tasks and laboratory practices and those of Roche. I was fortunate that the replacing of a performer happened amicably and at an early stage in the development process.

When a performer in a more established company is replaced, the original performer is usually called upon to work with the new performer to help re-create the role (see Fernandes: 2005, and Byrnes: 2010). If the work is at an advanced stage of the creative process, or after the premiere, the new performer will often learn a role that has been set and fixed within a complex structure. Ruth Amarante, a dancer in Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, talks about this aspect of the work in an interview with Ciane Fernandes, where she describes taking on a role from Anne Marie Benati: "It is her history, but I take it for myself. So, it is as if it were mine. [...] I incorporate the role of another person like this" (Amarante in Fernandes: 2005, p115). Changing performers in this way changes the nature of the performer's relationship to the role. In this situation the function of the performer has moved away from that of deviser/creator to being one of an interpreter. This is reflected in Fernandes when she describes Amarante's interpretation of Benati as: "very convincing" (*ibid.* p114), implying that she saw Amarante's performance as needing to convince her of its authenticity, a form of representation of Benati. Elizabeth LeCompte of the Wooster Group agrees when she writes of *Rumstick Road* (1977):

The Important thing about Rumstick [Road] was that Spalding [Grey] was actually up there, the person that it happened to. With anyone else playing it, it becomes something

²⁶ Carter performed *The Carter Piece* at the beginning of the show in costume and make-up.

that Michael Feingold [a theatre critic of the time] would like. It becomes a play, like [Emily Mann's] *Still Life*.

LeCompte in Savran: 1988, p.97

Sudden injury or illness is another factor that affects all performing arts. In such a case a new performer will be brought in to learn the role, if possible. Laboratory Theatres and established companies will often have performers who are not performing in the production, but who are well versed in the techniques, concepts and roles of the work. It is often relatively easy for these performers to step into roles to cover injury or illness. This is one of the major advantages of large companies and Laboratory Theatres over small *ad hoc* groups created for single projects. There are, however, some issues that would need to be addressed, even by large devising companies. For physical theatres and dance companies, the differences in physicality between performers can present a challenge, and often requires roles to be adapted to suit the new physicality - this can include other roles within the piece where duets or group work needs to be adapted to the new performer. Similarly in musical devising, instrumentation could become an issue. When Webber fell ill with pneumonia before the first performance of *Apologetics I* I brought in a new performer, clarinettist Ralph Lane, to perform in the project. Lane had had no previous experience in devising, and did not play the bass clarinet. Liang and I adapted the performance to accommodate Lane, reducing the total running time from forty minutes to thirty, creating a new role for Lane, and adapting the material to accommodate the new instrumentation. It is interesting to note how much of this process was conducted by Liang without needing my presence - although I did oversee the final rehearsals with Lane.

Looking back on the process of incorporating Lane into the production, it is clear that neither Liang nor I considered the performance to be complete without Webber. However, I feel that if the new performer had been part of the laboratory work, and if we had had a little more time to adapt the piece, then it would have been possible to accommodate a new performer, even with a change in instrumentation (within reason). When a key performer is replaced, the resultant piece is not so much a performance of the original work, but a new version created and sustained for the time it was needed. This was certainly the case in that performance of *Apologetics I*.

4.4 Summary

The aim of laboratory work in *Apologetics I* was to investigate the idea of a creative company - to work on ideas that were not necessarily going to be performed, but that informed our practice in both performance and creation. Most Laboratory Theatres work for extended periods of time with the same performers, where "unlimited time" (Brook in Grotowski, 1968, p.11) is their greatest resource. Despite *Apologetics I* taking just over a year to create, I felt that we were only just beginning to understand the techniques and processes we were exploring. I became interested in developing *Apologetics* as a continuous practice, a work that had no final fixed form. It would be presented in various incarnations as the opportunities arose, but always be changing and reflecting our laboratory work. This is a very different model to *Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred* - which was performed twice with no development between

performances, and *The Carter Piece* - which was created to give the performer room to react to the environment of the performance in the moment of performance.

Chapter 5

Water Music

Autobiography in Devising Processes

In a distinct way, each performer becomes enactor of his own self.

Self and performance become inseparable.

(Annemarie Matzke in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.176)

In this chapter, I explore the idea of using the performer's autobiography as the basis for the creative process. In my earlier projects I had developed material by manipulating acoustic elements (in *Alfred*), or by working with performer's reactions to stimuli provided by myself (verbal descriptions in *The Carter Piece* and the play in *Apologetics I*). Working with autobiography is one of the most personal ways of creating collaboratively, and is often used in devising processes (see section 5.1.1). By the time I came to create *Water Music*, I felt that I had enough experience of devising as an approach to develop this project autobiographically. In order to work with such personal subject matters, I wanted to collaborate with an experienced devising performer. I chose to work with Sonya Cullingford who is a professional dance and physical theatre performer and also a violinist. Additionally I wanted to create a work as director-performer to explore how this changed my viewpoint and processes. I continued to develop the laboratory approach I had used in *Apologetics I* to allow the process to go deeper into our autobiographical background. This meant that the process took just over a year to complete.

This chapter is in three sections:

- The first is a section on autobiography and process in the creation of *Water Music*.
- The second explores the aesthetics of failure that forms a large part of many devised practices - with an overview of how I have applied this aesthetic in my research.
- The third outlines two key theoretical areas relating to autobiography in the development of *Water Music*: representation and composition.

Water Music is a work for violin, trumpet, voice and electronics. It was created and performed by Sonya Cullingford and myself.

5.1 Autobiography and Process

Although not a necessary condition of devising, the use of autobiography is a common feature of devising processes and is central to the creative methods of all three principal models I use in my research. This section is in three parts. First: an overview of how autobiography has been used by my principal models. Second: an overview of how I developed my use of autobiography in the investigative phase of the *Water Music* process. Third: a discussion of how the autobiographical elements were implemented in the performance.

5.1.1 Autobiography in Devising

Alongside my three principal models, autobiography is a significant feature in the work of numerous other devising companies. Its use is often foregrounded by the companies and is openly evidenced in their performances. For example, Pina Bausch's dancers often use their real names when referring to each other in performance (see Josephine Ann Endicott in Fernandes: 2005, p.52). If a new performer takes on a pre-created role, then the names change with the performers. This implies that Bausch wishes the audience to identify the performer as themselves, rather than as a character. The performative use of autobiography stems from Bausch's creative method, which often utilises a performer's memories to create material. When Julie Shanahan describes the creation of a scene in *Tanzabend II* (1991), she explains how Bausch used this method to bring together several of Shanahan's memories to construct the scene. The final material combined a physical improvisation with a verbal improvisation drawn from separate memories (see Shanahan in Fernandes: 2005, pp.119-20).

The relationship between performer and character is often made more complex by the deliberate confusion of autobiographical with fictitious information. Philip Auslander uses the term 'persona' to indicate a character drawn from autobiography where the "performed presence is not a character [...] but that also is not quite equivalent to the performer's 'real' identity" (Auslander in Callens: 2004, p.95). This is particularly true for the work of Forced Entertainment. Tim Etchells, of Forced Entertainment, states that through creating pieces: "we ghosted the situation and we ghosted ourselves. We made versions of ourselves" (Etchells: 2012 p.212). Forced Entertainment rarely use character names – especially in their later shows. Using their real names helps them to blur the lines between autobiography and fiction. Etchells notes that:

[Forced Entertainment] told you so many times they weren't acting that when they did act, they hoped you'd think it real. They pretended to tell lies, they pretended to tell the truth. And often they pretended to be themselves.

Etchells quoted in Helmer, in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.53

Although fiction is clearly present in the work, autobiography remains a powerful creative force within their process. Through the use of autobiography, the performers' "private moments are made public" (Helmer in *ibid.*). The use of autobiography is a crucial tool in realising Forced Entertainment's central performance concepts of investment and risk (see Etchells 'On Risk and Investment' in Etchells: 1999, pp.48-9). If the material is not personal to the performer, they do not risk themselves emotionally in the performance of it.

The Wooster Group has a slightly more complex relationship to autobiography than either Bausch or Forced Entertainment, as their autobiographical materials are often layered with their use of pre-existing texts (see chapter 4). This means that although autobiography remains at the centre of their working process, they often use character names in their performances. However, the actor is usually observable within the pretence and occasionally explicitly so. For example, in *Point Judith* (1979) Spalding Gray introduces the other performers by name along with the characters they will play (see Savran: 1988, p.140). For the Wooster Group, this is an essential element of differentiation between their work and a

more conventional approach to setting plays. Kate Valk, a long-term member of the Wooster Group said:

Liz [LeCompte] isn't getting a play and casting it, and then collecting a production team together to make it. It's in the room. So, in one sense it's always autobiographical. Sometimes this autobiographical element is much more evident because it's way out front and other times it's submerged in a mask or some sort of vehicle or frame - a story that we can feel ourselves in.

Valk in Quick: 2007, p.58

Former assistant director (and occasional performer) of the Wooster Group, Marianne Weems points out that the autobiography used in creating works is often an amalgamation of the performer's own experiences with that of LeCompte and other performers (see Weems in Quick: 2007, p.58). It is therefore rarely pure autobiography, even before it is layered with pre-made texts and other found materials. LeCompte acknowledges this balance, but notes that: "I have to find a way to communicate with twenty different performers so that each one is showing me something that is fully themselves, and not some construct I've made" (LeCompte in Yablonsky and LeCompte: 1991, p.42).

Theatrical autobiography is often primarily considered as an aspect of performance - specifically as presenting the performers-as-themselves as present - i.e. the audience is aware of the performer's personal connection to the events they describe. This is the approach taken by Govan, Nicholson and Normington in their chapter on autobiography in devised work (see Govan, Nicholson and Normington: 2007, pp.59-73). Autobiography as performance is a rich and fascinating field of research, and there is little doubt that this is a key aspect of many theatre companies' approach to the subject. However, in making *Water Music* I was more interested in researching autobiography as a creative tool only. I took this approach as I did not want to become side-tracked into semantic considerations of text or overly theatrical performance. Where I did use text in *Water Music*, it is used primarily structurally through repetition, and not semantically. This is an important difference between my approach and those of the three models described above.

5.1.2 Autobiography as Practice in *Water Music*

Water Music investigates autobiography predominantly as a creative tool. In this section I outline the process of developing the principal creative ideas in the investigative phase of *Water Music*. First I examine the central ideas drawn from our autobiographical practice: breathing and the ritual practice. Then, I examine the use of text and how that relates to our development of autobiographical materials.

Breathing and the Ritual Practice

The impetus to create *Water Music* arose from contemplating a memory of an incident in my childhood where I was held underwater by a wave whilst swimming in the sea. Although the incident was fairly brief (not more than thirty seconds) and did not especially threaten my life, it marked a change for me where I first felt utterly vulnerable in water. This was when I first became aware of my own mortality. *Water Music* arose from a desire to explore this incident and its role in my life. I began

by linking this memory to other incidents from my life related to breathing and life processes. The most significant of these was an activity I developed during an extended period of illness during my teens when I was confined to my bed for several months. I would gradually slow my breathing, using breathing and relaxation techniques derived from *Ki Aikido*²⁷ practices until I no longer felt the need to breathe in. I would then wait until a process deep within my body forced me to begin breathing again. I had almost forgotten about this activity, until my exploration of the sea memory brought it back to mind. When we began the creative process, I wanted to use this activity as a ritual practice - an exercise that would begin and link every rehearsal. Throughout the process, we changed and explored this ritual practice, performing some form of it in nearly every rehearsal. An example of the ritual practice can be seen in example 5.1.²⁸

The use of the ritual practice focused my rehearsal technique, as it forced me into a deeper exploration of a single task. In the previous projects, we had found some tasks to which we returned a few times, but for the most part I was interested in the surface results of the tasks - the sounds or images produced when the musicians investigated the task. The ritual practice allowed me to build material from a deeper, more embodied experience of a task than I had done previously. Equally, this was the first creative task in my research that began with no obvious musical connections. When we began this research, and for a part of the creative process, I had no idea how the task could relate to music, or how this task could develop into material we could use. This sense of being lost and confused in the process is often seen as an important starting state in a devising process. Pina Bausch said: “when we begin we have no idea what we are going to do with the space” (Bausch in Climenhaga: 2009, p.46). Tim Etchells put it even more strongly when he said: “I trust discoveries and accidents and I distrust intentions” (Etchells: 1999, p.55). In my previous projects, the concept of exploring was limited to not knowing which musical option we would use in the piece - the exploration was taking place within a musical paradigm. In *Water Music* I began to use a deeper meaning of exploration; beginning outside of music, from an autobiographical starting point, and moving into music through the process.

I wanted to develop Cullingford’s autobiographical input in the process, as I felt that all performers in a project need investment in the process.²⁹ To achieve this, I asked her to begin to keep a breathing diary. This would be a record of any thoughts or memories of breathing that might occur to her during each day. I also kept a breathing diary. Together these documents created a list of breath-related autobiographical situations and ways of breathing that we drew on throughout the process.

Gesture work, Text, and the Phrase

One of the motivations to create *Water Music* was a desire to investigate gesture work - a form of performing task drawn directly from Pina Bausch’s work. In my research so far, I had deliberately avoided using direct translations of techniques drawn from existing practices, as I wanted to concentrate on investigating general approaches and aesthetics. In this case, I was especially drawn to Bausch’s

²⁷ *Ki-Aikido* is a Japanese art derived from the martial art *Aikido*. It focuses on using physical movements, relaxation and awareness to improve the practitioner’s daily life.

²⁸ given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_5.html

²⁹ Of course Cullingford’s experience of the ritual practice and her point of view were significant contributing factors in the process. But I wanted her involvement to move beyond that of an interpreter of my tasks.

gesture work and I wanted to find a musical parallel. Bausch's gesture work is derived, from the German dance tradition of *Ausdrucksanz*³⁰ (see Climenhaga: 2009, p.116). Her approach was to create a series of stylised gestures that could act as a form of intuitive sign language. The example I was most drawn to is taken from *Nelken* (1982-3), where Lutz Förster dances to George Gershwin's *The Man I Love* (1924) expressing the song's lyrics through gesture work³¹. I was fascinated to see if we could create a similar effect using spoken words and music.

I began with a text by Tim Etchells that described his discovery of a heart condition (Etchells: 1999, p.114). I was drawn both to the beauty of the text, and the relevance of the semantic content to the ritual practice we had developed. I began by looking at different ways the text and the music could relate, initially assigning a single musical gesture or note to each phrase of the text. We improvised different pitches and gestures. When we found a gesture we liked, we would notate it loosely as a memory aid - using only pitch names and a series of symbols we developed to indicate extended techniques. This notation was often used in conjunction with video documentation. The slow tempo of the violin phrase allowed us to explore the internal details of the note-gestures and their relationship to rhythms of the text. Figure 5.1 shows an extract from my notebook showing the phrase in relation to the text. The music phrase is written in blue, the red notes signify a separate attempt at creating the phrase. We developed the task by linking the note-gestures we used to a word in the text - so that if that word were to be repeated, we would use the same note-gesture. Audio example 5.2 shows this phrase in an early rehearsal.³²

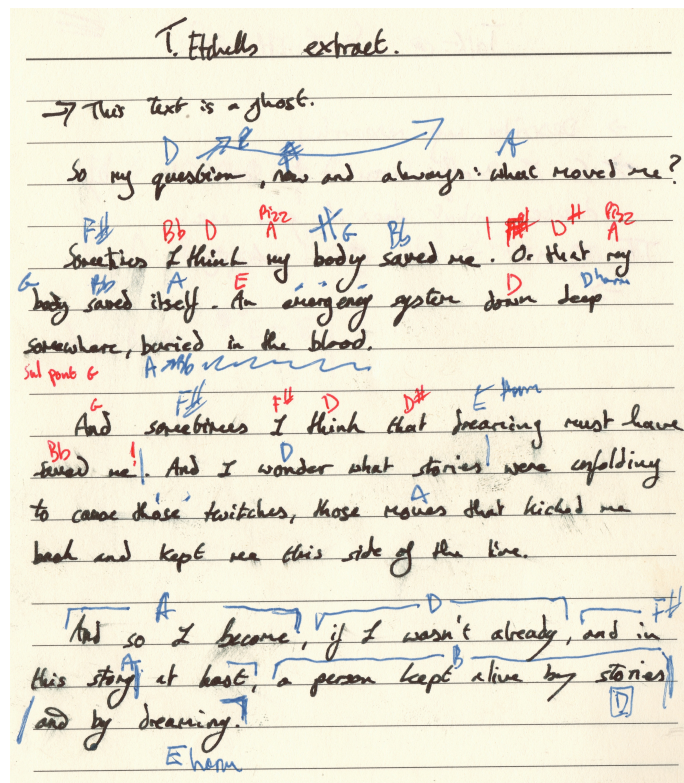


figure 5.1 Short Phrase from my *Water Music* notebook

³⁰ German expressionist dance - usually associated with Mary Wigman

³¹ A video of this moment taken from Chantal Akerman's documentary *Un Jour Pina m'a Demandé* (1983) can be seen currently at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8wnBSclJjg> (accessed 17th October 2013).

³² Audio only. Given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_5.html

After working with this short phrase for some months, we began to work on a full phrase where every word of the text had an associated musical pitch or moment. The Full Phrase would become the structural backbone of the project - much like the number sequence in *Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred* (chapter 2). I later created a third phrase based on breathing gestures to go alongside the text and two violin phrases. Figure 5.2 shows the relationship between the Breathing Phrase, the Full Phrase and the text as used in performance. The Full Phrase is notated with pitch names and some idiosyncratic symbols we used to denote gestures or extended techniques. The Full Phrase is shown in example 5.3, where the details of the gestures and extended techniques can be observed.³³

Text	Violin Full	Breathing Phrase	No.	Text	Violin Full	Breathing Phrase	No.	Text	Violin Full	Breathing Phrase	No.
So	A	deliberate out-breath	1	the blood.	^	heartbeats (neck)	29	kept	Bb		54
my	A pizz	cough	2		^			me	∩	in-take after suspension	55
question	D ->	in breath - mid	3					this	F#		56
now	Bb	in breath - high	4	And	G	out breath	30	side	Bd Gliss	Quick Breaths	57
and	G	out breath - Low	5	sometimes	F#	long in breath	31	of	^^		
always,	Eb ↑	in breath - mid	6	I	Bb		32	the			
what	A	cough	7	think	C#		33	line.	B		
moved	Ad	small cough	8	that	D‡		34				
me?	∩	in-take after suspension	9	dreaming	E harm.	wheeze	35	And	G	out breath	58
				must	(C#)		36	so	A	large in breath	59
Sometimes	F#	long out breath	10	have	B↓	blow out through teeth	37	I	Bb		60
I	Bb		11	saved	Bb		38	become,	G		61
think	C#		12	me.	∩	in-take after suspension	39	if	D		62
my	A pizz	cough	13	And	G	low out breath	40	I	Bb		63
body	G ‡	swallow	14	I	Bb		41	wasn't	B		64
saved	Bb		15	wonder	D		42	already,	A		65
me,	∩	in-take after suspension	16	what	A	cough	43	and	G	out breath	66
or	G		17	stories	∩		44	in	A vib		67
that	D‡		18	were	In breath		45	this	F#		68
my	A pizz	cough	19	unfolding	p G# ^		46	story	∩		69
body	G ‡	swallow	20	to	V			at	D		70
saved	Bb		21	cause	^			least	Db↑		71
itself.	A		22	those	"		47	a	spic. A		72
An	E pizz		23	twitches,	↑Eb		48	person	B		73
emergency	pizz.bow	heart under suspension (chest)	24	those	"		49	kept	Bb→		74
system	on strings			moves	Ad gliss			alive	vib		75
down	D		25	that	D‡	out breath	50	by	F‡		76
deep	D harm		26	kicked	Bb↓			stories	∩		77
somewhere	Sul Pont G		27	me	∩	cough	51	and	G		78
buried in	A	heartbeats (neck)	28	back	A‡		52	by	F‡		79
	^			and	G		53	dreaming.	E harm.	wheeze	80

figure 5.2: Text, Full Phrase and Breathing Phrase as used in performance

5.1.3 Autobiography as Performance Technique in *Water Music*

Impulses and Memories:

Although our use of autobiography was limited to creative and not performative aspects of *Water Music*, I still had to find a way of creating performance material from the autobiographically generated material. I began by examining the internal impulses experienced through the ritual practice that we had developed. I wanted to try to recreate, using external impulses, the experience of the body re-starting the breathing process. The sensation we both reported feeling was best described as: 'like a slap against our diaphragm' - a form of internal jolt. We experimented with re-creating this feeling through carefully slapping each other on the back. When we had created an approximation of the feeling, I wanted to explore the effect this slap would have on our playing. I quickly realised that I was

³³ given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_5.html

most interested in using the slap as an impulse to play a note. Example 5.4³⁴ is taken from a rehearsal exploring this idea. It quickly became apparent that the impulse took the form of an articulation that I could then recreate without the external stimulus. I developed this material into a counterpoint to the Short Phrase we called the Articulation Section.

Whilst making the violin phrases, I had begun to draw on the list of breathing experiences we had collected from the breathing diaries (see section 5.1.2). We had used the list of breathing experiences to inform the pitches and gestures we used to create the violin phrases. For example, the harmonic E pitch on ‘dreaming’ was drawn from a wheeze. Equally, when I came to develop the Breathing Phrase, many of the breathing techniques were also drawn from the diaries - although some were sensations experienced during the ritual practice. For example, the ‘heart under suspension’ with the text ‘emergency system’ (see figure 5.2) was based on my experience of my heartbeats during the ritual practice. The breathing diaries would also inform many other areas of the performance. For example, I took a memory of a panic attack and applied it in abstract form to the Articulation Section. This gave the Articulation Section both a shape and autobiographical content. Figure 5.3 shows the structure of *Water Music* with the Articulation/Panic Section beginning at 10’30”.

Section	Part	Start point in submitted video	Cullingford	Picknett	
exposition	1	0'00"	'Full Phrase' (musical version) - then sits down	-	
	2	2'15"	'Breathing'	text in full	
1st section	3	3'12"	'Breathing' x 3 breaths	'Breathing' x 3 breaths	
	4	3'53"	Collapse with 5 'Sung Breaths'	'Face-Painting' x5 - gradually moving to breathing through trumpet	
	5	5'09"	'Suspension'		
2nd section	6	5'25"	in breath - put on headphones	in breath goes to 'Exhalation Solo'	
	7	5'55"	playing what she hears	'Breathing Phrase'	
	8	6'50"	same with pitches		
	9	7'07"	'Full Phrase'		
	10	8'11"	'Full Phrase'	speak text from halfway through Cullingford's phrase	
	11	9'05"	'Full Phrase'	text full	
	12	9'59"	'Transition Phrase'	text fade out (prepare trumpet)	
	13	10'30"	'Short Phrase'	'Articulation/Panic' section	
	14	11'30"	stuck on "my body"		
		15	12'05"	'Short Phrase' (one section only)	'Long Note' accompaniment
		16	12'33"	stuck on "wonder what stories"	
coda	17	12'44"	'Breathing Notes'		
	18	13'55"	'Breathing'		
End		14'25"	Exit		

figure 5.3: *Water Music* structure

Alongside the breathing diary and ritual practice I also used other approaches to autobiography in *Water Music*. For example, I wanted Cullingford to approach the violin phrases with the same mind-set each time - especially during the creative phase. To achieve this I asked her to play the first note of a violin

³⁴ given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_5.html

work she was fond of playing and that had significant memories for her. This note became the first pitch of the Short Phrase (third note of the Full Phrase). Later, I asked her to apply the same feeling to the entire final paragraph to give it a different feel from the rest of the phrase. This is something we retained in the Full Phrase. Finally, late in the process, I asked Cullingford to create a version of the Full Phrase using this feeling. To help achieve this, she created this phrase away from the spoken text. We called this phrase the Full Phrase (musical version), and I used it to open the work as a whole. This technique of autobiography as musical memory is a method I had used before in *Apologetics 1* to create the lullaby (see chapter 4), and to some extent also in *Alfred* (chapter 2).

Complicity:

Aside from the exploration of autobiography, I used *Water Music* to continue my exploration of laboratory techniques (see chapter 4). Specifically, I wanted to look at complicity through a singing task. The task began with both of us lying on the floor with our eyes closed, then we would choose a pitch and attempt to vocalise it at the same time as the other. The central idea was to accept the resulting harmony without altering our original pitch. From this initial task we developed the idea further - first including instruments, then later developing a second-layer to the task where we would minutely bend the pitches after sounding to find interference patterns and harmonies. From this task we developed both the Long Note Accompaniment material (from 12'05" in figure 5.3) and the breathing notes material (from 12'44" in figure 5.3).

The Use of Technology:

The exploration of breathing in *Water Music* became centred on the challenge of externalising internal impulses. I was fascinated with the process of translating something only one performer could experience into a performative act. To explore this further I decided to use some technology. Technology has a long history in devised theatres, especially the use of film and television in the early works of Forced Entertainment (see Helmer in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.62). Technology is especially central in the work of the Wooster Group's productions (see Dunkelberg: 2005 for an excellent description of the Wooster Group's use of film in their *Poor Theater* (2003)). Using headphones and a lavalier microphone allowed me to explore my internal sounds through Cullingford's interpretation. Example 5.5³⁵ shows this material in rehearsal - initially the sound from my microphone is audible, later only Cullingford's interpretation can be heard. This material developed out of the breathing notes task. I would use the microphone to create my 'exhalation' to which Cullingford would create a Long Note Accompaniment - attempting to alter the texture and pitch of her note in response to changes in texture from the microphone. Cullingford would attempt to interpret the sounds I produced in real time through her violin. This is similar to a device used by the Wooster Group in many of their later performances where a performer would channel external information in real time into a performance through an ear-piece. The Wooster Group initially used this device to help performers remember difficult text, but they later kept the device as a way of creating new and unexpected elements in each performance (see Kate Valk in Quick: 2007, p.162). In our practice, I found that the most interesting effects were created by drawing the microphone across my face as the change in texture of my skin and hair would create different textures in the resulting tone. This material we called 'Face-Painting'.

³⁵ given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_5.html

I also began to use the microphone to enhance internal sounds I was able to make during the Breathing Phrase and whilst playing the trumpet in the Exhalation Solo. I used this material to explore a transition between externalising the sounds through loudspeakers and playing the sounds through Cullingford's headphones, so that only she could hear and respond to them (as can be heard in example 5.5). We used this transition in the performance, although the effect is not as clear on the video as it was in the room.

The use of the headphones changed Cullingford's relationship with my persona in performance - causing her performance to become internalised, whilst her sound becomes more projected (as the headphones cut much of the external noise). In the performance, the only time Cullingford plays the violin without the headphones, she is performing the musical version of the Full Phrase. This allowed her to explore and express the differences between the projected and internal performing states.

Although there are many types and layers of material in *Water Music*, almost all of the material derives from the central tasks of the ritual practice and text. Autobiography was used as a tool for spinning material from these devices through the breathing diaries and musical memories. Although *Water Music* is not a performed autobiography (as many of the dance and theatre models I have explored are), autobiography was central to the creative process and performative states of *Water Music*.

5.2 The Aesthetics of Failure in Devised Performance

Alongside autobiography - and often as a direct result of its use - devising practices frequently embrace an alternative aesthetic of performance in which it is common for the performer to be "prioritising [...] content over technique" (Climemhaga: 2009, p.53) in performance. A prioritisation of content has led devised theatres to explore features of the human condition in performance - especially notable among these features are the use of failure, mistakes and non-acting (where the performer is visible as themselves under the character). This has often led to accusations of bad, or un-professional performance. In this section I will examine both the theoretical background of this aesthetic approach, as well as my own use of it in my practice.

5.2.1 Theoretical Background

There has been a particular critical resistance to the aesthetics of failure as used in devised theatre. This is especially evident in the early works of Forced Entertainment. For example, shortly after the premier of *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* (1994), Forced Entertainment lost the support of their most significant funding body for their next project. Etchells remembers the root of the decision as being "concerns about aesthetics, 'poor quality productions', 'low production values' 'lack of development' and [...] questions about our status as drama" (Etchells: 1999, p.22). Etchells describes the decision as: "largely a category error; being shamed for losing a race that one never entered" (*ibid.*). Forced Entertainment had been an established company at the time with ten years of consistent work. They managed to regain their funding through a "long and public battle" (*ibid.*), with the support of several significant figures in British theatre. Equally the Wooster Group are not immune from critical

attacks aimed at their aesthetics - see Andrew Cowie's eloquent defence of their *Troilus and Cressida* (2012) from such criticism of their aesthetics (Cowie, 2012).

That both the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment are willing to persist in their use of this aesthetic, despite negative criticisms specifically citing this aspect of their performance style, indicates that these ideas are integral to their practice. From Cathy Naden being so (intentionally) drunk that she cannot complete her lines in Forced Entertainment's *My Eyes Were Like the Stars* (2001) (see Helmer in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, p.62), to the Wooster Group's failure to re-create Grotowski's *Akropolis* (1968) from a video in *Poor Theater* (2004) (see Dunkelberg: 2005), this aesthetic forms the foundation of many of their works.

Bausch has also embraced this aesthetic for moments in her work. For example, in *1980, Ein Stück von Pina Bausch* (1980) the performers repeat a limerick one after another, each performer getting the poem wrong in different ways. This material was drawn from a task exploring the trouble non-native speakers in her company had with repeating the poem (see Fernandes: 2005, p.57). Many of Bausch's explorations of failure are related to the systems of training experienced by herself and her dancers. For example, Dominique Mercy's inability to get a ballet phrase right in *Bandoneon* (1981) results in an endless cycle of repetition and failure (see Fernandes: 2005, p.55).

All these acts of failure and non-acting are used to expose the performers as people in the moment of performing. It is an aesthetic based on prioritising the beauty of a human connection in performance over a perfect statement of an objective pattern. Tim Etchells encapsulated the motive to explore failure in performance when he wrote:

It's often been said (wrongly) that we don't act, or that we don't know how to act. The truth is we're interested in something else, something that doesn't look or feel like what most people call acting. [...] it is often less comfortable, more vulnerable, and to my mind more present than acting.

Etchells: 2012, p.216

5.2.2 The Aesthetics of Challenge and Failure in my Practice

The examples given in section 5.2.1 above divide roughly into two techniques. The first is a representation of autobiographical failure such as exemplified by Dominique Mercy in *Bandoneon* (1981). Mercy is an accomplished ballet dancer and could have easily achieved the phrase had he wanted (see Fernandes: 2005, p.55). His portrayal of failure is under his control and could have been intricately choreographed. The second technique is for the performer to be placed in a situation where failure is inevitable and beyond the performer's control. Cathy Naden in *My Eyes Were Like the Stars* (2001) is a good example. Here the failure to complete the given task is genuine, but the material within the piece is still achieved - i.e. her inability to speak coherently was the desired result. In my research, I have been more interested in exploring the second of these two models.

Whilst making *Ne Pleure Pas, Alfred* I became fascinated by the possibilities of using challenging phasing tasks to create a specific performing state for the performer in the moment of performance. This was principally used in the ‘phasing’ material performed by Sadler (see chapter 2.4.5). In *Apologetics I*, I asked Webber to play multiphonics that were deliberately unstable and not guaranteed to sound clearly. I was drawn by the vulnerability of her reactions in the fascinating moments when the multiphonics begin to slide away from her, her struggle to retain the note, and the fractured beauty of the resulting sounds.

As a devising director, the central challenge for me was to set a task that was conceivably achievable, but in practice was either highly unstable or unsustainable over the duration I asked for. This allows the performer to engage only with the challenge of the task and not with the acoustic effect. In exploring these tasks, it was important to me that the performers were completely aware of what I was interested in achieving, that they were comfortable with the task, and that they didn’t fake the experience.

In *Water Music* I used both approaches to failure: the representation of past failures and placing the performer in an unstable task. These explorations of failure were chiefly focused on the Exhalation Solo - at 5’25” in the video (see figure 5.3). The opening pitch of the solo is an example of a representation of past failure. The performing technique recreates autobiographical memories of the sounds I used to make while learning to play the trumpet. Like Mercy in *Bandoneon*, I am completely in control of the effect of this failure. The rest of the solo is an example of placing the performer in an unstable task. The underlying task is to attempt to play increasingly higher pitches in a harmonic series until I completely run out of breath. As the solo progresses, the sound becomes thinner and less supported as I physically reach the end of my breath. I used the effect of failures in this solo to underscore the use of breath in the production of trumpet sounds - relating the physical act of performing to the autobiographical ideas behind the work.

5.3 Theoretical Aspects Arising from the use of Autobiography

The use of autobiography in a devising context has several effects on the nature of the process and performance. In this section, I want to outline two aspects of the creation of *Water Music* where these effects had a particular resonance: the concept of representation and the process of structuring and composing.

5.3.1 Representation

When a memory from one’s personal history is developed through a devising process, it necessarily changes from the historical event to become an abstracted representation of that moment - a “symbolic reconstruction of the dancer’s experience” (Fernandes: 2005, p.93). This is because even the most direct translation of an autobiographical memory has to be fitted within the larger structure of the piece - to work within the context of the performance. Problems can arise if the performance material changes so much that it becomes divorced from its autobiographical origins in the mind of the

performer. If this happens, then the material could have originated from anywhere, with no connections to the performer and the devising process would become merely a way to generate material without altering the essential relationship between performer and performance. Elizabeth LeCompte actively looks out for this distancing effect in her rehearsals, saying that when she asks to “stop someone, it means I don’t feel the actor has invested the performance with the person of herself. It doesn’t have to be natural, just some part of the person is invested that I can recognize as that particular person” (LeCompte in Yablonsky and LeCompte: 1991, pp.42-45). However, it is important to recognise that there is a real level of representation going on within the ‘symbolic reconstructions’ of previous experiences. LeCompte notes that: “Richard [Schechner]³⁶ felt that you had to feel an emotion in order to convey it. He wanted people to actually experience an emotion before an audience. I believed that an actor didn’t have to feel an emotion in order to express it” (LeCompte in Champagne: 1981, p.20).

Within *Water Music*, representation allowed me to create and perform using some very personal moments from my own autobiography. This is principally because I did not use autobiography as a performance tool. Therefore, although our performances are driven by our connection to autobiographical moments, the autobiography is not directly readable in the performance. Perhaps the most explicit use of representation in *Water Music* is the Suspension material (see figure. 5.3 at 5’09”). This section is a representation of the ritual practice. We chose not to perform the ritual practice for real in the performance as it takes a long time to achieve, and it is physically draining. I felt, as LeCompte did, that we did not need to experience the practice live in order to express it. In many ways we could express the internal feelings of performing the ritual practice better through representation than we could through enacting the ritual within the piece.

5.3.2 Composition and Structuring

Because of the focus on autobiography in *Water Music*, the majority of the project was spent exploring the generation and development of material. I did not begin to consider how the material might fit together until a very late stage in the process. Many of the materials were derived from related tasks, and so had similar or related elements. For example, the breathing notes task led to the Face-Painting task, which in turn led to the Breathing Phrase. The Breathing Phrase itself is equally related to the violin phrases and the text. However, I wanted to find deeper connections between the materials to underpin the structure of the piece. Dance and theatrical traditions have a very specific definition for the term ‘composition’ which I found useful for conceptualising my structuring process. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau describe composition as: “putting together raw material into a form that is repeatable, theatrical, communicative and dramatic” (Bogart and Landau: 2005, p.137). Here composition is seen as a form of compositing - juxtaposing blocks of material to construct a meaningful whole. The blocks of material will react to their new positions within the whole, but the core of the material will remain essentially the same. This is a very different approach to constructing materials to fit a predetermined structure. This approach to composition is mentioned in connection to all three of my principal models, but the application is particularly clear in the work of Pina Bausch. Renate Klett, for example,

³⁶ Richard Schechner was the founder and director of The Performance Group, the precursor to the Wooster Group. Elizabeth LeCompte worked as his assistant director - see Chapter 1.4.1 for more details.

remembers seeing Bausch with a pile of papers, each with the title of a different material written on it, literally arranging and rearranging them to find a structure (see Klett in Climenhaga: 2013, p.78).

The compositing process of *Water Music* began after we had found most of the material we would use. I would arrange and rearrange the materials we were developing trying to discover how the materials could fit together. When I had fixed a structure, I would bring it into the rehearsal to see if we could find, within our performance, the relationships I had envisaged when constructing my plan. Several ideas that appear to be progressions in the performance were in fact created independently, then fitted together. For example, in the performance the Breathing Phrase seems to generate the Full Phrase - whereas in fact the Breathing Phrase was created much later during the composition phase in order to create a link between the Suspension, Face-Painting and the violin phrases. When the materials were placed within the structure, our aesthetic ideas about the piece developed new dimensions. This is because we began to find new links between the materials that both strengthened our understanding of the deep-level mechanics of the piece and created new meanings within the existing materials. The compositing process, therefore, both found new meanings in the piece, and clarified the materials that we were exploring. The materials reacted and changed in response to each other and to their newly emerging meanings.

5.4 Summary

In developing *Water Music* I was interested in investigating what it would be like to perform materials drawn from my personal history. This forced me to focus on the human elements that underpin the processes. This was something that I had not fully appreciated previously. This focus forced me to explore fewer materials, but to a greater depth. In the end, I feel that by having a greater focus on fewer materials benefitted the clarity of the performances. The process of *Water Music* also developed the laboratory techniques, began in *Apologetics 1*, to include a more social element in the approach. I began to see materials as not just the acoustic effect of a task, but as a link between the performer and the piece. It therefore became increasingly important for me to preserve and cultivate the bond between the material and the performers in a deeper way than I had using the interpretative method of *The Carter Piece* and *Apologetics 1*. The use of autobiography allowed me to achieve this and opened up new perspectives on the issues of composition, replication, failure and performance within devising in general and my particular approach to it.

Apologetics 3

Changing the Performer's Paradigm

In the beginning when we were still finding the process from ground zero. That was difficult. We have come a long way from there I feel.

(Fontane Liang: Appendix A, p.94)

At the core of the devising model is the performers' relationship to the material they perform. During the process material is first drawn from the performer, and later re-expressed by them as performance. The previous chapter (5) explored how material can be drawn from the performer. This final chapter examines how the performers' relationship to the material can be explored in performance.

This chapter is in four sections:

- The first section is an overview of the extended project *Apologetics*, which was continually developed throughout my research.
- The second section is an outline of *Apologetics 3* focusing on techniques I used to investigate changing the performer paradigm in my work.
- The third section is a durational comparison of six performances of *Apologetics 3*, exploring how the change in performer paradigm manifested in the performances.
- The final section examines the performer paradigm in devised practices, with reference to both established companies and my own research.

Apologetics 3 is a concert work for harp and bass clarinet, created in collaboration with, and performed by, Fontane Liang and Charlotte Webber.

6.1 Towards *Apologetics 3*

The *Apologetics* project began in my first year of study with *Apologetics 1* (covered in chapter 4) and continued through many stages of development and exploration through to *Apologetics 3* - created and performed in my last year of research (2012). The *Apologetics* project can be used to trace the maturation of my devising technique throughout my research period. In this section I will briefly explore four auxiliary pieces that arose from this project using them to illustrate significant developments in my understanding and use of devising approaches.

6.1.1 *Stabat Soror* (2010)

The first project from *Apologetics* was a solo concert performance of the *Stabat Soror* section (opening bass clarinet solo) from *Apologetics 1*. Working with Charlotte Webber, the material was rearranged and refocused to create a more self-contained structure. Extracting a single section of a pre-created work and re-contextualising it as a new performance is a relatively common practice within

theatrical devising models. For example, Forced Entertainment's durational work *12 am: Awake & Looking Down* (1993) consisted of "a single sequence from *Emanuelle Enchanted* [1992] extended for a period of eleven hours" (Helmer in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004 p.52).

With hindsight, I can see that *Stabat Soror* had several problems in creation and performance. I believe that these problems essentially relate to its position as an extract of a longer work, performed independently of that work. I believe that I did not have enough directorial experience at the time to achieve the necessary distance from the principal work, *Apologetics 1* (which was still being created), in order to create a self-sufficient piece from elements of that work. I would have needed to be more ruthless in altering the materials, content and structure to fit its new context. Although the piece was by no means a failure, I realised that I would have to learn how to step out of the process and see the material as it would appear to someone experiencing the piece for the first time. This is what Susan Letzler Cole describes as seeing "things as 'the Other'" (Letzler Cole, 1992, p.106).

6.1.2 *Apologetics 2 (Sketches and Improvisations) (2011)*

In creating *Apologetics 1* we had worked hard to set the material with intricate detail. This allowed the performers certainty in the content during performance, but it had also begun to distance them from the creative origins of the piece. After the performance in February 2011, I wanted to find a way of re-engaging the performers with the material. I therefore felt that I needed to break the relationship between the material and the structures of *Apologetics 1*. I began by asking the performers to improvise using aspects of what they liked or remembered of the material. These improvisations were completely free apart from these basic instructions, and with a rough duration of fifteen minutes. As the material was completely divorced from the structure of *Apologetics 1*, the performers were free to focus on how and what they were performing in the moment. The improvisations were given the title *Apologetics 2 (Sketches and Improvisations)*. We presented this twice as part of an installation/performance, alongside a projection also taken from *Apologetics 1*. An excerpt of this performance can be seen as example 6.1.³⁷

I did not include the performances of *Apologetics 2* in my submitted works, as I do not consider these as strictly devised works. These were improvisations with no structural planning or shaping of material on my part. I consider them to be a useful exercise in the *Apologetics* project and a fruitful part of our laboratory process. It was also important for the musicians to perform these improvisations in front of an audience, as it helped them to leave behind the details of *Apologetics 1* and to re-discover the core ideas of the material.

Many devised performances are intricately set, and performed within strict parameters. For example, the recent Forced Entertainment performances *The Coming Storm* (2012) and *Tomorrow's Parties* (2013) have completely fixed text. This is because they often have to be performed with subtitles (as discussed by the performers in after-show talks on 20th June 2012 and 20th November 2013). Even within this restriction, the performers find ways of adapting the performance each night. In *Apologetics 1*, I found that detailed setting gave the performers a comforting certainty, but I think that the performers and I

³⁷ given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_6.html

were not experienced enough to retain and perform clear connections to the creative impetuses through such dense setting. *Apologetics 2* allowed me to revitalise the material we had been working with.

6.1.3 *Repeat Indefinitely* (2012)

Repeat Indefinitely was a performance in the form of a lecture. The project has three principal layers of material: a development of the ‘whispers’ exercise from *Apologetics 1* (see chapter 4.1.2), a series of ‘question’ tasks set and performed by the musicians, and a lecture text spoken by myself in a ‘lecturer’ persona.³⁸ The Whispers task was developed from its laboratory origins into an audience interaction task. The musicians asked individual audience members a series of questions (typically about childhood memories). They would then perform a short personalised improvisation based on the responses the audience member gave. The text is a poetic description of a series of issues around devising music that we investigated in rehearsals. I also invited Jennifer Carter to perform sections of *The Carter Piece* to open and close the piece.

Repeat Indefinitely marked a significant change in my rehearsal practice. I became much more focused on the performers’ experience of the process - trying to find ways of redefining the composer-performer relationship in our rehearsals. To explore this, I used ‘question tasks’ - an approach inspired by Pina Bausch (see chapter 1.4.2). As *Repeat Indefinitely* was a lecture-performance about devising music, I wanted to use questions that explored the issues we faced as devising musicians. We developed a series of abstract questions that would form the conceptual backbone of the second section of the performance. Rehearsals were focussed around finding ways of presenting answers to these questions musically. Example 6.2³⁹ is a video from an early rehearsal. In this extract, the musicians are finding ways of answering versions of the question: ‘what notes should I play?’ - a question originally posed by Liang. The question quickly goes through several formulations, ending with Liang performing an answer to the original question, and Webber performing an answer to a related question: ‘do I need to play notes?’ This short rehearsal extract also includes a typical intervention by me in Liang’s improvisation. As Liang begins to play, I hear her gradually accumulate notes (possibly unconsciously). I am fascinated by this as an answer to ‘what notes should I play?’ - so I ask her to add the accumulation task to her improvisation.

Repeat Indefinitely was principally a theatrical work. The emphasis was on the semantic content of the lecture and on the performative qualities of the musicians, rather than on the musical content - which was not as developed as I would have liked. For this reason, I did not include this piece as part of my doctoral submissions. However, I found the creative process of the project was more satisfying than previous projects. I greatly enjoyed the more open rehearsals, which were based as much on discussion and opinion as they were on playing. I continued to develop this approach in my subsequent projects *Water Music* and *Apologetics 3*.

³⁸ This text can be seen online at: http://doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Repeat_Indefinitely_Text.html

³⁹ given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_6.html

6.1.4 *Take Me Back and Leave Me There* (2013)

My approach to creating and setting tasks changed significantly over the four-year *Apologetics* project. Initially, I was interested in creating complexity through gradually adding layers of rules onto the tasks I set. I would then alter and discard the rules freely as I searched for a sound result I liked. This was particularly evident during the creation of the Game section in *Apologetics 1*. The musicians found this approach confusing and creatively stifling. Webber recalls: “The first few games [in *Apologetics 1*] were much more complex [...]. And the structures were changing each time. I found that really hard” (Webber: appendix A p.91). And Liang remembers thinking:

Oh my god, I spent such a long time trying to get my head around it. It’s not that I couldn’t do it; it’s just that there was a huge resistance and inertia. You have to put in a lot of effort, not even to do it, but just to understand it [...] then you would drop the section.

Liang: Appendix A p.94

The experience of the performer’s dislocation and confusion in *Apologetics 1* when confronted by an overly complicated structure and too many imposed details led me to reconsider my priorities within the process. I had been approaching the compositional process as I might a notated score - setting myself a task, then layering details and complexity into it. In some respects I was effectively challenging the musicians to memorise a score I was verbally creating and editing in the moment. I realised that devising required a different approach, where details are carefully grown through collaboration. Devising derives its complexity in a large part from the performers, not by imposing it onto them. Some materials required a lot of rehearsal time before they started to reveal their potential. Throughout the *Apologetics* project I increasingly set simpler tasks and devoted longer rehearsal time to exploring them. I would encourage the musicians to find details in their playing through discussion and by creating a clear aesthetic structure for each task. *Take Me Back and Leave Me There* is a good example of a simpler task taken from late in the research.

Take Me Back began as a laboratory task exploring listening and finding complexity in repetition. I invited the physical-theatre actress Vanio Papadelli to work with us for a few rehearsals. I asked Papadelli to perform sections of Greek and English text from her previous works: *Phantom Limb* (2010) and *The Air Changes The Colour of Things Here* (2009). The musicians’ task was to choose a short section of text as it was spoken and imitate it on their instruments. They would then loop this imitation, exploring how they could change details in their sound in response to the group as a whole. As we explored this exercise, I asked the musicians to choose shorter and shorter phrases, ending with them choosing phrases of only one or two words. During the task, the musicians would find a phrase, repeat it for a short while, and then find a new one. They also occasionally reversed the order of notes, or altered the octaves of their pitches. The simplicity of these short phrases allowed the musicians to find more details than when they had longer sequences to remember. A rehearsal of this exercise can be seen as example 6.3⁴⁰. After recording *Apologetics 3* we set and performed this task as a short piece under the title *Take Me Back and Leave Me There* (2013).

⁴⁰ given on DVD 3, and also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_6.html

6.2 *Apologetics 3* Overview

Apologetics 3 was created with six sections: Waste Land, The Soldiers, The Mother 1, The Mother 2, The Sisters, and The Game. Each section uses techniques drawn from our laboratory practice, which employ different approaches to performer freedom within a structured performance. In this section, I explore these techniques and how they function, beginning with a short overview of the general structure of the piece.

6.2.1 Structure:

In most devising projects the creation of the structure is a process that occurs after the creation of the material (see chapter 5.3.2). However, when I began work on *Apologetics 3*, I already had a solid groundwork of the material from *Apologetics 1* and the subsequent laboratory work. Therefore I decided to begin by creating a loose structure, and then form the work around this. My initial plan was to create a stronger narrative arc by moving away from using the plot of the play, *Apologetics* (2009), as a structural framework. In the text, the characters of the sisters are trapped inside themselves, rendering them mute and passive. As the play develops events happen to the sisters, changing the world around them. Yet they are unable to break free from their helpless condition. For *Apologetics 3* I wanted to create a new narrative where the sisters can finally emerge from their passivity to regain their childhood state. I began by giving each section a name drawn from characters or descriptions in the play and a short outline of plot, mostly drawn from the play text. These condensed plot fragments shaped the piece towards the final child-like game section. I then gave each section a question drawn from our work on *Repeat Indefinitely*, and an overview of my musical ideas for the section. I then began work with the musicians, spending the first few rehearsals exploring, discussing, altering and setting this plan. The plan we had developed at the end of this process is given as figure 6.1.

Title	Rough Duration	Notes	Pitch material	Plot	Question
Waste Land	4 mins	The sound is gradually drawn from the performers There must never be a silence Each sound must be an extension and evolution of what went before Static / unstable heartbeat- like sounds / breath sounds / multiphonics / Chords made by brushing rather than plucking the harp strings. also sounds that are hard to hear as well. starting with Webber's long note and in-breath	mostly sounds with Liang isolated lullaby pitches	Two sisters exist in a waste land - that is all they do. They struggle to express their trauma that was caused by an unseen event	What is music for us?
The Soldiers	1 min	Loud and frightening. Clarinet chords, pulses and echoes on harp. Aggressive and not pleasant.	Liang pitchless material - Webber two multiphonics	The sisters are buffeted by the aftershocks of the event	Does the audience have to understand the plot to understand the emotion?
The Mother 1	2.5 mins	Liang Solo: Same as opening of old solo until full melody (childlike and innocent) Then fragmentation to silence. Webber quiet counterpoint of breath sounds and low/high pitches	pitches from the solo	One sister remembers her mother and briefly escapes the trauma/shock	Does the audience have to be there?
The Mother 2	1.5 mins	Webber Solo: Screaming to life. Remembering the lullaby through the ghost notes and solo sounds. Liang solo chords as background?	same	The second sister remembers the mother singing lullabys	Do we recreate or create moments in performance?
The Sisters	2.5 mins	Transition section. Using the lullaby the sisters come to life. They start to play with the lullaby and remember its true (faster) form.	lullaby + spare pitches	The sisters find each other and begin to recover	Do we need to know why we play?
The Game	3 mins	Copying game' of two pitches, moves into 'following game'. Swap roles and reverse.	pitches only	The sisters use each other to regain their lost childhood by playing a game.	Why do we perform?

figure 6.1 *Apologetics 3* plan

The structure of *Apologetics 3* was a great deal less complex than previous structures we had worked with. This was a reflection of my increasing inclination towards simpler formal structures, favouring instead musical complexity arising from the musicians' interactions in performance. The simplicity of the structure allowed the musicians to concentrate on the flow of material as it was performed. Webber notes that: "When you have got [the structure] mapped in your head, you can let go and really think about what you are playing - in a good way" (Webber: Appendix A, p.93).

6.2.2 Waste Land and The Sisters: Autobiography and Waypoints

When we made *Apologetics 1*, I based the characters and material around the play text. This decision caused some friction in the process as the performers felt as though they were being asked to act – a skill for which they had had no training.

The thing that I have always found hardest is doing the acting stuff, because I just haven't been trained to do it at all. It's not that I'm against it; it's just out of my comfort zone. Because to me, the way I perform music is in a very genuine way. I try to perform it as myself.

Webber: appendix A, p.93

For *Apologetics 3*, I wanted to explore an approach based on the Wooster Group's work, where the character is mixed with the performer's autobiography and personality. To achieve this I drew on my experiences with *Water Music* (Chapter 5), developing new autobiographical techniques. An example of this is the 'rain work' exercises I used as part of the Waste Land section.

I began by asking the musicians to describe a childhood memory of rain. At this point Papadelli had joined us in the studio. This gave us three very different memories of rain: Papadelli from Greece, Webber from the United Kingdom, and Liang from Singapore. I asked the performers to explore the different ways they could describe the rain memory: through smell, sound, simile, contextual memories, etc. We then found ways of describing these aspects of the memories through musical material. At the end of this process, each of the performers had several sections of rain material developed from their own memories. This material did not have a specific structure or definitive content, but could be described as a series of 'performance states'.

I developed a technique I called 'waypoints' to link these various performance states together. The waypoints technique begins with performers inhabiting a single performance state. They then find ways of bringing in elements of the next performance state until they have fully transitioned between them. From this performance state they then transition to the next and so on. Each performance state becomes a waypoint in the structure of the material. To create the Waste Land section I set the order of each musician's performance states. We would then run the section, and I would make adjustments to the speed of the transitions and order of the materials. The performers would also add their own comments and suggestions. Although the performers trace independent paths through the material, they are aware of each other's material and are careful to adjust their performance to complement that of the other.

I used the waypoints technique again in The Sisters section. In this section I needed to find a way of connecting The Mother 2 material with the opening of the Game section. The basic material for both performers is based on the Lullaby material from *Apologetics 1*. The performers begin this section in the aesthetic world of their respective solo sections. As the section progresses, they use the waypoints technique to transition to the opening of the Game section. Like all waypoint-based sections, the performers found strategies and approaches that would enable them to achieve this reliably. The Game section begins with Webber sounding a single pitch repeatedly. I was always interested in the authenticity of the moment between Webber beginning the Game and Liang realising and joining in. Webber always judged the moment to begin the Game based on when she felt this effect could best be achieved.

6.2.3 The Soldiers and The Mother: The Individual and Physical-Semantic Models in *Apologetics 3*

Throughout my research I have focused on ways of allowing the individual performers to be identifiable as themselves within a performance. The performer inhabits a persona created from aspects of their own personality, skills and history, and filtered through the interests of the project and director. The very best performers are readily recognisable by their presence, voice or content of their material. Spalding Gray of the Wooster Group and Dominique Mercy of Tanztheater Wuppertal are clear examples of this.

Throughout my research I have looked to find ways of achieving the same level of recognisability in my performers. This has proved difficult for several reasons, not least because it takes many years to develop strong personas. Also I felt that the standardised instrumental design we use created a reduced range of individualisation compared to the human speaking voice. I made an early decision not to rely on spoken semantic communication to create personas in my research, as I wanted to concentrate on the musical communication of the work. I was therefore restricted in the use of this effective identifier. We did explore other ways of creating identifiable personas on stage as part of the process in both *Apologetics 1* and *3*, such as physicality. However, these approaches also require extensive time and experience to use effectively.

Throughout the *Apologetics* project we made some progress towards creating a persona-based performing practice. To achieve this I developed a variety of approaches. The first idea I developed was to base the material we created on the personality of the performer, as I perceived it. I used this approach during the creation of *Apologetics 1*, and the effect is still observable in The Mother 1 section of *Apologetics 3*. This solo was built up around Liang's natural ability with mathematical structures, and can be contrasted with The Mother 2 section, built around Webber's more instinctive approach. This creative technique is effective, but I found I tended to impose material that I thought would fit the performers – this either led them to using uncomfortable material, or it did not challenge them as creators.

My second approach was to leave the material open to allow the performers more freedom to make decisions in performance. This approach can be seen in The Mother 2 section. Here Webber uses the Lullaby material from *Apologetics 1*, but is free to discover new ways of playing that material in the

moment. However, the more we practised this approach, the more fixed it became. It was important to remind the performers to explore the material during the performance.

Whilst developing *Water Music*, I discovered a third approach - which was to find a physical, rather than mental, relationship to the material. I found that, as a performer, if I stopped defining my material by pitch, duration, dynamics or timbre, I could use a more instinctive conception of how the material should feel and sound in performance. This instinctive approach could be fine-tuned by watching videos of my performance, or getting feedback from an outside eye. By working this way I could discover how the material I wanted to use should feel or sound as I played it. Then, in performance, I would search for this feeling. In *Water Music* I refined this approach by reducing the performance variables I was using. I ended up using a single trumpet fingering – which produces pitches from only one harmonic series. This allowed me to focus on the effect my pitch had on the performance, rather than on the pitch itself.

In *Apologetics 3* I applied versions of this approach across the process, with a special emphasis on the Soldiers section. In this section we concentrated on creating a physical relationship to the material – focussing on the uncomfortable screaming and panicking nature of the material. I also reduced the variables the performers used in this section – Webber to a pair of repeated multiphonics and Liang to the ‘static’ rhythm from *Apologetics 1* played in various ways. Liang also used harmonics to pre-empt the sound world of her solo (The Mother 1). The section is also structurally static, it does not evolve or arrive at any new ideas - the section simply exists in a single performance state. The static nature of the section meant that the performers could concentrate on their sonic interaction without worrying about guiding the performance towards the next section.

It took us a long time to build the skills and language to begin to find identifiable expressions of ourselves in performance. We achieved much, but there is still more I would like to discover in this area. Individualisation is not always desired or achieved, even in the established devising traditions of dance and theatre. The company aesthetic often dictates many aspects of a performer’s persona leaving performers struggling to find their identity within a strong performance tradition. As I progress with my work, I would like to find new ways of finding and supporting different performer’s personas within my projects.

6.2.4: The Game: Laboratory Techniques and Fields of Possibility

Games are one of the most common and effective devising techniques, as they often highlight the performer’s interaction – with the performers’ genuine reactions frequently becoming part of the aesthetic. Forced Entertainment’s durational work regularly takes the form of a game. For example, in *And on the Thousandth Night* (2000) performers must tell a story until instructed to stop by another performer, who then begins their own story (see Naden: 2011, and Forced Entertainment: 2010). Occasionally a performer will be unexpectedly left to continue a story beyond what they had prepared for – in these moments the performer experiences a genuine “knife edge” (O’Connor: 2011) performance state.

In *Apologetics 3* I wanted to finish the work with a game to exaggerate the journey between the opening Waste Land material and the childlike ending. The Game section consists of two intertwined games. In the first Liang attempts to play the same pitch as Webber, who must play only one pitch, but can alter the octave she plays it in.⁴¹ In the second game Liang attempts to imitate the style of Webber's playing. The games are then reversed with Liang leading. The games in *Apologetics 3* differ from those used in *Apologetics 1*. In *Apologetics 1* the Game section comprised several set game tasks. These tasks had started as games, but had become set during the rehearsal process. The games in *Apologetics 3* were genuine games, where the performers were following simple rules, and trying to outwit each other for as long as possible.

The Game section uses a creative technique I developed and used throughout my research which I call 'fields of possibility'. I begin with a very open task, or occasionally an improvisation. After each performed response, the performers and I would discuss what we liked and what we did not – gradually finding the aesthetic core of the section. As director and an outside eye, I would lead these discussions and have the final say on any decisions we took. Gradually over several rehearsals, the 'fields of possibility' of the responses would become more defined and detailed. As this happened the aesthetic core of the material would also become clearer. Using this technique I was able to define materials to a greater or lesser extent as was required. This technique was based on the 'nice cop / nasty cop' process as described by Tim Etchells (see chapter 1.4.3).

I see the Game section as the culmination of four years of laboratory work. The performers combine their complicity practice with their personas, using detailed leading and following techniques and their embodied aesthetic knowledge to perform a section that is always recognisable, yet never the same twice.

6.3 *Apologetics 3* in Performance

In this section I compare six performances of *Apologetics 3* to investigate how the strategies for changing the performer paradigm, outlined in section 6.2, affected the performances. *Apologetics 3* was performed five times during the video recording session (20th December 2012), and once at a live event (6th February 2013). During the video recording session I encouraged the performers to focus on their in-the-moment interactions, and less on following the structure of the piece. I believed that the combination of the simplified structure and the intensive rehearsals had allowed the performers to learn the structure to an instinctive level. The performers never strayed from the structure of the piece, but there were significant differences between the six performances.

For this comparison I use duration as an indicator of the range of flexibility within the performances. Duration is a useful tool to measure changes between performances as it is easy to measure accurately, unlike timbre or phrasing for example. I believe that changes in duration correlate directly with the range of flexibility in the performances. The performers themselves cite changes in duration as an

⁴¹ Occasionally the performers get excited and play more than one pitch at this point, but I feel that this only adds to the aesthetic of the Game section.

indicator of changes in other performance qualities, noting that the nature of the performances “changed and that was nice. The lengths of things would change. That means that you are actually performing it properly. If it is always the same duration, then you are not doing it properly” (Webber, in appendix A, p.99). To illustrate the range of flexibility I include videos of three performances: an annotated version of the submitted performance (example 6.4), an alternative performance from the video recording session (example 6.5), and the live performance (example 6.6).⁴² These videos are given as: track 4, track 2, and ‘live performance’ respectively in figure 6.2 below.

Track		Section						Total
		Waste Land	Soldiers	The Mother 1 (harp)	The Mother 2 (bass clarinet)	The Sisters	The Game	
1		04:18	00:52	02:43	01:42	03:19	03:41	16:35
2 - alternative		04:32	01:02	02:46	01:36	04:23	02:35	16:54
3		03:58	00:36	02:30	01:04	03:36	03:22	15:06
4 - submitted		04:27	00:55	02:41	01:26	02:56	03:18	15:43
5		03:16	00:46	02:38	00:59	02:22	03:27	13:28
live performance		03:49	00:47	02:42	00:46	02:32	02:10	12:46
maximum difference	as a duration	01:16	00:26	00:16	00:56	02:01	01:31	04:08
	as a percentage of longest duration	27.9%	41.9%	9.6%	54.9%	46.0%	41.2%	24.5%
Average Duration		04:03	00:50	02:40	01:15	03:11	03:06	15:05

figure 6.2: Comparisons of Durations in *Apologetics 3* performances

- all durations are in minutes and seconds

Figure 6.2 shows the duration of each of the six sections of *Apologetics 3* compared across the six performances. The table also shows the longest version of each section (given in red) and the shortest (given in green). The difference between these versions is given both as an absolute duration, and as a percentage of the longer performance. The average duration of each section is also calculated at the foot of each column. The same durational analysis is given to the total durations of each performance.

The effect of the performance strategies can be clearly seen in the variation of durations between the takes. The Mother 1 section had the least variation as the material was directly taken from *Apologetics 1*. No new performance strategies were used in the material, and the section still retained a high level of setting and detail from our work on *Apologetics 1*. This can be contrasted with the Sisters section, which features the largest durational change as an absolute value. This section used a waypoint technique to traverse the disparate musical worlds of The Mother 2 and the Game, and therefore needed to take as long as was necessary in each performance. Despite the lack of audience, each take had a very different character. This is reflected in the general variation in overall duration. The longest take (track 2) is a full four minutes longer than the shortest (the live performance). This variation of nearly 25% is a clear indicator of the performers reacting to the unfolding nature of each performance. With the addition of an audience there is scope for even greater variation within this piece as the performers respond to the audiences’ reactions. This is an aspect of performance that can be encouraged and developed in future work.

⁴² These are all given on DVD 3, and are also available online at: doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Chapter_6.html

6.4 The Performer's Paradigm in Devised Performance

Performers in devised music projects might not consider themselves to be composers, but undeniably they have a creative role to play. In this section I explore devising projects from the performer's perspective. Drawing on both my own experience as a devising performer, and that of the musicians from the *Apologetics* project, I explore the performer's relationship to both the creative process and to performance – with particular regard to their relationship with the audience. The section is in three parts:

- The first is an overview of various approaches to framing the performer's role in performances.
- The second, an examination of my research from the performer's point-of-view.
- The third explores the concepts of ownership and trust as developed within my research.

6.4.1 An Overview of the Performer in Devised Processes

When I began my research, I was interested in examining the audience's reaction to music created through a devising process. Both The Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment have clearly stated intentions to create specific audience interactions with their work. LeCompte is interested in each member of the audience having a unique experience of the performance (see Savran: 1988, p.53), whereas Etchells is interested in the spectator becoming complicit in the performance through the role of 'witness' (see Etchells: 1999, pp.17-18 and Malzacher, in Helmer and Malzacher: 2004, pp.121-135). In my own practice, I became increasingly aware that it would be extremely difficult to define or quantify a specific difference in audience perception between music created by devising and music created through other processes. I do however believe that devising creates a distinctive interaction with the audience, and that this is made possible by the unique relationship between the performers and the project. As my research developed, I became more interested in exploring the relationships between the performers and the piece, process, and performance. I began to see the performers as dynamic, living scores, able to embody a conception of the piece that was both precise and flexible. From this idea I became interested in creating a form of precision in performance that did not rely on a detailed definition of the performative outcome, but was instead based on a shared understanding of the essential elements of the material.

The performers working in Forced Entertainment, Tanztheater Wuppertal and The Wooster Group have a distinctive conception of their role within the companies and projects. These performers display a strong sense of collective ownership of the work, often representing the work to the press or academics (see Quick: 2007). Although they will usually display a deep understanding of the director's vision, performers will commonly express a unique personal view of the work, both during the process (see Letzler Cole: 1992), and after. Within the process, each performer's sense of individual identity, along with a sense of group identity, are important foundations of their practice (see Fernandes: 2005 and Climenhaga: 2009). None of these attributes are unique to devising performers, but there is a strong sense that many devising practices are dependant on a mixture of collaborative responsibility, individual perspectives and self-identification.

I wanted to change the relationship I had with performers in order to engage fully with this aspect of the devising performance paradigm. I wanted to move their role within the project away from that of an interpreter, to one of collaborative ownership of the process, project and performance.

6.4.2 Creating and Performing Devised Music

To explore the relationship between the performers and the process I held an informal interview with the musicians from *Apologetics 3*. The full text of the interview is given as Appendix A (p.87). I have divided this section into two parts exploring the primary experiences of a devising performer: creating and performing. Each part outlines some key ideas that the performers raised in the interview.

Creating:

I was interested in which qualities the performers considered important for their devising practice. The performers emphasised the concept of ownership in the project saying: “You need to know your boundaries” (Liang: Appendix A, p.93), and you need to “not be afraid to say when you don’t think something is good” (Liang: *ibid.* p.94). It was important for me that the performers kept a sense of their own ideas, interests and styles within the process. We worked to create a group aesthetic without losing our identities within the project. Liang noted that a performer’s self-awareness can be explored within the process, as well as affirmed by it: “You need to know your limits as well. So that you can either push it, or know that something is not going to work.” (Liang: *ibid.* p.93). However, the relationship between the performer’s sense of ownership and the director’s power of veto can be a source of friction. Webber acknowledged this whilst identifying a key skill for devising performers as an ability to let go of ideas that are rejected saying:

There is that thing as well, about not minding that you [the director] have got the last say. You have to be able to not take it personally. It’s not our piece, it’s your piece; we are just helping you find it. Each idea we bring is just a spark. Like saying: ‘what about this?’ If it doesn’t work, then it doesn’t work.

Webber: *ibid.*, p.93

As much as the performers engage with the ideas of the director, the director must balance the relationship by supporting and guiding the performers. Webber noted that: “Sometimes I want to be told what to do. [...] Then if we disagree we will tell you.” (Webber: *ibid.*, p.96).

Within my process I was determined never to give the performers notated material to learn. This avoided the temptation to fix material early and dilute the performer’s connection to the process. To begin with, both performers found this problematic, as it went against their previous experience of relating to music. Webber remembered that during the making of *Apologetics 1*: “I was always a bit unsure. It was partly my fault as I have a bad memory, so I need stuff written down.” (Webber: *ibid.*, p.88). The performers developed strategies for remembering materials, such as relating geometric shapes to sections of the Game section in *Apologetics 1*: “We made shapes to help us remember. We used them to help us remember what to do next.” (Liang: *ibid.*, p.95). The performers were always

allowed to create and make their own scores of the material as it was developed.⁴³ I always recorded each rehearsal, with either audio or video. I would use these recordings as documentation and to help me plan the subsequent rehearsals. I rarely showed these recordings to the musicians, as I wanted them to engage with the task and not with the result. This is a decision I am still unsure about, as I might have found an effective way of using the recordings with the performers. The performers certainly felt so:

I think that we could use the recordings more. If we do something that you like, then we could record it, then we have it. Because that is half the problem, I forget things. Whereas, if you could specifically pin down bits and record those bits.

Webber: *ibid.* p.96

I found that when I examined recordings of moments I had liked in a rehearsal, the recordings frequently seemed flat and uninspiring. The energy I had enjoyed live did not come across in the recording. I therefore became interested in capturing the impulses that created the moment, rather than any specific musical result. However, in my work on *Water Music* (chapter 5), I did use video recordings. This is because I was acting as both director and performer, and using video recording enabled me to get an outside eye on my material. Using recordings in rehearsal is certainly a common approach amongst devising dance and theatre companies, and one that I still think carefully about using.

As a performer and director, I have always found the most difficult stage of a devising process to be the creation of the initial material. This can be a lengthy phase where it is often difficult to see where the process is going. With no definitive goal in sight, the rehearsals are often long and draining. Webber recalled experiencing this with the creation process of *Apologetics 1*: “In the first rehearsals, that didn’t really happen, so I left thinking that I don’t really know what we did. It was a long time, and I felt like we had been there for hours and we still don’t know what we are doing.” (Webber: *ibid.* p.95). As the performers and I got more confident with the process, we learnt to flow with the process and work through the difficult rehearsals. As our confidence grew we found we needed fewer markers and details in our material:

The first time that we did it - I think because maybe we didn’t know how to produce it in the end, how to actually perform it - we gave ourselves a lot of things to remember. [...] But as you get used to it, then you relax. You know it well, from past experiences. Having too much detail, to this extent, doesn’t work.

Liang: *ibid.* p.88

The growing confidence in ourselves as performers, creators and repositories of the material meant that we were able to create material that was defined not only by its musical content, but also by the meaning and history the performers attached to it.

You genuinely know the reasoning behind everything you are playing; you know where it has come from and you know why it first happened because you were there. You never

⁴³ Some of these scores can be seen online at: http://doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Performers_Notes.html

have that with any other piece of music in the world. People can sit down and try to work out why notes are there, but they weren't there, they won't know why the notes are there.

Webber, *ibid.* p.98

Performing:

In my experience, devised music stimulates a very distinctive state of mind in performance. I wanted to see if the musicians I worked with had similar performance experiences. Both performers confirmed that there is a different quality to the performing state in devised projects from other music projects they are involved with. Webber described this state as being “much more in the moment” (Webber: appendix A, p.89). They found that being ‘in the moment’ gave them the freedom and security to make spontaneous decisions during performances: “actually when I’m not worrying about so many things, I am more dedicated to what I am playing” (Liang: *ibid.*, p.89). These decisions can be used to steer the performance and react to each situation as it arises:

I don't find that I drift at all mentally, because I'm always judging what I'm going to do on what has happened before. I really like the fact that the piece moves and you can drive it yourself. You can feel where it is building and where it is going.

Webber: *ibid.*, p.89

The reactive performance state is founded on strategies and trust developed through the rehearsal process. Both performers are aware of each other's likely reactions, and have developed techniques for responding together: “there is a lot of trust that is built. You know that whatever happens, even if you have amnesia halfway, you'll be fine as long as you still play your instrument” (Liang: *ibid.* p.90). The trust between the performers is maintained by constant communication: “In the stuff that we do, you have to be listening. If you didn't have aural awareness, you would get lost” (Webber: *ibid.* p.90). Liang noted that, in performance, their “next move depends on the other person” (Liang: *ibid.* p.90) Both Liang and Webber mentioned a specific moment in *Apologetics 3* when the piece transitions between The Mother 2 and The Sisters, as being a moment when they had to react to each other:

There were a couple of times, where we have that weird cue - where I go from my solo into the lullaby [*Apologetics 3* from roughly 9'30" in the video] - and it's really confusing because they sound very similar. And sometimes [...] you'd come in and I was still playing the solo. But that's fine, and I'd just go with it.

Webber: *ibid.* p.91

The performers talked about how the devising process gave them a familiarity with the material that allowed them to explore meaning in performance. Liang noted that: “when you are so clear about these gestures, you are so much more clued-in to looking for meaning in the music. I think devising trains you to always really know what you mean. So that everything you play is meaningful” (Liang: *ibid.* p.98). Webber then qualified this with: “When you play every gesture like you mean it confidently, then you have this [quality of] prediction. And *Apologetics* gives you this.” (Webber: *ibid.* p.99). Both performers felt that they were interacting with the audience during the performance, although both admitted that the audience's reactions were difficult to quantify. The interaction with the audience became an idea in our

creative practice and performance technique: “it’s about finding out how to do that [playing off the audience] within the structure. I think we got quite good at placing things in the piece, and it did change from performance to performance.” (Webber: *ibid.* p.99). Liang stressed that this technique did not come easily: “It took time for us to get to that level” (Liang: *ibid.* p.99)

The feeling of security helps to make performing devised music feel technically undemanding, even when the performers are using complex techniques, such as multiphonics. It was never my intention to write technically demanding music with this process, as I was more interested in why we play, rather than how we play. Both performers stated that the pieces were not particularly challenging to play, although Webber noted that: “I would say it is [...] not hard to play because it has come from us. Even though you make us do unnatural things, it has always come from us. [...] with *Apologetics*, you start in the centre and you build outwards.” (Webber: *ibid.* p.98). I feel that the use of technically challenging material should never undermine the performer’s ability to access the devising performance state. If the technical challenges come from the performers, they would be unlikely to undermine the performability of the material. As Webber states, even if there were very technically challenging material, it would not feel unnatural as: “It would come from my fingers” (Webber: *ibid.* p.98).

6.4.3 Ownership and Trust in Devising Projects

I was fortunate that in my research I did not encounter any problems with issues of ownership or trust. However these issues are clearly potentially present in any collaborative creative process, such as devising. In this section I will briefly outline how ideas of ownership and trust affect devising projects, and my own approach to these issues.

Like most small-scale work, devising projects are built on relationships that go beyond the merely contractual – although some form of contract underpins most companies. Each member of the group is valued for their unique place within the creative dynamic, developing an *ad hoc* role in the group around their presence, skills and personality. Forced Entertainment presents a good example of this structuring model. Tim Etchells describes himself as a member of the Forced Entertainment collective whose principal role is to write and direct. It is not his company, and he does not claim sole ownership over the works (see Etchells: 1999, pp.15-23). Richard Lowdon is another member of the Forced Entertainment collective whose roles include creating the designs for the pieces and performing. Forced Entertainment’s structural model is, however, rare in contemporary devising companies. Both the Wooster Group and Tanztheater Wuppertal follow a more typical company structure where the director holds a more powerful ownership position than the performers. However, even in these models the performers have a stake in the company and its performances – sometimes taking an active role in the company administration and management. Performers are often free to discuss the work in public in considerable depth. The company members clearly operate on a creative level beyond that of performance technicians.

In my own practice, I have consistently taken the view that the performers own their particular contributions to the work, and that I own the work as a whole. In this model, I would need to seek permission and consensus if I wanted a new performer to play material created by another. However, I

would be free to use the same tasks and approaches to create new material without permission from the original performers. There is a high level of trust operating within the group, which ensures that the performers feel able to express opinions about the process as it develops. In an open atmosphere issues of ownership should be able to be quickly identified and resolved.

Although I did not encounter any problems, ownership and trust remained important ideas within my processes. During my interview with Liang and Webber (appendix A) I asked how they would feel if someone else performed the material they had created with me. Both performers were shocked by the suggestion and reacted with disgust to the idea (see appendix A, p.92). This highlights a clear boundary of trust within our practice. The performers had a well-defined understanding of the group structure, which enabled the development of the group's relationships. Webber described these relationships well when she said:

I know it's our piece as well. But, although we perform it, it remains equal because you have all the concepts. You chose the whole ultimate direction of the piece. If you don't have someone doing that then... That's why us improvising together is something totally different.

Webber: Appendix A, p.92

6.5 Summary

The relationship between fixed material and improvisation within devised projects is often a grey area (see Etchells: 2013b). Some performances are tightly scored with little room for the performers to steer the performances - whereas other performances could be almost seen as free improvisation. The difference between improvisation and devising is always found in the performer's relationship to the material. Devising processes can generate material whose definition is so elusive that its realisations vary wildly from night to night. But however inexpressible, devising material always has a definite meaning for the performers to which they return in every performance - seeking to generate new interactions and new connections. In every performance we search to find the ephemeral moments that might become a lasting memory.

During my research, I have become increasingly interested in developing a performance practice that uses performer freedom to discover and stimulate unique experiences within performances. Although I feel I have made progress in moving towards this, I know that there is much more to explore in this practice.

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Appendix B

Related Compositional Approaches, Practices and Works

My research specifically looks at adapting devised theatre and dance techniques and approaches to the composition of music. Several of the musical outcomes of my research have similar features in process or performance to existing compositional practices. In this appendix I explore the extent to which my research outcomes relate to three categories of music practice:

- In the first section I look at broad compositional approaches
- In the second, individual composers who have used practices related to devising.
- In the third, composers who use techniques that could be considered as devising in their work.

B.1 Related Compositional Practices

This section explores how my processes and outcomes relate to four broad categories of western art music practice: scores with increased performer input, collaborative composition of solos, works created around a group, and creative music workshops (including Backbone composition).

B.1.1 Scores with Increased Performer Input:

There are several methods for incorporating greater performer input within notated traditions. These include: graphic notation, open scores, and improvisations on given material. In the latter, the musicians are normally given a set of pitches and improvise the rhythmic content, or vice versa. These approaches change the role of the performer from someone who primarily ‘realises’ the score, to someone with a significant creative input in the piece. This should be seen as a sliding scale of performer involvement, and not as discrete categories. I should not like to suggest that any piece could be performed without some creative involvement from the performer - as even meticulously scored music, such as Brian Ferneyhough’s, is performed with a degree of interpretation⁴⁵ (see Marsh, 1994). However, in pieces with greater than usual performer involvement (graphic notation, open scores etc.), the performer is obliged to take a more creative role than is habitual in contemporary practice in western art music. Derek Bailey’s research into improvisation in notated and graphic scores makes clear that often the composers have “specific musical expectations of the improvisers” (Bailey: 1992, p.70). For some composers the imprecision of specific musical meaning in the graphic score is the main purpose of using this approach to scoring. Christian Wolff, for example, is not interested in collaborations prior to the creation of the score, but is instead “interested in the working relationship between composer and performer through the medium of the score” (Thomas in Chase and Thomas: 2010, p.211).

⁴⁵ I take the view that there is a scale of interpretation in performing arts, from: ‘as accurate a rendition as possible’ to ‘free improvisation’. Improvisation itself is a subjective marker on this scale. What for some people would be improvisation is interpretation for others. Where I use the term improvisation in this text, I refer to a one-off performance with a significant level of performer involvement. It should be made clear that ‘truly free improvisation’ is extremely rare, as most improvisation has rules on some level. This is especially true in devising practices, where the ‘improvisations’ are task or goal orientated.

Devising music expands on the idea of the performer as co-creator, to create works that are drawn directly from the performer's personal responses and experiences - as I explore in chapter 5. The process of devising allows the composer/director to control how these responses are used and, indeed, if they are used. This is because the performer's primary creative input occurs in rehearsal, forming the basis for discussion and consensus. In this way, the devising composer has more direct control over the final output than, for instance, a composer working with improvisation within a notated score - as, theoretically, nothing is performed in a devised piece that has not been approved, at least tacitly, by the composer.

The most obvious difference between devising and scores with increased performer input is in the nature of the score. Graphic notation, open scores and scores from written instructions have a precisely controlled physical manifestation i.e. the score, whereas devising scores are formed of a carefully nurtured understanding between performer and composer/director which may have no physical manifestation at all. Notes, sketches and references generated by the musicians and composers in devising processes do not function as instructions for creating the piece, but as *aide-mémoires* for the performer who created them.⁴⁶

B.1.2 Collaborative Composition of Solos:

In intimate collaborative composition, such as that between Luciano Berio and Cathy Berberian when creating the *Sequenza III: for female voice* (1965), it is often difficult to distinguish the roles of each partner. The synthesis of composer and collaborator can be so deep that some composers have actually specified the performer as essential to performing the piece, for instance, Sylvano Bussotti's 5 *Pieces for David Tudor* where "the words *David Tudor* in the title are in no sense a dedication, but rather an instrumental indication, part of the notation" (Cardew: 1961, p.22)

Fabrice Fitch and Neil Heyde noted their experiences of creating *Per Serafino Calbarsi II: Le Songe de Panurge* (2002-3) in an article '*Rececar*': *The Collaborative Process as Invention* (Fitch and Heyde: 2007). This text outlines a relationship where the performer (Heyde) works to create solutions to problems he discovers in a pre-notated draft of the piece. These solutions are then discussed and incorporated into the next draft. For the most part in this collaboration "the role of the instrumentalist may be very important, [but] it is rarely that of an inventor" (Fitch and Heyde: 2007, p.71). This could be taken to be a common model for such collaborations. However, Heyde occasionally describes techniques they developed together, such as the 'doppelganger effect' (Fitch and Heyde: 2007, pp. 85-7), which would then become influential throughout the work. In these moments, Fitch and Heyde's model of collaborative composition bears some resemblance to the relationship structure in devising practice - although in devising practices these moments would be developed into the piece through the performers, whereas in Fitch and Heyde's model they are developed through a notational practice.

⁴⁶ Examples of such notes, sketches and references from my processes can be seen at: http://doctorate.michaelpicknett.com/Performers_Notes.html

B.1.3 Works Created Around a Group:

Some composers develop a group of musicians specifically to perform their works, such as Steve Reich with *Steve Reich and Musicians* (sometimes credited as the Steve Reich Ensemble). This model has many elements in common with the concepts of devising and laboratory work in particular. Reich's musicians were not explicitly 'trained' to perform his music, but became proficient in performing his works through prolonged exposure to his compositional method. Russell Hartenberger (an original percussionist during the creative process of *Music for 18 Musicians* [1974–6]) noted that: "Regular rehearsal over a long period of time imbedded the piece in my mind and body" (Hartenberger in Moncrieff: 2009, p.31). Reich (and others such as Philip Glass) pioneered a model of musical dissemination that can serve as template for a non-notational devising practice (although Reich's music was notated). However, Reich's performers were limited in their creative input. As Hartenberger recalls: "Each week he would bring in the next section he had composed and we would rehearse it and connect it with what we had learned earlier" (*ibid.* p.32) - which implies that they merely rehearsed what was already written with no input into the creative process. Although, Hartenberger goes on to say that: "There are certain places the tempo traditionally shifts when the piece is played by Reich's ensemble" (*ibid.* p.34) - suggesting that the ensemble had some interpretative influence. Devising music has definite connections with this tradition of composer ensembles, especially in the close relationship between performer, ensemble and piece.

B.1.4 Backbone Composition and Creative Music Workshops

Backbone composition is a method of creating music from a pre-created score with minimal information. The process was originally developed by Peter Wiegold, and has been extensively researched by Jackie Walduck (1997 and 2005) and Tim Steiner (1992). Backbone composition is developed from an initial 'backbone material' that Sean Gregory describes as:

This given material can be a skeleton score of notated rhythms, melodies and harmonies; a subject or theme such as 'migration', 'cityscapes', 'seasons' and 'the Creation'; or a narrative text, be it a story or a series of poems. A sense of meaning for the participants in the process and final product is often connected to the project's subject matter.

Gregory: 2005, p.288

Walduck describes the process of creating music from this as: "the backbone material is fleshed out by a process of improvising around the given music, evaluating and refining the responses" (Walduck: 2005, p.318). Backbone composition can be seen as employing the same creative process of task and refinement, that devising does. However, I would argue that Backbone composition places less emphasis on the role of performer as score than is common in devised practices.

Creative music workshops, like Backbone composition, developed from the educational theories and practices of John Paynter and Peter Aston (see Paynter: 1982 and Paynter and Aston: 1970). Creative music workshops are designed to enable musicians of different abilities to create music together, and are often used in an educational or sociological context. However, as Sean Gregory points out: "The artistic and musical end product of a creative music workshop process is as important as the social implications

of the process” (Gregory: 2005, p.290). The workshops cover a wide variety of creative techniques. The general principle of these techniques is to create through participation. This results in a creative method that is often analogous to devising practices. This is unsurprising given that the early history of British devising in theatre was intimately connected to the practice of Theatre in Education, the theatrical equivalent of creative composition workshops (see Kleiman in the SCUDD archives no.015988).

B.2 Comparable Practices and Works

Some composers’ practices draw on similar aesthetic ideas to those discussed in this commentary. These are interesting to note, although it is debatable as to whether the practices discussed in this section can be considered devising. In this section I explore two practices that demonstrate how non-devising practices can touch upon the ideas discussed in my research: Giacinto Scelsi’s *Canti del Capricorno* (1962-72), and the work of Mauricio Kagel (1931-2008).

B.2.1 *Canti del Capricorno*

The *Canti Del Capricorno* is a collection of twenty-one songs for voice, written for Michiko Hirayama by Giacinto Scelsi (1905-1988) between 1962 and 1972.⁴⁷ Scelsi’s usual compositional practice was to create music through improvisation on various instruments, which he would record and edit. These improvisations would then be transcribed and scored into fully notated pieces (see Anderson: 1995 and Uitti: 1995). This technique, however, would not normally be considered devising, as the creative process is divorced from the performative one. On the other hand, there is evidence that Scelsi created music by collaborating in improvisation with other musicians. As Frances-Marie Uitti writes: “he considered the [...] task of transcribing these tapes to be for the artisan, not for the artist [...]. Thus he saved his creative energy for those spiritual Devas whom he believed assisted his musical output” (Uitti: 1995, p.12). Uitti’s use of the word ‘assist’ to describe the nature of the musician’s role could imply that the musician partook in the creative process as improvisers. While Uitti herself was one of these ‘Devas’, her precise input into the process is not known. The input of Hirayama into the *Canti Del Capricorno* is better known, but by no means clear. Hirayama herself states: “We began by improvising one or two pieces. He would record the result; an assistant then transcribed the singing in notation. Later Scelsi no longer cared how precisely it was notated. [...] I had to fill in a lot myself what he had conceived musically. Scelsi authorized me to do that” (Hirayama in Kanold: 2007, pp.15-16). It is clear from this material that Scelsi’s process has many aspects of devising within it: performer creation, performer-specific music, flexibility of interpretation and non-notated aspects. However, the specific use of tasks to frame or direct improvisations is not mentioned in accounts of Scelsi’s compositional process, which leaves open the question as to the extent that Scelsi’s process relates to that developed through my research.

B.2.2 Mauricio Kagel

Mauricio Kagel’s works for musical theatre were drawn from a deep understanding of theatrical theory and practice from the late 1950s and early 1960s. Particularly relevant to my research is

⁴⁷ Thirteen of these songs are *a capella*, seven have various accompaniment. The vocal aspect was created on Hirayama. Most of the accompaniments seem to have been created using Scelsi’s normal compositional methods.

his connection with the concept of post-dramatic theatre - in which performances need not be primarily based on text (see Lehman: 2006). This is a prerequisite for creating devised theatre. Kagel's music theatre works often explored "the physicality and kinesis of playing [...] not [as] a mere means to produce music but [as] central to it" (Heile: 2006, p.35). This approach to staging musical works falls under the umbrella term 'composed theatre' linking the works of Kagel with that of other composers including Goebbels, "Schönberg, Cage, [...] Aperghis, Schnebel, Tsangaris" (Exeter University, drama research website - accessed 23rd June 2013). The study of composed theatre⁴⁸ provides an interesting link to the theatrical natures of *Apologetics 1* and *Alfred*. However, the theatrical element of *Apologetics 1* is not the focus of my research, but a form in which devised music can be presented.

Kagel's specific approach was to "chart the material available" (*ibid.*) through the instrumentation available before composing the music to be performed. Kagel may have asked his musicians to improvise in order to create these charts of available material. This would be particularly useful when playing unfamiliar or newly created instruments. Kagel would then create works from this material.

Like Reich and Monk (B.1.3 and B.3.2 respectively), Kagel founded his own ensemble of musicians, the *Kölner Ensemble für Neue Musik* (from 1959). Although much of his music at this time was written for the ensemble, it was carefully scored in such a way as to be able to be performed without his supervision (see Heile: 2006, p.37). Approximate notation is occasionally used in his work, possibly for parts Kagel himself would play (see *ibid.* p. 40). Kagel often later revisited and rescored his approximate notation into precise notation (see *ibid.* p.44), indicating a preference for precisely notated music.

Kagel sought to investigate theatrical concerns through his music theatre works - many of which have featured in my research. For example, Kagel investigated the concept of representation (see section 5.3.1) in *Sonant 1960/...* (1960) by asking the musicians to perform fully notated music silently. In asking the performers to play specifically notated music Kagel "avoids the rupture between music performance and acting that tends to produce bad music theatre" (Heile: 2006, p.36). Kagel embraced the aesthetics of failure in some of his theatrical works - this is a central creative concern of Forced Entertainment and an element often explored in my research (see chapter 5.2). For example, *Die Rhythmusmaschien* (1978) "prizes the individuality of failure over the sameness of perfection" (*ibid.* p.65). *Siegfriedp'* (1971-2) for solo 'cello explores a similar change in the performer through exhaustion in repetition as is found in Pina Bausch's use of repetition in *Ein Trauerspiel* (1994) (see Coleman and Kagel: 2004 p.66 and Fernandes: 2001, p.116). This use of the aesthetics of exhaustion and failure is particularly remarkable as Kagel's works are usually meticulously scored. Kagel also explored aesthetic concerns related to devising beyond his theatrical works. For example, "Kagel's pieces most unequivocally embraced the idea of work in progress" (Heile: 2006, pp.31-2). Works as works-in-progress is a central theme in my research especially in relation to the *Apologetics* project (see chapters 4 and 6).

⁴⁸ See the University of Exeter's composed theatre research hub
<http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/staff/roesner/projects/composedtheatre/welcome.shtml>

B.3 Composers Who Use Some Devising-Related Approaches

There are some composers who may use devising practices as part of their compositional approach. It is often difficult to discern specific mentions of devising in notes and interviews with the composers, as the language of devising is not yet common in discussions of musical composition. Equally, it is not clear whether many composers would recognize or use the term themselves. However, reading between the lines, it is evident that some notable composers occasionally use techniques that are very similar to devising. The most significant of these are Heiner Goebbels and Meredith Monk. Recently, some younger composers, such as James Whittle (see Whittle: 2012), have begun to refer to themselves specifically as devising composers. Whittle's focus has been on the theatricality of music, and therefore draws on the tradition of Kagel. The clearest examples of devising-like practices I have found have been in the work of Monk and Goebbels. Therefore, I have outlined only their practices in this section.

B.3.1 Heiner Goebbels

Heiner Goebbels is both a theatre director and a composer. As a composer his work spans a wide range of performance arts, including composing for "theatre, ballet, opera, radio, TV and concert hall as well as tape compositions and sound installations" (Goebbels and Gourgouris: 2004, p.1). Goebbels is well known for developing performative aspects of music making in his composed theatre works, such as *Schwarz auf Weiss* (1996).⁴⁹ However the connections between his compositional approach and devised practices are more complex than those of many other composers exploring composed theatre.

Goebbels's compositional practice has incorporated several of the ideas related to devising that I have discussed in this commentary. For example his use of pre-made material, such as: Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925), traditional Japanese music, and the music of the Beach Boys in his stage work *Hashirigaki* (2000) (see Atkins Durham: 2003, p.516). This is strikingly similar to the Wooster Group's approach to using text (see chapter 4.1.1).

However, Goebbels comes closest to devising in his use of improvisation as part of the creative process. He states that: "yes, I allow myself to improvise in the composition process, but in the very end everything is completely precise" (Goebbels in Goebbels and Gourgouris: 2004, p.8). He goes on to clarify that the musicians are occasionally part of this improvisation, saying: "they [the musicians] developed characters, atmospheres, gestures, etc." (*ibid.* p.10). The use of improvisation allows him to engage with other devising-related ideas. This is especially true in his use of non-notated music - he states that:

in *The Liberation of Prometheus* [1993] there is not one note written down, but every show is like every other. You see, there is a lot of freedom in creating a very precise window of music to which all the musicians agree.

Goebbels in Goebbels and Gourgouris, 2004, p.8

⁴⁹ Goebbels labels this strand of his work as 'music theatre' - see http://www.heinergoebbels.com/en/archive/works/music_theatre_staged_concerts - accessed 25th January 2014

Goebbels also explores both communication between performers and autobiographical elements as part of the composition; noting that three languages are spoken in *Schwarz auf Weiss* because these are the languages the musicians spoke (*ibid.* p.10).

Unlike Reich and Monk, Goebbels does not work with his own ensemble, but he does form long-term relationships with certain established ensembles, creating several works with each group. This allows him to establish some of the benefits of laboratory practice and familiarity with the performers. He has stated his preference for self-organized ensembles saying: “their motivation is so much higher [...]. They decide whether they want to work with me, [...] they decide collectively on all aspects of the ensemble, musical and non-musical” (Goebbels in Goebbels and Gourgouris: 2004, p.11).

As is common with many composition practices, Goebbels’s approach is flexible and responds to the differing needs of each compositional situation. Therefore, it is difficult to define a single compositional approach. For example, Goebbels’s work with the Hilliard ensemble, *I went to the house but did not enter* (2008), usednotated music that Goebbels would bring to each rehearsal. He would then use continuous feedback in rehearsal to constantly update and re-arrange his score (see Hilliard: 2008). Here his approach differs markedly from that taken with Ensemble Modern, with whom he created *Schwarz auf Weiss*, and is much closer to the Fitch and Heyde model discussed in section B1.2

Goebbels does not specifically mention devising practices as an inspiration for his compositional approach. Instead, he cites his experiences of playing and creating rock music as: “how I learned a certain freedom, primarily in the way of performance, non-conducted performance, and definitely the freedom in creating music together as a group” (Goebbels in Goebbels and Gourgouris: 2004, p.11).

Goebbels’s techniques have influenced many younger composers such as J. Simon Van der Walt, whose own compositions aim to consider a musical “ensemble as a collection of *performers* rather than a collection of *instruments*” (Van der Walt: 2011, p.1). This is a core idea within devising.

B.3.2 Meredith Monk

Meredith Monk was trained both as a dancer/choreographer and as a musician/composer. Her work has frequently brought together these two art forms, using techniques from her dance background to approach collaborative music making. Monk’s compositions have ranged from solo vocal works (often performed by herself) to large-scale theatrical and operatic works, such as *Juice* (1969). Monk has worked extensively with her own groups of performers, initially The House (founded 1968), and later her Vocal Ensemble (founded 1978). Like Goebbels, Monk’s compositional approach varies from project to project as circumstances dictate. However, it is clear that she has used devising-like processes for a significant proportion of her works. Her approach has also changed over her career, from her earliest works where she did not work through improvisation “but by meticulous arrangement” (Putnam Smithner: 2005, p.96), to later works where she increasingly used a collaborative approach. She summarises her change in approach as:

I was trained to think that by terrorizing people they'd do better [...]. Over the years I've learned that when you do the opposite so much can come back to you in the commitment and passion with which people work.

Monk in Putnam Smithner: 2005, p.113

Monk's most collaborative processes are often described with ideas that are familiar in devised practices – such as: allowing “her company to add reaction and comments of their own” (Monk and Bates: 1988, p.19). Nancy Putnam Smithner describes a typical process as being in three stages. In the first, the company takes “three to four weeks to play and improvise together” (Putnam Smithner: 2005, p.110). This is followed by a break of several months where “Monk revises the song, texts, or compositions, and writes new material based on the interaction of the ensemble” (*ibid.*).⁵⁰ In the third stage, the company “reconvenes for another intensive period of final rehearsals” (*ibid.*). Although this approach takes place over a much shorter time-period than a typical devised dance or theatre process, it could still be considered as a devised practice.

Monk's use of archetypes to create characters in her stage works has been often commented on (see Koenig: 1976 p.54, or Goldberg in Jowitt: 1997, p.50). This can give the impression that Monk is not interested in the audience seeing the performers-as-themselves (see chapter 5). However, this is clearly not the case as Monk thrives on the collaborative nature of her process. Deborah Jowitt notes that: “Elements from the histories or day-to-day lives of the performers might also, highly distilled, find their way into Monk's compositions.” (Jowitt: 1997, p.13).

Monk's performers in both her Vocal Group and in The House are clearly very important to her practice. Marcia Siegel noted her connection to theatrical models through her company's writing:

Both Monk and Robert Wilson lead semicommunal groups of people who live and work together, and their theatre pieces stress the continuum of lives in that community. You are meant to be aware of growth, of their pasts and personalities that have contributed to the theatre event.

Siegel in Bernard in Jowitt: 1997, p.99

The performers have a stake in the creative process, and a sense of ownership over the material. Pablo Vela, a long time performer and collaborator with Monk, notes that: “you feel very attached to the material, because some of it is your material, or material you have created with someone else in the cast. You feel possessive about it” (Vela in Putnam Smithner: 2005, p.112). Monk's compositions are clearly built on the performers she works with by giving them a creative input into the process. Like devised theatre or dance practices, this is achieved through improvisation. Mo Bates notes that Monk uses: “improvisation to clarify ideas; urging her singers to find their own voice” (Monk and Bates: 1988, p.19). These improvisations are often based on ideas or melodies that Monk herself has brought into the rehearsal room. Paul Langland, who worked with her on *Dolmen Music* (1979), remembers that:

⁵⁰ This stage of the process is also occasionally used by devised theatre directors who sometimes notate set structures, such as texts.

“Meredith would come in with melodies, and she would have ideas on how to flush them out, we’d improvise a bit.” (Langland in Putnam Smithner: 2005, p.114).

From her earliest works, Monk avoided the use of sheet music in her creative process, noting that she would sometimes despairingly say: “*would you rather I brought in sheet music?*” (Monk and Bates: 1988, p.19). Her avoidance of notation has allowed her music to change over time: “The thing that is beautiful about live performance is you could look at a piece after not performing it for a long time, it’s the same piece, but it’s grown and changed” (Monk in Putnam Smithner: 2005, p.114). There are many similarities to this in devised practice, see chapter 3. Monk’s music has always been taught aurally, but she has become increasingly interested in the problems of notating her work as she considers ways of passing on her heritage (Putnam Smithner: 2005, p.114). Langland assessed the problems of scoring Monk’s music, noting that: “you would have to reappraise the whole musical notation system in order to write it down” (Langland in *ibid.* p.114).

Monk’s works have a strong connection to vocal traditions, particularly opera. Voice has been her primary instrument in both composition and performance. Often she uses instruments as accompanying ostinatos or drones. For example, in *Our Lady of Late* (1972-3) she accompanied herself by “rubbing a finger around the rim of a water-filled wine glass to create a drone” (Jowitt: 1997, p.10).

She has described her stage works variously as: “‘a theatre cantata’ (*Juice*); ‘an opera epic’ (*Vessel*); ‘an opera’ (*Education of the Girlchild* and *Quarry*)” (Banes: 1978, p.15). The connection to the theatrical vocal tradition is one that I have purposely avoided in my research, preferring to focus on works for instrumentalists. It should be noted that: “Monk prefers to avoid conventional text” (Putnam Smithner; 2005, p.105), working instead with “vocables” (*ibid.*). These are “repeated syllables - a kind of vocalise - [where] no literal text interferes” (Jowitt: 1997, p.11). Through this non-semantic communication, she desired the listener to have a direct experience of the music, rather than through a conventional text. Therefore, her theatrical relationship to operatic traditions - such as libretto and linear narrative - is by no means straightforward. Her operatic works often have more in common with the composed theatre practices of Kagel and Goebbels than traditional narrative opera.

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