Music Theatre without Voice

Facilitating and directing diverse participation

for opera, musical, and pantomime

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Abstract

Much has been published in recent years about different areas of disability theatre and fringe theatre that is interested in inclusivity and music. Some productions and companies have become prominent players. Within the area of opera, musical, and pantomime, however, the concept of inclusive music theatre lacks a critical space for evolving a shared vocabulary in praxis. Deploying methods from the field of practice arts research, this PhD thesis investigates inclusive music theatre as coherent aesthetic paradigm. The research articulates through studio and performance work what constitutes participatory music drama and consolidates a discrete set of engagement strategies under the umbrella of 'music theatre without voice'.

A renewed, polyvalent notion of voice emerges in all this as sensorial tool, image of creative agency, and political metaphor. The thesis extends the idea of voice into a multi-sensory discourse (olfactory, gustatory, visual, tactual, and aural), reaching out to differently-abled communities with a particular focus on learning disability and non-verbal communication. In doing so, the dramatic praxis opens up a discussion into how inclusive music theatre appears as an embodied practice away from naturalised norms of linguistic, intellectual, or physical ableism. The thesis further sheds light on the position of the facilitator-director within inclusive work as a liminal figure between co-creating and artistically guiding devising and rehearsal processes.

To problematise this fluid role, co-creative leadership is explored through a variety of practice research projects, evidencing methods of how to facilitate and direct successfully in these contexts. The projects presented include a pantomime devised with young adults from the autistic spectrum; a melodramatic story for women with learning disabilities; a multi-sensory opera experience for women with learning disabilities. The thesis further updates the practice in times of Covid with research into digital facilitation. It also investigates techniques of musical storytelling within an LGBTQ setting to reveal the adaptability of the practice articulated. The PhD introduces and coins the term *faciliteur* for a participatory director within the inclusive work field to advance academic discussion as much as practical considerations.

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Chapter 1

Voice and Mind

I. Introduction

Towards a new listening

Within the last few decades, music theatre has become more and more inclusive, at least on the surface. West End productions care for diverse casting with black musicals such as *Tina!* or *Motown*. Intergenerational plot lines as in *Mamma Mia!* and gender-aware productions around female friendships as in *Wicked* diversify the stories that are told. Professional music theatre stages care for including representatives of marginalised groups. They have developed accessibility programmes to facilitate interaction with opera, musical and pantomime through relaxed performances or disability-confident workshops. New productions are commissioned, too. An example is the urban eco-opera *The Lost Things* for the Royal Opera House (2019), performed by a diverse ensemble of differently-abled actor-musicians. Inclusive ensembles were also featured in the National Theatre's underworld musical *Hadestown* (2018)*.* These productions, however, often still rely on professionally-honed skills that are based on mainstream assumptions of voice ability and a certain kind of intellectual ableism.

Admittedly, *music theatre* as a term can function as a catch-all for many different forms of theatrical performances including music, but often clear-cut genres such as opera, musical, or pantomime come to mind when the term is mentioned. Having said that, it can also be used to refer to more experimental forms of musical entertainment or avant-garde practice even. Likewise, *music drama* is often directly associated with composed-through opera (such as Wagnerian music drama), but the actual usage of the term is much more fluid in praxis, describing storytelling projects that rely on music and often vocal performance to some extent. But the style and frequency of music, for instance, can vary. Therefore, the principles developed in this thesis are easily transferable across different genres of music theatre, ranging from the popular, such as pantomime or musical to the more classically-orientated opera performance. (More about this in part II of this chapter.)

The denominator that joins the different versions of music drama in the following research, hence, is a different on: Namely, that the realm of music theatre praxis questions of linguistic ability and norms of sound seem still prevalent as a unifying observation between different sub-genres. *Music theatre without voice,* therefore, as a concept wants to shape a space where 'voice' can be thought and located within a broader understanding of sensory expressiveness that doesn't privilege the 'conventionally-vocal' over other sensory streams. It extends *music theatre* as a genre definition by decentring lingo-centric or verbal practice within a broader spectrum of also non-verbal practices. This sometimes requires the reader to stretch traditionally narrow definitions along an embodied spectrum. In the more mainstream context sketched, music theatre performances are still primarily associated with professional voice training, expectations of physical fitness, command of musical pitch or just vocal stamina.

Music theatre works that aim to rethink conventions of voice as directorial concept and facilitation practice – especially regarding diversely-abled qualities of voice and mind – remain a rarity despite (or perhaps because of) some prominent examples. And maybe because it is quite a challenge to notate these works or talk about them with the language we have. Publications on music theatre practice that particularly target an amateur ensemble of performers with not only different voice abilities, but also different intellectual abilities, e.g., learning disabilities or in mental health contexts, are hard to find.[1] Consequently, this kind of music drama often happens under the radar in series of workshops. If it happens, it often happens in isolation or appears in a succession of singular projects without a clear framework of practice. Thus, a space for reflecting upon inclusive practice in music theatre specifically is needed.

This PhD, therefore, connects the dots by establishing an aesthetic framework that enables us to think about music theatre inclusively for the British scene. As a result, the subsequent chapters will explore and apply an alternative aesthetic voice concept for musical, opera, and pantomime. This brings different areas of existing knowledge from drama theory and practice together to produce significant new insights and consolidate

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[1] Some of the sparse examples not necessarily from an (Applied) Theatre and Performance perspective but from an analytical, musicological one: Since 2017, Charlotte Armstrong curates a blog on Opera and Disability representation, https://www.operaanddisability.com/. In the classical context, composers have started to write for 'disabled voices.' John Fulljames mentions a Danish example in his interview (see digital appendix).

them around an innovative practice paradigm that can be used as starting point for facilitators, directors, and other theatre practitioners who are interested in inclusion or alternative ways of 'doing music drama'.

Core research inquiry

In the following, the thesis investigates **how inclusive music theatre works as a practice if one doesn't follow a normative (ableist) understanding of voice**. How does music theatre 'sound' when a practitioner tries to create something outside of the 'sound expectations' of the genre, with a broadened understanding of voice or with differently-abled voices? Leading on from that, the analysis responds with concrete practice evidence to the question **how to make music drama as a genre inclusive and participatory**.

The premises of this practice research rest on two argumentative pillars: (1) 'voice' in music theatre can be multi-sensory and effectively answer to specific 'requirements' of the genre and be in dialogue with some of its aesthetic traditions (2) assumptions of voice as seamless carrier of emotion and expression of uniform character identity in music drama (and as representation of socio-political identity) reshape organically when the first principle is implemented in practice. The result is **an opened-up and inclusive form of music theatre** that re-imagines **voice as multi-sensory tool**, practically and conceptually.

The research project is interdisciplinary in nature as it touches on the fields of **voice studies**, **disability drama** – with a particular focus on facilitating **cognitive diversity** (e.g. mental health, multiple and profound learning disabilities) –, and **music theatre practice**.

The practice-based research makes an original contribution to a contemporary arts discussion by reframing music theatre as an inclusive discourse. Though this framing has started in other art forms, music theatre as a performance sub-genre is wanting. Central to this undertaking is conceptualising voice as an inclusive practice through a performance-driven research inquiry. This will consolidate the artistic practice and advance existing knowledge to create **original new insights** into the newly emerging discipline henceforth called 'music theatre without voice'. 'Without (a) voice' hereby becomes a positive

statement that encourages and recognises creative explorations outside of dominant ideas of vocal training. In an age where competition in the music theatre industry is higher than ever and audiences increasingly diversify, it is crucial **to develop techniques that broaden the understanding of what music and voice can be for new audiences**.

The potential sociocultural outcomes of inclusive music theatre may reveal and advance conventional assumptions of the genre aesthetic, but also show how we can playfully engage with principles of music theatre making and innovate them together with differently-abled participants. This research produces concrete strategies that can help other facilitators to translate music theatre direction and composition into an inclusive process. The work in question happens at the intersection between careful facilitation and direction for vulnerable groups and establishes an open set of criteria to describe inclusive music drama as art form.

About the title

With the title, I'm referring to voice as multi-layered entity: as a normative construct, a musical practice, and a phonological phenomenon of intermittent sound waves in music drama. The preposition 'without', however, also reveals that *the verbal* (intellectually and articulatorily) in musical or operatic communication still often forms a quickly-naturalised component and unquestioned requirement, despite the genre's diverse history of sound experimentation. In recognising settings where certain verbal abilities cannot be taken for granted, music theatre can literally happen without voice.

Yet, voice doesn't straightforwardly equate with the verbal and vocal ability. This is an unsaid assumption this thesis wants to playfully reveal through practice research. 'Without voice' doesn't mean that this kind of music drama doesn't possess vibrant vocality, or, even more extremely put, subject-expression. Referring to possible normative expectations with its assumptions of deficiency, the title component 'without voice' thus functions as a provocation to ignite a discussion. It also invites the reader to consider whether 'without voice' easily equates with 'no voice', in an attempt to continue a debate around inclusion and highlight achievements made in the sector of disability theatre, for instance, and applied drama since the 1980s and 90s (see more in my review of disability

drama companies in Britain in chapter 3). Or whether the different label presented here is not also a confident and proud expression of an aesthetic that revels in the productive absence of one-dimensionally-applied convention. Through the incorporation of norms without value judgment, 'music theatre without voice' affirms deficiency.

As a consequence, acknowledging assumptions of ableism as a productive starting point for developing diverse practice, this study wants to sound out a space for the non-verbal in music theatre, for semi-verbal participants or people with an intellectual or physical speech impediment. Inevitably, the research focus gains a political edge as it discloses the marginalisation of an inclusive practice that often happens away from commercial representation, even within the disability arts sector. However, not falling into a binary of demonising existing, more mainstream vocal expression, it also shows how working together between the extremes might resolve the absence of one voice within a plurality of differently-fashioned voices.

In the humblest manner, this PhD wants to 'give voices to' or locate voices of difference in neurodiverse music drama. One way is by bringing visibility or audibility to an often-overlooked sector even within the current climate of inclusivity; the other is by breaking open the normative concept of voice in music drama, replacing it with a diverse set of multi-sensory vocal techniques. This invites differently-abled performers to participate in works of music theatre. But it might also help professional performers to rethink their own assumptions about the genre or find out of feelings of creative stagnation. It might ultimately lead to the question as to whether neoliberal ideas of vocal participation of the individual are an appropriate set of metaphors for all-inclusive representation. As a communicative necessity in an intersubjective debate, 'without voice' may function as an awkward, yet also strangely appealing place holder because its core meaning is still fluid and has not yet crystalised around theoretical norms in academic debate.

Throughout the thesis, particular focus will be paid to performers with learning disabilities and the sub-genre of opera. I would like to highlight, that my practice approach in its research period has defined inclusive music theatre with a broader scope than used in more formal contexts: The projects subsumed here range from a pop-inspired pantomime for young adults with autism to an exploration of sound and silence in a melodramatic storytelling for non- binary men to digital facilitation project with live music.

The interdisciplinary overlap of music theatre without voice: hand-painted Venn diagram to illustrate the links between theory and practice

Methods: documentation as challenge

In practice arts research, trying out different strategies with different groups is a dynamic process. Sometimes, one strategy works with one group and not with another, depending on the individual needs of an ensemble. Therefore, the collection of strategies suggested here shall function as a source of inspiration rather than a fixed pattern that will always yield the same results. The research process was discovery-driven. In a nod to Jerzy Grotowski (1969 [1995]: 174), its methods were informed by seeing theatre as cooperative laboratory where one finds out through trial and error, through *experiment* in the studio as Grotowski notes for Stanislavski's' approach to 'defining' an acting technique:

> There are, in fact, very few acting **methods** [bold in the original]. The most developed is that of Stanislavski […]. Throughout his numerous years of research his method evolved […]. Stanislavski was always experimenting himself and he did not suggest recipes but the means whereby the actor [or actress] might discover himself [herself / themselves], replying in all concrete situations to the question: 'How can this be done?' [gender awareness inserted by the author]

Beyond promoting a Stanislavskian personal cult, what this excerpt describes on a more impersonal level is a practice methodology for drama research that is also true for this thesis: The creative methods researched evolve with every project and do not remain static, universal, or untouched from the findings but modify with them, though the overall premise remains the same. The tools that are thus produced by the research, however, do not function as instant recipes but as impulses for further explorations, as the *means whereby something can be done*. Though the research is framed at times in a more abstract, academic, or intersubjective language, the outcomes are documented with 'concrete situations' in mind so that the practice can be transferred to other work contexts.

Finding ways to make accessible the techniques explored around multi-sensory voice for other facilitators marks a research contribution in itself: In contrast to arts research that works with material that can be more easily fixated, e.g., the composed score of a piece of music or the painted result of a drawing exercise, the interpersonal and processual nature of community drama posed its own challenges of documenting insights into the creative process; so did finding ways to capture in a research environment the creative processes of the individual facilitator-director. This PhD, therefore, chooses a combined documentation method between descriptive and interpretative writing and digital content accessible through website links.

The challenge of research projects between creative practice and academic reasoning is to find a model that accommodates needs specific to the two different disciplines. The two disciplines are often grasped with the (questionable) dichotomy of an 'artistic method' on the one hand and a 'scientific' one on the other. Interestingly, 'academic' seems to be easily equated with the positivism of the natural sciences, almost disregarding different models of thinking that are also practiced in the humanities, for instance. Where academic research of the scientific kind requires rigor in the fields of planning and communicating outcomes, creative practice is often lead by finding out

intuitively, diverging from the initial research aim. This may lead to constantly redefining parameters of the academic experiment.

Melissa Trimingham (2002) provides a solution for the non-binary position of practice research between academic research and creative practice by fusing hermeneutic logic with a more traditional approach of communicating knowledge in academic settings. Her suggestions around 'A Methodology of Practice as Research' promote the idea that the changes of the artistic process itself can be tracked in research writing about a project (e.g., commentary and interpretation): 'The "disorderliness" of the creative process must be incorporated into the methodology' (2002: 56). My chapter about the practice journey pays tribute to this by reflecting how my research inquiry has evolved slightly with every project, starting with the question of how to open up conventions of directing (popular) musical theatre. The journey then answers this question by gradually discovering an inclusive directing paradigm through exploring facilitation techniques within a disability and mental wellbeing context.

In Trimingham's argument, the changes that become evident during a practice phase can modify the research question. This hermeneutic back and forth between the part (practice project) and the whole (overall thesis, a 'purposeful activity towards a specified end', 55) can be documented and made transparent as part of the research journey by responding flexibility to the needs of the work. This method is especially useful in collaborative, inclusive processes since it acknowledges how 'research outcomes [in theatre and performance] are likely to depend on the creative processes of others in addition to [those of the researcher]' (2002: 55). Learning then from the collaboration feeds back into the research.

Practice researcher Robin Nelson provides another methodology for creative arts research, and also Performance as Research (PAR). In his triangulation model, he theorises how practice can be successfully translated into verbalised, scientifically-legible research. In his model, the two steps of practicing (doing work, embodying knowledge, felling intuition) and thinking about practice (intellectually understanding that an artist makes a particular choice) are then connected to writing about (explicating in an intersubjective manner) the creative processes. Yet, in Nelson's triangle diagram, similar to Trimingham, these steps do not follow out of each other in linear fashion, but are 'imbricated within' (Nelson 2013: 37)

each other, sometimes happening in overlaps or simultaneously in constant triangular exchange.

The geometrical figure of the triangle with mutually-influencing sides thus becomes another version of the PaR hermeneutic spiral. Communicating this relationship between creative practice and conventions of academic knowledge is as much part of practice research as finding words to express the embodied workings of art-making itself. Trimingham (2002: 57) further concludes: 'The solutions found are merely *an* answer, but never *the* answer.' The implied plurality of this approach also ties in well with an open understanding of *voice* promoted through this PhD, which displaces an absolute norm of vocal virtuosity within a paradigm of differently-abled choices.

Nelson further observes how different artistic research projects may require different forms of *articulating* and *evidencing* the work, often depending on the art form. Thus, a PaR project about the sensitive drama work between people from different backgrounds that often develops over months marks such a case as it would be impractical – and to an extent unachievable – to record every moment in every corner of a workshop space. A writerly description of the practice journeys, therefore, draws a more comprehensive picture for the reader. The thinking about and planning of inclusive co-creation in music drama is *de facto* part of the work of the creative artist, as Nelson (2013: 32-33) summarises:

> It is important to remember that arts practices can be thoughtful and that, correspondingly, writing (of all kinds) is a practice. [...] [Susan Malone] points out that, just as arts practitioners dance or write or compose to find expression for complex, and not easily apprehended, thoughts and feelings, writers coin tropes to 'cover over a gap in reasoning and a gap in material evidence.'

The following blend between academic writing, creative writing, and descriptive workshop reflections agrees with this observation. It also explains why the word count of this practice PhD goes beyond what is often considered the norm in the field (yet not the binding word count). Documenting the interpersonal and internal processes of the community artist ('complex [...] thoughts and feelings') sometimes requires more written context which is provided through quotes from field notes.

In doing so, this PhD hopefully gives rare, concrete insights into the actual learning processes of the facilitator-director. It aims to illustrate and to externalise them in multi-

modal form, with a video chapter (see chapter 4), for instance, documentary photography and elements of visual thinking along the way. Using the space for captions underneath videos and images to paraphrase the practice and to provide clips with an explanatory narrative for what the reader can see becomes one of the ways of articulating research findings in digital formats and contributes to the **production of new knowledge**.

Over the last few decades, viable models have crystalised in the social sciences that share common assumptions in what alternative, non-traditional research constitutes (cf. Schwarzpaul-Engels/Peter 2013): Many of the advocates of practice research consider creative practice and reflecting on it through documenting it and conceptualising it within a research enquiry as research similar to laboratory work in the 'hard sciences.' Practice as research aims to speak the language of these sciences by rhetorically mimicking this form of communicating and archiving 'knowledge.'

Practice research, thus, is partly about finding a language that describes creative work from the inside but as outsider. This inspiring dilemma makes the researcher part case study, and part objective observer. 'Music theatre without voice' pays tribute to the constant *act of translation* by aiming to articulate difference differently. The chapters thus consist of multi-modal documentation and articulation of the inquiry and its outcomes. This is reflected throughout the thesis with unusual diagrams (which I call flow charts due to the 'liquidity' of the materials used and to highlight that definitions in practice work often contain fluid, somewhat flowing, moments of definition), video links, and short interactive tasks.

The logic of chapters: evidencing the unsung

This thesis falls into two overlapping parts: In order to address the inherent politics (and mute bias) of much academic work that prioritises book-knowledge and a particular intellectual form of approaching knowledge-production (e.g., definitions, followed by literature reviews, followed by case studies), the structure of the argument intersperses more conventional chapters (chapter 1 and chapter 3) with practice journeys and workshop descriptions. This reflects the two approaches into the subject matter, from a more intellectualised, theoretical way, and through practice itself. Therefore, this introductory

chapter is not immediately followed by a book-based literature review, but by a practical exploration of various projects that help to think about the concepts introduced. Further, to move beyond the binary, excerpts from interviews I've convened with directors and facilitators in the field of participatory music drama are featured alongside more conventional book-knowledge to provide a spectrum of archival media. The interviews can be accessed as audio files in the digital appendix to feature orality as one means to think about 'voice' in music drama.

To set the scene, the first chapter includes an introduction to terminology relating to the aesthetic of music theatre with its medium specificities at the intersection of voice studies, facilitation, and disability drama. This section also clarifies terminology around established voice practice and historical movements in directing music drama that may be seen to pre-shadow aspects of staging inclusively. It is important to note that the material presented is not about a history of avant-garde music drama as elitist experiment, but about how certain aspects of alternative voice practice may adumbrate a more contemporary approach towards creating music drama together, in democratic fashion, with people with learning disabilities, for example, or in mental wellbeing contexts.

The third chapter provides a literature and practice review surveying the output of learning-disabled theatre companies such as Mind the Gap or The Lawnmowers as well as existing literature on community drama work and inclusion. Excerpts from interviews with opera director John Fulljames, who staged Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses* for the Royal Opera House with community theatre elements, and inclusive facilitator Tim Yealland, who has worked in music theatre for people with special needs for decades, will provide insights into contemporary British practice.

Throughout, opera will provide a comparative frame to map out the spectrum of inclusive facilitation and directing aesthetics within the current British music theatre scene. The thesis will contrast two versions of what could be considered a participatory approach to music drama: A more directing-centred work model will be represented by references to director Cal McCrystal's production of *Iolanthe* (2018) for the English National Opera. His panto-inspired operetta production deployed interactive moments and gaudy gender-fluidity for a West End audience. Resonate Arts' workshop series about *Un Ballo in Maschera* for Opera Holland Park (2019) made opera accessible for a group of elderly

citizens with the on-set of dementia. This represents a more facilitation-centred approach that is less interested in generating a final performance than in the processes of experiential workshops.

Chapters 2 and 4: from pantomime to digital storytelling

As stated above, book and verbal knowledge is only one way to sound out a dynamic genre shift that concerns new audiences. The application and practice section of the thesis in chapters 2 and 4 approaches the topic using different learning modalities within studio contexts. The chapters refer to projects I've conducted with diverse community groups over the last five years. The projects share an interest in the work with people with different intellectual abilities or in mental health environments.

Arguably, the written section translates the outcomes into linguistic blocks, but videos and photographs hopefully complement the verbalisations with *taciturn moments of knowledge communication*. In the online appendix, scrapbooks from the major case studies can be accessed. These different forms of 'voicing' the creative research process will help to articulate the findings and hopefully make my practice decisions transparent and accessible for others to use. Sometimes descriptive text, sensory illustration, or story elements provide a more accessible way into the practice from an inclusive perspective than conventional forms could.

Chapter 2 features my own practice with an experience-based report around early case studies from community music dramas with disability groups from across the East of London between 2017 and 2019. With the youth group of Arc in the Park, I devised a 'very new pantomime' that is documented through excerpts from scripts, lyrics, and a recording. The facilitation process is traced in a fragmented narrative that features quotes from field notes and evaluations. The chapter further discusses a melodramatic storytelling project for women with learning disabilities in 2018. Clips from the rehearsals are provided through links and commented on via the captions.

Overall, the experience report traces the gestation of concrete tools to facilitate inclusive devising for pantomime, melodrama, and opera. Conceptually, the chapter

contains discussions about inclusive representation, a performative understanding of identity (e.g., fluid, constructed), and strategies of self-aware stylisation from the perspective of the instructor. The practice journey culminates in the interactive story *The Fool Eater*: *Urban Loneliness and Mental Health* (funded by the Arts Council England) which I organised in 2019 for the LGBTQ community.

The facilitation story continues in chapter 4 with the multi-sensory opera experience *They Called Her Salt* (funded by the Arts Council England). From 2019 to 2020, the project was a collaboration with Powerhouse for Women with Learning Disabilities. Situated in London's East End, Powerhouse is a charity that empowers women with learning disabilities through the arts. The chapter brings conventional forms of analysis together with a focus on describing the use of materials and gestures to voice in music drama. A photo documentation can be found in the online appendix, as well as a video chapter that discusses relevant moments from the workshops but also leaves space for learning through uncommented moments of viewing. I will provide more information on the various charities and on how to access audio-visual content later.

The opera chapter is rounded off with insights into digital facilitation, gathered during a spin-off project of *They Called Her Salt* a few months into the Covid-19 pandemic. *Tony's Hot Day: a live story broadcast about the creativity of self-isolation, with illustrations and music* (29th of April 2020) marked a collaboration with inclusive drama group ActUp! Newham, situated in the East of London, and a host of international artists from California and Ireland to audience members from Germany. The project brought the praxis of music theatre without voice into the ZOOM age. A recording of the storytelling performance as well as of an inclusive song choreography is featured in the digital scrapbook.

The research into *They Called Her Salt* and the other projects locates the contemporary approach of inclusive music theatre making between directing and facilitating. In this context, the thesis also suggests new terminology for describing the role of the facilitator-director as a fluid, non-binary agent between different realms of dramatic practice. The work model will be called the *faciliteur.*

As a conclusion, the final chapter consolidates different practice choices to enable diverse productions, perhaps even in more mainstream settings, and contours voice in

music drama as multi-sensory tool. But the chapter also raises the questions whether a 'genuinely' democratic approach towards artistic representation can be meaningfully achieved within our current funding structures and marketing channels; and whether music theatre is an appropriate tool to 'solve' many of the related social queries. In an attempt to bring these questions into an open discussion, the conclusion finishes with a story script from the inclusive melodrama *The Dragon and the Wizadress* (from my 2018 project with Powerhouse, funded by Groundwork Culture Seeds). The story assembles in a metaphoric way many aspects mentioned throughout the thesis, from thinking creatively about voice abilities to the expressive potential of silences and the affirmative acceptance of vocal difference. But it also resists a conclusive answer on theoretical terms.

Summing up the research inquiry:

What is '*voice*' *in inclusive music theatre?*

How does it sound like, look like, feel like, taste like, smell like?

Flowchart with mustard: the original research inquiry as visual diagram. What does your voice smell like?

1. Towards an inclusive directing terminology

Job description *faciliteur*

Just as previous movements aiming at defining the status of the director within a production, whether that of the *auteur* or more recently the TV drama producer, have claimed artistic recognition for this role, this thesis claims creative status for drama facilitators who work in community outreach. Applied theatre scholar Sheila Preston (2016: 4) defines facilitators within the creative sector:

> Those who seek to engage communities using the arts may refer to themselves as facilitator [...]. Some [...] practitioners may consider the term 'facilitator' too [...] 'neutral' to express their practice. [...] alternative 'character' descriptions also signify nuances of the role being played in different contexts along with the kind of engagement that will be attempted, an indication of the emphasis of their interventionist 'style' or intent.

Preston also highlights that some scholars consider the term misleading because of its etymological origins of making something 'easy' (*facile*) in the sense of 'simplistic' (2016: 1). With this thesis, I'm continuing the discourse about facilitation following up these two observations: I will update the terminology to pay tribute to the nuances of a music drama facilitator also working as a director and I will give glimpses into the complexity of facilitation work through practice studies. Making things easy can be difficult. But this might be a truism.

Often, as a facilitator, I have been hired to animate a group, or 'make something' under difficult work circumstances: Spaces may not be ideal. The number of participants may be uncertain until the workshop starts. Working in South East London, the profession of facilitator often branches out into that of a social pedagogue. When young adults in a project about nightmares explore themes of domestic violence and alcohol abuse, the facilitator needs to be equipped to deal with it. Besides the social skills, the facilitator also emerges as a producer-director who is expected to make a show over a period of months, sometimes weeks or days, and find funding. He or she is writer, director, costume-assistant and more. All this requires a high level of creativity, flexibility, and a dynamic attitude towards making a performance.

Apart from the work circumstances that are sometimes close to adverse towards a structured drama process, facilitating can be described with similar ideas of artistic integrity as directing in other contexts. Many facilitators have their signature style, e.g., working with a target group, or an approach, e.g., musical storytelling. This thesis develops and assembles

a critical vocabulary to describe the work of the facilitator and its impact aesthetically and socioculturally in the field of music theatre. In a socio-political gesture to recast a normalised shorthand for artistic quality, the thesis suggests new terminology that grasps the complex creative role of the facilitator and describes co-creative procedures resting in more than one creative voice.

During the 20th century the idea of author, authorship or authorial authority were discussed heavily by philosophers and literary scholars. So let me briefly lose a few words on author-concepts before bringing the idea of the dramatic author-director together with inclusive facilitation. In his survey of 'Theories of Authorship and Intention', Dario Compagno (2012: 38) finds a useful translation for what the concept of *author* actually means in an artistic and theoretical discourse: He sees it as a version of 'subjectivity and its linguistic and semiotic expression'. Especially the idea of some form of *expression* helps to draw connections to a more performative concept of authorial manifestation. It is also this underlying assumption that qualifies the term *author* as a shorthand to describe any form of personal style that becomes evident through recurring aesthetic signs. These signs are then read as the subjective expression of a unifying entity behind a work. The singular author is constructed as a coherent fiction.

It is also in this context that mid-20th century debates around a more practice-based authorship arrive: In cinematic practice, the term *author* becomes annexed – in its French translation – by a school of filmmakers and critics related to *Cahiers du Cinéma* such as André Bazin. The journal aimed to alleviate the art of filmmaking to a sophisticated cultural practice by highlighting parallels between the high-class concepts of the aforementioned authorial mastery, drawing attention to how films, e.g., by Alfred Hitchcock, can show a similar kind of stylistic control as novels or poems. Behind this stylistic coherence, a singular creative individual can become identifiable. (cf. Caughie [1981] 2013: 9 ff) Though, of course, other theorists and filmmakers championed filmmaking as a collective art form, just as theatre, where the *auteur* then stands in for a film team. Around the same time, Continental theatre-makers consolidated the practice of a *director's theatre*.

However, this form of director's theatre was as much about constructing a coherent style (and author-*persona*) as destructing the seamless illusion of watching a play or opera (for Brecht's influence see also pp. 47 and 77). Informed by general trends of

poststructuralism or deconstructivism theory, texts became open to on-going (re-)interpretation outside which a stable reality became more and more questionable. Ironically, the idea of directorial control was harnessed in this context to prove the equivocality of artistic (and ultimately human) communication. In the field of opera, stage designer Adolphe Appia started this trend with his Wagnerian stagings in the modern period, moving away from theatrical realism into the realm of idiosyncratic abstraction . American directors such as David Alden or British ones such as Peter Brook continued the tradition of *Regietheatre* (the German word for 'director's theatre') in the Anglophone world.

In parallel to this development, mid-century author theory was heavily influenced by or crystalised around French post-structuralist Roland Barthes, among others. Barthes' claim of the 'death of the author' was meant to empower readers (and interpreters, perhaps directors) to question whether it is possible at all to access stable communication and, through it, any coherent intentional vision. As critics proved by highlighting contradictions and polysemy within their works, authors weren't masters of their own creations anymore, (cf. Compagno 41-44).

Though of course indebted to a notion of authorship rooted in the dramatic and cinematic arts, this thesis nevertheless, perhaps because it is centred around the idea of voice, multi-sensory communication, and language (or absence thereof) also departs from a literary theory tradition of the author sketched in the last few paragraphs. Through narratologically conscious writing and directing practice, it arrives at a performative model that realises within the context of music theatre, what Compagno observes for the author-debate at the end of the 20th century: a dramatic approach that neither needs to do away completely with the concept of 'author' nor closes out alternative ways of doing or interpretative participation. The author, like a facilitator with a certain aim or creative vision, then becomes a function which or who 'expresses a writing strategy' (2012: 45), which in return is executed collaboratively by readers. This model doesn't promote the absolute absence of shared communication, which in its post-structuralist or even post-dramatic radicality would be as total (or totalitarian) as claiming absolute creative control for a single individual.

The dialectic between radical post-modernist play, sparked by a (perhaps misunderstood) radicalisation of Barthes's dictum, and the radical postulation of all-controlling authorship in the end became productive (cf. Compagno). In an inclusive music-

dramatic context, this helps to reconfigure *author*-ity within co-creative environments when it allows to hold the only superficially paradoxical *directed (free) play*. In this thesis, I'm developing strategies to achieve this kind of directed play with diverse groups. The concept resurfaces as a non-binary practice in terms such as *semi-improvised* (cf. Ruth Bieber 2013) in disability drama and devising practice. In literary terms, Compagno links it to Umberto Eco's idea of the *open art work*, which is not radically open, but may contain intentional choices that leave certain moments open and thereby invite 'a plural communication' (2012: 50) as an option among many. *Intentional ambiguity* (ibid.), then, can become the expressive subjectivity of a collective. Ambivalence further humanises the process of art-making itself because it doesn't claim perfection or one correct way of doing.

It is these various theoretical ambiguities that I want to bring together through the practice of this PhD. Because the creative material of the case studies is also based on, what could be called, *applied literature* and *performative storytelling*, the practice journey includes a section on *staged traditions of orality* (see p. 102), highlighting how performances of literature relate to the performing arts and even a music theatre tradition that is interested to make accessible productions for new audiences. Interestingly, the result of the constant conversation between theory and practice leads for the dramatic arts to what Compagno sees as the outcome of the 20th century author-debate: 'a "useful" concept of author: a person writing for an end, even if s/he may not be able to foresee all the consequences of his or her choices. This makes a human out of the author' (2012: 51).

In a nod to the Continental tradition of the *auteur*, thus, the word *faciliteur* may best describe the hybrid or multi-role of a reflective facilitator, as sketched above, and an author-concept that develops action strategies with semi-defined outcomes. Like an *auteur*, the *faciliteur* considers his community work as connected by an aesthetic through-line and driven by an artistic vision that breaks open conventions of text and communication. Like a facilitator, the *faciliteur* rethinks directorial work culture within a climate of equal participation and collaborative diversity. She practices a democratic creative model critically – in the sense of Preston's informed facilitation approach (see below) – with differently-abled performers. These criteria are embedded in the work practice of the *faciliteur* and spring out of it as a response to her environments. Complementing a British directing school that demands truthfulness of text, traditions of facilitation allow the (British) inclusive director to

be 'untruthful to the text' and play with it, just as an *auteur.* Participatory director Cal McCrystal consequently remarks in his interview how the text becomes his 'vehicle'. In the *faciliteur*, Continental directing praxis meets with British community and social drama (see more about this in Chapter 2 and 3).

Many different names exist already to describe facilitation praxis in drama outreach, mainly highlighting the community engagement part of the job. General values often underlying the practice are 'enablement' and 'participant-centredness' 'in the context of a wider commitment to social justice and genuine co-intentionality' (Preston 2016: 1). Performance scholar and facilitator Petra Kuppers notes in her introduction to *Community Performance* (2007: 36):

> [C]ommunity performance practitioners can be employed by local councils to 'animate' communities, to provide and organise events around which people can come together, to help integration of immigrant communities, youth communities, disabled people, and many other social goals. In different countries, these positions have different names: animators, cultural workers, arts development officers etc.

The concept of the *faciliteur* introduced in this thesis pays as much attention to the aesthetic dimensions of the work of the facilitator as to its socio-political impact in diverse communities. Further, terminology – in practice settings especially – is often subject to fashions rather than strictly influenced by a universal, conceptual tribalism. Experienced music theatre facilitator Tim Yealland, for instance, describes himself as 'animateur' in his interview, referencing terminological trends at the time when he started out (for recordings of the interviews, see digital appendix). Yet, with this new, more specific framework, his work would easily comply with that of the *faciliteur* in music drama.

In the spirit of practice research, this thesis also locates facilitation itself criticality within its own work contexts and their sometimes unspoken assumptions. Preston (2016: 1) notes for facilitation that, like schooling, facilitating needs to be scrutinised as any other *cultural practice* as 'a site of both domination and liberation'. This thesis, therefore, doesn't assume that facilitation and its socio-political principles are always working 'for the good' but it self-reflexively calls interventions into question or reveals a difficult decision-making process behind them that may suggest different options in different contexts (see practice journey). After all, 'working in the uncertainty of [...] dilemmatic spaces, the facilitator undoubtedly will be faced with working outside of their comfort zone of existing experience,

practice and knowledge' (2016: 10). The following chapters with their case studies will draw attention to possible ableist or exotist dilemmas in practice, not as a form of failure but as a space for learning, and as a new form of expression that sees on-going dilemma itself as an artistic gesture.

Faciliteuring inclusion

It is also in the way that Kuppers lists different practice aims that this PhD define the idea of inclusion: Inclusion emerges out of the requirements of a group at a moment in time. The group can be brought together by an artistic vision. The identity, or fluid identities, of the group collaborate on the aesthetic of the piece. Sarah Larsen-Vefring (2021: 12) describes inclusion on stage as an aesthetic construct. In her monograph about Robert LePage's 'stagings of diversity' she adumbrates the look of theatrical diversity 'as a simultaneity of miscellaneous categories' – may they be linguistic, personal, or political. She draws her conclusion in response to the understanding of 'intersectionality [as] coexisting categories of difference' from the *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity* (2019).

The dynamic work processes of *faciliteur* mobilise this possibility of bringing difference together as a studio practice. Though an end goal is defined, the aesthetic outcome remains excitingly, perhaps frustratingly, in flux until the performance happens. This provides ample opportunity for shaping the process. One of the main directing principles of the *faciliteur* is to invite change, or to host a space that enables as Peter Brook described elsewhere 'an incomplete design' (2008: 114). Rethinking voice as a participant-led facilitation process can inform a truly diverse directing practice.

The artistic vision that guides 'music theatre without voice' therefore goes hand in hand with ethical facilitation practice. Ruth Bieber (2013: 23), the founder of Canadian disability company InsideOut, describes an ethos of shared adventure and equality:

> Facilitators are not viewed as specialists who prescribe treatments based on diagnostics. They do not focus on areas of deficit by attempting to eliminate or mask the challenge. Moreover, reframing the initially perceived shortfall as a potential theatrical contribution frequently leads to creative outcome.

The agenda of the *faciliteur*, likewise, is not 'to mask' disparate, individual creative response, but, almost doing the reverse, to flaunt them in their miscellany. As we will see in the

following, a respectful interaction with differently-abled people helps to achieve this 'unmasked aesthetic' of music theatre as a cooperative process.

Introducing new terminology to the notion of the inclusive worker also strengthens the socio-economic position the facilitator often holds within the theatre industry. Though facilitators may produce a show, lead rehearsals, and are involved in a project from the early planning stages, they are often not recognised as a driving creative force when it comes to salary. In many cases, *faciliteurs* act as musicians, too. It is high time to claim visibility and ensuing financial recognition for the complex social, creative, and pedagogic role of the dramatic facilitator. This is another way how this performance as research wants to give voice to often unheard contributions to music theatre. For facilitators, it can be crucial to take confidence in naming their skill set in funding applications, too.

Divergent directing and music theatre

The normative struggles within a musical form, though, can be tangible even in practice that aims to direct inclusively. Directing for musicals, particularly, but also opera and pantomime is still often associated with leaving musical parameters in place and giving priority to their 'unobstructed' dissemination. Matt Hargrave (2015: 102) in his publication on *Theatres of Learning Disabilities* describes a participatory music theatre project that partly fails to portray an inclusive aesthetic, because of these very attitudes towards music: too formally-closed, too disempowering.

Hargrave talks about Palmers and Hayhow's *Pinocchio* (2007) with York Theatre Royal and disability theatre companies the Shysters and Full Body & The Voice: 'the music defined the piece that *Pinocchio* would become, a dominating force that propped up the show.' In referring to the score as 'dominating' Hargrave introduces the language of stylistic hegemony. Under it, the performers needed to respond according to norms around timing dictated by the musical text. The inflexible score 'changed the aesthetic from drifting picaresque into a frenzied choreography [...] [a]ction and music had to cohere' (Hargrave 2015: 103). Coherence, in this sense, aims at a classical, i.e., linear, dramaturgy. The presence of neurodiversity often produces a more associative, maybe loosely episodic structure like in a picaro-story. Alternative logic requires an alternative voice concept.

It is here, where current experimental and academic scholarship around vocal teaching provide a loosened frame to contour the practice. Scholars such as Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015) and others, have recently started to explore voice beyond the narrowly-demarcated space of acoustic *sound* only: 'Vocal utterances do not signify meaning in their capacity as a particular species of signifying sound but, rather, in their ability to cause a shift in a given person. And the entirety of that shift in a material and sensory relationship is used as the basis of meaning formation' (104). The underlying argument in this is that due to an often-limiting assumption that voice needs to s*ound* in a particular way, other sensory dimensions of voice have become overlooked, such as vibration. Eidsheim notes that an ossified understanding of voice and music (e.g., exemplified by the *Pinocchio* example), can be partly traced back to how we intellectually notate elusive, dynamic, or shifting sensorial qualities such as touch (cf. 28). In a similar vein, Salomé Voegelin in her *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2010) complicates auditory perception as embodied, sensory phenomenon. Accepting 'voice', however, as a plural site of phonic utterance, the notion of voice as more holistic, embodied response can free up potential to include non-verbal participants.

A broadened understanding of the referent *voice*, thus, inevitably leads to a seeming lack of coherence in conventional performative and critical terms since we move beyond 'sonic ideals' or 'sonic expectations' (Eidsheim 205: 143) for which we have established words and aural concepts. Distinctions not only become blurry between what is perceived as *phonic* (e.g., speech sounds) or *sonic* (perhaps musical in the broadest sense, producing soundwaves) but also our very conception how this sound manifests in a material sense is challenged to widen and adjust. Initially, this might feel like a mind game, revealing how ingrained certain notions of *what voice needs to be* are in our logical thinking in order to 'read' it or 'listen' to it *as voice* or just 'recognise' it as such in a certain performance context. In her publication *Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice*, Eidsheim's main aim, thus, is to push beyond seeing vocal utterances as a static (acoustic) signifier (cf. 143). She promotes voice/sound production as 'articulatory action' (24), a (multi-sensory and dynamic) *event* that is 'at the core of singing and music' rather than a *result*. It is already noticeable that 'voice, listening, sound, and music [necessarily] [conflate into] 'multisensory phenomena' in this concept (28).

Where Eidsheim's research suggests that sonic material is already multi-sensory, my work wants to push this boundary further, by approaching the topic the other way round: If voice is multi-sensory at its core, then the multi-sensory can become a starting point for voice. What might sound like an experimental logic inspired by the biological non-sequitur that only because every mammal is considered and animal doesn't mean that every animal is a mammal, too, is actually an argumentative conclusion of a logic initiated organically by broadening voice. It must be possible to think voice, in a deconstructive argument such as presented above, primarily as a multi-sensory agent, focusing on non-verbal components, and not only or mainly as some form of *vocal sound utterance*. In brief: If voice is a multi-sensory phenomenon that contains non-verbal elements, then it must be possible to practice voice without 'voice'.

This takes the research full circle, by feeding the conceptual awareness of the post-structuralist argument back into applied praxis. The multi-sensory is a part of voice, therefore, the part can stand in for the whole. If voice is the animal category that includes the multi-sensory mammal, then this mammal must be able to stand on its own to represent the species. How we practice this part, and make it useful in, for instance, non-verbal situations that are initially excluded from the animal-presumptions of spoken or sung voice is subject of this thesis. Voice as an investigative tool, therefore, already provides the means to question its own assumptions. In a critical investigation that aims to move beyond vocal ableism, defined from the centre of a certain vocal practice, it is only fair then, to start the investigation from a different end by setting this end as the new centre in music drama praxis.

The handwritten diagram contains:

- MORE (highlighted)
- 'multisensory phenomena' (Eidsheim 2015)
- VOICE practice (highlighted)
- IS
- results in
- 'vocality' (cf. Meizel 2013)
- becomes integrated in
- IS
- how can this more be used in practice
- MORE (highlighted)
- how to use this awareness in inclusive contexts
- VOICE practice (highlighted)

Visualising the practice-based premise of investigating multi-sensory voice: If 'voice' is deconstructed into dynamic, multi-sensorial phenomena, then multi-sensory phenomena can substitute a narrow definition of voice and construct an inclusive vocal technique

The consequence from shifting critical attention away from vocal results to embodied, poly-sensorial processes gains a productive premise: 'The ideal voice can be of many different kinds – perhaps even one that refuses to cast itself in sonic terms, but that nonetheless contributes to the dynamic of sonic and vocal ideals' (2015: 143). Just like Eidsheim engages with voice from the position of action, inclusive music theatre practice engages with voice from the enabling methodologies of a multi-sensory event. If voice has been evidenced to be *more* than the norms associated with sound and music, then this *more* can become a practice. And in so doing, we can '[expose] the limitations of music analysis [or music theatre praxis], [and] analytical framework[s]' (47).

Though I'm sharing the word *multi-sensory* (in its hyphenated form here) with the existing academic reflections described in the previous paragraphs (where it is interestingly used without a hyphen), I would like to point out that the idea behind the term in inclusive praxis and academic parlance differs slightly as I'm using it in the context of engagement practice in theatre and performance rather than as a descriptive tool to evidence *what is voice*

also in musicological terms. In extending Eidsheim's analytical approach one could evidence how alternative voice performances communicate also through the olfactory (e.g., by smelling the breath of a singer) or the gustatory (e.g., by tasting this breath in particles flowing through a space) in addition to the vibratory. Music theatre without voice praxis, however, is about the co-presence of multi-sensorial modes of expression as a directorial aim and concrete realisation of a diverse aesthetic.

As the Venn diagram on page 12 visualises, in an alternative approach to music drama there is an overlap between the various critical, aesthetic, and practical disciplines that come together in the triangular intersection of music drama, voice studies, and disability theatre. Similar terminology is used with nuances in these disciplines. In a conceptually broadened understanding of voice practice and music, further, the distinction between *phonic qualities* (speech sounds), *sonic* ones (sound generally) and otherwise sensorial ones (e.g., touch, smell, taste) become hazy, as it resolves in the multi-sensory pluralism of inclusive expression.

As a consequence, the work of the *faciliteur* prioritises participant-led improvisation over exact reproduction. Thus, voice in inclusive music theatre direction enables the simultaneity of different timings and different *articulatory actions*. In line with the artistic criteria already introduced for the *faciliteur*, inclusive music drama praxis opens the textual rigidity and naturalised connex between voice and sound-production on various sensory levels. Of course, as noble as the inclusive aims might be, this 'radical' aesthetic of a de-centred, non-hierarchical approach to voice cannot always be fully realised, and, of course, might not always be the method of choice to achieve a particular artistic or inclusive aim for a piece of music drama. Embedded in facilitation praxis, the awareness of this option can be incorporated *by degree* as the following case studies illustrate.

Hargrave and others also often argue that disability performance shares in an aesthetic framework familiar to a modernist vanguard; in theatre one could draw lines to post-dramatic experiment or *regietheatre*. These movements accept the beauty of the haphazard as aesthetic meaning and unearth incoherence as structuring principles (see more in Chapter 3). Former associated executive of the Royal Opera House and director John Fulljames points out a dilemma, though, in a revolution of style that didn't quite go far enough in the field of opera, musical, and pantomime:

One of the failures of the revolution which was *regietheater* in the 20th century was that it failed to actually engage creatively with the music. […] I think [opera] is a very open art form and we could all be much bolder with the editions we make of scores. I'm much more interested in creating a performance edition every time you perform a piece rather than feeling you have to perform the piece in its *urtext*.

In his production of *The Return of Ulysses* (2018), Fulljames created a partly-revised performance score[2] that allowed for the participation of a community choir. 'To engage creatively with music' from the interview quote, thus, equates with creating voice access in a classical setting. A choir piece, also written by Monteverdi, was interpolated in the baroque opera to include the option for ensemble performance. A diverse Camden community choir was supported by young singers from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Fulljames relocated the drama in a contemporary mythical universe with references to the refugee crisis. The choir itself became an aural metaphor for the diverse voices of cultural migrants in our time, staging a simultaneity of miscellaneous identity categories. The production also addressed another aspect of voice in classical music theatre: that of language. Italian, as one of the main languages of opera, can potentially feel exclusive and alienating for new audiences who are not complicit in normative assumptions around linguistic or intellectual abilities. Therefore, his version of the opera not only rethought the musical text, within the possibilities of a 'Royal Opera House sound', but also the libretto with a new English translation (for the interview see the digital appendix). The Roundhouse production was not disability theatre, but John's directing practice realised what Hargrave pointed out for *Pinocchio*: the idea that the music score and its inscribed requirements can be treated flexibly, and thereby made inclusive.

Director of musicals and opera Phyllida Llyod[3] attacks a similar inflexibility in editing the musical and vocal requirements of music dramatic scores for new stage productions, which renders her artistic agenda close to aspects of *faciliteurism*: Aesthetic conservatism, she argues, prevents opera texts from being inviting for new audience and performer

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[2] Together with musical director Christian Curnyn and his team. The name of the director is used to aid communication about the works, but theatre is, of course, a collective art form.
[3] In her Joyclin Herbert lecture for the National Theatre on the 3rd of November 2017, Lloyd talked about 'Taking the Space' as a female director. She devoted a section to testing operatic scores for gender-inclusion and pointed out that often editing the original music is key to making music theatre texts accessible for new audiences. For more see beginning of Chapter 2.

groups. Conventional identity expectations around male and female voice qualities, for example, can pose a problem when re-imagining a canonical text. Sometimes, audible silences can communicate this, e.g., when a performer is shown on stage yet doesn't have a part to sing. Similar questions apply to contemporary perspectives on race and class representation. Again, the argument emerges that an inclusive practice in music theatre needs to rely on a different vocal skill set and a different understanding of how roles could sound like beyond certain verbal and intellectual conventions.

Often, the failure of music theatre performance to be inclusive thus roots in conventions of voice and music that do not allow for 'failure' (meaning deviance from norms of seamlessness). Yealland describes this aesthetic assumption as 'perfect' or 'correct' style in his interview. However, failure defined inclusively is the stylistic mirror image to inflexible, exclusive stage performances. Failure as aesthetic vision can become the *modus operandi* of full expression. Creating an 'imperfect design' is inscribed in and enables the praxis of the *faciliteur*.

Interestingly, this is where studies of disability and alternative performance overlap. Art and English scholar Tobin Siebers (2010) sees disability aesthetic as quintessentially a modernist aesthetic. The grotesque as the frightfully incoherent emerges as the live-affirming aesthetic of *the other* that brings human variation back into the discourse (see more in the theory section in Chapter 3). Music theatre without voice is original, free, and inviting, because it accepts the seeming deficiency at its heart as positive aesthetic practice. The absence of skilled voice work becomes rich, creative virtuosity. A directorial understanding that acknowledges any or some of these aspects leads to an inclusive piece of music theatre.

2. On voice, vocality, and different voice qualities

Voice as aesthetic practice and political metaphor

Voice, and by extension music, can take on many different forms in the history and praxis of music theatre. I have already referred to Eidsheim's musicological analyses (2015) on highlighting voice as a multi-sensory phenomenon that communicates not just through sound, and the following case studies will tap into a similar vein. Virginie Magnat in *The*

Performative Power of Vocality (2019) further draws awareness to the exclusive nature of discussing vocal experiences and the anthropocentrism (and for our context the ableism that comes with the norms of this human-centred approach) inherent in vocal metaphors as a description of human agency. She also explains why it seems difficult to discuss, e.g., find words and transcriptions of the non-verbal dimensions of voice due to our scriptocentric approach to knowledge-fixation, and perhaps even conventional vocal training (with its notating strategies).

In more mainstream circumstances voice has evolved as a regimented, exclusive set of values in traditional vocal pedagogy. One can speak of different voice qualities and mean the way how somebody's speech sounds, the aesthetic of the speech sounds themselves, as in opera, musicals, or even spoken word drama. One can think of voice as a socio-political concept that is linked to assumptions about personhood and political participation, especially in community theatre. Voice as facilitation practice can also become a metaphor for a person's embodied expressiveness.

In order to escape the limiting assumptions established terminology can induce in a reader and performer, recent discourse on vocal studies has introduced alternative terminology to grasp '*voice*' not as a one-dimensional norm, but a network of anatomical, cultural, and aesthetic processes, something 'like voice' but different. The term *vocality* seems to be a pragmatic response to the 'daunting task to address the multiplicity of linguistic, acoustic, cognitive-perceptual, and cultural factors that shape how we produce and hear human voices' (Meizel 2013: 267). Beyond cultivating an awareness for the sociocultural constructedness of *voice* (e.g., how it expresses 'identity' in a particular cultural setting) and its plural overtones as practice, the term remains at times difficult to pin down. It adjusts to the needs of the additional dimensions to voice that cannot easily be written down in conventional form but that may be immediately, tacitly, or intuitively felt as part of a performance. Thinking of *vocality* as a functional term rather than a clearly demarcated critical definition works in favour of a concept that aims to negotiate between written traditions, oral practice and the difficult to verbalise. In her most recent publication, Meizel (2020) coins the term *multivocality* to grasp the various dimensions of (divergent) voice-perception also with links to disability studies (e.g., D/deaf vocality).

For the purpose of this PhD, I want to focus on a classical and crossover-voice training as an illustration for what I consider a naturalised music theatre vocal style, or even more broadly speaking, a lingocentric conception of voice. As this PhD aims to recomplicate assumptions around what we *use* as voice in music drama, the term *voice* as touchstone for a more conventional practice seems to answer pragmatically to the needs of the practitioner to describe a technique. On these practical terms, music theatre *without voice* moves away from the one-dimensional along a multi-sensorial spectrum. The case studies evidence that inclusive 'voice' is deployed within the much broader sense of 'vocality', bringing in questions of identity performance in a diverse, cultural environment. Similarly, the opera form provides a useful field of comparison for the research because it is often located between commercial undertaking and community outreach. Many opera houses have their own learning departments, with a focus on inclusivity. Commercial theatres for musicals and pantomimes often don't. They follow a different production model and are often not linked to state funding. A network of inclusive practice has formed within opera that helps in a pioneering attempt to demarcate the field and give it concrete reference points for the praxis.

The directors and facilitators I interviewed and my own projects, therefore, relate to the operatic canon. They themselves would use the term *voice*, being rooted in practice, rather than the more academic *vocality*. In order to facilitate communication, I therefore prefer to use the term *voice* more frequently in the following than alternatives. Furthermore, opera in its most basic sense can be understood as 'storytelling with music', as director Fulljames breaks down in his interview, an inclusive description that is easily relatable to its various off-springs and subgenres. Therefore, *music* as a term sometimes stands in *toto pro parte* in the practice interviews and case discussions to mean also voice. Opera, in its narrow sense, is often associated with a particular set of classical aesthetic criteria and vocal techniques. It also produced a canon of classical modernism that helped to accept voice experiment as part of the form, as with Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (1922). John Cage is another avant-garde composer who experimented with alternative sounds and silences. *Music theatre*, rather than *musical theatre*, is often used to subsume various avant-garde practices, particularly from the second half of the 20th century. The ideas on voice presented here can

easily be extended to musicals and commercial pantomime where voice practice relies on a similar set of speech 'abilities' obtained through professional training.

Often, one of the main differences between the genres of music theatre lies in sound quality and voice style. One key difference is that in opera, voices are rarely amplified with a microphone, whereas in popular musical theatre they most likely are. The low-tech requirement makes opera as frame generally more practical for inclusive community music drama. In a classical voice aesthetic, the sound aimed at is a rounded, full voice sound, oriented towards the openness of Italian vowels and a clarity of diction, enabled by clearly-enunciated consonants, especially in early baroque opera. The shaping together with the respective vocal type creates a timbre that sounds operatic and can be identified as baritone or soprano, for example. Anatomically, the thick folds of the voice are engaged and transitions (*passaggios*) between various registers – the parts of the voice that correlate to different ranges – are trained to be smooth, controlled and without audible rifts.

In musical theatre, especially contemporary musical theatre, the shaping of the vowels is often 'Americanised', thus leading to a different vocal style. The aim is a speech-like quality that stretches the speech vowels into the upper register (belt) and produces nasalised sounds that are placed more to the front of the oral cavity. The difference in sound qualities originates in the shaping rather than the placement that is kept consistent through regular, athletic practice of the speech apparatus (cf. Kayes 2004: 41-110; Dimon 2018; Taylor 2008). Therefore, this voice norm requires a rigid training routine that presupposes physical abilities and naturalises ideals of vocal fitness, stamina, and musical literacy. These 'classical' or 'trained' (e.g., polished) vocal skills form an aesthetic counterpoint to a diversity of voicing creativity.

In this excerpt from our interview, facilitator-singer Tim Yealland locates the trained normality of professional voices in an inclusive inversion:

> [S]ong is a fantastic way to allowing everybody to be equal, that includes people who have no speech, ironically, people who have vocal difficulties and can only express themselves through gesture. Music and singing somehow brings people together in the most extraordinary way. It means that a person who is 'incredibly gifted', in other words, the trained opera singer, is actually on the same level. In many ways they are more disempowered than the person in the wheelchair, who is without speech, perhaps has cerebral palsy, but is expressing themselves […] physically. It's almost like the person who has the skill has a kind of disempowerment, they

are constrained by their skills. Whereas somebody who is less skilled is able to express themselves more fully – if you created the work in such a way that that is a possibility.

Yealland here describes voice in a broader, more inclusive sense as embodied response to music; with the aim to express a heightened, 'full' state of being, emotion, or humanity.

Voice understood in this way becomes a quasi-Utopian concept that helps to facilitate egalitarian participation in opera outreach. Here, it becomes relevant to briefly translate the socio-political understanding of Utopia into an aesthetic space for diverse music drama. When I speak of Utopianism in the following, I refer to an updated understanding of the political vision created by Thomas More in the 16th century. Utopia in a contemporary understanding becomes a space where a plurality of alternatives can be present at the same time. In this sense, Utopia emerges not as a static concept that excludes, but, close to a grotesque logic, incorporates opposition or seeming contradiction as a constant process (see following chapter). Most useful to understanding utopia as an active, creative process that 'encompasses' is Luke Martell's 2018 overview and update on 'utopianism and social change'.

In it, Martell argues that utopias can become a concrete tool to try out and thereby bring about (pockets of) social change. Inclusive music drama work bears striking similarities with what Martell calls *current utopias*, 'projects now that can be seen as utopian because they are very different to the mainstream society and attempt a utopian alternative. [They] are often actual and micro [and include e.g.,] alternative education' (2018: 437). Political utopias relate to a dominant ideology such as neoliberal, market-driven capitalism in a similar way as aesthetic utopias of diversity relate to a still often heavily normative mainstream aesthetic in musical theatre (that is also driven by financial incentives). In this sense, 'utopia now [becomes] a form of social change' (2018: 438). Current utopias show through practice (as in PaR) and application (as in applied theatre) what works and thereby can prefigure a grander design in trials of 'creative change' (cf. 2018: 437-439). Ultimately, this understanding of practicing utopianism is founded on a similar hermeneutic logic as practice as research itself. Current utopias 'are attempts at a better society in practice' (437) and thereby 'will create new material circumstances that facilitate fresh utopian ideas, novel objectives and change' (447).

Yealland alludes to a discrete skill set of directing *the work in such a* (Utopian) *way* that it encompasses different ways of expressing and encourages full expression. In the micro-Utopia of inclusive music drama, diverse participation becomes possible through different ways of doing. The result of this kind of practice, as the research projects will elaborate on in the following, *de facto* realises Utopian social principles, defined by Martell as rooted in 'collective ownership', 'collective control', 'egalitarian' (2018: 440). Transposed into the creative realm, these coordinates make up the matrix of a co-creative leadership that is interested in sharing artistic control rather than claiming individualistic achievement. In inclusive performance and applied theatre, the idea of creative empowerment *through* disability, which necessitates alternatives ways of doing in the first place, continues a tradition Hayhow and Palmer survey in *Contemporary Theatre and Learning Disability* (2005: 34 ff.). They link full expression to ideas of what is perceived as 'authentic' (untrained?, exciting? Human?) on stage.

In the field of vocal coaching, Kristin Linklater's notions in *Freeing the Natural Voice* are a useful touchstone for a similar wholistic notion. In contrast to traditional speech-training at conservatoires, her methods are designed to allow '*ur*-sounds' to come out intuitively in response to a person's environment and to from a direct emotional rootedness in the body. Linklater teaches to unlearn conventions of voicing within our learned social norms to discover individual sounds (may they be verbal, pre-verbal, or vocal in the broadest sense). Contemporary society's cliché of individualism has its roots in a neo-liberal approach that still often places individual agency and entrepreneurship as key to social success over community engagement, though this may possess much moral currency. Vocal individualism as a practical concept, however, can also surface as a technique that affirms difference within a community, instead of the training of norms.

In this sense, the inclusive vocality suggested here stands in a long line of avant-garde practice that aims to 'free the individual' from socially-induced, emotional repression (if that is what the individual chooses to pursue). Grotowski's idea of the *via negativa* is a drama-based equivalent to acting out (rather than singing out) differently from familiar psychological and social protocols. Yealland's description continues this in the paradox that to achieve an inclusive aesthetic in its own right, conventionally-trained professionals with internalised norms of voice may not be the leading experts.

Being vocal about the non-verbal

The idea that music theatre can exist without the dominance of one voice style (or the musical score) gains an important political dimension that is often overlooked, or as we say in German 'overheard'. In a contemporary discourse about the politics of participation, music theatre without voice also addresses the presumption behind 'having a (socio-political) voice'. It questions what is generally normalised as a desirable way to express your *self* by allowing silences to be heard within the socio-aesthetic conventions of the genre. In *Learning Disability and Contemporary Theatre*, Jon Palmer and Richard Hayhow (2008: 29 ff.) warn against unconscious voice-bias:

> In identity politics and in the general drive towards acceptance of difference from the 1960s and 1970s onwards it has been assumed that, despite being different to each other, people will all have equal access to verbal expression, if not to public acknowledgement of that expression. It has been assumed, too, that similar types of self-censorship have been produced under society's symbolic codes (albeit that these codes might be differently, and more rigorously, inflicted on black people than on white, or on women than on men, for example.) Yet for those with learning disabilities [or different voice abilities as an aesthetic concept, *my annotation*] these assumptions quite simply do not hold true, nor is a person with a learning disability ordinarily able to eloquently refute such assumption through the usual verbal or written means.

Alex Fox and Hannah Macpherson (2015: 137) in their *Inclusive Arts* manifesto give a similar warning when they observe that the 'need to "give voice"' to marginalised participants can be an 'oppressive and limiting approach in itself'. Voice in this socio-political sense becomes a metaphor of intellectual ableism with its expectations of eloquence and language proficiency. Political participation emerges as an ability to talk back to power on the terms of power. In a medium that relies heavily on telling stories through singing, music theatre without voice recognises listening – the absence of voice in favour of a pluralistic vocality – as a form of active participation.

It is also here where the theory of voice studies finds natural interdisciplinarity with the embodied practice of working with people with learning disabilities or cognitive struggles. Both fields require the *faciliteur* to re-think voice mainstreams, that rely on verbal abilities to express opinion or give form to expression, and to put them into multi-sensory

practice. Anna Chesner (1995: 1-2) describes the situation from her perspective of *Dramatherapy for People with Learning Disabilities*:

> In a society where the spoken and the written word is the currency for sophisticated communication […] and the means by which we build relationships, we find it hard to communicate with those whose verbal skills are limited or non-existent. […] Whilst groups of people with physical […] impairment are willing to identify themselves and give themselves a clearer voice and more public visibility, they are often at pains to dissociate themselves from learning disability. […] The outcome for people with learning disabilities, however, is that they are sometimes marginalised even within the world of disability.

In music theatre without voice, the creative incentive to challenge existing voice norms grows organically as a sensorial approach out of the ambition of the aesthetic. An urge to rework uniform, and potentially exclusive, concepts of voice is where the three disciplines of voice studies, disability work, and music drama practice overlap .

Race and health: voice studies as applied practice

Voice studies is a recent development in performance studies. It sits within the larger tendencies of the field to bring the (individual) body back onto the radar of performance analysis. Steeped in the ideology of the performative turn and post-structuralist undoing of stable meaning, voice studies consolidated as a sub-genre of performance studies in the 2010s, with seminal publications by Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson, such as *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience* (2015). Publications like these were building on special issues on voice by journals such as *Performance Research* (in 2003) and *Studies in Musical Theatre* (2012) (cf. Thomaidis 2017: 10). A decided focus on audio-vocal qualities beyond the logocentric idea of communicating 'text' (in whichever form) has become interesting also beyond the English-speaking world, with publications such as *Geschichte der literarischen Vortragskunst* that discusses the 'history and practice of literatry oratory' (public speaking) within centres of the German-speaking world.

Despite this trend in looking at vocality or pluralistic voices, studies on how a renewed understanding of voice practice influences music theatre at the intersection between learning disability and mental health, however, are not at the forefront.

Conceptually, voice is addressed as a normative construct that is instrumentalised within a Western discourse to communicate flawlessly. The effects of this re-conceptualisation of voice as sound (in the broadest, metaphorical sense) always already address the muted ableism of a vocal mainstream. In doing so, they reveal that conventional understandings of voice ironically often are about hiding the 'flaws' of the individual in a stylised version of individualism.

Voice conventions can also reveal racial bias, for example, with voice tropes such as the 'big black lady song' (Thomaidis 2017: 47), which remains a popular favourite in the promotion of recent West End successes such as the *Dreamgirls* revival. In her recent study on *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, Naomi André (2018: 19-21) goes into depth on how the sound of a voice can be intertwined with historical realities, yet at the same time act in contexts of liberation from oppression. For instance, André describes her 'engaged' practice like this when listening to a 1985 Metropolitan opera performance of *Aida* by black American soprano Leontyne Price thus:

> I feel as if I understand something new – […]. This voice comes out of a body that lived through the end of Jim Crow and segregation […] An engaged musicology helps me to hear Price's body and experience in her voice. Revealed in this voice is the childhood in Mississippi during the 1930s and 1940s; […] As the regal and long-suffering Aida, Price was the African American singer whose voice fit the character perfectly; in this role she proved so many people wrong for their bigotry and violence. And so many things right for those of us who have fallen in love with opera.

Just as there are many (conflicting) assumptions ascribed to hearing race through voice, also conceptions of mental and physical 'health' around vocal feats require careful scrutiny: Categories such as 'stamina' and 'fitness' need to be relocated from a narrow Western aesthetic ear within a broader understanding of vocal practice internationally. Korean Pansori, for instance, uses guttural sounds that are considered extreme (and anatomically unhealthy) to many Western ears. Thomaidis (2017: 55-56) describes how the voice style of Pansori theatre produces vocal nodes. These nodes, however, help to realise this theatrical aesthetic. When reconsidering vocality academically, it seems, questions of vocal health – and by extension of a 'disabled' voice –, vocal ability, and vocal norms are being decentred. Yet, the potential of this conceptual awareness for *making* inclusive music drama has not been amply explored.

Disabled voice aesthetics is occasionally acknowledged in voice and musical theatre studies. In his interview, Fulljames references Continental composers who explore the distinct expressiveness of 'disabled voices', for example, in Denmark (see digital appendix). Thomaidis (2017: 58) talks about Robert Lepage's nine-hour vocal performance collage *Lipsynch* (2008). In it, Canadian director Lepage strives to represent a fragmented and diverse modern world with superimposed vocal scraps and sung lines. Following Larsen-Verfing's argument (2021; 108), this approach to including different voice is more interested in constructing a vocal multi-aesthetic on stage rather than devising a participatory practice. Disabled vocal sounds, by people with aphasia become part of this multi-vocal choir piece. But they arguably stand in as theatrical metaphor for an un-trained performance idiom, to represent a group. Disability as narrative device is also featured in music theatre surveys like Raymond Knapp's article in the *Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability* (2015).

With my practice research, I would like to link the theoretical and contextual aspects of voice studies with the concrete practice of disability performance and music drama. Therefore, where relevant, I will reference voice theory during my practice research documentations to show how inclusive voice theory can be applied as part of an alternative music drama. The approaches to voice presented here evolve through performing the theoretical idea 'to de-naturalise [convention] and to rethink voice not as a given […] but as the plural, in-between, challenging […] practice of *voicing*' (Thomaidis 2017: 74). In this sense, the following practice explores voice as a multi-sensory tool to facilitate inclusion and to help develop a participatory aesthetic for music theatre.

Envoicing and voice personalities

Simply speaking, voice performance does not become a means to an end in voice studies but is recognised as *a spectacle in itself*. In a conventional understanding of 'flawless' drama or 'perfect' practice, voice has been attributed the role of facilitating communication of character, narrative, or content on stage without drawing much attention to the processes involved in vocalisations or identity formations. Further, idealisations of communication as unimpeded render productions 'professional, 'slick' or 'correct'. Yealland in his interview points out that in conservatoire training, singers are often trained to be performing artists

executing prefabricated texts, rather than to be creating artists, sharing in creating and realising the performance text. Because of an internalised hierarchy of the importance of text and intellectual meaning in Western culture, thus, voice has been mainly used to serve the text, and by extension the author, the composer or, perhaps even the director.

By focusing on the material realities of voice and the individual bodies that voice in a performance, therefore, many mute assumptions, and above all, a sense of intellectual ableism and mental health are addressed, too. Carolyn Abbate (1993) and other feminist and queer scholars have therefore used this awareness of the *voice body* to recast agency as part of the performance. When the spectators start to notice the person, who is involved in the process of voicing than they also realise that individual bodies are not 'invisible'. In fact, they form part of the performance text through the way how the performers use their voice and how the audience are used to hear it. In Abbate's example, therefore, a female performer does not just execute an operatic text written by a (most likely male) author, but actually *envoices* it, embodies it with her vocal qualities and her physical presence as co-creating artist. This is very similar to André's example of how the texture of Leontyne Price's voice partly locates and partly liberates her performance within a particular socio-political race discourse.

Breath and sonority: the voicing we share

As a result, voice studies and informed vocal coaching listen with a critical ear to voice gurus that have become established figures in the field. The argument is that their training often caters to the needs of a normalised or normalising theatre industry. The question often revolves around ideas of achieving a 'neutral body' in drama and vocal practice. Often, this neutrality is hastily equated with 'invisibility', making the performer – the voicing body – servant to the content that is to be voiced. (In many mainstream, commercial situations there is surely more than a grain of truth to that. Consider how performers' bodies and vocal personalities in big West End shows need to match the exact appearance of the performer who created a role in line with the established brand. A good example would be how all Glindas from *Wicked* need to show the same dizzy, blond-haired soprano sound of Kristine Chenoweth's original performance.)

Looking closely at the nuances in definitions of voice by practitioners such as Cecily Berry or Kristin Linklater, perhaps even their followers Patsy Rodenburg and Christine Fitzmaurice, however, does reveal a praxis that shares in some of the conceptual aims of voice studies. It is so often the case that training can serve different purposes and gain ideological meaning through the frame in which it is employed. The idea of freeing a natural voice by going back to some idealised state of unblocked original 'me' – as many voice coaches proclaim (see above) – without a doubt ushers in multiple concerns around identity and acceptance. However, the pre-verbal tremoring of Fitzmaurice Voicework, for instance, to access a more 'original' relationship with the voice shares aspects with a more inclusive, perchance pre-linguistic, definition of vocal sound and breathing.

In a world of difference, breath is – as Yealland and others have noted – a uniting metaphor and physical practice. In the wider context of our modern society, the idea of breath connects so many of our contemporary cultural sticking points, from race politics (George Floyd's "I can't breathe") to an environment that literally runs out of clean air. Respiratory illnesses such as Coronavirus have made the link between voice coaching and metaphors of air flow even more prominent. The English National Opera (ENO) has installed their wellbeing programme *ENO Breathe* in response to the Covid pandemic, employing vocal coaches to help sufferers from long Covid regain their lung capacity with exercises from singing tutorials. Questions of breathing aesthetic – as a prerequisite or part of voice practice – and disability would make for compelling further study. Asthma, furthermore, has become a chronic illness for many and has made the invisible act of breathing more audible. Again, in this broadened understanding the reader may see that voice – as somatic materiality and breath-reality – sparks interesting artistic collaborations at the fringes of music theatre.

But it also marks a move away from considering perfect vocal communication as the only legitimate means of voice practice in popular (music) drama. This emphasises a, perhaps subtle, but remarkable shift away from mid-20th century voice coaching as exemplified by Cecil Berry. Berry was voice director of the Royal Shakespeare Society. She honed her method to prepare actors for communicating clearly onstage and to train them for the demands of a mainstream performance market that required this. Her methodology

and definition of voice is summed up in, e.g., *Your Voice and How to Use it* (1975). In her guide, Berry ([1975] 1990: 49) remarks this:

> People are always asking me to tell them what is wrong with their voice. […] No voice is wrong if it is communicating adequately, and I would hate to feel that that is what people think. You cannot think of the voice apart from the person – it *is* the person speaking. There is no correct way of reading anything, for each person will respond in a different way to the same passage […]

Perhaps revolutionary for mid-20th century standards, where Received Pronunciation was the gold (and also classist) standard of speaking English publicly, from today's perspective, this passage reveals a crucial exclusion: No voice is wrong *if* it communicates clearly. In other words, if it doesn't communicate in an unimpeded manner, a voice is wrong. Recent vocality studies and the following practice research into music theatre without voice want to do away with this lingering assumption or, better, integrate it as one option of voicing in a larger paradigm in which disruption, interruption, or seemingly 'imperfect' vocal communication becomes part of the rich expressive possibilities of the genre. In all this, the aesthetic category 'wrong' is reclaimed as joyously right and deliciously inviting in a music drama context that cares for many different voice abilities.

Voice as multi-sensory tool

In summary, voice as psycho-physical concept, converging with mental health and personal identity questions, has become a commonplace in established voice practice. We can argue, however, that in standard voice definitions often certain ideas of 'right' (healthy, productive) and 'wrong' (unhealthy, unproductive) still underpin normative training, despite the conceptual progress made by individual coaches and in academic discourse. When it comes to mental health, personally and socially speaking, a healthy voice is one that works, that is reliable (for producers, or employers) and that can be expected to say what is deemed right within the professional hierarchy of the employment world. This is a standard, commercial definition of voice this performance as research wants to depart from.

Counter-definitions of vocality in theory and practice, however, can be established alongside more conventional paths, and function as progenitors for the underlying understanding of voice in this research project. When we look, for example, at Kristin

Linklater's voice coaching, voice emerges as a potentially multi-sensory tool and mental health device. Yet, this might rarely be recognised in contexts, in which her voice training is conventionally deployed to 'free performers' to work reliably in the mainstream. The following quote *from Freeing the Natural Voice* ([1976] 2006: 26) illustrates the point:

> Expand your vocabulary of voice to include physical, emotional, and sensual reactions of all your senses, not just hearing. […] In order to open your voice up to the assessment of one of your other senses, I initially suggest that you try to see you voice imaginatively before beginning the technical work.

In these lines from her comprehensive voice guide, Linklater implies the benefits a broadened approach to vocal practice can have for anybody, regardless of background. The metaphor to expand the 'vocabulary of the voice' points into the direction of a more wholistic understanding of the speech organ; wholistic not just in the sense of overcoming a body-mind-divide, but as a concrete imaginative practice that involves drawing, writing, and other forms of creative expression. Linklater describes a multi-sensory foundation of the sending *and* receiving of voice ('sensual reactions of all your senses') though not necessarily primarily to invite people with learning disabilities or cognitive difference in.

Nevertheless, if voice training is also about 'opening up the voice' to other senses than voice becomes a multi-sensory tool which can not only be used in preparation but also in performance. For this practice research work, I see this as crucial part of a definition of voice and the multi-vocal aesthetic the *faciliteur* aspires to in contexts of music drama.

flexibility
different
training
silence
acceptance

change

Voice practice can invite...

Mirror images: an inclusive definition of voice practice

Music theatre as meta-genre

To facilitate a readable text, *music theatre* and *music drama* are used interchangeably in the following. Julian Woolford (2013: 15-30) lists several genres and sub-genres of musical theatre in his guide on how musicals work. But he also concludes, that 'new musical writers constantly blur the lines between […] definitions of genre' (2013: 29). One of the stable stylistic criteria of opera in particular is that it is 'generally performed acoustically (without amplification)' (Woolford 2013: 28). But even this is changing when opera becomes a mega-event or is performed outside of the acoustics of opera houses. Fulljames' staging of *The Return of Ulysses* for the Royal Opera House at the Roundhouse exemplifies this. The demands of the location made micing up necessary, although the amplified style tried to come as close to a natural voice sound as possible. With regards to musical styles, opera becomes more and more cross-over in new work blending popular melodic lines with classical modernism (e.g., the ROH's *Coraline*, 2018 at the Barbican).

Since intellectual discussion about the poetics of music theatre began in early modernism, two main queries have resurfaced (Schmierer 2001: 77-84). The idea that a music theatre aesthetic in order to tell a story successfully needs to care for seamless integration of its different media normalises a particular skill set: 'The book musical is still the most predominant sub-genre of musical […] this is where the book, music and lyrics have been written specifically to tell a linear story' (Woolford 2013: 22). This is where the integrated genre aesthetic meets with the requirements of a seamless sound-voice (i.e., rendering 'transparent' any divergent body specificities of the performer) and a directing style that cares for rigid coherence, as discussed above. In other words, the book musical (or linear opera) introduces an aesthetic norm which requires a practice norm. [4]

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[4] In popular musical theatre, the book musical form is associated with Golden Age American writers such Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein (*Oklahoma!; South Pacific)*, or Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe (*My Fair Lady*; *Camelot*) (cf. Bush Jones 2004) and a 'slick' production value.

In a deliberate reversal of principles of smooth integration and realistic illusion, Bertolt Brecht's plays with songs (e.g., *Mutter Courage*, *Die Dreigroschenoper*) could be taken as a reference point on the other end of the spectrum. The medium specificity of allowing to bring in different dramatic forms to tell a story was deployed as a deliberate stylistic choice to *dis*integrate various dramatic forms, including music. Often, this strategy is equated with inserting critical distance into a play's perception: disruption, distance and de-familiarisation can become declared aesthetic aims (cf. Brecht 1964: 179-205). From the perspective of a media- saturated PowerPoint and music clip age, though, the disintegrating effects of sensorial or medial multiplicity need to be questioned. In both traditions, however, music theatre as an aesthetic seems to pose questions of how to bring different forms of performative expression together, set to music, and to what aim. The artistic aim of highlighting or hiding these processes then becomes a choice. The dominant production model decides as a matter of preference, rather than out of aesthetic necessity.

Changing medium

The medium specificity of the music theatre form to switch between performance modes to tell a story entails another aesthetic query: that of realistic motivation behind the choice to sing or suddenly dance a story. The concept of *verisimilitude*, or 'the reality issue' as Roger Parker and Carolyn Abbate call the debate in their *History of Opera* (Abbate/Parker 2015: 13-17) becomes a directorial challenge, but also an inclusive opportunity. The option to switch to an alternative medium or mode of 'reality' to tell a story together potentially accommodates different needs of expression. Compositional devices such as leitmotifs and counterpoint can be rendered potent inclusive devising strategies that help to keep the disparate work resulting from miscellaneous co-creative impulses together. This ultimately counters common believes that classical musical forms require an infinite amount of virtuosity. Finally, the least narrow definition that brings music theatre down to its practical essentials also came up during the interviews with director: 'storytelling with music' (cf. Fulljames).

The underlying assumption in this notion is that music and singing enable a stronger, rawer, more intense form of passionate expression. When the creative professional doesn't

rely on the exact idea of what singing (voice) needs to be, but rather on its effect and purpose within the emotional dramaturgy of a piece of music theatre, then an increase in emotional or physical intensity in the room as a result of change of medium can happen just the same through tactual, olfactory, or gustatory involvement. In fact, the 'raw intensity' of a non-conventional way of producing 'voice' might achieve this aim even more effectively for a 'listener'. Terms such as *vocality* (see 33-34) qualify this kind of more-dimensional potential of engaging the listener in the performance act of a more-than-sound-voice, as it:

> encourages us to consider *everything* [highlighted in the original] that is being vocalized [...] and offers a way to talk about a voice beyond simply the words it imparts or its colour or production techniques. Instead, it encapsulates the entire experience of the speaker or singer and of the listener. (Meizel 2013: 267)

In this thesis, I argue that the *way of vocality* does not simply need to apply to talking about voice in an academic or avant-garde context, it can also become a productive tool in inclusive work and mainstream work, as it increases the choices the *faciliteur* has at his disposal to bring about this felt change in aesthetic medium. Ultimately, it helps to tell a story powerfully. The focus on the holistic experience of vocality ('the entire experience') is also echoed by Eidsheim when she pins down the embodied function of voice rather than the aesthetic norms associated with an organ that produces intelligible sounds. In her understanding of voice as articulatory action (cf. pp. 29-32) she describes in a similar way as I did above the process *felt* rather than the outcome *heard* as key in a broadened understanding of vocal aesthetic: the 'ability to cause a shift in a given person [a]nd the entirety of that shift in a material and sensory relationship' (2015: 104).

Multi-sensory staging techniques in historical perspective

Directing pioneer and stage designer Adolphe Appia, inspired by Wagner's concept of total immersion in the artwork, defines the aesthetic qualities of music in his seminal *Music and the Art of Theatre* (1962[1898]: 8):

> Music is an emotional inclination which one may possess without necessarily being a master of musical technique or even an appreciative audience of the crude exhibitions of our concert halls and our operatic stages. Sensitivity to music requires a special aptitude for contemplation, which makes one quick to grasp the aesthetic significance of certain proportions and to respond spontaneously to their content of intensity and harmony.

This, de facto, is a description of an inclusive aesthetic, though Appia's symbolist and abstract directing approach relied on rigid execution. His musings map out an open, changing quality of responses to music, in contrast to how for example Hargrave sees the inscribed responses to the score for *Pinocchio* (see above).

In his attack against representational stagings, Appia democratises music theatre aesthetic: it is not for 'masters of musical technique' only, the skill set can be more diverse. The resulting renewed listening then leads to spontaneous and immediate rather than specifically inscribed reactions. Appia, of course, intended to highlight Wagner's achievement and to extend its immersive quality, guided by music, to the stage text as a whole (Gordon 2009: 92). Remembering Appia's approach as an early reference point, though, helps to construct an aesthetic tradition that starts to see music theatre as a multi-sensory and freely representational event. The practice equivalent to this can be deploying voice as a more holistic expressive tool, gaining the potential to respond flexibly to different learning types and emotional dispositions.

Multi-sensory in this theatrical sense describes an aesthetic that involves all five senses to engage the viewer (and thereby perhaps even extends existing multisensory voice studies), it may relate to a heightened level of abstraction or immediacy. Viewed radically, this ultimately democratises the use of the different senses and brings a level of abstraction and sensibility to a performance, counterbalancing the need for certain cognitive or linguistic abilities. In a way, this inclusive radicalism in aesthetic even transcends current studies such as Eidsheim's that tend to centre their research interest still in voice as initiating factor and often still within the (ableist) production of some kind of sonorous vocality. Fascinatingly, Eidsheim translates the learning from her vibrational practice back into an alternative voice pedagogy that results from her action-based understanding of articulation (cf. 2015: 145 f.), eventually producing sound, exclamation, or words, harnessing the multi-sensory actions to produce a more liberated vocal sound. Using the term *multi-sensory* in engagement practice for performance for young children or people on the autistic spectrum, however, doesn't necessitate this kind of feedback loop (or even latent hierarchy) in the co-presence of different vocalities

Music theatre as pedagogy

Because of its medium specificities between abstraction and figuration, music theatre also emerges as pedagogy in the realm of theatre and social change. Dani Snyder-Young, for example, describes how the form can be beneficial in sensitive socio-political contexts. She uses the original musical *Mom in the Moon*, devised by the Chicago-based Storycatchers Theatre together with incarcerated teenage girls from IYC Warrenville, a prison-like locked youth centre, as a case study. The heightened dramatic conventions of music theatre help to abstract personal stories and thereby render them once removed from the inner lives of the performer-writers: 'by abstracting traumatic stories into lyrics and setting them to melodies, painful memories can be transformed into beautiful songs' (Snyder-Young 2013: 66).

With describing this praxis, Snyder-Young directly connects to strategies of dramatherapy or music therapy. Other socio-political impacts introduced with forms of musical storytelling are community-building and developing self-confidence: 'the choral sections highlight the connections among individual stories, emphasising for the girls that they are not alone in their experiences' (Synder-Young 2013: 66). Again, music drama presents itself as an ideal aesthetic playground for inclusive work due to its medium specificities. But Synder-Young also cautions to ask questions around the 'inherent goodness' of using such pedagogies and to what end. It is crucial to be transparent about the ideology of an institution certain devices are deployed within and to try to be aware of possible mute assumptions behind the stories told. In my practice journey, I therefore try to reflect on my own aims and potential bias from the perspective of the faciliteur.

Summing up inclusive voice definition(s) for music theatre practice:

Voice is music

cheese solid

Voice is multi-sensory abstraction

cheese abstract

Voice holds neurodiversity

Voice sounds out difference together

Voice is voices in space

Voice is listening

What is inclusvie voice practice? This flowchart was made with objects from my music theatre productions and workshops

III. Ethics, language, and consent

The relationship between dramatherapy and inclusive music drama: aesthetic intentions, therapeutic impacts

Music theatre without voice is not dramatherapy, though it might often require an awareness of therapeutic processes. The artistic intention of the writer-collaborator, or the *faciliteur*, is not therapeutic learning through play; yet, inclusive music drama may facilitate positive behavioural change. A participant with a speech-impediment might encounter a release of emotions when her story is told in a project about silencing techniques of mainstream society. When a participant with social anxiety and/or from the autistic spectrum decides to join a group during a song, this fosters socialisation and may help inclusion outside of the dramatic space. Working in participatory contexts with untrained performers, often also means working with performers untrained to the emotional demands of group work, live performance, or being seen and heard on a stage.

It has been noted before by dramatherapists such Dorothy Langley (2006: 34) and others (Jones 1996; Jennings 1998; Granger 1990) that the role of the therapist shares practice with that of the director such as 'facilitat[ing] individuals to discover blocks and overcome them'. Blocks may be creative, social, or both. In the realm of performance praxis, as described above, avant-garde drama instructor Jerzy Grotowski (1968: 17) develops the concept of *via negativa* to address psycho-social blocks in creative form. Dramatherapy, applied theatre, and inclusive facilitation share roots and have developed in parallel in the second half of the 20th century. They developed in mutual exchange to respond to the demands of diverse, oppressed, or otherwise marginalised groups. Brazilian theatre-maker Augusto Boal is often cited as an influential figure in dramatherapy and applied theatre alike. Separating the methods in participatory work is not always possible nor desirable as it does not prepare the *faciliteur* for the demanding social circumstances they might find themselves in.

Like a dramatherapist, the *faciliteur* needs to be prepared to safely contain emotions in a workshop setting. Establishing clear spatial and temporal boundaries helps to create a safe space for everybody involved. Routines that mark the opening of a session such as

check-in rounds and closing rituals help to keep creative and emotional explorations within the inclusive space. Moments of sharing and warm-up can create an atmosphere of group trust, cohesion, and focus relevant for concentrated creative work (Langley 2006: 68). As an element of safe practice, creative arts therapy options were promoted as part of some events (such as *The Fool Eater*) as a follow-up for participants or audience members who felt the performances had brought up something they wanted to explore further.

When collaborating with, for example, the group of women with learning disabilities from Powerhouse, however, I did not enter the space with the presumption that anybody was looking for therapeutic healing but to facilitate a participatory music theatre project. Accordingly, the evaluation and reflective processes were centred around the performance, the discovery of a new aesthetic, for example opera for new audiences, and different performance-related skills. This focus is also reflected in the following documentation, interviews, and analyses. The research inquiry does not aim to produce therapy-related insights.

Bearing all these possible therapeutic side effects in mind, I decided to obtain basic knowledge in dramatherapy through a course at the City Literary Institute, Covent Garden, during the project phase. In addition, discussions with colleagues, who are certified dramatherapists accompanied the performance and research work. This helped me to responsibly facilitate and ensure a safe and respectful, yet creatively challenging environment. But it also protected me in my role as *faciliteu*r from risk factors such as lone work that arise in the precarious work situations of community theatre.

Positionality: how to call cognitive diversity

Identity politics, disability culture, and inclusion are shifting terrains with a plurality of terminology. The words used to describe the participants and contexts in the following are chosen with care. Choosing the terminology preferred by one school might be at odds with another. Therefore, I try to vary where possible to include a multi-faceted vocabulary.

However, I do have some preferences: In general, I prefer to use *differently-abled* to highlight the relative nature of concepts of ability. I see this as an inclusive term that can contain the professionally-trained as well as the amateur performer. Different abilities occur on both ends of the spectrum, and in-between. At times, 'person with a disability' is used to describe difference in an affirmative way with a people-first approach. I keep the use of 'disabled person' to a minimum. I'm aware that there are multiple special and learning needs, that can only be indicated as a spectrum, from mild or moderate to multiple and profound. In the case of gender politics, I will use queer, non-binary, or LGBT+ almost interchangeably to describe diversity in sexual identity and orientation.

Though mental health work and learning disability are grouped together here for music theatre without voice, I'm aware that these 'conditions' describe independent, yet also overlapping states of cognitive diversity. People with learning disabilities often face mental distress due to discrimination and exclusion. But this does not need to be necessarily so. Many people with intellectual differences show mental wellbeing and live happy lives. Likewise, somebody with a (temporary) mental health struggle does not necessarily show signs of what would be considered a learning disability, e.g., a relatively slower pace in academic learning, i.e., or behavioural difficulties in group settings. Yet, gentle facilitation techniques and an inclusive artistic vision are relevant for both sectors in a similar way.

The ableist gaze and the reverse gaze

Working in fictional arts, I believe authors can employ multiple perspectives and can be sensitive to perspectives they don't share. This is what we call empathy and can train through reading, writing, and performing. This does not mean that the feeling of embodiment is the same. There is productivity in distance and difference, though. As artist, I do not fall in the category of learning disabled but I do disagree with the primacy of the academic in our societies and care for extending equal value to alternative forms of understanding 'the world'. Further, I may relate to feelings of vulnerability shared in a society that often devalues divergent ways of thinking and acting in the world.

As a German native speaker, I might have encountered moments where certain conventions of the English language might have felt alienating and excluding. I have gone through periods where I questioned my progress of learning, measured within existing standards of a predominantly academic world view that governs how we measure 'success' in our societies. Yet, as a queer man my experiences of the world may also show significant difference to that of a woman with a learning disability, for example.

These remarks on my positionality as facilitator within my own social and cultural context implement Preston's suggestions of pursuing a critical, i.e., self-reflexive, facilitation pedagogy. The myth of facilitating and research 'neutrality' is thereby grounded in the '[r]ecognition that neutrality is a role that can be played [and] provides us with a range of flexibilities to see its potential uses (and misuses)' (Preston 2016: 2). The practice reflexions follow this dictum. With concrete examples, they show how I with my facilitator-persona work in a cultural context thereby revealing perhaps internalised decision-making processes to which my interventions may be subject. I'm a facilitator who sees allowing suggestions to stand uncommented as a way of empowerment. Thus, when I decide not to intervene to respect the miscellaneous creative choices of a participant, I might still not remain neutral. If a possibly colonialist choice is brought forward by a differently-abled participant, then my 'neutrality' of working with the creative suggestions contributed can become a socio-political statement. Following a critical pedagogy provides me with the chance to reveal how non-intervention in these contexts can also function as a de-colonising practice (for more see pages 69-70).

In the first place, this research project aims to describe the journey of the *faciliteur*. This puts me in a position of power, but also in a position of vulnerability. Being raised in Western cultures that still often construct 'women' (but also 'men') through a male gaze – as Laura Mulvey describes and objectifying perspective on women, I might be subject to unconscious moments of bias in a project for women with learning disabilities. However, my position as queer man also subverts a culturally-learned, heterosexual binary that might be reinforced by such a concept. Judith Butler and other queer scholars have made evident the inherent fallacy of a gender politics that simply replicates an 'equal world view' on the basis of an unreflected use of existing representational categories.

Further, what could be called an *ableist gaze* may produce a romanticising position that might assume naiveté on behalf of a person with an (intellectual) disability. This adds another layer to the idea of an objectifying gaze. The research writing, therefore, aims to depict the actual practice and outcomes in a way that does not romanticise a person with a disability, pretending that participatory music theatre may solve questions of funding and care available for instance. To do so, throughout the practice journey, I highlight moments of my personal learning where I've perhaps revealed my own naivety bias. I also call out an aesthetic agenda that could be considered as Utopian. (Pay ethics and equal pay within industry standards are considered in detail in Appendix 1.)

Between leading and following: the *faciliteur* in the middle of the work, yet separate. This shot from the inclusive opera project *They Called Her Salt* (2019) shows how the facilitator provides a rhythm for a movement exercise. But note how one of the participants reaches out to invite the 'observer' into the activity. This image expresses the liminal position of the practice-research and facilitator between director and participant, gazer and being-gazed-at.

In this context, it is important to highlight that gazing is not a one-way process. In fact, presuming this kind of 'neutrality' or 'invisibility' as researcher-practitioner may reveal an inadvertent creeping in of an old-fashioned *scientific,* abelist gaze. It also disregards many achievements already made in the field of gender equality and disability confidence. Frankly speaking, objectification can happen both ways (although these 'ways' may still be defined within a heteronormative matrix). As an example: While taking part in an opera workshop, one of the women from Powerhouse humorously pointed out when I leaned forward and accidentally revealed a part of my skin: 'Aren't you aware, you are surrounded by women?' So, it would be fallacy to pretend that the groups of adults I have been working with exist outside of the power dynamics of objectification.

When I appear as performer-facilitator in LGBTQ contexts, the network of gazes and counter-gazes becomes even more complex, and perhaps too personal to express here. Chapter 3 talks in more detail about individual cases, such as how people with learning disabilities express their view on sexuality, e.g., referencing Mind the Gap's projects about questions of childbirth and motherhood.

The *faciliteur* as research subject

Being partly observer and at the same time participant in the work processes helped me to develop my own lens or vocality to talk about the work. Finding an intersubjective form to communicate this involvement of the facilitating subject in co-creative process, and my own creative subjectivity, is part of the research findings of this PhD. My internal voice as facilitator is externalised through excerpts from reflective writing and field notes around the projects. Any author's work is arguably a voice of difference and does not equate with that of the actual person who writes and exists beyond the fictional (or analytical) work. I invite the reader to pay the same kind of respect to the positionality of myself within the work I present.

In this context, it is important to highlight, that the documentary material includes multiple focal points. Producing images and video clips of the projects marked a collaborative effort, co-recorded by representatives roughly corresponding to the target

groups of the projects. More information on the creative teams behind the projects presented in the following can be found in the (digital) programmes for each project (e.g., https://www.florianjseubert.co.uk/the-fool-eater-1 and https://www.florianjseubert.co.uk/they-called-her-salt). Out of respect for each person's right to disclose themselves, I shall not identify involvement further.

In general, it needs to be acknowledged that the documentation itself was organised along certain 'limitations' or 'enabling considerations', and sometimes governed by the sheer practicality to produce a reasonable length of footage. Cameras cannot always capture every angle of a creative process, or every single moment. Sometimes, one viewpoint is cancelled out in favour of another simply because the camera was positioned at a different place within the studio. Photos can be a useful way to communicate moments of creation, yet they are not a time-based medium capturing a process. Finally, the person behind the camera is not congruent with my viewpoint as facilitator. Though we might have discussed a general aim before a project, they might prioritize different moments, according to their own background and their own (unconscious) bias.

Consent

They Called Her Salt and connected PhD research has been approved by Goldsmiths Ethics Committee for Theatre and Performance. Where it was not possible to obtain consent from participants for the projects referenced, their guardians were asked. The participants were informed about the possibility of becoming part of a research publication. Multiple ways to disseminate the information in written, verbal, and visual form were used. Some consent forms remain with the collaborating institutions. Consent was obtained verbally in performance contexts (e.g., *The Fool Eater*) and audience members who did not want to appear in the documentation were re-seated. To respect participants' private stories, names have been anonymised or changed. Above all, in all the projects, participants took the active choice to take part through signing up to a project, or consciously attending a performance that was marked as interactive

If, despite all the measures undertaken, a person, as they read this, wants to withdraw consent to appear in the documentation, they can do so at any time. I am happy to remove images or delete respective references.

Diversity Rider

The projects discussed are diverse in form and content, but also in work culture. Working in community outreach across London, with a focus on South-East London, the teams of my projects often evolve organically. I believe that diversity riders are important, and I care for an inclusive work climate, but I would like to highlight that I chose the team members based on their artistic skills and their sensitivity towards the facilitation processes cultivated. It has not been difficult to assemble a diverse team and it has been a pleasure to be part of a rich, inter-cultural exchange. Quotas have not been followed, but from the documentation and programmes attached it becomes apparent that our ratios exceed common expectations of gender, race, and disability representation.

Chapter 2

A research journey: developing a practice of music theatre without voice [documentation part I]

Accessing the practice

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce different ways of facilitating inclusion in music theatre through practice. It traces the development of the *faciliteur* within the field, giving insight into the fruition of participatory pantomime and popular music dramas. The underlying conceptual understanding of vocality continues the argument that voice-as-sound-only can move away from a stable, uniform idea and be conceived as multi-sensory and collective in content and form. The practice answers suggested below are responses to a theoretical discourse introduced in the previous chapter. They can give interested practitioners ideas of how to recast voice as inclusive tool in their work. This chapter investigates music theatre as multi-sensory art form. The documentation consists of field notes, excerpts from accompanying devising materials (such as role cards, storytelling scripts, quotations from programmes), or feedback from participants.

   Digital content: Links provided throughout the chapter direct the reader to audio-visual content from performances and/or short video examples from the facilitation process. The video content is explained in detail in the captions provided underneath the respective YouTube clip and in the digital documentation portfolio: https://www.florianjseubert.co.uk/practice-documentation. This website section is password protected and can be accessed with the password **Saltworks123!!**. For data protection reasons, the videos are not publicly visible on YouTube.

Where and when?

In this section, I'm presenting the research insights gained through the practice of working in inclusive music theatre contexts over the last roughly five years. The research journey described here took place from time since I started research in 2016 to its writing up phase in 2021. The insights collected along the way will be represented through individual items

associated with a practice discovery. The format of an experience report identifies moments of finding out in my chronology of 'doing inclusive theatre without voice' in East London. I will locate the learnings in concrete contexts and material objects to follow the idea of voice and expression as multi-sensory journey.

The report itself was written about a year into the Corona-crisis. This had an interesting effect: The lockdown-hiatuses permitted a feeling of historical difference to my own work while writing and reflecting on the practice. It allowed me to connect dots of learning and to create a bigger picture in form of constructing a learning-oriented research journey in a time where the digital had changed daily interaction. I will use strategies of storytelling to communicate the learning, revealing the fictionalising element inevitably involved in writing a chronology effectively by creating coherence out of the initially random.

At the same time, the collage-style techniques deployed keep track of a certain randomness of creative discoveries, reflecting the idea of a fractured vocality, rather than upholding the illusion of monolithic narration. Sometimes, I might admit that parts of the journey are lost, without clearly retrievable documentation, at others the loss will be filled in with interpretative text. As in music theatre without voice as a performance form, it is not about creating the illusion of seamlessness. In all of this, the research sprang out of the practice, and vice versa.

I. Training grounds: the conservatoires of the *faciliteur*

Beginnings and *auteurism*

Sometimes, we set out on journeys without realising that we are on them. When I started thinking about music theatre as an open genre rather than a closed aesthetic exclusively based on a certain kind of virtuosity, I raised the question why so few commercial musicals (e.g., West-End productions) in centres of the English-speaking world were interested in aesthetic experiment. What would a break with conventions of theatrical realism do to

these performance texts? What would 'untruthfulness' to the text look like? And ultimately, how would these aesthetic questions relate to inclusion on the music theatre stage?

At that point, I linked aesthetic experiment in theatre to continental ideas of *regietheatre* and the *auteur* as explained in the introductory chapter. Why couldn't musicals look like the radical deconstructions of opera we might see on Continental European stages, at the Salzburg Festival, for example, or Berlin's Ensemble? In 2008, I had seen a production of *Lulu* by Robert Wilson in Berlin and in 2017 an opera version of *Lear* (written by Aribert Reimann) directed by Oliver Stone. As I would find out, there was sometimes a bureaucratic answer to an aesthetic question: When it comes to classical musical theatre, often the custodians of rights have an interest in leaving texts 'unchanged' as is the case for most musicals managed by the Hammerstein and Rogers Estate. Also, the Continental European idea of *regietehatre* comes with its own baggage. It is not primarily interested in accessibility or a democratisation of the theatre-making process though this might happen as a side-effect.

Socio-political relevance may depend on the context within which iconoclastic strategies of 'violating' the coherence of an original text may be used. Or it might result from the pragmatism required when working with canonical source materials in unusual environments. I managed to ask established director Phyllida Lloyd about her view on and her use of *regietheatre* within the British scene. During a craft debate organised by the Director's Charitable Foundation at RADA studios on the 1st of July 2019, I framed a question with the suggestion that this approach provided 'freedom to include marginalised groups [through changing] the aesthetic of a conventional theatre production.' Lloyd perceived *auteurism* as an unpretentious praxis:

> Because of the dominance of Shakespeare and the text this country has been for a very long time 'the play is the thing.' And [I have tried] to approach it in a way that our Eastern European neighbours have been doing for generations. I got a scholarship in the 1980s to Russia and Soviet Georgia and watch Russian and Soviet Georgian directors in rehearsal which had a profound influence. I went to watch, amongst other companies [a young Georgian theatre company] who were doing **Hamlet**. I went into the rehearsal room and they were arguing about what translation they are going to use. Obviously, this was in Georgian, but let's say, they were saying let's use the equivalent of the Ted Hughes version: a bit of Ted Hughes and then we also swing in with the Byron translation just for 'To be or not to be' and then after that we cut the rest of the act. The play was replying to a political situation there that was so feverish. They were unable to speak through new writing. They

were using classical plays to criticise their regimes, particular Russian and Soviet oppressors. I began then to think: Let's step back from the idea if we don't do the unexpurgated **Hedda Gabler** it's not going to be worthwhile. Actually, look at how is this piece of writing replying in its entirety to the audience of the day. I think that had a big influence on me.

The liberating potential of 'stepping back' from the unaltered version of a play also surfaces in Llyod's observations from the talk at the National Theatre cited in Chapter 1. In this talk, the director applies her 'expurgation'-principle not just to the written word, but also to other sign systems of a performance text, such as music and vocals in opera.

Being fascinated by the aesthetic possibilities of creative play through directing, I remained intrigued of how to create genuine involvement of diverse audiences through elements of a more non-mainstream aesthetic approach that had 'cutting up' and 'inviting in' as one of the guiding through lines. Admittedly, the identity concept of the *auteur* sits uncomfortably within a British theatre scene when it is based on ideas of a solipsistic *enfant terrible* destructing a sacred text. But drawing attention to the inclusive potential of formal experiment changes the purpose of this style. There are several British directors working today that de facto deploy *auteur* strategies to make 'involving' theatre for the British stage; for instance, through the tendency to rewrite the texts (Emma Rice or Cal McCrystal, see Chapter 3) or through the tendency to fracture canonical narrative devices through a socio-political lens (as with Lloyd's *Tina* or *Mamma Mia!* or Katie Mitchell, see more below).

If we see *auteurism*, consequently, not as a fixed artistic identity connected to personhood that expresses itself consistently through time but as a succession of artistic actions and choices, then, a fascinating awareness arises: The system of the *auteur* overlaps with the practice of inclusive work in British community theatre. Aesthetic actions of breaking with conventions and aesthetic learnedness can deliberately address issues of inclusion. Thereby, they also reframe monolithic principles of voice and music theatre-making by, e.g., bringing in the peripheral, whether through the content or context of a story or the form of how this story is communicated. This practice, then, results in an aesthetic where the aesthetically experimental becomes central, and the central inclusive.

Many artistic discoveries, just like in science, are partly based on coincidence and on an awareness developed through experience that what happened coincidentally can be deployed as a technique subsequently. When I started investigating ideas of aesthetic

openness, I happened to become interested also in the work with people with disabilities. Around then, I also felt my own voice continuously failed me, though it was clearly audible to the outside, and, as a migrant between the German and English-speaking world, I felt physically and aesthetically voiceless within the conventions of how a voice 'should' sound (which one?). This might have revealed my own set of *biases* and *standards* (a term I will refer to later on in this journey) at the time.

East London/Canning Town

In many ways, the training grounds of a 'centre' where preserving efforts of a certain kind of text for a certain kind of voice dominated were perhaps not best terrain for the research of a participatory directing language. The training of alternative tools organically associated with locations where aesthetic processes of difference happened as part of the local matrix. Fittingly, my journey started in a space where coincidence rather than trained coherence emerged as creative strategy out of the spatial DNA. Reflecting on the coincidental element of the practice research journey is in line with what Trimingham (2002: 57) observes in her PaR methodology when she discusses the inevitable arbitrariness of a hermeneutic logic that continually evolves. The resulting circular of thinking can only be stepped in and out of at an 'arbitrary starting point of entry' (and correlating end point). Commencing in back streets of East London spatialises this understanding of the creative PaR process.

In 2016, I lived near Canning Town in the East End of London. Canning Town in the mid-2010s was a grim place, industrial, a continuous construction-site promising of a future that might never come. 'The new Shoreditch', upbeat trendsetters reassured about the place, 'twenty years from now'. The vision of a hip and soon-flourishing East End should mark the final achievement of the urban regeneration area that once was the docklands of the working people.

In 2012, the Olympics had been there, four years before I arrived. Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Stratford was a 40-minute walk away from the underground station. Canning Town tube station released its trains from early in the morning to late at night. The Olympics had gone, and besides a vast sports ground and decent public transport, had left the elephantine Westfield shopping centre, attracting attention further away from more

residential stops. At times, it seemed Canning Town was only there as a place to get away from on the silver Jubilee line, off into the shining commercialism of central London or Stratford East.

The area's main asset was (and perhaps still is) that it was well-connected. Hence, the derelict factory buildings near the station lured the occasional musical spectacle into reasonably cheap abandoned spaces. One year, Secrete Cinema's version of *Moulin Rouge* turned a large, empty storage hall into a version of a Parisian Montmartre. The only other pop cultural event of these years that stuck to my mind was the Queen's 90s birthday.

On the special day, the interested royalist could acquire a set of commemorative stamps from the local post office. When I arrived at the post office, however, feeling more as a tourist than as a royalist, in the late morning of the 21st of April 2016, the clerk said that a lady – presumably from Plaistow – had bought up all the stamp sets with the famous royal group picture. In it, a young prince George stretched upward from a little makeshift podium to fit his head into the perforated frame next to his great-grandmother's. The second commemorative set, a collection of historic royal moments, was still available. I bought one for a friend at home, and one for myself.

It was on one of my wanderings towards the Royal Victoria Docks, past the post office and past the empty factory, that I stumbled upon a church behind fast-rising apartment blocks. Maybe the spiritual dimension of the space is significant, maybe it isn't. St Luke's Community Centre at that time had a café in the front, run by an elderly lady called Sara, an elderly lady who, as I discovered later, also ran several local board meetings, was, I believe, involved with the labour party and, most importantly, made an excellent pie.

Why am I telling you all this? Perhaps to show that training to practice a different kind of voice is less directed than it might look from the outside. Finding a different kind of voice means allowing discovery off the main streets. In this poetic inversion, the training grounds of the *faciliteur* become the everyday streets of East London. That's where the learnings happened, at the periphery to a centralised vision of a musical theatre mainstream.

The lady, Sara, with the pies that tasted like old stories of East London, invited me into her café. Often, builders would sit on green wrought-iron chairs in front of the main

entrance under a gothic arches and would watch the high-rises around them grow. The builders would chat to Sara and have her daily special – SpagBol (which I found out to mean Spaghetti Bolognese), fried fish, a sandwich or bacon roll with brown sauce. Canning Town five years ago was a different place.

I didn't know what I wanted when I came to the café, but Sara had something to offer: 'So what do you do?' 'I work at Goldsmiths.' 'I know somebody from Goldsmiths. They sometimes come here to work with our group for women with learning disabilities. They do theatre.' 'I do theatre, too.' I said and was perhaps a bit annoyed that even in a remote café in East London it wasn't possible to feel unique. 'You should get in touch with them,' Sara encouraged.

I had volunteered with the youth theatre Chicken Shed that summer for a few trial sessions at the recommendation of a friend. I found the work with differently-abled people inspiring, so I said: 'I'd love to.' Sara gave me an e-mail address of their coordinator Tae, and also she said, 'There is another charity in Canning Town. Arc in the Park on Hermit Road, I will give you their address, too. They have a youth club for young adults with autism. You should get in touch with them.'

First scenes with objects

I got in touch with both groups, Powerhouse for Women with Learning Disabilities, my now long-standing collaborator, at St. Luke's Community Centre, the former church, and Arc in the Park. Surprisingly, I received positive responses from both charities, which, if fellow practitioners are reading this, is rare. Often, responses come with a significant delay or not at all. But in this case, responses came. I visited a few sessions of both groups, took part as a volunteer, and devised short workshop exercises for the two groups.

A few weeks in, I was intrigued to create a short inclusive performance workshop involving objects for the women from Powerhouse. Lemons, I just remember, were there perhaps from the beginning as one of my multi-sensory leitmotifs. *Lemons make you happy* is a saying freely translated from German, and they just might. The participants could relate

well to the fragrant, tactile citrus fruits when I asked the groups to come up with short emotional responses to the series of objects.

There was a postcard from the Maldives, too, I remember, and a little knitted rabbit a friend had made. The different textures of the objects and associations helped to encourage a creative process. We created scenes: Somebody was cutting lemons in the kitchen and tried them. They tasted sour. Distorted faces. In another one, somebody received a postcard from a foreign land with yellow fish in blue waters. They felt happy, the fish and the participants. Cheerful. Thus, one of the first learnings on my practice research journey was that it is possible to express strong emotions with the voice(s) you have. Without relying on a narrow understanding of voice, many different moments of theatrical performance just like in music theatre communicated emotion and character.

Another piece of learning, in hindsight, has become one of my main techniques in creating music theatre without voice: Inclusion thrives on facilitating coincidence, or creating a dramatic, perhaps mundane space where 'different things can happen' and become part of the overall stylistic vision. A spectacularly-diverse performance can happen in a seemingly unspectacular environment. A bit like Canning Town. A sense of dramaturgical coherence comes into this theatre through the acceptance of coincidence as creative structure. Its artistic aim, thus, is not to make the coincidental cohere through minute repetition, but to accept the coincidental as ultimate coherence. The *faciliteur* needs to learn how to accept that performance can only be partly directed in inclusive contexts. Imperfection foster surprise.

From the view of responsible facilitation in vulnerable contexts, the objects also fulfil two more crucial functions in this approach: (1) They provide a readymade impulse that is relatable with different senses. (2) They provide a sense of security, literally something to hold on to.

Being professional

Critic-practitioner Dan Rebellato (1999: 83) notes that ideas of professionalism and acquiring technique in (British) theatre often carry assumptions of gaining skills within a particular kind of training context associated with institutionalised training:

> Sociologists often stress the importance of training to professional identification. Its significance is less to do with the complexity of the tasks in hand than the impression generated that the profession possesses formalised skills and a body of knowledge that need to be acquired by serious, disinterested study.

Professionalism in a field, thus, rests on an abstractly-defined symbolic understanding rather than on a clearly-defined essence of what 'formalised' and 'disinterested study' needs to comprise. Rebellato, henceforth, precisely concludes: 'What professionalisation involves has been much debated' (1999: 82). The skills of the *faciliteur* require finding, or defining your own space, and are necessarily directed by the coincidence of who comes together and is included in the resulting studio situation.

'Deficiency' on conventional terms – as already alluded to in the introduction – becomes the positive definition of a training that can only happen in the absence of more formalised standards of study. *Technique* in this journey towards professionalisation (if we want to use this word to describe a process of becoming a skilled labourer in a field) derives from experience through practice. Practice research seems the natural mode of inquiry for the more independent processes of the *faciliteur.* In his interview, director Cal McCrystal describes this *other* skill set that seems to emerge as a recurring theme in music theatre without voice as 'intuition coupled with experience' (see more in Chapter 3 and for the full interview the digital portfolio).

Every training situation serve different purposes and different needs, so value judgements remain relative constructs. The first stretch in the development journey of the *faciliteur*, however, reveals the ableist assumptions in a certain understanding of training that is often considered central to music theatre, but remains only peripheral to that of the *faciliteur*: academic coherence and stylistic seamlessness.

A revamped evaluative matrix

If spatially-variable responses and an aesthetics of coincidence emerge as artistic principles in the work of the *faciliteur*, then we need to shift the paradigm of evaluation, too. For inclusive music drama, criteria need to be considered that flank ideas of visibility, 'loud volume' or the performance of singular virtuosity. Aesthetic guidelines that recognise the socio-artistic outcomes of creative sharing and voice as conversation through music drama are helpful. Making this alternative evaluative matrix heard – especially in funding contexts – is crucial and part of the communicative process of the *faciliteur*. Before I tell you about the next part of my journey, therefore, I would like to introduce some evaluation points that may accompany your reading and perhaps inform your appraisal of the following pieces of learning.

In reflecting on the 'effectiveness' of inclusive music theatre work, mass appeal – as in size of venue, audience numbers or volume – and virtuosity – as in the vague idea of an artistic excellence obtained through a particular kind of training that focuses on individualised artistic work rather than imaginative community –, need to be balanced with questions of *meaningful participation*, *diverse opportunity*, and *creative dialogue* as well as *innovative aesthetic outreach*. All these criteria tend to be interested in bringing people together through the aesthetic encounter of music theatre without voice. They value difference, may it be cognitive, physical, ethnic, or gender-orientated, as ability of mutual exchange. This assessment matrix frames music theatre as a social utopia where encouraging personal, open exchange becomes part of the aesthetic of the art from but allow for 'failure' (as conceptualised in Chapter 1).

Meaningful participation could, for example, describe whether events of inclusive music theatre feature moments of personal encounter through group performance. How are participants welcomed into the space? In my projects, there is usually a form of creatively-facilitated warming period. This could happen through a personal welcome at the door or a comment that directly addresses the audience from the stage.

'Meaningful' then means achieving creative intimacy within the work of art through getting in touch with our senses. I have used gustatory elements to encourage a sensory group experience: inviting members to try flavours that correspond to the themes of the story. It is also the set-up of space in a way that allows strangers to get in touch with each other. This could be actualised through a cabaret-style table seating or grouping of chairs

around 'action tables' where the guests can explore objects during a performance (for more on this device see Chapter 4). Again, the idea of creative and emotional involvement in the performance is broadened and realised through concrete ideas of shared participation opened towards the audience space, which creates a feeling of community and gravitates around the central metaphor of socio-political vocality.

Diverse opportunity directly connects to this broadened understanding of the consumption of a music theatre performance. Ideally, there is not just one way to engage with the performance content. Multi-sensory activities help to invite different abilities to take part. This shapes a space of imaginative opportunity where different opinions can be expressed and heard in different aesthetic vocalities. Not every sense needs to be engaged all the time, but I've found it encouraging for a diverse audience to at least have one element for each sense included in the event. This could be as straightforward as a panel discussion with movement exercises, which followed the performance of the *The Fool Eater* (see below), or a way to voice your thoughts through writing them on objects and placing them on stage. *They Called Her Salt* (see Chapter 4) invited the audience to add a cheery wish to a tree prop as part of the stage design.

Creative dialogue can be understood in this sense, but also captures the multi-sensory potential of music theatre as an artform. Has there been the opportunity to explore different art forms in response to each other?, could be a question that may help to reflect the standards of an inclusive work of music theatre. Concretely, has a tactile object inspired a song and the song inspired an illustration. This then, connects to the overarching idea of facilitating innovative outreach on aesthetic terms. Like a multi-sensory leitmotif, it translates a theme into a chain reaction of aesthetic outreach. This also addresses questions of how audiences consume music theatre. The number of audience members almost requires to be reduced to secure a meaningful creative dialogue and to encourage participation.

It might have become apparent that these standards of inclusive music theatre directly link to the concerns of a space where coincidence can happen. This coincidence is permitted by the group of people that participate. To some extent, the show is then directed by responses. Artistic criteria that cancel out or are not interested in listening to these responses as part of a performance, then, cannot be the evaluation tools of choice for

inclusive music theatre with different vocality aesthetics. The *faciliteur* directs a space that values participation and the unpredictability that comes with it. These aspects need to be reflected in its assessment. The *faciliteur* partly directs a production so that it can be directed by others. In this space, the question who holds 'creative' power is displaced by a concept of creative sharing as formal realisation of a music theatre practice that strives to give inclusion a socio-political and stylistic voice. Outreach becomes part of the aesthetic of a piece.

II. Developing live direction: A panto-project for young adults with autism

The White Knight and the Two Bears (2017) with Arc in the Park

Core discoveries into how an aesthetic framework could look like that is able to hold the diverse requirements described above happened during a pantomime project I created for Arc in the Park in 2017. The project was called *The White Knight and the Two Bears*. I only realised through reflecting on the practice in hindsight how crucial the discoveries had been to unlocking a viable praxis paradigm for music theatre without voice. It had literally been behind me all the time.

A pantomime is something 'very British' (and Australian): Pickering and Henson (2013: 85) note that 'the nearest that the American theatre comes to the British 'panto' is in shows for children's theatre'. Pantomime is a form of popular music theatre that retells a fairy story with a twist, bawdy humour (for the parents), camp awareness of role-playing and a lot of audience interaction. It's unbelievably shrill and shows over-the-top self-awareness. Though a clown that doesn't use words may appear in it, pantomime does not refer to the art form of silent miming. A stock character of pantomimes is the dame, a man dressed as a woman that plays the villain. This take on the skirt role can be traced also in 19th century opera culture as with Engelbert Humperdinck's witch from *Haensel and Gretel*.

Though I used the loose idea of retelling a fairy story with colourful characters and quirky plot twists for *The White Knight and the Two Bears*, I did not insist on using the stock characters conventionally associated with the panto form. I wanted the characters to develop out of toys the group members had brought in. The tactile and familiar nature of the objects sparked multi-sensory involvement already in the devising process. I called our project *a very new pantomime* to mark the distinction from the classic form but to acknowledge the traditional background.

A youth club for young people with special needs

Arc in the Park is a charity with their headquarters in a corner of Hermit Road Park, East London. Their community space is located under a large piece of corrugated iron shaped into a roof like a half moon, adjacent to a small playground and garden. So, perhaps there was something magical about the place which suggested it as a location for a modernised fairy story. Over two months, in November and December 2017, every Thursday afternoon, I devised the panto performance together with their youth club for young adults with special needs. The performance was on 14th December. The special needs of the partly non-verbal participants ranged from mild forms of autism and learning disabilities to significant speech impediments.

Directing the devising process: a menagerie of diverse characters

Allowing contributions from the group to direct the dramaturgy and content of the story, we collected a menagerie of diverse characters. I found that non-realistic styles of storytelling – as in fairy tales or magic realism – work well to accommodate grotesque character choices or plot anachronisms organically. This aids a relaxed openness during the sharing ideas phase on behalf of the *faciliteur*. One member brought in a book about Camden-based rap trio N-Dubz. He was a fan of hip-hop characters in general. Others had forgotten their toys at home and reached for some of the big teddies the space provided in its play area. One

participant brought in a white toy figure of George, the English knight, on a horse. We decided that this knight could be one of the heroes of the story. The brown bears became the villains.

This allows me to make a remark about inclusion on the content level and the representation of different ethnicities and gender. By breaking with normative story conventions, a *faciliteur* aims to questions cliché and create engaging art works out of these breaks with norms, between politics and aesthetics. However, the creative professional sometimes finds himself in the dilemma how to intervene or not intervene when a group member brings in a choice deemed 'problematic' within certain underlying assumptions of a progressive society. Turning a white, male hero into the main character of a fairy story that ultimately developed into the direction where two brown bears were the villains and hence needed to be attacked by the white hero, is not a timely piece of writing.

However, when working with young adults with special needs especially, changing characters and suggestions too much to serve a political message is also problematic; or unreflectedly ideological. Firstly, it can potentially endanger empowerment when telling somebody directly that a certain creative choice is not acceptable. Requiring changes to personal preferences (in our case the choice of a beloved toy) can also trigger anxiety for somebody on the autistic spectrum. This endangers breaking the trust in an open-minded creative process. At worst, it risks reinforcing a message people with disabilities are often confronted with in society, that what they choose to like or do is considered 'wrong.'

Finally, intellectualising too much during the devising process disembodies the creative work and may confuse and hamper the judgement-free inclusive exploration I was aiming for. (This is, by the way true for most practice-based work at the cross-section of politics and free exploration. If a reflective, socio-political dimension comes in too early, the group often becomes inhibited, or worried to externalise stories that are deemed unacceptable in a contemporary discourse.) In a safe dramatic space, 'difficult choices' can often be addressed at a later stage and gently redirected through questions and dramaturgical guidance. This often turns out to be more productive and addresses unconscious bias in an accepting and inviting way.

The white knight example is also an instance where Sheila Preston's observations on the dilemmatic nature of facilitation work come into play. Preston (2016: 24) notes that the complex tasks around enabling participants to create dramatic work which is empowering yet also socially-progressive (or in our context inclusive) may lead to 'contradictory intentions'. These in return result from two different forms of pedagogy that may work in tandem but not always in unison. Inviting the participants to bring in toys to devise a story marks a form of 'participatory pedagogy' that works successfully on the basis of encouraging through absorbing participant choices as illustrated above. However, with its ideological indebtedness to social change movements (which through the nature of the practice itself also underlie my own work) applied theatre methods that have absorb self-awareness from Henry Giroux 'critical pedagogy' would need to question this choice through a more active intervention on behalf of the facilitator. There is no easy answer to resolving this, but performance itself may provide non-verbal ways out.

In the case of our white knight, I eventually decided to allow the character choice to be in dialogue with the actual performance text we were creating. The white knight was chosen by a bright young teenager of Black-Asian descent. His confidence with taking part in the creative process and his refreshingly non-mainstream body image created enough non-verbal tension, I felt from the perspective of the *faciliteur*, to call the persona of the white knight and its socio-political ramifications into question through performative contrast.

In a sense, outreach practice had become a defining aesthetic element in the resulting performance, following the criteria I've mapped out above. Further, it was in line with the directorial agenda I had set out for the project in my field notes after the second session:

> Use whatever input that comes from them [the group] (e.g. fight and bear scenes) from the repertoire of collectively inherited story elements, and try to bring the story elements together gently, with plot elements you provide / plot twists that get the story moving forward (connecting the individual ideas and images with dramaturgical / linear shaping / moving on from one episode to the next – providing the direction that allows the individual ideas and characters created together with the group members to shine and come together in a connected (coherent) whole, to carry the individual ideas and shape them into a coherent piece of theatrical work

The directing vision of the *faciliteur* becomes apparent with 'bring the story elements together gently' through 'dramaturgical […] shaping' and 'providing the direction

that allows.' Also, the two poles of some notion of 'coherence' or 'the whole' on the one hand and empowerment as part of an aesthetic of conversation ('individual moments that shine') on the other were part of this early aesthetic description.

The message of a diverse cast owning their archetypal role choices, thus, became a powerful commentary on some of the more traditional plot elements. The performance resulted in an authentic, heart-felt, and fresh contribution to an inclusive discourse than any more outspoken intervention for the sake of diversity could have been. The strategy of embodying contrast sees the physical and vocal text of a performance as equal to the pre-fabricated, written or intellectual conceptions of a role. Encouraging the participants to commit to their characters also had the side-effect of meaningful involvement. The parents of the 'white knight' and the charity coordinator confirmed at the end of the project:

> The whole youth group were enthusiastic about taking part in the pantomime […]. The parents informed us that the young people had been practicing the scripts at home and that they thoroughly enjoyed the performance.

After workshop work: narrating the performance

After the first devising sessions with the objects and characters, I went to my office in order to organise the creative impulses so that we could practice with some kind of loose script. The character choices and plot moments tended to be disparate, but I wanted to fill in some of the dramaturgical gaps for the audience without losing the individual suggestions. So, I wrote short introductions, like in a story, and inserted the voice of a narrator in the background to step in and keep the story moments connected during the performance:

The White Knight and the Two Bears

Christmas Panto for Arc in the Park

NARRATOR

It was an unusually warm day for winter in the Kingdom of Arc. But then again, the Kingdom is a very special place and things are a bit different here. Almost like as in Australia, where the summers are cold and the winters are ready for surfing Santa Clauses. We might even spot a Kangaroo.

In the royal hall

The King of the Realm, George the White Knight, chilled happily on his throne, his legs

Bringing in a fictionalised avatar of the *faciliteur:* experimenting with indirect ways of providing guidance during a musical story performance. In this cut-out from the script of *The White Knight and the Two Bears* (Arc in the Park, 2017), the narrator sets the scene and directs the group of performance on stage. (Full script available in the digital portfolio.)

The storytelling function helped to prepare a dramatic space so that spontaneity could happen. During the rehearsal process, I had realised that as director-facilitator I often stood amongst the action gently guiding the participants with the volunteers. (This strategy can be gleaned from the rough recording of the final performance: https://youtu.be/L7pBocZI9Yg.) I found that by reading the 'stage directions' as 'story moments' the rehearsal process became fictionally motivated and much easier to communicate and to relate to by the participants.

Further, it allowed me as director-facilitator to remain on stage for creative reasons and not as a support worker. This provided reassurance for the participants, but did not take away performance confidence, as they were saying their lines as independent actors. It allowed me to indirectly direct the action with improvised moments. Another benefit with loosely-assembled groups: This format enables somebody to take part even last minute.

Looking back at my field notes from the 11th of November 2017, I, at the time, tried to identify a role that described this gentle, participatory understanding of a directing aesthetic, between facilitating, writing, and performing, as *a method* of inclusive music theatre-making. Note the struggle for words externalised by listing different tasks and my overuse of punctuation marks. Later, the blank space in terminology would turn into the idea of the *faciliteur*:

> BRIEF REFLECTION on the method
>
> Writing a panto together with autistic young adults / how to produce content and the instructor's role (as director – moderating and consolidating the content impulses [given] by the participants)
>
> Writing together with the group (disability / autism), providing them with conversation / imagination starters that lead to the content of a story or a song text. E.g. providing a frame work (like the start of a song, or a fairy tale model, certain character types or let the children / adults bring in objects from home, or make drawings about characters and then see which story can develop from them.

It is interesting that so many elements from the practice of the *faciliteur* are alluded to in this early reflection: the idea of multi-sensory impulses, from drawings to objects to include different ability groups in the creative process; but also, the need for 'a framework', something that initiates a space to enable creative coincidence.

The *faciliteur* as on-stage storyteller and epic host

Only while going through these notes did I realise that I provided the answer for how that model would later look like in the same sentences – 'like the start of a song, or a fairy tale model'. In a way, the role of the *faciliteur* becomes like an engine-starter that helps a project to take flight or simply break the ice. He or she may slightly withdraw or completely hand over the performance to the people in a space.

The *faciliteur* is therefore more present within the performance *and* less present than a conventional director. In my field notes, I also use the term 'host' to describe this ambivalent role. Akin to narratological concepts, the *faciliteur* as narrator can be part of the action (*diegetic*), taking the viewpoint of a character within the show. Simultaneously, he is

firmly lodged outside the story world, as *non-diegetic* entity. In a conventional understanding, the director would gravitate more towards the *non-diegetic*, the facilitator towards the *diegetic*. In a non-binary understanding, the *faciliteur* vacillates between both.

As director-performer, the *faciliteur* can intervene during the performance with authorial remarks that are part of the fictional construct. He or she can be part of the performance and visible. In doing so, the technique dramatises epic strategies to facilitate inclusion. This could be an interesting nuance to the role of the *faciliteur* that might distinguish his role description from the more conventional facilitator who guides a group towards a performance, and not necessarily becomes an integral part of the performance. It also reveals from the performers' perspective that narrational tools on stage need not be 'alienating' (as the Brechtian concept is often (mis)-translated) but can also be involving and encouraging.

Appearances of the *faciliteur*, of course, can be realised along a spectrum. Not every performance needs to be handed over completely or narrated through. Sometimes, short moments of participation and co-creation within a more conventionally-staged performance can become powerful tools of inclusion. In others, the *faciliteur* can be one of the main performers, as I explored in *The Fool Eater*, where I was one of the main narrators. The performative narrator is the avatar of the *faciliteur*, a material incarnation of a vocal directing language in a most secular, pragmatic sense. The *faciliteur*'s *logos* serves as much as it asserts. This recasts outdated myths of the artist as god-like inspirator within a more pragmatic, collaborative context. The narrator is a performance mask (a *persona*) of the *faciliteur* that helps to open the door for the coincidence of creative voices to pass through.

Non-verbal direction

In the same vein, non-verbal elements can function as tools of dramaturgical shaping. Besides the belligerent bears in a dark forest that wanted to eat the children of George's royal subjects, our story universe was populated by a trio of rappers, deriving from the suggestions of the group member who had brought in references to N-Dudz. Consequently, our rapping band was called the M-Dudes. Playing one of the rappers was especially popular with a non-verbal group member of black British origin who had chosen the characters.

His enthusiasm for the role, I thought afterwards, might have revealed discrimination he must experience in everyday situations within his community. His condition was mixed with a form of autism that triggered him to jump up and down occasionally as a stimming practice to compensate social input. I suspected that he must rarely get the chance to play a neurotypical teenager embodying his favourite rapper.

I was glad that the young man taught me out of my own bias, and thereby shaped the performance content with his perspective. To fictionally integrate his ability of jumping, I had invented a kangaroo-character visiting the forest of the bears from Australia. But the youngster was much more interested in being a rapper. One of the volunteers had indirectly commented on this by highlighting to him that he seemed to enjoy this part. During the costume-making workshop, he then crafted a thick gold chain out of yellow cardboard, perhaps referencing grime-culture in East London. The young man was one of the first participants to appear on stage for the final rehearsal when we practiced the hip-hop group's entrance. These were also moments, where he seemed to manage the jumping well:

Session IV after reflections [field notes from 01/12/2017]

[…] especially the non-verbal ones, such as M. – they really enjoy being part of a project, of exploring roles they normally couldn't do in everyday life (rapper) because of their speech impediment. M. is very concentrated, and I treat him like every other actor in the group, I make eye contact and tell him what to do [with this I meant giving directions, from the perspective of a director, ed. FJS] and – he really enjoys being complimented on his work and encouraged. Because, I think, very often people must overlook him or treat him [badly]…I think he knows very well what's going on […]. I fell in that trap as well […] where you, because you don't really listen to [somebody] or don't really see what they like about a project, force an interpretation into their sounds of what they like or not. I thought it was a good idea that M. played the kangaroo, but he preferred the rappers.

These self-critical observations honed another crucial research insight for the *faciliteur*: listening to what participants in the room tell the outreach worker, not just with their conventional speech-voices, but with their enthusiasm, with the positions of their bodies in space, or their tactual choices. Where do they want to be? Or where don't they want to be? Music theatre without voice requires this form of three-dimensional listening on the part of the director, a listening that again discovers through coincidence in a process.

At the time, I had a chat with a fellow PhD student and mother of an autistic son. She said in a conversation: 'They like nothing more than being treated as everybody else.' So I had concluded in my field notes with focus on my practice learning. This is what music theatre without voice can do: 'don't care about […] disabilities when casting a play […]' (quote from a field note). For the aesthetic, I concluded with the by-now familiar stylistic dilemma: '[casting] the non-normative within the norm, this gives structure but at the same time undermines the rigidity of this structure.' Speaking from today's perspective, this strategy partly endangers structure because of some of the internalised expectations of how music theatre performances are conventionally viewed. Within the dramatic space of the pantomime, possibilities arose to act 'against' social expectations.

This also points to the creative potential of *envoicing* already mentioned in the introduction. The practice concept coined by Carolyn Abbate (1993: 225) gives interpretative audibility to the actual body on stage of a music drama. The individualised agent who has a subject-voice and whose voice the spectator hears does not vanish behind an *a priori* work of art of a composer or writer. In the example mentioned above, *envoicing* turns multi-sensory, as the embodied participation of non-verbal amateur-actors uses touch or preference for objects as well to communicate *against* textual assumptions. How does the performing vocal body – through multi-sensory expression – empower themselves over the social and artistic scripts?

The pantomime showed within the fictional space that the differently-abled participants could embody roles they chose to embody and make them their own. This is a prime example of the *affirmative model* of disability in action. A notion from disability studies, the concept forms a middle ground between the *social model*, that sees disability as societal construction, and certain strands of an (outdated) *medical mode* that define disability as tragic obstacle. The *affirmative model,* in contrast, accepts impairment (rather than disability) as a starting point for personal empowerment (cf. Kuppers 2014: 32; Colin Cameron 2014: 4). The theoretical tool casts disability as an invitation for positive exploration and for positioning the individual agent within the realities of a 'disenabling' world.

Of course, the role of a rapper played by a non-verbal actor 'sounds' different. But that is the point. It sounds different and therefore it is possible. On this empowered note, I

would like to highlight that my choice of pronouns in the field notes (*I* and *them*) was not motivated by reinforcing some sense of binary distinction (*us* vs. *them*) but rooted in my shifting position as practice-researcher. From the observer's perspective, I used *them* to mark a critical distance in my role as 'outsider' during the process and after the process. In practice, the feeling of *we* as a community became more of a reality in the inclusive music theatre work described.

A rap song in a Christmas story

In the panto-story, the bears would have been slain by the knight to rescue the children. A *faciliteur* (with a certain pacifist bias) might feel that an intervention is needed in such a case, to not promote violence as a form to resolve conflicts. The plot was gently reshaped in the rehearsal process, so that the rappers came to the fighting scene and transformed the spectacle into a song-and-dance number, into collective pantomime. The rap marked a moment of interaction that resulted in a conga-line, inviting the audience in to participate. This heightened the emotional energy in the space.

The group had devised the rap-song of the M-Dudz by collecting a list of objects, inspired by imagining presents for Christmas. In general, it is useful to keep imagination grounded in material and physical references. This makes them relatable on a concrete, multi-sensory level. This grounding speaks more immediately to the imagination than abstract, intellectual concepts and invites mental difference in. The following excerpt from the rap evidences this method ins its compositional aesthetic (the whole lyrics can be accessed in the <u>digital portfolio</u>):

> Bum bum ba bum bum pff
> Bum bum ba bum bum pff (clap)
> Bum bum ba bum bum pff
> Bum bum ba bum bum pff
>
>
> When you are fighting with your bears
> Think about flowers, powers, fidget spinners,
> Think about cottages by the sea with a wonderful attic and a fig tree
> And our fighting no more

The conga-performance started with a rhythmic patter to establish a beat, but also to focus the group. Even on this micro-level, a warm-up period is built in the structure of the song. This allows for participants who might struggle to remember verbal content or music, as well as participants who might have joined the project at a later stage to follow the rhythm. Note also, that physicalised exercises are indicated in the 'song directions' '(clap)' documenting diverse opportunity in the form of notation.

In aestheticized disguise, the song makes use of a mental wellbeing tool to disperse the fighting energy. Displacing sensations of anger (alluded to with the metaphor of 'when you are fighting with your bears') with material, mundane counter-associations such as 'flowers' or 'fidget spinners' helps to step out of one emotion into another emotional setting. The cognitive distractions bring release for the group and help the *faciliteur* to ensure a safe dramatic space. From the way how the parents described the beneficial effects of the project one can insinuate that the outreach aesthetic had an impact on the wellbeing of the actors. The mother of the boy who had brought in the white knight remarked that 'the children were very relaxed'. Others noted that 'they were happy, they had smiles on their faces'. Whether elements of the aesthetic practice became a cathartic coping strategy also outside the dramatic realm needs to be left for therapeutic studies.

Closing doors: organising the rehearsal space

The weekly rehearsal sessions brought a routine to the group meetings that helped to provide a feeling of reliability and of a safe space. Sometimes, reassuring an intact workshop space so that coincidence and multi-sensory storytelling can happen is one of the key tasks of the director-facilitator in community projects. I noted in my observations after the first two sessions in November how crucial holding an inclusive space[5] is and how much thought-practice can be required in gently establishing it:

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[5] The term of 'holding (a space)' is often used within facilitation contexts though it originates in the writings of British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. In the 1960s, Winnicott defined the parameters of therapeutic environment with this idea. While observing Opera Holland Park's dementia project around *Un ballo in maschera*, lead facilitator Emma Nutfield and head of programme Abigail Sudbury, for example, used this term when reflecting on the work. The words describe a blend between establishing a workshop atmosphere and physically organising a studio environment.

> The first feeling I had when I entered the […] space and took part as a visitor in the youth group was that of the lack of centre and focus of the group. The space itself is very disruptive, as it is disrupted […] by people coming in and out of the room. The doors to cupboards, the kitchen […] is frequented quite a lot during the session by member of staff […]. The front door is opened at random points during the session because of late comers, or facilitators of other groups. The space contains no clear distinction between resting area / play area and focus area.

As illustrated earlier, some of these realities of working in underfunded and understaffed community settings with voluntary participants need to be absorbed into the work, as they are outside of the facilitator's 'control'. In fact, I'd argue that trying to control them by muscling in can be counterproductive as it necessitates elements of policing that go beyond the point. Further, only because somebody arrives late or decides to sit at the other end of a studio space doesn't mean they aren't involved in the project. Sometimes, the spatial restlessness enables creative focus, like a stimming device.

This partly explains my focus on working with the space as one of the aesthetic constants for music theatre without voice. In a way, this can be seen as a spatialised equivalent to an aesthetic praxis of acceptance. If I have time to establish a workshop routine over a longer period of time and am able to assemble a team of reliable volunteers, I'd opt for establishing an accommodating, inclusive space through showing and non-verbal directions. In the case of a space like for the pantomime that was qualified by open doors, the practice choices looked like this:

> I tried to keep all doors shut (especially the ones that do not need to be open), I tried to create a centre and performance space in the room by summoning everybody together in a centre of a circle [of chairs], I tried to also temporarily demarcate the session space from break spaces. This, of course, is disrupted by late comers and also members of staff [and volunteers] […] As I'm only a visiting facilitator it is very difficult for me to communicate the lack of attention […] [to them]. I tried to (non-verbally) integrate them in the group through mildly forcing them to join the exercises (e.g., if they refused to come up with a movement and introduce themselves in the introductory round, I turned their unconscious movements [of refusal, ed. by FJS] into their trademark movement). I also tried to (gently) tell them not to ask [and answer, ed. by FJS] questions about the session content before the group had actually started (e.g., about the toys the children [had] brought in […]).

Mapping out strategies of the *faciliteur* onto the space helps to grasp his role. The established space works on two levels. The first level is caring for a space that is as little disrupted as possible while working, where the doors are literally closed. This can happen through gently establishing boundaries, e.g., by marking the session start (and not talking

much about the session content before). The reader might have noticed my struggle in the field notes to mark this as a 'gentle' and 'mildly' forceful process. On the second plane, is the creative space that exists within the space of the closed doors. And in this space, all doors are wide open for coincidence to visit.

Finally, the panto-method is an ideal metaphor to verbalise the creative vision behind music theatre without voice as a collaborative artform that decentres hierarchies of of vocal performance. The formal preparations invite for one singular voice to be absent. A uniform idea of voice rests on the assumption of an un-changing, 'unexpurgated', 'perfect' sound that can be minutely reproduced and is congruent with (expected) identity scripts, may they be musical, vocal, or social. 'Without voice' hints at a patchwork of different sound bites and senses: it hints at multi-sensory coincidence. Here, it is useful to remember that *coincidental* doesn't only mean 'haphazard' but literally translated it means 'happening together'. The playful shattering of voice without the attempt of bringing together *again* results in bringing together *anew*.

III. Devising characters: melodramatic storytelling for women with learning disabilities

The Dragon and the Wizadress (2018) with Powerhouse for Women

In 2018, T*he Dragon and the Wizadress* continued the practice research into facilitating inclusive music theatre. The project implemented intuitively the learnings from *The White Knight and the Two Bears*. But with this version of modern melodramatic storytelling, I also consciously developed an aesthetic of invitation further for music theatre. In a more structured manner, the project made use of multi-sensory storytelling devices as part of the practice of the *faciliteur*.

The story itself was about little dragon Cinder who arrives at a chicken shop at New Cross. He is lost for improving his roar, or voice, to fit in. The idea was to use this plot and create a performance during a five-day summer school in July 2018 together with the women with learning disabilities from Powerhouse. The project was funded by *Groundwork*

Culture Seeds and consisted of a week of workshops and rehearsals, with two-hour sessions in the mornings and afternoons. The interactive melodrama happened on the 27th of July 2018, at Canning Town Library. In addition, I had attended the week before the show to explore the main themes together with the participants as a warm-up.

Powerhouse for Women with Learning Disabilities

Powerhouse are a London-based group of differently-abled women. The forms of intellectual difference in the cohort are diverse. They range from people on the autistic spectrum to people with multiple and profound intellectual and physical disabilities. In their own words, the women share a preference for image-based, non-sequential learning: 'We find reading and writing difficult.' Many of the members of Powerhouse live in supported environments, some in deprived London neighbourhoods where they are exposed to crime. Powerhouse is a charitable organisation based in Newham, East London, and coordinated by social pedagogue and inclusive dance facilitator Tae Catford. It exists since the 1990s. The organisation's aim is to empower women with learning disabilities through the arts in bi-weekly creative sessions.

Co-creative tasks

The project used the already established annual summer school model of the East London charity. Every year, Powerhouse invited a series of guest artists to facilitate music, arts and crafts, and mental wellbeing sessions. In contrast to the pantomime, I brought in role cards with prompts for devising different characters of the story written originally for Powerhouse. The guest facilitators were then to devise the multi-sensory 'character voices' and/or songs together with the group in their respective workshop session. Please have a look at the role cards for the two protagonists to gain an understanding of this practice:

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

Role Card #1   POWERHOUSE Melodrama

The Wizadress of New Cross

Marylou is a Dutch owner of a jerk chicken shop near New Cross station. She returned to Europe from a journey through the Mongolian desert three years ago and decided to open a chicken shop in London. Her business is going reasonably well, especially during the early afternoons, when, as some people say, you can ask your fortune from her and, perhaps, buy a charm or two.

<u>Your task as a group leader</u>

How does Marylou sound? How does it sound in her chicken shop? Come up with a brief non-verbal exposition that presents your character to the audience when the story introduces her. Use movement, sound, costume, colour, perhaps some scraps of words to bring your character to live.

(1) Come up with a signature motif (a brief tune, a sound, a movement) your character uses when appearing in the story.

(2) Come up with a soundscape that accompanies moments when Marylou performs magic, transforms something, or sees into the future.

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Turning *faciliteur*-work into a co-creative task: Role cards like this from the melodramatic storytelling project for women with learning disabilities invited guest artists and participants to devise voice personalities together.

Every workshop leader received a 'role card' to shape a character audio-visually together with the women. In writing the character cards, I wanted to diversify conventional character themes. In general, I think of this practice of deciding on character outlines beforehand as a good way to give the creative process direction and then hand it over to the group. The sketches allow to direct character trajectories with a twist and prevent inadvertent stereotyping as experienced with the toy of the white knight in the previous project.

But they also allow to subtly author in a vision from the perspective of the director, introducing a network of telling names and motifs. The modern melodramatic fairy-tale, for example, contains references to musical theatre culture – *The Wizard of Oz* – suggested by the assonant pun 'the Wizadress of New Cross'. The neologism of a female version of the

'wizard', also sparked curiosity and conversation about the gendered nature of this term. It felt apt for a project mainly led by women. The role cards allowed for layers of intertextual play without compromising the overall aim of accessibility.

Like the narrator-parts in the pantomime, the devising notes set the scene for a character and provided an evocative frame. The fictional prompts were the written manifestations of the *faciliteur*, using elements of storytelling. The aesthetic of the storytelling itself cares for an inclusive layering of identity markers: The wizadress is 'a Dutch owner' of a Caribbean 'jerk chicken shop' who had lived in the Mongolian desert for some years during her life. The locale was relatable to the participants: Chicken shops are a common sight in East London. Like the Christmas presents-list song for *The White Knight*, the setting provided associations with concrete sensations: the smells of frying oil or the saltiness of battered chicken. Imagining food contexts is visceral and direct and can elicit vocal response. (Hmmm.)

Ethno-grotesque character sketches

In addition, the ethno-grotesque sketches of the characters provided points of contact for many different ethnic backgrounds. On a more conceptual level, they call a notion of identities as fixed into question and suggest a playful performativity with ironic exoticisation. The obsession of the chicken shop owner with Orientalist appearance is exaggerated to the point of heightened costume drama. By profession, she appears as an opera singer in the story, familiar with the practice of using stylisation to perform identity as artifice rather than essentialist nature.

During the research phase, this form of grotesque exaggeration emerged as an effective rhetorical strategy to enter into a discourse with stereotypes and keep them dynamic, yet relatable. The excessive stacking of diverse character traits gains a level of stylistic self-awareness, destabilising a notion of exact re-presentation; an aim which has become questionable in a (post)post-modern age of endless semiosis, visual manipulation, post-truth or simulacral approaches to understanding reality. On a practical level, the colourful references to variegated costumes inscribe concrete textures and materials into

the fictional sparks. The characters form a bricolage of miscellaneous heritages, realising in a nutshell the inclusive criterion of creating a 'look' of simultaneously-staged difference.

In addition, the multicultural references also allow for different sound languages and rhythmic flavours to enter the music drama organically. In my field notes after the summer school, I listed the possibilities of different aesthetic markers within various cultural sound worlds: 'Chicken shop, percussions, bells ("Orientalist", "Exotist" awareness but provides different sound worlds that can be successful to contrast certain experiences.)'. This quote also reveals a certain dilemma an inclusive *faciliteur* can face when striving for diverse representation. It is not easy to do justice to different cultural perspectives and manage them from one's own cultural position. Breaking up 'directorial' voice, therefore, can actually help to achieve a more profound representation of in a contemporary cultural multiverse.

Representation with the means of existing artistic traditions ultimately contains elements of misrepresentation. Rhythmic associations to represent some form of oriental *other* have their own back story of cultural appropriation, from Puccini's *Turandot* or Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* to Jerome Kerns' incorporation of black musical traditions. In the introduction, however, I quoted black opera researcher Naomi Andre who highlighted how performing bodies and voices within these traditions can transcend learned associations.

The practice research evidenced that aesthetic awareness, and confident use of it, can be a potent way to address and redress questions of appropriation as part of the performance on the non-verbal level without necessarily suggesting a conclusive answer. The strategy of ethno-diverse *envoicing* explored with the pantomime can open up another universe of resonances within bold characterisations. Like the pantomime, the performance text of the melodrama was co-created by the diverse cast of women from Powerhouse. With the physical realities of their bodies and voices they pushed back against ethnic stereotypes. Recognising the complex presence of multiply-embodied voices makes the stage text a rich experience, in a similar way as André (2018: 21) notes for black opera:

> In addition to the importance of who is onstage is the narrative point of who gets to speak – which is more complicated than who we see onstage. I want to further complicate the important statement that the physical presence makes, and the presence of a larger narrative voice; both can be, but are not always embodied together.

The technique of bringing in defamiliarized, yet relatable, co-created characters like Marylou can enable a free inclusive process. In the looping of voicings – from writing the role cards, to devising a multi-sensory voice, and performing on stage – creative leadership becomes a string of handovers and in the end a shared gesture. This removes the idea of 'one identifiable (artistic) voice' in the favour of a pluralistic process.

Safeguarding through exaggerated aesthetisation

Bringing in a larger-than-life template doesn't require much direct personal sharing, even less than bringing in a beloved toy, for example. Aesthetisation creates a safe distance to the characters. In return, this ensures a safe dramatic space and may require fewer interventions at a later stage by the faciliteur. Providing character sketches does not preclude multi-sensory empowerment over shaping a character voice for the stage, as the prompts can be changed during the devising process or evolved in it.

In a field note from the 6th of August 2018, I observed that the consecutive process remained participant-led:

> The idea here is to keep as much of the quirkiness of the characters as […] the participants come up with […] only shape the characters in their constellations and dramaturgical drives to gain a coherent story […]. This bringing together provides a subtle, and often invisible support structure for the ideas of the participants that will recognise their characters in the story and therefore will gain a feeling of genuine contribution to the final project.

Role Card #3   POWERHOUSE Melodrama

Cinder, the dragon who can't roar

Cinder is a small dragon and, at the age of 243, quite young for his species. Cinder, as most dragons are, is a boy and a girl at the same time. When Cinder was born, there were a lot less people around, so the little dragon gets a bit frightened when more than two people are around him. But his major concern is that as a dragon, she can't roar properly, which, his father told her is quite crucial for a real dragon who wants to keep intruders at bay. In dragon school, she was bullied for her 'silent roar', while the other dragons were roaring loudly into his ears, which made him slightly scared of loud sounds

Your task as a group leader

How does a dragon sound, that seems to be very nervous and scared of the world? Come up with a brief exposition that presents your character to the audience when the story introduces him. Use movement, sound, costume, colour, perhaps some scraps of words to bring your character to live.

(1) Come up with a signature motif (a brief tune, a sound, a movement) your character uses when appearing in the story.

(2) How does it sound when Cinder tries to roar? How does it sound, when he becomes more confident about the fact being a silent roar can also be quite cool? Can he roar loudly sometimes if he doesn't feel the pressure?

(3) How does it sound when too many loud sounds remind Cinder of her past?

Harnessing strategies of postmodern play: The aesthetic facilitated by the role cards aims at defusing essentialist notions of identity in favour of a simultaneity of 'competing' markers, actualising the underlying assumptions of what 'diversity' could mean as an aesthetic category (see introduction).

Just as Marylou confuses stable ideas of 'ethnic identity' in favour of a sartorial celebration of diversity, the character-profile of Cinder, the dragon, showcases a fluidity of gender. To render this concept physical, the dragon in the story changes gender with every jump they make. I also discovered through my practice preparations that introducing metaphors of 'disability' or different voice abilities render theatre without voice even more coherent as an aesthetic vision that advocates a broadened understanding of voice in form and content. The struggle for the little dragon to find his voice, being surrounded by other

'louder ones' poeticises the quest of this practice research PhD. It is important to emphasise that the dragon does not have no voice, but she has a different one which she learns to make heard and the other characters of the story learn to notice. (The story script is provided in the conclusion.)

As seen through the role card examples, coherence to the project came in via narrative tools that extended the idea of dramaturgical shaping over the whole devising process and not just to the performance itself. But inscribed in the aesthetic is also an invitation to pluralise the idea of artistic voice on various levels.

Metaphors of voicelessness

Reviewing the practice revealed a fascinating through line of metaphors of 'voicelessness' in the projects: In the story of *The Fool Eater*, loneliness is represented as the allegory of a baby crying silently, without an audible voice. For *They Called Her*, I consulted with our dramatherapy adviser of how to safely find another way of talking about paralysis, as our main character is not able to move (and speak) conventionally. *Stillness* came up as a useful substitute. Dragon Cinder, naturally, possesses an unconventional voice-problem, too. Consolidating these moments from my projects here, I'm understanding that these instances of seeming 'voicelessness' do not equate with a lack of voice in the sense of expressive agency; especially when taking non-verbal communication into account.

In the stories, characters with gentle voices often manage to assert themselves, transforming situations. They have a voice once the listener recognises the phenomenon as broadened and multi-dimensional. Of course, one wants to be careful not to instrumentalise disability as an abstract heroic or noble sacrifice; that is also ultimately, why humour enters the scripts to defang saccharine cliché (compare the end of the dragon story).

The technique of including vocal metaphors comes close to what Petra Kuppers (2014: 130) observes for the use of a wheelchair in performance as 'not just a narrative, but a tool, a lived experience, an aesthetic statement, and a form of self-identification.' In the case of voice, vocal metaphors reify the absence of a more tangible tool such as the wheelchair. In inclusive music theatre projects, feelings of voicelessness or stillness may

indeed by a lived experience for members who have a speech impairment or are otherwise non-verbal or just soft-spoken. Music theatre without voice is a theatrical structure with an in-built awareness of different voice abilities and it aims to find concrete metaphors. Fictionalising different states of voice proudly emerges as a defining aesthetic practice.

One final role card articulates this idea of an aesthetic of supporting different voices through metaphor. In the story, a conflict arises around Marylou about a splash of hot butternut squash soup caused by a puppet being thrown into a pot with boiling liquid. One of Marylou's regular visitors is the boy with the yellow birds who has the soft power to resolve conflict through song. The boy embodies another version of being without a standard voice. He collaborates with two songbirds as a form of vocal aid. In an act of collective performance, the boy-bird-team transforms the situation. This solves various conceptual issues as the 'disabled individual' is not sacrificed to restore peace but included in shaping the situation as empowered part of a group, like the rap band in the pantomime. (The song can be heard in the second half of the clip example 2 from the rehearsals: https://youtu.be/1MyUI5LdQkU.)

The lyrics of the song were co-devised by the group, organically continuing literary images of voicelessness:

> The boy with the yellow birds
> singing softly in the air
> A voice that's never heard
> Treats everyone with care

In form of an allegory, the boy with the birds also sums up some of the barrier-free practice which can be witnessed in contemporary disability theatre. The practice review in Chapter 3 discusses the 2016 production of The Who's *Tommy*. The production doubled parts with more than one agent, featuring conventionally trained voices alongside disabled voices on stage.

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Role Card #2   POWERHOUSE Melodrama

The Boy with the Birds

The boy with the birds is an enigmatic character. He seems to watch what's going on between the other characters. His trademark is that he is always accompanied by two yellow canaries, which are flying around him and are singing their song. He is a small and thin boy, who seems very fragile, but it seems when he comes near people who are fighting or frightened, they calm down. The atmosphere brightens and warms and the birds enlarge their circles to encompass the whole group. The boy with the birds can't speak, but it seems the birds speak for him with their song.

<u>Your task as a group leader</u>

How does the Boy with the Birds sound? How could you bring the 'birds' on stage? Visually, aurally? Can they have their own life and mobility? Come up with a brief non-verbal exposition that presents your character to the audience when the story introduces him. Use movement, sound, costume, colour, perhaps some scraps of words to bring your character to live.

(1) Come up with a signature motif (a brief tune, a sound, a movement) your character uses when appearing in the story.

(2) Come up with a soundscape that communicates harmony and peacefulness in times of conflict when the Boy with the Birds comes closer to a scene of conflict?

(3) How could the boy sound when he wants to say something but without speech? How could the birds step in?

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An electronic birdsong: To voice the character of 'the boy' on various communicative planes, a team of guest artists devised a song piece with bird whistles, synthesiser, and lyrics in response to this role card together with the women from Powerhouse.

Updating a dragon legend

Some of the metaphors and characters of *The Dragon and the Wizadress* were inspired by workshops I had facilitated for Powerhouse before. For example, I discovered that the participants had become fond of a little cuddly dragon I had brought in to organise our check-in rounds. This dragon with its scintillating coat and large marble eyes was a highly visual and tactile object. The toy was named Cinder by the producer and became the main character of our music drama (see Role Card #3 above).

In my preliminary workshop before the summer school, I had discovered that the dragon worked well as multi-ethnic symbol: Volunteers from diverse African communities knew the dragon from folk tales and drawings of lizards; care workers of Asian backgrounds were familiar with the legendary reptile from Chinese mythology, for example, as talisman; in their shared mythological heritage, European cultures know the wyvern from medieval legend. In reflections after the summer school (6th of August 2018), I noted that 'the participants [seemed] attentive, focused and committed to the performance'. I had gained this impression from the way how they responded to the character(s), e.g., when we explored our individual dragon roars.

With a particularly English instalment of the dragon myth, I tried out the storytelling format in the pilot workshop on the 16th of July 2018. For the workshop, I freely adapted a version of the myth I had found on Project Britain while browsing through the internet. I want to briefly dwell on the pilot story, since it marks a crucial trial phase for the aesthetic of conversation I'm researching as one of the signature practices of music theatre without voice. The short script was written for the 13th of July 2018:

The Legend of St. George and the Dragon, almost

St. George travelled for many months by land and sea until he came to Libya.

Here, he heard that a dragon had been torturing the country and its people for a very long time.

"Every day," said an old man to St. George, "Every day, the dragon demands one of our children for supper."

And as he had finished his sentence, a loud roar came from the dark woods on the other side of the village.

An old woman added: "Only the king's daughter is left. We need to find somebody who slays the dragon. We need to save at least her, not because she is more important than anybody else. But because she is the only young girl that remains."

George said: "I am brave, or at least I have to be, because it is quite scary to fight with a dragon, but I will try to kill the creature and thereby, hopefully, save the princess."

So, George went into the deep, deep woods, following the trademark smell of dragons, a mix of sulphur and Arabian eau de perfume made from orange leaves.

"Hello," said George, to the dragon. "I am here to slay you, for I am a knight and dragon slayer by profession."

The very green and mildly drowsy dragon opened one of his yellow eyes and said: "Well, well…you people always come here and want to kill me. Why?"

"Because I need to protect the princess, fair and fairer."

"What should I do to the princess?"

"Eat her."

"Eat her. That's quite funny. I'm a vegedragian. A veggie-dragon. Can't you tell. I'm green all over."

"Where are the children then?"

"Which children?"

"The ones you ate."

"First of all, I did not eat them. I marinate them and store them neatly away for guests. Some dragons do like a snack when they come to visit. And they come more often, nowadays, because the king steals all their caves for mining gold and diamonds. So I provide refuge for them. Refuge and marinated children."

"Interesting," said St. George, the dragon-slayer, asked the dragon whether he could spare the royal daughter, the dragon said "Yes", and the job was done.

In many ways, this retelling followed the aims from the panto to develop a more inclusive, split-up mythological voice by allowing different characters in the story to talk back; not only to talk back, but to actually have a meaningful conversation with *the other*. The other can be, for example, apostrophised with Orientalist gestures (compare to Marylou's description). Following Edward Said's use of the term, 'Orientalist' can be anything that communicates a certain hierarchy between the West and a nebulously-defined 'East'. In doing so, it casts the Oriental as mystical, decadently-enticing, and un-changing attraction. The 'Arabic eau de perfume' is such a stylised remark that was also alluded to in the online version.

In contrast to the online template, however, many more characters receive a voice in my version: St. George finds out that he doesn't need to kill the dragon, because the beast is a friendly vegetarian. Conversations like this bridges the binary of opposites and productively resolves conflict. I also amended class value in the story by putting the worth of the princess into context as the last daughter standing: '[S]he is [not] more important than anybody else. But […] the only young girl that remains.'

Further, heroic courage is reframed as the knight openly admits the burden that expectations of conventional masculinity pose to him: 'I am brave, or at least I have to be, because it is quite scary to fight with a dragon.' These dramaturgical interventions may be

considered governed by my own humanitarian bias towards how conflicts should be resolved when envisioning a peaceful inclusive Utopia. I see a merit in this pedagogic of mythopoetology: It opens up an intertextual conversation with dominant cultural voices. On the level of craftsmanship, bringing in alternative twists, derived from an inclusive awareness, makes for engaging, unexpected storytelling as it dodges cliché.

Dual orality: sharing the storyteller's authority

I semi-performed the story script of the dragon legend together with Tae, the coordinator of Powerhouse. We delivered the story as an impromptu reading. I had casually split up the passages of the text during the workshop break so that we could take turns in a performative reading as I didn't want to read it alone like a talk but as a conversation. I realised that my quirky adaptation of the dragon-legend with its contemporary twists and tactile food-based language (references to vegetarianism, tongue-in-cheek cannibalism) and the performance mode of *dual orality* engaged the group of women and focused their attention on the process of creating our own images of dragons.

The performance had literally become a conversation between the narrators and with the group, rather than a reading directed at them by one, monolithic voice authority. The live reading allowed us to be in conversation as narrators and stop our reading when the women would respond intuitively to the story content. In my field notes after the project, I tentatively made the connection between this practice and an early instance of a job description of the *faciliteur*:

> Describing the role of the non-mainstream auteurist-director, or writer-director of the project (my role) – invisibility, conceptual framework, constantly incorporation and fictionalising/dramatizing the workshop output and being able to rehearse it with the group when bringing together the elements, storyteller (double voices) in the double sense, person who actually tells the story, but also the director who keeps a coherent dramaturgy on a conceptual level.

The practice of doubling captured in the idea of 'double voices' eventually became amalgamated into the non-binary artistic double of the *faciliteur* with his/her practice of being visible and invisible at the same time. Through the conversational interventions of the spectator-participants, the question of the 'narrative point of who gets to speak' (cf. André

2018) becomes a dynamic, conversational performance. The creative framework results in the participatory multi-voice that is music theatre without one single vocal authority.

This aesthetic splintering of the storytelling-voice can become a directorial concept if contoured further: The raconteurs interact with complicity to tell a story but retain their own persona and personal relationship with each other during the telling of a tale. Though the voices come from a performer-body, the vocal personality gains qualities of an acousmatic being that can shapeshift into various characters. In short, the directing aesthetic cares to give different voices flexible shape and polylithic identity.

For the practice of writing a script, I have adopted the technique to write the story first and then find pleasure in 'breaking it up' – distributing the lines to multiple narrators – and in anticipating moments for multi-sensory interaction. The act of voicing becomes part of the performative attraction of the spectacle; an aesthetic of acceptance democratically includes every remark made in response to a participatory action. I researched this directing approach further with *The Fool Eater* (see next section of this documentary chapter).

The format of the semi-improvised reading of the dragon-legend became part of the main performance of *The Dragon and the Wizadress*. For the performance, I had roughly split up the final story script into sections, so that one of the summer school volunteers summer could read the story together with me. Storytelling now became fully-integrated onstage facilitation. In doing so, the positionality of the narrative (verbal) point was made transparent as part of the show. Music theatre elements (songs, soundscapes, other forms of noisemaking in a broadened understanding of music) were interwoven with the dual voice-over. The conga-line element from the panto, for example, translated into a short dragon-parade. The women had created their own dragon costume with a set-designer guest artist, opening the show like during a Chinese New Year's parade. The performance was an on-going conversation with semi-choreographed handovers between the women from Powerhouse and moments of audience address.

Playing back in a circle of chairs

Besides broadening the approach to vocalising a story, the spatial organisation needed to change, too, to accommodate some of the needs of the performers. Standing in front of an audience didn't feel comfortable and wouldn't have been viable for some of the women. In addition, standing on stage for a long time can cause anxiety. It might make people who are normally used to being considered 'invisible' on the social stage feel exposed and vulnerable. Some of the regulars used walking aids. Conventionally coordinated stage entrances and exists would have created tripping hazards. Part of an inclusive directing approach needs to embrace the physical and cognitive conditions in the arrangement of the stage space, e.g., through creating seated opportunities.

A traditional form of popular music theatre provided a useful aesthetic touchstone to solve this staging query. Variety show forms such as the minstrel format deploy seated staging. I had seen Kander and Ebb's *Scottsboro Boys* a few years before at the Young Vic, so my reference to the minstrel form was probably inspired by this re-framed staging (by choreographer-director Susan Stroman) of the highly problematic racist genre practice from 19th century America. The musical dramatisied the historical case of a wrongly-convicted group of black brothers in the American South.

I thought the production's reclamation of the genre to retell the story from a different socio-political angle was successful. What I was drawn to in this setting initially, though, were less the sociocultural connotations but the chairs. The practice of sitting in a semi-circle as a group of performers that responded to a loose progression of narrated episodes in an epic tradition as in Susan Stroman's direction was exactly what made a piece of music theatre accessible also for women with learning disabilities or physical impairments.

But of course, the racial connotations were on my mind, and I realised that what I had learned from the white knight and the performative flaunting of stereotypes could also effectively work in this setting. Views may differ, but the practice research proved it aesthetically highly effective to recycle a once racist form and hand it over to an ethnically-diverse group of women with learning disabilities in an attempt to empower them to tell their story and be confidently-visible in this very form on stage. In many ways, this

technique of *playing back* at the mute assumptions of a genre context became a most powerful tool to advance a socio-aesthetic discussion.

In fact, facilitating the project in a way that allowed the women from Powerhouse to own their performances confidently might have been the most enjoyable progressive commentary on the troubled history of the vaudeville genre. One performer of mixed ethnic background was encouraged to describe Marylou in a literal stand-up monologue in her own time. She directed the pacing of the character description. She walked to one side of the audience and explained Marylou with a drawing she had made of the chicken shop owner. This was her space. This was her voice. She directed the performance. The story context and the setting easily accommodated this and after a few minutes, the storytelling invited her gently back to re-join the seated group.

Melodrama and sound-making

Like the minstrel show for race, melodrama ushers in potential gender bias for a group of women with learning disabilities. Melodramas often revolved around female figures in crisis. Further within disability studies, 19th century melodrama is often cited as a theatrical space where identities, especially those of 'cripples', are performed in a heightened way, so that a 'normal' audience would be able to read their roles. Inscribed in this, is an understanding that the ways how disability has become visible in our societies always already includes an element of self-stylisation on behalf of the 'disabled actor', meaning a level of awareness and control involved in creating a role.

Petra Kuppers (2017: 24-25) summarises this practice in *theatre&disability* as inserting a 'distance between being and performing in Victorian melodramas.' In doing so, '(real-life) cripples […] employed techniques such as exaggerated [behaviour] to make their disability legible and acceptable.' In the context of music theatre without voice, exaggerated identity performance is part of the aesthetic matrix but perhaps for the opposite purpose, that of exposing categorical thinking by making stylisations jarringly obvious. Further, when I refer to melodrama here, I mainly refer to the practice of setting a performed story to incidental music.

More recently, director Katie Mitchell has included melodramatic sound elements into her gender-aware stagings. For e.g. *We've Sufficiently Tortured Each Other* (NT, 2019), her sound designer has composed score modules that can be looped to orchestrate the live event. During a Katie Mitchell conference at the National Theatre, I had the chance to ask the sound designer about this practice. Though her conceptual aim was not linked to inclusion and historical melodrama, her readymade, composed sound modules seemed an interesting contemporary touchstone for a looser form of music theatre, a play underscored with music, like a film.

In many ways, the staging of the 'modern melodrama storytelling' made use of a similar strategy. With soundscape tasks (see role cards above), the guest artists were invited to produce sonic modules that could fit in as a form of underscoring (or overscoring) during the storytelling. For the chickenshop, two guest artists co-created an 'Oriental' soundscape with the women, using percussive instruments. The spells from the menu of Marylou's shop were spoken into the sound environment and motivated the composition. 'Good spells' and 'bad spells' that could happen as a result of a wish were dramatizsd with actions. (Facilitation example 3 captures moments of this in the second half of the clip: https://youtu.be/TSE6UWp2KIw.)

As a non-verbal exercise, I devised an activity that involved puppets the women had made from plastic cups, straws, and papier-mâché. The puppets were a way of giving shape to the character of a puppeteer. The marionette-player loses one of his dolls in a pot of soup. The bang of the plastic, when it hit a big metallic pot provided a sound moment that illustrated this scene in the story. (Facilitation example 2 captures the sound from our pre-performance rehearsal at the beginning of the clip: https://youtu.be/1MyUI5LdQkU.)

Participatory scratching

Finally, I want to focus on participatory 'sounding together'. One of my practice discoveries revolved around including performers and audiences in the live process of storytelling like foley artists. In the story, the dragon can't roar loud enough to make himself heard, therefore, s/he scratches on Marylou's window-counter. For the performance, I had brought in wooden party sticks; the ones that have a little handle on the back for making skewers.

With them, the participants emulated the dragon's sound by scratching on their chairs. This turned their seats into a percussive instrument which was easily accessible and effective. The scratching externalised the voice of the dragon. The chairs receive dramaturgical meaning besides their function as support structures.

Swiss percussionist Fritz Hauser and other avant-garde composers have used everyday objects to a similar effect to make 'music'. Hauser for example conducts workshops with chopsticks or ribbed drumsticks, exploring rhythmic sound crescendos within a space. (I had taken part in one of his workshops during a scholarship programme of the Salzburg Festival.) The research evolved the technique into a participatory exercise during a performance. Like the sound-makers in early film, the audience was asked to gently scratch when the dragon wanted to raise their voice, providing the character with a powerful, collective organ. The collective scratching created a sense of physical and aural mirroring for the women and increased the (perhaps unwonted) feeling of visibility. The tactual activity released stress. (During the rehearsal, an early visitor tried out the participatory task. At the beginning of facilitation example 3, the exercises can be seen and heard https://youtu.be/TSE6UWp2KIw.)

Readymade sound devices such as the wooden sticks are easily available for a low budget, often a necessary precondition for community performance. *Readymade sounds* emerged as another key element during the practice research around participatory music drama. The inclusive effect of using readymade sounds that invite audience participation is that the audience feels involved in the story and part of the performance process. (In a way, it can function as an ice-break. For more on this, compare the *The Fool Eater*.) Subtle tasks like scratching do not discriminate between abilities. Straight-forward, touchable sounds allow almost everybody to get involved, even people who are partly paralysed or have cognitive impairments. Non-verbal participants may enjoy touching a percussive device, scratching over it with a fingernail, or banging it against the frame of a wheelchair.

In a world of amplification, social media polish, and fake noise, rediscovering the gentle sounds of a scratch feels like an aesthetic revolution – eventually, it might amount to a powerfully soft roar.

IV. Audience participation: interactive storytelling and loneliness in the LGBTQ+ community

The Fool Eater (2019) for the LGBTQ community and any lonely Londoners

After the successful exploration of oral storytelling and melodramatic participation in the traditions of British panto and American variety show, _The Fool Eater_ (funded by the Arts Council England) added another dimension to the conversation with conventions of music theatre. This piece of practice research not only developed the voice-over application further, but it also relocated it in a different inclusive setting. Further, it actively engaged with the opera canon. The project was framed as _interactive story about urban loneliness_, with a particular focus on young non-binary men and any lonely Londoners. References to Germanic oral storytelling, in addition, complicated my positionality of _faciliteur_ within the performance piece. The success of the undertaking also partly lay in attracting a diverse crowed of different ethnicities, gender identities, and ages. Our youngest members were around 20 years of age, our oldest members around 60.

The event took place on the 17th of May 2019 in the music wing of Goldsmiths' Richard Hoggart Building. It consisted of the interactive story performance of _The Fool Eater_ and an ensuing mini-dramatherapy workshop that invited the visitors to turn the themes and allegories from the story into dramatic tableaux. Finally, the questions of the story were explored in a panel discussion that opened out the debate around loneliness, body image, and sexual identity to the audience. By many participants, the participatory quirkiness of the project was perceived as rendering the issues 'comfortable to talk about' (feedback note). The vocality of the story had seemingly encouraged the audience to submit questions and opinions via posting a written note into a circling jar or on Twitter. Thus, they contributed their voices to the event.

Gay and Bisexual Men's Wellbeing Group

The project marked a collaboration with the Gay and Bisexual Men's Wellbeing Group, facilitated by certified dramatherapist Dan Skilli and formerly hosted at City Literary

Institute, Covent Garden. Some of the group members attended the event and took part in the ensuing workshop. Skili's group exists since 2017 and is open to all men who identify as gay, queer, or bisexual. The monthly wellbeing meetings discuss topics related to masculinity and queer identity. The group is made up of regulars and casual visitors, from all age groups, ethnicities, and walks of life. Since the pandemic, digital meetings accompany face-to-face events.

Traditions of staged orality

Faciliteurism, similar to *auteurism*, is also about revealing a directorial 'identity' behind a work: a 'signature style'. As already alluded to, co-creative processes render this identity, and the positionality of a director within a work, a complex and dynamic jigsaw. Yet, it can help the *faciliteur* to understand his own creative roots and how they influence his creative decision-making, so that they can be played up or down. The following insights gained from the research, therefore, are used to contour this involvement exemplarily, since in form and content, the oral storytelling of *The Fool Eater* contains links to Germanic versions of a stand-up performance, like the *Kabarett*.

German 'Kabarett' is a catch-all term to describe German-speaking variety entertainment, particularly monologues with a satirical, political, or moralistic edge. It evolved from modern, urban centres such as Berlin, Vienna or Munich and created various sub-genres, as the 'literary cabaret' (dt. das literarische Kabarett). The art of poetic oratory emerged as popular entertainment in this cultural environment and has been conceptualised recently by Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus in his *Geschichte der literarischen Vortragskunst* (2020) (lit. 'History of literary oration').

Kalkus traces the development of the performance praxis from the ancient Greeks through eminent figures in German literature who enjoyed reading out plays (e.g., dramatist-performer Frank Wedekind), or otherwise literary texts (e.g., satirist Karl Kraus). In doing so, they cultivated voicing text in a semi-staged manner as art form in its own right. The history extends spoken word performance to voice and language teaching, as well as stand-up comedy in the 19th and 20th century.

Historical contexts are shifting, so are national identities. The practice of staged speech-making can be traced in other cultures, too, such as in forms of Chinese tearoom entertainment with its musicalised joke-telling; or in the delivery of West African folk stories performed to the beat of the Djembe drum and other percussive instruments.[6] For my practice in the English-speaking world, the concept of poetic oration is useful primarily to find a viable definition and aesthetic family that help to further enlightened the practice of music theatre without voice. The key lies in the practicality of the genre context.

The concept of literary oratory creates recognition for the 'acoustic dimension of literary communication' (Kalkus 2020: 5) with the minimal requirement of some kind of oral performance that relies on listening and the option of direct address of the listener. The aesthetic requirements connected to the semi-staged spoken word performance make it useful as a contemporary *arte povera* in low funding contexts, for example. It can happen almost anywhere without complicated requirements of stage design or make-up. The praxis needs some kind of voice – which I argue can be multi-sensory as well – and some story or literary content (in itself a flexible definition) that wants to be communicated *aloud* to a listener.

 According to Kalkus, the art form itself retains community-building potential, since the voice directs an event of coming together within a familiar aesthetic. Many people have experienced a version of such literary performance through amateur poetry-readings, listening to a Christmas story in a shopping centre, or similar events. The art of public storytelling, therefore, lowers the thresholds of access on the part of the listener *and* the performer. Crucially, to be 'successful' this form of acted-out literary communication relies on a different set of criteria to a straightforward theatre performance. The aim is not to create a perfect illusion of being in a play but a dialogue between performance reading and fiction, drawing awareness to the process of speaking or verbalising.

The production context with its beautiful imperfections can be visible and the separation of space is less policed. In a way, music theatre without voice explores a branch of this form of performative storytelling that is located at the intersection between music

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[6] London-based IROKO Theatre Company promotes this kind of storytelling work in educational workshops, to engage younger audiences, for example, and communicate allegorical learning to music. The company was founded in 1996: www.irokotheatre.co.uk.

theatre and poetic oratory and is interested in recognising voicing as much as voice content as part of the dramatic spectacle. Further, Kalkus (2020: 3) hints at the affinity between music and poetic oration when he talks about the 'wahlverwandschaftliche[…] Beziehungen zwischen Vortragskunst und Musik […] bis hin zu einer melodramatischen, dem Singen angenaeherte Vortragsweise' (lit. 'an affinity between oratory and music, up to a melodramatic form of speech-making that approximates singing').

Humoristic readings and performative storytelling

Building on that, cabaret artists in the German scene, such as Juergen von der Lippe or Thorsten Straeter, have rediscovered the practice of the humorous or humoristic reading in recent years. Perhaps because it creates a low-tech, intimate atmosphere and a conversational connection with the audience; and, I would like to add, a more inclusive one, too. Some of these 'performing authors' also link their stories to inclusive questions such as raising awareness of mental wellbeing. Straeter, for instance, uses his stories to talk about depression.

Author readings, of course, are also a popular version of this form of literary performance and practiced with gusto by contemporary writers such as Helmut Krausser or Felicitas Hoppe in the German context, but also in the English-speaking world. The stories read could range from short observational sketches to fictional pieces. In a way these performative readings of literature, lightly dramatised excerpts from books or sketches, are in a long tradition of oral poetry, reaching back to the minstrel performers of the Middle Ages not just within the Germanic world. What distinguishes this practice from improvisation, however, is that some kind of rehearsal went into it.

The orality of medieval performance has been an aesthetic element that has accompanied my practice and studies in the form of medieval drama groups or medieval troubadour song studies and translations. The telling of a story to partly-improvised music with deliberate audience address is quite similar to these earliest forms of music-theatre-making. Little remains of the music of the early German troubadours and minstrels and the sociocultural location of medieval performance differed significantly from contemporary

locations (compare questions of class); yet, the practice of performative storytelling nevertheless suggests an aesthetic of accessibility.

Rarely a concept on paper may ever perfectly achieve absolute inclusion in reality. In some projects, the aim may be a radical sense of co-creation to facilitate a space whereas much individual voicings as possible are included at the expense, perhaps, of a more structured story communication. In others, the voice of the facilitator as director and writer might be strong, allowing for pockets of interaction. *The Fool Eater* is an example of the latter.

Vocalic bodies in motion

In the LGBT context, *The Fool Eater* evolved the research into deploying the frame of oralised, melodramatic storytelling and grotesque involvement as an affirmative inclusive exercise further (for an updated use of the grotesque see Chapter 3). The project gained significant insights trough practice research: By shattering the fabulatory voice further and introducing three performative narrators (instead of two, taking turns) the triple voicing had become a more conscious artistic choice. It worked in favour of an aesthetic vision of showing identity concepts as performative, flexible, and detached from the appearance of an actor through a fragmented use of voice. This playfully inserted 'distance between being and performing' as Kuppers theorised in the case of a melodramatic aesthetic (see previous project).

This idea of performative distance realised through the opened-up voice aesthetic is fleshed out specifically underneath the *dramatis personae* of the script entitled *The Fool Eater (after a medieval farce by Hans Sachs) a grotesque fairy tale for modern times for three diverse narrators [version March 2019]* and guided the rehearsal process:

> The three narrators should be of different gender and ethnic background. The characters they take turns to inhabit are: *the fool eater, doctor Bernard T Franklin, his assistant, an American, three fools.* The roles are distributed flexibly among the three narrators. The director is encouraged to cast the narrators against type. The appearance doesn't matter.

With a nod to an epic practice of performers stepping in and out of characters to break the illusion of a fixedly performed identity, the remark that 'appearance doesn't

matter' may be read as a deliberate position against an obsession with casting 'the right body image' or 'voice type' in more commercial productions. This frees the imagination around a 'vocalic body', as much as it acts socioculturally against normative body image. The technique implemented, thus, a version of performative contrast, derived from the envoicing research of former projects, as conscious stylistic criterion.

Three narrators stepping in and out of characters: In this shot from the recording of *The Fool Eater*, co-narrators Amari Harris and Fran Bushe step into the role of the fool doctor through semi-staged gestures, examining surgery utensils. Notice how the sparse set aids the aesthetic of literary oration: Two spotlights illuminate the makeshift 'readers' table, placed on a carpet to create a warm and intimate atmosphere within a functional space.

In voice studies, 'vocalic body' describes 'another body [...] produced by the expectations vested in the voice by the listener' (Thomaidis 2017: 60). In his theatre and voice overview, Thomaidis links this idea to Steven Connor's *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford, 2000). Thus, in *The Fool Eater*, the narrators' voices morph into representing different characters that might not be congruent with the race, class, or gender background a 'conventional viewer-listener' might assign to the performer. This creates an interesting dialogue between the bodies seen verbalising on stage and the characters these voices actually conjure up. (The visualised 'radio-play' might generate moments of imaginary dissonance.) This aesthetic felt apt to communicate to the non-

binary or generally diverse audience the project was conceived for. The directorial guideline also provided the potential of developing dramatic relationships between the three narratorial voices, as alluded to with *The Dragon and the Wizadress*. Detached from an obsession with appearance, psychological realism could be applied on new identity grounds to construct emotional bonds between the vocalic personifications (see more below).

In dialogue with opera

On another plane, *The Fool Eater* was conceived as addressing conventions of opera and music-making, alongside an inclusive impetus to address questions of mental health and urban loneliness. It introduced opera themes and a participatory understanding of incidental music to the inclusive space. The story harnessed canonical characters and debates from classic music drama for an inclusive purpose: The script was based on a German template from the late Middle Ages. *Der Narrenschneider* by medieval performance artist Hans Sachs tells the story of a patient ailing under his sins. The patient is bloated with allegories of gluttony among others. He visits a fool doctor who cleanses him of his sins by operating them out of him – making him and his body image 'normal' (decent, acceptable) in the Christian world view of the time.

Sachs famously appears as the (progressive) protagonist in Richard Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger*. The opera is about the working-class version of the medieval troubadours – the master-singers – and investigates aesthetic questions of innovation and convention. Arguably, the opera suggests it is about marrying the two by allowing a reworking of the established (see the director's notes below for more information on this performance culture.) So, read from a contemporary music-theatre making perspective using a template of the Sachs-practitioner (as writer-director and live storyteller) is significant as source material: It taps into discussions around performance practice and musical theatre style for new audiences.

Further, farces and early progenitors such as pub plays performed by wandering minstrels et al. would include audience address and ideas of impromptu semi-stagings in an intimate setting. The community benefits of this performance practice have been outlined above regarding literary oratory. The show intended to deploy the fool narrators in a similar

fashion as medieval pub players, washing with their speeches over a mundane setting. The three contemporary mastersingers of *The Fool Eater* invaded a space of the everyday, in our case a room between lecture theatre and seminar room, and thereby transformed it into an interactive community experience through a grotesque and performative use of voice.

Storytelling voices transform a mundane space through outreach: In this shot from the recording of *The Fool Eater*, two of the three narrators go into the audience space, interacting with the audience members. Like medieval pub players, the performers reach out to the spectators throughout the storytelling event. Note the semi-staged quality of the performance space – the performers carry their scripts, the class-room quality isn't hidden.

Addressing shame: mental health discourse and disability

Cultivating the idea of interacting with contemporary voices on a content level, *The Fool Eater* relocated the Christian morals of the source material around the seven sins and personal shaming within a 21st century London context. This shifted the perspective from the doctor who operates on the seemingly-flawed person ('the fool cutter'), to this person's sometimes bizarre acceptance of his inner 'fools' or vices ('the fool eater'). Many of the conceptual connections regarding theatrical style and inclusive agenda become apparent in the director's note from the 19th of May published in the programme for the event [highlights in the original]:

Hans Sachs was a medieval German shoemaker and wordsmith for popular performances in pubs, inns or on the market stage. Whether his *meistersang* ('master song poetry') or his farces, his texts were crafted for oral presentation. Sachs belonged to a guild of *Meistersinger*-poets that would consider their creative craft as akin to their daily work as handymen. He was a *poeta faber*. His language was that of the working people. From a contemporary perspective, his writing shows a mix of camp exaggeration and grotesque body drama. His plays are full of jealous men, gluttons, *Columbinas* and *Capitanos*. **Cardinal vices are lustfully portrayed in excess, before they get tamed in a quick finale with a nod to the religious morals of the day.**

Exaggerated stereotype and vulgar excess do not only function didactically in a normalising sense, but also help to take the edge off of stigma, vice and related feelings of isolation. **Grotesque relocation brings taboo topics into the open with joyful exaggeration and counterbalances moral shame with freeing laughter**: this tendency gains therapeutic value within a society that still often struggles with finding the right or wrong words around topics such as sexual identity, promiscuity and obesity and therefore remains silent or enshrouded in clumsy political correctness. **To start a conversation, it is important to find words at all - any words**. I think we can learn from the open discourse of the Middle Ages to bring our own social problems forward. This discourse was grotesque and, at times, overtly incorrect, yes, but it was also inclusive, unafraid and playful. It incorporated the marginalised into the stage discourse and changed power dynamics in carnivalesque reversal.

A recent instalment of German culture, the film comedy *Toni Erdmann* (Maren Ade, 2016) also shows a version of grotesque laughter as inclusive social therapy. Even when capital takes over and ethnic gaps seem to widen, the bizarre main character says in a very inappropriate situation: **"Don't lose your humour."** It's about the encounter between people. Don't be too strict, it seems he implies, when facilitating opportunities to bring people closer together.

My modernised adaption of Hans Sachs' 16th century farce *Der Narrenschneider* (lit. 'The Fool Cutter') about a man who ate too many fools (or vices) follows a similar aim. We are all fool eaters in this metaphorical sense, and the question remains whether some of our mental health worries are really that scary to deal with once we have learned to laugh about them individually, because **we are supported within a warm-hearted community of collective laughter that does not judge who we are and how we express it**. Unafraid laughter can be the beginning of change.

I hope that *The Fool Eater* brings some contemporary questions into focus around mental health, urban loneliness and other modern 'vices' that many people in our society have to deal with and still often feel shame about. Through the story's defamiliarizing aesthetic and gentle humour, it might become easier to talk

about these questions - they become bigger and therefore more visible and easier to touch. My adaption is not about hiding, it is about showing. If the depictions spark controversy, that's great. If they spark fierce debate, that's even greater. And if they spark anger, that is something out of my control as a writer and director. **Whatever reaction *The Fool Eater* sparks, please don't lose your humour.**

The grotesque appears in these notes as a space that is freeing of expectations, inviting, and non-judgemental. This oddly correlates with the unpredictability of genre, generated by the subtitle of the event, and noted by Dan Skili from the audience's point of view (see *Appendix 2* for more information on how the audience received the project and the 'inexpressibility of the project's genre'). But it also refers to a performance praxis that uses laughter and playful interaction as 'inclusive social therapy'. Ultimately and in an ideal world, this leads to social and self-acceptance, bringing a socio-political impact to the discussion of inclusive voice. This also creates a link to a narrower understanding of 'disability theatre'. Ruth Bieber (2013: 253-2) sees a humorous 'trickster energy' as one of the defining features of a dramatic disability style:

> Disability Theatre challenges conventional thinking and pushes the borders of complacency and stagnation […] an agent of social change: building community, nurturing the Trickster spirit, and encouraging 'active' participation.' […] Trickster energy challenges staid belief systems and well-worn habits by unearthing unconscious assumptions and toppling worldviews that have lost their usefulness

The fool energy of an LGBT mental wellbeing theatre is a relative of this trickster spirit of disability drama. Music theatre without voice, interpreted in this way, can function as a theatre of social change.

Welcoming the audience

In order to facilitate meaningful encounter through the arts from the beginning, the arriving audience members were welcomed at the door and assigned a mascot from the story and provided with a colouring-in template of this mascot. A participatory cabaret setting was achieved by the layout of the space and table seating. The audience members were grouped around functional-looking, white rectangular desks. The handed-out mascot prints would allocate them to a team and provide a quirky conversation starter. This way, new groups of people would be 'gently forced' into making contact with others. People who arrived alone

at the event about loneliness, thus ended up as part of group experience where they could interact if they fancied. To facilitate these encounters further, two of the narrators were seated amongst the audience members to strike conversation. This marks a literal translation of an aesthetic of conversation and meaningful encounter through voice outreach.

Once I had opened the story space, as one of the narrator-facilitators, narrator 2 (Fran Bushe) and 3 (Amari Harris) joined the telling event from the audience. Unexpectedly, the voices of their narrating functions came out of the spectator's space, acoustically linking the story across the room directing a network of inclusion. I imagine it like a roof of light strings being pulled across the auditorium by the voices coming from different corners of the room. Eventually, the three narrators united in the front, at a makeshift pasting table, on a colourful carpet and illuminated by two construction site lamps. The triple voicing then became apparent as voiced by a group of diverse identities. Amari has a black Caribbean background. Fran Bushe represented a feminist voice, and I a queer male voice.

Amari asked me during our initial team meeting whether there was a tokenistic element to this diverse casting. In our current climate of visibility, this is an important discussion to anticipate and consider as inclusive *faciliteur*. However, with the aesthetic concept I had lined out and that had been part of the stage directions, I had explained that the inclusive voice conception required diverse casting as inherent element in order for the artistic ambition to succeed ('appearance doesn't matter'). The story personae were perceived as diverse amalgamations rather than appropriated clichés. In a way, it is the opposite to tokenistic deployment of visibility, as it provides creative, dramaturgical, and fictional meaning to representing diversity on stage in a contemporary style; an aesthetic of various identity categories held simultaneously within a vocal performance. Amari supported the idea henceforth.

Communication between fiction and 'real world' as inclusive directing technique

Throughout the staged reading, the team of narrators ventured into the audience space to semi-perform fool eater Benny Carnaby's journey towards London Bridge to meet Doctor Franklin. The narrators sat down next to members or addressed fictional lines from the story

to them, thereby through voice performance, blurring the lines between real space and fiction. This illustrates the *faciliteuring* directing style that aims to inflect lines with multi-layered motivations.

On the first level, the motivation is located in the story. For example, Benny likes to eat a lot of strawberry jam for his breakfast. On the second, it communicates an emotional backstory between the narrating personae, e.g., one of the narrators really likes strawberry jam too and the other is aware of this. And on the third, it reaches out to the audience by, for instance, bringing them in to the unbelievability of the sugar intake, encouraging a response through making eye contact while stressing this fact. Thereby, an inclusive directing process is inscribed in the staging, which builds an opportunity of change into the performance event (the eye contact could potentially elicit a response). These staging choices imagine communication between fiction an 'real world' as part of the aesthetic.

In many ways, this directing technique can be considered quite a radical form of audience interaction and needs to be facilitated carefully not to make people feel uncomfortable. However, once the spectators realised that they were not forced into any form of direct interaction, or even had the chance to withdraw into mindfulness drawing at their discretion, the atmosphere became relaxed and the physical intimacy of the space appreciated.

Visual storytelling

To further highlight the humorous, genre references and to include an element of visual communication, the staging choices of *The Fool Eater* echo another music-dramatic tradition, namely that of ballad-mongering. The three performers enter the stage and for a short period tell a story about a character with social disabilities and identity struggles. Their story is illustrated in real-time with the help of visual technology such as PowerPoint slides. Public balladeers told their story songs while pointing at a map of illustrations. Recycled for an accessible context, the visuals made the event more inclusive by adding another layer of communicating the story to different learning types. Providing the colouring templates of the different 'vices' (such as gluttony as little jester, or promiscuity as a shapeshifting

American cowgirl), the conception of the event added another level to ease people who might struggle with verbal communication into the space.

Illustrator Selma Hafizovic had met the fluid identity depictions and vocal realisations of the story with a cartoonish style with unfinished touches. In her programme bio, she describes her art as often '[playing] with the idea that in considering her work, you might complete the creation the artist has begun.' This translated the conceptual qualities of the narrating voice(s) and the directing style into a visual look. Accordingly, the audience members were free to design their mindfulness drawing while listening to the story, using Hafizovic's template. In doing so, the viewers also co-created the visual voice of the story (for visuals see the photo documentation in the digital portfolio).

Duck whistle choir

It was in this context that I discovered the usefulness of 'action tables' (see more about these in Chapter 4) that would feature a variety of readymade sound objects and multi-sensory impulses to bring the vocal performance into three-dimensional space. The mirrored stage set-up also encouraged the audience to co-act. They had their own tables in front of them from where to tell their stories. This followed-on from the research insights gleaned from the use of the bamboo sticks of the dragon project. In the case of *The Fool Eater*, the different creative utensils (from pencils, to bells, duck whistles, and brownies) made the voice palatable as a physical experience. The devices translated it into a material extension, as much as an acoustic phenomenon.

The items correlated to different scenes from the story, heightening the communication of it: When the story talked about the main character's infatuation with ducks, for example, this fictional signal could be felt within the space through the audience blowing into the duck whistles provided on the tables. (An image of the whistle can be found in the flow chart chapter 1.) Ducks represented a faint idea of community for the main character Benny, as his brother works as duck farmer in Peru. Therefore, the incidental score produced by the collective whistle choir augmented the storytelling emotion into the quirky-sentimental, like perhaps an extended aria would do in a more conventional opera setting, dwelling on the emotion of longing through sending air through the vocal tract. (At

the beginning of *The Fool Eater* recording part 1, the whistle sound is rehearsed with the audience: https://youtu.be/GnxKM8LaK_Q.) Again, with the duck fifes as readymade vocalisation tools, the interactive story deployed a device that would provide access to taking part in the sound-making to as many abilities as possible, with speech impediments or without.

Gustatory participation

The fool eater's preference for chocolate pastry was rendered interactive and sensory through the invitation to munch on a piece of cake (with all the necessary allergy warnings this entailed beforehand). This brought another strong emotion into a sensory medium and created an incidental score with the sounds the audience made while eating their brownies (see minutes 12ff of the recording part 1: https://youtu.be/GnxKM8LaK_Q.) Further, as illustrated at the beginning of the chapter, food-related metaphors, smells, and textures have the potential to bring in a wide number of people. Most people can relate to the like or dislike of brownies.

When featuring edibles, the *facilitieur* needs to consider health and safety. Before the facilitator-narrators opened the performance, it featured humorous security instructions on the PowerPoint presentation. The instructions were rendered as if the presentation itself was a character in the performance, speaking to the audience through writing and images. In a post-human theoretical mind-set, even technology can receive its own personalised voice in music theatre without voice. The *acousmatic* voice of the PowerPoint presentation remained silent, but the computer technology became audible with short jingles (composed by project manager and sound designer Rosie Stately) to separate the individual chapters of the story.

Whether the munching sound of a piece of chocolate pastry or the trumpeting approximations of waterfowl, the interaction of the audience provided the melodramatic underscoring for the triple voicing of the story and contributed miscellaneous vocal expressions to the event. The handovers between storytellers and spectators that can be seen throughout the recording were facilitated via improvised moments of conversation. Harris, for example, can be seen in the video recording and the short trailer to encourage

the audience to eat a brownie at the respective moment in the script. This functions as an impulse to shortly break the tension of focused listening, which tends to make the play experience more inclusive. It provides release and allows for short conversations and laughter in the style of a relaxed performance.

Relaxed performances and total concentration

In a more conventional opera setting, a concentrated atmosphere throughout often aims at quiet immersion; a concept of total absorption ironically inherited from Wagner's all-encompassing artistic ideal. In recent years, *relaxed performances* have entered the schedules of theatres to accommodate different needs. Relaxed performances care to create a less 'concentrated' atmosphere: house lights may still be on; seating can be more relaxed; chats might be allowed. Harris and Bushe both had a background in applied theatre, stand-up, and interactive art forms. While directing the script during the rehearsals, I encouraged the co-performers to follow their instincts during the performance, identifying possible moments of impromptu facilitation and playful relief.

The readerly aesthetic of the delivery further loweres the threshold of what is considered 'perfection' on conventional terms. Taking scripts into the performance gave it a rehearsal-feeling, showing a process rather than a finished product. Further, this form of delivery also has the potential to include actors in the cast who might have trouble remembering lines due to stage fright or a mental condition. Any digression or opening-up during a show, however, also requires some form of plan or structure to depart from. The semi-performed and semi-interacted aesthetic of participatory storytelling provides both.

For an example: Since the formula 'ladies and gentlemen' felt somewhat out of place, the performance commenced with a question to the audience of how they would like to be addressed in a non-binary context (see beginning of recording). This discussion about labels and pronouns carried on from the one-week rehearsal period where the creative team had pointed out that the opening address would need to change. As facilitator-director, I wasn't comfortable with suggesting a term that speaks *for* the audience. Eventually, the issue was resolved with the *faciliteuring* idea of making the discussion part of the performance through having a brief conversation with the diverse voices in the room.

Likewise, flowers were distributed to every visitor as closing ritual with a short goodbye, combatting with a multi-sensory sign of community any lingering taste of loneliness when leaving the show (see photo documentation in the digital for more interactive choices).

Operatic touchscape

All these vocal, tactile, and sonic interactions, therefore, created a multi-sensory sound- and touchscape similar to the melodramatic and participatory orchestrations of the dragon project. But they also highlighted a different musical feel for a production that was in dialogue with opera. This music theatre without voice production showed that classical virtuosity can be replaced with interactive spontaneity and that voice as flawless acoustic phenomenon can be complemented in a multi-sensory event with quirky, readymade sounds.

The spectacle of voicing and virtuoso composition with everyday objects was part of this piece of music theatre. Shifts between different media indicated the heightened emotional involvement of the character-narrators (e.g., a love for food through brownie-munching, a longing for a missed family member through whistles) and brought the audience members in. Operatic themes from canonical figures were carried over; yet the audio track sounded markedly different from what the average opera-goer might expect to hear as 'opera'. But who could confidently say it wasn't? *The Fool Eater* illustrates what music theatre without voice can achieve as a mature art form and mental health tool. In this piece of practice research, the conceptual level around performativity theory and voice studies was turned into complex, inclusive practice.

Chapter 3

Singing the canon inclusive

I. Literature review: constructing an alternative corpus

Interlocking the practical and the verbal

After providing an overview of voice, music drama, and directing terminology (Chapter 1) and after approaching the theme of making music drama accessible for diverse communities from the perspective of the *faciliteur* (Chapter 2), this chapter reverts to a more narrowly defined academic approach. The following literature and practice review contextualises the field of contemporary participatory music drama in the UK, within disability drama and current trends in inclusive arts research.

This order diverts from a conventional academic dramaturgy that expects a book-based literature review before a practice investigation. The decision was motivated to allow practice and research to enmesh at equal measures, which is often a more accurate description of understanding newly-developing practice. This side-by-side approach hopes to decentre a hierarchy often communicated by placing academic knowledge and discourse over the taciturn knowledge discovered through performance-as-research.

Book-based investigation: theories behind an *inclusive* aesthetics

Many publications on inclusive aesthetic share the ambition to connect disability arts or art made by communities of amateurs to a modernist canon with its alternative stylistic principles. Tobin Siebers, Matt Hargrave, and Alice Fox and Hannah Macpherson find different ways into this connection: They highlight that art made by differently-abled people or untrained artists (within learned conventions of art-making) produces stylistic parameters that can be described with reference to avant-garde traditions such *fluxus*, conceptual art, or the 'aesthetics of the ugly'. These art movements pivot around the processual, the non-normative, and the visibility of the excluded or stigmatised. Aesthetic labels often deployed

to describe the art made outside (spatially and aesthetically) of established norms are, for example, 'absurdity, shock, eccentricity, doubt, confusion, disgust, antagonism or sheer pleasure' (Fox/Macpherson 2015: 10).

The lack of a more neutral critical vocabulary shows that the aesthetic canon of modernism often developed its language in oppositions to standards of 'beauty' (with a preference for symmetry, balance, or containment) and the socially-acceptable. The heterogenous and shifting nature of the discourse itself externalises its own aesthetic programme and has become radicalised towards post-modernist movements.[7] Despite the rising awareness of biased terminology, value judgements seem to remain within the linguistic framework developed over the 20th century to describe art in play with norms and based on a less prescriptive vision.

Inclusive therefore becomes a term that, though with its own faults, shifts the critical vocabulary and provides a descriptive alternative for art contributions that cannot be grasped adequately, it seems, with the vocabulary at hand; or with one term only from the arsenal of existing descriptions. This is where *inclusive* as aesthetic label overlaps with 'diverse' (as mentioned in Chapter 1) which describes an artistic approach that aims to co-present various identity categories within the same creative/theatrical space.

Fox and Macpherson rightly point out that the term *inclusive* can re-introduce a binary that presupposes exclusion. However, an inclusive logic at its core is founded on work conditions that bring difference dynamically together rather than reproducing the binary logic of an exclusive mind-set from the other end of the spectrum. *Inclusive* in the sense of music theatre without voice, thus, would be a collaboration between classically-trained opera singers *and* women with learning disabilities, rather than a project of opera exclusively for differently-abled participants (see Chapter 4). This is where the potential and creative challenge of the art form lies. The co-existence of various forms of communication,

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[7] I'm aware that ideas of modernism and post-modernism are heavily debated, but I would like to focus on ideas of modernism as a gradual fragmentation of concepts of identity and truth that has become more and more diverse and radicalised over the course of the 21st century. This leads to claims about the loss of 'substance' or of shared community values. Post-modernist tendencies have been amply theorised by Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, or Marc Augé.

as illustrated through the projects in Chapter 2, marks another form of *inclusive* aesthetic that does aims to integrate multiple forms of expression.

Working together in neurodiverse groups has produced its own practice codes and working aesthetic. Petra Kuppers (2014: 7ff.) refers to an 'ethic of accommodation', whereas Fox and Macpherson highlight the collaborative nature of inclusive work as an 'aesthetic of exchange' with its 'ethics of encounter'. In the practice journey, I've described this approach as aesthetic of invitation, welcoming spectators into the process of live creation on stage. Ultimately, this result in an aesthetic of acceptance through artful encounter.

Making art together in these senses becomes a similarly Utopian principle as finding voice together, it emerges as a mutually-enabling process that relinquishes antagonism (Fox/Macpherson 2015: 17):

> [C]ollaboration with people with complex communication needs can help enhance creativity by forcing all practitioners to think about new tempos of work, new spaces of practice, new creative ways of facilitating non-verbal dialogue and new media through which to enhance creative expression.

Fox and Macpherson's critical manifesto about *Inclusive Arts Research* focuses on fine art and contemporary art as a frame of reference. The practice research presented in this PhD aims to find a language to communicate inclusive art for directing music theatre and redefining 'voice' as expressive principle. Perhaps because of the centrality of assumptions around voice ability, this conceptual extension has been lacking for musical, opera, and pantomime to date.

The quintessentially modernist: learning disability aesthetic

Within theatre and performance, Matt Hargrave is leading the discussion about an inclusive performance aesthetic. He wants to connect *Theatres of Learning Disability* to a modernist canon and thereby create recognition of these projects *as art*. The performance scholar sees dramatic works that question what art can be and how the spectators perceive it as a relevant aesthetic criterion of contemporary art. Inclusive art projects take part in the unmaking of established meaning. The 'trickster spirit' of *The Fool Eater* alludes to this potential of disability theatre that Ruth Bieber (2013: 253) conceptualises as an '[an energy]

that challenges [...] well-worn habits [...] toppling worldviews that have lost their usefulness'. The plurality of form that 'undoes (singular) meaning' to create different ones, is key to the understanding of inclusive aesthetics in this modern or even post-modern sense. What inclusive practice shares is an interest in 'no single, overarching aesthetic effect' (Fox/Macpherson 2015: 10).

The grotesque as inclusive mode of inquiry

At the intersection of queer community performance and disability arts, German-American scholar and alternative choreographer Petra Kuppers has emerged as an influential practitioner that advocates a diverse aesthetic of acceptance, accommodation, and inclusion. Her life story as disabled dancer and outspoken Lesbian often enters her work between drama-making and oral performance (e.g., through staged poetry). Kuppers promotes an alternative dramatic aesthetic as a potentially political revaluation of existing norms and as a way to investigate embodied emotions in relation to historical injustices. Her scholarly work deploys community performance as research in its plurality, from public engagement art to carnival flotillas. Kupper's writing – like her facilitation style – is participatory and multi-modal, inviting the reader and/or the audience in to discover their own expressive means. Her work is especially relevant for highlighting the role of the facilitator-scholar who engages diverse spectators through non-verbal modes of inquiry.

John Palmer and Richard Hayhow with their publication and practice work on *Learning Disability and Contemporary Theatre* (2008) focus on a specific marginalised community. Centring around learning disability as one of the guiding methods in rethinking dramatic conventions shares practice with Matt Hargrave. Palmer and Hayhow identify their genre context as 'devised theatre', 'physical theatre', or 'radical theatre', endeavouring to work beyond logocentrism.

In publications like these, a host of terminology for a 'deviant', alternative or embodied style is used to describe *the other* as an – often distorted – mirror image to a dominant discourse. In disability culture, the term *crip* has met a revival (Kuppers 2014: 30), like *queer* has been reclaimed in gender studies (Butler 1990). This practice research brings back the term *grotesque* in comparable fashion to inclusive parlance. With its rich tradition

as a dynamic, and potentially all-encompassing aesthetic notion the term meets the needs to describe an emerging genre that is undulating in its seeming paradoxes (compare the director's note from *The Fool Eater* and the idea of ethno-grotesque sketches from the melodrama project).

Grotesque used descriptively initially denotes an inclusive practice that strays beyond binaries in an aesthetic of constant change and inversion. In their on-going agility, arabesque structures visualise this non-classical style. The term captures a dynamic stylistic paradigm that accommodates difference in an open-ended creative process. Understanding the term *grotesque* in this affirmative sense – as a stylistic tool that organically houses miscellaneous categories at the same time –, the concept reclaims diverse identity, expresses pride in disability stories, and becomes rejuvenated as non-normative mode of academic inquiry. From this perspective, *grotesque* and *inclusive* promote a similar non-binary or fluid logic that comes in handy when dealing with practice research around music theatre without voice.

Kayser and Bakhtin: academic traditions of the grotesque

The grotesque surfaces with various connotations in modernist representations of 'human ugliness' and social outsiders: in the 'freak shows' of popular entertainment (Bogdan 1988), for example, the actor training of Meyerhold (Gordon 2006: 101); or the clowning stylisations of Lecoq. In the realm of cultural criticism, Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Literature and Art* (1963) and especially Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (1965) define the grotesque as aesthetic category and literary mode of representation. With their nuances, the literary scholars trace the grotesque gesture as playfully outside of existing norms of order.

Kayser, for instance, sees cave drawings of hybrid creatures between human, animal, and plant as a prime example of grotesque style, since it defies easy categorisation within established taxonomies. Similarly, Bakhtin highlights this artistic mode as dynamic way into inclusive social innovation: He traces inversions of social orders and a constant re-making of myths around life and death in folk spectacle. This reveals the potential of this aesthetic

logic to invert accepted behavioural scripts without necessarily opposing them, building up a swirl of reality from what is.

Indebted to their own sociocultural climate (e.g., a Freudian interest in the humanities in the mid-20th century), Kayser links the accompanying cognitive subversions of *grotesque* depictions to sensations of Freudian terror and taboo. Bakhtin (as an early representative of a post-structuralist strand) revaluates this terrifying confusion of order as a joyful celebration of structuralist chaos, emphasising laughter and life over angst and the uncanny behind. His inverted world orders of *carnivalism* with their ensuing bizarre body dramas bridges the gap to contemporary analyses of the *weird* as non-binary methodology: 'Weird writing exposes how realist art represents a compromised means of representation, its mimetic imperatives being poorly suited to the capture of the outré' (Freeman 2017).

Non-realist, visceral expression also has emerged as an organic element in the research around the aesthetic of music drama with multi-sensory vocalities. *Body dramas* – in the sense of a gleeful dwelling on bodily functions, may it be eating, defecating, or burping in the medieval sense – crop up in inclusive art organically and build an inspiring connection to artworks from the past. Besides breath, the scatological or daily routines mark relatable and shared themes for most viewers (e.g., walks to the toilet, the inadvertent passing of wind). As shown in the practice journey of Chapter 2, the potential to engage people with learning disabilities, dementia, or across cultural barriers through visceral, culinary language became a recurring insight. Further, open body drama, bringing back the faecal humour of the middle ages, release shame in collective laughter. They are a readymade form of embodied communication. Like inclusive practice, grotesque aesthetic, therefore, encourages 'new visions of how society might be' (Fox/Macpherson 2015: 7).

II. Practice review: jumbling the mainstream

Learning-disabled and neurodiverse drama ensembles

It could be potentially misleading to group too many different neurodiverse companies and mental health approaches under one generalising ('grotesque') headline. My own work shows affinity to drama work for people with intellectual differences; it branches out into

work for different states of mental health as well as queer drama. The projects reviewed in the following tackle identity questions as well as social trauma, loneliness, and resilience. Constructing a simple connection between learning disability and metal health issues also disregards the complex overlaps that occur between intellectual difference/learning disability and mental health.

So, the shared practice review contextualises the work presented in chapters 2 and 4 within community work that is tendentially interested in mental variation and/or marginalised perspectives The productive-conceptual approach around research music theatre as an alternative communication tool in neurodiverse and queer wellbeing contexts is less interested in 'training' a group to fit into 'marketable' forms than perhaps some of the ensembles presented. (Analysing what is 'marketable' or commercial, within a disability sector even, and what isn't would require a separate conversation, but I will point some aspects out in the following attending to questions of a linguistic mainstream, fluency, and the verbal.)

In general, there are two tendencies within the theatres of learning disability that become apparent when surveying the field: The field separates performers on the muted fault line of an ability to communicate plus an (already existing) motivation to act. As learning disability is a broad spectrum, these two 'mainstream abilities' cannot easily be taken for granted in participants, depending on the profoundness or multiplicity of their intellectual disability, or their state of mental health. Many established theatre ensembles focus on work with people with learning disabilities who are (and this is a contentious term) 'able enough' to take part in dramatic work without much additional support. Back to Back (Australia), Mind the Gap (UK) or MOOM (Sweden) share that their inspiring and aesthetically-innovative work relies on their learning-disabled actors to be able to sound-voice within an existing paradigm of theatrical conventions, leaning towards smooth communication.

Mind the Gap

The website of Mind the Gap states that the company aspires 'equal opportunity' for their actors and actresses in terms of 'artistic excellence'. This artistic excellence is arguably

defined in relation to a mainstream market that relies on actors to communicate with a certain level of immediate intelligibility or 'professionalism'. Therefore, the training programmes of these companies care to facilitate training that ticks the mainstream boxes of voice, movement, and actor and the text (cf. YouTube testimonials in 'About Mind the Gap Academy' from 9 March 2021). The special needs of the neurodiverse cohorts are met by allowing more time to learn skills, for example, or a gentler directing approach. The Mind the Gap studio – a conversative-style academy – is run by non-disabled professionals alongside a diverse group of people with learning disabilities.

Per se, there is nothing wrong with this approach and these companies have produced ground-breaking theatre for decades. Further, since their founding decade in the 1980s, they have contributed significantly to the proud visibility of a diverse body image and of mental variation, educating audiences. Mind the Gap have produced cutting-edge shows that cared for themes that came partly out of the groups and challenged the views mainstream society holds of what people with learning disabilities think, feel, do, or need. Mind the Gap's production *MIA. Daughters of Fortune* (2016 ff), for example, raises questions of sexuality and the child-bearing wish of a learning- disabled heroine. Back to Back's euthanasia burlesque *Ganesh versus the Third Reich* (2009 ff) reclaims historic disability discourses in a grotesque culture-mash up.

Yet, what these companies have also done is found a way to recreate expectations of a mainstream market of what a trained actor needs to be able to do: communicate ('voice'), move (without a lot of prompts, in an 'aesthetically-pleasing' way, not seated?) and the ability to speak text. Their marketing material, like most companies' in a digital age, relies heavily on the visually-polished. Many of their ensemble members seem to be keen to be visible. When working with people with more severe learning disabilities, perhaps paired with bodily disabilities and speech impediments, these creative requirements, however, would not be accessible for many participants.

As Miriam Wood in her *Music for People with Learning Disabilities* (1983 [1991]: 134) notes:

> Many handicapped [word used in the original] people lack movement. They may be unmotivated or find movement difficult because of physical problems and prefer to sit all day. [...] The use of movement to music can be beneficial in all circumstances, encouraging

movement for the less motivated and providing a framework for movement which produces order out of chaos for hyperactive pupils, or provides and outlet for a superabundance of energy.

So, the challenge of a radically inclusive form of vocality and music drama, accessible even to the most 'severely' different, requires a rethinking that meets these needs as well as aiming at mature creative expression. Music and song, therefore, in music theatre without voice also fulfil the need to motivate and ease into performance – this can be the spectacle and beauty of the performance itself – they can carry the impulse to act or help to learn that such an impulse can exist; or they can reveal how expected standards of speaking fail in action. Having said that, Mind the Gap or Back to Back's show catalogue is diverse in itself. Thus, there are various overlaps also between the practice research presented in the following as music theatre without voice and some of their work. Especially, when Mind the Gap, for instance, organise participatory happenings that invite other groups and audiences in. In 2019, the company staged ZARA an outdoor performance that explored through the provision of a gigantic baby doll as the central object metaphor of the performance questions of learning disability and parenthood (cf. the online material on the Mind the Gap website). The baby, in a way, stood in for a larger-than-life, dream-like desire to have a child from the perspective of a learning-disabled character.

This piece of theatre showed an element of outreach within the aesthetic of the work, which I highlight as a criterion of an inclusive, participatory aesthetic (see above). ActUp! Newham, my collaborator for the ZOOM storytelling *Tony's Hot Day* took part in this outdoor performance as one of the community groups. Also, the idea of using enlarged 'toys' to initiate a performative happening allows to draw parallels to e.g., making a big cardboard dragon for *The Dragon and the Wizadress*, or in general, using objects to motivate play-acting and centre storytelling in a non-verbal element (as in the panto-project for young adults from the autistic spectrum). Of course, since Covid many of the existing disability companies have diversified their work into the online realm, too, with showreel-type performance material and/or films with music.

The Lawnmowers

The Lawnmowers from Gateshead, founded in 1986, choose a more participatory approach. Like Mind the Gap, they care for self-devised productions and political issues that affect people with learning disabilities and have helped to change the media representation of disabled people significantly since the 80s. On their YouTube Channel *The Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company*, the group promotes learning disability research work and interactive drama pieces, deploying Forum Theatre techniques.

In an attempt to make current institutional health care structures more accessible, the ensemble have devised a Creative Health Awareness Training (CHAT) that dramatises experiences of the participants with the NHS (e.g., encounters with doctors, bureaucracy). The purpose of the participatory project is to educate people who work in these sectors (and a wider public) through drama-based forms of learning. The project hopes to bring change to the system. The Lawnmower's dramatic work gives a constructive political voice to research undertaken by Mencap, one of the leading UK charities for people with learning disabilities. In the opening of the CHAT documentation video, a written description states that over a third of deaths of people with learning disabilities 'are due to them not getting the right health care' (cf. YouTube, Lawenmowers Creative Health Awareness Training (CHAT), 10 Jan 2018).

Different kinds of difference

Since the 1980s, the inclusive drama market has become a broad spectrum that caters to different needs. Initially, the movement was motivated by Graeae's trail-brazing foray into advocating agency and visibility for diverse body types on stage (see more below for their musical theatre work). Disability drama group Graeae's mission since then has been to champion innovative form to accommodate difference. Coming out of the social reform movements of the 1960s and 70s, that also fought for desegregation and political participation of people with disabilities, the 1980s marked a decade where disability studies consolidated as a discipline in universities, with a particular focus on the social model (Cameron 2013). People with disabilities further made connections with each other through unions and, in the arts, the formation of the National Network of Disability Arts Forums.

Many companies like the above have formed in this climate and continued their important work in different areas; though, as delineated in Chapter 1, not necessarily with a focus on finding representational formats for people outside the lingo-political norms. Showing the 'bias' within an already highly inclusive work model reveals how important it is to differentiate further and evolve participatory forms when it comes to diverse mental types to and to demarcate a field where more work is needed.

Oily Cart

Oily Cart's sensory work exemplifies a branch of inclusive work for learning-disabled or cognitively-diverse crowds that relies less on what the mainstream market would term as effective, *intellectualised* theatrical communication. Also, since the 1980s, they aim to 'reimagine theatre for young audience[s] to make it more inclusive' (cf. their website's About). They started out with productions for under-five year olds. Oily Cart work with abstract soundscapes, textures, and interactive prompts in a space of sensory safety engages the minds through tactile immediacy, sensation, and music.

Most recently, in response to the lockdown restrictions, the company have found a way to chop up their performance work into interactive immersive sessions one can recreate at home and access via YouTube: *The Sensory Sessions* uses arts and crafts, visual input, and sounds inspired by shows such as *Jamboree.* The company's website describes the 2020 live event as:

> a vibrant piece of gig-theatre made for and with teenagers with […] profound and multiple learning disabilities. Each tune in the gig has been co-created with a young person who is non-verbal. Audiences experience live Balkan music, colourful tactile costumes, sousaphone vibrations and interactive music and noise making.

Oily Cart particularly caters to children and younger audiences. With the music dramas researched here (relating to mental health or learning disability), however, this PhD deliberately focuses on adult co-creation, accessible to a whole spectrum of mental abilities. The themes discussed (i.e., loneliness, personal empowerment), and the musical aesthetic introduced can arguably be deemed tailored to an adult outlook on life, though hidden within a fairy-tale-like, grotesque style. Yet, stories such as the *Dragon and the Wizadress* (see final chapter for the script) also appeal to young audiences.

Similar to Mind the Gap's approach, the projects presented here rest on the belief that inclusive work doesn't need to be infantilising. Although some of the techniques to engage multi-sensorily might be looked upon as 'simple', they are chosen to increase access and deployed in a context of the adult themes sketched. Just as disability and simplicity are relative term, maturity is too.

Maturity through choice

On a musical level, there is nothing wrong with using certain forms of music as a conversation starter. However, the unpredictability of life as an ultimately unsafe zone may be echoed in more complex musical and lyrical experiments or vocal and textural dissonances. Miriam Wood (1993: 102) underlines as reason for writing her own songs for her clients that 'as [participants] grow towards adulthood they need songs with meaningful words which express their feelings and outlook on life'; as another reason she states that in existing songs 'very often too many words are used'.

Through its aesthetic diversity, music theatre without voice for adults has the potential to address a cultural blind spot described by Anna Chesner in *Dramatherapy for People with Learning Disabilities* (1995: 1-2):

> Ideas that are expressed by people with learning disabilities may have their origin exclusively in the spoken word, or in television [and social media, update by the author]. Books, travel, and full participation in the available culture are enriching influences that may be virtually absent from the identity of some people with learning disabilities.

This PhD advocates strongly through the practice outlined that a failure of our cultures to manage the exposure to 'immature' content for everybody (often content that sells well on social media, or on the popular musical stage as family entertainment) shouldn't be turned into an assumption of what people with learning disabilities like or don't like. Sometimes, it is more about what they have had the chance to experience (and access) and what they hadn't. A more nuanced, less social-media oriented approach can also be beneficial to improving mental health conditions in adults. Therefore, the mere suggestion of creating an opera experience together with adult women with learning disabilities, as described in the following chapters, creates an innovative aesthetic experiment and original piece of practice-as-research.

Open-ended melodic forms, asymmetric rhythms, and cacophonic symphonies do not reinforce an idealised harmony of a predictable world. The aim of the practice research is to (if only occasionally) move beyond a Disneyfied popular idiom or to integrate it into a choice of musical styles: not opposition, but inclusion. Song choices from animated films, voiced by adorable characters, are popular with many groups. The *faciliteur* can use popular songs as icebreakers, too. But music theatre without voice projects also care to introduce some more variety to offer choice. Many participants respond well to it and show that 'refining aesthetic taste' (whatever that means) is not the prerogative of the 'intellectually-able.' Hayhow and Palmer's neurodiverse group Full Body and the Voice (see Chapter 1) comes closed to this 'authentic' approach, though arguably, their aesthetic concern is with contemporary theatre, not diverse vocality in music drama.

III. Participatory music dramas

Attempting a cross section: London and the inclusive music theatre stage

Though the field of inclusive arts research and practice is gaining momentum, when it comes to music theatre specifically, it appears sparsely ploughed, apart from occasional remarks or singular publications (e.g., *Black Opera* by Naomi André, 2018). To gain a corpus of secondary references that are more tailored to the particularities of this research inquiry – with a focus on a sensory, participatory music theatre in Britain – I conducted a series of interviews with directors and facilitators who, within the last five years, created productions that show elements of music theatre without voice: their productions feature moments of *collaborative aesthetic* with amateur or community involvement, or active *audience participation* within a space that is set out by the director-facilitator, or respond with *multi-sensory, dynamic (e.g. gender-fluid, neurodiverse, grotesque) aesthetic choices* to works of the music theatre canon.

The full interviews with comedy director Cal McCyrstal, opera director John Fulljames, and facilitator-director Tim Yealland can be listened to as part of the digital portfolio. The aural archive marks an attempt to consolidate (some) contemporary practice, as a starting point for more comprehensive studies in the future. Consequently, the cross

section presented here doesn't aim to be representative. It rather insinuates a conceptual matrix, in which to locate the research of this PhD. This marks the third contextual strand after a theory-based inclusive research section and a review of neurodiverse drama ensembles.

When interviewing, I tried to remain neutral in my questions, but it seemed just addressing themes of vocality and participation in music drama led to a shared perspective. Aesthetic problems of conventional music theatre that surfaced in the interviews are in a nutshell: the dominant prominence of inflexible scores; ideas of voice perfection; often exclusive norms of virtuosity and training. Music theatre without voice, therefore, marks a liberation from these prerogatives. Fulljames refers to the practice of *regietheater* as a more open directing language.[8]

The discourse around a closed an open directing aesthetic similar to a Continental *regietheatre* has its prominent figures also in Great Britain, first and foremost with director Peter Brook. In his seminal treatise *The Empty Space*, Brook links a general aesthetic openness of drama productions to theatre's medium specificity as dynamic and changing artform of the present. Lloyd's understanding of *auteursim*, quoted at the beginning of Chapter 2, likewise highlights the potentially inclusive, socio-political dimension of this directing practice and flashes a bridge into *faciliteur*-work.

Diversifying storytelling on alternative stages

Fulljames mentions various reasons why normative requirements linger within classical (British) music drama institutions such as the Royal Opera House: audience expectations of a slick sound, for example, or recording needs for CDs, or opera cinema. These media require a classical – meaning perfectly presented and unchanging – voice sound in music theatre and shape audience expectations. In his practice, Fulljames deliberately relocates classical

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[8] *Regietheater* is an aesthetic movement that is often associated with Continental European directors that placed their open artistic vision over the truthful delivery of the text, as 'intended' by the playwright or screenwriter (Kreuzer and Risi 2011; Parkison 2010; Pavis 2010; Delgado and Rebellato 2010). The concept sits somewhat uneasily within the British directing context where values of truthful rendition of the written – or composed – text are placed over signature style and auteur mannerism (Rebellato 1999: 86-87). See also chapters 1 and 2.

opera in spaces where voice experiment and a more inviting music drama aesthetic are possible. As observer, I shadowed his production of *The Return of Ulysses* for the Royal Opera House at the Roundhouse.[9]

Participatory elements to make the Monteverdi opera accessible for new audiences and performers included the work with a diverse community choir to represent a group of refugees; a staging atmosphere of a live concert where the opera singers speak to the audience at the beginning of the show; and a staging in the round that seated members of the audience near the action, which happened on the central, revolving stage (overcoming classical spatial divides that reinforce distance between the untouchable diva and the humble viewer as well as rendering an audience space more democratic as many more seats gain a prime focal point through the rotation); tactile readymade props such as empty water bottles, or thermo-blankets out of silver foil hinted at a contemporary sensory aesthetic. Having said that, Fulljames also admitted that the alternative staging in the round space allowed for this coming together in the first place. On Covent Garden's main stage, different voice abilities are more difficult to showcase. This exposes expectations of listening associated with the a particular location itself.

Bizarre personifications

In 2019, the Lindbury Theatre – ROH's studio space – explored a grotesque music drama aesthetic with *The Lost Thing*. The contemporary opera tells the story of Shaun, a boy in a wheelchair, who discovers an ineffable 'thing' that seems to function as a metaphor for nature lost in urban spaces. The thing, however, comes to life through music and a gawky physical language. With its tingly bodysuit, multiple legs and green garlands, the presentation of the thing creates multi-sensory interest and lends a different kind of voice to the lost creature's recovery story.

The 'thing', a bizarre personification of what cannot be expressed in intellectualised ways e.g., a loss of a spiritual connection with nature, was represented by members of the

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[9] Fulljames started out as a young director in the fringe scene of London, he worked for the Young Vic, later became Associate Director of the Royal Opera House and now works as CEO of Royal Opera Copenhagen. He regularly directs productions for the Royal Opera House and cares for opening the elite art form to diverse audiences.

Candoco Dance Company. The ensemble expands – as they state on their website – 'perceptions of what dance can be'. Their company is made up of disabled and non-disabled performers. The cuddle aesthetic of the dance thing expressed ideas of connectedness and community that seemed to be lacking from the urban environment of the human characters: It could be deciphered as a metaphor of inclusion. Choreographer-director Ben Wright's body-based aesthetic informed the collaboration.

The story itself was inspired by the picture book of the same name by Australian author-illustrator Shuan Tan (who won an Oscar for the animation film). In an interesting chain of collaborations, it appears, the music drama came about through various embodiments of what voice can be as multi-sensory incarnation. Jules Maxwell's eclectic modernist score echoed this accommodating spaciousness of the approach. The ineffability mystery at the heart of the story demanded for a liminal aesthetic of operatic vocals between noise and sung passages.

A quirky storytelling aesthetic has emerged as a trademark of another instalment within recent British opera-writing. Maybe as an attempt to provide a stylistic framework for the visibility of diversity, *The Angle Esmeralda* (2020), composed by Lliam Paterson with a libretto by Pamela Carter, based on a short story by Don DeLillo, deployed such a style, too.[10] The project was directed by Guildhall's resident producer Martin Lloyd-Evans, who champions new work and often collaborates with young professionals.

The performance (like *The Lost Thing*) made use of an inexpressibility enigma (the angle) that was communicated through the verbal accounts of diverse urban characters (e.g., nuns, passers-by). Their storytelling pieces *performed* the action: the composed orality of the accounts themselves comprised the event. Besides bringing a playful (and arguably consumer-friendly) twist to recently-written fare, the multi-faceted storytelling also moves away from 'realistic' ideas of casting. Often, stories can be voiced by a diverse choir or ensemble. From a dramaturgical view, the story communication remains intact, while casting and staging choices can remain flexible, accommodating different needs or different spatial conditions.

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[10] The premier performance at the Barbican was cancelled in 2020 due to Covid-19. However, I saw previews at the Guildhall School of Music in February 2020 which allowed me to write in more detail about the lost performance.

Though without noticeable amateur or audience participation, in content and aesthetic, the urban nature fable about the *Lost Thing* (and *Esmeralda* to an extent) ticked many of the boxes of contemporary music theatre without voice: They featured a diverse cast (from orchestra on stage, to singers, to dancers); showcased a chopped-up storytelling aesthetic that re-shaped monolithic idea of an oral performance; and questions singular storytelling authority. The new operas deployed a co-presence of different vocal virtuosities (e.g., a rediscovery of countertenors) to give voice to the 'unnormal' lost thing or individuals in a crowd.

Yet, on a formal level, these inexpressibility fables remained inaccessible to differently-abled viewers or entirely new audiences on the spatial and temporal plane. The performances were not conceived to engage the viewer actively through participation, for example, but to be watched as a multi-sensory, multi-vocal spectacle on stage. They required the ability to listen for one or two hours in a dark auditorium. Having said that, the ROH's Learning Platform provided a visual story that could be viewed at home and in preparation of an encounter with *The Lost Thing*.

Facilitating community opera

Tim Yealland's work for the English Touring Opera is another prime example of how contemporary British opera strives to engage marginalised communities. Like Fulljames, Yealland cares to make opera accessible by bringing in amateurs as part of commissioned productions. In contrast to *Ulysses*-approach, though, his projects are more facilitation-based. Yealland has devised large-scale community operas e.g., *One Day Two Dawns* in Cornwall. The 2008/9 production used local Cornish history such as references to a full solar eclipse as a starting point.

The structure of the devising process was workshop-driven, as Yealland describes on his website: 'Participants were part of an exciting creative process leading to two final performances. Almost all the music and words were created by participants working with a professional team. The nine participating groups were involved in a series of creative workshops prior to May 2009.' Amongst the community groups involved was also Cornwall-

based Access Theatre, an inclusive company for adults with learning disabilities and their carers.

The facilitator also appears as writer-director: Yealland has written numerous libretti for operas for young people. When I interviewed him via ZOOM during the lockdown 2020, he referred to an opera for babies he was working on with a composer that allowed to explore sound worlds beyond established conventions of voice:

> I've been making so much different work for SEN audiences over many years. […] I've been in situations where you squirm in your seats because the audience isn't involved. […] You have [to get] the audience to tell the story with you and be surprised by the story. Sometimes you just use very crude methods of engaging people. There are just so many ways of doing that. It's a lovely way of thinking about making work. It's always about the group, it's never about you as an artist showing off your work. But – this is the key thing – this also demands from the artist, particular the creative artist, absolute rigour never ever to dumb down to your audience, ever. You should hear this music my friend Russel has written for this opera for babies. It's phenomenal. It's never ever the kind of things you'd expect from CBBies. As we know, kids' ears are really fresh. They don't need to be lead. There are open to new sounds and new harmonies.

In this statement, many of the key points of disability theatre and music drama overlap. He addresses the seeming paradox that inclusive work – whether for SEN audiences, young adults, or babies – eventually yields (what I referred to earlier as) mature work ('new sounds and new harmonies'), innovation, and a re-thinking of form. Seemingly simple (or 'crude') methods of sensory engagement require the artistic vision of an ambitious *faciliteur* between director and animator, at the cutting edge of dramatic invention: '[I]t's about rigour never, ever to dumb down to your audience.' Music theatre without voice, thus, redefines ideas of artistic rigour – one could also call it excellence or highly-skilled professionalism as alluded to in the journey-chapter.

The two directors cited represent the spectrum of the *faciliteur* from both ends: Fulljames directs within a professional opera aesthetic to host moments of amateur participation. Yelleand's practice can be located on the other end of the spectrum. As self-declared animateur, he works with community groups over a series of workshops, devises new operas, and brings in a creative team to turn the project into an – often one-off – performance on a community stage.

Both practitioners exemplify an inclusive directing style to opera in the way how they blur the lines between audience and performer, amateur and professional

engagement. Contemporary British opera in general shows interest in collaborative storytelling. Works such as *The Lost Thing* or *The Angle Esmeralda* feature the act of communication as part of the spectacle. Yealland and Fulljames try to integrate moments of participation further into (classical) works: They collaborate with community choirs, or (re-)write words and music. Using opera content as starting point for the work with marginalised communities, the practice research of this PhD relates to this shaping of a music-dramatic space that allows for difference to come together.

Pantomime as participatory drama

With British-Irish director Cal McCrystal the situation is slightly different: He does not necessarily set out to produce inclusive music theatre, but his directing strategies of inviting audience participation and breaking open the stage text bring different vocalities together in what can be called a grotesque performance. His aesthetic vision behind the formal openness is in line with Yealland's understanding of inviting audience interaction as part of keeping the performance interesting, which is rooted in an understanding of 'not dumbing down to' audiences.

McCrystal has a background in classical acting training from the Royal Scottish Conservatory and studied clowning with Philipp Gaulier in France. In the programme notes to *One Man*, *Two Guvnors* (originally for the National Theatre, directed by Nicolas Hytner in 2011), for which he acted as physical comedy director, McCrystal traces a participatory, sensory comedy heritage through British traditions of faecal humour:

> What gives our sense of humour its distinctive identity? […] Sometimes British humour is summed up as simply 'pee-pee ca-ca' and it cannot be denied that we have always had a fascination with bodily functions – a predilection that has been missing from, for example, American humour. [...] The storylines [of British comedy TV and performance] were mainly vehicles for the performers to interact with the live studio audience […] [with] 'asides' directly to camera – certainly influenced by the traditions of Commedia dell'Arte. Many will be familiar with these techniques through Christmas pantomimes, which have thrived in Britain for over 400 years [definitions and dates differ in histories on the subject matter, remark by the author].

In McCrystal's case, strategies of humorous address and whimsical, even multi-sensory games with the audience are inspired by traditions of British comedy and clowning.

In fact, he has become associated with the 'British brand', being hired as comedy director also for the *Paddington*-films.

His staging of *Iolanthe* (2018) for the ENO becomes significant in this context of an updated British tradition of physical and interactive comedy: The comic opera, written by Gilbert and Sullivan, satirises Victorian politics and class distinction. The fairy Iolanthe crosses the (forbidden) identity divide between humans and fantastic creatures by marrying a mortal. The stage design of the fairies cares for visual interest through bright colour schemes. The camp performativity of the style borders on grotesque identity play: after all, one of the main characters is a non-binary creature, half fairy, half human.

McCrystal and his team wrote improvised stand-up monologues for a newly-fleshed out character: The fire brigadier (only mentioned in a song in previous renditions) directly addresses the audience (almost as an emcee). He enters an audience box for his introductory monologue and thereby breaks the divide between on-stage and off-stage space. Multi-sensory audience involvement in the director's other (co-)productions include, for example, a game of orange-throwing and catching with the audience in *Don Quixote* (a play with songs for the RSC, together with Angus Jackson) or stand-up comedy that breaks the fourth wall in his musical circus extravaganza *My Beautiful Circus* (Gifford Circus, 2018).

McCrystal's work as part of a directing team also illustrates recent trends in British music theatre, where directing collaborations become more visible. Director Marianne Elliot, for example, co-directed a new version of *Death of a Salesman* together with Miranda Cromwell for the Young Vic in 2019. It might well be a sign of a shift in the perception of directing as lone leadership towards a co-creative profession. Theatre, and musicals especially, have always been a collaborative effort. Classical American fare is associated with directors (such as Hal Prince) as much as with choreographers (e.g., Jerome Robbins or Agnes de Mille, Gillian Lynne in the British realm). But the position of the director often remained undivided, still steeped (perhaps) in Romantic notions of a singular artistic vision. Music theatre with diverse vocalities redresses this singularity bias and is interested in the *sympraxis* of the *faciliteur*.

Re-writing gender texts

Director Emma Rice, former executive of the Globe and collaborator of McCrystal as part of the improvisational comedy collective *Spymonkey*, shares stylistic openness with Cal's directing approach. Both create musical theatre texts that rely heavily on body humour (a dramatised version of Bakhtin's medieval body dramas) and storytelling as collaborative event, across different genres of music drama. Their work is representative of an inclusive directing style that is inclusive as much *in form* (through inviting participation within a space, often through non-verbal means) as *in content* (e.g., by re-authoring parts of the original text). The directors deploy strategies of a facilitator during their shows to bring the audiences in and keep shows dynamic performance texts.

In her retelling of Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus from the Underworld* (ENO 2020), Rice lets her characters speak to the audience to tell their stories. In the Globe *romcom* musical *Romantics Anonymous* (2018), the audience received chocolates at the entrance of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse as a gustatory way into the fictional universe. (One of the characters works in a chocolate shop.) Rice often rewrites or adapts existing repertoire, especially concentrating on female narratives; a strategy many inclusive directors share with *regietheater*, enabling different voices to come through canonical remains. Thus, scholar-practitioner Julian Woolford describes Rice's musical theatre work as 'reinterpretation' (2012: 22).[11] Similarly, McCrystal understands the '[dramatic] text as [his] vehicle', which also entails a certain flexibility to vocal scores.

Marianne Elliott's version of *Company* marks another recent British rewrite of a canonical text. Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's original chronicles the (lonely) life of urban singleton Robert and his friends over a few consecutive birthdays. Elliott rewires the gender parameters of the text: She switches the main character to a female named Bobbie and a straight couple becomes a same-sex affair on their way to getting married. In this case, the gender swap also means a swap of vocal types on the musical plane.

Though inclusive in content, Elliott's show remains conservative in staging: apart from occasional audience complicity conventional for musical comedy (e.g., actress Patti Lupone winking at the spectators), the fourth wall remains intact. These tendencies connect

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[11] Questions of staging aesthetics have been cited as at the heart of a row between Emma Rice and the Board of Trustees during her time as creative executive of The Globe (cf. Cornfold 2017).

with Phyllida Llyod's demands (see chapter 1) to redress canonical music drama texts on all levels: from the composed score to staging, lyrics, or libretto. What becomes clear is that not only Continental *regietheater* but also various genres of contemporary British music theatre (revivals) provide a touchstone for an open aesthetic approach and a tradition of multi-sensory interaction from Shakespearean drama, to music hall and pantomime (Baker 2014; Gordon and Jubin 2016).

Accessibility workshops and outreach work

On the other end of the spectrum of inclusive music theatre approaches are more traditionally defined facilitation projects that don't necessarily aim at a final show. Their main raison d'être is the process of coming together, motivated by music theatre content. One of the organisations that champions accessibility workshops as part of their opera seasons is Opera Holland Park's INSPIRE outreach programme. Founded in 2005, the programme set out to engage diverse communities through music-theatre making and the repertoire of the opera's summer productions.[12]

To feature breadth of approach as much as depth, this practice review concludes with a project by a team of fellow facilitators, led by Emma Nutfield. *Opera4Thought*, a project the institution has co-facilitated over the last few years with Resonate Arts – an organisation that specialises in bringing music to people with dementia –, involves elderly people with on-set dementia in a series of musical afternoon teas. The workshops feature themes from an opera in a blend between live performance and participatory creation. I shadowed *Opera4Thought* in 2019 when they convened their sessions around Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*.

Over two months, the afternoon ensemble of senior citizens practiced a chorus from *Un Ballo in Maschera* together with young artists featuring in the main production. Themes from the opera (such as friendship, fortune-telling, and mask-wearing) were integrated into the workshops through multi-sensory activities. Making fortune cookies was a gustatory

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[12] Since 2019, I have been working as a facilitator for their team (with their head coordinator Abigail Sudbury) and therefore managed to gain insights into a contemporary British practice of facilitating inclusion in opera.

activity inspired by the character of Madam Arvidson, a clairvoyant. The senior citizens were encouraged to produce sentences for the cookies that reflected upon advice for good friendship. Creating and adorning masks added a visual and tactual dimension. The workshop series culminated in a rehearsal with the main cast on stage and an opera visit.

Opera4Thought is a version of music theatre without voice. Showcasing ways to achieve an inclusive, participatory, and collaborative aesthetic that brings in different levels of virtuosity and cognitive ability through music drama. The workshop format is less integrated than an opera production with a community choir such as *Ulysses.* But seamless integration, as described in the introduction, is not one of the guiding criteria of music theatre without voice. In fact, various levels of integration lead to new aesthetic cross-pollinations and tend to make productions more accessible.

Disability musicals and access

Finally, a host of existing productions by disability theatre companies shall round up this practice survey. First and foremost, the already mentioned theatre company Graeae have become a major player in promoting and taking part in an 'aesthetic of access.' Through sign language and other strategies, the access productions remove barriers from consuming and taking part in live theatre. Graeae have established their own training system similar to Mind the Gap and created successful musical productions such as *Reasons to be Cheerful* (2017). Scholar Kirsty Johnson (2012) describes practice performances in Canada in a similar way. Others, such as Joy of Sound, an inclusive company based in London, rethink music-theatre making through crafting accessible instruments. In music theatre circles, sound-voice is often described as 'instrument'. This PhD relates to this metaphor by exploring alternative access to voice praxis and possibilities to build it differently.

With a look outside the London bubble, a touring production to note of recent years is Ramps to the Moon's *The Who's Tommy* (2017) in collaboration with Sheffield Playhouse. Set in post-war Britain, the musical follows the protagonist from a traumatic experience during his childhood – his father returns from war and shoots the boyfriend of his wife in front of Tommy – through his fame as pinball wizard in the 1960s to a psychological resolution of his trauma. This production followed a similar idea of integrating disabled and

non-disabled performers through signed choreographies as Graeae and others do in their repertoire.

Tommy, as a musical text that centres around *disenablement* of the main character through childhood trauma and social corruption (resulting in physical silencing and the need for a stimming device such as the pinball machines), encourages diverse casting choices. By doubling (visibly on stage) an actor with a speech-impediment with another voice, this production created an interesting accessibility aesthetic of live collaboration. In a way, this stylistic choice is in line with the disability-confident message of the musical: self-acceptance and seeing impairment as a strong point that, in Tommy's case, helps him to be successful as a pinball wizard, though stardom becomes a maiming quality eventually.

The style of the production also implicitly addresses questions of double voicing discussed in Chapter 2. On a conceptual level, the 2017 staging of *Tommy* called monolithic ideas of seamless voice into question. It made this awareness a distinguishing, innovative feature. The production, though, did not necessarily open a participatory space for the audience to interact with the music drama on stage. It aimed to integrate a diverse cast into existing conventions of storytelling and realistic representation (as much as one can call the already permeable world of The Who's rock surrealism realistic, but at least in theatrical and staging terms). Accommodating neurodiversity and fluid identity in an interactive happening, such as described in the practice report, was not necessarily their core concern.

Chapter 4

Hot Days, Chili, and Opera: outreach and digital engagement

I. *They Called Her Salt*: A neurodiverse *Orpheus*-experience for women with learning disabilities

1. Preparing for an inclusive opera event

The previous chapters sketched and contextualised the practice journey of the *faciliteur* from devising pantomime to melodrama and directing other genres of musical theatre. The chapters showed how I – in my role as practice-researcher – arrived at the practice of music theatre without voice organically, applying a conceptual awareness of how latent, narrow voice norms can exclude from productions of music drama. The research projects also elucidated the positionality of the director-writer within co-creative procedures. In this chapter, the different techniques gathered over a series of practice research journeys are investigated in a quasi-feature-length work.

The multi-sensory opera experience *They Called Her Salt* (funded by the Arts Council England) followed on from past collaborations with the women from Powerhouse, introduced in Chapter 2 with *The Dragon and The Wizadress*. The opera project was motivated by the research interest to make opera more accessible. Thematically, it recycled the Orpheus-myth; the mythological subject connected with the baroque sound world of an early opera canon, most directly with Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, and brought in a classical voice. Further, like for *The Fool Eater*, the project's research purpose was to engage directly with canonical, music-dramatic material and relocate it in a different aesthetic and cultural environment. For instance, *Salt* recycled motifs and a *ritornello* from Monteverdi's opera freely to inspire inclusive vocal and movement responses.

The event

They Called Her Salt took place at various locations in South East and East London: Goldsmiths' George Wood Theatre in Lewisham; St. Luke's Community Centre near Canning Town; the Applecart Arts Theatre in Plaistow. Between November 2019 and February 2020, the undertaking consisted of a masterclass-style opening workshop with professional opera singer Catherine Carby. The Australian mezzo-soprano regularly performs at the Royal Opera House and other classical institutions around the word. In an initiating workshop, Carby volunteered to present two contrasting baroque arias from Handel's *Guilio Cesare* (1724) for the women from Powerhouse. The chapter chronicles the process from this opening workshop via a series of devising workshops to the final performance in front of an audience on Valentine's Day 2020.

The video chapter

This chapter documents and articulates the processes and aesthetic choices behind the making of *They Called Her Salt* so that the production can be envisioned by a reader who has not attended the event. The chapter is complemented by video content and a digital commentary to give insight into the workshop processes, gestation of the performance content, and practice of the faciliteur behind the scenes. As mentioned in the methodology section in chapter 1, documentation of the relational and interpersonal work of performance has its limitation, being produced from a certain perspective with its choice of framing.

The featured video chapter (https://youtu.be/mDsrSv1gmvg), however, aims to provide an intersubjective, rare glimpse into the actual work of the *faciliteur* as part of a co-creative opera set-up. In doing so, the digital scrapbook might capture the agenda of the *Salt*-opera better than a full recording of the final production. Having said that, the digital content finishes with an abbreviated overview of the final show. As a work between art and academic documentary, the video chapter realises in its own right what the programme infers for the production itself:

> *They Called Her Salt* is a diverse audio-visual collage that brings the classical together with the previously unvoiced. After decades of avant-garde experimentation, opera has the potential to be open and inviting as a multimedia art form that is in a love affair with the breaking of norms as much as with keeping them. How better to celebrate an alternative Valentine's Day? By re-examining what counts as 'music' in the context of opera and by

demonstrating how silence and subtle sounds are also powerful tools of storytelling, we are diversifying a classical art form and make it accessible for a new audience.

'Music' in quotation marks follows a similar argument as an extended conception of 'voice'.

Masterclass setting

Going back to the essentials, with a nod to Grotowski's poor theatre, of a dramatic format such as *the masterclass* as a space of vocal training revealed a scope for adapting it within a different voice-context. In the field of opera singing, a masterclass is a workshop space between performance and training. A professional singer (or otherwise expert in the field of vocals) comes in to listen, and occasionally to present, work from the operatic canon and then gives feedback on technique, performance, and style of the presentation of the pupil. Masterclasses can, of course, happen outside of *conservatoires* and have become a commercial shorthand for accessing expert knowledge about practice – whether in writing, filmmaking, composing, or singing.

The form itself, therefore, does not necessarily prescribe the sound aesthetic to be produced in this context, but it describes a learning dialogue: an expert listener commenting on what they hear from a person in training or otherwise new to a field of work. The result is a conversation about voice with different levels of 'proficiency'. In having this conversation, the vocal concept is opened up naturally, especially when 'discussing' with multi-sensory voice qualities. The result is an alternative, inclusive music-dramatic performance (for redressing judgements hidden in the conventional idea of proficiency see the revamped evaluative matrix in Chapter 2).

The masterclass format and its inversions: Music theatre without voice takes conventional forms and plays with their mute assumption on a multi-sensory level, inviting diverse participation. This photo shows mezzo-soprano Catherine Carby performing for the women from Powerhouse

This idea of a mutual presentation of vocal expression within the aesthetic/pedagogic space of opera training was at the heart of the 'masterclass with lemon' (see more about the citrus fruit below) that happened on the 2nd of November 2019, at Goldsmiths' George Wood Theatre. Professional singer Catherine Carby presented two baroque arias to the women from Powerhouse. The project used this as an opportunity to introduce the group to a sound style and musical language they might not have been exposed to much before (for questions of increasing access to a varied cultural diet for people with learning disabilities see chapter 2).

In a facilitated collective discussion, some members and volunteers revealed that they knew opera music from the radio. They associated the sound with panto-style shows or occasional medley concerts they had visited. Attending an actual live opera event appeared out of reach for many. The inaccessibility of the time frame of an opera production and the behavioural codes around consuming it posed many obstacles (e.g., later in the evening, or of a length that makes attention difficult). Through the masterclass, the women from

Powerhouse had the choice to sign-up for a live experience. The demand was high, and the 16 van places calculated for the transfer to the studio space were quickly taken.

In general, positive associations with opera as collective music-making crystalised during reflections before and after Carby sang: 'Singing and it makes you happy', 'heartfelt', 'big expression', 'opera feels like a holiday', 'what life is about', or 'intense' were some of the answers I collected in my notes. Interestingly, the concept of embodied emotion externalised ('big expression', 'heartfelt', 'touching hearts') emerged as well as a broadened understanding of expression through 'dancing' or 'gathering'. As art form, opera seemed to be associated with tactile, as well as movement-based forms of 'big expression' alongside a narrower understanding of voice as singing.

In the video impressions from the masterclass (at the beginning of the video chapter), the viewer can see the spectrum of how the members of Powerhouse responded to the live performance. Considering the different personalities of the group, some from the autistic spectrum, some with difficulties concentrating for longer periods of time while remaining still or seated, the group remained attentive to Carby's performance. Some members 'just' enjoyed listening, some seemingly drifted off, others seemed physically engaged by mimicking Catherine's openly rising and falling melodic lines with hand gestures, already finding different ways of performing in response to an operatic sound.

Understanding emotions without words

In general, an argument can be made both for reducing the standard aria content for an (inclusive) masterclass from two contrasting pieces to one to secure optimal concentration of the group. I noted in my field notes that 'listening to Catherine's first aria felt quite focused'. An argument for incorporating more listening content, however, can be backed with the intention to provide a sense of variety and choice for the listeners, which worked in practice: 'Despite some minor accidents, we did manage to get through the content planned for the session. [...] The explain piece had the right length and style and brought people in' (see section 'The lemons' for the explain piece).

In an e-mail exchange before the masterclass, Carby suggested the following two arias with (extreme) contrasting emotions for the class: 'How about two Cornelia arias –

misery from the top of the opera and happy at the end when she's worked out how to kill her enemy?!' The opera *Guilio Cesare in Egitto* (1724), from roughly a similar stylistic period as Monteverdi's operas, dramatises Caesar's love affair with Cleopatra. The famous lovers form the primary couple, while Cornelia, widow of Pompeius, is on a quest to avenge her dead husband after he was killed by the Egyptians. Cornelia's first aria from Act 1 'Priva son d'ogni conforto' expresses the sadness, desperation, and loneliness over her dead companion. Her last aria from Act 3 'Non ha pui che temere' matches the desperation of the first act with the relief and happiness of having achieved her aim, now being free of anything more to stir her.

Understanding on a non-verbal level: Engaging with Italian opera arias as part of the inclusive masterclass. Note the spatial arrangement: The *faciliteur* takes a seated position to flatten perceptions of hierarchy and invite an equal space of sharing.

I favoured *Italian* opera arias for the purpose of the masterclass because I believed this could create a level linguistic playing field for all participants. For most members of the group – volunteers, facilitators, and participants alike – Italian was a foreign language. The exercise, therefore, did not rely on an ability to understand words as a norm of perceiving voice content. Thwarting intellectual comprehension in this way had a freeing effect. It

allowed the group to listen out for emotional subtexts and led to a broadened experience, away from conventional ideas of cognitive ableism and the only-verbal. After every aria-performance, I asked the members of Powerhouse in my role as facilitator what they felt the arias were about based on the sentiment of the music and the expressiveness of the voice. The group managed to identify the emotional content with surprising precision.

The following transcriptions of the flipchart paper, on which the responses of the women were documented, evidence the general emotional tendency perceived; yet the representative sample also acknowledges the absence of a 'pure' result. The musical delivery of the first aria was associated with mixed emotions from happy to sad but strongly leaning towards the latter:

'joyful'

'high / low'

'moving house'

'saying goodbye'

'upset'

'about two partners'

'calm'

'peace'

'someone died'

'sad'

'happy'

'silence'

'tears'

'safety'

'crying'

'sth sad happened'

'missing sb.'

Most comments stated a situation of personal loss and existential parting between two people. Despite some of the contradictory emotions (or because of them), the perception of the aria correlated to the inner disorientation felt by a widow after the death

of her partner. The competing interpretations also show that artistic communication relies on the richness of (mis)interpretations of the consumer. The priority of verbal communication, thus, was immediately displaced within a wider communicative context: The musical, lyrical, and performative content of opera arias did not require an elitist knowledge of compositional backgrounds or historical periods but seemed to work on an intuitive level.

> I summarised in my field notes after the masterclass:
>
> Though we received a mix of emotions (that highlight that music theatre pieces are polyvalent sign structures and that emotions can have changing, subjective tendencies, we did find a tendency that pinpointed the content of the Italian aria song very exactly: a sad song about somebody who had died and feels missing. The musical qualities 'calm', 'safety' did lead to story content around missing sb, saying good-bye expressed in images such as 'moving house' and 'tears'.

In a similar vein, the lighter 'feel' of the second aria example was described by the group with accuracy as 'happy', 'excited', 'fast', 'in the middle', 'couple', 'reaching out', 'rhythmic', 'dancing/singing'. The emotional content of the first aria that could wake difficult sensations in the participants was balanced with a more upbeat piece of music before the break. The transition of the arias from 'sad' to 'happy' marked a gentle facilitation method, ending on an up-beat emotion, that cared for the participants' mental wellbeing. In doing so, the workshop deployed musical dramaturgy as a safe-guarding tool.

Response pieces

Following the masterclass format roughly, the task was then for the members of Powerhouse to *sing back* to Catherine what they had understood, in their own expressive idiom. In my role as *faciliteur*, now with a directing aim, I asked them to devise short response pieces in groups to the music they had heard and the themes discussed. The groups were supported by applied theatre volunteers and a dramatherapist to help facilitate non-verbal response pieces and to manage arising emotions. The variety of performances ranged from a short play of a family reunion at an airport, inspired by the theme of parting, to an abstract movement piece, and a humorous coffee-house scene that deployed an appropriation of an operatic vocal quality: distorted, elongated vowel sounds and a performative speech pattern (see video chapter, first part).

In the field notes from the 2nd of November 2019, which I took after the masterclass workshop, I documented and contextualised the response pieces verbally:

> Interestingly, in the three performance groups we saw three different responses to the opera music pieces – that actually responded to the different sensory levels of an opera performance: singing / the human voice[,] [movement, and an acted scene]
>
>> (1) Tea song and coffee song: "Do you want a cup of tea?": channelled the ups and downs of the voice in an opera song (K. physicalised the movements of the melody / the high and low) and then the group produced an avant-garde style piece of speak-singing of the everyday (tea / coke that make you burb) but clearly inspired [by] the melodic lines and voice resonances in opera singing (SONG AND MUSIC)
>>
>> (2) Movement piece that blended the two aria feelings into a choreographed routine that transitioned from the 'sadness' and the swaying movement of crying into individual hopping dance, turns, and a 17th century court-style dance piece that brought joyous moments (DANCE AND MOVEMENT)
>>
>> (3) An acted scene of happiness (with things of sadness) where a character travels and goes on holiday for a family reunion: scene at the passport control / reunion with the mother (S. mother / A. mother just died) (ACTED SCENE) / S. voiced some *performance embarrassment / anxiety*

The final few lines from the field notes highlight the necessity of the sensitive skill set of the *faciliteur*. In general, exercises can always be modified or scrapped altogether if the *faciliteur* feels it might stretch a participant's comfort levels too much. The intention behind the exercises, after all, is to create participatory drama and not to facilitate therapeutic change.

Outside the bubble of millionaires

The role of music as 'support worker' in this context also needs to be emphasised, as gentle underscoring of a performance situation can help to minimise feelings of exposure or speaking to an acoustically empty space. In the background of the scenes, accompanist Cliodna Shanahan underscored the pieces with music from the arias in the style of a silent era cinema-pianist. This technique of melodramatic sound-tracking found an effective return from earlier projects, as a way to bring disparate music theatre elements together and to create a safe, inclusive space (see chapter 2). The non-classical interpretations of

vocal responses through speech, sound, and movement were then played back to Carby. In appropriate masterclass-fashion, the professional singer gave her opinion:

> Catherine commented that the family reunion scene and the content of the opera response were actually quite spot on in many ways / after the performances she explained the song contents (husband just died / revenge and rescue from the oppressor – form of reunion) [from the field notes, 02.11.2021]

The feedback captured the participant's attention and created a feeling of being seen and heard in this space. The masterclass format shares performance qualities with popular talent shows on TV and therefore marked a familiar, pedagogic environment for many participants.

The conversation between the trained opera singer and the group of differently-abled women can be understood as an inclusive, meaningful performance of being in dialogue through a broadened understanding of vocal approaches. At the end of the masterclass, some of the women wanted to express their affection – in non-verbal terms – and (shyly) asked whether they could give Catherine a hug. This kind of crossing of space would be unusual in a strictly classical setting that strives to maintain aesthetic and spatial distance between performer and audience-participator.

One woman commented while waiting for the van that would bring the group back above the river Thames from the studio-theatre in Lewisham to their home base in Newham, East London: 'I've never been here.' She said this in response to the theatre space, and perhaps also in response to the musical style to which she had been exposed. In many ways, the opera project moved the women and through the endeavour to break open vocal norms brought people together in new (aesthetic) environments that can be called music theatre without voice. As already insinuated at the beginning of the practice journey, 'peripheral' spaces are central to inclusive voice work.

But inclusive work of this kind need not be perceived as a one-way street: Music theatre without voice is not an act of charity, where benevolent generosity is passed down onto an eagerly receiving group of clients. On the contrary, the format's aesthetic voice conception facilitated mutual encounter on both ends of the spectrum through a happening such as the masterclass with lemon. Just as the women of Powerhouse had discovered a new and (for them) unusual form of voicing, also Catherine Carby, the world-class opera

singer from Australia, had taken part in an open, aesthetic exchange. By taking part, she also followed an invitation to discover a new performance style, that was neither separate from nor an exact reproduction of existing performance praxis.

After the masterclass, Carby concluded that she felt the workshop had shown a truly democratic approach to opera-making and that it had been an unusual experience for her, too; to get in touch with different physical and intellectual voices, 'getting out of the bubble, where I sing for millionaires every night'. These comments from all sides of the spectrum of vocal abilities show what a music theatre without voice approach can achieve, ideally, as a way of advancing stylistic awareness through broadening vocal practice and de-centring mute assumptions of intellectual ableism. The findings from this practice research fed into an aesthetic paradigm, where various vocal categories could be present at the same time.

Passing on the voice: In an accessible warm-up exercise, vocal engagement becomes fictionalised into the pre-verbal sounds and sensations of passing on a bee. Through movement, the professional mezzo-soprano shares her trained voice with one of the members of Powerhouse who passes it on to dramatherapist Jacqueline Francis (for more on accessible warm-up exercises, see Appendix D).

Manual to an opera singer

On a conceptual and sensory plane, the citrus fruit in the title of the 'masterclass with lemon' added another expressive category to the project. Lemons were connected to a short explanatory piece about what opera is. Further, they added a gustatory and olfactory extension to an understanding of vocal engagement. The tactual nature of the wax-like, yellow skin created a sensory point of involvement as well as a visual stimulus. In the second part of the workshop, it provided a performance cue that realised stylistic elements from the paradigm of music theatre without voice: a way of bringing in an 'imperfect', 'grotesque' sound element and a moment of *performing back*.

First, the lemon connected to a story-like, explanatory text I had written for the group as an introduction to singing in an operatic voice style. The text brought a moment of oral storytelling to the workshop (compare *The Dragon and the Wizadress* or *The Fool Eater*):

The Opera Singer. A Health and Safety Manual

This is Catherine. Catherine is an opera singer.

What does that mean? She often sings very long songs where the melody never comes back, unlike the refrain of "Super Trouper". Where the melody goes, you want to know: Nobody knows. That is why some people think opera music is difficult and the best and others think it's just boring. But most of the people, I'm sure, don't care that much about what other people think and just enjoy the music, whether ABBA or opera or both.

Because Catherine often performs in opera, the musicals of the 19th century, she gets to play rather cool parts, like in Superhero movies. When I met Catherine, she played a goddess all dressed in gold. For many people, opera singers, especially women, are still considered god-like: divine. That is why they are often called divas. But Catherine is not a diva in the proper sense because she is nice and you can talk to her. So she is an approachable diva. You can even ask her questions or, perhaps tell her, that you don't like opera music.

Her Fears
When opera singers can play all these heroes and gods, you might ask, are they afraid at all of anything. Do they feel fear?

Many opera singers are afraid of losing their voice, because their swinging voices touch our hearts, which, in return, touches their heart. That's what we call a win-win-situation. But then again, there are many other things you can touch hearts with – for example cuddly toys. So that's not all too bad.

Lemons
But what is super-bad for an opera singer is when you eat a lemon in front of her eyes while she sings. That is the opera singer's worst nightmare, like the water for the wicked witch in the West.

That's why, just in case you get too afraid of Catherine and her god-like voice, I brought some lemons for you. As protection. But, I'm sure, you might not need to use them. Or perhaps, only to see what happens. That's what experiments are for.

The text makes use of various rhetorical strategies, primed in the journey chapter, to prepare a new and differently-abled audience for an opera experience. The text is replete with concrete tactile vocabulary (cuddly toys, water, touching hearts). Actual lemons were handed out to the participants while the text was semi-performed as a reading. In a similar way to previous interactive storytelling events, the quirky props provided a moment of focus through multi-sensory involvement. For some members of the group, the round fruits could have functioned as quasi-stimming devices, helping them to cope with the unusual group experience in the studio.

The text deploys references to a more familiar, popular culture (e.g., ABBA songs, the Wicked Witch of the West, superheroes) as bridges into a more unfamiliar, operatic territory. The text was intended to do away with classical ideas of distance around the opera singer. It features many characterisations of accessibility: Catherine is introduced by first name; the concept of the unfailing god-like opera diva is rounded with highlighting her vulnerabilities; the fear of loss of voice is addressed. Implicitly, this brought an awareness from the field of disability studies in that disabilities are often of a temporal nature. Sharing insights about vulnerabilities in a safe space may bring the group closer to a professional singer, but the singer also closer to the group. Further research in the sector of psychology could perhaps enlighten this perception.

Actual acoustic and phonetic concepts from voice studies also became part of the introductory text. To make the text more concise, I cut some paragraphs before the masterclass on how vowel-sounds worked anatomically (through tugging the strings in the throat like a guitar cord). Ideas of co-presence and embodied feedback loops, however, remained part of the text: 'their swinging voices touch our hearts, which, in return, touches

their heart', turning the playful explain piece into a multi-layered conceptualisation of vocals in music drama.

Lemons: a sensory counter-vocality

On an explanatory level, the manual treats the opera singer humorously as a different species or 'new toy' that needs to be explored. The vocabulary is explained by going back to the practical basics of what the word 'diva' means for example, or how voice as a communicative tool works. But it also cares to introduce an operatic aesthetic in clear language: for example, that opera compositions tend to more complex musical structures ('melodies that rarely come back'). The text also decentres an inherent hierarchy implied in this idea of complexity by leaving the choice of taste to the listener, always reminding them that they are empowered to say if they don't like something.

The smell and taste of the lemons, in the end, not only added a tactile joke and multi-sensory comfort to the project but also reversed techniques of *disenablement*: The text introduced the lemons as a talisman-like device the participants could turn to in case they became uncomfortable with listening to the strong, classically-trained voice. It reified the choice to say 'I don't like something' by providing a performative counter-tool that had the power to cancel out an ableist voice temporarily; a voice possibly perceived to be 'stronger' than somebody else's voice. Eating lemons, or just holding them up in front of a singer, made it impossible for the 'perfect performance' to continue (for techniques of embodied, sensorial disruption of more normative voice scripts compare Chapter 2).

Eating lemons in front of an opera singer: This gustatory gesture provided the women with learning disabilities from Powerhouse with a sensorial voice in a classical masterclass setting, broadening the notion of voice performance in this context. In the background: some participants enjoy watching the multi-sensory spectacle.

As a final warm-down exercise, the members of Powerhouse had the chance to bite into their lemons, as projected by the manual, while the mezzo-soprano was singing the arias again. This performance move rendered some of the core principles of music theatre without voice tangible: The result was a humorous body drama, resting in a conversation between different kinds of voice – sonorous, tactile, tasty – within the same space. Carby's lips started to curl after a few moments. She had to laugh. The acidity of the citrus fruit functioned as a sensory disruption to a monolithic, i.e., exclusive voice process, and created an alternative sound experience.

Like the quirky props of *The Fool Eater*, or the scratching devices of the dragon story, the lemons removed barriers in engaging with operatic content in the broadest sense. In doing so, they helped to level out conventions of class, virtuosity, and linguistic ability inscribed in operatic standards through a visceral community experience. The exercise centred around reimaging voice expectations together through non-verbal practice, taking

theoretical insights from disability and voice studies as starting point. The reverse-silencing device of the lemons called into question the seemingly flawless ability of the opera singer, and thereby rendered fluid the hierarchy between trained sound quality and amateur.

Some of the group members enjoyed watching the grotesque performance taking place in front of them. I commented on the function of the lemons in my field notes after the workshop in this way:

> The lemon ideas worked very well to keep the focus during the short explain piece – and the group remembered them so that at the end, they would request the lemon exercises. It did engage and wake up even shier participants (B. / J.) – so there was something about the physicality, the smell and the acidic taste and the opportunity to do nonsense / clowning / childhood play in front of an opera singer that brought fun and joy to the group (irreverent / **iconoclastic / doing something that reverses the power structure between classically trained singer and marginalised audience / a carnevalistic tool that materialises and physicalizes reversal of hierarchy, a guided moment of disorder, and power play coming together in a moment of laughter** [highlights in the original]

Dramaturgically and didactically, the lemons helped to structure the workshop experience: Similar to a cliff hanger, they kept interest in the process through the anticipation to try out the lemon-eating in front of the singer at the end of the workshop. Not only was the final lemon choir an immediate and sensorial way of engaging the group, as noted in the field notes, but it also provided a nice check-out round and final coming together, releasing any tensions that the emotional input of the arias might have incurred. Conceptually, the 'silencing device' of the lemons gave the members of Powerhouse a friendly tool to unhinge securities of naturalised voice norms.

The practitioner may find that the artistic intention inscribed in such a notion of participatory direction translates into an artistic guidance that provides a framework which allows for its own destruction; 'a guided moment of disorder' in the traditions of the carnivalesque. The lemons worked as a bizarre catalyst that achieved this directorial vision.

Empowerment through multi-sensory play: cliff hanger and extended vocal device. How to use a lemon in front of a professional singer? One of the members from Powerhouse seems to have some engaging ideas.

2. Strategies for inclusive voice: workshop techniques

London's *Orpheus*-cosmos

At the time of the *Salt*-project, the *Orpheus*-myth found various revivals on London's music theatre stages. The source material seemed a popular subject matter for contemporary re-inventions, following today's trend to rediscover and rewrite mythological *ur-texts* of Western culture from a marginalised perspective. The retelling of myths is also often motivated by funding requirements that are interested in rendering storytelling more inclusive. Informed by an awareness of gender and the constructivist play with identity,

funders value an effort that highlights the on-going relevance of canonical stories for current, new, and diverse audiences.[13]

Emma Rice's version of the operetta *Orpheus in the Underworld* (1878, Jacques Offenbach) for the ENO in 2019 recomplicated the gender representation of the original along these lines. From an able-bodied angle, the production cared for writing female voices into the performance text (see Chapter 3). The musical *Hadestown* (2006), by American singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell, staged at the National Theatre 2018, raised concerns about industrial machoism and eco-exploitation in the modern United States. I only realised the connections of *Salt* to these works later as the development phases of these productions overlapped. *They Called Her Salt* reconfigured the original myth not only regarding identity questions (retold from the perspective of Eurydice, Orpheus' damsel in distress), but also as *performance praxis* to redress the ableist technique of music drama itself, encoded even in the most up to date reimaginations for the professional stage.

The whole project sequence from the devising workshops to the final showcase with its contemporary resonances constituted the opera experience. Hence, the choice of words 'opera experience' to describe the process as a whole as inclusive work of opera. The *Salt*-opera ended with a presentation of our devised work as *multi-sensory opera experience* at the Applecart Arts Theatre on Valentine's Day 2020, just weeks before the Corona-crisis ushered most of society and its cultural institutions into lockdown.

Eurydice and perceptions of femininity

The storytelling aim behind using the Eurydice-myth was to remodel images around femininity, stillness, and (thwarted) agency encoded in a traditional representation of the underworld couple. The story elements were paired with the biblical myth of Lot and his wife. In the programme notes, I elaborated on the inclusive intentions behind the project:

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[13] This interest also correlates to the impetus of the *Equality Act* from 2010 that protects identity characteristics such as disability, race, or sex / gender reassignment, and notes a 'duty to make adjustments [for disabled persons]' based on socio-economic inequalities. The arts sector has absorbed this push into its aesthetic criteria, yielding a current style of inclusion that aims to diversify storytelling by highlighting exclusions in established texts.

The mythological mash-up recycles plot elements from two stories that focus on taking away female agency through 'punishment' with stillness and invisibility: […] In both stories, the female characters were punished through 'disablement' by a male authority. From today's perspective, this power dynamic demands re-examination, so does the understanding of disability.

The connection between an alternative voice or understanding of able bodies, thus, goes hand in hand with exploring an alternative story voice to represent differently, away from the canonical bias. Again, by bringing a broadened understanding of communication in, the identity scripts could take different aesthetic routes and thereby open up new content. The director's notes highlight the potential of 'effective visual communication and the gentle demand for remaining visible' and how 'non-verbal, non-violent resistance and defiance [can count] as ultimate agency in the face of established behavioural scripts.'

The themes chosen felt relevant to the group based on experiences some women had talked about in sessions leading up to the project. For instance, some members illustrated through anecdotes how they felt (mis-)treated and overlooked in everyday situations, for example when trying to buy something in a shopping centre. Arguably, their often-unconventional performance of femininity as disabled women in public spaces contributed to a sense of marginalisation, which shows the particular vulnerability of the women from Powerhouse.

The behavioural directness of some members of Powerhouse, resulting from their developmental differences can be misunderstood when unconsciously judged against demure idealisations of womanhood. Their inability to facilitate 'pleasant' communication (cf. melodrama references in Chapter 2) may add further to moments of discomfort in a passer-by unfamiliar with learning disability. A different body image, resulting from physical impairments or eating disorders, as well as a different speech pattern thus may increase the women's feeling of not being seen, or heard, or understood in public.

The concept behind *They Called Her Salt*, thus, was to *envoice* traditionally silent or silenced characters (e.g., Eurydice, Lot's Wife) with a multi-sensory voice-body, not only disclosing the gender bias in canonical subject matter but also, or especially, the classical voice bias in the way how female characters and disabled women are often treated (or not treated) in the operatic canon. Besides the gender dimension, being turned into a pillar of salt provided a sensitive and immediate tactile metaphor of paralysis, impairment, or

motoric disability without being patronising or a form of disability exploitation. (The team had discussed the language to use during the project with dramatherapist Jacqueline Francis.)

In an anti-climactic showdown, consequently, the main character Salt asserts herself against 'the boss from the underworld' (Hades) in a non-violent and non-verbal staring contest. Supportive companion and world-class flute player Pepe Gamberoni (the Orpheus-character) withdraws from this final contest; like the knight in the retold dragon myth from the melodrama project (see Chapter 2) remnants of masculinity concept are also reworked in the new version of the underworld myth.

A multi-sensory narrative voice

To provide a spectrum of images to address questions of gender, agency, and disability, *Salt* crossed the *Orfeo*-myth with the biblical character of Lot's wife. When Lot's wife disobeys the orders of a divine power, she is turned into a pillar of salt. She initiates this transformation by looking back at the burning city of Sodom where she should have averted her eyes,. Interestingly, Lot's wife does not receive a name in the original story but is named as the possessive of her husband. Hence, in the *Salt*-story version, the main character reclaims 'Salt' as her nominal identity and expression of personhood.

Previous chapters have explored how terms such as *queer*, *crip,* or *grotesque* are being rediscovered as statements of personal confidence rather than punishment. The story opening of *They Called Her Salt* reflects this shifting attitude towards name-calling:

Part 1: A garden that sounds like the sea

Narrator 1: They called her Salt, because she rarely moved.

Narrator 2: Sometimes when they walked past her house, they saw the curtains twitch. They turned around and she was gone.

Narrator 1 (to the audience, explanatory): They called her Salt, because she vanished with a ripple behind the ocean on her window screen.

Narrator 2: Sometimes, she sat in her garden behind her house and saw the waves in the trees.

Narrator 1: She heard the birds sing above and felt the wind dance in her hair.

Narrator 2 (continuous as uninterrupted): Like ribbons through midsummer wreaths, the air brushed over her skin, and a smile appeared on her lips.

Narrator 1: They called her Salt, because she rarely moved, and yet, her lops formed the brightest smile in the world.

The opening sets the tone for a synaesthetic perception of the world. Boundaries between objects, sounds, and personhood become fluid: the wind dances in Salt's hair; she sees the waves in the trees; the garden sounds like the sea. These first lines of the story aim to bring in alternative forms of communicating. Salt is 'in touch with her environment' through the brushing over skin, or the kinetic-visual movement of lips into a smile. This corresponds to the already established motif of listening to different volumes in music theatre without voice.

The dynamised, synaesthetic space keeps perception flowing and changeable, producing an oralised, unfinished landscape painting that can be co-created by the performance text. The aesthetic of this opening is further in conversation with a modernist aesthetic, which, as elaborated in the theory review, shares stylistic similarities with the aesthetics of learning disabilities. The tactile, sensory narrative voice (due to a lack of abstract or conceptual nouns) renders the text concrete. A concentrated listening was noticeable during the rehearsals and the performance which bespeaks of a level of engagement of the group.

The idea of decentring the focal point of vision through a narrative voice rich in sensory details is at the verge of becoming a literary, musical trope when re-presenting disability. Famously, William Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) explores the storytelling voice of one of the main characters with profound learning disabilities, in a fractured, fluid manner. The narrative style even disperses ideas of time and space in the synaesthetic flow of anachronistic events.

With *They Called Her Salt*, I wanted to keep the fairy-tale like simplicity of oral storytelling to engage the participants and spectators. Finally, the dynamic nature of perception is paired with a nuanced attention to Salt's actual physicality. Her body is not frozen, salt-like, or 'still', as the collective village-voice 'they' proclaims through calling her salt. Caveats highlight a different form of being in the world: 'They called her Salt […] yet'.

The actual performance text, in which the women from Powerhouse moved, sang, and visualised the action highlighted this different kind of agency and representational voice and a performing back against stereotypical depictions.

Visible conversations

With a highly visual anecdote, the character of Pepe illustrates questions of 'correct' performance. Pepe metaphorically relates to a struggle with conventional notions of unperturbed sound. The flautist-virtuoso has retired from the classical world due to a dispute over how an 'appropriate' instrument needed to look like. Consequently, Pepe *decides* to remain silent in this context. He upholds pride in an alternative aesthetic:

> Narrator 1 (to Narrator 2): Rumour has it that Pepe lost his job as a world-class flute player, because he demanded his flute be painted red at all times.
>
> Narrator 2 (confirming, in fake Italian): "Red, like a chilly from Sicily", Pepe said.
>
> Narrator 2: The manager of a famous concert hall in New York said: (in fake American) "Mr Gamberoni, we are a serious hall here, we cannot have our instruments painted in the strangest colour."
>
> Narrator 2: Pepe's response was brief (in fake Italian accent): "Red is not a strange colour. Red is red, so I go."
>
> Narrator 1: These were the last words the professional classical world hat heard from Pepe, the flautist from Sicily whose music was a hot as a chilly.

Through colourful language, this excerpt not only visualises themes of normative aesthetic and exclusion, but it also stages conversation *as act* in various layers. The double-narrating voice follows on from previous projects, inscribing a dialogue between narrators into the performance spectacle: In the case of the opera project for women with learning disabilities, the story was *(en)voiced* by two female narrators from British-Nigerian (Chimo Uma) and Turkish backgrounds (Zeynep Kaparoglu) (see programme in the digital portfolio for performer biographies.)

Double-narration and piano: Two narrators tell the story of Salt and her invaded garden, while music and movement content express the story in multiple form. The act of narrating becomes part of the staging and is fully visible as a complex performance act, breaking open monolithic and simply aural conceptions of voice.

The lines quoted above reflect on the act of talking itself: *Inquit*-formulas and phrases tracking the flow of the inner-fictional dialogue become part of the narrative flow ('he said', 'Pepe's response', 'the last words […] heard'). The almost musical rhythm of the dialogue becomes part of the spectacle of the semi-staged reading. During directing, I encouraged the performers to understand the written text as musical text, caring for pacing, volume, and handovers with stage directions using musical terms such as *accelerando*, *crescendo*, etc.

The camp play with dialects ('fake American', 'fake Italian'), leaning toward endless semiosis, further questions naturalised vocality constructs and ethnic identity (cf. Meizel 2013) in the fashion of ethno-grotesque sketches illustrated in Chapter 2. In the end, a diverse cast of female narrators read in the *fake* regionalised vocality of two male characters and commented on this act of speaking simultaneously. The play with dialects

also engaged the group while listening to this paragraph and contributed to the diverse spectacle of voicing.

'My face is hot like chili': devising a multi-vocal song piece

To turn the dialogue between the Italian musician and the American impresario into a piece of music theatre, the group devised a 'chili song' that dramatised the conversation between the two characters. 'My face is hot like chili' became the most popular of the song pieces with the women from Powerhouse. (An excerpt can be heard in the second part of the <u>video chapter</u>). The song production made use of a *call-and-response* structure to mirror the stichomythic exchange between the characters:

> **Pepe = group 1   Boss = group 2**
>
> Pepe: My face is hot like chilly.
>
> Boss: No, no, no. Food is hot.
>
> Pepe: My face is hot like chilly.
>
> Boss: Go to work
>
> Pepe But it's my instrument.
>
> Boss: Go to work
>
> Together: Let music be the food of love.
>
> Do you want a cup of tea? (Ad Lib.)

The formal exchange between group 1 and group 2 at the beginning transitions into a freer part that associates the warming feeling of the hot musical instrument with different kinds of food. The video excerpt shows moments in which the performers create an ad lib. – sequence live on stage, presenting food items through voice, movement, and mirroring. In disability theatre and improvisational work, this concept is often termed 'semi-improvised' work or 'rehearsed improvisation' (Bieber 2013: 27). In effect, this semi-improvisation as part of the song rests on a co-creative tension between a formal frame that enables spontaneous ideas. The semi-directed set-up allows participants who are unable to attend rehearsals regularly or want to join in spontaneously as well as the audience to take part in the music drama.

In the song, various vocal qualities are featured simultaneously: a more extreme operatic, vocal sound intersects with speech-like structures, and distorted sung lines. In doing so, the song enmeshes various voice categories into an inclusive collage. The first line of group 1 ('My face is hot like chilly') consists of short, repeated downward steps in seconds within the range of a fourth. The response by group 2 is grounded in a monotone figure of three notes that does not contain any flexibility, shaping the determined nays of the boss. The demand of the boss of Pepe to go to work, where the call-response-pattern switches, is likewise grounded in a stagnant melodic figure, only to be countered with Pepe's fiery upward fourth complaint 'but it's my instrument'. The dispute resolves in a pleasant melodic unison that builds on the previous fourth with a gentle swirl of three notes up the scale and one note down towards the resolution: 'Let music be the food of love.'

The speech-oriented musical lines of the song came out of a devising process: The participants were asked for their associations with hot food or chilies. These associations then gradually transitioned into a heated, fictional exchange. The devising process itself was initiated by visuals of chillies – which immediately sparked joyous laughter – when the group started to brainstorm about where one could find and feel spiciness. In this conversation, jokingly some members claimed (like Pepe's boss) that instruments couldn't be hot, only food was. This is how the sung dialogue came about.

The *ad libitum*-part 'Do you want a cup of tea?' resulted from the masterclass with opera singer Carby. As can be seen in the response pieces, one group had devised a scene in a café where a character asks in an operatic idiom (lengthened, distorted vowel sounds, rounded resonances) for a hot beverage.[14] The sound profile of the question featured a speakerly repetition of the same note for the first part of the sentence, only to move up in a free glissando towards the end of the question. As a leitmotif, this sung line stayed throughout the project and became part of the final performance.

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[14] The non-naturalistic sound performance was taken from the masterclass where the women of Powerhouse appropriated intuitively Carby's operatic vocals with whale-like distortions of vowels, perhaps influenced by popular culture and ideas of whale-speaking from *Finding Nemo*.

Facial gestures enable visible silences: A strong gestural expression became part of a song piece created for Pepe, one of the main characters, who plays a flute as hot as a chili. Note the interesting position of the hands of the performers. The hands 'frame' the mouths that are about to open and sing. In doing so, the move fashions an apt metaphor of music theatre without voice, an aesthetic paradigm that aims to flank conventional sound production with multi-sensorial mobility.

The speak-singing of the song delivery – gleefully-shouted by some members – created a piece of heterogenous voice styles. Though the range deployed for the dialogue scraps was appropriate for the (un-)trained vocal apparatus of the participants (staying just below an octave), the shift in sound qualities from almost-spoken word to shouting to modulated vowel-shaping showcased a variety of non-popular vocal styles that can be found in (modernist) opera pieces. At times, the sound aesthetic segued into recitative-style narration. For non-verbal participants, adding grimaces to visualise the sensory heat of the chillies (e.g., through touching the faces in spicy shock) encouraged barrier-free participation. In this extended gesture of vocal expression, the face became the instrument, as the song lyrics claimed.

3. Palpable metaphors of stillness: other character workshops

They Called Her Salt consisted of five additional devising workshops, arranged around the characters, locations, and themes from the story. With Pepe's audio-visual characterisation the previous section gave an example of how the *faciliteur* can structure a devising process that is in dialogue with operatic norms. It also showed how through free association voice can be extended as a concept away from ableist norms of vocality and appear as a poly-voiced procedure.

In the following, some of the other sensorial techniques are briefly explained to offer practitioners a rounded picture of the options the *faciliteur* has to include alternative modes of expression within a music theatre event. The descriptions function as pieces of arts research, answering the core academic inquiry into how notions of voice can be expanded through multi-sensory practice in music drama. The purpose of every workshop was to explore a different character from a sensory perspective with the tool set of an inclusive voice paradigm. Like the role cards used in the melodrama project, the personified devising authors a framework (or general direction) within which the participants could co-create the look, sound, or taste of the multi-sensory music drama.

Action tables: a gustatory choir

The chili song described in the previous section was so popular with some members, that one of the women dressed up with chili socks for the night, extending the vocal piece into three-dimensional space. The colour red had become one of our visual leitmotifs for the Valentine's performance. Every performer found something red to wear. To spark this on a gustatory level, pieces of chili chocolate and chilies to nibble on were provided during the show. Imagining and tasting spicy food sparked an immediate, concrete co-sensation for performers and spectators, mimicking the idea of vocal feedback loops. Audience members could access the props on action tables (cf. *The Fool Eater*). Like a gustatory choir, the - audience continued the sensual experience through their taste-participation.

Action tables: The spectators could participate in the story event via gustatory sensations while the tale was told on stage. Chili chocolate and cherries expressed characters through smell and taste. Sculptures of the main character, made of salt dough by the women from Powerhouse, invited tactile engagement.

The technique of bringing in a 'box' of props to engage audiences and participants with different intellectual abilities has become a staple of neurodiverse drama projects. The already mentioned drama company Oily Cart (see Chapter 3), for instance, uses a multi-sensory combine of textures, sounds, and sights to interact with groups non-verbally. Most recently, in a response to Covid, Oily Cart have created *The Cart* (2022), which is basically the touring version of an action table. Isolated from the need of performers to physically travel around from school to school, *The Cart* comes with various props, specially made instruments, and an online resource pack (https://oilycart.org.uk/resources/this-is-the-way-we-roll/). The aim is to enable school children to come up with a 'multi-sensory mayhem' [...] [b]ursting with colours, textures and sounds' (cf. company website). The faciliteur-direction in this, one could argue, comes with the various creative options inscribed in the assemblage. The choice provided opens up an unlimited opportunity of combinations and explorations as free play (note the word mayhem as an aesthetic description of a

multiplicity of simultenous inputs), yet it also comes with a sense of direction and overall creative vision. It arguably contains an element of the company's 'personal style' not just through the technique used, which is arguably a sharded one (see next paragraph) but through the set of content choices that almost seem to function as an interactive retrospective, resolving creative agency within the depersonalised provision of props.

The material in Oily Cart's 'musical blog', the online material for *The Cart*, features a collage of varied projects from its 40-year history and highlights an aesthetic through-line in their sensory theatre work, harking back to their early beginnings:

> our latest touring project, celebrating 40 years of Oily Cart and of sensory theatre. The company started with the founders travelling around in an old van packed full of colourful props, puppets and instruments. They pitched up anywhere and everywhere, bringing stories to life with children from all different communities.

This is hoped to spark a creative legacy that can continue without the (initial input) of *The Cart* realising an idea of empowerment that, at some point, doesn't require the initiating force anymore:

> Staff will be provided with resources and guidance to support [the students] in co-producing the experience for and with [them], so that even when The Cart rolls on, the sensory tools and techniques live on in the school.

Though not necessarily directly inspired by Oily Cart's use of props as part of a participatory performance, it is fascinating to have ended up through my research process with similar engagement techniques, which shows that here is a certain intersubjectivity emerging organically from the craft of practicing inclusive music theatre together with participants. From the directing point of view, I found it helpful to integrate a set of props within the performance space, hence the cabaret-inspired action table setting for *The Fool Eater* and the *Salt*-opera. Whether in the form of a rolling vehicle or as a customised piece of furniture, the props provided to an audience during a show are a practical way of inspiring audience creativity within the given parameters of the overall aesthetic of the faciliteur.

The spatial layout further eradicated a clear-cut separation of story space and audience space, enabling the directed free play and shared creative leadership. Team members had positioned small groups of chairs (in a cabaret-style arrangement) within the

space, structuring the room in a wave-like pattern. On the action tables and chairs, the audience could also find song sheets with images to join the singing during the performance (see more in the video chapter). Disability drama group ActUp! Newham took part in the event. Their facilitator commented afterwards:

> We were very curious to see how opera could be an inclusive experience and were amazed that it actually was. […] We have seen Powerhouse perform before and have never seen the members so engaged as in this performance.

The group's facilitator particularly pointed out how some of the non-verbal members enjoyed the participatory choreographies and tasting the chocolate.

Salt: tactility leitmotifs

To give sensorial shape to the main character Salt, I brought in images of female sculptures across history. An image of Nefertiti was presented alongside a bronze sculpture of Oprah Winfrey to show a variety of female sculpture-making. The act of creating named sculptures of women came close to a political act, as a recent audit by Art UK found that in London less than 5 % of public sculptures depicted women.[15] The main purpose of the exercise was to use salt as a leitmotif in giving multi-sensory shape to our unconventional heroine. In doing so, the task involved the participants in creating the look of the main character, providing her with a visual as well as tactile expressive voice.

The group started by collecting adjectives about how salt feels. Sodium chloride emerged as a non-binary concept between useful (e.g., in the sense of 'healing like rain', 'warm') and 'dangerous.' The words collected in this associative exercise became part of our opening song piece 'The salt is like the snow' (see digital chapter). These non-verbal or part-verbal sessions of facilitated group devising achieve in a learning disability context what the early workshop practice of drama company *Graeae* achieves on a verbal level: It enables a diverse ensemble to exchange ideas on how they want to tell a story and express their creativity in a participatory context. In 1982, Richard Tomlinson, one of the founding

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[15] For the report see this news item from the 21st of October 2021: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-59010156.

members of *Graeae*, notes on differently-abled 'voice production' in his seminal volume

Disability, Theatre and Education:

> Conventionally a voice teacher is working towards clear articulation, a wide vocal range, projection, and a good timbre. If the actor in question has a severe speech disorder, then that approach is probably inappropriate. The aim is still to communicate, but the methods may be different. (73)

Disentangling *the aim to communicate* from the *methods [that] may be different* and partly featuring this process of change in a performance is what *They Called Her Salt* in the end led to. Bringing in visual and later on tactile forms of expression, at the same time as verbal ones, takes into account that inclusive devising processes with people with intellectual differences need to change medium (or method) to offset conventional forms of theatrical expression. The aim is still to communicate, yet, music theatre without voice is not interested in hiding when communication seemingly fails within the conventions of lingocentric theatrical expectations. On the contrary, revealing how a multiplicity of multi-sensory vocal expression produces textures where one-dimensional communicative efforts are decentred becomes a strong aesthetic statement. Where Tomlinson discusses methods how voice can still be featured (e.g., through a tape recording in the 1976 production of *Sideshow*), a broadened understanding of what constitutes voice in music drama denaturalises expectations of how it *needs* to occur in it at all.

Giving the main character a tactual expression: 'Voice' in the music theatre context of *They Called Her Salt* gained a haptic dimension. Words and associations with salt were formed into a series of salt dough sculptures by the women from Powerhouse. For the show, the sculptures were positioned within the audience space as an extension of the story.

In an arts and crafts session, the women were invited to mould their own sculptures of a woman out of salt dough. This then marks another manifestation of the principle of broadened or multi-sensory voice in inclusive music drama. To communicate a character can be achieved through the method of tactility. A democratic medium, salt dough is a safe and low budget clay that doesn't need an oven to dry but can be left out for a couple of days. Salt, therefore, didn't just appear as verbal and musical leitmotif but also in tactile form as a key ingredient of the paste. A *leitmotif* is a composing strategy in classical contexts, inserting a short (musical) phrase in a more openly structured piece to infuse subtle coherence. The motif is often associated with a character or a recurring theme. It communicates aesthetic coherence. In a similar way, the salt workshop utilised the crystallised seasoning in its various states (as word, as sensation, as taste) to provide a through line through the piece that could feed flexibly into the production of multi-sensory chains. Being absorbed by illustrator Selma Hafizovic, for example, the sculptural salt dough shapes became part of one of the promotional posters for the event.

The key to all of this within the paradigm described in this PhD is that the character is communicated *also* 'without voice' (in the narrow sense) by pluralising the methods of communication deployed. The musical or verbal notion of the leitmotif was, like voice, extended into the tactile, gustatory, olfactory, and visual realm, aiming to invite the greatest number of people into the performance text through providing multi-modal outlets at the *same* time. Hence, norms of communication co-existence with different praxis, building the dialectic that progresses a whole discourse. Similarly, the aim of communicating salt as leitmotif marked a directed effort. Within the character outline, free play was invited on various levels. With Preston's critical approach to one's own methodology in mind, I have to say that not all engagement practice results in full engagement of everybody or communicates in an intersubjective manner to the audience.

However, using tactile elements such as salt and sculpture-making worked well to include a broad number of participants. For short moments of practical utopia, it felt that almost everybody of the group was involved working towards the shared creative aim of making their sculpture, and thereby contributing to the sensory look of the final operatic performance piece itself. When the *faciliteur* understands that successful diverse engagement doesn't have to work in absolutes, then the approach to the work itself can become more flexible and relaxed. And moments like collective sculpture-making stand out as a successful *current utopia* that is successful for the very reason that it doesn't need to be perfect or translate, e.g., into full-time engagement by everybody during a two-hour-workshop. A diverse activity is successful because it accepts when somebody wants to disconnect or opt-out within the space of the exercise. This is their contribution. The sculptures also doesn't need to communicate an intellectual concept to the audience, as they communicate a sensory one.

In an exercise following on from the sculpture-making, dramatherapist Jacqueline Francis asked the group to choose three body shapes from the menagerie of sculptures. These body shapes, coming out of the salt dough experience, fed into a choreography-like movement piece. The body positions chosen ranged from an open corporeality with arms apart ('open hug') and leaning backwards ('stretched back / arms up') to a more closed, hugging posture ('twisted body / hands across'). The contrasting movement motifs were first rehearsed and then strung together into a choreographic sequence. Movement

provides another method of radical inclusion, as Tomlinson observes for *Graeae*'s work. Though spoken from the sociocultural perspective of the 1970s/80s when the company was founded and inclusive politics only progressing with baby steps, the underlying aesthetic principles still resonate with the affirmative movement practice of *Salt* that grew out of taking sculptural shapes into individualised actions:

> [W]heelchair dancing is very often based on square or country dancing, and as such it can be effective. But as always with this aping of able-bodied behaviour, it looks clumsy and incompetent unless performed by physically competent paraplegics with good arms and balance. This is needlessly limiting. No matter how handicapped [terminology in the original] people can express themselves in movement. But their abilities have to be channelled and made relevant to music.

This almost marks the reversal of the *Pinocchio*-example given in the introduction, where action needs to cohere to music. Tomlinson favours a participant-led approach, where, in absolute accordance with the affirmative model of disability, the expressions offered by a group are made relevant to music. And I would go so far as to say, in the inclusive music drama often the music is made relevant to them, too. The sculptural way into the movement exercise, further, provides a non-verbal starting point for exploring different body shapes. In a broadened understanding of expressive voice, the 'aping of able-bodied behaviour' is thus resolved in a different representational language and the acceptance of simultaneous difference. Music theatre without voice is about evidencing an aesthetic through empowering participants to ape their own vocality in a space with others.

Chain of leitmotifs: Visual artist Selma Hafizovic translated the shapes of the salt dough sculptures into a painterly image for the poster. In doing so, she continued the co-creative chain of salt-related, multi-sensory responses to the opera content in her illustrations. Note how the perspective of the menagerie created by the women from Powerhouse is picked up in Selma's composition (cf. image above).

Some of the shapes ended up in the final performance choreography (see the <u>video chapter</u>) and were used in the beginning to reach out to the audience: The group entered the stage space through the seated audience members. About the directing approach, I noted in my field notes from the 6th of November:

> In today's session, we explored the main motifs Salt […] and Stillness (as active choice) of the opera project and aimed at exploring the operatic aesthetic (experimental, extreme voice qualities / classical compositional strategies and ideas of multi-sensory composition (through salt dough sculptures into song ideas and movement patterns […] to devise content from the perspective of the participants and produce a piece of integrated music theatre with an experimental sound quality […]. On a directing level, we were translating elements from a 'professional' directing approach into an inclusive community theatre approach by introducing the concept[s] in a multi-sensory way […].

In the evaluation session at the end of the project, the women were still referring to the modelling exercise and pointed it out as one of their favourite modes of engagement. At

the end of the first devising workshop on the 6th of November 2019, one Powerhouse member commented: 'I like the dance and the salt.'

Percussive soundscapes: making ocean shakers

In one of the devising workshops, the task was to compose a soundscape for Salt's environment: a garden near the sea, where wind rustles the leaves. Extending the idea of the readymade sound devices from previous projects, I came up with an arts and crafts exercise which allowed the group to create their own percussive instruments to acoustically paint the scene: ocean shakers. The making of the shakers was easily accessible, as it used premade DVD boxes as cases to fashion flat maraca-style percussions.[16] The participants could fill their shakers according to their own gusto with coarse sea salt (another way to continue the multi-sensory leitmotif) and wooden beads. The making, therefore, included many layers of tactility. (The use of the homemade instruments can be heard in the <u>video chapter</u>.)

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[16] Using old DVD boxes could add a recycling dimension to the task. In the case of this workshop, plain DVD boxes were ordered. Something that could be changed in the future projects.

Creating a multi-sensory soundscape: Percussive instruments made from DVD cases, sea salt, and beads were designed by the women from Powerhouse for the stage performance as an acoustic representation of the locale. The sleeves could be removed and painted individually. The flatness of the instrument allowed a production of gentle wave-like sounds and movements, and created visual and tactual interest.

However, the sound device also should carry a tactile dimension as a true representation of a music theatre without voice style. Therefore, ribbons were added at the tip of the boxes to create tactual contrast. The coarse, *staccato*-like nature of the shaking sounds was counterpointed by the soft, almost inaudible sounds of brushing through the ribbons, like the wind wafting through mid-summer wreaths in the story text. The ribbons added a visual dimension to 'playing the instrument' as multi-textured expressive experience.

In a semi-choreographed exercise, the group created a wave of rising and falling movements to set the scene in a non-verbal style. The high and low positions of the shakers were accompanied with crescendos and decrescendos in volume, translating musical ideas into visual and tactile equivalents. In doing so, the exercise redeployed operatic techniques (e.g., an orchestra emulating the sound of an environment) within a multi-sensory, non-verbal exercise. (For graphic representations of voice in *They Called Her Salt*, see the digital scrapbook.)

From the underworld into the digital: a construction-site choreography-song as representative devising process

Finally, with a documentary montage, the video chapter concludes this written section. The second half of the video chronicles the workshop processes of a session in which the Hades-character was devised as a sound-and-movement piece. The processes can be seen as representative of the other workshops presented here, though, of course, with a different sensory input as focus.

The sonic shape of 'the general from the underworld' was inspired by responding physically and pre-verbally to construction-site sounds. As a listening impulse, the task introduced recordings of bulldozer and buildings site noises (that are briefly featured in the

video chapter, too). The sounds not only corresponded to the character's industrial background as a general arriving on a caterpillar-tank, but also brought in sound content that didn't rely on conventional language or vocal material. In a broadened understanding of voice, 'noise' becomes an acceptable currency.

The video shows the gradual development of how 'noise' of a truck digging becomes aesthetizised into movement (as a physicalised form of expression) to preverbal non-standard opera sounds such as blowing raspberries, mimicking machinery digging up through the ground. These sounds connected to actions the general could do when he arrived ('sleeping', 'eating, 'dreaming'), which lead to the creation of the interactive song piece: 'Here comes the general'.

The video chapter assembles moments from the initial sound-directed workshops in sharing ideas to arranging the individual moves into a choreography with lyrics. This choreography was then set to a *ritornello* from the original Monteverdi score. The sound impulse of construction machinery percolated into the movement style (e.g., the up-and-down of pistons, or 'the claw') and finally into verbal images as well, organising the composition. In preparation for the session, I had composed an interactive verse that, like the A-B structure of Pepe's song, provided a prompt that allowed for *ad-hoc*-composition. In doing so, the song frame recast the techniques of the *faciliteur* into the realm of song-composition. (Short clips from the performance at the end of the video chapter show how the general's song was incorporated in the opera experience and invited the audience in.)

Opera in the end

Though the *faciliteur* made most of the dramaturgical choices of the story and wrote the script to fictionalise direction away from conventional social scripts (e.g., the representations of femininity), the multi-sensory characterisations, song work, and the choreographies were entirely down to collective devising processes. Smells, tastes, tactile content, and other sensory impulses were used to assert voice (in the sense of aesthetic presence, embodied expression, and creative agency) in different media at points in the music drama to heighten or change the a state of expression.

Combing the arrival of the general with an elaborate movement piece, for instance, noticeably altered the atmosphere in the room like a conventional aria would. The women from Powerhouse got on their feet, using umbrellas and an orange safety helmet to build the human machine of a wheel-turning caterpillar. This contrasted strongly with the previously seated performance. In the video, the viewer can see me intervene when a member of the cast feels briefly unwell. This highlights once again the precarious position of the research-practitioner between being drawn into the processes he is observing.

During the performance, I had intended to remain 'invisible', positioning myself in the back of the space, encouraging the women from Powerhouse and the volunteers to take centre stage in a new opera about diverse femininity narratives. The live intervention, which becomes part of the 'final performance', can be accommodated, however, in the flexibility of music theatre without voice as a visible and performative act of support in the sketched traditions of *ad-hoc*-direction and the intended transparency towards 'imperfection' of a stage work. Finally, a collective show moment involved the spectators and brought the whole theatre space to their feet, amounting to a form of support of the show on an aesthetic plane.

Taking creative leadership on stage: One of the women from Powerhouse became the leader of the Hades-choreography on stage. The safety helmet was part of the costume. She said she was nervous before the performance but proud after. Usually soft-spoken and not comfortable with speaking in front of many people, a non-verbal understanding of voice provided her with the opportunity to take visible leadership through movement.

Reimagining voice in inclusive performance as research, thus, reneges the ableism inherent in the genre of classical opera. But it also shows that inclusive opera is possible in the most democratic sense, bringing forth innovative creative choices and techniques while (or because of) utilising the most democratic ingredients. This chapter tracked a concrete practice process of how this undertaking can happen; there may be many alternative ways. As mentioned in previous chapters, opera houses, directors, and composers have already addressed excluding conventions. However, on main stages inclusive productions – especially vocally – are still rarely seen. When music theatre without voice fails to be like something else, then the *faciliteur* has realised its core artistic mission; and then is perhaps when the art form is especially fascinating to watch, and hear, and feel, and smell.

II. *Tony's Hot Day*: musical storytelling in lockdown. Insights from a digital practice research project via ZOOM (Corona 2020) with an inclusive drama group

Coronavirus has helped to prove the durability of the practice of music theatre without voice which has been documented and developed in the last chapters. In April 2020, roughly two months after *They Called Her Salt* had finished, I set out to evolve the praxis in times of social distancing and ZOOM-conversations by doing further research on the performative and participatory storytelling model of diverse music drama. Field notes taken at the end of April 2020, around the time of the project, protocol the context which initiated the research endeavour: 'Covid-19 and lockdown radically altered core elements of inclusive theatre-making and facilitation with regards to bodily interaction, touch, and physical involvement of the participants.' The research aim, thus, for *Tony's Hot Day: a live story broadcast about the creativity of self-isolation with illustrations and music*, delivered on the 29th of April

2020, at 2pm, was to find out through online performance how inclusive music theatre work translated into the digital environment of ZOOM.

ZOOM gazing

Though a comparatively young discipline, digital inclusive drama has some academic reference points before the pandemic: In her monograph *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making* (2017), Bree Hadley describes an aesthetic shift between dramatic paradigms arguing with Marshal McLuhan that the medium influences the meaning of content produced. Hadley importantly points out how aspects of accessibility intersect with worries about exclusion from the digital and a commercialised incentive behind many social media platforms, shaping the 'meaning' of the output. This motivation needs to be especially carefully probed when working with vulnerable participant groups or in mental health contexts. *Tony's Hot Day* was not commercially funded. In fact, besides a small college bursary, the project relied on voluntary participation.

Nevertheless, the shift from live analogue theatre to theatre organised through the medium of video-conferencing came with an awareness of applying the inclusive technique in a different artistic medium which engendered different ways of generating creative advocacy. Designer-research Autumn Caines (2021) has theorised 'the Zoom gaze' in analogy to Laura Mulvey's *male gaze*, warning against the many normalisations of hidden power dynamics while using the platform, e.g., through a lack of real choices in the setting of its modes of representation. The critical writer analyses the ZOOM gaze, asking whose perspective is normalised through the lens provided by the company who runs the platform; or who, in return, is objectified or disempowered by its standard settings.

Caines highlights two issues that also become relevant for an inclusive digital music drama project and the role of the *faciliteur*: Firstly, the host in ZOOM settings is hierarchically-placed above participants qua the 'the powers' the host has to, for instance, admit certain participants. This becomes especially relevant in the context of voice as the host also has the power to 'mute' others. Holding the digital space in this sense carries moments of dissimilarity from hosting an accessible, participatory studio space in real life where participants can intervene with their voices or bodies at any moment in time. The

faciliteur receives silencing powers to an extent in the digital realm, she doesn't have in analogue facilitation. Having said that, Caines points out how the end-consumer of a zoom call has the power to alter some settings, customising the way how they receive the digital input. Further, they can take themselves out of a dramatic conversation by muting their microphones and screens; comparably, one could say, to participating or choosing to opt out in a real space.

Secondly, although there are some variables in the way how a person presents themselves in a ZOOM frame, the stylistic choices around framing within the technological window is limited, set to medium wide-angle close-ups of the upper body and eyes (partly depending on the camera somebody owns.) In a digital performance space that is constructed by deploying a filmmaker's awareness, the pre-set camera settings need to be acknowledged. In a way, the *faciliteur* has more and less control over the dramatic output.

However, the cinematic dimensions of the ZOOM space add 'fascinating creative possibilities for alternative ways of presenting music theatre as a story with music and illustrations', as I noted in the field notes from the 24th of April. They add an element of pacing, inherited from filmic editing, for example, and sound design, 'bridging between different media allows to mediate time lags.' These delays in transmission, involuntarily, realises aspects of music theatre without voice through a potential asynchronous multiplicity of vocal input, working beyond conventions of 'coherence' (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Finally, the constant confrontation with an image of oneself may also create pressures of 'adjusting' oneself, through fixing strands of hair or make-up, gauged by 'how others see me' (cf. Caines); which can have detrimental effects on mental health and self-image, but also for an aesthetic paradigm that values 'the imperfect' as rich creative expression. However, from the position of this early digital practice research project, it is important to point out that some of these unquestionable concerns may be used for beneficial effects in an inclusive context. Being confronted with one's own visibility in a creative group setting can heighten the feeling of being seen. The ability to access a project from the safe space of one's home can reduce barriers in participation. The filmic dimension of the gaze can become a creative tool, and in the case of a staged project, used for deliberate compositional choices, which will be explored in the following.

So, there is a double-edged dimension to transferring diverse participatory work to the new medium. Caines summaries: 'Being on camera turns the space you inhabit into a personal stage and everything that appears in it (including who you share space with) into props.' In the case of an accessible drama project this 'readymade' feeling of being on stage can be an enabling situation as it sets the coordinates for a creative space. The *faciliteur* carries the responsibility for safe-guarding and highlighting the ZOOM space the group is working in as a dramatic space. As in analogue projects, recording can only happen with the consent of the participants, as was the case for *Tony's Hot Day*. An awareness for other pitfalls of the medium further is key to uphold a diverse space and prevent inadvertent racism, e.g., '[with] virtual backgrounds erasing Black skin altogether' (Caines 2020). In our project, though, we did not come across such a technological malfunction.

Digital project with ActUp! Newham

In many other ways, the digital setting was comparable to the workshop settings that formed the basis of the inclusive music theatre projects presented in previous sections. ZOOM enabled the participants to come together in small to medium-size groups. Questions of barrier-free work environments and accessibility were displaced into the digital environment. Where step-free access, refreshments and facility support had been a main concern in work that happened in analogue space, digital accessibility empowered different participant groups. But it excluded others such as the women from Powerhouse who mostly do not own laptops or smart phones with which to connect to the digital world.

Act Up! Newham, also based near Canning Town, in the East of London, in contrast, were able to creatively harness the digital space. Together with their facilitator Hannah Facey, the group had attended the performance of *They Called Her Salt* and was interested in a collaboration. The inclusive drama group states on their website that they remain committed to 'finding ways to [produce] exciting new work [even in these times of coronavirus]'. The neurodiverse ensemble usually meets for weekly dramatic sessions with the aim 'to demonstrate to other groups [...] good inclusive theatre [practice].'[17] They have created various projects of their own and participated in international and intermedial

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[17] More information can be found on the group's website actupnewham.co.uk.

dramatic exchange. Before lockdown, the collective was working on a 'new film' in Spanish and English titled *I am Toni…Who am I?*, resulting from a collaboration with a partner group from Chile.

From the beginning of the lockdown phase, ActUp! Newham kept their weekly routines by meeting on Zoom. For the digital performance as research, I joined some of their sessions to devise an object-choreography together with the ensemble. The piece was to be integrated into a live transmission of a story reading. The group was also invited to co-create the visual look of the digital story, contributing illustrations (see the digital programme in the online documentation for images). The story with music and illustrations was coincidentally also named after its protagonist Tony. ActUp! Newham attended the performance together with the digital spectators. Many members from the creative team of *Salt* took part in the digital endeavour such as Chioma Uma as one of the narrators, Selma Hafizovic as illustrator, and Cliodna Shanahan as pianist-composer.

Zoom technology has moved on in the meantime and the function of enabling 'original sound' to not cancel out different volume levels of a music performance has become a well-known practice in music-making circles. In April 2020, some of these technologies were still in their beginning. Therefore, the performance was prepared in part before it became integrated during the live event, as will be explained below. Overall, the project managed to keep audiences and performers engaged. Viewers commented on the work as a 'nice piece of escapism [in times of isolation]' and how they had 'thoroughly enjoyed [it]', being inspired to explore the creative potential of their homes more.

Tony's summers

There nevertheless remained a connection to Powerhouse with *Tony's Hot Day*: During a summer workshop the year before, I had continued the performative storytelling research with the group from the dragon production as a one-off intermezzo. I had written a story script about Tony, a man who had just moved into one of the newly-built flats near Canning Town – where the charity's community centre is located – struggling with the loneliness and the heat of his place. The story picks up many of the themes I had explored in some of the other projects (such as in *The Fool Eater*). It investigated questions such as finding a voice

for loneliness and counterbalancing feelings of isolation through the creative community of making music drama together with unusual voices. It also continued the technique of splitting up narrative voices in an *ad hoc*-reading.

In the story, Tony discovers a little cockroach and a fly, who managed to enter into his flat. Eventually, they form his company, and, through singing together, disperse his loneliness. One of the few items already moved into his flat is a turquoise fridge in an American style. The fridge is at the heart of solving the heat problem, as his new friends suggest that he could, in grotesque fashion, place his head in the fridge to cool down. The story finishes with the contrast of different body and emotional temperatures. The community singing warms Tony's heart and encourages his neighbours to join in, while the fridge helps him to keep a cool head in the summer heat. (The full story can be listened to here: https://youtu.be/36axdbFlFgM.)

Voices in lockdown: adapting story content

During the early phase of lockdown 2020, singing from balconies or in front yards was one of the preferred ways of the media to illustrate community spirit and how being creative helped the isolated self to stay safe and sane in times of social distancing. So, the story of Tony could be easily adapted to this situation as a transferal to the digital environment. The season of the original story changed from summer to spring: April, 'the cruellest month' and time of the broadcast. Coincidently, already in the original version, the location of Tony's flat was very close to the ExCel Centre in the Royal Victoria Docks. This area received unprecedented attention in March and April 2020 due to the fast-erected Nightingale emergency hospital for Covid-patients. (Thankfully, in hindsight, the centre remained less busy than the story imagined.)
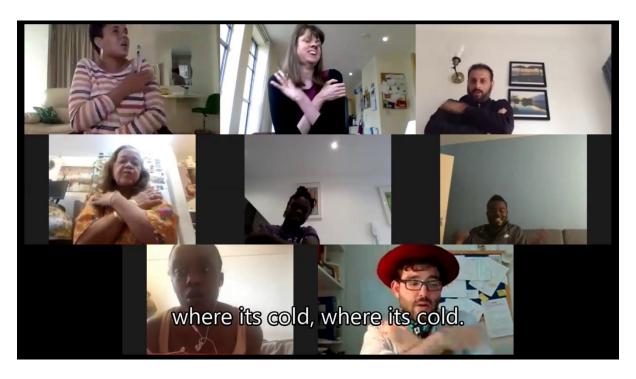
For the summer performance of the story with Powerhouse, I had explored an interactive choreography, similar to the one featured in the *Salt*-performance. Using the question what the members could find in their imaginary fridges as a prompt, the workshop produced victuals-based song lyrics. The resulting object-list song (compare the 'Rap of the M-Dudes' from Chapter 2) deployed movements to illustrate the fridge items, broadening the understanding of participating in the creative voice. This facilitation approach translated

smoothly into the lockdown project, continuing the idea of using 'democratic ingredients' (e.g., concrete language, multi-sensory stimuli, readymade objects) to create inclusive music drama.

A pre-composed element, like in the song of the general from *Salt*, provided gentle direction through its basic, recurring structure. I had written a short rhythmic refrain before the workshop as a vessel for the object ideas, again combining a clapping riff to involve participants on a non-verbal level with the lyrical elements:

> I'm putting in the fridge [object] [object] [object]
> I put my head in the fridge when it's hot, when it's hot
> I put my head in the fridge where it's cold, where it's cold

The refrain invited a juxtaposing surrealism that derived from the group discussion around ordinary items (from cucumbers to pre-packaged, homemade pies) with the sudden twist of placing a human body part – the head – next to them. The food-based language paired with quirky humour created a bizarre body drama in content and form. The unusual twist kept the participants interest and encouraged them to brainstorm freely.

ZOOM invites choreographies in seated position: To illustrate the lyrics for a fridge-song, accessible movements were added to the performance. In this shot, the performers are expressing the temperature in Tony's fridge non-verbally through a body posture that communicates being in a freezing environment. The seated arrangement in front of computers worked in favour of the paradigm of music theatre without voice.

Further, the workshop session with Powerhouse included moments of melodramatic soundscaping, inviting the participants to non-verbally voice the fly through buzzing and the cockroach through tapping their feet. For the digital performance, these participatory cues became part of the PowerPoint slides (see following sections) that were used to illustrate the storytelling, encouraging the audience at home and the performers from ActUp! Newham to join in, even while being on 'silent mode' during the story reading.

Perhaps one of the most surprising research insights from translating an analogue inclusive piece into a digital medium was that many of the creative parameters could remain the same. In fact, performative storytelling as music theatre without voice appeared highly adaptable to the most disparate settings, once more proving the observation about the accessible nature of this low-key, semi-improvised style of literary oratory (see Chapter 2). Organising a performance around an acoustic dimension of story with its multi-sensory permutations opens productive ways into creating affordable and resourceful pieces of inclusive, music-dramatic performance.

Multi-sensory materiality through object work

The spatial arrangements, tried and tested for inclusive music drama in previous research, could remain almost the same in the ZOOM context apart from being physically together in a venue. The group members, already sitting visibly on the 'stage' of ZOOM in their little 'tiles', resembled the semi-circular layout or the tendency towards seated situations of the live performances. In fact, the transferal to the online medium almost normalised this presentational mode, as the ZOOM frame limits expansive movement in space, though not within the frame provided. The image below shows how the participants could individually experiment with their positions within the tile as a form of representational choice.

The audience, likewise, was able to join in by leaving their cameras on, or just watch by turning their cameras off, empowering their own choice in how to take part in the event. I noted in my field notes after the event: 'Making the technical aspect transparent can create a form of involvement.' Explaining and practicing the various setting options (e.g., how to use the chat function) before the performance started contributed elements to a

participatory warm-up. In the first months of ZOOM popularity, these were important instructions to share as not many people were familiar with the technology.

'Find an object at home'-tasks proved a potent way to spatialise dramatic work in front of a screen, encouraging participants to move in space with a playful motivation. In preparation for the two sessions with ActUp! Newham, in which the group developed their version of the tactile, multi-sensory fridge song, I had asked the group to bring their favourite item from the fridge to the workshop, from vegetable to butter. The members brought in a creative selection, from lemons (on the popularity of citrus fruit in inclusive work compare the *Salt*-section) to cheese. Thus, in bringing in their own sensory impulses, the members of ActUp! Newham contributed to co-creating the on-screen look of Tony's music drama.

The object task marked a similar strategy as described in previous chapters to engage the participants actively in shaping the look, sound, or feel of a production with their own object-choices (cf. the pantomime project, salt-sculptures). The choice of objects therefore added to the visual input of the choreography on screen for the live audience. But it also added a tactual layer of engagement to their participation and kept a haptic, material feel in a potentially disembodying digital world. (The object-choreography can be seen in full here: https://youtu.be/qLGFLiP9kQU.)

Exploring the creative choices of the ZOOM frame: In this still from the fridge items-choreography, the group is experimenting with positioning their objects at varying distances within the frame, co-creating a mobile collage for the participatory song piece. The randomness of objects chosen echoes conceptualisations of an inclusive aesthetic where disparate categories are presented simultaneously

The multi-sensory materialities of experiencing a dramatic space together, thus, were at least partly replaced in the digital with the object work. From a directing perspective that focused on a music theatre aesthetic particularly, the inclusive choreography also realised a key principle of music theatre without voice: The ensemble piece was deployed at the climax of the short story performance, right at the end, when Tony, his friends, and even the neighbours are titillated to come together through song. After the event, the reflection notes highlight the effects this change in expressive tool had:

> Leading up to the group performance as finale also heightens the collective performance energy / and provides a form of release which fits a performance dramaturgy that aims to tell a story somewhat linearly in different forms of performance language (embodiments).

It is interesting that the word 'embodiments' felt right at the time to describe the digital involvement, as indeed, it felt like the voices, movements, and images constructed a digital corporeality that was palpable even beyond the screen. Audience members described this afterwards as a 'seamless viewing experience' via the shared platform and through the musical handovers. Following the aesthetic premises of music theatre, the song at the end of the oralised and musicalised story augmented the performance energy and generated a moment of participatory, community aesthetic like the general's song and other stunts had managed in earlier projects. In line with devising music theatre without voice between direction and facilitation, the choreography fulfilled a participatory function as much as stylistic one.

Therefore, the aesthetic considerations behind structuring the dramaturgy of this digital work of music theatre without voice were rooted in the directing traditions illustrated in Chapter 1. The research evidenced that the warmth of voices, the community spirit, and other non-verbal sensibilities were picked up by the digital medium in a comparable way as in real space. Of course, this is based on the feelings of individuals as feedback loops were partly interrupted or displaced into chat responses as the audience had mainly switched off

their cameras during the performance. Audience-research into how ZOOM performances are absorbed and felt in spectator's bodies could be an interesting follow-up for the future.

Techniques for easing into the digital space

One of the *faciliteur*-techniques that needed to be adapted to the digital from the participatory storytelling approach described above was that of welcoming a group into the space. In the analogue projects, the *faciliteur* built in a moment of creative encounter at the entrance of a project, whether through colouring in mindfulness mascots at the beginning of *The Fool Eater*; the gentle check-in rounds with the performers before the dragon story (https://youtu.be/Fm27G0fmP8s); or the contributions of the audience to the stage design of *They Called Her Salt* (see the digital scrapbook). On ZOOM these direct physical interactions with the performance space were not possible. But the practice of warming up an audiences' imagination through aspects of synaesthesia nevertheless found a way into the opening of *Tony's Hot Day*.

The technique of a dream journey functioned as a multi-sensory ice breaker for the project. Together with narrator Chioma Uma, who took over one of the voices in the story performance, I invited the participants to close their eyes (if they felt comfortable) and to transport themselves into Tony's apartment. The idea of layering performance reality with fictional reality through vocal impulses, thus, found continuation also in this project. In the field notes, this technique was summed up as:

> mindfulness inclusion [as] a way to make the story participation interactive despite (or inspired by) the technological possibilities / including an audience through silent interaction (silent clap, imagination, and home response).

In the introductory 'mindfulness inclusion', the audience was invited to become aware of what they felt, smelled, or heard in their own room and then to imagine how these sensations related to Tony's flat. The aesthetic purpose of this exercises is documented in the notes this way:

> Easing the seams between the different performance languages (arriving in the imaginative space of 'Tony's flat', allowing time to settle in, preparing moments of silence before the

music sets in → similar questions as in stage music theatre of how to seamlessly blend different performance languages through choices of pacing, overlap.

The research reflections articulate that contemplative, more introspective forms of participation such as active listening ('silent interaction') mark a useful way to translate multi-sensory engagement into the digital realm.

Bridging the perceived reality of a home space with an imagined environment, the dream journey redeployed relaxations methods (e.g., familiar from Alexander technique) and fictionalised them into short pieces of open-ended direction. But it also cared for some form of aesthetic coherence (as loose frame) from the position of the director 'to seamlessly blend different performance languages.' Camouflaging directing as creative, participatory process, the strategy of the dream journey felt reminiscent of principles of *faciliteuring* work explored earlier.

Translating an interactive story aesthetic into a digital direction: These slides were shown (and read out) at the beginning of the live broadcast to invite the audience into Tony's world, tickling the imagination of different sense and bridging between performance and fictional reality. The 'Join in'-slide combines a melodramatic sound cue with a visual marker, indicating moments during the

performance, where the spectators could non-verbally voice characters at home. The project evidenced how participatory directing techniques of the *faciliteur* could be transposed into a ZOOM environment.

Directing digitally mediated voices

The directing processes around online storytelling continued a broadened attitude towards directing voice as wholistic process on a conceptual level. The field notes conceptualise directing language with musical similes: 'reading the lines like a musical score (pacing, rhythm, pauses) to hand over to the music, taking emotional attitudes from the music / lingering in emotions and images the music narrates.' During the rehearsals with Uma and Shanahan, narrating metaphors were thus extended to include the improvised piano score 'as third storyteller', helping to communicate the directorial vision for the digital broadcast. Where in previous projects words had become more like music and non-verbal sensations, in this project, music became more like words to communicate between the different artforms and find a common denominator.

Like the handovers practiced between the lines of narrator 1 and narrator 2, the music took over the narrative process at times: '[T]he story cues start[ed] a journey the musical element finish[ed].' In doing so, it created spaces for the warmed-up imagination of the audience members to dwell on a dramatic situation. Hafisovic's illustrations formed another voice-dimension, telling the story on a visual plane, like the music 'exploring the creative worlds the story opens […] beyond words.' The research notes summarised afterwards that the visual element (the slides in general) fulfilled an even more important dramaturgical role online in helping to communicate the story inclusively and effectively: '[T]he visual component brings elements together' and functions as a bridge between the media, keeping attention focused. Hence, I concluded: 'The illustrations make the storytelling tangible.'

In this coming together of verbal narration, music, and images, the filmic sensibility of working on ZOOM described earlier became evident from the perspective of the intermedial director. Even more than in the analogue space, directing on a video-conferencing platform required a sense of pacing that helped to edit the different parts together. For a live broadcast, this editing happened on-screen through 'pacing practice':

allowing images, music, and text to stand as statement when introduced / chapter headlines like images presented a clearly demarcated vocal melody that frames the headline like an image.

This short note describes how different media work together to contour a fictional point. But the rhetoric also captures a form of collaborative overlap as integrative directing principle. This derives from the way how the intermedial directing process itself is framed with a conceptual language, constantly translating between different metaphoric discourses: 'a clearly demarcated vocal melody that frames the headline like an image'. The result of this narratological combine aesthetic can be experienced in the recording of the dress rehearsal.

On otherwise practical terms, pacing refers to, for example, the speed with which the slides are presented and at what point they are brought in during a musical break. The idea of allowing an expression to 'stand as a statement' is comparable to concepts from stage directing that require an action on stage to have conviction and presence. The pacing, of course, also needed to consider varying broadband speeds. Ironically, the technology counterpointed all endeavours to create 'seamlessness'. Ultimately working in favour of a music theatre without voice aesthetic: The possible incongruities resulting from time lags or a different choice of viewing the event (e.g., in gallery view) inserted moments of 'diverse coherence'.
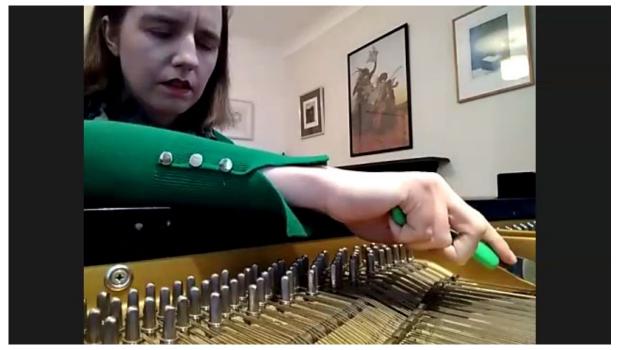
The technological by-products realising a diverse vocal track made up for some of the losses of intervention described above in the transposal from the analogue to the digital: The practical dimension of interaction *during* a storytelling event didn't translate well into the digital setting. Editing three 'soundtracks' together already took some care, as – especially at the beginning of the Zoom-era – 'competing' channels sometimes cancelled each other out. Choirs, therefore, often recorded, and still record the different parts separately and only bring them together in post-production. For a live story broadcast, however, pre-recording was not an option. So, I decided to direct the story performance and the choreography separately and feature them one after the other.

Domestic leitmotifs and home equipment

The practice of broadening the idea of the leitmotif and the metaphor of voice into a multi-sensory, collaborative composition proved also viable online. Following the concept of 'the creativity of lockdown' announced in the subtitle of the event, the various expressive dimensions of the production deployed domestic utensils, such as kitchen equipment, readymade sounds, and home office supply. In doing so, an accessible, 'democratic' aesthetic language was declined through the miscellaneous creative sign systems. Partly, these findings were discovery-driven, inspired by the production circumstances of a home space. The story and its fictional premise further expanded ideas of voice in times of loneliness to include the non-verbal (e.g., onomatopoetic animal sounds) and the inanimate (such as the fridge) as grotesque conversations partners. This encouraged the collaborators to experiment.

As I already described, Act Up Newham were invited to bring fridge-related objects to spark the creative song-and-dance process. The individual objects were presented to the camera in performative fashion and translated into semi-sung sounds, rooted in the individual words. For example, the sonorous front syllabus of the word *cucumber* added a humorous sound dimension to the word. The gustatory dimension of using food items that may emit a smell in space added another sensory aspect, comparable to previous work. Therefore, these kitchen objects translated, in leitmotif fashion, into audio-visual moments and gave voice to the project.

But kitchen-related readymades also fed into other elements of the sound and look of the digital story. Pianist Cliodna Shanahan, who was familiar with the unusual devising processes, committed to the approach by suggesting to bring in spoons, spatulas, or a coffee-maker as percussive instruments. This made the domestic sphere of Tony's flat audible and created a quirky score between modernist improvisation and sonic collage. The use of kitchen utensils and the piano once more echoed earlier music-dramatic traditions such as the melodrama or silent era cinema-accompaniment (see Chapter 2).

A readymade sonic score: During the practice research phase of the rehearsals, pianist Cliodana Shanahan continues the idea of readymade leitmotifs. She explored Tony's sound world with scratching a spatula over the strings of her grand piano. Note how within an inclusive music-dramatic space, certain ideas are naturally recurring such as the scratching device from the dragon story. (More images of the 'kitchen utensil orchestra' can be found in the digital programme.)

Most importantly, these aesthetic choices made the performance and musical score accessible: From the practice side, using objects many people have at home fashioned a transmogrified sound of domestic realism. It democratised participation as much as possible, not requiring a large budget or complicated equipment to co-create at home. In doing so, *Tony's Hot Day* recycled a core concern of the research inquiry, diversifying voice through inviting differently-abled communities into the process of voicing a story through multi-sensory, non-verbal points of entry and in a spontaneous manner. Qualitatively, the efficacy of the techniques used was suggested by an audience comment in the chat section that implied in a humorous repartee after the show: 'Will head to my fridge now – thank you'.

Finally, in her visual look for Tony and his newly-found companions, Selma Hafizovic, who also illustrated *The Fool Eater* and *They Called Her Salt*, picked up the idea of incorporating home equipment. Hafizovic (perhaps intuitively) used mundane utensils such as neon highlighters for the colour scheme of her illustrations. The homemade functionalism

of the visual was also echoed by the participants from ActUp! Newham. The home creators were invited to contribute their own fridge illustrations through drawings of items or taking pictures with their fridges at home (see the digital programme).

Closing the multi-sensory chain: Also illustrator Selma Hafizovic felt inspired to experiment with mundane objects such as highlighters, intuitively linking in with the accessible 'do-it-at-home'-aesthetic of the object choreography, the story content, and the musical underscoring. The image shows Tony with his head in the fridge. The fly and the cockroach are accompanying his grotesque performance

The marvellous, almost magical collaborative realism of the piece of music theatre without voice that sprung from Tony's creativity in lockdown shows once more that an aesthetic of the initially small gesture and of seemingly mundane volume can lead to an innovative and interactive performance piece. The inclusive practice of music theatre without voice enables to (re-)discover the expressive potential in the most marginal of spaces, turning them into centre stage. *Tony's Hot Day* translated the praxis of music theatre without voice into the digital realm, evidencing its adaptability to different settings. The research journey of the *faciliteur*, with the aim to contour an inclusive paradigm for

music theatre, started in Canning Town's East London Streets. It ended, in times of lockdown, in urban kitchens around the world.

Conclusion

Social learning through inclusive practice

I. Music theatre for a new world order

Questions of artistic democracy

This PhD extended concepts of conventional voice usage in music drama into a multi-sensory praxis. Through chronicling, documenting, and reflecting upon the journey of a music theatre-maker between facilitator and director, the thesis developed and consolidated an aesthetic paradigm for rendering musicals, opera, or pantomime inclusive. In order to grasp the hybrid role of the practitioner in inclusive contexts, this thesis introduced the term *faciliteur* to advance traditional associations around the role of a facilitator or *auteur*-director. In doing so, it contoured the position of an artistic leader within an inclusive artwork and its democratised work culture. Thereby, diverse participation uncovered ableist assumptions hidden in established forms of music drama through inviting new audiences into the art work.

Through a research method that sees dramatic explorations within a studio space and performance *as* research, the previous chapters illustrated and recontextualised the role of the director. The findings were evidenced through visual forms of documentations (photographs, video clips, diagrams) and interpretative text, articulating the taciturn knowledge involved in the interpersonal practice of facilitating diverse participation for marginalised communities. The case studies focused on learning disability and speech impediment, or non-verbal communication.

Along the practice journey, a concrete set of techniques of multi-sensory vocality was developed, widening notions of communication into the sensorial spectrum. Some key tools to make music drama accessible on the basis of a broadened understanding of voice are the use of 'readymade' sound objects (such as whistles, sticks for scratching); the introduction of a tactile dimension of voice (through clay work or body choreographies); the

translation of vocal qualities into gustatory or olfactory sensations (e.g., through food-related exercises, the introduction of citrus fruit or salt as ingredient). These strategies effectively facilitated barrier-free artistic participation at all proficiency levels.

The strategies contour a creative practice that aims to break new ground within traditions of music theatre as performance paradigm *and* work culture, on stage, off stage and in the digital realm. The multi-sensory, polyvocal performance praxis, initially springing from the work with people with learning disabilities, was also successfully redeployed in other participatory contexts that cared for creating a sense of community through aesthetic; in mental wellbeing contexts, for instance, or when working within marginalised communities such as the LGBT+ cohort. This highlighted how democratic gestures of outreach are inscribed in the artistic DNA of music theatre without voice.

Questions of style

The research showed how voice as an expanded concept still realises key stylistic characteristics of how the aesthetic and dramaturgical effects of voice are conventionally theorised in music drama. Voice as participatory practice becomes a 'device' to change aesthetic register, heighten involvement in the story, and/or communicate strong emotion in a different expressive medium just like with a more conventionally-understood singing practice. Voice thus can function as intermedial, liminal agent and umbrella to subsume music-dramatic practice that has not had a demarcated critical space previously. If the centrality of voice is considered one of the core criteria of the forms of storytelling through music described here, then voice as multi-sensory tool *is* voice in music drama.

Throughout, voice was addressed on various levels as a multi-faceted concept and political metaphor. As a narrowly-defined linguistic entity it was revealed as potentially excluding intellectual difference, still often being a shorthand for political representation of a subject-state within contemporary society. Acknowledging the work that has been done already in the sector, this thesis wanted to expose this mute assumption within a disability discourse through diverse, concrete practice. In doing so, the research evidenced alternative ways of participating within a collective space. The findings can be transferred to other contexts of social learning. The multi-sensory techniques developed in the case studies, for

example, could become useful skills in non-normative contexts of education, special needs schools, or otherwise sensitive learning environments.

On a stylistic plane, a monolithic aesthetic of vocal authority, consequently, was diversified through the introduction of multiple narrators. Further, *performing back* non-verbally at conventionally-understood voices created a multi-layered performance text that realised core criteria in the stage construct of a diverse 'look': the simultaneous existence of miscellaneous identity categories and dramatic languages. Voice thus emerged not as the singular vocal expression of a gifted individual, set to a pre-composed text, but as a collective process of shared creative agency. With its strong conceptual element, the work presented reflected upon acts of speaking as much as it favoured 'imperfect communication' as part of the performative spectacle.

Questions for the future: music theatre without voice and the commercial?

In the studio, aiming at a music theatre production in the loosest sense while allowing as much participation as possible has revealed challenges the creative journey of the *faciliteur* addressed through practice. Some questions remain an on-going negotiation however: How can one generate a more conventionally 'consumable' dramatic work when radically declaring the simultaneity of heterogenous expression a key artistic feature? The answer might be found along a spectrum, of course. Some of the project presented, such as *The Fool Eater* or *Tony's Hot Day*, integrated participation towards the end of the performance or as subtle melodramatic underscoring. In doing so, the stories themselves could be perceived more directly.

Another question might be: Is it possible to give artistic authorship to everybody in a space, at every particular moment of a production? Do the noble aims stated in the evaluative matrix of this PhD (in Chapter 2) translate into a feasible practice that not only wrestles with inherited ideas of how creative work in music drama *has* to be, but also or especially with the very limited funding available for community work? Factors outside of the creative work cannot be blotted out; for instance, the reality of inadequate spaces (acoustically, or rooms that are too busy); irregular attendance; or not enough (consistent) support staff. These aspects also need to be taken into account when pondering the viability

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of the model. As suggested in the introduction about the job description of a drama worker between authorial direction and participation, an updated form of creative leadership might help to find *useful* answers in this context. The *faciliteur* does not give up creative direction altogether, but the direction given doesn't pre-design every moment of a work and work process. It aims at creating a frame of openness that accommodates change intentionally.

Though care needs to be taken when extrapolating from the artistic field into the social domain, many of the aesthetic challenges of music theatre without voice (as an affirmative model of participation based on collaboration and co-creative leadership) become representative of socio-political questions of our time. The creative learning emanating outward from the inclusive studio could inform the contemporary debate: It seems that many of the problems in defining the paradigm are caused by how we think about artistic quality and creation in a neo-liberal, highly commercialised culture that markets exceptional individuals (and their narrowly defined, normative voice capability) as artistic, cultural, or political leaders.

Let me briefly hark back to Martell's updated theory of productive utopianism, introduced in the first chapter. Not only have the inclusive music theatre projects presented here explored 'alterative social relations' (Martell 2018: 439) on a *micro* level through *actual* practice, but at the connex of a diverse aesthetic they have also evidenced that a renewed understanding of working together can include change and divergence as part of the design. Even more so, a genuinely inclusive creation also includes elements of the mainstream or allows for absences in the work: people that do not want to be heard, or cannot attend, for instance. Inclusive utopias are about imperfection and a far cry from absolute notions of achieving a finished work. They go right, when they go wrong. It is through the simultaneity of differences, the core of an inclusive aesthetic, that music theatre without voice functions as a Utopian prefiguration: 'It is possible to have criticism, pluralism and change in utopia. Utopia is a process even when it is achieved'. (2018: 448)

A list of further questions follows on from the creative practice experiments, hence: How do Western societies, whether Britain or more globally, that are founded on narrowly-defined principles of participation ensure a space where every voice – linguistically-able or not – can be heard at equal measure without ending in unproductive chaos? Can the notion of 'chaos' itself become a productive structure? Music theatre without voice has partly tried

to evidence this. Similar to Martell's *current utopias*, the inclusive music drama championed here 'allows space for pluralism and change but with a design for an alternative to the present rather than no conception of an alternative' (2018: 448). In this sense, Peter Brooks' quoted 'incomplete design' results in an aim of productive change.

In the current funding climate, it is extremely difficult to secure lasting resources to explore alternative modes of collaboration over a longer period of time. In a socio-economic and political model, where leadership is still often defined as a one-*man*-job to achieve a marketable outcome, how much space (and time!) is there for an inclusive process that cares more, perhaps, for the processual, personal nature of participation and community? Do our societies want to have the resources to invest in this? As an aesthetic playground, music theatre without voice can investigate many of these questions through creative practice and research.

Future work may want to evolve this approach further and perhaps come up with ways to incorporate the described aesthetic into channels of our neoliberal, social media culture. My own work on participatory storytelling via ZOOM could function as a pilot that can be expanded. At the time of writing this, however, I have been unable to secure any substantial follow-up funding despite (re-)submitting applications for years that meet the criteria of funders and are praised for their innovation and importance.

Co-existence

Finally, the challenges of music theatre without voice are challenges that happen on a spectrum between two systems of defining agency: On the one hand, there is a model that rests on singular artistic leadership ('the director', 'the composer', 'the playwright'), reproduceable form (e.g., the rehearsed opera), and marketable, i.e., predictable, outcome ('the seamless voice'); on the other hand, we find an approach that shifts the paradigm to recognising co-creation (multi-vocal leadership), semi-improvisation, and an aesthetic of imperfect diversity. Within a sociocultural environment that understands requirements of monolithic leadership as choice rather than as norm, music theatre without voice may encounter fewer challenges, as it wrestles with fewer expectations. But music theatre

without voice has also illustrated through artistic practice that these models of leadership can co-exist productively within the same space.

Therefore, a crucial impetus behind this PhD project was to creatively reshape theatrical work models and vocal concepts to make space for an alternative music dramatic language. Undertaking the effort to explore ways of talking about this kind of work and finding ways to document it accessibly and meaningfully, as a consequence, can become a political statement, qualifying the worth of a newly-evolving work culture. Finding alternative words to describe a leader that can also be a collaborator; confidently defining a vocal aesthetic that escapes its own definition with every new project; giving attention to the process as *working art* rather than the production as definitive artwork grounds the aesthetic debate in a profound attempt at conceptual, systematic, and practical change; defines a new system.

In cultural systems that struggle to recognise the inability to voice as positive creative statement, music theatre without voice will remain an unobtainable Utopia; most profoundly, because these societies do not provide enough financial value to back practice research to advance work continuously and safely. Within spaces of difference, however, and systems that are more adept to reflect upon their own inflexibility and often contradictory nature, music theatre without voice has already become a reality – and the drama of a new world order.

Appendix A: Salaries, funding, pay ethics

The reality of pay

It is notoriously difficult to pin down payment structures in the freelance and theatre sector, beyond the recommendations of unions and minimum wage. On paper, the fees need to look in line with the standards, but in reality, the extra work and untracked hours that go into organisation and creation remain invisible. The question of fair and equal pay becomes of particular importance when talking about teams of differently-abled performers. One needs to be able to afford music theatre without voice and/or have a voice to raise concerns with existing payment structures.

This is not the place to go into detail about the disheartening politics of funding in community and non-mainstream arts. But these processes are also part of the work of the *faciliteur*. Concerns of inclusive aesthetic seem inevitably linked to financial appreciation and crop up in literature on disability theatre. Ruth Bieber (2013: 66), for instance, addresses 'the project grant conundrum': a blend of finding organisations that fund the aims of an inclusive project or company and finding the time to tailor applications to an ever-new set of specific criteria. Often, foundations do not fund individuals, though, which then means investigating the options to turn a project or portfolio into an organisational structure. In many cases, this structure needs to have been successfully running for a few years to qualify for more funding. What sounds like a chicken-and-egg situation is one.

The *myth of corporate charity*, as Bieber (2013: 65) calls it, also needs to be taken into account, especially when working with adults with learning disabilities:

> Large corporations do donate millions to charity, but these funds are often inequitably distributed. Each corporation supports a favourite charity, and adult actors with disabilities requiring guardianship support do not seem to attract corporate and private donors.

This is not to generalize, surely, and private funders exist that do care for all kinds of drama outreach work, even if it is not 'Instagrammable'. But I've unfortunately encountered similar situations as Bieber when trying to garner a few thousand pounds for, e.g., *The Dragon and the Wizadress* for women with learning disabilities. Large corporations who are interested to fund avant-garde music drama, and have this as declared aim of their philanthropy

mission, oddly don't see the avant-garde nature of music theatre without voice outside of global, well-mediated festivals.

At the heart of the problem is often one of (relative) size: community music theatre projects that want to meaningfully engage differently-abled participant groups rely on smaller group sizes, shorter performance times, sometimes one-on-one-support structures. Often marginalised, semi-professional groups do escape the radar. Hence, their time of visibility is limited. The metaphor of visibility can be translated into audibility for music theatre without voice. Based on commercial performance standards, one would need to ask: How long is a voice heard and how loud? The length and the volume is difficult to qualify in dialogue with mainstream productions? This may be one of the reasons why, to cite Bieber (2013: 38) once more, '[p]aradoxically, in spite of its evident vitality, Disability Theatre remains largely marginalised from mainstream theatre and audiences.'

Or the problem is more basic than that, simply one of practicality of attendance. How far would you travel to see 15 minutes of music theatre without voice, at a time that is convenient for the performers? When I worked on the project *The Dragon and the Wizadress* with Powerhouse (for more about this project see Chapter 2), the reality of the performance parameters boiled down to this: the performance was staged at Canning Town Library (far off in the Docklands area) at 5 pm on a Friday afternoon. Evening performances would go against the daily routines of the performers. The performance lasted about 25 minutes. It was a hot summer's day that day in August 2018, and exactly half an hour before the performance the only thunderstorm of the season, and in fact, the heaviest of the year hit London. So, some audience members inevitability arrived at a time when large scale shows consider admitting late comers. There was no second performance since the logistics would have been too complicated and (considering the limited funding) too expensive.

Scale doesn't equate with aesthetic innovation or meaningful inclusion in a project, though. Music theatre without voice doesn't needs to happen completely out of an ear's reach of a possible audience either. The multi-sensory opera experience *They Called Her Salt* attracted around 200 participants as part of the workshops and for the final performance,

on Valentine's Day 2020 at the sold out Applecart Arts Theatre in Plaistow, East London, even further away than Canning Town Library, and at around the same time of day.

Scaling up

Since the Opening Ceremony of the Paralympics 2012 visibility and audibility of disability theatre might have found a strange benchmark. Deaf director Jenny Seale oversaw the ceremony. Members of disability drama group Graeae and others performed song work on stage. However, the sport opening wouldn't necessarily classify as music theatre without voice, nor was the driving factor for audiences to flock to this performance a declared interest in innovative music drama. Most people came because it was already a mega-event – the Summer Olympics, after all, in London – and it might be put to the shrewdness of producers of this show to savagely use the scale to display inclusive 'British values' (whatever that means beyond the headlines).

The disability pride of this ceremony sadly did not translate into furthering the financial cause. Sealy notes in a video interview (cf. 'In Conversation with Jenny Seale & John Kelly', 29 Aug 2014) two years after the ceremony that government support for making work accessible had be scrapped. For disabled artists like her that meant much of the support disappeared: Being deaf, Sealy requires an interpreter to direct. Without an interpreter, she argues, she couldn't work.

Dan Rebellato scrutinises the principles that still often decide about public funding and the 'artistic excellence' of theatre projects. He cleverly exposes superficial values that relate to ideas of high art virtuosity, rooted in 'a vision of art grounded in conspicuous prestige' (1999: 41-42).

> [T]here is no necessary reason to suppose that only large-scale works can inspire the best efforts of theatre or music workers. What *is* certain is that large-scale works require large scale venues, and therefore are more likely to attract large scale attention.

Of course, the value system of the Arts Council (who funded two of the projects featured in this study), and in its wake other regional funding bodies such as London-based Groundworks Culture Seeds (who funded *The Dragon and the Wizadress*) has changed since

Rebellato wrote this observation. Their agenda diversified with a particular focus on inclusion, community engagement, and regionalism. Yet, volume and numbers of a project are still part of the way to measure engagement, so is an intellectually-conform voice to fill in funding forms and evaluation templates. The crucial clause for accessibility is in the small print: personal access cost can only be covered *after* a successful application, after preparing an up to 100-page-document, after months of waiting for decision-making. One needs to have finance, normative voice, and stamina to make music theatre without voice happen in the current 'inclusive' funding climate.

Transparency

I want to be transparent about the financial circumstances of the projects in this book to give aspiring *faciliteurs* a realistic picture of how the work comes about. This is part of the political edge of music theatre without voice. The National Living Wage (at the time of writing) hovers just under £9 per hour. For reasons of privacy, I'll not mention charities or institutions by name, as this is not a diatribe. It is more about raising awareness of the reality of pay in the sector and its ethics. Throughout my research period, I've been employed as a freelance facilitator-director at various levels in the sector, from amateur charity to professional opera house. I've been offered as little as 30 pounds for a 2-hour creative session, including preparation and evaluation time, travel costs as well as travel time. No expert mathematician is needed to see that this bottom end of the scale is far beyond minimum wage not only in London, but everywhere.

The bottom, however, can be driven into the basement even further, when involved as a volunteer. Volunteers, or observers, are usually un-paid. I've observed and de facto volunteered as assistant-facilitator for several established charities and companies without pay. Arguably, the learning was some pay-off, and of course the rewarding nature of the work itself. Towards the top of the scale, I've experienced demands from established professionals in the community and non-mainstream sector of roughly 150 pounds per 2 hr session. I have been paid 130 pounds occasionally per 2 hr session, excluding preparation and travel. If you add all of this up you would need to be involved in five projects

simultaneously, and that is projects organised and coordinated mainly by yourself, to also cover holiday periods.

The time that goes into correspondence and coordination is excluded from the pay, so is the time invested in proposal-writing or grant research. Canadian Ruth Bieber (2013: 64) made similar observations, that show that the financial marginalisation of the sector transcends national borders across the Western hemisphere:

> Proposal writing requires time and energy. Community theatre artists are usually volunteers with day jobs, working to pay their own household bills and volunteering their time towards the production. Who is left to write proposals?

If roughly £1500 to £2000 are needed to cover living expenses, insurance, and rent in London and live 'comfortably', then payment standards in existence for inclusive work do not meet these needs. We are talking about a field of work that requires highly-skilled professionals and that produces outcomes that are crucial to make our societies an equal, accessible, and fair place; lasting inclusion remains a Utopian concept.

The *faciliteur* as producer: paying the actors

The members of Powerhouse, for example, the performers who took part in the devising and the performance of *They Called Her Salt*, did not receive any pay. But I wonder whether there is more leeway and whether I might have followed the inherent bias of the funding criteria when calculating the budget. In the case of *They Called Her Salt*, a medium-scale community arts project, that stretched over four months, 10 workshop sessions (some on weekends) and a performance, we are talking about a budget of around 10 000 pounds, plus in-kind support. Before the Corona-crisis, the Arts Council required 10% funding coming in through different sources. This could have been anything from free use of space to an opera singer, who works pro bono.

Speaking from the perspective of the *faciliteur*, if I want to make an inclusive project for people with diverse abilities safely happen, I need to not only care about the space and the creative personnel, but equally as important, the project needs to involve a team of support workers. Part of our team was a dramatherapist, social pedagogue and Powerhouse

organiser Tae Catford, and a team of three volunteers (which also received some symbolic pay as part of the project, which is revolutionary within current payment practice).

Powerhouse itself is an organisation funded on project basis and survives on small to medium-scale grants. Therefore, our inclusive opera project co-maintained their sessions while we were there. Normally, the group meets twice a week (on a Monday and on a Wednesday) to come together for a two-hour session in the morning and a two-hour session in the afternoon. Their coordinator of facilitates most of these sessions by herself, with an irregular set of volunteers that come and go as they please. The women pay a small monthly fee as service users. For many, it's their only chance to enjoy a feeling of community and socialise, be creative and care for their mental health.

Therefore, the funding we received from the Arts Council went into upholding that safe space – physically and mentally. The endeavour was not for profit. The women did not need to pay any fees for the opera project itself. We provided refreshments and organised transportation where necessary, e.g., to enable the group to attend the masterclass with a professional opera singer on the 2nd of November 2019. Indirectly, therefore, most of the pay went towards the women and to fashioning a pleasant, empowered environment for them. Guest artists such as illustrators, musicians, and actresses to support the story performance received fees for commissions or workshop rates.

As a conclusion, just paying for the bare minimum of making an inclusive music theatre project happen, with some small allowance for hiring professional artistic talent, we ended up in need of roughly 10 000 pounds. Some of that money, as illustrated above, was fictional – meaning we never received it, since it came in through in-kind support, free labour, and space. I'd argue that saving even further on staff or demanding even more free labour as in-kind support makes the project unsafe from a dramatherapeutic perspective and severely unethical towards professional artist-facilitators. We haven't even talked much about the co-performers themselves. Arguably, they were not there because they expected pay, but there to receive the benefits from the structures created through the funding received.

Playing the funding game

Let us play a game of what-if: What if, as facilitator-producer, I paid everybody more accordingly on the application paper and included a similar fee for every amateur-performer. The budget would roughly need to triple, paying 100 pounds for a group of 10 performers each, would bring it to 1000 pounds just for every workshop on top of the existing costs. For 10 workshops, this would make another 10 000 pounds. However, because Powerhouse is not a professional theatre company, but a voluntary arts club for women with learning disabilities, the women can decide freely about their attendance. Some might be there for all sessions, some or only a few. Some members only came for the performance (which brings its own challenges).

Therefore, the project would need to hire a finance manager to make the payment procedures themselves accessible within an inclusive project that aims to be accessible on all levels not just on the surface. Therefore, at least another 1000 pound would be needed just for this person to come in and coordinate everybody's pay and to track expenditure meticulously.

Tripling the budget then gets to the critical point where scale/volume creates another obstacle: If an individual creative applies for more than £15 000 pounds (in the case of the Arts Council), a higher volume of evaluation is needed, meaning an interim report would need to be written, a cashflow prediction, and other administrative attachments. This is not to say that these requirements aren't valuable and, from the funder's perspective, reassure a reliable coordination of the project, but for the projects we are talking about, the additional work load would not be easily manageable. Further, for higher sums you'd most likely apply not as an individual but as an organisation. Remember, we are talking about a sector where everybody was already working overtime and de facto is underpaid for all the work that goes into coordinating an arts project with a significant care element.

The point I'm making is that guiding principles of arts recognition (may they be called attention, volume, or visibility) connect to practical financial considerations on the production side that are often unrealistic in many contexts of music theatre without voice. The proportion of support staff and inclusive experts needed to make a seemingly small-

scale project happen is not adequately considered in the funding guidelines and assessment principles the funding bodies go by.

Therefore, questions of ethical pay need to be considered within the context of community theatre and its precarious work situations. One of the key financial preconditions of the work featured here was that I as *faciliteur* could afford to take the time off as part of my practice research, largely based on my own financial situation at the time. If I had had to pay for a family, say, or a mortgage, or just wanted to afford some of the conventional assets of Western mass consumption like a car (which, Alas!, I don't), all of the above would probably have remained unheard of.

Appendix B: The inexpressibility of genre

After *The Fool Eater*, I met for an interview with dramatherapist Dan Skili. He supervised the potentially therapeutic aspects of the project. Skili has a more than 20 year experience as a drama therapist working in inclusive settings, e.g., for the LGBT+ community and people with learning disabilities for the London Borough of Sutton. I would like to feature a brief excerpt from the interview here to capture the inclusive atmosphere during the project as it was felt in the room:

How would you describe the atmosphere in the room with regard to the audience?

Very good. Very nice. Very friendly. Very open. A lot of people didn't really know what they were in for because how would you describe and event like that. It was a slightly unusual event: It was a performance but a very unique performance. Perhaps you could see on people's faces that they didn't really know what was going to happen and that is not necessarily a bad thing at all. But they were not in party mode they just came in looking a bit perplexed and curious, and then they warmed up to the whole thing. And I think the atmosphere became very warm and supportive throughout.

So, you would say it is okay to have this surprise moment and not necessary communicate exactly how the performance is going to be?

I think it is quite nice personally to go into an event where you don't really know what is going to happen. We have a lot of performances commercially where people already know what it's about so it is very safe. They go for example, into a comedy like *Mamma Mia!*, or a serious play and they know that they either are going to be in party mode or in a more serious mode before they go and watch *Hamlet* or *King Lear*. I like the idea of you not quite knowing what you are going to experience.

It seems almost like another form of playing with the audience or audience interaction: playing with their expectations, the norm and the mainstream in that sense, where the expectations are part of the whole playfulness.

Yes, and I'm not sure where you got all those people from: They were a bunch of people who were prepared to be open and do that.

It seems the play with vocalising stories differently extends to expectations of what the spectator is about to hear and how they hear as part of a music theatre performance. Reception can be complicit in shaping the dramatic space. Listeners therefore are therefore always already co-creating. Listening is also a 'culturally and historically situated practice' (Thomaidis 2017: 72), potentially reinforcing genre expectations. A knowledge on the

visitor's part to identify what he or she is about to hear can create voice expectations. An absence of clear expectations can, therefore, generate an inclusive listening that is complicit in shaping expanded vocality.

From a commercial perspective, the inexpressibility of genre may create the worry of how to communicate the event to a large audience group. However, referring to the criteria of meaningful outreach and creative dialogue this concern remains of secondary importance for inclusive music theatre. The mystery of not knowing exactly what to expect can be equally enticing for new audience groups and renders the genre close to a happening. Innovative genre descriptions such as 'music theatre without voice', 'modern melodramatic storytelling' or 'an interactive story with music and illustrations' as for the online project *Tony's Hot Day* (see chapter 4) are therefore part of recasting an understanding of what music theatre can *be*, by departing from what it *is* and how an audience can talk about it.

Appendix C: Accessible breathing exercises for an inclusive masterclass

Buzzing

Often, masterclasses and voice coachings open with collective breathing exercises or a warm-up routine. For *Salt*, these routines were partly repurposed to introduce everybody non-verbally through creating a shared bodily experience in the studio space. Together with Catherine Carby, I facilitated various short activities from the repertoire of vocal warm-ups to engage different parts of the speech apparatus and warm-up the vocal cords. To encourage lip-trills, I brought in an image of a bee and facilitated a drama game. The task was to pass round an imaginary bee while making a buzzing noise. Any physical difficulties were masked by the fictional situation: In it, the focus was less on doing the trills 'right' but sending the bee on in a group effort. Wiggling movements accompanying the game or the touch of fingers and arms while passing the insect on could replace vocal impairments in a multi-sensory understanding of voice. The exercises included everybody in the space. Interestingly, the vibrations felt through touching a neighbour's finger, while this person was buzzing, transported the 'soundwaves' produced on a tactual level.

Vowels and conga

Carby contributed an exercise to warm up the vowel sounds. A popular warm-up in voice training is the combination of any of the five vowel sounds (a, e, i, o, u) with a nasal (m, n) in front to achieve a placement (i.e., a feeling of resonance) in the upper cavities of the mouth. The nasal consonant also helps to stimulate the vocal cords into a soft on-set. Catherine humorously explained that opera singers enjoyed saying 'me, me, me' all the time. Though perhaps not intended, the practice of saying 'me' and making 'me' heard in a space of people could have confidence-building effects, especially for participants who are not used to representing their interests of being heard as a person with an awareness of self.

Finally, I brought an image of a ship with a foghorn in to inspire *glissando*-exercises or sirens. This sound production is popular in vocal warm-ups since it tends to smooth the transitions between the different registers of the voice from head to chest, or high to low. In general, exercises such as this are useful as a starting point because they are gentle warm-ups that can happen seated – and in almost any space safely –, prevent injury when exploring different vocal sounds, and create a sense of community. A conga-line to ABBA's 'Mamma Mia' broke the ice further and rounded up the bod warm-up. Including a popular song also diversified the opera aesthetic of the workshop. A conga-line functions as an accessible dance piece, as it creates support as part of the form by holding on to somebody's shoulder and being held in the back by another team member (see the <u>video chapter</u> for brief impressions; images in Chapter 4).

Appendix D: Alternative conclusion

[script from *The Dragon and The Wizadress*]

The wind rose from the East over London and a little dragon travelled on a cloud. Cinder travelled comfortably on his cloud. He felt like snowflakes or like British nannies, who, he knew, told stories about sugar and medicine. Accidently, Cinder opened his umbrella that was twice as tall has him directly above New Cross Gate Station. And she jumped off her candy floss train. You must know, dragons change gender with every jump they make.

He landed, with another jump, in front of a jerk chicken shop, right next to the station. The sign above the door read in swirling letters: *Marylous's Fried ChooChooGout*. It was a big chicken shop for a small dragon who had only just arrived, couldn't see properly through the greasy windows, and, above all, couldn't roar as – his father had said – all proper dragons should be able to do. Loudly. Fiercely. Respectably. If you roar, you are a dragon. If not, you are ridiculous.

Inside, a bunch of regulars had occupied the three round tables in front of the counter. The owner, Marylou, stood at a big chicken kebab stick that was dripping with fat. She had come to London and had opened this shop after an unhappy incident with a grain of sand in the Mongolian desert, her favourite place in the world, apart, of course, from the *grachten* of Amsterdam, where she spent her childhood.

From her journeys, she had brought back a Bedouin folk song she loved to sing while chopping chicken legs.

When she had finished her song, Marylou asked: "Okay, guys, dolls, and birds," for there were present an old puppeteer, a policewoman named Rosie and a little boy, who couldn't speak, but had two yellow canaries as companions that could twitter.

"Okay, who wants to know their fortune?"

The boy with the birds stepped up to the counter.

Marylou leaned over the bar in her gaudy African tunics in yellow and purple, and with a sparkling Oriental turban on her green hair. She wore these garments with the pride and theatricality of a Dutch diva and former opera singer who had grown up between big blocks of cheese in the Netherlands but had always been dreaming of the East: the snow-covered markets of Russia, the orange deserts of Mongolia, mystic labyrinths, and spices, and all the other stuff that dreams of the East had turned into glittering realities of the West.

One must add: The wizadress had kept a bag of magical dust as a souvenir from the desert. The locals tell this is what give her chicken an extra special flavor. Who knows?

Marylou said to the boy with the birds, after seeing into a bubbling pot of gravy: "You won't hear if you look. You will find if you see."

The birds started to fly in circles around the boy's head. He looked confused.

"You won't hear if you look. You will find if you see – what kind of fortune is that?" asked Rosie, always skeptical of Marylou's gravy futures.

She kept pondering the riddle in her usual way, walking up and done the little shop in a routine of electric movements.

"You are cooking up all these mysteries. Where is your fortune-telling license?", the old puppeteer asked.

Marylou didn't seem to be bothered: "I'm the Wizadress of New Cross," she pointed to a sign on her counter: "Fortunes and Transformations. By the Wizadress of X Cross, 50 p, including VAT."

Suddenly, the guests in the shop heard a scratching sound on Marylou's glass counter. They were surprised. Because what they hadn't heard was a little dragon with a large umbrella walking in. He had opened the front door just enough to squeeze through, had walked past the three tables with the three guests, and now, with his pointy fingernails asked for attention. If you can't roar, you perhaps can scratch.

"Excuse me," the dragon put a hand in front of his face as if embarrassed that he had said something.

Everybody was a bit surprised to see a small dragon standing in front of the counter of a jerk chicken shop in South East London. So, they listened. Not because he was small, or because he was very soft-spoken, he could have been tall and loud as well, it wouldn't have mattered. No, they listened because he was brave enough to open the door, go up to a very tall and scary counter, all by himself, and then scratched silently. He had something important to ask. That was the only thing that mattered.

"Yes," said the Wizadress of New Cross.

"I would like a transformation, please."

The Wizadress was delighted.

"Well, there are many transformations on the menu." She pointed to a board next to where it said bagels and burger specials.

"You can have a special transformation, with extra ketchup. How about some fresh spells? Or a vegetarian transformation with minced meat and Halloumi on top?"

The dragon was confused with the choice and looked at the other guests. When they had heard the last transformation they had all shaken their heads in warning disgust.

"I just want a plain transformation, please. Without condiments. Thank you."

The crowd thought that was very sensible idea and they nodded their heads approvingly.

"A plain transformation. For here or to go," asked the Wizadess of New Cross.

"I would like it here please," responded the dragon.

All of a sudden, the puppeteer chipped in: "If I may ask, what kind of transformation do you want exactly?"

Dragon: "I want to be a dragon."

The boy with the birds made signs the birds translated into a trapeze act that was meant to say: "But you are a dragon."

"Yes, you are," said the policewoman since she knew about rules. And according to everything she had ever learned in police academy, a little turquois lizard-like creature definitely did not tick the box of English man and banker, though the dark umbrella made it difficult to decide at first glance. Rosie made an electric movement and thought she had thought enough, so she said: "Yes, you are," something she thought she had said before.

"No, I'm not. My father and all my friends at Dragon College tell me: To be a real dragon you need to roar fiercely, loudly, respectably. And the only roar I can make is not very load." He roared softly. The birds of the boy loved it.

Marylou jotted down: "One plain transformation: small roar to big roar," she looked up, "sure you want no sauces? Just 5 p extra," she got a bit annoyed with people denying her the sauce income. "Or hot sauce?" But the dragon said he wouldn't be able to stand the burn.

"Okay," the Wizadress of New Cross said and started performing swishing movements above her head and chanted something that was supposed to sound like Mongolian overtone chanting but sounded more like the dying aria from *La Traviata*. The past of an opera singer always shows.

"Wait, wait, wait," said the puppeteer.

The wizadress was a bit annoyed and impatient: "What?"

"To me, it doesn't seem like he needs a transformation. He is a bona fide dragon."

The policewoman had checked the dragon data base on her phone and actually jumped to the puppeteer's side to confirm: "Yes, that is quite right. According to our database, a dragon is practically everybody who is not an English banker. Though you might want to get rid of the black umbrella, darling!"

Marylou was seriously annoyed now, because she wanted to perform her transformation and also, she needed her money. Running a chicken shop in London was costly.

Wizadress: "Move over, puppet-man. Your puppets are for babies. This is my chicken shop. It is the wish of the customer to get transformed, so therefore I will fulfil his wish."

"She has a point there," acknowledged the policewoman.

This aggravated the puppeteer who now threw his fifteen and a half puppets angrily into a big pot of butternut squash soup.

A splash of the yellow liquid hit the Wizadress of New Cross in the eye. It was her bad eye, the one a Mongolian meerkat once had taken out to polish neatly while Marylou had been waiting at a camel junction. Unfortunately, a tiny grain of sand had remained at the back of Marylou's eyeball and had been pestering her ever since.

The spice worked its way through Marylou's optic nerve, right into her brain, and, as we all know, pain on the brain is the worst.

The longer the pain lasted, the more enraged Marylou got.

And her yellow flaps of clothes turned into wings, the size of ten chickens, and her violet flaps of clothes turned into scales, the scales of dragons, and her feet took on the size of two big Gouda wheels of cheese.

Her green head burst through the ceiling of the chicken shop. Furiously, she overlooked New Cross Gate Station where she saw two orange snakes leaving at the same time.

The Wizadress of New Cross was now seriously angry, and perhaps would have scourged the whole road leading up to yet another *Sainsbury's Local*, had not the boy with the birds been carried onto the roof by his two yellow canaries and started singing, not really singing, but humming, not really humming, but gesticulating a tune, so soft and so silent, so angry in its peacefulness and so painful in it harmony that the dragoness of New Cross was swaying gently in the wind from the East, in a blend of exhaust fumes and dangerous city air due to the hot weather conditions.

And passengers who were waiting at the station to get to London Bridge, but looked for a moment into the opposite direction, got very angry as well at the boy with the birds.

They got angry at a tune that would not transform the world, because tunes rarely did, but would try to calm down a very tall lady in too much yellow and too much violet and with green hair; a lady, who had all the right to be enraged by the pain caused by hot butternut squash splashed onto her bad eye by the flying puppet of a man with a diploma in ventriloquism.

But the boy kept on humming and the birds with him, because he knew that you won't hear if you look, and you will find if you see. And that this was the only way.

And gradually, Marylou calmed down, the puppeteer calmed down and the policewoman, who felt she had to call the police to report such an incident calmed down as well. And so, they all looked at the little dragon, all of a sudden, with curious faces:

"What's your decision, little dragon?"

"Do you want to roar?"

The little dragon, after so much commotion, decided for the chicken shish with extra onion and garlic mayonnaise instead.

And some people, who really listened, said afterwards they had heard a wonderfully strange, and very loud noise coming from Marylou's chicken shop that day: It was, of course, the content burb of a very small dragon with an extra big appetite for garlic chicken.

Digital appendix: Overview [video documentation]

The digital portfolio consists of a recording of the pantomime with Arc in the Park; three facilitation example clips from directing *The Dragon and the Wizadress* (2018); a recording of the full performance of *The Fool Eater* (2019); a video chapter chronicling the facilitation journey and performance of *They Called Her Salt* (2020). The archive also contains photo documentaries of the major projects as well as additional material such as scripts and programmes.

In addition, the digital portfolio archives interview recordings with directors John Fulljames, Tim Yealland, and Cal McCrystal as audio files. Further, it documents the context for the question posed to Phyllida Llyod.

The portfolio can be accessed via the website www.florianjseubert.co.uk > PhD practice documentation in the pop-down menu under *Projects*.

The password is **Saltworks123!!**.

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