



School: Music and Performing Arts

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Project Title: Tarrare

UOA: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

Research Timeline

Date	Rationale of research activities and decisions undertaken
01/12/14 - 30-02/15	<p>Wattle and Daub (WD) theatre company received Wellcome trust funding and approached me to direct their Puppet Opera based on medical research into an 18th century autopsy. WD shared their primary research conducted through interviews with pathologist Alan Bates (University College London), disability historian Professor David Turner (Swansea University), and Professor Havi Carel, phenomenology of medicine (Bristol University) and initial performance research findings from initial Arts Council-funded Research and Development phase that included the construction and performing of prototype puppets culminating in a 20-minute work in progress performance at Bristol Old Vic's Ferment showcase in July 2012.</p> <p>In collaboration with librettist Tobi Poster-Su (TP-S) and puppet director and researcher Dr Laura Purcell Gates (LPG), we created an initial storyboard for the show, drawing on the medical research findings, historic information and official autopsy report of the real Tarrare and making initial framing decisions. It was decided the story would all take place in Doctor Percy's autopsy room, while he was performing an autopsy on Tarrare, but would travel to 3 major locations—the freak show, war and a Prussian prison, the centre for incurable freaks (hospital) and be book ended by the autopsy room.</p>
15/ 03/ 2015-	<p>Initial mapping session with TPS and composer Tom Poster (TP) to develop and map the emotional journey of the piece through all elements—this map then informed all creative decisions from this point: the start of an adapted form of directing, dramaturgy which maps the emotional journey of all characters against the emotional journey of the show, and then decides what creative element best supports the sharing of that (music,</p>

visual storytelling, puppetry, medical research).

Initial discussions with LPG, and Emma Powell (puppet maker) about the puppets based on the medical research and what we would like them to do.

15/07/2015-
02/09/2015

Rehearsals

Day 1-5 of rehearsals: With all members of the creative team present (including designer and puppet designer). We used Bella Merlin's description of Stanislavski's methods of textual analysis to identify and name together the 'given circumstances' of each section, to split the piece into 'bits' and name them together and then name the 'objectives and counter - objectives' for all 'characters' in every section (Merlin B 2014). In very simple terms: *What do they want? What is stopping them? When and why does that change?* Because we weren't working from a traditional script, as we were working from a storyboard and a musical score, this way of working would have to later be adapted to thinking in an audio/visual rather than psychological form, for now we were creating the blueprint for the characters' emotional journeys that all the other choices could stem from.

Day 6-15 of rehearsals: Development of a methodology for staging the piece. Having broken the piece into 'bits' and named them myself I gave those to all members of the team. We worked on it bit by bit, developing our methods for showing the psychological inner workings of the characters by using external sometimes technical approaches. These looked different for each creative form (music/puppets/singing). I rehearsed with singers to find their vocal journey through each scene both through the music and using the 'given circumstances' and 'objectives and counter-objectives' identified in week one as well as a few other Stanislavski based techniques to find a series of 'actions' (Merlin,B) for the character which signposted their emotional journey. I then worked separately extensively with puppeteers and puppet director LPG to find the puppets' way of portraying this same psychological journey through breath, facial angles, points of concentration for the head, movement through the space and if another puppet was on stage the spatial relationship between them. Still going back to the simple question: *What do I want?* - then what is the best way for each individual puppet then to technically show this?

The next stage was bringing the singers and puppeteers together to develop the overall visual dramaturgy of the scene, which supported both the overall connection between sound and image (singers singing, puppeteers puppeteering but a sense of synergy so both combined to create one character) and through scenography, sound, props and relationship to space was able to tell the story in the clearest possible way—depicting specific locations, journeys, physical entrapments all within the frame we had chosen for the piece which was the medical autopsy room.

The methods for developing these scenes included playing a lot with physical space between singers and puppets, again the use of some adapted Stanislavski/Bella Merlin exercises including 'tempo/rhythm' (Merlin, B), questioning and developing the framing device of the performers. How much are they seen? Who are they? Are they always in the autopsy room? And all elements referring back to the original textual analysis work of the week before so all were supporting the same journey.

The development of the 'toddler death' section was a big breakthrough—a pivotal, important and tragic section which only included music and visuals. This is where Tarrare meets the toddler, plays with the toddler, watches the toddler die and then eats the toddler. We had to map very specifically beat by beat what was happening for each character and then create a score of physical movement, which exactly reflected these huge changes in emotions. This video was then sent to TP, along with the emotional score of objectives and counter-objectives, and from this he developed music which supported each new feeling as it arrived in the visual storytelling. TP and I spoke about the development of the music being very beautiful. We wanted the audience to sympathise with Tarrare, so this section needed to be both beautiful and awful.

Throughout this period, we were working on the music and any additional transitional music which needed to be created for practical purposes.

When it came to pulling the show together in the theatre, I worked with the lighting designer who had not been present in the process since the first week, by using the same guiding principles: *What is the emotional journey of the scene for each character? What is the location/ specifics of storytelling (given circumstances)? How can the lighting enhance the audience's understanding of both of these things?*

02/09/2015- 30/11/2015	<p>Premiere performances in TFT and Suspense festival.</p> <p>Showcase performances with post-show talkback sessions with creative team and project partners: Bristol Festival of Puppetry (Tobacco Factory Theatres, 2-3 September 2015) and Suspense Festival, London (New Diorama Theatre, 2-3 November 2015).</p>
01/02/2016- 24/01/2017	<p>Post-showcase meetings with project partners and creative team to plan for UK tour including show alterations.</p> <p>Based on my own reflections from the initial research period and audience feedback, I discussed with the core creative team (TPS, LPG, TP) a dramaturgical shift where the doctor's journey through the piece was more complex and nuanced than previously and at the forefront of the action. This would hopefully allow the medical research and context to play out more strongly and the audience to gain a stronger sense of empathy with the doctor as well as with Tarrare. Medical research was changing and this character's journey through the piece represented a historic development in medical research practices.</p>
02/01/2017- 19/01/2019	<p>We re-mapped the journey again, with the methods already described and I offered some stronger objectives/counter objectives for the doctor to play. From this mapping EP remade the doctor puppet to support this different character. TP rewrote some of the music to support this different telling.</p>

Revisited all sections of the play and restaged a number of the scenes, most specifically the final scene, with the new storytelling as our guide. We decided now the doctor was the storyteller, and with the medical research/ethics foregrounded, that the final image should be Tarrare in a glass jar. For all his extraordinariness he became another specimen to add to medical knowledge.

UK tour 2017, The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak: 10 March 2017, Michael Tippett Centre, Bath Spa University, Bath; 8-9 March 2017, North Wall Arts Centre, Oxford; 30 January-17 February 2017, Wilton's Music Hall, London; 25-28 January 2017, Tobacco Factory Theatres, Bristol.

01/09/15 - present	Became senior lecturer at Bath Spa university. As module coordinator for the second year core module 'Making Performance' on the drama programme, where I developed the module to reflect and disseminate my research findings and impact the specific curriculum with my research methodology. The module teaches the basic Stanislavski processes I explored here and then goes on to explore practically how to adapt them to suit different genres of work and different forms of storytelling including movement/ sound. Tarrare is used as a working example of this process.
03/2020	Show released publicly online in March 2020 during lockdown; over 7k views as of May. Ran a series of Directing and dramaturgy masterclasses at Bristol Old Vic Theatre school where I explored practically with the directing and writing students the methodology developed through this research and how we might apply it to other forms of directing.
