

*Embodying Greek Tragedy:  
Phenomenological Explorations of the Suffering Body  
in Theory and Practice*

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*To my grandmothers Elli † and Dionysia*

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the theoretical, practical and performative possibilities produced within the triangularity of phenomenology, Greek tragedy and contemporary dance theatre. The body constitutes the primal matter of all three disciplines privileging their co-examination in the post-dramatic *mise-en-scène*. Hence, the project proposes a model of dramaturgical analysis to establish a system of identification and facilitation of embodiment in performer training and theatre directing. The process is engaged with the suffering body in Greek tragedy and is evidenced by three body-centric performances. At the same time, it resists traditional logocentric approaches in order to unseal novel interpretive avenues.

The case studies are developed upon the phenomenological theories of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Drew Leder, treating the body as the nullpunkt of all perceptual experiences that are perpetually present in the ultimate here and now (Dolezal, 2009; Sokolowski, 2008). In this regard, the first performance, *Prometheus Immobile* (2018), marks a practical examination of suffering that departs from stillness and confinement. Following a systematic analysis of Leder's (1990) modes of disappearance, *Bacchae in Absentia* (2019) explores consciousness in psychosomatic imprisonment, emphasising mental conditions as manifested ecstatically. Finally, the dance film *Medea Inside* (2021) crystallises the essence of the phenomenological enquiry, reifying a visceral amalgamation of lived and performed realities of confinement in domestic and virtual environments. The filmed performance deploys the pregnant body as a reference to selfhood and alterity.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

cf: (conferatur) compare

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

PaR: Practice as Research

PCI: (School of) Performance and Cultural Industries

PMPP: Phenomenological Model of Performance Practice

PTPP: Performance Training, Preparation and Pedagogy (Research Group)

SM: Skin Manifests (exercise)

SRT: Skinner Release Technique

trans.: translation; translated

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# Introduction

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## 1. Phenomenology in Theory

### 1.1 Philosophical Dichotomies and Methods

Dance and performance scholars are increasingly using phenomenology to articulate their practice (Fraleigh, 1987; Kozel, 2007; Parviainen, 1998; Sheets-Johnstone, 1966) or expand the field of performance analysis (Garner, 1994; Johnston, 2017). However, a rigorous qualitative research method seems to be missing or remains underdeveloped in regard to the wide employment of phenomenology as an analytical model in performance studies. Giorgi (2008) observes that:

[A] proper understanding of how to employ the phenomenological method in the social sciences is not something about which a consensus exists. There are several procedures being] recommended presently, but not all of these are acceptable, either according to the criteria of phenomenological philosophy or in terms of sound phenomenological research strategies. (Giorgi, 2008, p. 1)

In the era of corporeal prominence, contemporary academics-practitioners incline towards the phenomenological theories of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. Still, we can gather very little information about their application as analytical or research methods. This fact allows the constant impeachment of the phenomenological approach by opponent theories, such as analytical philosophy or rationalism. Furthermore, it raises concerns about positionality, personal involvement and impact on findings.

Psychology can provide us with illuminating phenomenological interventions, such as Amedeo Giorgi's (2009) Descriptive Phenomenological Method, Jonathan Smith's (1996) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Max Van Manen's (2007) Phenomenology of Practice. Phenomenology in the qualitative research of psychology indicated the beginning of the quest for an appropriate phenomenological method. Meanwhile, there has been a rising demand for phenomenological applications in the social sciences since the early '70s. The prominent schools of phenomenology originated from the understandings of

Edmund Husserl and his student Martin Heidegger (Utrecht School) and their approaches to Transcendental and Hermeneutic Phenomenology, respectively.

Husserl's Transcendental or Descriptive Phenomenology is concerned with the epistemological enquiry that asks, *What do I know about the world?* Here, it is the nature of knowledge that primarily occupies its ontology. In this respect, reality is internal to the subject and located within the limits of its consciousness. The epistemology is accumulated around the concept of *epoché*; that is, the phenomenological reduction or bracketing. The researcher becomes a transcendental subjectivity that remains neutral and unbiased (bracketed), avoiding using prior knowledge or judgement not to impact the subject(s) of the study. The examination calls on intuition and description – thus, operating in a pre-reflective manner. The methodology relies on imaginative variation and the reduction of research data into units of meaning. The reductionist approach justifies Giorgi's endeavour to ascribe measurable qualities to the phenomenological process and legitimise it as a valid scientific method. The tendency towards rationalisation is positivistic and defends the axiom of objective reality. It is, therefore, rational and measurable, explaining why empiricism and reductionism rely on data to reach an outcome (quantitative research).

Heidegger and the Utrecht School developed the Interpretive or Hermeneutic Phenomenology, where the focus is ontological and centred on the question, *What do I know about myself in the world?* The ontology of the hermeneutic approach is located in the nature of being and the lived experience as it appears in the subject's *lifeworld* (Husserl, 1936/1970). Epistemologically, the researcher is involved in the study as part of the world, bringing in their input and prior knowledge. The analytical process uses interpretation reflectively. Hence, the methodology utilises other theories and 'iterative cycles of reflection for a robust and nuanced analysis' (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). Drawing on the paradigm of naturalism, reality is subjective; thus, inductive and dynamic (intersubjective) as it develops between relationships, such as the one between researcher and participant in qualitative research. Van Manen's (2007) applied phenomenology is widely employed as an in-

depth investigating model with patients and students in medical sciences. At the same time, Smith developed IPA as a psychological approach to qualitative research.

The debate originates in the opposition between description and interpretation of the lived experience. The notions of description and interpretation ignorantly replace each other, at times falling into circles of misuse (Giorgi, 2008). Hence, we need to find the appropriate methods to examine the lived experience in performance research and elucidate meanings validly without deviating from the phenomenological logic. Dichotomies serve the human tendency to rationalise phenomena and simplify their apprehension through categorisation. Observation, interrogation, description, analysis, and interpretation are fundamental cognitive processes of human consciousness.

Issues regarding reflexivity and positionality emerged from the practical nature of the research reinforcing the interrogation of phenomenological bracketing. Often conducted by researchers-practitioners, the applied phenomenological methods are not as explicit due to the obscurity caused by interdisciplinarity and the 'multiple overlapping identities' (Kezar, 2002, p. 96) that principal investigators might inhabit. The dual capacity of the researcher-director, for instance, might influence assumptions in various ways, given their active involvement in the process. Mason-Bish (2019) notes that 'positionality is a transitory and dynamic situation' (p. 264) and the fluidity between identities may impact findings and the exchange with participants. What is more, in the case of the researcher-director is the constant concern with power relations (ibid.) and the dynamics developed between the researcher and the subjects within the ensemble.

The query also raises questions about first and third-person perspectives (Sanford, 2016) and the validity of the interpretation of findings when the researcher is involved as a research subject. In the case of *Medea Inside*, the final practical piece of this project, questions on positionality and influence emerged as our studio interactions took the form of digital encounters during the lockdowns. I sought to identify the degree to which a researcher's phenomenological estimation can remain



unbracketed when interacting with their research subjects, especially in extreme conditions like a pandemic. Influenced by our dramaturgical interpretation of the tragedy, similar thoughts sprouted regarding the extent to which the researcher remains unbiased in the investigation of vulnerable and oppressed female subjectivities when they identify as such.

Literature on reflexivity and positionality demonstrates that it depends on the researcher's position as an insider/outsider (Berger, 2015; Mason-Bish, 2019). Despite Giorgi's position, which situates the investigator outside any prior knowledge, this status is pivotal to assessing their influence on the research findings and outcomes as personal traits, beliefs, ideologies, experiences and preferences play an essential role in decisions and assumptions during data analysis and the meaning-making process (Berger, 2015; Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Finlay, 2002; Horsburgh, 2003). These parameters can also determine the linguistic and communicational avenues selected by the researcher during data collection (Mason-Bish, 2019, p. 265).

Hence, the study argues that framing the research as descriptive or interpretative and determining the researcher's position a priori are fundamental axioms in the process. However, phenomenological interrogation cannot be a fixed, rigid method but rather a flexible one determined by the openness of our *being-in-the-world*. The researcher should be able to adopt different approaches as long as their applicability and functionality are defined and evidenced. That should follow a disciplinary attitude (Giorgi, 1985) whilst being in accord with the method's requirements and specificities (Giorgi, 2008, p. 2).

The research confirms that first-order phenomenology is descriptive, yet any interpretive properties of the method are secondary but inherent, constituting fundamental cognitive processes of the human consciousness. The research resorts to other disciplines, such as psychology and post-structural feminism harnessing their interpretive potentiality to explicate perceptual phenomena. The richness of the findings will reveal the benefits of the congruent phenomenological attitude and

subjective openness that operates in a pre-reflective manner. In Section 3 of the Introduction, I illustrate how my research utilised the transcendental approach for data analysis adopting a reflective strategy in studio practice.

## 1.2 (Medical) Phenomenology and the Performing Arts

Phenomenological encounters with dramaturgical analysis and performance studies became evident in the late '80s. Works such as States' *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (1985) and Garner's *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (1994) attempted to merge the two fields revealing invisible performative and interpretive aspects. States engages with Heidegger's phenomenology to interpret the theatrical phenomenon. He describes imitation and action as 'two virtually co-reflexive terms' (States, 1985, p. 5), placing action *outside* drama as it stands 'logically and chronologically before the business of composition'. In contrast, the action that develops *inside* drama constitutes 'the medium in which the work presents its representation' (p. 6). Furthermore, he argues that semiotics offers a linguistic approach to theatre, preventing 'any sensory engagement with its empirical objects' (p. 7), and when combined with phenomenology, it allows a holistic perspective of the theatrical event. States' focus, however, neglects the actor and remains on 'the psychology [...] of the audience' (p. 14). As a result, he falls into a latent objectification of the actor as a representing device of the text.

In my BA studies, I was primarily interested in philosophical and psychological investigations in performance analysis. Starting from semiotics I then embarked on phenomenology, to analyse and translate Garner's *Bodied Spaces* (1994) into Greek. Garner's view is congruent with States' idea about the complementarity of semiotics (the referential) and phenomenology (the experiential) (pp. 14-15). Drawing on Husserl, he examines the body both 'as' and 'within' the space it inhabits. In his exploration of Beckett, Post-Brechtian performances and contemporary theatre, Garner explores the corporeal and perceptual possibilities of the embodied subject.

Moreover, he analyses the embodiment of experience in a broader historical framework presented from the subjective standpoint (*nullpunkt*) of *here and now*.

His phenomenological interpretations of the performing body examine suffering conditions and their perceptual implications in cases including disability, pregnancy, gender issues, violence and trauma. Finally, he attempts to define ‘the politics of embodiment’ (p. 159), giving prominence to the symbolic characterisation of the suffering body in social terms.

Many of the terms Garner uses in his work, such as *ecstasis* or the phenomenon of *presence-in-absence*, derive from Leder’s work *The Absent Body* (1990). Leder harnesses Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body to capitalise on the lived experience and scrutinises the body in medical and quotidian contexts. His study emphasises the chiasmic nature of the body discussing in-depth concepts such as *ecstasis*, *recessiveness*, *dys-appearance* and *disappearance* in a psychophysical approach of subjectivity and the lived experience of *being-in-the-world*. His work investigates presence and the ‘essential structures of embodiment’ (1990, p. 2) through absence appropriating the Husserlian and Merleau-Pontian theories to analyse conditions where embodied consciousness is absent or invisible.

Leder’s work was fundamental for my MA thesis *Medical Phenomenology in Drama: An Introduction to the Interpretation of the Absent and the Suffering Body*. The dissertation drew on medical phenomenology to analyse psychosomatic manifestations of pain in contemporary European and American drama. My thesis inspired the approach of the same topic to ancient Greek tragedy in *Phenomenology of Pain and the Suffering Body in Ancient Greek Tragedy: Five Works* (2017, pp. 69-84), which cultivated the ground for my PhD research.

Leder applies medical phenomenology to shed light on internal awareness and ‘the primacy of perception’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). His phenomenological description of the functions of bodily organs to physiological processes demystifies the structures of consciousness. Furthermore, it illuminates behavioural and physiological responses for a wide range of bodies and body states, movement and skills.

Medical phenomenology is the study of the experience of illness based upon the ‘synthesis of first- and third-person perspectives’ of the embodied person as opposed to the cold clinical practices of biomedicine that use evidence-based

objectivity and the lack of empathy towards patients (Goldenberg, 2010, p. 44). Leder argues that while the lived body is witnessed and 'articulated by science as well as the life-world gaze, including intellectual cognition along with visceral and sensorimotor capacities' should not be treated in a reductionistic way that excludes 'the spiritual dimension of life' (Leder, 1990, pp. 7-8). According to Carel (2011), Merleau-Ponty's 'distinction between the biological body [Körper] and the body as lived [Leib]' places emphasis on the subject of illness as perception forms 'an embodied activity' (Carel, 2011, p. 3) to understand the experience of suffering (p.1).

Medical phenomenology is pivotal for this research as the analysis and interpretation of the themes under examination include or combine cases of medical interest that involve modes of absence and alienation, such as pregnancy, disease and mental illness or sensory deprivation and death. I argue that the employment of phenomenology with a particular focus on suffering provides the researcher-director with a psychophysical (Leib) insight into the tragic body that expands beyond the physio-biological (Körper). Thus, we pave the way to the embodiment and understanding of vulnerability, absence and loss. I argue that the contribution of medical phenomenology will benefit psychophysical training and body-centric directions.

Moreover, we bring to the fore the traumatised subjectivity. Greek tragedy unravels the stories of bodies whose tragicity is determined by the uncontrollability of their unfortunate fate, often resulting in psychosomatic traumatisation. This neglected area, the tragic body, operates as an umbrella term for all the bodies under examination in this study. Their examination alongside bodies which suffer the consequences of political regimes or authoritarian power and abusive relationships is crucial to the concept of tragicity in Greek drama. Again, understanding the psychophysical impact of such cases can facilitate further developments in contemporary directorial and training practices.

In detail, the study is concerned with Leder's four modes of embodiment: these manifest in the *ecstatic*, the *recessive*, the *chiasmatic*, and the *dys-appearing* body. As ecstatic, he means 'the surface body' (p. 4) and its projecting manifestations: the expressive, emotive and communicative modalities which are characteristic of the

sensorimotor surface of the outer or visible body (p. 4). The term recessive refers to 'the bodily depths' and 'the ways in which the visceral organs, along with certain of the body's temporal modes, recede from personal apprehension and control' (ibid.), including biological functions, emotionality and the subconscious.

Furthermore, the body is deemed absent when dysfunction disrupts its normality 'such as pain, disease, and social breakdown' (p. 4). The objective of the research is the absence of the 'ordinary state' when the body becomes alienated from the Self (ibid)<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the notion of the chiasmatic indicates the reciprocity between the ecstatic and the recessive (p. 62), where the body is concurrently the perceiver and the perceived or, in other words, the subject and the object of perception (p. 63).

Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophical approaches revolve around a body-centred phenomenology as opposed to Cartesian dualism, which dichotomises body and mind. Merleau-Ponty and his theory on perception (1945) is an existential approach to the world through the body-subject (*le corps propre*), which interacts with the world through its sensorimotor capacities. For Merleau-Ponty, 'every perception is a communication or a communion' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. xxv), associating experience with consciousness but mainly foregrounding it as an inherent, fundamental and embodied condition. The body from *here* and *now* interacts with other objects or bodies in a pre-existent-world frame characterised by a primordial openness (*Lebenswelt*).

From these views of the body either as an instrument or milieu or through the absence of consciousness, recent scholarship demonstrates significant progress in associating phenomenology with performance studies, expanding the research to the digital field and viewing the body as a medium or mediator. In *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology*, Kozel (2007) discusses material bodies and the effects of their digitalisation at a conceptual and sensory level. For Kozel, bodies in digital technology constitute spaces for a 'phenomenology as closeness' (2007, p. xvi). In this context, she applies Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory to foreground her own sensory and 'subjective experiences' (Kozel, 1994, p. xvi).

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<sup>1</sup> Also see Chapter 2, pp. 51-52

Attempting to transform phenomenology into dance (p. 28), she appropriates 'hyper-reflection' as a means of realisation, concurrently examining the researcher's own lived experience (pp. 10-12).

Relevant literature expands from psychological associations between movement and behaviour to phenomenological approaches to dance. Parviainen brings together Kozel and Fraleigh in *Bodies Moving and Moved* (1998) to examine the dancing subject through the phenomenological lens. Her research investigates the 'ethical and cognitive values of dance practice and danceworks' (Parviainen, 1998, p. 12). She employs Merleau-Ponty to draw upon the body as 'a standpoint from which moral issues emerge' and explore how physicality communicates them (ibid.). Kozel and Parviainen set the ground for a phenomenology of contemporary dance and the moving body. Similarly, I am interested in the journey through and within the lived experience to reveal how essence and form are reflected kinesthetically (Kozel, 2007, p. 22).

According to Parviainen (1998), Sheets-Johnstone's *Phenomenology of Dance* (1966) does not clearly demonstrate its phenomenological identity (Parviainen, 1998, p. 12). Nevertheless, the latter's article, *From Movement to Dance* (2012), explores kinaesthetic memory in learning through a phenomenological lens. The study attempts to determine the empirical parameters of meaning-making processes in dance movement. In *Dance and the Lived Body* (1987), Horton Fraleigh attempts to approach dance as a text and describes the experience of the dancing body within time and space. Although she appropriates the 'lived body' as it appears in existential philosophy, she fails to define it in this context. Instead, she remains on an intuitive analysis of her subjective experience, not engaging in depth with philosophy.

While phenomenologists have extensively scrutinised the performing body, there is a gap in understanding interiority during the re-enactment of traumatic psychosomatic states. The study revealed the connection between essence and form while capturing the kinaesthetic reflections of the lived experience (Kozel, 2007, p. 22). Evidenced through the latest developments in the field of performing arts, the study expands beyond the theorisation of praxis to praxis itself, giving birth to creative and

performative opportunities while shedding light on the embodiment of suffering and the interiority of trauma.

### 1.3 Phenomenology and Greek Tragedy

The present research forms a dramaturgical and performative, rather than a philosophical approach to Greek tragedy, where the body and the embodied subjectivity comprise the null point of the phenomenological enquiry. Scholarship seems to have marginalised the area of possibilities between phenomenology and Greek tragedy, neglecting body-centric associations through the theories of Husserl or Merleau-Ponty. Furthermore, most of the work brings in the proscenium Hegel's phenomenology and the concept of time. The most common areas of interrogation resulting from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) are the theorisation of the temporality of tragedy (Billings, 2014; George, 2006) or the philosophising of the ethical (Gasché, 2003) or existential dimensions of tragedy in modernity (Rancher, 2008) addressing issues of 'incommensurability, discontinuity, otherness, strife, and crisis' (George, 2006). Other current phenomenological developments in tragic theatre involve the phenomenology of the mask (Bukala, 2014; Conroy and Leitch, 2015; Grimes, 1975) or the dramatic space (Weiss, 2020).

In the realm of contemporary continental philosophy, scholars have demonstrated a noticeable interest in treating the tragedy as a conceptual model or literary genre to analyse structures of justice and power within societal systems and their evolution from antiquity to modern times (Billings, 2014; Mudde, 2009; Oliver, 1996). That explicates the analytical fixation of literature with Sophocles' *Antigone*, a tragedy where the appropriation of the philosophical thought of Hegel, Heidegger and Kierkegaard interminably recurs (Gall, 2003; Mudde, 2009; Oliver, 1996; Rancher, 2008) in search of the essence of tragedy (Gall, 2003).

Hegel's phenomenology is employed in feminist readings of *Antigone* to 'propose that a tragedy of action [...] is inescapable for subjectivity understood as socially constituted and always already socially engaged' within the framework of the community (Mudde, 2009, p. 183). Assertions that subjectivity should be

approached as the product 'of relations embodying potential tragedy' (ibid.) or attempts to identify the position of women in modern Western society and discuss the family value, as well as the impositions of the domestic sphere on femininity (Oliver, 1996), appear to question Hegel's example of *Antigone*. Despite the literature invested in this particular tragedy, phenomenology is regarded again as a philosophical device for social analysis rather than an avenue to describe the lived experience.

On the contrary, the *Phenomenology of Pain in Ancient Greek Tragedy* (Bouzioti, 2013/2017) constitutes a pure phenomenological account of pain, suffering and absent bodies in the tragedies of *Prometheus Bound*, *Bacchae*, *Medea*, *Oedipus* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. The presentation introduces a contemporary phenomenological reading of the embodied subjectivity in Greek tragedy. The endeavour to describe the perceptual fields of consciousness and the lived experience of suffering within dramaturgical and performative contexts was fundamental in formulating the phenomenological enquiry of the present thesis.

Stage directions of the tragic body are detected in the practical context. However, they do not bear any explicit link between phenomenology and tragedy, nor have they happened to be viewed as objects of phenomenological speculation. For instance, Theodoros Terzopoulos' (Theatre ATTIS) *Bacchae* (1986) evidenced the existence of body-centric training where physicality expands vocality and vice-versa. His so-called *Dionysian Method* involves breathing and energy release exercises concentrated around a repetitive pelvis movement. This way, the performer releases 'all the things we need to hide behind reason'. At the same time, meanings are conveyed not through words but through 'physical vibrations' (Terzopoulos, 2016), which are defined as the 'primal quality' indicating an instinctive physical language (ibid.).

The continuation of Terzopoulos' practical heritage infused with evident influences from Zarrilli's psychophysical training is apparent in the ensemble's *Simeio Miden* (Zero Point) practice led by Savvas Stroumpos. Although the company's name references the Husserlian null point, their work does not explicitly state possible associations with phenomenology.



In the dance field, contemporary artist Dimitris Papaioannou claims to choreograph tragedy adaptations in a non-psychological way to elicit feelings and not an understanding of the plot (Papaioannou, 2018). His continuous demand for a first-order reaction reminds the phenomenological bracketing where the importance lies in 'what your eyes can capture and not what you know' already (ibid.). Papaioannou seeks a deep understanding of the human body, which is quite evident in his work. His training draws on Laban, whereas the body is constantly deconstructed in its aliquot parts through the 'crystallisation of fundamental and archetypical movement' (ibid.). Characteristic adaptations of Greek tragedies include *Medea*<sup>2</sup> (2008) and *Homer's Iliad, Rapsody 10* (2010), while intense mythological references are apparent in *The Great Tamer* (2017) and *Transverse Orientation* (2022).

Conversely, Pina Bausch's mythic representations (i.e. *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1974; *Orphée et Eurydice*, 2008) communicate through psychological movement historically and culturally shaped entities investigating human and sexual relations through the motifs of synchronisation and repetition (e.g. *The Rite of Spring*, 1975). Arguably, her psychological performative language urges performers to enrich their character with their inner impulse (*singularity*) through improvisation and co-creation. Bausch examines the subjective experience through *what* moves the performing body, not *how* it moves (interview with J. Schmidt in Servos et al., 1984). Particularly influential to my work are Bausch's hybrid models of representation that combine film, dance and theatrical techniques, mainly found in the documentary-dance film *Dance, Dance Otherwise We Are Lost* (2011), which was an anthology of Bausch's works directed by Wim Wenders as a tribute to the choreographer.

## **2. Research Objectives**

The experimental nature of the research required a concrete framework to avoid deviations due to the trial-and-error approach adopted in the studio. Given the embedded reflexive approach, the performers played an active role in the research design. Their contributions had a highly informative character that facilitated the advancement and supported the evolution of the process.

Firstly, I had to design a methodology to translate theory into practice. Secondly, I needed to direct studio practice and inform theory through findings. The research objectives were formulated around the establishment of a phenomenological model of theoretical analysis (dramaturgical) but also of practical reflection (performer training) and embodiment (theatre directing). Hence, the research question is encapsulated as follows:

- What can phenomenology disclose about the suffering body in the theoretical interpretations and directorial practices of Greek tragedy?

Consequently, the following sub-questions arise:

- In what ways can phenomenology inform the dramaturgical analysis of classic texts?
- How can we realise phenomenology in the practice of Greek tragedy (performer training and theatre directing) to embody internal experiences?

Qualitative exploration offers a deeper understanding of underexamined phenomena highlighting possible issues (Cavana et al., 2001; Marshall and Rossman, 2006) in the embodiment of psychophysical traumatisation. The research focused on the phenomenological exploration of the suffering body in the making process of Greek tragedy adaptations. Namely, *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus and Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Medea*.

Identifying the research questions and concretising the research framework acted as systematic methods of data collection and organisation. In this respect, the research was concerned with unknown phenomena emerging during performer training and theatre directing and identifying solutions to be used by future researchers and practitioners (Phillips and Pugh, 2000).

The thesis consists of three Chapters which discuss theoretical and practical approaches to the body in *Prometheus Immobile* (2018), *Bacchae in Absentia* (2019) and *Medea Inside* (2021). Every Chapter is subdivided into two sections: Performer Training and Performance Making. In Chapter I: *Prometheus Immobile* (2018), I investigate immobility as psychophysical imprisonment. First, I introduce the reader

to the fundamental principles of a phenomenological investigation in studio practice: breathing, the senses and movement. Then, I refer to the research framework around the concepts of ecstasis, absence and recessiveness evidenced through examples from my practice. The Chapter closes with a discussion on early observations.

The second Chapter, *Bacchae in Absentia* (2019), explores consciousness in psychosomatic imprisonment following Leder's modes of embodiment. The exploration reaches the depths of mental illness and related ecstatic manifestations. The Chapter offers a detailed guide to practice-based activities and navigates the reader through phenomenological and practical findings.

Chapter III: *Medea Inside* (2021) forms the phenomenological examination of a hybrid product as determined by the occurrence of the pandemic in 2020. The Chapter hosts a set of psychophysical exercises conducted in physical and virtual environments discussing recorporealisation through the interventions of virtual performer training and remote directing (teledirecting). *Medea Inside* looks at confinement in those settings and investigates pregnancy in the context of selfhood and otherness.

The Conclusion summarises the research findings, touching upon the themes under examination from a dramaturgical, directorial and pedagogic perspective. In addition, it discusses how the proposed phenomenological model (PMPP) has facilitated embodiment and the wider psychosomatic benefits generated from phenomenological training. Finally, it cultivates the ground for further advancements in remote directing and applied theatre.

### **3. Phenomenology in Practice**

#### **3.1 Phenomenology and Psychophysical Training: Thinking in PaR Terms**

In most of the exercises I design, the phenomenological drive is incorporated to investigate lived experience in various forms and body conditions. The research builds upon the practices of Phillip Zarrilli and Meg Stuart, utilising my previous

phenomenological interventions (i.e. blindfolds for the examination of sensory deprivation) to create new practical agendas in performer training.

First, the aim is to explore the performing subject's psychophysical response in conditions of absence, suffering, and internal or external imprisonment. Second, the project seeks to understand corporeal and perceptual implications among individuals (i.e. intersubjective experience) in line with the phenomenological enquiry of the study. Therefore, in order to uncover and understand the human condition, we need to position and navigate ourselves as researchers within various fields, maintaining openness and curiosity to embrace difference and novelty. The complexity of responses and rejoinders is characteristic of human nature, while individualisation is fundamental in the phenomenological method. This attitude underlines our phenomenological stance and allows for exploration and experimentation. PaR is inextricably and essentially dependent on that in the same way science relies on laboratory experimentation, trial and error and the liberty to doubt.

Mock integrates a reflexive attitude in studio practice giving prominence to corporeal approaches through practice. In *Performing Processes: Creating Live Performance* (2000), she indicates a cyclical model of performance proposing the recycling between processes of conception, development, presentation, reception and reflection (p. 9). Current developments in performer training show that practice is more favourably served from a reflective embodied phenomenology with epistemologies that might incline towards the Husserlian method of a separated researcher or the Heideggerian one, where the practitioner is involved in their subjects' lifeworld. By adopting the phenomenological attitude (Wilson, 2015, p. 42), my research uses a pre-reflective circle of somatokinetic investigations through continuous validation of findings to capture the lived experience of the suffering body.

PaR illustrates the journey from phenomenology as philosophy to phenomenology as a research method. It forms a conceptual framework where the 'creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs' (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 5). The artistic product results from a creative research process, and

its content 'can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research' (ibid.).

The study drew on Phillip Zarrilli's phenomenological heritage in performer training to apply it to the field of non-logocentric performance in Greek tragedy. In *(Toward) A Phenomenology of Acting* (2019), Zarrilli addresses questions of attentiveness through 'first-person accounts of embodied practice' (Zarrilli, 2017), while his work encompasses elements from Asian martial arts (taijiquan/kalarippayattu) and yoga to develop self and bodily awareness, attunement between body and mind (bodymind) and energy directing in pre-performative actor training (Zarrilli, 2017). Similar exercises were incorporated at the beginning of each workshop to explore those areas and introduce the ensembles to the realm of psychophysical training.

In Stuart's practice, exploring emotional states through breathing allocates the dancer outside herself, 'both as a practice and as a form' (Peeters, 2010, p. 22). Her methods include the Alexander and Klein techniques, Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) and contact improvisation to release the body from unnecessary tension and enhance focus, body control and communication with the self. According to Stuart, the dancer's body needs to be characterised by emptiness and transparency (p. 29) – principles that resonate with the researcher's attitude in relation to phenomenological reduction. Variations of Stuart's activities enriched the study's psychophysical agenda, particularly in the search for the lived experience of sensory deprivation and the understanding of the reciprocal relationship between emotionality and movement.

The employment of Zarrilli and Stuart's practices serves a dual purpose. First, we bring together well-articulated psychophysical methods in the two fields we examine: dance and theatre. Second, as both approaches are developed with a focus on the outer and inner body, they facilitate and invest in phenomenological enquiry.

Moreover, there is an undeniable connection between physical theatre and the postmodern *mise-en-scène*, which is found in elements such as non-logocentrism, the 'density of signs', 'musicalisation' and physicality, elemental heterogeneity and the 'aesthetics of risk' (Lehmann, 2006). From Artaud's *body without organs* to

Grotowski's narrator body and from Brecht's political bodies to Beckett's disembodied subjectivities, we understand that most of those practices adhere to the same principles of physical theatre. Yet, Wilson, Bausch and Papaioannou are contemporary artists interested in dance theatre that involves large choruses (especially for Bausch and Papaioannou); they share similar aesthetics of simplicity; emphasise the *opsis* of theatre and adopt 'visual dramaturgy' (Lehmann, 2006) by designing dream-like landscapes that interact with the actor's body and movement; incorporate in their directions stylised gestures with Gestalt connotations that conform with the psychological; involve psychophysical training or acting; and work with ensembles utilising devising practices where the 'rehearsal [functions] as collective thought-process, piloted by the director' (Hayman, 1979, p. 134).

Thus, my contribution is rather holistic in the lineage of somatic practice. It synthesises elements from psychological acting (i.e. Stanislavskian method) and physical training informed by interdisciplinary practice (i.e. Zarrilli, Stuart). My psychophysical approach adheres to phenomenological principles and focuses on the embodiment of suffering (not its ostensible representation). I aspire that such an approach will elevate performance and benefit further advancements in performer training, theatre directing, or other choreographic and somatic practices and applied theatre.

### **3.2 Research Methodology and Interview Design**

The research methodology was framed by various mixed strategies that facilitated the collection, documentation and analysis of qualitative data grounding the descriptive evaluation of the embodied experience. The framework was based on in-studio and online experimentation in performer training and data collection through observation and interviews. In detail, the methods used in the study varied from participant observation (live or recorded) and field notes to the documentation of first-person narratives obtained in semi-structured interviews, focus groups (ensembles) and informal discussions that would follow a workshop or a set of exercises. The semi-structured interviews were developed upon a set of 'wide-angle

questions' (Kozel, 2007, pp. 48-51) to ensure the phenomenological focus of the research design and 'understand phenomena by descriptive means' (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). The questions were formulated according to the respective performative enquiry in each case study. Semi-structured interviews allow space for the participants' lived experiences to unfold, starting from bracketed curiosity (Wilson, 2015):

How did it feel to...?

Please describe the experience of...

How did you experience (the)...?

What were your thoughts or feelings about/when/during...?

According to the Husserlian method, thematic and content analysis are used as meaning-making mechanisms within a reductive approach to data analysis. First, finding patterns in first-person descriptions of the experienced phenomenon leads to establishing units of meaning while bracketing all external knowledge. Then, by utilising imaginative variation (such as hypotheses or possible scenarios) and articulation through the language of performance, we get to the essence of the experience in a situated structure; that is, we describe the phenomenon within a particular context by generalising the experience and not by universalising it (Giorgi, 1985; Smith and Osborn, 2003).

The 'interview schedule' (Smith and Osborn, 2003) does not draw on a 'predetermined hypothesis' awaiting validation (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p. 55). Instead, the development of clear units of meaning derives from identified patterns in multiple communicational and expressive systems (performative and verbal) in first-person description. This organises the responses into thematic categorisation. However, scheduling is essential as it structures the interview and focuses on the subject matter while preparing the researcher for potential difficulties and ways to overcome them (ibid.). In short, we observe that interview scheduling precedes the interview, whereas 'theme clustering' (ibid.) and connection between themes are post-interview data analysis processes.

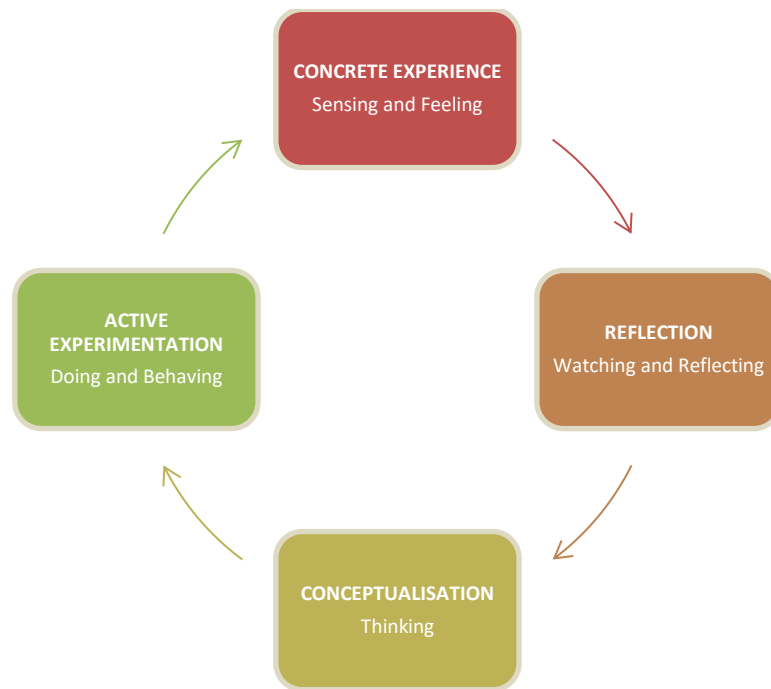
### **3.2.1 Sampling**

The practical investigation of the research took place at the facilities provided by the University of Leeds. I recruited undergraduate and postgraduate students with relevant backgrounds (e.g. dance, physical theatre) or similar research and artistic interests (i.e. philosophy, postmodernism, somatic practices). The sample varied between eleven to thirteen participants for each project. Participant selection for the inaugural performance was based on personal invitation, snowball sampling and announcements to the broader community of the University. In contrast, the *Bacchae* and *Medea* adaptations used official calls and auditions addressed to dance professionals and theatre practitioners while expanding the search to dance schools (Northern School of Contemporary Dance; Yorkshire Dance) and other Higher Education Institutions (Leeds Beckett University; Leeds Arts University). In *Medea Inside* (2021), the audition was advanced to a psychophysical workshop, where I joined forces with the actor trainer and coach, Mark Shields.

### **3.2.2 Studio Methodology**

The questions addressed to the ensemble during the workshop examined the participants' immediate lived experiences and internal responses to an activity. This two-phased collection of qualitative data (workshop discussions and post-performance interviews) ensures the accuracy of findings and minimises assumptions during the meaning-making process. Besides verbal communication, which can sometimes be limiting in a practice-based context (Van Manen, 1997), the research also used observation and intuition to extract meanings from bodily communication. In this respect, the performative nature of the project justifies the use of recordings and field notes.





*Fig. 1 Adaptation of Kolb's Reflective Model (1984)*

However, in a practice-based setting, the lived experience alone cannot provide the researcher with the research outcomes and lead to 'developmental insight' (Bolton, 2010, p. xix). Instead, it requires a reflective approach (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Loughran, 2002) and an examination of the process as an ongoing learning and research activity. The study used the approach of 'reflection in/on action' (Schön, 1983), following the rationale of Kolb's experiential learning cycle (see *Tables A and B*). Starting from the initial stimulus, the 'concrete experience' (Kolb, 1984), where the ensemble is introduced to an activity for the first time or explores an exercise from a different perspective, it then develops through the stages of reflection and evaluation. At this point, the participants reflect on their lived experiences through discussions coordinated by the researcher. Still, since the material is recorded, the researcher can reflect and assess the findings from their observation, field notes and group discussions. Next is the stage of analysis and conceptualisation, where we form abstract and generalise ideas in a given context.

A. ADAPTATION OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD [HUSSERL AND GIORGI]		
A1	Bracketing all external knowledge	Neutrality and transparency for both researcher and performer (e.g. Breathing in studio practice)
A2	Patterns in first-person descriptions	Participant observation; participant (non-) verbal responses and behaviours in activities
A3	Establishment of units of meaning	Exploring meaning-giving and meaning-making processes; codes of communication within the ensemble
A4	Imaginative variation	(Guided) Improvisation; Activities; Performer's input
A5	Identifying the essence of the lived experience in a situated structure	Formation of ideas; Generalisation; Finalising the research process or the creative product

B. ADAPTATION OF THE REFLECTIVE MODEL AND ACTION RESEARCH [KOLB AND SCHÖN]		
B1	Initial stimulus - experience	Introduce the ensemble to the text or an activity
B2	Reflection and Evaluation	Focus groups; Interviews; Diaries
B3	Analysis and Conceptualisation	Data Collection; Workshop evaluation; Formation of Ideas (i.e. relevant to the research or to the directorial approach)
B4	Active Experimentation	Improvisation and Development of new or extant psychophysical agendas

C. FINDINGS VALIDATION METHODS			
C1	Colaizzi	Validation based on	Research subjects
C2	Van Kaam		Experts; peers; audience
C3	Van Manen		Researcher as a reflective practitioner
C4	Giorgi		Publication and criticism; audience reviews (including interviews and questionnaires)

D. PHENOMENOLOGICAL MODEL OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICE I [PMPP]					
Zero Point					
Step 1	A1				
Step 2	B1				
Step 3	A2				
Step 4	B2	+	C3	+ /or	C1
					C2
Step 5	B3	+	A3		
Step 6	B4	+	A4		
Step 7	A5				
Step 8	C4				
Step 9	Repeat Process (if necessary)				

In the studio, the researcher-practitioner evaluates the method employed; for instance, detecting the strengths and weaknesses of a workshop in order to examine its effectiveness and improve it. In addition, the investigator analyses the material collected while moving on to forming the first units of meaning. Then, active experimentation might take the form of improvisation or signify the development and readjustment of activities from extant agendas.

This ongoing process of systematic enquiry identifies action research as an integrated methodology acknowledging the educational-training setting where the study is conducted. Both action research and the reflective approach adhere to the principles of phenomenological analysis. While the enquiry is concerned with the

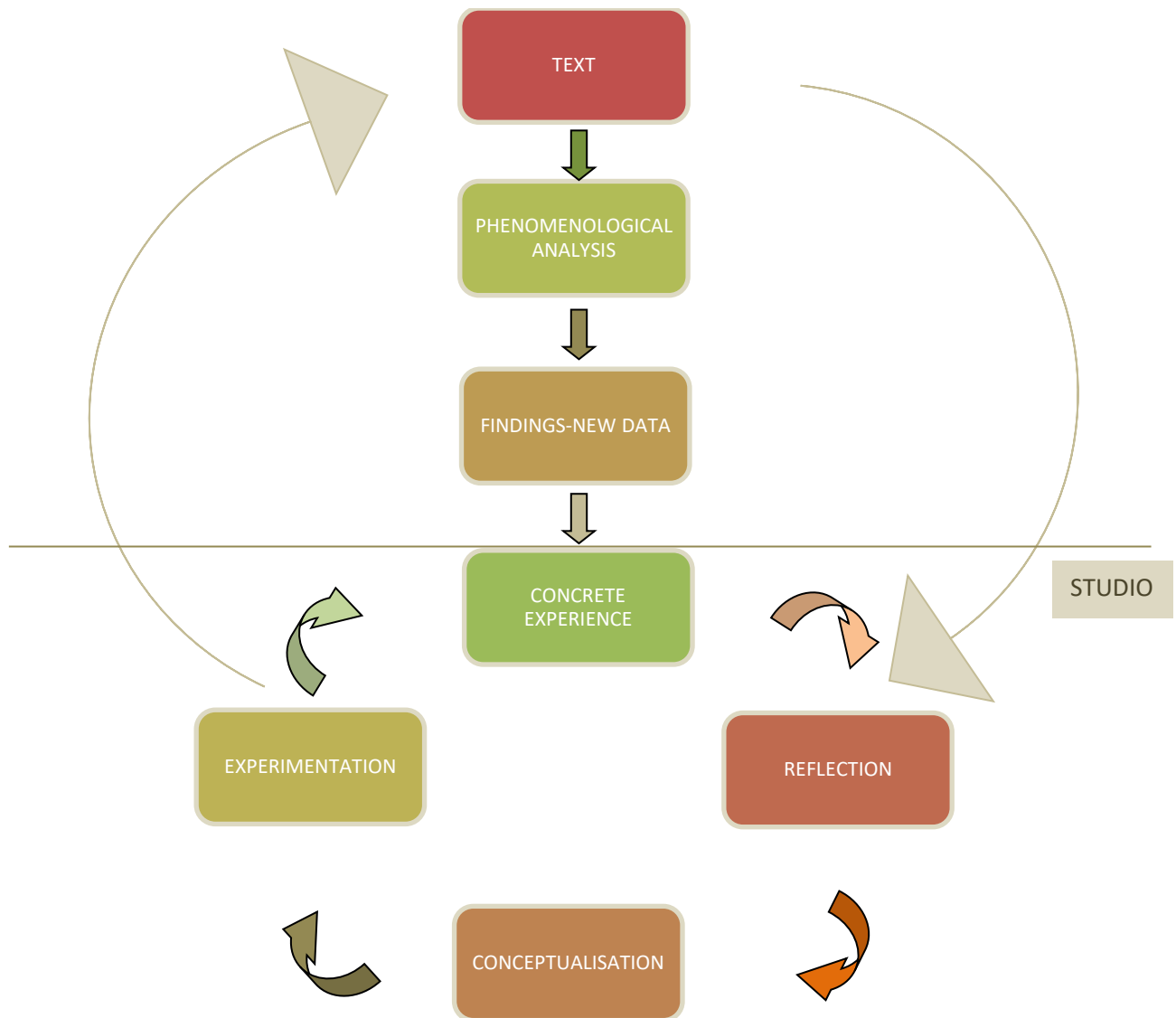
applicability of phenomenology as a descriptive method of Greek tragedy, and consequently its implementation as a practice in (psychophysical) performer training in the same context, it is pivotal to secure the validation of the method through its findings (see proposed model: *Table D* and *fig. 2*).

In transcendental phenomenology, we have three distinct approaches to validation: Giorgi's (1985) approach, where the verification of findings is produced from publication and criticism; Colaizzi's (1978) reconfirmation by the research subjects; and Van Kaam's (1966) intersubjective validation by experts (Reiners, 2012, p. 2). Although the findings are primarily validated by the researcher, I employed a set of validating methods due to the mixed nature of the project (theory and practice) (see *Tables C* and *D*).

On the other hand, in the context of practical implementation, we acknowledge how a form of confirmation is also indirectly generated by multiple bodies (Reiners, 2012): the long-term participants who compare and describe their experience in group discussions during the workshops or the final interviews (Colaizzi, 1978); external observers of the process including peers or audience (Van Kaam, 1966); and the researcher as a reflective practitioner (Van Manen, 1997). At this point, and although the research takes Husserl's descriptive route as promoted by Giorgi, it is apparent that 'the more these ideas are dissected, the more difficult it is to draw a clear line' between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Wilson, 2015, p. 40) when working with intersecting fields and overlapping concepts.

### **3.2.3 Online Methodology**

*Medea Inside*, the final practical piece, moved to a digital environment due to the pandemic. As a result, ontological, ethical, methodological and pragmatic issues arose alongside the necessity for respective modifications. The online methodology relied on the principle of (remote) observation and replicated online the reflective methodology I employed in the studio.



*Fig. 2 The Phenomenological Model of Performance Practice (PMPP)*

In addition, I incorporated the method of narrative enquiry (Lyons and Kubler-LaBoskey, 2002), where journaling starts as a form of narrative phenomenology to develop into performative phenomenology. In other words, the research subjects produce qualitative data in written form (diaries) and translate them into embodied data at a later stage.

Although narrative methodologies can reveal the intention behind human action (p. 163), the research was mainly concerned with data that fostered the understanding of 'phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them' (Klein and Myers,

1999, p. 69). The task required the subjects to re-articulate their responses through movement that would be recorded and percolated in clear kinetic patterns to be performed in the next online session. The presentations involved peer-reviewing, while the generated material informed the dance film.

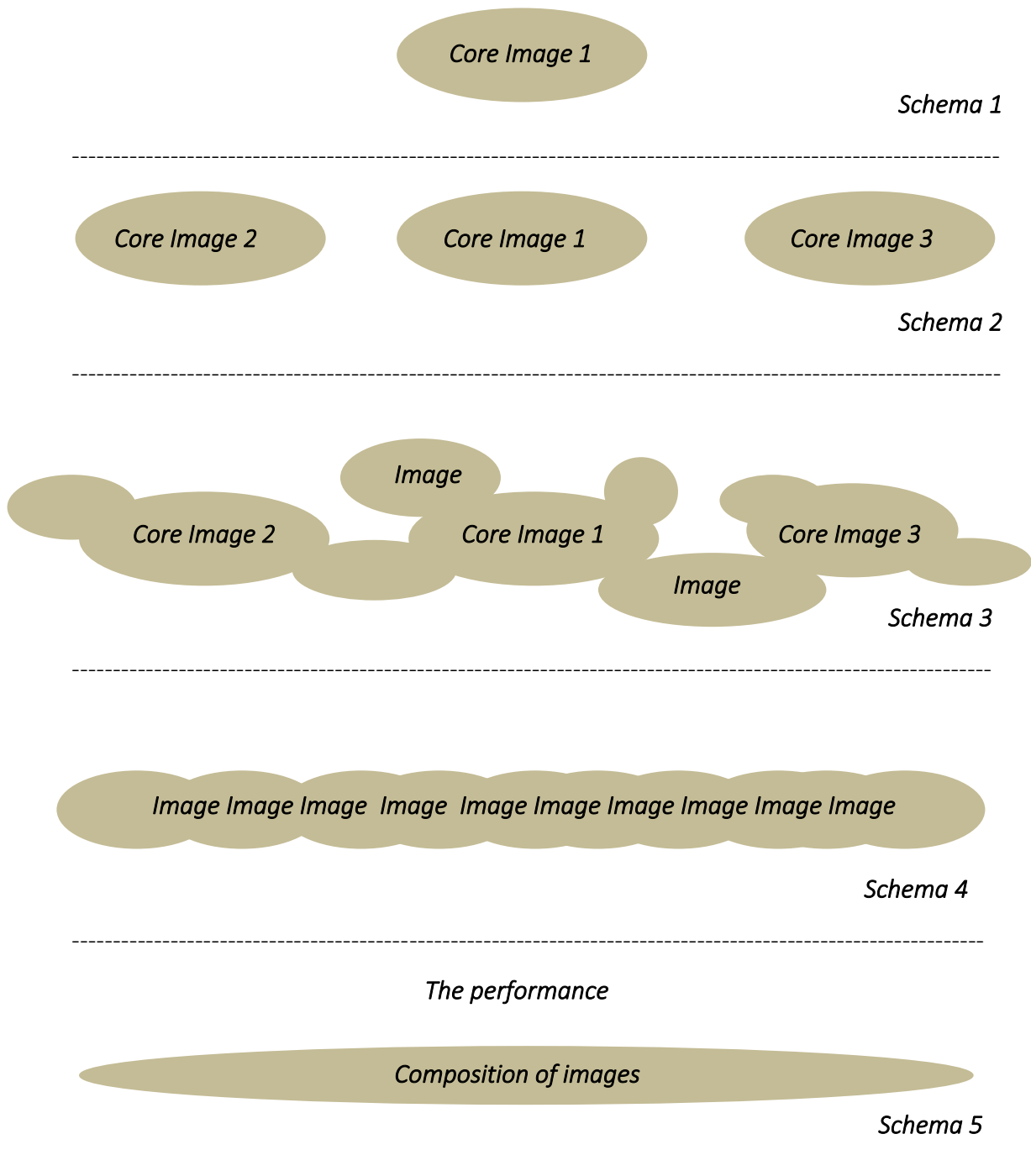
In detail, each participant would daily update a personal online journal for at least two weeks. Those reports expressed their quotidian experience of isolation, capturing their psychophysical response in verbal, written and performative forms. The ensemble learned to 'articulate the interplay between writing and improvisational dancing to describe a methodology for an embodied, sensual and experiential mode of writing/dancing' (Middelow, 2011).

#### **4. Conceptualisation as Coalescence: Visual Dramaturgy and Musicalisation**

In Physics, *coalescence* is the process of two fluid drops merging. The phenomenon is caused by their mechanical properties. The process of coalescence describes with precision the conceptualisation process in my work. Core images, which initially stand on their own, grow by merging with other images. The visual material derives directly from an imaginative process or is generated and inspired by studio improvisation.

It is observed that during the coalescence process between fluid particles, surface tension results in a consequent energy release. The dynamics developed within intersubjective relationships similarly release energy, enriching, reshaping and reconfiguring the material, which is then realised through the medium of the body and its movement. Every new visual, aesthetic or somatokinetic product is an image that merges with its adjacent ones, thereby composing the performance.

The graph below (*fig. 3*) demonstrates the conceptualisation process. Allow me to use a few examples from my case studies to explain the illustration. In the first schema, for instance, the core image involves Prometheus grasping the light/fire in *Prometheus Immobile*.



*Fig. 3 Conceptualisation of the process as coalescence*

Similarly, in *Bacchae in Absentia*, the image refers to Agave’s dance while holding Pentheus’ head or Medea’s attempt to uproot her feet from the ground in *Medea Inside*. In the second schema, there is a conscious effort to create two or more core images as an attempt to demarcate the performance. These images are set to

construct the plot architecture. For example, in *Bacchae in Absentia*, we had the birth of Pentheus' head in the opening and the final scene. In the third schema, the images are the director's imaginative products or the ensemble's improvisational outcomes. Finally, the fourth schema shows the organisation and synthesis of the material (assemblage), while schema five provides an illustration of the performance as a whole.

In the context of a holistic organisation of the performative elements, we must acknowledge the contribution of other collaborators. Particular emphasis was given to the light design with Jack Weir in *Bacchae in Absentia* and my assistant Pedro Sánchez-Cervera in *Prometheus Immobile*. Light played a pivotal role in the representation of dismemberment (e.g. in Pentheus' sparagmós in *Bacchae in Absentia*) through the theatrical appropriation of Caravaggio's technique, the *chiaroscuro*, encountered in the Black Theatre of Prague and Papaioannou's performances. The technique utilises light to draw attention to an object while background objects remain in darkness. Moreover, we used light to support the creation of dream-like landscapes that resembled regions of the subconscious mind highlighting the concept of absence. In *Medea Inside*, I remotely instructed the ensemble on how to use light in order to emphasise specific body regions or actions.

Similarly, music and sound design were pivotal for the embodied investigation in the studio and on stage. Although the study cannot provide a phenomenological analysis of music in the context of performer training and directing, performers admitted that music reinforced the emergence or enrichment of particular feelings during rehearsals. For example, it facilitated B1's feelings of empathy during the lament of the Chorus in *Bacchae in Absentia*.

Moreover, the continuous music in the first two performances was preferred due to the absence of a composer, but also in order to create an emotional escalation. In *Prometheus Immobile*, the tone of the music changes midway to portray the contradiction between actions and consequences, revolution and torture, or power and pain. Pauses were used when we needed to create a contrast or underline the vocalicity of a body. In *Bacchae in Absentia*, I use a repetitive pattern to illustrate the sound of obsession and madness. Breathing or other bodily sounds generated by



intercorporeal or environmental encounters composed the psychophysical soundscape of the performances.

In *Medea Inside*, the process was reversed; the music score was composed once the film was assembled (post-production) so as to match with precision every bodily micro-gesture, move or response and facial or vocal expression. Music references were utilised as a pre-score for performers to work with initially. The music score incorporated natural sounds of breathing, pain moans, screams, gasps and pants in a vibrant soundscape that comprised corporeal vocality with electronic sound. The integrated sound effects aimed to create a naturally immersive yet not intrusive or exaggerated experience.

For instance, water is a powerful audiovisual element that governs the film for its connotations, primarily to the psychobiological construction of the volatile nature of femininity (menstrual blood, breast milk, tears) attributed to it by Western society (Bramwell 2001). Submarine effects and ultrasound is composed for the balloon-blowing scene to create a recessive impression of the interiors of the maternal body. Through this sound, we return to the experience of being-in-the-womb as embodied subjectivities before entering the 'external' world. For this scene, in particular, there is a mix of air and water that incorporates the performers' breath.

The film's composer, Vasilis Georgakopoulos, remarks that the music 'religiously followed the kinesiology and energy in every scene' in an attempt to 'decode movement and expression [...] and translate them into sound' (Georgakopoulou, 2021). Pauses and sounds were alternated to communicate ambiguous states indicating the interchangeability between juxtaposing concepts such as life and death, peace and war, love and hatred.

## *Prometheus Immobile* (2018)

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### I. Performer Training

#### Introduction

If we seek to understand the traumatizing [sic], disruptive presence of the suffering body in the representational modes of contemporary political drama, we must begin with the body as zero-point of the subject's phenomenal world. (Garner, 1994, p. 162)

The performance *Prometheus Immobile* (2018)<sup>2</sup> signifies the phenomenological zero-point (*nullpunkt*) of my research in the context of suffering embodiment in Greek tragedy. According to Husserl, the *nullpunkt* designates the body as the source of all cognitive processes and is determined by the spatiotemporal nexus of *here and now*. The departure from *Prometheus Immobile* discloses an intentional and essential ambiguity between the methodological and the ontological. Immobility denotes every beginning; the staticity typifying the zero-point is the peaceful moment of contemplation before motion and any other form of action or cognitive activity. Michael Polanyi's '*from-to* structure, which characterises experience in general' (Leder, 1990, p. 15) describes the intentionality that is inherent in subjects and the consequent motility towards the object of their attention.

In the project, motility appears as a movement *towards* an understanding of embodiment: a shift from staticity to motion. Therefore, this research forms a(n experience of) movement towards the understanding and embodiment of the lived experience. Yet, to understand movement, we first need to experience immobility and view those two as complementary rather than contradictory ecstatic modes. It is understood that Prometheus views the world from a fixed point; his immobile corporeal status distorts his perceptual fields by differentiating the spatiotemporal qualities of his being-in-the-world. His staticity gives rise to methodological questions in the phenomenological context of training and performance-making:

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<sup>2</sup> The performance was supported by the Centre of Practice Research in the Arts (CePRA), University of Leeds in 2018. An excerpt of the piece was presented at the conference *Per/Forming Futures* at Middlesex University (2019). The recording of the show is available at the complete e-thesis version; the link is removed from this version in accordance with the copyright legislation.

- How can the performing body perceive and embody the viscerality of torture?
- In what ways does the ecstatic communicate the inner body and vice versa?
- How do we train and direct the performing body drawing from and capitalising on the lived experience?

This chapter explores methodological and interpretative possibilities in a contemporary adaptation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. It aims to establish a phenomenological model in performer training and performance-making in Greek tragedy. *Prometheus Immobile* is characterised by openness, fostering a trial-and-error process so as to reshape and reevaluate my practice.

The project-specific questions above address key areas that arise from the primal research questions. Namely, the first query seeks to understand how the recessive body perceives pain. This knowledge will take us to the understanding of the visceral impact of suffering, which will emerge through the exchange between dramaturgical analysis and improvisational sessions. The second question examines how this knowledge will be translated onto the ecstatic body through their chiasmatic interconnection and the concept of absence, allowing us to recognise the psychophysical impact of confinement. The third query asks what the new learning is for future applications. Here, I will create a practical guide of directorial and training techniques generated from the research of lived experience.

### **1. Studio practice**

The studio practice followed the progressive logic of training, rehearsals, and performance as the final destination. Hence, it was divided into a series of workshops followed by a month of weekly rehearsals. The workshops required full attendance to ensure maximum engagement. However, due to the voluntary nature of the project, attendance was often impacted. Therefore, the rehearsals were scheduled on a one-to-one basis or in groups according to the ensemble's needs and other practical requirements. That also served solo or duet parts that called for

detailed attention, such as Io's dance duet with her father or other interactive parts, or the scenes that involved stage combat.

## **2. Research Aims**

As *Prometheus Immobile* was my first exploratory endeavour, I attempted an examination of the basic principles that underpin the theory of phenomenology. Accordingly, I started investigating the fundamental triangular relationship of breathing, emotions, and movement to identify perceptual, sensory, and bodily associations and their utility in performative contexts.

### **2.1 Relocating Breathing**

From consciousness studies to the disciplines of dance and theatre, breathing plays a central role in the 'systematic analysis of essential functions of the mind within the physicality of the body' (Nair, 2007, p. 154). Breathing is linked to temporality and consciousness through its repetitive nature. Possible alterations in the breathing pattern consecutively affect them and vice versa. In the *Restoration of Breath* (2007), Nair argues that 'the level of consciousness can be altered through systematic application of intentional breathing' (ibid.). This statement is supported by the late psychophysical approaches of the performing body. Zarrilli, for instance, who borrows from Eastern practices, links the 'outer surface body' (the ecstatic) to the 'aesthetic inner body' (the recessive) through the act of breathing (Zarrilli, 2007, p. 56).

Likewise, Meg Stuart's work *Are We Here Yet?* (Peeters, 2010) informs my practice facilitating the investigation and development of the fundamental relationship between breath, emotionality and movement. Stuart claims that breath manipulation and its relocation as 'the centre of awareness' (Peeters, 2010, p. 156) bypasses resistances while making accessible any desirable emotional state (ibid.).

Breathing constitutes the first pylon of my research practice as it actively contributes to the execution of motor processes and the exploration of (in)voluntary 'physical

and emotional states' (p. 20) that shape our perception. In *Prometheus Immobile*, breathing operated as the primary impetus towards the generation, management and alteration of emotional states, and it weaved the natural corporeal soundscape of the performance.



*Fig. 4 The ensemble in a breathing circle. Photo credits: Ramzi Merabet*

## 2.2 Reconfiguring the Senses

Before the increasing interest in sensory responsivity and the appropriation of psychoanalysis and phenomenology in the late twentieth century, most studies focused on external views of the performing phenomenon. Performance analysis primarily relied on philosophical and historical reviews, theoretical assumptions, observation and personal estimations. Therefore, those appraisals were based on an observatory rather than an empirical analysis that is not always indicative but reductive of the significance of embodied cognition for performers and characters.

On the contrary, phenomenology draws from the lived experience of the world as perceived through the senses. What is of interest in the particular body-centric context of tragedy adaptations is that the senses in performance appear to be much

more than receptive structures. For example, Banes and Lepecki's *The Senses in Performance* (2007) is a collection of practitioners' reflective accounts of sensory perception. Those accounts emphasise 'the political agency of the senses' (p. 3), which are subjacent but resistant to power and presence systems. Below I explain my views on Prometheus' biological body as politicised, where his senses operate as radical conductors of an authoritarian system.

Moreover, the workshops focused on sensory perception and responsivity, setting the ground for investigating concepts such as absence and background disappearance (Leder, 1990). Sense-based exercises studied these concepts in:

- the relationship between body and objects through their qualitative properties
- proprioception and exteroception
- sensory stimulation through taste and hearing
- sensory perception of time, space and intersubjective encounters

Sensory experimentation allowed us to understand bodily functionality and adjustability in real or fictional situations. For instance, cases of visual impairment (i.e. Teiresias, Oedipus) or metaphors employed to describe emotional or corporeal states, like Io's feeling of loss when walking in unknown territories, were informed by reenacting blindness with blindfolds.

### **2.3 Navigating Movement**

Given the body-centric approach of the research, movement could not be missing from the equation. Movement was treated in multiple ways: as a form of subjective expression, an ecstatic response manifesting the recessive body, and a mechanism of inhabitation and (re)configuration of the space. I employed principles and methods of movement informed by the Skinner Release Technique (SRT) to explore its phenomenological implications. In addition, I used guided improvisation to embellish forms of expression (Johnston, 2006, p. 5) and activate the unconscious perceptual fields of the embodied subject.

Movement exercises had a psychophysical base and included animal work to encourage the discovery of the chiasmatic nature of the body. For instance, observation of animal behaviour or Jan Fabre's exercise *The Lizard*, which introduced the recessive body through imagination and physicality. Fabre's physiological method does not look at psychological realism, where an emotional or psychological impulse initiates an action, but 'it stems from a physical impulse' (Cassiers et al., 2015, p. 277). The improvisation fostered experimentation with the performers' inner instincts, setting aside imposed socio-cultural restrictions. Hence, 'guided improvisation' was critical in performer training as 'the relationship between physical and emotional states and involuntary actions resulting from extreme situations' constitute the nullpunkt of the creative process (Peeters, p. 81). The performers, through the workshops, unanimously claimed that they acquired deeper body awareness and bonded with the team. Improvisation informed the rehearsals with kinaesthetically and emotionally rich material. All choreographed parts stood as cultural or sociopolitical statements manifested through presence or physicality; performers acquired the ability to embody and communicate that, without imitating movement (ibid.).

### **3. Setting up the framework**

The psychological and physical violence the characters of Prometheus and Io suffer in distinctive ways demonstrates the magnitude of holistic incarceration, disclosing a profound politicisation of the biological body in unison. Aeschylus portrays bodies as political milieux in the discourse with their physical environments, while violence evolves in individual and social spheres (Garner, p. 178). Prometheus' and Io's narratives of pain and loss constitute verbalised phenomenologies that disclose the pathogeny of their remote worlds. In Prometheus' case, evidence and emblem of the violent invasion of his body is the disclosure of his liver. This organ exists unseen in the visceral depths of the body in physiological conditions. Thus, two pivotal questions regarding studio practice emerge from the phenomenological interpretation of the text:

- How do we train the performers to access their inner bodies?
- How can we embody visceral and ecstatic vulnerability?

Aeschylus sheds light on the recessive body and its unseen viscosity that exists beyond our perception by medical imagery (Karp, 1996, pp. 4-5). My practice needed to communicate the impact of the psychophysical violence in *Prometheus Bound* and articulate pain in non-verbal ways. In the following sections, I demonstrate my devising methods. First, I discuss the incorporation of stillness to experiment with ecstasis. Second, I investigate *absence* with blindfolds and, finally, I employ an imaginative approach to understanding *recessiveness*.

### **3.1. Ecstasis: Exploring Immobility in Bodies of Resistance**

In order to embody the conditions of the psychophysical modes of imprisonment that occur in the tragedy, the workshops ran on the concept of stillness. Stillness exercises were embedded in the entire practice to familiarise the performers' bodies with that physical state. In addition, even if the activity did not involve stillness, I would ask them to freeze in unsuspecting moments. During the workshops, the performers became accustomed to freezing in uncanny positions with steady focus achieving a better sense of body awareness and control (P2, P3, P8, P9)<sup>3</sup>simultaneously. Stillness offered a higher level of sensitivity as the performers started to pay attention and give depth to the detail regarding their bodies or the space. Its longitude would gradually increase throughout the process to capture the psychophysical effects of immobility. For instance, P1 retained a crucified position on stage for two-thirds of the performance. Moreover, P5 performed Zeus' statue with extended arms for approximately fifteen minutes. The enactment of the obsessive intractability by Prometheus and Zeus, was intended to mirror the sickness that feeds power relations (Karp, p. 7). P5's body inevitably broke down, manifesting its collapse through the involuntary movement of shaking. This physiological bodily

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<sup>3</sup> Indicators for participant anonymisation according to the Data Protection Act (2018) and ESRC Framework for Research Ethics



response was incorporated in the final performance (P5), evidencing the embodiment of suffering generated in the workshops.

The externalisation of internal conflicts portrayed the ecstatic modes of representation. The same applies to the verbal disputes between characters displayed or implied in the text. I devised meaning-giving movements drawing from statuesque postures and representations of wrestling scenes on Greek vases, which by default were determined by a representational sense of diachronic immobility. Diachronicity, in this case, was meant to express the long-lasting presence of violence in power relations and the infinity of the internal conflicts we experience as human beings. The second workshop included a set of fighting exercises and wrestling. The performers would have to explore variations of fighting solo or in pairs and groups. Those variations would consist of fighting with or without certain body parts (i.e. hands) or with/without certain senses, such as fighting with blindfolds. That allowed different bodily regions forgotten in background disappearance to ecstatically emerge and display their contribution to activities of our daily bodies. We identified some wrestling postures which we infused with stillness during stage combat work. Stillness isolated the wrestlers' focus and drew attention right to the wrestling bodies. Immobility gave depth to the inter-corporeal moment, penetrating the phenomenal fields of embodied subjectivities.

### **3.2 Absence: Self-loss in Sensory Deprivation**

Absence is another examination area and refers to cases of mental illness, dreams, illusions, sensory deprivation, or states of unconsciousness where the subject cannot detect perceptual, sensory or motor activity. We understood that, by definition, it might be unlikely to reproduce or embody absence in full mode in the studio. Also, resources and time limitations in this first exploratory endeavour did not allow an in-depth exploration of absence. Thus, in *Prometheus Immobile*, I focused on bodily response and perception in simulations of sensory deprivation to draw parallels in real-life situations that would serve the tragedy.



*Fig. 5 Wrestling: Copying Greek wrestlers from a marble relief (510 B.C.) Source: Wikimedia Commons (2007). Photo credits: Johannes Rudloff*

In the ecstatic modes of absence we explored, I noticed a disposition consistent with Leder's (1990) definition of absence; that is, the condition where the body remains unthematized by its experience (p. 1). In detail, blindfolds introduced the performers in cases of visual impairment in a pre-reflective manner. Experiences of loss, insecurity and impotence could be analogised to Io's mental illness and eternal wandering in unfamiliar lands. Moreover, the ensemble seemed more confident and developed navigation skills in dark environments.

The blindfolds, combined with the conditions of slowness and stillness, facilitated the emergence of the absent body and the subconscious phenomenal fields in the dark scenes of Io's dream. The masks operated in a similar way for the Chorus. P2 experienced a form of loss and a 'trance' feeling of death (P2) while he was lying under the heavy black drape. He expressed a similar experience for the acts behind the mask; a shadow of absence was magnified, especially when performing on stage (P2). However, it was still unclear how to incorporate this physiological bodily response to explore the subconscious more substantially when studio practice presupposes conscious body-minds. Decision-making and emerging questions in *Prometheus Immobile* prepared the ground for my future research projects. *Bacchae* and *Medea* are two tragedies predominantly occupied with mental illness and absence of consciousness.

### 3.3 Recessiveness: Delving in Visceral Depths

From Aeschylus' descriptions, it appears that Ancient Greeks acknowledged hepatic regrowth. In the myth, the liver grows back every night, while the eagle returns every other day to attack it (Chen and Chen, 1994, pp. 754-5). The metaphor of the liver is intentional. This organ balances metabolism and processes blood by detoxifying chemical substances, among its many properties. Similarly, in meritocratic societal systems, the 'organs of power' (Zavros, 2017, p. 174) are accountable for restoring order. This allegory links the recessive body with broader sociopolitical mechanisms turning our attention inwards.

The phenomenological inquiry shifted from the ecstatic to the recessive to shed light on our visceral depths in the training process. Stuart's devising practice inspired the breathing exercises I used at the beginning of every workshop to draw attention to the body. This training choice is 'both preparative and compositional' (Strickson, 2018, p. 349) as the performer enters a mode of controlled self-isolation, inviting a 'quiet energy to be applied to the subsequent devising process' (p. 351).

Furthermore, that led to pregnancy-related studio research. Parts of our experimentation were incorporated into the show to represent Io's thirteen generations and the coming of Heracles. Breathing and stillness combined with animal work activated 'muscle-mind-imagination to discover imagery kinetically through sustained engagement' (p. 349). In that case, Fabre's *Lizard* exercise offered an insight into the body's recessive modalities and functionalities. The intertwining of those methods encouraged a more 'visceral' response during the embodiment of suffering from a threat addressed to an organ hidden in the body's visceral depths.

## II. Performance Making

### 1. Directorial Approach

In *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), Lehmann refers to the concept of 'visual dramaturgy' (pp. 93-95) to describe an unconventional theatrical form that resists the subordination to the logocentric dominance of the dramatic text while attributes



*Fig. 6 Prometheus and Io suffer eternal immobility and constant mobility, respectively. Photo credits: Georges Bacoust*

greater significance to elements located outside the hierarchy of language. Therefore, the emerging hierarchy of signs that are dominant within the universe of visual dramaturgy does not necessarily imply a merely visual organisation but an organic autonomy (ibid.), which in my practice develops within a (quasi) independent mode from the text. I used the prefix *quasi-* as the performative event generated by this adaptive process is not entirely definite. Instead, it is reframed and gravitates towards a body-centric dramaturgy.

The process aimed to reshape the language into a physical body through a visceral and ecstatic translation of the text to communicate it physically. Stuart's practical thinking informed the choreographic process. In particular, it facilitated the reconstruction of 'systems of translation' (Lepecki in Peeters, p.64) between the body language and the language as an autonomous body. Hence, I prioritised in-text body-related references and activities to practice the externalisation of invisible emotional states. For instance, Might instructs Hephaestus to '[t]ight round his ribs

(...) Go lower. Hoop his legs. Hit hard' [70-80] (McLeish and Raphael, 2013). Here, the language strongly expresses physical actions upon a body, aiming to restrict the embodied subjectivity. For this scene, I used a human triangle of violence to depict the diversity of violence in power relations.

Communicating meanings through *opsis* and gestural precision dictates a reenactment of the text that heavily relies on physicality and form. Each scene-episode constitutes an act of assembling choreographed images that operate within a 'tissue of signifiers' (Reinelt and Roach, 2007, p. 9), creating a series of consecutive tableau-vivants (Lehmann, 2006, p. 151)<sup>4</sup>. The images supersede each other, embroidering the plot architecture in semiotic and phenomenological coherence. At the same time, the tableau-vivants, as clear-cut performative manifestations of embodied meanings, use *framing* to indicate well-defined beginnings and endings. In Robert Wilson's theatre, frames are deployed in that sense, resulting in the reception of the stage space as a 'deliberately and programmatically' closed entity of strict geometries and bodily precision (ibid.). The stage space in *Prometheus Immobile* exists in a dreamlike fictive temporality inviting the audience to experience embodied sufferings and exposed visceralities.

The psychophysical material produced in the studio through improvisation informed the choreographies. Each gesture forms a phenomenological vector, an embodied signifier, that derives 'its value from its position within the picture-system' (Reinelt and Roach, p. 9). The aim was to incorporate the subjective lived experience into a 'socially recognisable' kinesiology (Peeters, p. 66). The intertwining of the 'subjective' and the 'social' carries the essence of the politicisation of Prometheus' bodily presence. That is ecstatically portrayed in the sculpturally choreographed landscape of bodies (p. 64) around him. The corporeal fragmentation and the uncanny bodies found in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) significantly influenced my gestural lexicon in *Prometheus Immobile*. There

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<sup>4</sup> The episodes were: *Cosmogonia, Evolution, Titans and Gods, Dominance, The Fire, Apocalypse, Crisis, Collision, Punishment, Fate, Oceanides, Attack, Meandering, Oestrus, Loss, Prophecy, Justice, To Egypt, Volte-face, Corpus Montānus*.

were direct conceptual and historical associations with Nietzsche's Superman (1883) and Johann Strauss's *Blue Danube* (1867), forming the auditory-musical basis for the choreography design. Darwin's Evolution theory (1859), Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (c. 1508-1512) and other artistic representations of religious content are reenacted in a naturalistic bodily narrative of human evolution.

The inquiry 'How is this phenomenology?' invests in the continuous presence of lived experience from studio to stage. Yet, the concept of embodiment in the context of ecstasis, recessiveness and absence occurred mainly in proximate moments or performers who experienced or witnessed a form of suffering (see Findings). Below, I elaborate on the idea of *Corpus Montānus* to offer an example of the phenomenological nature of the performance.

### **1.1 The *Corpus Montānus* as Telos and the Society as Body-Image**

Leder's 'telic demand' (1990, pp. 81-82) or Bakan's 'telic centralization [sic]' (1971, pp. 31-38) are concerned with an organism's 'systemic pursuit of homeostasis or balance' (Glucklich, 1999, pp. 494-495). The Greek term *telos*, meaning 'end' or 'goal' (p. 497), is determined by the effort and functions that serve a higher end. Glucklich argues that to avoid a systemic collapse, a 'subsystem or individual organ can be 'sacrificed' for the telos of the overall system' (p. 500). That explains the liver metaphor in the tragedy: the liver is an organ in the bodily system, while Prometheus is a citizen in a social system. Here, self-sacrifice also functions as the reshaping of individual and collective identity (p. 503). The embodied subjectivity masters its body image by crossing the limits of its corporeality; Prometheus incarnates his symbolic higher *end* with a self-transcendental act.

In *Prometheus Immobile*, we encounter two forms of social bodies: the symbolic body of Prometheus and the collective body of the Oceanides. Initially, these bodies are distanced, conveying the confusion about their value and moral systems, which I tried to express through their collective retrogressive movement. Retrogression here also appears as a statement of temporality and consciousness between past and present. The Chorus starts its journey to self-awareness by witnessing Prometheus'

bodily and mental torment. For both the Oceanides and the audience, '[t]he witnessing of pain [...] is an awakening to political awareness and intervention' (Garner, p. 183) and signifies the beginning of change. Garner states that 'witnessing is itself a vicarious re-experiencing of pain, a mimetic inhabiting of the suffering body' (ibid.). As it evolves, it modifies the perception of the suffering body both as experienced and viewed. Ultimately, the inescapable bodily coalescence between the Chorus and Prometheus illustrates these two bodies' shared values. Furthermore, it signifies their empathy towards him.

Prometheus' body is constantly damaged, violated and negated, mirroring the objectification of the social body image by the authoritative power. In the final scene of the performance, Prometheus' body becomes the 'path to social metamorphosis, a material resistance to the realization [sic] of utopian vision' (p. 172), calling for a systemic recovery. The Chorus's collective body voluntarily moves towards Prometheus, echoing and sharing his suffering, throwing up Oceanus as a chronic disease invading society's body. The same breathing pattern characterises the collective movement as they move in synchronisation, manifesting the body's supportive mechanisms against disease and the effort to regain balance. The *private* or the *individual* becomes *public* and *collective*, respectively. The Chorus is reconfigured as Prometheus' corporeal extension to reclaim their being-in-the-world through a shared breath and a unified embodied consciousness (Bouzioti, 2019). *Corpus Montānus*, as the final scene, serves *Prometheus'* telic demand.

## 2. Preliminary Findings

The exploratory nature of the training process in *Prometheus Immobile* offered a new insight into textual analysis, performer training and performance making. It demonstrated a potential to benefit from this line of research that examines the lived experience in the embodiment of suffering in Greek tragedy. Arguably, the studio practice redirected the research towards specific areas of exploration, reshaping my questions around the performing body. Studio experimentation was

central to understanding suffering as it takes research beyond theoretical assumptions.

### **2.1 A Phenomenological Reading of the Body in Greek Tragedy**

A phenomenological reading of *Prometheus Immobile* potentialised critical engagement with underrepresented dramaturgical areas. Such an analysis of Greek tragedy discloses valuable embodied knowledge regarding the phenomenal fields of ecstasis, recessiveness and absence. The approach increased body awareness and revealed new ways of seeing and perceiving. For example, in *Prometheus Immobile*, the actor gains an embodied insight into Prometheus' threatened viscerality. Moreover, the approach reframed the research questions and the training with a more explicit body-centric focus. However, these possibilities were mainly revealed to the participants who read the text, which led me to consider incorporating a phenomenological reading in the studio for the upcoming projects.

### **2.2 In Search of a Phenomenological Language in Studio Practice**

The workshops aimed to reveal the role of sensory functions and movement and how these are associated with perception. This route allowed the performers to express or embody emotional and felt states through movement, as well as being able to describe them. Responses from group discussions and interviews with the performers demonstrated the development of a limited phenomenological vocabulary in describing the lived experience. As a result, they understood the process and developed an internal communication system based on phenomenological concepts.

### **2.3 Notes on the Ecstatic Body: Closeness and Otherness**

Otherness emerged in the ecstatic moments of closeness as it predominantly inhabited the interactions between performing bodies. Closeness here refers to the enactments of violence (i.e. the wrestling workshop/scene) or moments of intense proximity (Io's dream scenes, *Corpus Montānus*).



Despite their contradictory nature, a common denominator of these instants is the 'double sensation' of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp. 106-107). I was interested in examining the consciousness of pain and the 'ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of 'touching' and being 'touched' (p. 106). Hence, I experimented with self-tactility on different body regions to engage the performers in a reflective activity. In self-touch, the body subconsciously exercises a cognitive function 'from the outside... to distinguish it from objects' (p. 107). The aim was to enter this space where the subconscious mind operates and study the perception of a body in pain. The study of self-touch is instrumental in cases of self-harm when the body is simultaneously the causal factor and the recipient of suffering.

The body was experienced as subject and object concurrently in the violent scene among *Might*, Hephaestus and Prometheus. P2 and P8 witnessed their body 'split in two at the same time' (P8) during the rehearsals and on stage. For instance, in the *Triangle of Violence*, this alienating experience occurs when a body region imposes action on another. The left arm attacks the right; the right hand asphyxiates the throat; both hands pull the legs one after the other. P8 mentioned that 'one hand is the victim; the other hand is the killer'. P2, who executed the same action against his body, treated his hand as a different or independent object outside the body, claiming that 'when you move it there's a real tension [...] which can be quite exhausting' (P2).

In another case, being touched by an Other is experienced as the subject's corporeal extension (i.e. in *Corpus Montānus*). P1 emphasised the role of hands and the lived experience of tactility as a feeling of 'relief' when other performers touched him while hanging from a ladder for over thirty minutes. I quote an extract from P1's interview below that portrays the development of ecstatic dynamics in the phenomenal fields of intersubjectivity and intercorporeity:

P1: I've been through so much hardship, so much suffering, and then you just have this moment of solace. It's just like beauty in terms of hope, and I think it can mean a lot on a lot of different levels. She (P4) was like a symbol of hope in a situation that seemed incredibly hopeless... And that was why I was really trying to get out with that part was that feeling of... 'Everything is ok now'.

RESEARCHER: As your character or as P1?

P1: As both... The fact that we were so close to each other, I mean all so close to each other, not just me and P4, everybody. Actually, yes! To link that to a feeling very similar, the end! Those two moments were just like relief almost, and I genuinely felt relief in my body, which was weird, really, because I was in a lot of pain. That says a lot about the human mind as well. (P1)

The extract displays the presence of embodiment and the therapeutic dimension of proximity in the context of suffering. On that note, otherness is a distinctive dimension of the ecstatic in a materialistic and experiential manner. Prometheus' uncanny posture, his flesh against the wooden surface, his arms lifting the weight of his body, and the longitude of his torture ecstatically mark his perceptual fields while the body is constrained upon that ladder. Still, the solitary nature of martyrdom had a phenomenal impact on the embodied subjectivity. When the Chorus surrounded him with their bodies and the boundaries of flesh became almost invisible, his body 'felt relief' (P1) as if the pain was the object of shared osmosis. Although P1 unconsciously treats the body as different from the mind, P8 realises the existence of a 'communion' between mind and body (P8), validating the aims of psychophysical training. At this point, I presume that P1's habitual articulation of pain explains the dichotomisation of body and mind, which is irrelevant to the training method.

#### **2.4 Temporal Parameters and the Training Process as Factors of Embodiment**

There is evidence that long duration, slowness and repetition appear to play a pivotal role in the embodiment of suffering. For example, extended abidance in exercises resulted in mental and physical exhaustion that created a form of authenticity (P2). Furthermore, repetition or long-durational executions of action accelerated the process of the embodiment of suffering for both the performing body and its surrounding bodies (P3). Leder argues that pain is reaffirmed via its sensory intensification and temporality. The perceived environmental stimuli and the temporal dimensions are distorted by the suffering subject's consciousness affecting

the subject's perception (Leder, p. 74). The embodiment appears to be amplified when associated with uncanny body use or unfriendly environmental conditions.

During the rehearsals and on stage, P1 finds himself repeatedly chained on a wooden ladder two meters high from the floor. His isolation from the company contributes to his spatiotemporal perception of pain. Nair suggests that '[c]onsciousness can be understood as patterns of spatiotemporal relations' (Nair, p. 165). Moreover, Nair employs Kierkegaard's philosophical approach to repetition, where every reenactment of life involves repetition as a form of a forward recollection through memory (p. 168). In both cases, every recurring action is time-determined and time-dependent. If the embodiment of suffering is reenacted, then its reoccurrence results in a concretisation of presence. Longitude, frequency, rhythm and pace seem to be determining factors. The extract from our interview with P3 below is an indicative example of the preceding statement:

[W]hen he gets like to put up and tied and bound to the throne... At that point, I am behind the stage, so I can just hear him, and I can hear "Aaagh! Ouuughh...!" and it's quite like you can't [sic]... see anything so... in the last couple of rehearsals and the performance he sounded like he was being crucified, it was pretty... visceral! [...] Oh, there's another one where you cut off the senses so I can see it, and perhaps that made it stronger, and I also felt like next to him like I was behind him in the curtain, I was pretty close, and I could get a sense of the suffering as well... the suffering, I personally didn't [sic] go through any, but you can feel it through P1... you could really feel him... you could tell him aching by the last day... (P3)

What appears evident from this extract is also the aftermath of the phenomenological training. P3 refers to the sense-based exercises, particularly the one with the blindfolds to recreate the experience of sensory deprivation to describe his lived experience of another subject's suffering. P1's vocality affected P3's auditory perception viscerally as the black drape obstructed the latter's visual field. The sound (of pain) was magnified, while its stridency penetrated the flesh echoing suffering in P3's perceptual fields. Therefore, it appears that the training contributed to opening up his sensory understanding of the world and introduced the (performing) body to a new way of perceiving. Although in an embryonic stage, the impact of the training process is apparent in the quotations cited earlier. There is a

certain degree of embodiment in the rehearsals that climaxes on stage. We could argue on a double embodiment of suffering; a direct one for the subject of suffering (P1) and an indirect one for those who witnessed it (P3, audience). A similar phenomenon is common in cases of treatment or documentation of 'violation and subsequent traumatization [sic] of others' (Seton, 2013, p. 28), such as in psychotherapy or journalism, respectively. Finally, the fear of failure and the feeling of inescapability on stage may intensify the lived experience of suffering. However, the studio space operates in a mode of freedom, inclusivity, and openness to new ideas, reducing emotional risk.

### **3. Towards an Embodiment of the Tragic**

Prometheus' immobility was a significant starting point in the search for the phenomenal concepts of ecstasis, recessiveness and absence in performative contexts. The first chapter evidenced how these concepts are critical in understanding the body in Greek tragedy. The ground is fertile in theory and practice, yielding further phenomenological developments. Yet, it is necessary to look closely at the material we can generate through practice and turn it into valuable knowledge. For instance, we need to ask what readjustments the training process needs according to each project's demands. Or whether the model is flexible enough to cover all possibilities and how immobility can inform the practice in *Bacchae in Absentia* and *Medea Inside*. In *Prometheus Immobile*, we looked mainly at the ecstatic and the recessive through the concepts of imprisonment and immobility. The other two works will take the research further to consciousness and the recessive depths of viscerality. What is necessary from now on is to establish an effective methodology and reliable research process reflected through practice.

## *Bacchae in Absentia* (2019)

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### I. Performer Training

#### Introduction

The second project, *Bacchae in Absentia*, was selected due to Euripides' striking representation of the relationship between *flesh and blood* (Leder, p. 62). The tragedy discusses mental illness as a result of political oppression through a chiasmatic deconstruction that registers its impact on the outer surface of the embodied subjectivity.

Here, the concept of *deconstruction* in performer training will be utilised in line with the Husserlian epoché: the performer forms a transcendental subjectivity that remains neutral and unbiased (bracketed) or 'empty and transparent' (Stuart in Peeters, p. 29) to allow a pre-reflective flow of expressive movement that draws on intuition. However, the term also stands as an aesthetic description of visually 'dismantled' bodies.

While mental illness refers to the recessive body and the Dionysian rituals to the ecstatic, the chapter seeks to identify:

- How can performer training reveal the lived experience of the inner body, which suffers mental instability and facilitate embodiment (here, in cases of oppression or obsession)?
- How is the inner experience of mental illness manifested ecstatically?
- What directorial techniques should be employed to convey the inner truth of the suffering body in the absence of speech?

The chapter introduces contemporary directorial readings of the body in *Bacchae* and adopts PMPP to theoretically and practically explore suffering. In *Prometheus Immobile*, we attempted to understand how the physical impacts the psychological, addressing questions from the ecstatic to the recessive. In *Bacchae*, we take the research a step further by mainly gravitating to the inner body and the ways it manifests itself on the sensorimotor surface of the embodied subject.

## 1. Phenomenology in Psychophysical Studio-practice

The conceptually deconstructed consciousness that leads to the reconstruction of the performing body is primarily influenced by Euripides' *Bacchae* and governs the training process and the directorial approach in *Bacchae in Absentia*<sup>5</sup> (2019). The project navigated deconstruction developing a physical discourse between *tèlos* as an *end* and a prerequisite condition of evolution (purpose) for both individual and collective bodies. The metaphor of deconstruction as rebirth is embedded in the cultural history of modern productions of the *Bacchae*, originating in the '60s when a broader socio-cultural change was shaking extant cultural establishments.

Fischer-Lichte's predominant position in *Dionysus Resurrected: Performances of Euripides' 'The Bacchae' in a Globalizing World* (2014) reflects this methodological and ideological evolution in performance, acknowledging the Euripidean tragedy as a call for intercultural collaboration, especially since Schechner's *Dionysus 69* and onwards. This Dionysian shift states the necessity of ideological and political transformation, a key theme in the tragedy. Moreover, Fischer-Lichte's understanding implies the rejection of the classicist performance analysis model and its substitution by an interpretive model grounded on cultural analysis (Sampatakakis, 2014). Besides its cultural and sociopolitical connotations, *Bacchae* is principally a body-centric tragedy, evidenced in Pentheus' dismemberment with his decapitation by his mother and the frenetic dance of the Theban women. The classicist treatment of Greek tragedy, though, dictated the prevalence of the original text, prioritising words over bodies. In contrast, the new directorial wave reflected the Bacchaean moral of social change through radicality, violence and sacrifice. The religious practice of Dionysus and its association with excessive behaviour, alcohol consumption and sexuality have inspired a plethora of directions that sought to understand primitive origins and human behaviour under oppression.

Schechner's radical adaptation of *Bacchae, Dionysus 69* (1970), which he developed with The Performance Group, pioneered not only environmental theatre (Britannica, 2009) but also introduced postmodern performance emphasising the body: the

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<sup>5</sup> The project was supported by AHC, University of Leeds with the Research Dissemination Award (2019). The recording of the show is available at the complete e-thesis version.

production was devised featuring textual deconstruction, homosexual content on display, full nudity and exposure of male and female genitals (*Dionysus 69*, 1970). The Euripidean tragedy reinforced the radicalisation of performance making, and '[t]he Performance Group played an essential role in promoting the American movement for sexual liberation and freedom of speech' (Sampatakakis, 2014, p. 391) by using provocative sexual language and imagery.

Dodds (1960) asserts that the tragedy of *Bacchae* is concerned with our ignorance of 'the demand of the human spirit for Dionysiac experience' (p. xlv). This experience is 'an added dimension of emotion' (James Adam in Dodds, p. xlvii), preoccupied with the tendency to release the suppressed subconscious; this is a functional phenomenon often encountered in loss of control. Uncontrollability, which is instrumental in the ecstatic modes of expression, is immanently interwoven with self-loss. Ecstasis is located at the crossroad of 'self-loss, pain and violence' (Henrichs, 1984, p. 205) that composes the Dionysian identity (Petridou and Spatháras, 2004, p. xiii).

On the other hand, in Terzopoulos' *Bacchae* (1986), liberation is a product of physical exhaustion for the embodied subject. Here, the phenomenal body recedes from reality in an elliptic, negating dimension of the self. Terzopoulos' process, the so-called *Dionysian Method*, derives from a body-centric viewpoint and shares similar principles inscribed in phenomenology. His approach 'communicates the extremity of human suffering somatically [...] by supra-human anarchic forces' (Sidiropoulou, 2017, p. 59). His work explores the recessive and the subconscious through their ecstatic manifestations in extreme conditions.

Similarly, Jan Fabre's durational theatre piece *Mount Olympus: To Glorify the Cult of Tragedy* (2015) encompassed 'deeper layers of selfhood and somatic experience, opening up its audience to moments of "dreamtime" or "ceremonial" time, as in ancient traditions' (Decreus, 2016). The twenty-four hours long performance constitutes another ecstatic example of collective hypnosis, while it heavily relies on a quasi-directed ecstasis to manipulate energy through psychocorporeity.

The training in *Bacchae* addressed lived experience in relevant physical and mental constraints. The themes were mainly concerned with dismemberment and the absence of consciousness through ecstasis. The ecstatic dance performed by the Bacchae destabilises order, acting as a political statement of 'self-possession and self-reclamation' (Garner, 1994, p. 210), disclosing personal traumas as much as broader social pathogenies.

## **2. Leder's Modes of Embodiment and the Re-Construction of the Performing Body**

The workshops in *Bacchae in Absentia* explicitly refer to the four modes of embodiment Leder proposes in the *Absent Body* (1990) the *ecstatic*, the *recessive*, the *chiasmatic*, and the *dys-appearing* body. Leder elucidates that '[a]s ecstatic, the body projects outside itself into the world. As recessive, the body falls back from its own conscious perception and control' (p. 69). Hence, due to the co-existence of these modes, 'the lived body is necessarily self-effacing' (ibid.). While essential modes of disappearance indicate internal and external functions, the body tends to be 'absent from experience' (ibid.). The notion of the chiasmatic underlines the relationship between *flesh and blood* (p. 62), where the body is both the perceiver-subject and the perceived-object (p. 63).

Further, Leder discusses the topic within the Western cultural context where Cartesian thought is prevalent, locating 'the essential self with the incorporeal mind' (ibid.). Given the recessiveness of visceral mechanisms, intentionality is attributed to 'a disembodied mind' (ibid.), a description which is particularly convenient to the conceptual demystification of the two juxtaposing analogies displayed in *Bacchae*: Pentheus' dismemberment and decapitation portray a bodiless head, while the absence of consciousness characterising the women illustrates an army of mindless bodies. Both representations emphasise the prevalence of Cartesian dualism in the West that is under reconstruction by the effeminate God from the East. This reconstructive occurrence signifies the necessity of personal and social change in how we perceive our being-in-the-world.



The *absent body* is an inclusive mode of the ecstatic-recessive withdrawal of the body from its experience and explains 'phenomena in which the body manifests as a problematic or disharmonious thing' (p. 70). Those phenomena are associated with body presence in cases of pain, disease, and gestation, where the body may experience absence and perceive itself as *Other* or as an 'alien-presence' (p. 76), consolidating Cartesian dualism (p. 70). Bodily dysfunction determines the concept of dys-appearance, which is not necessarily associated with disease or pain. However, it is apparent how those modes constitute the notion of the *suffering body* and relate to a body-focused reading of *Bacchae* through implicit (i.e. alcohol consumption) and explicit (*sparagmós*) manifestations of absence. The body in pain separates the subject intuitively from the condition resulting in self-alienation. Leder notes:

In pain, the body or a certain part of the body emerges as an alien presence. The sensory insistence of pain draws the corporeal out of self-concealment, rendering it thematic. No event more radically and inescapably reminds us of our bodily presence. (Leder, p. 76)

The chapter is divided into the modes of embodiment determined by the Dionysian philosophy of deconstruction. All modes are intrinsic to the lived body's constitution and consciousness. The workshops were designed to explore those modes of embodiment in performative contexts. In the meantime, particular emphasis was given to the examination of the suffering body through absence and pain. In the following sections, I demonstrate how breathing and psychophysical training facilitated embodiment in *Bacchae in Absentia*. Both are informed by Eastern techniques embedded in Western practices, forming a *pragmatic* metaphor that reflects the Dionysian advent.

## **2.1 Preparing the Ecstatic**

The performer training aimed to reveal the nature and importance of the ecstatic body. An objective was to raise body awareness to understand how the body functions as an ecstatic source and perceptual system. This section outlines the

exercises related to exteroceptive and proprioceptive capacities. The purpose is to illustrate how 'absence is intrinsic to the perspectival nature of embodiment' (Leder, p. 12), which shapes our perception of the body and the world through the ecstatic flesh.

Stuart's *Emotional Body Parts* (Peeters, 2010, p. 156) [link in complete e-thesis] is a critical activity in my practice. The performers are instructed to move certain body regions in specific emotional states. For instance, they must infuse naughtiness in their hips or anger to their elbows. Registering new expressive modalities to body parts enables the ensemble to explore their body and expressivity through devised movement. According to Stuart, that 'creates a high concentration of the state' (ibid.), which leads to corporeal reconfigurations. The ecstatic body manifests the inflicted emotionality holistically. Those body regions whose expressive potentiality is underrepresented in our daily intersubjective communications are now fully displayed.

*Missing Limbs and Missing Senses* is a set of phenomenological exercises I developed in previous years. The ensemble performs daily tasks omitting one or more senses or body parts. These activities informed psychophysical characterisation in scenes, such as Pentheus' dismemberment. The participants navigate space by altering their level or speed while wearing blindfolds (*single sensory deprivation*). In addition, variations, including the blindfolds, explored bodily response when more than one sense is affected (*double sensory deprivation*). Another activity would involve tying up shoelaces using only one hand. In this project, the blindfolds serve as the metaphor for madness, where the body experiences the absence of consciousness. I viewed the Bacchant madness as a foggy landscape of the mind that distorted reality and disorientated the body. Thus, blindfolds represented the rupture in the phenomenal fields of consciousness.

Moreover, during the breathing exercises related to the embodiment of sensuality, I developed another task with blindfolds; the performers had to express romantic and affectionate feelings with/to different regions of their bodies, eliminating the use of their hands. Again, the difficulty evidenced the tendency to express affection mainly through our gaze and hands, setting the rest of our bodies in absence.



*Fig. 7 Sensory deprivation: Hands I. Photo credits: Ramzi Merabet*



*Fig. 8 Sensory deprivation: Hands II. Photo credits: Ramzi Merabet*

The sensorimotor surface of the outer body becomes hypersensitive. The flesh allows the infusion of environmental stimuli, which in turn, rebalance the body's lost equilibrium. The flesh is porous, and its permeability reveals how '[t]he lived body is necessarily chiasmatic, a perceiver/perceived' (Leder, p. 63). In *Blind Attack* [Appendix I: 1.1], integrated animal work was used to simulate the behavioural codes of predators (i.e. lions or hyenas for the Bacchae) and victims (i.e. deer for Pentheus). The blindfolded female performers developed alternative bodily mechanisms to locate each other in space and attack their prey. Namely, they invented body sounds to form a chain of bodies empowered by collectivity through ecstatic connectivity (B2, B11) [Appendix I: 1.2]. B11 observes: 'we became a body and all of a sudden we started moving altogether and we were expanding and coming back again as a body' (B11). Thus, self-expansiveness generated within dynamic intersubjective fields realised a corporeal unification towards self-reclamation.



*Fig. 9 Sensory deprivation: Hands III - Together. Photo credits: Ramzi Merabet*



*Fig. 10 Sensory deprivation: Eyes. Photo credits: Dionysia Bouzioti*

The second set of exercises consisted of shaking and spinning so to prepare the ensemble for the lived experience of ecstasis and absence. Shaking facilitated the relocation of the live body's centre in its visceral depths, starting from the abdomen. In particular, it was intended to externalise the ecstatic movement resulting from a repetitive rhythmic spasm. In addition, the workshops invested heavily in spins as an exercise inspired by the religious practice of the Sufi dancers, who claim that they embody God through this bodily manifestation of self-expansion. However, the task was challenging for most, requiring long-term training.

The physical task activates an intense inner force that gradually grows, leading to ecstasis. That results in the externalisation of suppressed emotions that immure the mind; that form of release is associated with the enclosure of divinity as the movement sets the spirit free. The impingement of the somatic on the psychic is apocalyptic in dance rituals and 'provide[s] a religious experience that seems more satisfying and convincing than any other' as '[i]t is with their muscles that they most easily obtain knowledge of the divine' (Huxley in Dodds, 1960, p. xiv). Although the



scientific scholarship is immensely limited to defending the legitimacy of this position, therapeutic tremoring, trembling therapy, neurogenic tremoring, Trauma Release Exercises (TRE) or shaking meditation are some of the terms used by dance and yoga therapists to describe this stress-release management approach.



*Fig. 11 Shaking in/as performer training - ensemble. Photo credits: D. Bouzioti*

The technique, whose origins trace back to the ecstatic dance of Shamans, appears to have healing properties for treating trauma, anxiety, and depression (Keeney, 2005; 2007), dividing shaking into voluntary and involuntary. In the first case, the subject is the cause of voluntary shaking as the agent of the tension. In the second, involuntary tremoring characterises the condition of muscular tension resulting in spasms caused by exercise, especially in untrained bodies. Such approaches treat body and mind as a whole (*bodymind*) and offered valuable information in my investigation of ecstasis in ritualistic practices. B5 outlined the loss of her body control and the inability of her mind to act upon it. Still, her description is not subject

to Cartesian dualism as she looks at her unified bodymind being rendered in the ecstatic force:

It's [sic] more about feeling with my body [...] it's [sic] more about being in my body [...] through the manic moments... I couldn't [sic] stop my body even if I wanted to. So, (it) is just moving without control. The subject causes voluntary shaking, and that was a task for me and my mind. (B5)

During shaking, the participants expressed the feeling of being or getting 'out of (my) mind' (B6, B4), being in a 'trance' or a 'state where I was not thinking... like a catharsis' or having an 'ecstatic' experience (B4). B3 used it as a means of naturalistic acting, experiencing the embodiment of physical and mental exhaustion towards a 'physical telos' (Leder, p. 18):

I am pretty exhausted by that point [...] and too tired to escape, so that exhaustion is really good. [...] I am doing actually one shake, and I am just actually knackered, so it felt kind of true to the scene that Pentheus [...] has been beaten, he's been savaged, and now he's been ripped apart, but he's now at this point where he has no ability to fight left within. (B3)



*Fig. 12 The ecstatic modes of shaking - performer. Photo credits: D. Bouzioti*

The reversibility between the ecstatic and the recessive, as well as the physical and the emotional, determines the chiasmatic nature of the procedure. This undeniably perceptual-corporeal phenomenon underlines the phenomenological accountability and validity of psychophysical training.

## **2.2 Breath and the Recessive Body**

*Breathing* exercises are influenced by Stuart and from yoga practice. The purpose is to thematise breath and explore the effects of breathing variations. In Eastern philosophy, consciousness is directly associated with the function of breathing. In *Restoration of Breath* (2007), Nair offers a detailed account of breathing techniques and their integration into actor training from the 20th century as a 'systematic discipline' (p. 137).

For Jacques Copeau, breath 'is the basis of gestural sincerity and vocal concord' (ibid.), whereas Stanislavsky enhances acting quality 'with silent moments and non-verbal communication' (Nair, p. 139). Breathing is instrumental to psychophysical training as it communicates meaning through unconventional psychic expressivity. The rationale behind Stuart's breathing exercises aligns with Jacques Lecoq's understanding of breathing functions as they connect 'bodily movements and emotional attitudes' (p. 143), explaining modalities of emotional change. Moreover, Zarrilli's practice, as we have seen earlier, suggests that deep breathing 'controls the actor's physical and emotional levels.' (p. 146)

The aim of practising breath attentiveness is to raise awareness of the interaction between recessive and ecstatic modes of embodiment. Zeiler (2010) suggests that the subject focuses on the action and function of breath and the journey of air through the body. While practising this, 'there is no threatened or disrupted intentionality, nor discomfort or alienation' but a harmonic relationship between the body and the world. Zeiler calls this *eu-appearance* (2010, p. 16) in contrast to Leder's *dys-appearance*, which refers to the body's appearance 'as thematic focus, but precisely as in a *dys* state' (Leder, p. 84); that is, dysfunctional.



*Share Your Breath* is a variation of breathing patterns where performers breathe together at various paces without instructions. They intuitively form groups of two or three performers. They naturally lower their bodies while searching for direct contact between their corporeity and space (e.g. by touching the floor) and share a profound experience of sensuality. This 'accident' facilitated building up the process to a certain extent of sensuality.

*The Grape* is the *practicalisation* of Leder's apple example, which examines how 'the incorporation of an object into visceral space involves its withdrawal from exteroceptive experience' (p. 39). The performers are offered a grape in three rounds. I examine their lived experience in focus groups moving from the outer to the inner body every time a round is complete. For instance, they are initially not instructed where to address their focus and naturally consume the grape. Then, I ask them to draw their attention to their senses and the object's properties. Finally, I address their focus on the body's internal response during ingestion. The exercise aims to familiarise the performers with the theory and demonstrate the concepts of background disappearance and visceral absence. However, this is an endeavour to clarify aspects of corporeal disappearance in practical terms rather than making the theory of phenomenology explicit from end to end.

Respectively, we observe the performers practising sensory thematisation, which contradicts our pre-reflective activity in daily life during digestion. In the following rounds, the performers delve into various considerations regarding focal and background disappearance once the grape disappears into the visceral regions of the inner body. For instance, once the grape leaves her oesophagus, B2 returns to the pain in her back and other thoughts regarding her daily responsibilities. However, we notice an interruption of attention to the rest of the world during mastication. At the same time, other body regions remain forgotten in background disappearance while the participants use imagination to experience the internal journey of the object (B7). Interestingly, B3 used the *Grape* to embody the rational/irrational shift in the *Point A-B* exercise. That enables them to explore body depths in behavioural alteration situations.

### 2.3 Chiasmatic Investigations: Flesh and Blood

In *Point A-B* [link in complete e-thesis] the ensemble executes physical shifts between emotional states to explore psychophysical effects. The participants must cross the studio from one side to the other, embodying the physical impact of two opposite forces; the first holds them to Point A while the other pushes them to Point B. Initially, the force is imposed externally to measure the impact psychophysically. The performers embody it and try again on their own. Despite any implications related to the Cartesian divide, the activity aims to improve psychophysical awareness by demonstrating the complementarity and interdependence of body and mind. Located between the city of Thebes (Point A: Mind; the rational) and the Woods (Point B: Heart; the irrational), the performers need to embody and perform the perceptual-corporeal shift.

*Point A-B* is the practical exploration of the theorisation of the *body as/in space*. The activity brings potential interpretations and relevance of the physical movement in space as a phenomenological display of emotional or perceptual states. Furthermore, it examines intentionality through praxis in the Euripidean embodied and spatial allegories of the urban and the wild. B7 agrees that this exercise is ‘more dynamic [...] in terms of emotional process or emotional journey’ and ‘made sense of that progression of thinking inside more [...] tentatively’. *Point A-B* functions as a ‘thinking process’ for her. To B4, the exercise triggers an association with mental states, such as the feeling of ‘confusion’. Moreover, for B8, the activity facilitates his development from a statue to a god. He also notices an alteration of emotional levels physically translated into space through changing body levels while performing on stage.

The training involved animal work to enhance hidden performative aspects of characterisation, while emphasis was given to the externalisation of primary and primitive emotions. In contrast to *Prometheus Immobile*, the performers studied animal behaviour *before* the workshop to incorporate it perceptually and physically. The exercise contributed to the development of scenes entailing an animalistic character. The *Meal*, for example, is a metaphor for human oppression and exploitation, whereas the *Attack* represents Pentheus’ dismemberment. Both scenes

were concerned with the incorporation of human flesh, as in cannibalistic practices, examining the absorption of the ecstatic body (object) by the chiasmatic (subject) and its disappearance in the recessive body. The process was informed by the *Grape* shedding light on the phenomenon of *incorporation* where a body absorbs another body. Finally, animal work indicated approaches to embodying behavioural response through the body of an Other (the animal) and the physical ways such bodies form collective ones (i.e. a pack of lions: fig. 13).



Fig. 13 Animal work: Looking at lion behaviour. Photo credits: Dionysia Bouzioti

#### 2.4 Making Absence Visible

The exercise *Skin Manifests* (SM) was an attempt to explore a situation of crisis physically. The investigation looked at the impact of a traumatic experience on physicality within a performative context. It did not pursue an understanding of its causality nor fell into scientific or philosophical assumptions about mental illness. The activity was developed in the context of irrational behaviour described in the specific tragedy. The instructions focused on the physical and functional imprint of a mental crisis on the sensorimotor surface and its exteroceptive and proprioceptive impact on exploring uncontrollability. A group discussion followed the exercise, where the participants shared their experiences.

A sense of discomfort for some of the participants emerged from the conversations. In such simulations, the subjectivity might experience the assimilation of its entire existence within a 'negative bodily awareness' (Zeiler, p. 10). *Skin Manifests* shows that the extent and density of embodiment of particular mental states are relative, and they depend exclusively on the subject's perceptual and emotional tolerance or vulnerability. Such performative investigations shed light on the degree of the phenomenological interest that links respective disciplines, such as psychology to performance or neuroscience to dance. However, the directorial radicalisation observed in Schechner's *Dionysus 69* (1970) or Brook's *Marat/Sade* (1964) that involved the risk of psychophysical traumatising is not part of this project. In contrast, we explored *the embodiment of a state* rather than *the experience of the state per se* due to inherent risks and ethical concerns.

Finally, *Say Your Name 100 Times* is a perpetual repetition of their name and unnatural patterns of movement accompanied by meretricious laughter or other sounds in order to examine the effects of vocality and repetition in the inner depths of the body and consciousness. The performers admit a 'feeling of madness' (B2) due to the repetitive utterance of their names. The iteration occurring in a specific rhythmical pattern alters breathing causing exhaustion and dizziness resulting in the subjectivity's entrapment in its own body sound.

## **2.5 Reflections on Dys-appearance**

The workshops' intensity and persistence were a way to explore 'intentional disruption' and 'spatiotemporal constriction' (Leder, p. 73) as conditions affected by pain. *Skin Manifests* was a way to explore emotional/psychological pain and examine the impact on the subject's cognitive, perceptual and physical activities.

The development of the exercise *Face Violation* led to the scene of female abuse in the prologue. The face represents the female body: eyes for the breast and mouth for the genitals. The participants consent whether they wish to participate due to facial contact involved. The ensemble is then divided into two groups. Group A touches the faces of Group B; the latter must demonstrate physical resistance

without using their hands or moving around space. The exercise examines power relations and how pain inflicted on the ecstatic body impacts the visceral depths of the victim's body, simultaneously revealing aspects of social dys-appearance (Leder, pp. 96-99). An additional dimension was the examination of the 'perpetrators' lived experience. Interestingly, Group A proceeded to execute the instruction without resistance despite their 'genuine discomfort' (B7), which they admitted later in the group discussion.

Both perpetrators and victims share a feeling of empathy. However, B4 makes an interesting observation that validates Leder's association between social dys-appearance and the Other's gaze; B4 initially felt 'guilt', but 'not empathy because you can't see the face.' For him, empathy derives not from violating one's corporeal territory but from the gaze. Leder argues that social dys-appearance is a form of disrupted communication where the gaze of the Other objectifies the subject resulting in a split between self and body (Leder, p. 96). Repetition embodies violence as the feelings of discomfort are dislocated over time in a state of oblivion (B7).



*Fig. 14 Exploring abuse in Face Violation. Photo credits: Dionysia Bouzioti*

### 3. Embodying the Text

The phenomenological imperative is to embrace, understand and distil the world between the real and the fictional. Accordingly, the workshops in *Bacchae in Absentia* included both individual engagement and ensemble readings. Text-based exercises familiarised the ensemble with the tragedy, and actioning facilitated the physical articulation of the text. In addition, the activities drew on improvisational techniques and psychological gesture to allow an ecstatic non-verbal expression of internalised interpretations. The exercises that follow illustrate the ways of textual engagement in the workshops:

In the exercise *Embodying the Text*, the participants perform a line that entails references to the body. The textual material should refer to bodily postures or gestures, body chemistry (i.e. fluidity) or functions (i.e. a heartbeat), actions, emotional states, sensations, or feelings. A group discussion about their experience, interpretation of the text and physical choices follows the improvised part.

The process is reversed in the *Post-Traumatic Solo*. The participants articulate their personal experience of *Skin Manifests* in three words that reflect their trauma on the ecstatic body. The process is based on impulse and spontaneity. To ensure they do not affect each other, they report to me secretly. We then use variations to improvise each performer's verbal choices.

The text-based exercises demonstrated a sound understanding of activities earlier taught in the training process. Their improvisations evidenced the acquisition of a skill set developed in the workshops, which now lies in background disappearance withdrawing from our attention. Skills incorporation is an 'act from not just my present organs, but a bodily past that tacitly structures my responses' (Leder, p.32). In *Bacchae in Absentia*, we notice a transformation of the performer's 'sensorimotor repertoire' (Zarrilli, 2007, p. 50) during skills acquisition. This transformation is simultaneously a process of 'incorporation' (Leder, p. 31) due to a series of thematisations that 'provoke explicit body awareness' (ibid.). Once the skills are incorporated, they disappear into the depths of consciousness hidden from our attention. Leder asserts that:

If absence lies at the heart of the lived body, then any extension of its sensorimotor powers must necessarily involve an extension of absence. This then explains the experiential disappearance that accompanies the incorporation of skills (ibid.).

B1 physicalised the theme of metamorphosis, which she experienced as a 'stepping into a new world and a new body' (B1). The performer perceived her body as an inhabited space and a chiasmatic vehicle to embrace and explore the world. During our discussion, B1 realised that she adopted the *Point A-B* exercise (explained later) to actualise the corporeal and perceptual shift. That explains Polanyi's 'from-to' structure which characterises the embodied subjectivity. Leder deploys the structure in his discussions on the intentionality of consciousness to describe 'bodily possibility' (p. 32).

Similarly, B2 appropriated *Shaking* to embody the feeling of Agave during the recognition of her child. The performer admitted a perceptual rupture where a temporary absence of consciousness alienated her hands while shaking. The hands were perceived as the Other and felt detached from her sensorimotor surface. B3 used uncanny extra-daily kinesiology to perform dismemberment. The movement initiated in his guts to spread out ecstatically.

On the other hand, B4 appropriated the *Grape* exercise reversed. His part in the recognition scene with Agave involves a soliloquy of painful words. His hands transform into a torrent of words coming out of his mouth. His abdomen erupts in spasms manifesting his internalised suffering. The movement in concentric waves comes from his recessive centre; the abdomen is simultaneously the source of speech and the centre of existence.

## II. Performance Making

My directorial approach relies on Leder's (1990) phenomenological account of the body, Garner's (1994) phenomenological interpretation of *Bacchae* and Dodd's (1960) philosophical analysis. This section aims to unveil the conceptual design of the performance and its theoretical underpinning.

### 1. Phenomenal Vectorisation in *Bacchae in Absentia*

The performances of this research formulate empirical iconographies manifested through corporeal signifiers. Each iconography consists of phenomenal vectors: cultural signifiers that bring spatiotemporal reflections of the lived experience. Leder (1990) clarifies that phenomenal vectors are bound in meaning (p. 150) and open to 'overinterpretation' (Eco, 1992), while '[t]he body's practices [sic] and self-interpretations are always already shaped by culture' (Leder, p. 151).

The organisation of the training material and the mise-en-scène of *Bacchae in Absentia* aimed to create a phenomenal field of multiple interpretations, where vectors would be liberated from their predetermined cultural signification. Thus, my directorial approach drew a deductive trajectory from the representation of things to the essence of the things themselves, beyond 'their flesh and surface' (Müller, 1982, p. 43). Besides, this is the inescapable truth of *Bacchae*, the search for the essence that is detached from any social stereotypes, cultural connotations or historical references. For instance, the Zaloggos dance, in the end, bears no historical intention. Instead, it discloses the dynamic field of phenomenal energy in corporeal intentionality and inter-subjective agency: female bodies share their psychic material physically and expand through each other while their bodies experience the vacuum of silence. Pavis argues that the deconstruction of the text and the performing body is not associated with destruction. It instead seeks to attribute currency and relevance to contemporary principles (Pavis, 2013, p. 161).

Such direction of the body encourages expression from its innermost depths through the text, which is now inherently registered upon its flesh but, most importantly, absorbed and inhaled by a resurrected subjectivity. The text exists, but the body is no longer limited by *lògos* (speech). That leads to the reconstruction of the gaze -a new scenic perception in a postmodern world, where 'new patterns of thought and new 'structures of feeling'' (Williams, 1966, p. 18) offer an insight into embodied realities. Several questions now arise regarding the direction of the embodiment of the tragic:



- How can the performing body convey meanings and feelings registered upon its ecstatic flesh?
- How is the phenomenal self disclosed through the process?
- Consequently, what is the impact on embodiment in the interplay between post-dramatic direction and absence of *lógos*?

Garner suggests that from Appia and Artaud to Fabre and Wilson, the lived body constitutes the 'dramatic author' that arbitrates the verbal and non-verbal counterparts of the contemporary *mise-en-scène* (1994, pp. 206-207). Sheets-Johnstone argues that dance is pre-reflectively inherent in 'any lived experience of sheer body movement' (2015, p. 112), while 'somatic movement experiences have the potential to extend consciousness' (p. xv). Moreover, Sondra Horton Fraleigh (1987) views dance as an act of embodiment that unifies Körper and Leib. This unification, in turn, reveals the 'poetic body', which is not a product of objectification or reduction to its aesthetic qualities (Garner, p. 207). Therefore, the assumption that the body is reduced to an aesthetic object due to the stylised direction of the postdramatic is invalid, as it demonstrates the capacity to register and engrave its embodied experience on movement.

In the direction of *Bacchae*, *opsis* 'is not simply a *hēdusma* or additional *seasoning*' (Foley, 2003, p. 343). The metamorphosis of the text in a kinesthetic libretto, the praxis and the scenographic design are organically interwoven to give rise to the performing body. In *Bacchae in Absentia*, the set consists of two large constructions: the mountain and the lake. Initially, the set aimed to represent the wild and the urban. At a second glance, though, the scenography encapsulates an implicit metaphor of the mountain and the lake as the breasts and the genitals of the female body. The solid mountain can symbolise the rational and the head, whereas the volatile surface of the lake denotes the irrational and the abdomen as the source of instincts. That explains the allegory of the two satyrs pouring wine directly into the pond, which represents the abdomen. Further associations correlate the stability and rigidity of the mountains to masculinity and the fluidity and volatility of the lake to femininity by virtue of menstruation and the reproductive process that typify the female body.

## 2. Phenomenological Insights

Table E outlines the conceptual journey of *Bacchae in Absentia* from theory to practice. The modes of embodiment refer to the concepts we encountered in phenomenology as defined and developed by Merleau-Ponty and Leder. The theoretical underpinning of the project elucidates the phenomenal fields of exploration and illuminates the areas of suffering and pain under examination. Performer training and performance making were built upon the following body-centric themes: (i) Dismemberment and death; (ii) Imprisonment [constraint, abuse]; (iii) Absence of consciousness and uncontrollability [madness, dream state]; (iv) Pain and suffering; (v) Metamorphosis; (vi) Sexuality.

The performance begins with a dismembered statue of young Dionysus. The statuesque figure represents a young man with blonde hair lying on a pedestal. Both his arms and the lower parts of his legs are missing. The deconstructed Dionysus may receive a plethora of interpretations when associated with essentialism or related to the divine. The final scene reverses the opening with a deconstructed Pentheus, symbolising rationalism and the human. We also encounter this cyclical pattern in Agave's pregnancy. In the first scene, she gives birth to Pentheus' dead head. In the final scene, she relocates the decapitated head in her abdomen, re-embodiment her child. This act refers to Dionysus' rebirth, which his name implies: *born twice*. The re-embodiment underlines maternal hope and indicates the return to life. This cyclicity emphasises the binaries of birth and death that govern the tragedy. Binaries are blatantly embodied through the destruction (*sparagmós*) of Pentheus' ecstatic body, causing an 'anxiety of fragmentation' (Lacan in Pavis, 2003, p. 235) even to the surrounding bodies (B7, B8).

The prologue foreshadows the fate of the tragic character. The bodies of the Theban women are objectified and consumed by patriarchy. Their impotence to react leads to their corporeal fragmentation. Agave's body gives birth to a deconstructed masculinity, the remnants of which unsettle her being-in-the-world. The intrusion of pain allowed the investigation of embodiment and its corollaries in consciousness and the body. Agave's rhythmical labour breathing, combined with darkness and the

eerie whispers, led the audience viscerally to ‘physiological and perceptual disorientations’ without narrative (Garner, p. 193). Moreover, the scene explored the subconscious depths of dreams, where ‘the lived body is away from itself’ (Leder, p. 22), and absence is present in the disruption of corporeity. The endeavour, finally, brought together the states of dreaming and madness that are both classified as modes of absence.

The pattern of the reversal repetition I employ in *Bacchae in Absentia* is apparent in the scenes of the *Meal* and *Sparagmós*. The title of the second scene (*Meal*) is an anagram of the word *male* and symbolises the culture of female bodily consumption by the male gaze. *Sparagmós* is the reversal condition, the reaction to bodily objectification and engendered performative practices that imprison the engendered subject. The *Meal* is the exploration of *flesh eating flesh* within the context of the ecstatic and the incorporation of otherness. This time, though, differs from the pregnancy in *Agave’s Dream*, where the *flesh is fed by flesh* inhabiting it naturally. The first occurrence translates as death, and the second refers to life.

## 2.1 Directing Asphyxia

The themes of imprisonment, constraint and abuse are explored alongside sexuality in the context of *έρως-θάνατος* (*love - death*) or *όδύνη-ήδονή* (*pain - pleasure*). The *Meal*, *Violation*, *Slaves of Illusion* and *Imprisonment* connote the politics of embodiment and power relations through a gender-specific lens. Leder claims that culture is a product of biological needs and bodily desires. Therefore, the lived body establishes vectors that ‘are mutually engendering structures’ of their respective cultural framework (Leder, p. 152). The scenes deliberately capitalise on the conventional disembodied visualisation of women by objectifying ‘male spectatorial vision’ (Garner, p. 187). The *Meal*, in particular, portrays the existence of phenomenal vectorisation physically through bodily consumption as a provocative statement about female abuse and exploitation, touching upon issues that range from domestic violence to trafficking. Garner ascertains that this form of visual disembodiment prepares the re-embodiment of the female body ‘as erotic *object*’ is subdued to its material attributes and assigned for voyeuristic consumption (ibid.).

E. PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRAINING					
<i>Bacchae in Absentia</i>					
Scene	Scene Title	The Body as +(Character)	Mode of Embodiment	Phenomenal Field of Exploration	Training (examples)
Opening	<i>Dionysus' Statue</i>	Dismembered (D)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface; Dys-appearing	Absence	Missing Limbs; Immobility
I	<i>Agave's Dream</i>	Pregnant (A); Absent (A)	Recessive; Inner; Visceral; Dys-appearing	Otherness; Absence; Dys-appearance; Suffering	The Grape; Blindfolds exs; Breathing
II	<i>The Meal</i>	Objectified, Consumed (B)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface; Dys-appearing	Dys-appearance; Suffering	Animal work; Breathing
III	<i>Violation</i>	Used, Violated (B); Subject (M) or Object (F) of Power	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface; Dys-appearing	Dys-appearance; Suffering	Facial Violation
IV	<i>Resurrection</i>	Divine (D)	Chiasmatic	Sensuality	Breathing and Sensuality
V	<i>Slaves of Illusion</i>	Subject (D) or Object (B) of Power; Absent (B)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface; Dys-appearing	Intentionality; Agency; Absence; Dys-appearance; Suffering	The Grape; Breathing;
VI	<i>Ecstasis</i>	Absent (B)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface; Chiasmatic	Absence	SM; Point A-B; Shake; Breathing
VII	<i>The Messenger</i>	Observed, Objectified (B)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface	Suffering (B)	Shaking; Breathing
VIII	<i>Imprisonment</i>	Subject (P, M) or Object (F) of Power	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface; Dys-appearing	Dys-appearance; Suffering	Breathing; F.Violation; Shaking
IX	<i>The Conflict</i>	Subject (D) or Object (P) of Power	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface;	Suffering	Point A-B; Breathing
X	<i>Metamorphoses</i>	Transformed (D, P); Absent (P)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface;	Otherness	SM; Point A-B
XI	<i>Witnessing Deconstruction</i>	Objectified (B, P); Tortured	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface;	Suffering	Breathing; M.Limbs
XII	<i>Sparagmós</i>	Dismembered, Consumed (P); Absent (P); Dead (P)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface;	Absence; Dys-appearance; Suffering	SM; M.Limbs; Shaking
XIII	<i>The Trophy</i>	Objectified (P); Absent (A, P)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface;	Absence	SM; M. Limbs; Point A-B
XIV	<i>The Lament of Limbs</i>	Dismembered (P); Suffering (P, C)	Ecstatic; Outer/Surface; Recessive; Inner	Absence; Suffering	SM; Missing Limbs; Shaking
XV	<i>Apocalypse</i>	Dismembered (P); Absent (A, P)	Recessive; Inner; Visceral; Chiasmatic	Absence; Suffering	Point A-B; Breathing
XVI	<i>Bodies of Pain</i>	Incorporated (P)	Recessive; Inner; Visceral	Suffering	Point A-B; Breathing; The Grape

M: Male, F: Female, P: Pentheus, D: Dionysus, A: Agave, B: Bacchae C: Cadmus

*The Meal* and the *Violation* express precisely how the human body is subject to social practices and highlight the demand for social change. Society is required to abandon the predominantly male perception and cultural appropriation of the female body image. *Resurrection* and *Ecstasis* form the physically articulated response in traditional representations of women underlining the necessity of re-embodiment independently of prefixed ideologies and political constructions (on stage).

In most scenes, the female body is disciplined and unable to react. This impotence describes the psychophysical imprisonment occurring in patriarchal environments. The performance utilises the body as subject and object simultaneously. Here, the constraint is the derivative of an abusive and dominant tactility that is direct (face touching in *Violation*) or indirect (Dionysus' leashes in *Resurrection*). Bodies are utilised as prisons, traps and lethal weapons. Furthermore, the disruption between the rational and the instinctive that preoccupies the tragedy and the Cartesian divide between body and mind is symbolised by the attachment of the leashes on the women's neck as the region that corporeally links the head with the rest of the body.

Finally, in the context of deconstruction and reconstruction, the ecstatic bodies collapse and reveal the vulnerability of their traumatised viscosity. The body's invisible organs are soft and sensitive, like the victims' eyeballs, when violently squeezed back into their skulls by their abusers during the *Violation*. Pentheus and the royal family revalidate themselves through an unconventional use of their bodies. They control the Other, applying abusive self-expansion through invasive tactility. *Violation*, which started as an improvisational workshop, deepened our understanding of the embodied engendered subject and its 'psychic corporeality' (Pavis, 2003, p. 241), illustrating viscerally how the intrusion into other bodies solidifies the transcendence of the perpetrator's boundaries (Garner, p. 196).

## **2.2 Choreographing Absence**

The absence of consciousness was investigated in relation to uncontrollability. Thus, two fields of examination emerged: dream state and mental disorders, such as

schizophrenia, obsessive behaviours and addiction. Those are either identified in the text or added in the adaptation to serve the research purposes. Dreamlike narratives appear in *Agave's Dream* or *The Lament of Limbs*. Mental disorders and other forms of perceptual absence are prevalent in *Ecstasis*, *The Trophy* and *The Conflict*. Common among these renderings is the infiltration of the world and its phenomena through an altered and distorted perception. The deformed consciousness is sensory registered on the body, creating a dysfunctional state of existence. The embodied subjectivity then experiences dys-appearance while gradually losing itself in the quicksand of suffering. I employed light and darkness's contradictory but complementary effects to render it visually and concurrently experientially. The initial approach would display the body-mind disconnection and the absence of consciousness through the utilisation of black head coverings for Agave and the Chorus. The black material would be visually absorbed in the darkness of the stage rendering it invisible. A reversed illusion would be applied to specific body parts of Pentheus' body to represent his corporeal fragmentation. However, difficulties with the logistics only allowed us the second part.

Elements from the ritualistic practices of the Mohammedan dervishes and the Siberian shamans, who use dance to celebrate consciousness and incorporate divinity, are integrated into the embodiment of ecstasis. Dodds writes that in these instances, 'dance induces a sense of being possessed by an alien personality' (1960, p. xv). The repetitive movement of the head and the continuous tremoring that dominates the body rapidly infect all the members of the Chorus, turning dance into 'a compulsive obsession' (ibid.).

However, a complete embodiment is never accessed, advisable or necessary. In particular, the shamanistic 'mixture of anxiety and pain' and the accompanying agitated somatic activity (Sidiropoulou, 2017, p. 59) would disorientate the performers both physically and mentally. Therefore, performative rituals were examined exclusively in the studio, whereas a selection of movement material generated from the improvisations informed the choreographic score.

In *The Lament of Limbs* and *The Trophy*, Pentheus' remnants of flesh and bones constitute the corporeal effects of bodily violation. Pentheus' body experiences a

reversed objectification, which now originates in the female gaze. Albeit this gaze is defined by a perceptual absence, while Agave speaks over the alleged lion head, 'she strokes it with unconscious maternal affection' (Dodds, p. 224). The return to consciousness is represented with a pause, which facilitates her readjustment to reality. Dodds assumes this is because of her impotence to understand that 'her mind is clearing' (p. 230). Henceforth, we notice a behavioural alteration; she is no longer the authoritarian queen of the *Meal* scene nor the absent-minded worshipper of the *Attack*. Agave has a new consciousness. Still, it is apparent that Agave 'is like a subject coming out of deep hypnosis' (ibid.), highlighting the concept of absence, which Dodds emphasises by mentioning amnesia as a consequence of 'sudden alterations of personality.' (ibid.)

Cadmus clears Agave's sight to help her return to a normal state of mind. The gesture forms a physicalised metaphor for clear vision, thus implying an undistorted perception. Agave needs one last look to recover her memory, and 'Cadmus skillfully leads up to the *ἀναγνώρισις*, appealing to older memories that have not been repressed' (ibid.). Cadmus' fingers on Agave's eyes have a different function and purpose from the invasion to the eyes in *Violation*. Still, it attempts to permeate the ecstatic body and reach the recessive depths of her corporeality to heal the effects of its painful dys-appearance.

At *The Conflict*, we have a concurrent exploration of madness and the theme of metamorphosis and sexuality. Pentheus loses his mind; he screams, splits, and constantly moves back and forth in space like a manic pendulum. Portrayed with an intense uncontrollability, he contrasts 'the supernatural *ήσυχία* of Dion' (Dodds, p. 97). Foley highlights the kinaesthetic efficacy of *opsis*, where '[t]he physical transformation communicates to the king as the rationalizing [sic] speech does not. Sound, gesture and symbol express the god even more effectively than language' (Foley, 2003b, p. 343). Pentheus' ecstatic aggression and agitated behaviour begin his bodily and perceptual metamorphosis. Simultaneously, Dionysus reveals his divine identity hidden in a mortal's body. This double transformation illuminates the antithetical distinctions between man/woman, god/man, and tragic/comic (Foley, 2003b, p. 344), which are demonstrated by an alteration in his mannerisms and

costume. Pentheus is performing his new identity in his new dress. The corporeal boundaries of the engendered subjectivity become volatile while the male gaze re-examines its thematised object. A male god with effeminate characteristics and a king in a feminine outfit re-embodies femininity in new terms. In addition, this transformation forms a 'new relationship with one's body, a new sense of corporeal possibility' (Garner, p. 206), suggesting the self-transcendence and re-embodiment in new terms. Finally, an additional transformation occurs where Pentheus turns 'from spectator to spectacle' under the Dionysian manipulation (Foley, 2003b, p. 357), who 'then stands back or disappears into a position of heavenly observation, an unmoved spectator of human struggle' (Foley, 2003b, p. 348)

### **2.3 Staging Suffering**

Suffering was approached and performed through body movement and vocality. The participants admitted higher resonance with the scenes of vocal (yet not verbalized) articulations of pain. The ensemble selected Agave's screams in the prologue and Pentheus' screams in *Witnessing Deconstruction* and *Sparagmós* as the most impactful scenes. Pavis claims that the vocalisation of suffering corporealises the text in a manner 'that is much more difficult to perceive than emotions and motivations' (Pavis, 2003, p. 218). When in pain, we turn inwards, drawing our attention to the body and the source of our torture. This disposition leaves little room for the verbal articulation of pain. Similarly, in theatre, the inexpressibility of pain should not be inscribed in words; it should instead embody the essence of the text in the performing body.

There is a noticeable effect in the relationship between suffering, otherness and collectivity. The shared experience of suffering is not a reductive factor for the individual's pain. Indeed, as Leder confirms, 'pain is marked by an interiority that another cannot share' (Leder, p.74). Even so, collective moments of shared pain drastically impact suffering, offering relief to the traumatised subject(s). Indications of this phenomenon are met in the Zaloggos dance analysed earlier.



Another case was the attack of Pentheus' guardians on the Bacchae when B6 was separated from the Chorus by two men. Despite the collective suffering invading the group's corporeality, B6 felt a differentiation of the experience at an individual and collective level:

We were a team because we had suffered in the same way, and then I was taken to the side, away from all of the girls. So [...] I had to fight for myself. (B6)

In her case, suffering was the causal factor determining the group dynamics –a behavioural phenomenon emerging in collective crisis, such as in wars or mass catastrophes. However, she claims that co-suffering did not counterbalance her pain nor decrease its effect. Moreover, she fully embodied the fear of damaging her body due to the choreography requirements (B6). The piece did not 'break the illusion' (B6); it instead reinforced the embodiment.

Similarly, in the recognition scene between Agave and her dead son, B1's empathetic disposition created a feeling of sorrow while performing the mourning dance in the background:

When I was doing them, I was embodying the tragedy and also [...] it felt tragic in my mind, [...] it became something that I could feel inside rather than just doing it. (B1)

The participant encounters difficulties articulating this intersubjective form of pain because it does not originate from her own body. However, the interview findings evidence that empathy works in favour of embodiment. A similar case was P3's indirect embodiment of Prometheus' suffering in *Prometheus Immobile* when the protagonist vocalised his torture on stage (pp. 36-37). In both case studies, we understand that the experience of co-suffering internalises the pain of the Other as one's own pain.

### **3. General Observations and Findings**

The research employs qualitative thematic analysis based on the descriptive phenomenological approach. There are no predetermined themes; instead,

qualitative data are collected and organised into patterns of meanings. These lead to the synthesis of themes that emerge from group discussions, interviews, and observation. Although the component parts of training change depending on the aims of each project, training principles remain the same throughout the research justifying the similarity among the emerging themes in the analysis. Reoccurring themes forge a set of predefined questions asked in the interviews in order to assess and re-evaluate the efficiency of the element under examination throughout the research. For example, phenomenologically informed studio-based communication was an emerging theme in *Prometheus Immobile*, which I reexamined in *Bacchae in Absentia*, and I will reevaluate in *Medea Inside* according to the findings. This process is essential to the advancement of specific elements. Other repetitive themes are self-awareness, direct and indirect embodiment, the curative capacities of the training process, spatiotemporality and embodiment. All three chapters elaborate on these subject matters in the respective sections of observations and findings.

### **3.1 Methodological Observations**

All participants in *Bacchae in Absentia* share a common interest in mental phenomena, and a considerable number of them have directly or indirectly experienced cases of mental illness. The cast unanimously received the process well, crediting training and appreciating the benefits of their improved psychophysical awareness. They gained an in-depth understanding of the process, the underpinning theory, and the relationship between body and consciousness. As a result, the ensemble could articulate the project aims and understand the functionality and application of performer training methods in performance making. There was a frequent use of phenomenological terminology in the rehearsal space.

Moreover, the heterogeneous composition of the cast played a critical role in emotional expression affecting the embodiment's extent, quality, and intensity. From this perspective, dancers see tasks (B5), while actors see characters. This divide, alongside their professional backgrounds and experience, determined the ensemble dynamics and demands [Appendix I: 1.3]. However, the intensity benefited

inter-subjective solid connections and created a fertile ground for further phenomenological discourse. What arises from my observations and interactions with the ensemble is that the amateur performers (undergraduate students) were the most flexible and eager to expose themselves to the new training and absorb it to a great extent.

On the contrary, participants, who claimed to be 'professionals' (B10, B2), demonstrated a degree of rigidity and difficulty in adapting. A factor that worked favourably for the method was the longitude (two years) of our collaboration with some of the students, which enhanced the relationships developed among us, and contributed to their familiarisation with the approach. These observations led to the following two statements:

- (i) Time and longitude of the training process played a pivotal role in embodiment.
- (ii) The inter-subjective relationships alongside the arising bonds among participants enhanced the successful application of the method.

All performers notice perceptual, emotional-driven and performative change (B1, B3, B4, B5, B7, B9) or enhanced confidence and psychophysical 'awareness' (B5, B7). B5 admits that she feels 'more complete as a performer' and that this training method contributed to 'get unblocked' from her training in ballet and personal tragedies. She experiences 'changes from the inside and then the aesthetics of (her) body', overcoming the difficulty of shifting from previous training practices. Similarly, B9 'gained a basic understanding [...] to get into an emotional state to approach the tragedy as if it was a more realistic event'. B7 acquires an understanding of an introspective approach. B7 adds that 'rather than see it from the outside and the aesthetics, everything had to come from an emotional response or an emotional understanding first'. B3 and B1 admit skills development with a clear understanding of why we use specific movements and kinesiology or breathing. B1 developed physical skills and an 'emotional stamina' to the 'material of the play' (such as death, grieving, being restricted or controlled). Both B1 and B3 realised the beneficial impact of the two-year phenomenological training.

Moreover, B4 points out that '[t]here was a clear theoretical underpinning. [...] Even the *Grape* was a very good exercise in sort of... introduce the concept' (B4). He further adds that the exercise *Embodying the Text* made him 'conscious of (his) feeling' (B4), drawing his attention inwards. The activity allowed him to act from his 'gut', rendering his performance 'more impactful' and focused (B4). His attention is relocated to his body flowing from the centre of his existence. B8 makes an interesting observation regarding the diligent elaboration of the process from the workshops to the rehearsals and then to the final performance:

I was aware of where the workshops were implemented into the process of rehearsals. [...] I could definitely see the relation to why we had to shake in the workshops and why we had to understand our body [...] and again with the breathing [...] I think you can see the connections with the process, I don't [sic] think I had realised the power of them until the show. Like how important they could be or how they change the show for the better. (B8)

Nevertheless, two of the performers felt they lacked an understanding of the sequence. B6 successfully identified similarities between the approach and cinematic techniques, an artistic method that confused B5 and B10. The performers made considerable recommendations to facilitate a coherent, uninterrupted understanding by fully incorporating the workshops into the rehearsals and not treating them as two separate circles.

Emotional expression for dancers is mainly funnelled down through physical articulation. There are examples of actors, though, who agonise with physical expression because of their background in logocentric acting. Both disciplines, dancing and acting, are characterised by the background disappearance where the most skilled body region is thematised while the rest of the body is consigned to oblivion. Hence, skill acquisition in mixed ensembles is time-dependent and discipline-based.

### **3.2 Phenomenological and Performative Observations**

According to earlier observations (workshops section) and participants' responses, the training process enhanced body awareness. Phenomenological performer

training advances the embodiment of specific emotional and psychophysical states. Thus, the level of immersion in exercises that involve a psychological focus differs among performers, and it is analogous to their openness to the project's objectives. Most of the ensemble managed to embody the lived experience, as described in detail earlier in the exercises section. There are incidents of light discomfort during specific workshops, such as the *Skin Manifests* exercise on mental illness embodiment or the *Face Violation* scene. This discomfort is equally accountable as an embodiment because it affects the participant corporeally and perceptually to a significant extent. Similarly, there is an apparent embodiment of ecstasis and suffering during the workshops. Finally, breathing as a function of the recessive body facilitated the development of sensuality and emotional alteration.

The participants made relevant references to the absence of consciousness and noticed focal or background disappearance during the exercises. To most, *Point A-B*, the *Grape*, *Face Violation*, and *Shaking* were essential activities to their phenomenological development due to their recessive and reflective nature. B5 admits uncontrollability and a feeling of 'mania' described as 'more (of) a conceptual suffering than really-really suffering physically', while 'through the manic moments I couldn't [sic] stop my body' (B5). B6 shifted to 'a mental state where everything is more foggy and impulsive'.

The ensemble's selection of words indicates embodiment. For example, B6 refers to the ecstatic dance and the relevant exercises as 'manic moments' [B6] where uncontrollability was prevalent. That capitalises on the lived experience of absence subconsciously articulated in words. Should the participant have considered shaking or ecstatic dance on stage as two alienated phenomena, she would have used a respective phraseology.

Furthermore, B8 notices moments of true madness for his fellow performers who experienced 'different stages of madness [...] to portray what madness is to them... it is multi-faceted' (B8). Although we are unaware of individual methodologies in approaching *Skin Manifests* and the material they may have used, that forms B8's assumption.



*Fig. 15 The Bacchae ecstatic dance. Photo credits: Patrick Bannon*

Indeed, madness manifests in many ways and individualized performativity underlined this aspect unveiling the significance of a phenomenological examination of distinct subjectivities. In like fashion, B8 was appreciative of the directorial approach that respected subjective experience and allowed it to emerge in the performance context. The participants acknowledge the critical role of the training process towards the embodiment of the absent body. B8 claims that:

It was not just a portrayal of madness [...] through this process you realise that it's [sic] subtle madness, then it's [sic] slightly elevating madness, and then it keeps going and keeps going until it gets to that point of scream. (B8)

His description of the emotional escalation validates the training process. B8 could further identify that B3's character 'completely loses it at some point of the play [...] and you definitely can see that from his breathing,' because he made this 'shift in thirty seconds' and it is 'that point of madness you can only connect it to the workshops'. From breathing and emotional alteration and passing on to exercises that link substantially the psychic and the physical, the performers acquired a skill

set that was no longer outside their body. The incorporation of psychophysical training, therefore, led to its pre-reflective practice and 'experiential disappearance' (Leder, 1990, p. 31). What is more, the embodiment of the respective perceptual state and the phenomenon of 'elevating madness' (B8) witness the presence of absence in performative contexts. According to Leder (1990), the lived body, in this case, falls within a condition of self-effacement through a simultaneous self-projection into the world and a withdrawal from 'its own conscious perception and control' (p. 69).

### 3.3 Being-in-the-world and the Gaze

As it appears, the gaze plays a unique role in the relationship between our existence and the world. *Bacchae in Absentia* generates a palpable sense of self-reflection through the 'gaze of the Other' (Leder, p. 23), reshaping and enhancing embodiment. For instance, B5 elevates her performative experience to the sphere of the real, especially when she is the object of observation by an external Other. In particular, she claims to reach a more profound level during the open rehearsal and the live performance. Indeed, for many, the stage and a live audience operate as fortifiers of embodiment (B3, B5).

While on stage, B3 experiences a chiasmatic withdrawal from the world caused by ineffable exhaustion. His eyes are deliberately shut from the decapitation scene to the end of the performance. In parallel, his invisible body is being moved around the space by B10, who holds his head from the hair. The performer compares the loss of sight to death and the absence of his conscious mind:

I slip into darkness in that moment as well because my eyes are closed, which is a bit like dying. [...] Having your eyes closed is very weird because I am led by B10. I am half in the space, half just completely out of it, because closing your eyes, your mind tends to drift [...] you are not acting anymore really. [...] my focus was in my head, and my head was meant to be dead, and I was kind of trying to take the life out of it, which puts you in a place where your mind is really wondering [...], and you are not there. (B3)

The gaze is the ‘most prominent’ ecstatic function ‘in shaping the experiential field’ (Leder, p. 37). Its absence is detrimental to consciousness, given that it structures the experience of the world (ibid.). Accordingly, the subjectivity is trapped and imprisoned in an exhausted, dismembered body led by an external agent-subject who causes a sense of ‘disorientation’ to the object’s sensorimotor surface.



*Fig. 16 Agave playing with Pentheus' head. Photo credits: Patrick Bannon*

Moreover, while ‘[c]onsciousness can be understood as patterns of spatiotemporal relations’ (Nair, p. 165), it is now clear why B3 in *Pentheus' Head* has no perception of the spatiotemporal continuity around him and experiences its disruption:

There's [sic] so much stuff that goes on during the lament I just don't [sic] see, and I have no idea where the progress is. There is no point of me [sic] counting, there is no point of me [sic] doing anything, so I'm [sic] just out of it completely. And then when I open my eyes again in the end, it's like a joke, it's like back to reality. You come in from an almost out-of-the-body experience where you are like dead. (B3)



B3's claims of being 'out' and living an 'almost out-of-the-body experience' attest to the existence of the ecstatic in the way Leder presents it. Ecstasy, etymologically, means to *stand out*, whereas absence is described as *being away* (Leder, pp. 21-22). B3's experience of a disrupted here and now illustrates 'the ecstatic nature of corporeality' that 'is always correlative with this primordial absence' (p. 22).

B4, in addition, experiences a background disappearance on stage during the dismemberment scene, which he partially ascribes to the lighting:

...emphasis on the face because it was the only part that was lit. I guess in that moment, I forgot the rest of my body, and it was like the face was like the focal point, attention goes away from what you do with the rest of your body, but I was still conscious of the rest of my body. I guess you get that sense of disembodiment because of the lighting. (B4)

B8 talks about the embodiment of suffering through the gaze interpreted as empathy for the Other with the simultaneous experience of indirect suffering. While witnessing Pentheus' torture, his voice cracks and goes silent before he finishes his thoughts. The conversation revolved around the vulnerability of the body, fragmentation, and death:

I can't imagine what it would be like –even if I was dead and my body got torn into pieces. I can't imagine how that would feel. [...] when I saw [...] the limbs been collected... It's just so strange body parts being collected like tokens, like a little trophy or something, just seeing such essential tools of the human body... being picked up. (B8)

Pentheus' dismemberment elicits existential concerns throwing perception into confusion. B8 contemplates the post-mortem experience of a fragmented body, and despite the experiential absence since the body is dead, the spectacle of disembodied limbs remains unbearable. That results from the mechanical perceptual response of 'self-body division' (p. 70) that occurs in the wider context of bodily dysfunction, where pain is often a dominant sensation. The description of dismemberment as unimaginable by the observer (B8) and the emergence of concerns regarding mortality are caused by secondary suffering that caused a corollary effect similar to 'sensory intensification' (p. 71)



*Fig. 17 From sensory deprivation to the dismemberment scene. Photo credits: Patrick Bannon*

Moreover, the first and final scenes provoked empathy in the performers, capitalising on the experience of existential apprehension through vocalicity (screaming and panting). B1 says that she could not feel the pain of the Other, but she ‘felt all of the emotions of grieving and of suffering’ in the rehearsal for the first time. The emotional discomfort was translated into bodily and facial heaviness, where ‘everything became a massive weight [...] like death at the end of life’ (B1). The inter-subjective relations developed in the studio empowered the sense of collectivity, favouring the successful function of the Chorus as one body. All the female performers felt anger and empathy during the collective acts in the scenes of violence and lamentation, respectively, unveiling ensemble connectivity through psychophysical processes.

#### **4. A Non-Conclusion**

The chapter has demonstrated a plethora of examples indicating the embodiment of direct (B3) and indirect suffering *through* the Other (B1) or *for* the Other (empathy) (i.e. B7 and B8 for B3; every one for B10). In addition, there were notable cases of

absence in all modes of embodiment, occurring primarily during the training process. However, moments of psychophysical tension on stage shared an equal impact in the embodiment of suffering.

The project *Bacchae in Absentia* elucidated how a phenomenological reading could transform the performing body's perception while recorporealised through its deconstruction. In addition, it demonstrated techniques to reshape acting through psychophysical training. Performers witnessed a change in their acting approach and acquired a deeper understanding of the method, ameliorating self-awareness. Many performers experienced the phenomenological modes of embodiment under examination related to absence and dys-appearance. The embodiment, however, was analogous to their psychophysical stamina, openness to learning and experience in characterisation. Furthermore, embodiment was dependent on the longitude of the process.

The theoretical underpinning of the process was deemed successful, yet a minority encountered difficulties associating the training with the final product. This issue predicates that the organisation of the process and an efficient communication system are still in progress. Asking about establishing a phenomenological language between the director and the ensemble led to the following realisation: phenomenology is not to speak in phenomenological terms but to speak from within. Hence, it is the researcher's job to articulate the method and its findings phenomenologically. This recognition led to altering the approach in *Medea Inside* (Chapter 3).

## *Medea Inside* (2021)

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### Introduction

The pandemic that hit England in March 2020 deprived the research project of space and physical contact with the ensemble. Yet, the new circumstances were conducive to examining psychophysical imprisonment since all participants were obliged by the government to self-isolation due to force majeure.

While the understanding of the lived experience was the primary research objective, the unexpected twist in the methodology enriched the ontology of the research practice. As such, the experience of isolation was *lived* rather than *represented*. That, alongside the many implications deriving from such a shift from the proximal and lived to the remote and digital, offered a new introspective tool and experimental condition.

The chapter will examine Medea as a decentred and disconnected subjectivity. Garner (1994) appropriates the term ‘decentered’ [sic] (p. 216) from Young’s phenomenological account of the experience of self-alienation during pregnancy (Young, 2005, p. 49). Decentralisation describes the phenomenon of otherness as it emerges from the female corporeal centre and turns the body into an unfamiliar space. Merleau-Ponty (1945) used the same term to express a phenomenal duality in perception in the cases of schizophrenia and homesickness (2012, p. 299). Further to this, Pavis appropriated the term to denote a post-human mediated reality (Pavis, 2003, p.47). *Medea Inside*<sup>6</sup> (2020) legitimises the use of all those decentralising manifestations. Namely, the protagonist’s past involves a record of homicides while she faces the solitude of exile and experiences the condition of motherhood. Finally, given the representational context of this project, Medea was remotely incarnated by pixelated bodies.

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<sup>6</sup> The excerpt from *Medea Inside, Medea’s Chorus*, won second place in the Out of Chaos Competition in USA (Nov 2020) supported by BADA and the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University. The dance film *Medea Inside* (2021) has been nominated for Best Experimental Film at The Budapest Film Festival 2022, won the Gold Award for Best Student Film in the Milan Gold Awards 2022 and the Honourable Mention for Best Student Film in London’s Falcon Film Festival 2022. Finally, it was selected for the Lift-Off Global Network Showcase Extravaganza 2022 and donated to the APGRD, University of Oxford. The film is available here: <https://youtu.be/neilrGXindo>.

## 1. Phenomenological Views on the Inside: Aims and Research Questions

The emphasis on the interiority of the body and the *inside* in the title could tacitly imply a distance from the *outside*, leading us to the dichotomisation between Self and world. Such an assumption reverberates Cartesian materialism, which seems apparent in internalist thought (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, pp. 122-123). However, such allusions can be rejected in a phenomenological context, as the subjective locates itself in the core of the interaction between the Self and the world. Hence, the mind is not a 'self-contained' entity detached from the outside, and as such, it cannot be examined in autonomy as the two extremes suggest, but only through its interdependence with the world (pp. 123-125).

Both Husserl's (1950) and Heidegger's (1975) phenomenological accounts (Husserl, 1964, p. 38; Heidegger, 1982, p. 422) treat the mind and world as two interdependent systems, where '[t]he subject is a being-in-the-world and the world remains 'subjective' since its texture and articulations are traced out by the subject's movement of transcendence' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 500). As Gallagher and Zahavi argue, 'the relation between mind and world is an internal relation, a relation constitutive of its relata, and not an external one of causality' (Rudd in Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, p. 125).

Hence, *Medea Inside* divulges underrepresented aspects and possibilities of the embodied, engendered subject during its changing corporeality. The *inside* in the title does not imply or highlight any divide between interiority and exteriority. Instead, it treats them as two aspects of human existence that complement each other. Therefore, the research questions for this project are encapsulated as follows:

- What does a performative discourse on Medea's transcendence involve, and how does that change during the digitalisation of the creative process?
- How do the embodied subjectivities (both fictional and real) experience the abrupt upheaval of their normality, and how does this affect their perception of the world in the context of this project?

- Finally, in what ways can the performer embody Medea's intentionality and its objects and other 'interior experiences' (Conroy, 2010, p. 15), such as pregnancy and suffering, and how is this differentiated through digital platforms?

In this Chapter, the research questions are divided into two sections to illustrate the conceptual and practical evolution of the final project. In the introductory section of Performer Training, I demonstrate the transition from dramaturgical analysis to training design. Thus, the first question seeks to permeate Medea's subconscious mind and its intentionality about the world she inhabits to explore the body as perceiver and perceived. With PMPP, we examine how the characters perceive the world to suggest practical ways they negotiate their interiority ecstatically. Their perception of the world radically changes the way they perceive acting and training. The investigation needs to adapt to the new circumstances of social distance and virtual environments. As the process evolves, we must seize how that affects embodiment. The last query focuses on particular interior experiences offering subjective depth during the digitalisation of the process.

In the second section, which concerns Online Practice, I am interested in the directorial approach of the suffering body and the practical consequences given the ontological and methodological modifications of the digital shift and the experience of the pandemic:

- How does the digital shift affect the phenomenological direction of the suffering body?
- What does this mean for the research and the embodiment of the lived experience?

The pandemic created the necessity to radically modify the work's performative and representational codes through extant and novel creative practices. The objective was to preserve theatre's liveliness and the phenomenological attitude (*epoché*) towards digital mediums by harnessing alternative resources and approaches.

However, this is not part of a thesis on filmmaking practices or film phenomenology. Instead, the chapter is concerned with a remote performance-making approach aspiring to inspire further research in comparative phenomenological studies for different mediums in the field of performing arts. The first part of this chapter examines new possibilities and interventions to sustain ensemble devising processes remotely. The second part builds on a new concept of online performance-making, continuously informed by lived experience. Focusing on the concept of embodiment, the method reinvents and establishes phenomenological developments of digital creative strategies that can benefit contemporary and future creators.

## 2. Navigating Domestic Interiors

The exposure to naturalistic domestic environments translates allegorically into investigations of 'psychological interiority' (Rebellato, 2021) or even (in)voluntary invasions of one's private sphere to satisfy subconscious scopophilic impulses (De Vos, 2015, p. 29; Freud, 1974, p. 157). For example, in *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre deploys the image of a man looking through a keyhole to describe voyeurism as an act dissimulated in secrecy bearing in tandem the implication of power exertion on the object of gaze (Sartre, 2003, p. 283; De Vos, 2015, p. 30). Yet, instances of plays such as Maurice Maeterlinck's *Inside (Intérieur)*, 1895) or Papaioannou's long-durational performance *Inside* (2011) and films including Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 *Rear Window* or *The Neighbor's Window* by Marshall Curry (2019) suggest a form of interactional activity. This activity is shaped around the idea of an experiential exchange or felt mutuality (Bannon, 2015, p. 128), even when the spectators remain unseen in the auditorium.

Naturalistic representations of domestic interiors effortlessly dominated lockdown settings in imposed digital encounters and numerous artistic attempts of confined expressivity. *Medea Inside* is a product of its era, where a plurality of domesticities emerged from electronic windows exposing interiorities to (un)familiar eyes. The film invited the spectator *inside* alternate domestic settings, shifting the focus *inside* multiple embodied subjectivities while serving a dual purpose: first, it acted as an

alternative contemporary response to stagings of Greek tragedy, a practice originating from the 5<sup>th</sup> B.C. open-air amphitheatres, which locate the action outside the family *oikos or estia* (house and home respectively). Second, the invitation relied on the metaphor of the body as *oikos* of the soul, primarily seeking to encourage the audience to look inside Medea while developing an experiential discourse. The film accumulated the performers' lived experiences during the lockdown, attempting a phenomenological account of the body as (pregnancy) and in (imprisonment) space. *Medea Inside* is a corporeal tribute to interiority outlining the boundaries between safety and imprisonment, the private and the public, the recessive and the ecstatic. The work introduced us pervasively and documentarily to the affairs of a family as performed by a real-life couple and a Chorus of two who were re-envisioned as reflections of the protagonist.

In the Euripidean tragedy, Medea is a foreigner in Corinth. The narrative begins with the acknowledgement of the committed adultery. That leads Medea to poison Jason's mistress and her father. Her revenge climaxes when she commits infanticide. Medea's most prominent portrayals and theatrical representations viewed her as a 'wild beast' or a 'madwoman' (Easterling, 2003, p. 187). The film, on the contrary, without justifying or reducing the act of infanticide, looks inside the body during forms of isolation and gestation. The feelings of isolation and imprisonment resonated with the lockdown, while gestation was deployed to address embodiment and lived experience in the context of motherhood, suffering and otherness.

Medea wavers between rootedness and uprootedness, expressing an existential paradox of non-belonging and non-escaping. We could argue that as an immigrant and victim of abuse, she suffers from the effects of traumatic bonding (Dunton and Painter, 1970; 1993) with Jason and Corinth. Accordingly, the dipole in question is essential when we refer to the remote nature of the project, addressing issues of proximity and remoteness that shape the directorial approach.



## I. Performer Training

### 1. Studio Practice

The company's composition is subject to annual alterations, with the remaining participants offering valuable comparative feedback. The previous chapters have already analysed the breathing exercises. Yet, variations such as *Moving the Breath* and *The Body is not yours for madness* (Peeters, 2010, pp. 156-157) are contingent on the particularities of each research project. Finally, reasonable training adjustments are in place according to each company's (training, physical, or emotional) requirements.

#### 1.1 Breathing Loss

According to Stuart, the manipulation of breath grants access to a 'particular emotional state without needing any scenarios' (Peeters, p. 156). In *Bacchae*, the performers reach a level of sensuality through collective breathing, whereas in *Medea*, breathing facilitates the gradual construction and generation of the emotion of sadness. In addition, I attempted to familiarise them with pregnancy and delivery through prenatal breathing techniques.

In the second workshop, narratives and improvisation supported the development of an emotional escalation drawing from Laban's physical scale, where the performers should express their feelings using only the expressiveness of their eyes. Instinctively, they all focused on their breathing and experienced an emotional flow in their 'stomach' (M6), 'guts' (M1) or chest (M8), building up in a 'logical progression' (M6). Breathing worked efficiently in developing emotionality and expressivity. For example, noticeable variations of intuitive and spontaneous faciality occurred during the exercise. The participants effectively associated transitions in their mood with changes in their breathing patterns (M7, M6, M8), especially when given a context. The emotional escalation generated sadness from the core of their recessiveness: 'I felt it deep in my soul' (M8).

## 1.2 Exploring Motherhood: Imaginative *Bubbles* and *Water Balloons*

In *Medea*, motherhood is one of the key concepts in the tragedy, raising questions about the engendered subject, particularly the female lived experience. The studio practice examined embodiment during pregnancy. The exploration imitated reality from conception to the amputation of the umbilical cord. Motherhood in *Medea* appears as a phenomenon where trauma and responsibility are interconnected, starting with the 'life-threatening pains of reproduction' (Foley, 2003a, p. 81) and ending in infanticide pain. In a materialistic sense, the children constitute the bodily extension of the maternal body through the umbilical cord. Hence, I argue that infanticide is the Euripidean metaphor for *Medea's* death (Bouzioti, 2017; 2021).

Therefore, the studio practice attempted to explore the recessive body during pregnancy and how its imprint on the ecstatic body alters perception regarding the Self, the Other, and the world. If we treat the fetus as living space within living space, questions about corporeal spatiality and otherness arise. In her essay *Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation* (1984), Iris Young discusses the phenomenon of otherness in pregnancy. The body coexists within another body, inhabiting its space, 'blurring the distinctions between inside and outside, myself and other, and compounding the experience of subjectivity' (Garner, p. 216).

The workshop design allows the exploration of the recessive body through exercises of relaxation, breathing and imagination to understand the effects of visceral alterations on the ecstatic body. To investigate the ecstatic pregnant body and its movement in space, we incorporated objects to measure body adjustment, movement coordination and balance and how these manifested in relation to the Other. I used a combination of activities to determine the phenomenological investigation of pregnant-maternal recessiveness. Those were inspired by:

- i) Miranda Tufnell's practice on writing and improvisation in the context of body-  
imagination-environment (PTPP Research Group workshop, University of Leeds, 2020).
- ii) Meg Stuart's breathing exercises, which led to the conception of the imaginative exercise *The Bubble*.

iii) Exercises from my previous projects, such as *The Grape*, were influenced by the theories of Leder and Zarrilli about the recessive and inner body.

Although the last two exercises are both based on object digestion, in the first case, we have an imaginative object inside the body, whereas in the second, a real one. However, in both cases, the journey is understandable only by our imagination and aims to familiarise the participants with the experience of conception and pregnancy in an early stage. *The Balloon* was a continuation of those two and attempted to build an avenue to the experience of gestation at an advanced level. All exercises were not classified by gender and applied to both female and male performers to familiarise them with the concept of recessiveness.



Fig. 18 Scene from *Medea Inside: Performing pregnancy*. Photo credits: M5

The first workshop followed a psychophysical approach, with the first half exploring the inner body through concentration and imagination with *The Bubble*. The second half investigated gestation physically using *The Balloon* and the *Pregnant Crawl variation*.

*The Bubble*: The first set of exercises was breathing- and focus-based. The aim was to place the performer right in the centre of their being-in-the-world shifting their

attention to their inner body. The activity requires bodies lying on the floor and five to ten minutes of relaxation and focus exercises on breathing. Next, I am narrating the imaginative journey of a bubble that begins in the mouth to descend to the lower parts of the body. My narration consists of a series of instructions in the form of questions. The aim is to increase their bodily awareness and encourage the exploration of perceptual possibilities by activating their imagination. In the meantime, while I examine focal and background disappearance:

You swallow a bubble. What is the shape of the bubble? Taste? Colour? Texture? How does your throat react? What do your organs do? How about your lungs and stomach? What do your muscles and tissues, and arteries do? Does your body make any sound? What would an inner body soundscape be like? What is happening to the back of your head?

The ensemble explores gravity, position, disposition, dynamics, space, and senses through a quasi-guided narrative. Meanwhile, they make decisions on the qualities of the bubble and its impact on their viscerality. In the second half of the journey, the bubble represents the process of conception and gestation. The subjects are guided on how to sense potential alterations in their breathing patterns, their organs' position or transformation, and the concept of spatiality. Additionally, we notice the relationship between themselves and the object (otherness), the lived experience as an intrinsic or extrinsic entity, and how that affects intersubjectivity.

In *The Balloon*, the participants are charged with filling up their balloons with water to establish a form of bonding with the objects as their creators. The volatility and unstable nature of the water aim to simulate gestation as they create a sense of liveliness and instability. The exercise involves a fully instructed Laban walk with variations around the space.

Initially, the performers are asked to walk and hold their balloons in extended hands at the height of their chest, performing various pedestrian tasks. Later, they place the object under their clothes in contact with their skin while altering levels, speed, or focus as they walk in the space. The purpose is to familiarise themselves with each other and the object. In order to raise awareness about their viscerality and

recessiveness, I ask them to take a moment and think of their (inner) body: *What has changed?* We then move on to the extra-daily, extra-pedestrian movement. I constantly ask them to notice the occurring changes and focus on their bodily functionality, vocality, and perceptual receptivity at the moment (nowness) of their lived experience.

The participants admit an 'appreciation' for their own body (M1) alongside a deeper connection and focus (M3). M1 refers to this 'appreciation' in the context of motherhood, where she is 'not just a vessel, not just someone to produce a child', showing a noticeable pre-reflective sense of protectivity and attachment to the object. For Heidegger, the maternal body is 'uncanny' as it is 'now no longer simply for her but for another being entirely', yet in the Levinasian account of ethics, the pregnant body 'becomes something of an embodied space for the ethical and yet that space itself is also transcended by the ethical as responsibility' (Shanahan, 2014). In this respect, it is explicit how Levinas' concept of responsibility and his apprehension of the transcendent subjectivity concerning the Other (ibid.) could apply to real and performative pregnancy cases. Therefore, a phenomenological account of the maternal body has generated an interpretive potentiality of performative discourse on Medea's transcendent subjectivity, simultaneously validating her body as the null point of our investigation.



*Fig. 19 Studio practice: Water-filled balloons attached to the participants' bodies. Photo credits: Dionysia Bouzioti*

### 1.3 Exploring Concepts of Otherness and Power in *Medea*

The tragedy offers a plethora of manifestations of otherness experienced by Medea. For example, she is the Other from Glauce's perspective as Jason's lover. Secondly, she appears as a stranger or barbarian for the Corinthians disclosing the climate regarding immigrants and racism. Thirdly, she is underestimated and objectified by patriarchy due to her gender. Furthermore, according to Young and feminist phenomenology (Young, 2005, p. 46; Sanford, 2016, p. 54), the mother might experience the phenomenon of otherness during pregnancy. Finally, we can assume that her two boys are socially and biologically constructed as Jason's reflections.

The workshop's theme was *connection* and *disconnection* in parental and romantic relationships. Specifically, we explored these two concepts in the relationships between father and child, mother and child, husband and wife, as well as between lovers. In all formations, disconnection can occur as a natural event (i.e. birth or death) or might be forced by other factors (e.g. distance, war). In order to examine in detail identities and relationships, I merged Meg Stuart's *Use Me* and *Frozen Man* (Peeters, p. 162) to organise the performers in active/passive duets in vertical or horizontal positions. Some examples that best served the purposes of the tragedy were: Lover/Lover, Intruder/Hostage, Voyeur/Object and Mother/Ghost. The purpose of the exercise was to explore relationships (of power) where the active body (subject) manipulates the passive body (object) and investigate how specific actions determine behaviour and physicality.

The performers communicate their stories and images of the Other through 'private intimate exchanges', micro-movements, whispers and eye contact becoming aware of their actions and each other's 'inherent states' (Peeters, p. 162). I repeated the exercise by changing roles and adding water-filled balloons in the end, which drastically altered the nature of power relations, especially with the pregnant male bodies in passive roles. Male performers 'could not be invasive' (M2), while some experienced vulnerability when they could not see their performing partner from where they stood.



*Fig. 20 Scene from Medea Inside: Exploring relationships and connection/disconnection.  
Photo credits: M1*

*The Body Is Not Yours* (Peeters, p. 157) is an exercise I used to examine perceptual and corporeal states regarding madness. Relationships of otherness occur in mental health cases when the body or the Self appears to act as Other, such as in psychosis or neurosis. An infanticide is an act that could be categorised as such. The performers start with the repetition of an effortless action, where their body is the agent, and their mind wants to resist. Body and mind here are not expressing a binary; the purpose is to resist witnessing the Self as Other. The repetition allowed them to explore the movement giving depth and space for expression. Although this is similar to *Bacchae's* rational/irrational motif, I employed it for two reasons. First, I meant to express the Chorus's and Medea's inability to move from a fixed point. Second, it formed a metaphor for their impotence to escape patriarchal oppression and Medea's fatal decision.

#### **1.4 Connection, Disconnection and Otherness**

Balloon-blowing (M6) and balloon-carrying (M5) were perceived as acts of corporeal extension (M5, M6). The water inside the balloon benefited the connection between the object and the body (M5, M6). Attachment to the balloon was experienced



*Fig. 21 Scene from Medea Inside: Exploring Otherness, power and domestic abuse. Photo credits: M12*

despite acknowledging that it consists of distinct materiality other than the participant's body (M5). M5 expressed a sense of connectivity generated by the warm water and its movement that drew her attention to the reciprocal activity between bodies of alternate materialities. The body's movement attunes to the water's movement readjusting proprioception. My body becomes a reformed centre of existence that 'makes space and the place of things that I encounter in the world possible' (Gallagher in Svenaus, 2017, pp. 78-79). The balloon is now 'enveloped within the body schema' (Dolezal, p. 216) and incorporated (Leder, 1990) by the subject in a prereflective manner. Although it should typically recede in focal disappearance, the nature and significance of the particular corporeal lieu draw the attention of the subjectivity. The body's natural limits and intentional moves are subject to modification and perceptual reconfiguration because of the artificial addition.

The experience of the object's embodied movement resembles quickening, where the hosting body feels the presence of another being (Svenaus, 2017, p. 80). Experienced in a mode of *absent presence* (Levinas, 1961/1969; Leder, 1990;



Shanahan, 2014), the phenomenon of a growing embodied and invisible Other operates in a connective capacity feeding the emotional bond between the pregnant body and its inhabitant. Responding to any queries around bodily alienation, and since the fetus/balloon in most cases appears to be considered an integrated body part, the phenomenon of physical alienation did not seem to occur. A possible explanation is that ‘an interoceptive experience of the fetus’s movements’ (Leder, p. 61) occurred while the performer perceived the fetus/balloon as an incorporated object. For this reason, it should not be related to Leder’s concept of disappearance, which occurs in pain and illness (Leder, 1990, p.69; Svenaus, 2017, p. 80).

As Svenaus points out, bodily alienation occurs in unwanted pregnancy (Svenaus, 2017, p. 81). Furthermore, according to Young’s feminist phenomenological account and the views of post-structural feminism, bodily alienation is more likely to occur due to the objectification of the pregnant body by the medical gaze and its institutionalisation (Young, 2005, p. 46; Sanford, 2016, p. 54). However, none of these cases can be identified in Medea’s tragedy. Hence, we cannot support an argument about alienation in this instance.

Moreover, popping the balloon caused feelings of ‘emptiness, gross and disgust’ and a sense of disconnection between subjectivity and object/Other (M6). The feeling of *disgust* here indicates our perception of the unseen, the bodily interior when it becomes visible as an external body unknown to our consciousness. The soil’s dry materiality and comminuted composition communicate the psychic density of Medea’s recessive interiority. At the same time, they mark materialistically the *télos* of the ecstatic body.

We examined the ‘pregnant subject’s viewpoint’ (Young, 2005, p.46) using a similar qualitative methodology as in research concerned with real pregnant subjects. We included ‘diary entries and literature and ‘phenomenological reflection on the pregnant experience’’ (Sanford, p. 55), consolidating first (participant/performer) and third person (researcher) perspectives. In our case, the concept of ‘quickening’ appears to be facilitating the ‘togetherness of mother and child, and this feeling is generally not referred to as alienating [...] but rather as the [...] fuller state of being’

(Bornemark in Svenaus, 2017, p. 80). The experience of quickening is evident in M3's characterisation of the balloon as her 'baby' that 'became the center [sic] of [her] focus, in a mental way, and the centre of [her] body, in a physical way, as it changed [her] movement'. In addition, M5 'felt very comfortable, maybe as a reflection of [her] desire to become a mother' noticing that 'you are a part of you, but also another being' (M5).

This statement brings Somerville's concept of 'becoming-other' (Somerville, 2007), where emergence is generated from the liminal fields of the process (of/or pregnancy) through self-transformation. Most importantly, it reiterates affirmatively Young's account of pregnancy. Otherness becomes an inherent part of the Self recovering her premise of the split subjectivity. The fetus or the *Other* 'is nevertheless my body', and '[r]eflection on the experience of pregnancy reveals a body subjectivity that is de-centred, myself in the mode of not being myself' (Young, 2005, p. 49). Here, Young links the fetus to 'a gas bubble' (p. 49), validating how I introduced the fetus as a concept in the studio with *The Bubble*. Liminality, therefore, translates as a space of an emerging subjectivity (Somerville, 2007) – a space within an embodied space, where 'I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body' (Shanahan, pp. 48-49).

### **1.5 Exploring Immigration: The *Blind Journey***

Immigration played a pivotal role in shaping Medea's behaviour and the final act. Medea was home-orphaned and family-deprived. The exploration of lived space and the experience of psychological and physical distance were crucial elements in understanding her lived experience. Merleau-Ponty writes on lived space:

Our body and our perception always solicit us to take the landscape they offer as the center of the world. But this landscape is not necessarily the landscape of our life. I can 'be elsewhere' while remaining here, and if I am kept far from what I love, I feel far from the center of real life. Bovarism and certain forms of homesickness are examples of a decentered life. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 299)

Medea is a 'decentered subjectivity' (Garner, p. 216); not only was she removed from her natural environment she also experienced her pregnancies as decentralities

after Jason's adultery. In this case, her interiority was inhabited by *Others* -two male subjectivities. Given Medea's dislocation, we can argue that she suffers from bovarism and homesickness. This view raised questions about forced immigration as a journey in uncertainty. For war refugees, in particular, immigration could be equivalent to sensory deprivation. Being in a claustrophobic environment among horrified bodies in the darkness of unknown seas, eyes and hands are useless when the subject lacks awareness of space and time.

The second workshop explored the areas of immigration and disconnection. Namely, in the *Blind Journey*, the participants tied water-filled balloons against their abdomens to simulate pregnancy. Half of the performers were blindfolded, while the rest acted as guides. The journey is a surprise outside the safety of the studio space. The aim was to investigate the lived experience of immigration for the pregnant or maternal body. The image of the dead body of the three-year-old Aylan Shenu (known as Alan Kurdi) on a Turkish shore in 2015 drew a connective line between the refugee crisis and the death of Medea's male children.



Fig. 22 Scene from *Medea Inside: Exploring immigration, pregnancy, suffocation*. Photo credits: M6

In the *Blind Journey* [link in complete e-thesis], the performers promenaded around the building in pairs of pregnant bodies. The reliance of the blindfolded 'impregnated' participants on their guides represents (pregnant) Medea's journey and her dependence on Jason. Furthermore, it consists of an empirical-political statement about the emigrational conditions in South Europe and one's blind reliance on a (un)familiar Other.

Finally, it aims to explore bodily and emotional responses; the guides developed a 'maternal' protective instinct and a heightened sense of responsibility for the Other. When I asked the guides to abandon their dependents, they hesitated. The blindfolded participants needed to work with the rest of their senses to navigate the building embodying feelings of loss and self-transcendence refugees experience in their journeys. Some of the blindfolded cooperated through physical contact (M6, M5). Others took the lead, demonstrating an increased sensory perception and autonomy (M2, M3). All participants were very conscious and protective of their bodies, especially their abdomen/balloons (M2, M3, M9). Time allowed them to feel 'normal' and learn to readjust their movement (M3).

Noticeably, the ensemble forgot to remove the balloons attached to their bodies after the exercise and during the group discussion. This state of oblivion demonstrates a degree of object incorporation (Dolezal, 2009, p. 216; Leder, 1990, p. 33; Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp. 165–166), and consequently, focal disappearance, as the balloon is treated as a forgotten part of the body (Leder, p. 33). The discussion revealed that the blindfolded performers experienced dependency in the first stage and isolation in the second phase. Moreover, the predicted sense of disorientation and the lack of spatial awareness were confronted with recreational imagination based on the reception of environmental stimuli through touch, temperature, movement, and sound. The guides developed a greater extent of consciousness and protectivity for the Other. Both groups embodied 'pregnancy' as their new corporeal state developing an instinctive proprioceptive readjustment. This forms evidence for the unconscious bodily organisation known as the 'background attitude' (Leder, p. 24).

## 2. Online Practice

Although the circumstances supported the examination of imprisonment, the project dealt with practical ramifications to performer training and performance making. The digitalisation of the process echoed certain reverberations in structure, form, ethics and methodology. All findings related to the benefits of the research methods during the lockdowns were not products of intentional efforts but rather observations that emerged during the exploration. Additional ethical approval was provided for the incorporation of journaling and online workshops.

### 2.1 Exploring Isolation

Recent studies on trauma have demonstrated that ‘the body does not distinguish between cognitively understood fiction and perceived experience’ particularly ‘through the performing of, and participation in, dramatizations [sic] and simulations of physical, sexual and psychological violence’ (Seton, 2013, pp. 25-26). This phenomenon is observed due to the ‘indiscriminatory receptivity’ (Seton, p. 30) and



*Fig. 23 Scene from Medea Inside: Domestic abuse. Photo credits: M12*

vulnerability of the body that enables pain embodiment (Levine, 2005; Rothchild and Rand, 2006; Seton, 2013, p. 30).

The condition of the pandemic as a reality-altering factor unanimously affected the embodiment of suffering, characterisation, and the ensemble's perception of the themes under investigation, such as suffering, loss, imprisonment and isolation, gestation, and motherhood. Characteristically, concepts used by the participants to describe lack of socialisation, fear, isolation, disconnection, anxiety, lack of control, entrapment (M3, M5, M6) and alterations in the status and dynamics of the ensemble and other external relations (M5) are considered to have affected the experience of those themes respectively (M5) as they 'were definitely enhanced' and 'channelled' into the characters (M3, M5) [Appendix I: 2.1].

Questions about the ontology of the performance would frame the research landscape anew, focusing on the embodiment and remote representation of the lived experience as several parameters would change. Moving from the reconstructed bodies of the Dionysian perception to a 'decentered and disconnected' (Pavis, 2003, p. 47) rehearsal space, the bodies became distorted and differentiated. Performing became highly personalised, while private spatiotemporality informed a reflective dialogue between the performing body and the lived experience.

Vectorisation became time- and space-specific: the participants would perform and improvise from their bed, in front of their sink or behind their shower glass. Those subjectivities reflected their genuine experience constructing iconographies of the *lived* and *felt*. The empirical iconographies of corporeal signifiers pointed to the essence of the things themselves, beyond 'their flesh and surface' (Müller, 1982, p. 43). The text existed more than ever; all embodied realities constantly informed performativity through the re-inscription of lived experience on the embodied subjects. Their corporeal *lògos* opened up a dialogue with a world that felt unfamiliar. We searched for a mediatised direction of the body that would allow it to speak its innermost depths.

The digital practice increased our meetings from one to two weekly. The digital shift also affected the structure and function of the process. Alternate methodological developments were necessary to explore the lived experience of embodying suffering in a digital medium. Hence, I incorporated daily diaries, improvisation, one-to-one work, self-recording, online shared videos and online group discussions, self-observation and self-criticism, peer observation, and informative feedback.

## **2.2 Journaling and Daily Improvisations: The *Three Gestures***

The intervention of journaling during the virtual workshops functioned simultaneously as a dramatic and research device, which appeared to have some considerable healing properties. I first attempted to incorporate it in the studio in *Bacchae in Absentia*, but it was rejected as an additional workload. On the contrary, the circumstances, the ensemble's bonding and the accessibility of the recorded material in *Medea Inside* prompted full engagement. The ensemble's daily contributions functioned as a bank of personal responses and decisions concerning isolation. The repetitive nature of the process was beneficial to their well-being in various ways:

First, journaling was integrated as a scientifically approved psychoanalytical method for self-evaluation and self-reflection, despite some initial resistance (M1, M6). For instance, M3 claims that in the early stages of the exercise was painful to perform her feelings, whereas the camera added a 'painful and scary' dimension to her performing experience (M3).

Second, scholarship reveals the benefits of journal therapy as an active approach to managing anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder or other depressive dispositions (Adams, 1993; Baikie and Wilhelm, 2005; Mogk et al., 2006; Pavlacic et al., 2019; Reinhold et al., 2018; Thompson, 2004). Evidently, not only did journaling have a positive impact on the participants' well-being, but it also demonstrated the presence of emotional and behavioural patterns (M1, M5, M7), increasing their self-awareness and coping mechanisms.

Third, the diaries provided the ensemble with a sense of routine and structure, offering purpose (M1, M3) and operating as a 'visual reminder' (M1) of their emotional journeys (M7). Combining discipline and purpose, the participants enhanced their self-esteem and feelings of worthiness (M1).

Finally, when mental and physical suffering was experienced, physicality was utilised to reflect and express personal embodied traumas that emerged during the lockdown (M3, M5). At a later stage of the exercise, called *Before and After*, I observed the intensity of common kinesiology consisting of gestures that revolved around their heads, chests, hands and abdomens. These communicated the two theoretically antithetical moves of *reaching out* or *closing in* as manifestations of suffering. The performers would also translate them into an active desire, or 'longing and yearning' (M5), often pointing to the area of their genitals and lower abdomen. Their movement at that point appeared to be highly structured.

Looking at it through a culturally conceived 'phenomenological anatomy', we can argue that their kinesiology confirmed the presence of an internalised trauma generated by self-isolation. According to Leder (1990), the 'bodily seat of consciousness or soul' is located in those areas, namely the head, the chest or the abdominal development of *hara* as it appears in the West, the Greek and the Eastern civilisations, respectively (p. 29). The persistent repetition of those gestures was asking for the healing of the respective body regions or, perhaps, the healing of consciousness and their perception of the world.

However, in *Medea Inside*, the traumatisation was caused by external factors and its co-occurrence with the process enriched the psychic material for the embodiment of suffering. Noticeably, instead of producing any possibility of traumatisation, the process acted reversibly as a healing counter-factor. The exploration was long, persistent, and repetitive. That was pivotal in order to *reproduce* the feeling through reiterated movement, negating, at the same time, the dramatic sense of mere *representation*.

By working with impulsive movement, the ensemble engaged 'with the body on an instinctual responsive level' (Hill and Paris, 2014, p. 164) to produce solo



improvisations of two to three minutes. While exploring entrapment, we used spatial elements such as tiles, glass surfaces, doors and furniture as multiple settings to create meaning-giving patterns of kinetic significations that would draw on their lived experience. For example, in the *Three Gestures* [link in complete e-thesis], the cast had to improvise and identify three precise key gestures. Particular emphasis was placed on the physical articulation of the written material through default reactions (Hill and Paris, p. 171), such as the contact between hands and heads, chests, or abdomens mentioned earlier.

Online meetings and screen-sharing comprised an informative landscape of peer observation which cultivated the ground for detailed reflections on subjective and collective performativity and movement analysis discussions with the ensemble. The process reinforced the company's bonding, creating an atmosphere of meaningful exchange. The element of competition existed only in the sense of self-improvement (M5).

The combination of journaling and daily improvisations as methods of self-expression admittedly functioned beneficially for the ensemble's well-being, simultaneously providing us with essential psychophysical material (M5). The task-giving approach and the reflective practice (M3) structured the participants' daily life during self-isolation. The digital encounters were admittedly beneficial, underlining the importance of self-reflection as a mechanism of self-improvement and social interaction (M4). In the lockdown context, journaling was described as a purpose-giving (M1, M7), motivating and 'helpful' (M5) but also positive and relieving (M3) process (Adams, 1993; Baikie and Wilhelm, 2005; Thompson, 2004).

Finally, journaling informed characterisation, creating concurrently 'a sense of connection' with the character (M1). Although articulating words into movement seemed to be a complicated task for some performers, it was assuaged during the process within a space of 'freedom' (M5) and absence of judgement (M1).

## II. Performance/Film Making

In this section, I will discuss the directorial techniques used in the remediation of *Medea* and analyse aesthetics, intertextual and interperformative references, and phenomenological observations during the filmmaking process.

### 1. Textual Corporealisation

*Medea Inside* could be described as a 'poetic documentary' (Monk, interview, 2019) as it was based on a set of principles that apply to verbatim theatre: lived experiences were externalised by the cast verbally and non-verbally through journaling and movement in an atmosphere of '[s]implicity, openness and the possibility for a broad range of connotations' (Sebestyén, 2019, p. 55). The primary influence was the very condition of the pandemic and the consequent confinement, with the predominant features being the static, the body that suffers psychosomatically, the outbreak of domestic abuse against women and the excessive preoccupation with the cleanliness of the body due to Coronavirus. The training focused on the participants' lived experiences during the lockdown creating a series of performances which substantiated the work. The audience, therefore, witnesses the documentation of the ensemble's challenging battle.

One of the film's aims was to 'subvert the primacy of the spoken word' (Brannigan, 2009, p. 123) to reveal the potential of the creative methods used at this process stage, such as the ways we accumulated (inter)subjective lived experience. The organisation and communication of the directing instructions were realised via texts of various formats and mediums: play texts in English and Greek, performer journals, reviews, choreographic texts, acting instructions, image descriptions, verbal texts, audio/visual instructions, electronic messages, maps, graphs, sketches, and social media pictures with captions. The emerging intertextuality evidenced a collective effort of communication that reshaped the ontology of the research confirming its phenomenological nature as the material was an amalgam of subjective experience. That led to the production of an evolving textual body seemingly dismantled and incoherent but fundamental in the film's realisation.

## 2. Re-corporealising Dance Theatre to Dance Film

In his psychoanalytical understanding of Greek tragedy, Manolopoulos (2015) views Medea as a 'primitive, traumatized [sic] existence' (p. 441). He initiates a discussion on the 'psychic constructions for preverbal experiences and traumas', interpreting Medea as a subjectivity within a context that 'lie(s) beyond language and meaning' (ibid.). Still, even from a biological perspective, movement precedes speech or language. Thus, dance as a movement-designated system of primordial communicational and expressive modalities enables the disclosure of subjective intentionality and transcendence (Ressler, 1931; Brandt, 2015).

Medea's tragicity is located at the core of her traumatic experience. Yet, most of the analyses remain on the verbal reenactment of her traumas, often neglecting the corporeal perception of the trauma per se. In dance theatre, body memory and transcendent movement can resuscitate the Euripidean 'sensory, kinetic, emotional, and perceptual images' without the mediation of words, as Manolopoulos suggests (p. 445). This can be considered as a form of re-corporealisation for the traumatised subjectivity. Respectively, in the context of *Medea Inside*, the physical articulation of the ensemble's documented trauma of isolation acted as a form of healing through the repetition of particular body narratives. In other words, the repetitive embodiment of trauma led to the re-corporealisation of the subjectivity, which was noticeably accentuated in the occurrence of the pandemic (M3, M5, M6).

Let us take *Ambiguity* as an example –an intermedial choreography characterised by a repetitive pattern in the scene of the underwater scream. The retrogressive monotony imitates the movement of a pendulum preparing the spectator for Medea's bathtub scene that shares respective kinesiology before the suicide/infanticide. The urge for transformation is inscribed on the body and its movement to indicate the unspeakable nature of traumas. Manolopoulos writes on regression:

[A] constant process of psychic construction is realized [sic] and resisted in oscillating movements between repetition and fantasy, regression and integration. Through the function of repetition, preverbal memory traces

are transferred into the present as images on the stage of consciousness [...] to complete their transformation. These regressive movements reach hallucinatory realizations [sic] of perceptions from which we construct fantasies to interpret the experiences we repeat (Bion, 1962, 1965; Freud 1919, 1920, 1937; Ogden, 2004; Green, 2012) (Ibid.)

Medea represents the unconscious. Similarly, the *Bacchae* portray the constant need to discover our inner Self through the repetition of mistakes that manifest transformed traumas of our subconscious past. Although we know little about the protagonist's psychological profile before murdering her brother for the sake of Jason's love, we acknowledge that Medea reiterates the act of killing family members [166-167]. According to psychology, the objective is different this time, as her children constitute narcissistic extensions of herself (p. 452). From a phenomenological point of view, though, they represent her psychophysical continuation, with their termination suggesting her suicide (Bouzioti, 2013; 2017; 2021). The oscillation, which in the film appears to be horizontal (left to right) for the Chorus and retrogressive (back and forth) for Medea, functions as a choreographic emblazonment of personal memory, the repetitive nature of which reveals its integration and interpretation in the subjectivity's history (p. 455). The element of subjective integration is clearly understood in the *Chair* with the climactic tense caused by the friction of the performer's hands on her lap. The choreography is profoundly associated with her internal confusion and a form of self-violence through the crumpling of the dress in the end. Moreover, the ensemble religiously reiterates and re-embodies movements performed by individuals to express the subjective within the collective and vice-versa in common (experiences of) psychosomatic traumas.

Circling back to *Ambiguity*, this form of bodily oscillation implies Medea's mental state as described in her affectionate monologue [1020-1080] towards her children a few moments before the infanticide. For instance, we encounter a contradiction between hand and heart in Medea's monologue:

My hand will never lack the strength for this. And yet... my heart, don't do this murder. You are made of stone, but leave the boys alone. Spare my children. [1053 -1058]

In the silent scene that heralds the bathtub scream, the Chorus Leader's body deliberately escapes the frame as a transition between the visible and the invisible oscillating between the conscious and the unconscious. The scene invites the audience into the liminal space in front of and behind the camera. The spectator is asked to investigate the notions of inhabitation and existence between fictional and real worlds. It feels as if the segmentation of the performance's continuum incites spectatorship towards its reconstruction and articulation as a 'totality' (Pavis, 2003, p. 8).

Douglas Rosenberg in *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (2012) refers to another form of recorporealisation –the one accomplished through the medium of film. While (dance) theatre exists in an experiential sphere of ephemerality and immateriality, screendance<sup>7</sup> creates a liminal space where hybridity and mediated representation take over. Thus, the dancing body is processed and deconstructed in post-production towards a reconstruction on and for the screen. The apparatus of filmmaking 'recorporealizes [sic] the bodies it represents and also rematerializes [sic] those bodies as a hybrid that is both corporeal and mediated' (p. 57). Crucial to understanding filmic recorporealisation is the dual capacity of the camera as a documenting and creative device. From its articulation being subject to a choreographic idea and its documentation by an anchored artificial eye to its archival and assemblage, the body encounters and embraces consecutive transformative reconfigurations before its final exposure for aesthetic consumption.

### **3. Time Manipulation, Decentralisation and Lived Experience**

Movement direction remains loyal to the intuitive, pure, bodily expressivity that *embodies* rather than *imitates* the lived experience. This explains my investment in (extreme) close-ups and the exclusion of other silent film techniques, such as excessive facial expressions or 'exaggerated grotesque gestures' (Balázs, 1972, p. 26). Instead, the dancers maintain the same subtle faciality and gestural body language we use on stage to convey 'the inner drama' (p. 73), drawing attention and

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<sup>7</sup> Dance film (Brannigan, 2009), screendance (Rosenberg, 2012) or video dance (McPherson, 2018) are some of the terms used to describe (non) choreographed movement created for the screen.

persisting on the *here and now* of the human condition. In addition, Rosenberg estimates that the methods of montage and fragmentation that include 'repetition, duplication and slowing down are used to intensify the continuity of the performance itself' (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 26). To this effect, the film is interested in extracting the experience of the suffering body within its lived spatiotemporal continuum rather than focusing on an accurate display of time.

For Brannigan (2011), dance film forms an aesthetic and technological continuity among screen media where framing, filming, and editing typify the choreographic process (Bench, 2013, pp. 133-136). Disruption, fragmentation, and non-linearity are features of the postmodern era. Still, they can also 'collide with the desire for a reorganization [sic] of time and space in mediated representations of choreographic ideas' (Rosenberg, p. 55). Rosenberg notes that filmmaking interferes with the continuum of corporeity and movement, undoing 'the temporal nature of choreography' (ibid.) towards the re-imagination of one's body through the idea of filmic recorporealisation (p. 57).

Similar reasoning applies to the *Moving Parts* exercise (see Chapter II, p. 6/22), which concerns the salience and agency of specific body regions. The film uses close-ups to transmit the same effect to the spectator and to allow 'access to these bodies' (Brannigan, 2009, p. 123). In the meantime, the performer herself draws her attention to the particular area inscribing her experience in kinetic trajectories.

Simultaneously, we foreground the agency of the body region while the camera's *external eye* is integrated into the action/process. M3 views the camera as an 'inconsequential viewer' that plays 'an active role in [her] rehearsal movement process' (M3). In *Medea Inside*, it is the director's eye and the performers' phenomenal intuitions that set the frame and guide the spectator through their lived experience. As Balázs (1972) aptly puts it, 'more space and time in the film was taken up by the inner drama' (pp. 65, 73) that is ecstatically manifested through movement for the screen. For instance, in the last episode, *Jason's Fall* was an ecstatic moment of loss expressed by M5, which M1 then performed with kinetic additions by the

director. The camera documents loss from three angles to show the emotional depth.

Furthermore, decentralisation typifies the climactic moments of fatal suffering in all three case studies. Prometheus is crucified on the right of the stage, indicating that heroes die in the margin. Moreover, Pentheus' body is savaged by the Bacchae on the right of the pond as an allusion to the unseen. Finally, seconds before the infanticide, the camera draws our attention to the left, to the lethal pin in Medea's hand. In all cases, there is an intense activity of faciality and micro-movement. *Faciality* or *faceicity* (Brannigan, 2009, pp. 45-50; Deleuze, 1986, pp. 87, 97) and bodily micro-expressivity are no longer two distinct entities but rather cooperate as parts of the same essence 'to become one expressive possibility' (Brannigan, 2009, p. 50). The film invites the spectator to a first-hand experience of the corporeal detail, where tragicity manifests. The camera lens charismatically raises the importance of impalpable nuances, fleeting corporeal moments or meaning-giving micromovements exhorting subjectivities to emerge.



*Fig. 24 Scene from Medea Inside: Decentralisation of the killing act. Photo credits: M1*

## 4. Chiasmatic Intermedialities

### 4.1 Intersubjectivity and Absence

Hybrid representation and post-human intervention forge a condition of virtual re-embodiment, redefining the concepts of proximity and intimacy in intersubjective relationships. The incubated intimacy is now different as the medium alters spatiotemporal concepts and dimensionality, with the senses adapting into a mediated phenomenology. Susan Kozel in *Closer* (2007) argues that ‘virtuality is the new materiality’ (p. 92), where ‘virtual reality is not opposed to embodied being and interaction, but extends and transforms both’ (Björk, 2010, p. 707). Similarly, for most of the cast, virtuality fostered ‘greater physicality and intimacy than our real engagement’ (Kozel, p. 99) (M1, M3, M6). The online discussions and interviews demonstrated that the majority found the process ‘therapeutic’ (M6) and that it ‘acted as community’ (M5) and a ‘constant’ (M3, M5, M6).

However, other aspects of the experience were differentiated among the members of the ensemble, with some expressing that studio intercorporeal interactions (i.e. touch, live observation and co-presence) reinforced characterisation and embodiment (M5), an advantage that they lost in domestic environments (M3). For others, domesticity, solo work, and digital practice forged in-depth exploration, enriched the search for the lived experience and embodiment (M1, M5), and enhanced intimacy and proximity (M6). M3 used the phenomenologically precise analogy of the phantom limb to describe present bodies, yet physically absent and disconnected. The ensemble is a living, breathing organism operating as a whole – the digital Other is regarded as a remote limb outside one’s visible spectrum and perceived space. Digital remoteness changes the subjectivity’s knowledge of the world as an object of consciousness, and their being-in-the-world is readjusted for the organism-ensemble’s survival.

Inferentially, the shift impacted intersubjective relationships, which affected the ensemble’s performance and well-being individually and collectively. In some cases, the shift encouraged in-depth analysis; in others, it amplified feelings of loneliness and emptiness. The participants lost direct physical, sensory, emotional and



cognitive interaction. Nevertheless, their bodies incorporated new skills as part of a subconscious readjustment to the novelty of the situation and the digital environment. This modification was not necessarily pernicious for the process. In contrast, it delineated the advantages of 'digital reflection' (Bannon and Kirk, 2014), where participants can benefit from 'presentational knowing using an alternate expressive mode of reflection' (p. 300) to enhance creativity and learning through digital technologies. Comparing knowledge between projects, we notice that the intervention of technology that involved 'a high level of manipulation of information' (p. 295) and the ensemble's daily investment facilitated their reflexive skills, consequently enriching the quality of their creative input.

Overall, the digitalisation of the process is directly related to the concept of absence; the intersubjective component of the performative interaction is mediated, while screens and camera lenses replace the audience. The director is absent from a significant part of the rehearsals and the making process. At the same time, spatiality is perceived within different contexts (digital, domestic, imaginary) and through a subjectively constructed dimensionality. The final product is absent until the late stages of post-production. It remains absent yet present from its creator-performers in a way similar to a child that exists in the maternal body.

Gestation is the ideal example of the ontology of becoming within the liminal space (Somerville, 2007, p. 232) that exists between naturalistic conventionalism and this type of 'transformative mise-en-scène' (Dundjerovic, 2003). What is noticeable, yet not obvious, is the revealing of trauma in the intersection of becoming, liminality and gestation.

Birth constitutes a traumatic experience for both the mother and the newborn (Rank, 1929/2014). The birth in the film is a metaphor for the vagina as an open trauma that exposes the inner and the private to the world. This *trauma* also forms evidence for the coming-into-being from an embodied space of existence to the phenomenally external world, although the fetus is already a being-in-the-world that pre-exists in a space within a space (Sanford, 2016; Shanahan, 2014; Young, 2005).

Moreover, Levinas (1974) associates maternity and pregnancy with the concepts of alterity and responsibility (Levinas, 1998; Shanahan, 2014). Using gestation as a bodily condition to render maternal suffering implicitly affirms the womb as an ethical space. In chiasmatic terms, Medea's flesh mediates between fetus and world. The ethical responsibility Levinas advocates for translates infanticide as an honour-saving act from future enemies [1060-1061]. This view of Medea's body functioning as a mediating corporeity reinforced the re-imaging of Medea and the Chorus in impregnated bodies. Apart from the retrogressive movement used to express the ethical dimension of Medea's act, the contact of the performer's body with the balloon further amplified their felt experience.

#### **4.2 Transmediality and Remediation**

Transmediality, which was formalistic yet maintained the same structural principles and aesthetic conventions, made room for corporeal and performative rearrangements while 'developing new modes of perception' (Kattenbelt, 2008, p. 21). At the same time, new meanings were available to a broader multicultural audience. Aspects of the practice were aligned with the 'cinematification of the theatre' (Meyerhold, 1930/2001, p. 254), which was informed by Meyerhold's earlier experiments that heavily relied on theatrical methods of representation (Kattenbelt, 2008, p. 24). The interchangeability between theatre and cinema was beneficial for both mediums, functioning as a 'medium-crossing form' of representation (Balme, 2001, pp. 148-150), enriching and expanding each medium conceptually, aesthetically, technically, in matter and form.

Some of the pivotal research questions stemming from the digitalisation of the performance were how we would preserve the embodiment of suffering in the inter-subjective interplay across mediums and how interchangeability could turn occurring limitations into novelty to communicate corporeal meanings. The production was committed to conveying the inner psychic responses without illusionary effects or cinematic commercialisation. The film was inadequate in that respect as it was solely based on psychosomatic potentiality. Remediation, as the 'representation of one medium in another' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p. 45), explains the phenomenological

attitude of such a transposition and the reasoning that supports the embodiment of the real between different mediums. Remediation goes beyond the limitations of representation, deepening 'the experience of the real' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p. 53). Still, the spectator was tacitly assigned to request that truth and enter the space between mediums where lived experience lies in full potency. Quite so, there was an instant connection between the two mediums to stimulate spectatorship through close-ups, narratives, movement, textures, and powerful earthly symbols, such as the water and the dust.

### **4.3 Teledirecting and Self-filming**

Although the digitalisation of Medea followed the conceptual practice of elemental dramaturgy as in the two previous works, there was an inevitable impact on the configuration of space(s) and bodies alongside many other difficulties which arose while working online and practising physical distancing. The material was changing formats relentlessly due to governmental measures and other concomitant internal factors, such as the reduction of the cast, illness and other losses or inability to attend, resistance to committing because of social distancing and the fear of proximity.

The transition was overwhelming, causing mental struggles due to the change in working environments, remote working, digitalisation, the imperativeness of integrating new methodologies, tools, skill acquisition and lack of physical connection. The positive aspects of the shift were accumulated in the ability to adapt and deal with logistics and technical problems, learn film terminology and 'how to listen to instructions and put [their] voice into things' (M1). In our quest for liveliness, we rediscovered creativity, and the subjective contribution was explicitly prominent, validating the presence of the phenomenological attitude within a devising strategy.

In more detail, a modification of the rehearsal methodology was deemed necessary. First, excellent space awareness was pivotal as the creative activity needed to be

adapted to the spaces provided in opposition to the transformability of the theatrical space.

Secondly, in most devising practices, part of the decision-making shifts to the performer. In our case, the performers were responsible for most of the decisions as the director had limited awareness of emerging issues during filmmaking. The partial exclusion of the director was unintended yet occasionally inevitable. The inability to observe and guide the rehearsal process and the director's holistic physical exclusion from the rehearsal space limited her digital presence to the instruction-giving phase before the rehearsals. Thus, a significant part of the making process remains unknown to the director, where rehearsals seem to coincide or merge with the filmmaking process.

The director has limited awareness of the ensemble's struggles during work. This ignorance entails a certain risk to their well-being, relationship with the director, and performance. At times, some performers would 'deviate' and follow their intuition through an extended experimental mode that was consuming in effort, labour and time, creating unwanted frustration and an extensive body of instructions. Rehearsals are organized explicitly in sub-groups (the Chorus, Medea and Jason or Medea and Glauce) or in a one-to-one mode via video conferences. The performers would need to facilitate a quasi-open filming process, which other household members occasionally supported.

That led to the alteration of the form, density, frequency, quality and delivery of instructions through alternate mediums and formats (audio and video recorded or texts and drawings) [\[\[link in complete e-thesis\]](#). Instructions were given before and post filming, but very rarely while filming as there seemed to be technical and practical difficulties for the cast in simultaneously operating too many devices. Consequently, new modes and formats of self-documentation for the performers were generated, such as journaling, photographs and video recordings archived to be later used in the film as original or reinvented material.

Additionally, a variety of personal creative processes [link in complete e-thesis] emerged from the given tasks, including:

- evolution of a particular kinetic pattern (M6)
- improvisation divided into exploratory, distinct, distilled movement (M1, M5)
- overtheorisation and overanalysis, which shaped a deductive rationale and performative approach to primal instincts (M1, M5, M7)
- enrichment of the choreographed material, which would draw from the currency of the performer's personal life or domestic environment and capitalise on the lived experience in a unique, subjective way (M1, M3, M5)

The virtual work provided the opportunity to devise and compose deeply personal esoteric movement. The ensemble's lived experiences were manifested in a non-verbal lexicon, either based on a 'separate script' from the original play combined with the improvised material from their videos (M5, M6) or came directly from their interpretation of the original tragedy. Some of the performers reinvented movement, while others merged the old movement with the new, emphasising their heads, chests and abdomens, as mentioned earlier.

#### **4.4 Creative Process and Conflict: Ensemble Dynamics**

The *Swan Lake Bath Ballet* (2020) by the choreographer Corey Baker, *The Barre Project* (2020) by William Forsythe and CLI Studios and Argyris Pantazaras' *This is not Romeo and Juliet* (2020) at Teatro Poreia mark the first productions of tele-direction during the pandemic. However, the diversity in the invented approaches is characteristic of the broad manifestations of teledirecting as a practice, an emerging field for future research. *The Barre Project*, for instance, used digital technology to enhance the result with visual effects. On the contrary, *Medea Inside* remained simple and truthful to convey the phenomenology of the process and its characters [Appendix I: 2.2].

The central idea was to utilise theatrical means while preserving theatrical economy. Textual embodied interpretations combined with the documented material were pivotal parts of the 'virtual choreographic process' (Le Compte, 2017). The impromptu sessions were inspired by but also generated pictures, gestures and sounds, which acted as source material. Similar to Katie Mitchell's methodological practice, the organisation of visual and auditory/verbal signs occurred after the material was generated (Mermikides, 2013, p. 160) to be refined in post-production and disclose the essence of the lived experience. Namely, the filmmaking process included the following stages:

- Guided Improvisation
- Discussion between the director and the ensemble
- Self or group recordings and documentation
- Study the documented material
- Criticise, amend and apply
- Fix and reapply until the product is finished
- Assemblage
- Film editing
- Music score

In all productions, the ensemble's formation and ideological orientation moved within a framework of equality. During the training process, I organised them under a 'shared understanding of physical and visual composition' (Heddon and Milling, 2007, p. 78) (Mermikides, p. 158). However, the hierarchy was deeply impacted during the lockdown, with conflict changing the creative landscape. Shifts in the collective's dynamics due to the pandemic led to the replacement or loss of members, which reshaped the final product several times. Le Compte discusses the conflict between her and her cast as a creative force.

Similarly, the resistance I experienced from some of the performers as a social distancing side-effect, the misinterpretation or even the circumvention of my instructions due to the remote execution of the project and the self-directed filming



Fig. 25 Scene from *Medea Inside: The Lament in Exodos – Loss*. Photo credits: M5

contributed to an informative sense of conflict. Choreographer Crystal Pite, who works with the concept of conflict, suggests that this is subsequent to the *dynamic processes* we recognise in our research journeys (Pite, 2019). Both textual and visual transformations generated from inaccuracies, errors, and conflict are what Somerville (2007) views as 'exquisitely dynamic intensities' (p. 232) in research transformations.

In *Medea Inside*, the conflict was liminal and subtle; it never revealed itself. It did not explicitly affect human relations, yet it determined the material's visual quality and the assemblage, impacting the plot architecture. The internalisation of the conflict was inevitable because of the lockdown fatigue and the fact that the work was engulfing voluntary participation and self-sacrifice.

#### **4.5 Performing for the Camera**

The camera is the artistic implement for the performers to physically articulate their inner bodies that become 'present in this moment of being looked at and recorded'

(Hill and Paris, p. 170). The gaze is there through an inanimate object. Sometimes, the performers welcome it as encouragement or motivation. Some others, it feels like an unwanted 'intruder' (M5).

The camera, in most cases, functioned as an extension of the body schema bearing another apparent duality. The device was felt as a digital limb for the performer, especially in the context of self-filming, reminding Leder's term of *incorporation* (1990, p. 33) and Merleau-Ponty's instance of the blind man's stick (2002, pp. 165–166). The camera functions as a 'magnifying' pair of glasses (M5; Don Ihde, 1990, p. 73) for both performers (self-reflection) (M5, M1) and spectators (reflection) as it transcends 'the natural limits imposed by the body' (Leder, p. 3). Occasionally, the camera becomes an artificial extension entering focal disappearance as part of the body (Leder, p. 33). To understand object incorporation, Luna Dolezal proposes that:

[t]he subject, once familiar with an object, will interact and engage with it in a prereflective and preconscious manner, as though it were an extension of his or her own body. As an object is enveloped within the body schema, it modifies the intentional attitude of the lived body, expanding and transforming the scope of possible activity. (Dolezal, 2009, p. 216)

The body schema modifications that occur by the utilisation of the camera are gradually absorbed by the subject 'in a seamless and prereflective manner' (Dolezal, p. 216) and recede in focal disappearance (Leder, 1990) or 'bodily transparency' (Dolezal, p. 215). *Medea's* transition from stage to screen produced novel realms of representational modalities that allowed the realisation of new dramaturgical, directorial and choreographic avenues. Apart from the schematic readjustment of the body, the spectrum of expression was subject to intermediality and the transition between performing environments impacting spatiotemporality and intersubjective relationships.

Besides the perception of the body schema, it is equally important to point out the impact of the camera on the body image during self-filming. In Chapter I (pp. 36-37), I discussed the act of witnessing the Other's suffering as a reiteration of the experience of suffering through a mimetic re-embodiment (Garner, p. 183). Taking this conversation a step further, we may ask: 'what happens when the performers



witness themselves (suffering)?' Some participants agreed that the camera acted as a 'second pair of eyes' (M1) in the studio, which witnessed and documented action (M3, M1). However, at home, the camera felt like 'an audience member' (M1, M3). Although the camera's presence initially increased stress levels and self-judgment, self-reflection through self-observation gradually improved self-awareness or 'self-consciousness' (M5) and appreciation for their body image (M5, M6). Self-reflection generated feelings of self-admiration and narcissism and, at the same time, loneliness (M1, M5). Yet, for M5, 'moments of self-consciousness' felt 'very freeing', revealing the encounter's potentiality between the camera and the performer.

The concept of self-reflection takes us to the appropriation of the Merleau-Pontian visual reversibility by Jacques Lacan (1964/1978), in which case a reflective surface is a prerequisite and for M6, that involved mirrors, camera lenses, and her computer screen. The experience of the body as both subject and object through gaze and touch (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 106) encompasses the phenomenon of seeing and being seen or touching and being touched respectively by the subject itself.



*Fig. 26 Scene from Medea Inside: The Infanticide or 'excorporation from depth disappearance' (Leder, p. 61). The soil as the aborted fetus. The soil's dry materiality and comminuted composition communicate the psychic density of Medea's recessive interiority marking materialistically the t elos of the ecstatic body. Photo credits: M1*

Likewise, this condition might entail the 'possibility of being observed which is always primary' (Lee, 2003), drawing upon 'an internalized or imagined gaze [sic]' (Lacan in Lee, 2003), which in turn determines the subjectivity under observation. Here, we have another type of split subject, where the Lacanian subject, through its gaze, becomes an 'object of desire' with a resulting denial of 'its full subjectivity' and self-alienation (Lee, 2003). The variety of screens she was exposed to, intermediated between the eye and the gaze, constructing a liminal 'space of projected and perceived images' (ibid.) of her body schema. Although the performer's initial contact translates as a mode of internal suffering, constant exposure and practice led to self-appreciative feelings. At the same time, it challenged gender norms and stereotypical notions of body image and sexuality (M6, M5).

## **5. Embodying the Tragedy of Suffering**

The psychophysical approaches employed in the study disclosed valuable embodied knowledge radically altering ways of perceiving and performing. The use of similar methods, such as the incorporation of breathing (i.e. Stuart, Terzopoulos), animal work (i.e. Fabre) or Eastern practices (i.e. Zarrilli) by other practitioners, has proven to benefit embodiment and psychophysical awareness. The process played a pivotal role in performer preparation and character development granting access to the unseen phenomenal fields of the body and human perception. For instance, M1's initial empathy for Medea transmuted into the embodiment of the character's tragicity during the training process (M1). The transition was facilitated by journaling and sensory exercises. Embodiment, therefore, is a process-led condition that requires sensory intensification and temporality as its key determinants, which are congenitally related to the perceptual structures of consciousness. Hence, the emergence of repetition and long duration acted as core training pillars within the context of reflective phenomenology.

Nevertheless, embodiment remains subject to external causality (i.e. the lockdown and the pandemic in this case). More importantly, it is dependent on subjective factors such as previous professional experience, eagerness and openness to engage

with the practice, sensitivity, personal memories, and traumas. The latter raises issues of ethical consideration in training due to the body's inability to distinguish between fiction and 'perceived experience' (Seton, 2013) or, in other words, between Self and Other. In *Medea Inside*, it was the process that counterbalanced the traumatising generated by external events.

The research illustrated that embodiment is non-representational (Buttingsrud, 2021, p. 16). That is explicit once skills or performance scores are incorporated by the performers (Leder, 1990, pp. 30-32). Repetition plays a pivotal role in this form of incorporation. One's kinetic phenomenology no longer constitutes a reference to the thing; rather, when they perform, they are 'becoming the thing' (Buttingsrud, p. 13). Again, it is worth reminding that skill acquisition is time-dependent and discipline-based, especially in mixed ensembles.

The embodiment of suffering can be direct (I suffer) or indirect (I suffer perceiving the experience of the Other) (Seton, p. 28). In most cases, performers are more likely to experience the embodiment of a particular state during the training process with a consequent amplification on stage, particularly when associated with uncanny posture or unfamiliar conditions. A similar phenomenon occurs in remote directing in the form of integrated versatility during self-filming (on and off camera), which domesticity emphasises. Furthermore, modes of suffering occurred in object relations and their attachment to the body (object integration and suffering of dis/connection), such as the balloons in *Medea Inside* or using blindfolds in training.

Finally, what is considered an objectification of the Self through the gaze has had a therapeutic effect through (self-)reflection, improving pre-existent perceived ideas about one's body image and self-esteem. Sartre's 'third ontological dimension' (Sartre, 2003, p. 460; Buttingsrud, p. 14) forms a philosophical understanding of observation as a means of reflection (Leder p. 23; Zahavi, 2017, pp. 18–29). This phenomenon can be realised through intersubjectivity and/or our deliberate interaction with reflective objects. In *Medea Inside*, for example, it is the camera during filmmaking, not the camera as a documenting device operated by the researcher outside the performer's attention. There appears to be a link between

self-reflection and embodiment enhancement (see pp. 72-75: *Being-in-the-world and the Gaze*) through the 'gaze of the Other' (Leder, p. 23). However, it is not clear yet whether these two occurrences are synchronous or asynchronous.

## **6. Spatiotemporal Dimensionality and Other Parameters**

The performers embodied the stages of conception, gestation, physical pain, and the idea of loss within the context of self-harm and infanticide. Spatiotemporal factors intensified the attachment with the object for M1, given the long duration of the project and the domestication of her character in an isolated environment. Repetition and constraint caused and revealed maternal vulnerability indicating that maternity is a passive state of 'a complete being 'for-the-other'' (Levinas, 1978, p. 170). The ensemble's language is indicative of their suffering to describe their physical encounter with the Other 'as a pain of the body' (Ainley, 2001, p. 214). For M1, 'disaster' implied a psychological and physical deterioration that inevitably led her character to her termination.

In a broader context, all procedures utterly altered temporality due to the lack of physical contact and direct verbal and non-verbal communication. The distance created deeper moments of observation as time was dramatically expanded. Undoubtedly, the lockdown was a traumatic experience, but due to its relevance to the themes in question, it contributed to an unbiased, genuine embodiment of imprisonment. In addition, the participants observed a deeper connection to their characters due to the Coronavirus, with an increased empathy towards Medea and her feelings of marginalisation (M1, M6).

Nothing remained immutable during digitalisation; intersubjective relationships, training, the creative process, and the interdependent concepts of time and space became obscure, opening up their boundaries. The studio and the stage now exist in digital windows that show domestic interiors. Each room accessed by the camera formed a potential setting for psychophysical responsivity exchanged in a mediated reality. Bedrooms, kitchens, and hallways became performative spaces, turning our screens into performative meta-spaces.

The personal transformed into the interpersonal, raising questions about hospitality and media invasion. The ensemble opened their private spaces that identified as rehearsal spaces. The rehearsal space and the intersubjective relationships became more informal. Contrary to studio behaviour, the performers were more accessible and generous in exposing their psychic material, which aligns with a certain degree of formality and self-control. The rehearsal space was no longer associated with privacy being constantly interrupted by household members. Correspondingly, the metamorphosis of the domestic space into a studio disrupted the household's privacy. Family and company members were concurrently performers and spectators in a liminal crevasse between rehearsal time and daily life. *Medea Inside* created an opportunity to examine how space and bodies can unfold in the uncharted multiplicity of novel dimensions and meanings while resisting the global psychosomatic crisis of the pandemic.

## Conclusion

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In his discourse about the postdramatic and the performing body's experience, Lehmann (2006) remarks: 'The dramatic process occurred *between* the bodies; the postdramatic process occurs *with/on/to* the body' where a physical 'self-dramatization [sic]' transpires in a process of auto-deixis (p. 163). Although Lehmann provides a thorough justification of the empirical focus in postdramatic directions, his definition omits the use of the words *in* and *within*, which are inextricably inherent in the embodiment of internal experiences.

This may lead to the assumption that the postdramatic treats the experience as a one-way phenomenon whose representation is merely directed from the inside outwards. In some cases, this manifests egotistically; that is, *from a suffering I to a suffering eye*, where the performing body is often led to its self-victimisation, practising self-destruction while the audience endures consecutive shocks. Characteristic examples are the productions of Societas Raffaello Sanzio and the integration and exposure of abnormal bodies; performance artists that exhibit self-harm seeking to provoke the audience like Stelarc; and diseased physicalities, like Ron Vawter in *Flaming Creatures*, who elicit the audience's empathy through an indirect embodiment of suffering (Seton, 2013, p. 28). This form of embodiment raises issues of ethical consideration in training methods and stage directions given the body's 'indiscriminatory receptivity' (p. 30) which exposes performing and witnessing bodies to pain (Levine, 2005; Rothchild and Rand, 2006; Seton, 2013, p. 30).

But this is not the objective of theatre. My interest in phenomenology and the embodiment of suffering in contemporary performance constitute the premise of this thesis that sought to identify the role of phenomenology as a theoretical and practical approach in classic texts and non-logocentric adaptations.

Already, from antiquity, we acknowledge the existence of the connection between *όδύνη* (pain) and *ήδονή* (pleasure). In *Poetics*, Aristotle identifies this connection in the inevitability and inescapability of suffering that determines the tragicity of the character and the anticipated condition of catharsis as a state of purification for the soul. As Lehmann points out, the novelty of the postdramatic (including performance art) is 'the transition from represented pain to pain experienced in representation' as a response to the re-presentation of the unrepresentable nature of suffering (p. 166).

Nevertheless, since the '50s, theatre and dance practitioners have made significant progress in the embodied research of the lived experience. Grotowski's training process involves the use of release techniques as a psychotherapeutic device; Bausch's rehearsal constitutes a 'collective thought-process' (Hayman, 1979, p. 134) of automatic responses; Stuart develops an agenda of chiasmatic training, whereas Zarrilli invests in the psychophysical balance between the inner and the outer body.

This thesis brings a radical change in embodied research and the way we perceive theatre-making: We establish a theatre where the actor reproduces the *energy* of suffering not by imitating the action as in dramatic theatre or experiencing the actual consequences of traumatisation as in performance art and the postdramatic. The reproduction of this energy, the so-called embodiment, results from phenomenological training, where the performers are taught how to recognise the *nature* of suffering and their *psychophysical response*. The actor learns how to gain psychophysical awareness -a quality that inevitably creates space for identification and empathy for the character liberated from the moral and aesthetic dilemmas that might derive from a postdramatic direction of the suffering body.

The psychophysical quest of the lived experience introduces us to -what we can call- the *phenodramatic* (phenomenological and dramatic) era of theatre. Generated by the principles of phenomenology, the idea of a *phenodramatic theatre* highlights and subserves the emergence of the lived experience (of suffering) as opposed to the exposure of a body that is forced (postdramatic theatre) or has chosen (performance

art) to exhibit its traumas publicly. Given that embodiment is non-representational (Buttingsrud, 2021, p. 16), phenodramatic theatre seeks not to imitate (dramatic process) or re-present (postdramatic process) but to *become* the essence of the thing per se (p. 13). In contrast to the narcissistic self-referential trajectory of the experience in several post-dramatic productions, the phenomenological approach emphasises the lived experience in a bidirectional, chiasmatic way. It fosters, thereby, the re-configuration and re-definition of our being-in-the-world as performed (perceived) or performing subjects (perceivers) present in the dynamic exchange with the audience.

PMPP echoes the principles of the phenodramatic. The thesis demonstrates the significance of phenomenology in conjunction with practice-based research as an evidence-based methodology synthesising first-person and third-person perspectives. Scientifically evident and ethically approved methods underpin the proposed system. The director safely guides the actor through self-awareness, healthy experimentation and multiple ways of expressive communication harnessing the benefits of psychophysical approaches. In methodological terms, PMPP accumulates strategies and practical knowledge deriving from Husserl's (1950) and Giorgi's (1985) phenomenological method, Kolb's (1984) reflective model, Schön's (1983) action research and Reiner's (2012) validation analysis of findings.

The employment of PMPP as a model of phenomenological training benefits embodiment and psychophysical awareness, acting as source material and contributing to the 'quest for anthropophany' (Lehmann, p. 163) by foregrounding the suffering body's lived experience. The application of PMPP discloses possible ways that phenomenological thinking can inspire and form associations, suggest alternate modes of engagement, and provide a space for the revelation and development of new ideas. This is clearly illustrated in practice by the case studies of this research and the embedded links to key training moments during the process.

What is more, the phenomenological analysis and the embodied exploration of the (classic) text reveal forgotten areas of dramaturgical and critical interest. The text is



8F. PHENOMENOLOGICAL MODEL OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICE PMPP II						
Zero Point						
Step 1	A1	Bracketing all external knowledge				Neutrality and transparency for both researcher and performer (e.g. Breathing in studio practice)
Step 2	B1	Initial stimulus - experience				Introduce the ensemble to the text or an activity
Step 3	A2	Patterns in first-person descriptions				Participant observation; participant (non-)verbal response to activities
Step 4	B2	Reflection and Evaluation	Focus groups; Interviews; Journals	+ C3 Validation through the researcher as a reflective practitioner and/or	+C1	Research subjects
					+C2	Experts; peers; audience (open rehearsals)
Step 5	B3	Analysis and Conceptualisation	Data Collection; Workshop evaluation; Formation of Ideas	+ A3 Establishment of units of meaning	Exploring meaning-giving and meaning-making processes; establishing ensemble's communication codes	
Step 6	B4	Active Experimentation	Improvisation and development of psychophysical agendas	+ A4 Imaginative variation	(Guided) Improvisation; Activities; Performer's input	
Step 7	A5	Identifying the essence of the lived experience in a situated structure				Formation of ideas; Generalisation; Finalising the research process or the creative product
Step 8	C4	Validation of findings through publication and criticism				Research dissemination; Audience and critics reviews
Step 9	Repeat Process (if necessary)					

<sup>8</sup> The indicators A to C accompanied by numerals refer back to the tables A to C in the introduction (p. 21), while Table F is a detailed development of Table D (p. 22).

a conceptual rather than a semantic sequence that, through a body-centric approach takes us to the essence of things challenging our perception of experienced phenomena. The creative method borrows elements from Bausch's rehearsal process, which amalgamates individual responses into a collective text, Grotowski's embodiment of ancient narratives underpinned by psychoanalysis, and Papaioannou's remnants of ancient symbols intertwined with abstract pieces of a dismantled contemporaneity. Harnessing phenomenology as a devised practice calls attention to the avant-gardist 'transition from sense to sensuality' (Lehmann, p. 148) that is prominent in non-logocentric theatrical forms. As Lehmann observes, the shift asks for a genuine, pure experience without ascribed meaning (p. 162); that will immerse performers and spectators in a sensory experience where self-reflection and meaning-making mechanisms are activated.

The thesis embarks from the classic text to present feasible ways that future analytical endeavours can be modelled, disseminated and enter debates. Directors, movement directors, choreographers, teachers and practice researchers will find in PMPP a creative device of critical embodied reflection. As a validated system, it provides the researcher-practitioner with evidenced research methods and exploratory artistic techniques through a nine-step guide (Table F). Theatre or film directors can employ the model to inform stage directions in a body-centric manner foregrounding the embodied subjectivity and the lived experience of particular conditions or certain circumstances. Instead of using imposed theatricality and facile acting techniques, PMPP grants access to the unseen phenomenal fields of the body and human perception for performer preparation and character development by drawing on established practices (e.g. Stanislavsky system, Laban). Likewise, choreographers and movement directors can enrich movement with emotional depth and train dancers on how to reach and communicate more profound levels of awareness that go beyond their physicality. Every chapter illustrates a detailed analysis of the suggested exercises and their potential utilisation developed from existing and new psychophysical agendas during the research. The list below includes activities and references to the respective chapters. Future practice-based

researchers and practitioners can use, develop, and expand the recommended activities in order to explore and embody the lived experience:

G. PSYCHOPHYSICAL EXERCISES LIST		MODES OF EMBODIMENT		
		Inner/Recessive/ Invisible	Outer/Ecstatic/ Visible	Chiasmatic: Perceiver- Perceived
E X E R C I S E S	Animal work			•
	Before/After			•
	Blind Attack			•
	Breathing			•
	Embodying the Text		•	
	Freezing		•	
	Narrated Improvisation			•
	Missing Limbs and Missing Senses/Sensory Deprivation			•
	Point A-B			•
	Post-traumatic Solo		•	
	Pregnant Crawl		•	
	Say your Name 100 Times	•		
	Shaking			•
	Skin Manifests		•	
	Spinning			•
	The Balloon		•	
	The Bubble and variations	•		
	The Grape	•		
	Three Gestures			•

Phenomenology as pedagogy is an idea initiated in earlier experiments. From 2015 to 2017, I conducted informal practice research with pupils aged five to twelve in a primary school. As in the present study, the findings demonstrated improvement in psychophysical awareness, development of intersubjective relations and higher engagement in drama activities through experimentation and improvisatory activities. The establishment of a phenomenological pedagogy has profound potential in acting and studio practice, facilitating the verbalisation, articulation, and communication of experience. The research demonstrates the successful application of phenomenological pedagogy from Primary to Higher Education settings, artistic contexts and live or virtual training environments that can benefit further developments.

Finally, the online shift of the research practice underlined the transferability of the proposed methodology (even during extreme conditions of psychophysical suffering) in remote and digital environments. The final turn of events could trigger a further examination of the benefits of medical or applied phenomenology in performance studies and mental health. The research can be expanded to applications of the model for director and performer training over digital platforms, applied theatre in correctional institutions and hospitals, and teledirecting for underdeveloped, deprived, and remote areas that might include vulnerable subjects (e.g. refugee camps or other survivor communities).

## Appendix I: Further Notes

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### 1. On *Bacchae in Absentia*

**1.1 Blind Attack:** *Blind Attack* aims to raise sensory and spatial awareness within the context of *Bacchae*. The female performers wear blindfolds and attempt to attack the remaining non-blindfolded male performers. A noticeable point is the female performers' frenetic behaviour while in pursuit of their male prey. These dynamics of the ecstatic outer bodies in the studio reveal an intrinsic social-existential truth about the engendered embodied subject and the forces that occur between opposite genders within an environment of threat. The survival mode activates intersubjective relations of power. Despite the social dys-appearance from blindness, which symbolises the absence of consciousness, they form a robust constitution that marginalises and disempowers healthy members of the 'community'. The exercise was preparatory for the attack on Pentheus and his sparagmós.

**1.2 Body Chain:** B2 reclaimed control of her body when aligned with another female body and proudly exclaimed: 'I felt that we girls could do anything!' (B2) while B11 tried to articulate the experience through a dynamic intercorporeal field of energies: 'the energy that pulled us together and pulled us towards specific directions... it was like we became a body, and suddenly we started moving altogether and we were expanding and coming back again as a body' (B11). All of them agreed that they had no feelings of empathy or compassion for Pentheus. B5 highlighted 'this pleasure of teasing him', B6 felt 'satisfaction', and B7 exclaimed while laughing that 'he brought it back to himself' and 'he deserved being torn apart' (B1) Henceforth, a game of pain and pleasure is embodied throughout the entire process with a climax on stage. They all confess empowerment through this 'collective mentality' of madness (B6).

**1.3 Observations on Ensemble Dynamics:** Besides the challenges emerging from the nature of the project, there is an interesting mix of participants reshaping the dynamics in the studio: (i) amateur actors with little professional acting experience and trained in Greek drama schools; (ii) professional dancers; (iii) graduate students from the School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds; (iv) inexperienced participants in both dance and acting. Interestingly, my capacity as a

researcher-director creates confusion for some of them. Those who consider me an amateur director create dynamics of tension and competition in the studio (groups i and iv), whereas those (groups ii and iii) who see me primarily as a researcher and then as a director are cooperative, respectful, and conscientious. This is perhaps due to the exposure of the individual to a certain discipline – discipline both as a behavioural framework and as a field of knowledge – that allows an analogous openness to the incoming knowledge. Inferentially, the most rigid perceptions concerning the training's understanding and purposes inexorably resulted in inflexible bodies. As explained, this response was most common in groups (i) and (iv), who demonstrated difficulty adapting to new training. That raised questions about the participants' selection process and strategies I could employ towards effective engagement.

## **2. On *Medea Inside***

### **2.1 Character development and Embodiment:**

#### **Automatic Writing, Online Readings and Characterisation**

The digital workshops were based upon the two main principles of *preparation* and *surprise*, underscoring the bidirectional reciprocity between practice and research. In *Three Gestures*, the ensemble physically explores the impulse of their psychic writings in their private space. In the activity *Before/After*, I ask them to see through their current subconscious flow.

*Before/After* is an adapted exercise that draws from the basic rules of automatic writing. At the beginning of the workshop, the participants write automatically, drawing from individual and collective traumas during the pandemic. The session lasted for fifteen minutes to allow them time to delve into their inner thoughts, observe their surroundings and themselves when they freeze and listen to their subconscious. What follows are the five stages the exercise consists of:

Task 1: Automatic writing for fifteen minutes

Task 2: Play reading (on a shared cloud file)

Task 3: Relaxation - Close your eyes for three minutes

Task 4: Automatic writing from the character's perspective for seven minutes

Task 5: Group reflection

The aim is to enable the performers to free their minds and create a deep, meaningful connection with their character through verbal interactions within an intersubjective environment. *Before/After* revolves around the self/Other dipole, where the Other is their character or co-performer. The exercise also fosters a creative exchange of words between the play text and the texts they generate. The participants felt liberation during their second writing and richness in words and emotions floating with increased fluency (M2). The second writing was more 'directed' (M2), 'coherent, narrowed and focused' (M7), as well as 'calmer and reflexive' (M3, M5) because they were provided with context (M7, M8). Finally, while the first writing was 'aimless' and revolved around the Self (M9), the reading created a 'stronger connection with the character' (M1), enhancing dramaturgical perspectives and drawing parallels with reality (M8, M5, M4).

In the next session, the participants highlight emotional or corporeal in-textual references. An 'in character' automatic writing of three minutes completes the session to reinforce embodiment. Most of them still use the third person, not the first person, as it is too early to identify with their characters. That led me to incorporate Stanislavsky's psychophysical technique of the *Seven Planes* to reduce the distance between performer and character through 'mental reconnaissance' (Merlin, 2014, pp. 60-61). The company would psychosomatically access the 'visceral and intuitive impressions of the text' (ibid.) by conducting their own research.

M3 found helpful the journals, which used 'moments of (hers) that echo (the character's) life'. The characterisation questionnaires (based on Stanislavsky's method and psychophysical acting) also facilitated character development (M3). Acting with members of the household (M1) or personal tragedies associated with the participants and their households during the lockdown (M3, M4, M5, M6) amplified the experience of embodiment.

## 2.2 Conceptualisation and Tele-choreographing

### 2.2.1 Plot Architecture and Conceptualisation

Erica Fischer-Lichte in *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies* (2014) refers to episodic and semantic memory to analyse the cognitive function of perception in performance analysis (pp. 49-50). In these 'distinct, yet interdependent' systems (Menon et al., 2002), episodic memory stores experienced events, whereas semantic memory relates to general knowledge and the subjective interpretation of events (Fischer-Lichte, 2014; Menon et al., 2002). From a phenomenological perspective, the perceptible phenomena are subject-related but not subject-dependent (Willis, 2001, p. 2), raising semantic memory to an idiosyncratic cognitive structure associated with individualised perceptions of the same world.

To better serve cognition through visibility, both *Prometheus Immobile* and *Bacchae* present facts in chronological order, not always obedient to the text. On the contrary, *Medea Inside* represents facts following an emotional progression. The film is an esoteric work of the female experience of things rather than a narrative about the things themselves. The plot architecture is based on the correlation of semantic memory with phenomenology, shifting our attention from the actual events (episodic memory) to the events as they have been experienced (semantic memory). Prologos and exodos delineate five episodes, which reveal perceptual fields of the mourning process as experienced by the protagonist and, according to Kübler-Ross's (2014), coping mechanisms of mourning (shock and denial; anger; depression and detachment; dialogue and bargaining; and acceptance). The perceptual phases are mainly depicted with apples, which appear as episode signifiers. Apples are appropriated as religious, cultural, and artistic allusions underlining their strong association with the female subjectivity in most (artistic) representations. Finally, the skeleton of the film is based on eight long-durational choreographies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Hands Solo*, *the Marriage Duet*, *Sea Lost*, *Chair*, *Wave*, *Spider Web*, *Glauce's Dance*, and *Jason's Fall*.



The rapid alternation of images and close-ups intensifies the notions of discontinuity and non-linearity that dominate Medea's narrative, implying the absence of consciousness. Once more, and as Brannigan (2009) astutely notices, the close-up underlines the concept of decentralisation both aesthetically and perceptually '[b]y breaking down any centralizing tendencies in the treatment of the body' as it 'restores the body's expressive capabilities' (p. 131). What remains invisible in the exposure of the body on the distant stage of the theatre now appears in its pure form in the close-up, elevating the 'decentralized micro-choreography' (ibid.) to the essence of phenomenology.

### **2.2.2 Tele-choreographing**

The pandemic served the aims of the research in the context of psychosomatic imprisonment and suffering validating its value as an informative opportunity where pain can act as 'a creative collaborator' (Hopfinger, 2020). The choreographies were pure phenomenological products as they would express the creator's subjective experience of her being-in-the-world at the time of creation, which intertwines with the ensemble's generated throughout the training period and during the lockdowns.

Staticity and impotence to act are apparent in several choreographies expressing both the physical inability to move and the socially oppressed character. For instance, *Hands* and *Chair* were both assembled on a chair to be performed by the Chorus Leader. The Chorus reflects Medea's feelings combined with their inability to act and prevent or protect her or her children. The *Chair* took direct inspiration from the dance film *Hands* (1995) by Adam Roberts. Although the background is darkened, the chair is positioned in a kitchen as a provocative statement against the domestication of female subjectivity and the unjustifiable normalised expectation of her domestic 'imprisonment'. The elements of staticity and restraint are pivotal to representing femininity in patriarchal systems. *Glauce's Dance* is also static as she is impotent to act autonomously and suffers her predetermined fate arranged by her father Creon. All performers in unison, found themselves and their characters experiencing various forms of entrapment. Reasonably, 'the pandemic and the

extensive lockdowns amplified feelings of entrapment and psychosomatic pain turning my research and its methodology into a vital tool of performative introspection' (Director's note, *Medea Inside* film programme).

The *Marriage Duet* is a static compilation of phenomenologies centred on the abdomen and the genitals. The emphasis on kinesiology, which expresses sexuality, menstrual or pregnancy pain and symptoms of anxiety or fear, is given by different angles, close-ups (CUs) on Jason and Medea and extreme close-ups (ECUs) mainly on the Chorus's body parts. *Sea Lost* and the *Wave* were conceived during improvisation on the surface of a tile or an A4 paper. The concept of being stuck or rooted in an unpleasant situation characterises all choreographies exploring the limits of the body and reclaiming self-expression and freedom through self-transcendence.

In *Sea Lost* and *Jason's Fall*, the main characters change positions in a 'circular' signification of the conflict through position and role reversal. The effect was achieved by framing them in perspective using depth of field (DOF), with the figure in the back appearing smaller to indicate the subject's insignificance. In *Sea Lost*, the Dutch Angle (DA) is utilised to evoke feelings of anxiety while giving emphasis on the concept of decentralisation; the camera is slanted towards Jason creating a diagonal impression of the domestic interior. The scene represents Medea's journey through the sea but also stands as a metaphor for her instability in a churning marriage, while her physical entrapment between Jason's body and the wall bears geographical, spatial and social connotations.

*Jason's Fall* was extracted by another performer's improvisation in the studio; M1 embodied M5's corporeal phenomenology of lament [link in complete e-thesis]. A noticeable observation is that M5's performance of lament was documented by the camera, which did not interfere with the creative process. On the other hand, M1's embodiment of M5's lament was *for* the camera involved in the process as her telic destination.

## Appendix II: Audience Reviews, Nominations and Awards for *Medea Inside*

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The reviews<sup>10</sup> are anonymised and collected from the film's social media, (personal) e-mails and messages. Commentary by the cast is included as their first encounter with the film was on its premiere day.

**A1:** 'This work is remarkable. In the moment of the birth, I felt real tension in my belly. It is complex, incredibly rich, and intelligent. Congrats [sic] to the director and the cast.'

'I literally felt pain in my belly while Medea was giving birth! I loved the way the narrative is linear and circular at the same time, the inside/out of the body/balloon, the familiarity of the home setting that normalizes [sic] Medea as an abused woman, and the contrast of the bathtub as a place of birth/death, self-care and madness, subconscious and reality. The doubleness of every element, the apple that is food and poison, the soil that is fertility and burial material, the string is revenge and self-violence. [...]

**A2:** 'This was a thought-provoking and powerful piece of media, an excellent tribute to both Medea and the shared experiences of women suffering within domestic hardships and in the world at large. Unnerving, and heartbreaking. At times it evoked memories of reading Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* for the first time, achieving a poignancy of human expression in moments, more than the serial adaptation has in its entirety. Each new episode was distinct and climactic yet built upon the previous ones, utilising a dynamic range of backdrops and settings. I cannot pick a favourite episode. The symbolism was incredibly powerful, the viewing experience enhanced by the soundtrack, not to mention the phenomenal acting portraying the significant range between distress and resilience and something unspeakable in "Glauce's" expression in 4 also. I wish I could study this entire film at length. I was intensely

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<sup>10</sup> Indicators: A- for audience and M- for performers

moved watching this - as a classics student, a young woman, and a fan of film. The achievement of all of this despite lockdown is significant, and not to be understated! Fantastic work by all the cast and crew to produce such an amazing piece of art that conveys such a powerful feminine voice without dialogue. Once was not enough - I will watch it again if I have the chance!

**A3** (trans.): 'That was a spellbinding experience, congratulations. Doing all this remotely makes it even more impressive.'

**A4**: 'Nothing but great things to say about *Medea Inside*. Strong emotions, incredible music, outstanding performances... Still cannot believe this was achieved during lockdown! If you have the chance I highly recommend watching it. [...] Congratulations once again to the whole team for pulling this together under such hard circumstances.'

**A5**: 'Just finished *Medea*, I am having a heart attack and I am traumatized [sic], it was that insanely amazing. Please please please go watch it, there is one (1) performance left tomorrow. From the point of view of a film student and working in the industry, I am shaken, it was incredible.'

**A6**: 'Sensitive, artistic and emotional! Still having goose bumps!'

**A7**: 'Objectively speaking, I find this work impressive mainly in these points: 1. [T]he unique female perspective: In almost all other versions of *Medea*, I saw the story of *Medea* between herself and others. But in this version, I see *Medea* and her changed relationship with herself, with her body, which indicate women's common physical suffering and psychological challenge. *Medea* is no longer vicious here, instead, I have great pity for her as when she avenged others, she inflicted multiple pains on herself. I feel her deeper based on my connection with my own body, and then my understanding of her. 2. [T]he unique performance design: the whole work consisted of body movement and music, but clearly delivered the story, particularly people's changed relationship, their complicated and even controversial inside pain/psychological conditions, which are reasonably/beautifully/poetically performed by subtle emotions, object metaphors and body movements. 3. [T]he fragmentation of the production process and the integrity of narration: this work is remotely directed

and combined with pieces these performers shot [sic] in their different places. However, the narration is quite clear, fluent and complete. What's more, it makes very good use of detailed presentations with the camera, which [...] diminished the disadvantages caused by the restriction of being unable to perform offline during the pandemic. [...] I hope this work could be widely seen and rewarded. I also want to see an offline version of this work, which might offer more possibilities on the body narrative and performance design.'

**A8:** 'It's a very interesting and unique piece. I could really feel the psychological pain and trauma of Medea. The pain of being betrayed, of being trapped, controlled, and destroyed. I could feel Medea's pain. I also think you succeeded in making Jason sinister, which given his heroic status in Greek myth is interesting. He came across very much as a cold, controlling and sinister figure. As a survivor of abuse I really resonated with the scene in Episode 2 (I think it was 2) where Jason and Medea are together and he is standing behind her, showing her love and then suddenly the body language changes and he begins to dominate and control her...very powerful, very chilling. Amazing performance work, I would love to see it offline on the stage someday.'

**A9:** 'What a work! That was so powerful, so moving, sometimes I had to look away, other times I felt like I was looking at myself. What an achievement by you and your incredible team. I feel honoured to have experienced it, thank you.'

**A10:** 'Medea was extremely thought-provoking. I thoroughly enjoyed the use of the different actresses to portray Medea's [sic] mental state at different parts of the movie.'

**A11:** 'Was really good, definitely gave off the conflict vibe. One thing that stood out for me was the way the sound and visuals complemented each other (applause icons).'

**A12 (trans.):** 'Exemplary work! Emotions changing, sometimes these emotions are extreme with symbolisms being expressed through movement and impressive music that take you to a peak and your catharsis. A complete creation in all aspects. Congratulations to the entire team!'

**A13:** 'First and foremost, congratulations on an astonishing achievement of conceiving and delivering this outstanding piece of work....

The use of the senses or rather sensory stimulus returned the audience to our own bodies which was exceptional experience for us in a digital space and essential to our engagement. I could feel the beard, the water, I could smell the soil, I could feel the temperature of the garden. The natural motifs, in particular, return us to something primordial and universal, both the soil and the water are a life source, but also how we return to the earth in our death and how water can both sustain us and be a lethal force too, was compelling. The significance of the senses and the idea of the natural was incredibly powerful in engaging with this work online.

There was a certain intimacy of the domestic space which could not have been achieved in a traditional theatre space and I thought this was fundamental to the performance. The domestic space as being constrictive and isolating resonates with us all right now but there also was a sense of defiance and independence in being alone which struck me. There was further meaning with images of both the archetypal and contemporary female side by side often in the same image which brought us closer to Medea and to you as creators and performers.

The choreography, specifically gesture and the images created using the hands, again, returns us to a primordial form of communication which invited a certain agency from the audience to interpret and communicate with you.

The images that you created using colour and texture, not only of the physical but the aural supported the sensory and episodic nature of the performance. The linen dress against a textured wall with the hair flowing was incredibly rich, simple, and open to responses.

It was undoubtedly clear how hard everyone had worked, and I want to thank you for your commitment and sacrifices for this project as an audience member to create this incredibly special experience for us. Well done indeed.'

**A14** (trans.): 'Bravo to the outstanding work of everyone in the team. This film was an experience on its own, created in difficult and charged times. The female figure in

all its manifestations; sometimes shocking, some others gouges memories or reminds us of the woman next door... in all of those, it overwhelms the spectator. Powerful, thought-out, finest piece...'

**A15:** 'This should apply for awards. I don't feel time when I'm watching it. Amazing!!! The choreography contains so much tension and illusions. This should be on a film screen. The sound is spatial [sic] for earphone users.'

**A16:** 'This project is the live proof that art connects us so easily even when being in different parts of the world in these difficult times.'

**A17:** 'It was marvelous. I felt like something hit my chest.'

**A18:** (trans.) 'Bravo! Beautiful... it leaves you with a sense of thinking about it and further analyse it...'

**A19:** 'So tactile and thought-provoking.'

**A20:** 'In theatre, we can limit our perception as 'oh, it's [sic] expressive dance or physical theatre but on film it felt like you could negotiate those categories more fluidly. Also because they were in non-performance spaces [t]he contrast of expressivity against the domestic and quotidian was very potent. [...] Unfortunately, the trappings of the theatre are hard to mediate when creating visceral work. But we are not used to seeing performance in that style on film. You're [sic] working against the conventions of naturalism that dominate film. And it elevates it. [...] I'm just overwhelmed by what you were able to create against such adversity.'

**M6:** 'Such richness in simplicity! The soil on the bed was so evocative.'

**M5:** 'Watching the couple made feel that the image of two people touching underlined the feeling of loneliness I was experiencing when self-filming.'

'It was strange to see someone else performing a movement which was mine. Repeating my movement (bringing head to shoulder) made me feel the sense of connectivity.'



Fig. 27 Laurel, Falcon International Film Festival, March 2022



Fig. 28 Certificate, Falcon International Film Festival, March 2022





Fig. 29 Laurel, Budapest Film Festival, February 2022



Fig. 30 Certificate, Budapest Film Festival, February 2022



Fig. 31 Certificate, Milan Gold Awards Film Festival, February 2022



Fig. 32 Laurel, Lift-Off Global Network, Showcase Extravaganza, March 2022



## First prizes

Del Valle High School and Bianca Sanchez

Galvin

## Runners-up

Dionysia Bouzioti (Leeds University),

Anne Buckley, Simonne Campos and

Christopher Rowe

## US School Award

Randolph-Macon College

## Appendix III: Questionnaires and Interview Templates

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### 1. Questionnaire for the Audience: *Prometheus Immobile*

- What were your immediate impressions during the performance, and how do you feel about it now?
- Which images have affected you the most and in what ways? What did you think or feel while watching them?
- How did the performance make you feel about the human body or your own body?
- Which types of movement had the strongest impact on you? What did you experience, feel or think?
- How did you experience the vocal interjections or body sounds given the lack of speech?
- How did Prometheus's long-durational immobility affect you?
- Were you familiar with the story of Prometheus Bound before the show?
- We have an interest in the intercultural impact of the performance. In order to do so, we need your nationality; please let us know below
- Gender
- Occupation
- What is your relation to the cast or the production team?
- How did you hear about the show?
- Would you go again to this type of Greek tragedy dance - theatre?

### 2. Questionnaire for the Audience: *Bacchae in Absentia*

- Which scenes or images affected you the most and in what ways? Please describe your experience given the absence of speech (logos).
- How did scenes of suffering and physical/bodily abuse impact you? Please cite them.

- Did you relate with any of the performers or the characters? Please describe any experiences related to feelings evoked by the performance.
- Any thoughts about the human mind and soul that emerged from the performance? (i.e. madness, loss of control, etc.)
- Did the performance trigger any associations related to pain or mental health issues (i.e. neurosis, psychosis, addiction etc.) that you or others in your environment have experienced? Could you describe this experience?
- Please feel free to express what this performance left you with overall. What kind of thoughts or feelings did it evoke in the end? (\*Anything the previous questions did not cover)
- Were you familiar with the tragedy of *Bacchae* before this performance?
- Gender
- Occupation
- Relation to the members of the cast/production team
- How did you hear about the performance?

### **3. Performer Interview Template: *Bacchae in Absentia***

#### **I. Methodology**

- Do you think that you gained an understanding of what a phenomenological point of view is? If so, how did that work for you both as an individual and performer?
- Has the training process helped you develop any skills?
  - Do you feel that you have evolved since last year, and in what ways?
  - Do you understand the project differently and how?
- Can you see where a particular exercise might take you to? Can you provide any examples of how the training might link to the rehearsals and transform on stage, and what might be the underlying meaning?
- Has anything changed in the way you approach:
  - a character?
  - your body?

- a character's body?
- the text?
- How has this training process changed your understanding of Greek tragedy?
- Any thoughts regarding the rehearsals?
- Has this training process (the workshops) helped you in any way during rehearsals?

## **II. Concepts, ideas, aims**

- How did you experience or understand the recessive and ecstatic body during the process?
- Which scenes or images affected you the most and in what ways? Please describe your experience given the absence of speech (logos).
- How did you experience specific scenes (e.g. the sparagmós scene)?
- How did you experience individuality and collectivity?
- Did the process, including the performance, trigger any associations related to pain or mental health that you or others in your environment have experienced? Could you describe this experience?
- How did you experience:
  - pain and suffering
  - suffering of the Other and empathy
  - power, abuse and fear
  - transformation (mental, bodily or performative shifts between states)
  - embodiment of the tragic

## **III. Personalised Questions**

and what will you take away?

### **3. Performer Interview Template: *Medea Inside***

#### **I. Methodology: Theory and Process**

- What was it that brought you here in the first place? What made you apply to this project?
- What were your intentions or expectations?
- What is your previous training, acting experience, and professional/educational background?
- How do you feel about the project and the ways it evolved and transformed?
- Who was your character –could you share a few words about them?
- What are your feelings or thoughts about your character in the play?
- What is your experience of the process regarding characterisation and identification?
- How did it feel to be given the responsibility or opportunity to create a character on your own instead of performing a fixed one?
- What are your feelings/thoughts about the other characters? How was your perception shaped around character Y? What has changed through the process and how?
- How did you find the process as a psychophysical tool in relation to acting? Strengths and weaknesses?
- What would you change to the process and why?

#### **II. The body; body and objects; body and otherness**

- Could you see how the exercises link to the themes of exploration?
- What is your relation to object X used in the workshop/film? How would you describe your experience with object X? Has anything changed in the way you see and experience things or those things in particular?

- Could you describe your relationship with others in the project?
- What is your experience regarding your own body/mind?
- Experience regarding the other bodies in the project?
- Please describe any moments of suffering (any kind: mental, emotional, physical etc.) or pain during the process.

### III. Changing the Process and the Shift to the Digital

- What was your experience regarding the presence of the camera? [i.e. in the studio and at home during the meetings, personal work, filming]
- What was your experience when improvising for the camera?
- How did journaling make you feel? How did it feel to write about your emotions and thoughts and then perform them?
- What was your personal making process?
- How did the filming tasks make you feel (every single task in particular)? Talk to me about your experience regarding teledirecting (remote directing).
- Experience of performing at home. How did it feel to have us and the camera in your personal space?
- In what ways did our digital communication impact you?
- How did you feel about the **frequency** of the **tasks** (daily improvisations)/**meetings** (increased to two at the beginning of the digital era and then decreased to once every three weeks)?
- What made you stay for that long and not drop out (given the pandemic)?

### IV. Project and Lockdown

- How did you experience the relationship between the project and lockdown/isolation? How did they affect or impact each other?



- How did the **project** impact your experience and perception of the play, its characters and your ideas on the themes under examination (isolation, imprisonment; mental health and feelings of loss; immigration; relationships and power/oppression etc.)?
- How did the **current situation** impact your experience and perception of the play, its characters and your ideas on the themes under examination (isolation, imprisonment; mental health and feelings of loss; immigration; relationships and power, oppression etc.)?
- Could you share any thoughts on proximity and distance?
- Working alone versus working in the studio. Could you describe these two experiences?

#### **V. Overall Experience**

- What did you like about your journey and what didn't you and why? What would you change?
- What is your overall experience? How would you describe your experience over the course of this long journey?
- What will you take with you? What would you keep from this experience?
- What was your experience/relationship with the director? What would you like them to change?

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