“THE INFALLIBLE PROTAGONIST”
A STUDY OF COMPLEXITY THEORY AND REHEARSAL DYNAMICS IN MONODRAMA

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Musical Arts

The Sydney Conservatorium of Music
University of Sydney
2016
Declaration

I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Ethical approval has been granted for the study presented in this thesis from The University Human Ethics Committee. Experts and Participants were required to read an information statement and sign a consent form prior to the collection of data.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________
Acknowledgements

Sincerest thanks and unending gratitude to Dr. Michael Halliwell, my unfailingly wise supervisor, for all the encouragement, wisdom, endless patience along with brilliant insights into every problem. Heartfelt thanks to Carolyn Sue, Kristin Savell, Sally Gillespie and Maree Ryan for their sage advice. A huge debt of gratitude to Rachel Bailes for editing assistance, Robert Lepage, Willene Gunn, Jonathan Khuner, Stephen Mould, Lindy Hurne, Kate Gaul, Tom Woods, Sarah Penicka Smith, Jimmy Kansau, Martin Buckingham, Alexander Knight, Andrew Morgan and the many others who were interviewed, surveyed or consulted for this project. Your generosity and fascinating insights into the world of opera and monodrama were truly enlightening. To the wonderful musicians, actors and artists who undertook these performance projects with me, I am in awe of your talent. To Michael Halliwell, Javier Vilarino, Simon Halligan, David Commissio, Suzie Q, Wendy Dixon, Patrick Keith, Eve Klein, Liz Evans, Sadaharu Muramatsu and all of the orchestral musicians who worked tirelessly to collaborate on these projects: your generosity and collaborative spirit made these projects so special. Finally all love and thanks to Joy, John, Schuyler, Mackenzie, Saskia and especially Michael for the joy of every day with you.

**Gebet An Pierrot**

Otto Erich Hartleben (1864-1905), after Giraud

Pierrot!
Mein Lachen
_Hab ich verlernt!_
Das Bild des Glanzes
_Zerfloß - Zerfloß!_
Schwarz weht die Flagge
_Pierrot! Mein Lachen_
_Hab ich verlernt!_
_O gieb mir wieder,
_Pierrot - mein Lachen!_
Abstract

Monodrama is a work for a sole protagonist, utilising both sung and spoken vocalism over a cathartic narrative. Developed as a subgenre of opera relatively recently, monodrama emerged in the era of Freudian psychology. Monodrama aims to convince the audience of the authority and infallibility of the protagonist’s point of view. An operatic monodrama rehearsal is a unique sociological dynamic, one that functions as a complex adaptive process with director, conductor and performer as principal agents. The effective functioning of this dynamic causes beneficial coherence, measurable by successful performance outcomes (Snowden, 2012).

An interesting phenomenon is observed in monodrama rehearsals, divergent from traditionally hierarchical rehearsal dynamics found in opera. The singer has increased agency in rehearsal, effectively transforming the dynamic from a negotiation between stage director and conductor, as occurs in opera, into a collaboration of equal yet distinct roles. Director, conductor and performer form a triumvirate of mutual respect, exhibiting porous boundaries of roles and responsibilities (or linkages). Monodrama rehearsals comprise a series of “safe to fail” experiments, repeating acceptable patterns with mutual agreement of three principal participants (or nodes), and creating unique norms leading to successful performance. The relative agency of each participant in a rehearsal, changing notions of authorship, and the success of this complex collaboration are discussed in detail, showing the possibilities for adaptive rehearsal structures in a traditionally conservative art-form.

Primary research is conducted through participation as director and singer in three monodrama production rehearsal periods: “Pierrot Lunaire” by Arnold Schoenberg, “The Seven Deadly Sins” by Kurt Weill, and “The Pomegranate Cycle” by Eve Klein. Industry professionals’ perceptions of the dynamics in monodrama and opera rehearsals are also studied through semi-structured interviews and surveys with thirteen subjects (N=13), four directors (D=4), four conductors (C=4) and five singers (P=5), considering self-reported “successful” performance in opera and monodrama. Both the performance practice research and qualitative research herein supports the hypothesis that a monodrama rehearsal is a collaborative triumvirate functioning as a complex adaptive system, contrasting with the power structures and dynamics commonly observed in opera rehearsals.

Key Terms: Opera, monodrama, America, neo-Romanticism, realism, the cult of celebrity, individualism, rise of small forms, collaboration, interdisciplinary art forms, authorship and author-function, triumvirate, Regietheater, complexity theory, complex adaptive system.
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1. Introduction: authorship in opera and operatic monodrama

In the early twentieth century, as romantic and baroque opera retreated further into history, opera houses staged productions adhering strongly to the composer’s perceived historical performance instructions, informed by performance practice conventions. Curated reincarnations of the fifty to sixty standard or repertory operas in historically informed productions occurred with regularity in Europe and America, with the ideological premise of preserving a historical tradition (Beyer, Kreuzer, & Chaikin, 2011), perpetuated by some opera houses to this day (Kreuzer, 2006). This adherence to historical convention sits uneasily alongside postmodern conventions of authorship and the rise of the director.

Some precedents for change were observed in nineteenth century opera performances. For example, the act of aria insertion\(^1\) gave renowned singers the opportunity to individualise a performance with material provided by the performer themselves (Poriss, 2009).\(^2\) Well into the twentieth century, productions across Europe began to value the increased importance of the stage director, rethinking traditional modes of engagement with audiences.\(^3\) In this environment there was also a flowering of new forms, including monodrama.

At the turn of this century, the concept of authorship of a work of music theatre has become a complex issue, one no longer ascribed to the composer alone. Movements from modernism to postmodernism have embraced Hegel’s view that contradictions appear between the perception of a work and the composed score (Boenisch, 2013). Theatricality, the interplay between text and performance, has become central to modern notions of performance authorship, effectively elevating the role of the director in a production.\(^4\) Theatricality also considers the method of

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1. Aria insertion could include repertoire from another composer, another opera or a song taken from another genre.
2. Stories abound of both appropriation and manipulation of composed material throughout classical musical history. Even Galuppi’s (1770) *Le Nozze di Dorina* included an inserted Mozart concert aria.
3. Likewise lieder conventions have recently been challenged by performers who use movement, staging, sets and even projections to challenge the conventions of a form of absolute music.
4. A director guides, governs, or supervises actors in a performance, from the Latin “to guide”. The Latin root for conductor is to “bring together”, and was used to denote military rulers in the late Middle English period. The opera director plans the dramatic action in reference to the libretto and music. On the opera stage this is particularly true when referring to the visual world. The conductor is responsible for the rhythmic “flow” of a live performance, or the sound world. Convention has built a particular set of responsibilities for directors and conductors in rehearsal and performance of opera that generally separates their roles and responsibilities into these two worlds.
engagement with the audience challenging traditional views of opera being authored authoritatively and solely by the original composer.

From the 1970s, the “bourgeois cultural practice” (Beyer et al, 2011, p.307) of recreating an opera for performance has been truly dominated by a director’s theatre, or Regietheater model. Regietheater is a broader construct of cultural, historical, political conditions in Europe from the turn of the twentieth century to the present. The German historical and political roots of Regietheater are culturally different to French mise-en-scène. The Regietheater director creates an authoritative visual aesthetic, based on a justifiable Zeitgenossenschaft, on which each subsequent iteration of the work is then measured and compared (Kreuzer, 2006).

Boenisch (2013) identifies a number of the principles governing Regietheater. Firstly, it affirms the Zeitgenossenschaft, asking the theatre to act as a companion to and for the present. Secondly, by overtly prescribing a particular point of view the work is made subjective, projected through the director’s own social, cultural and political frame, with the effect of both universalising and abstracting the mise-en-scène.

In re-imagining opera through the frame of Zeitgenossenschaft, the Regietheater director can mirror the role of the auteur in film. Regietheater is also influenced by filmic techniques and aesthetics. As evidenced by the use of video projections in place of set elements, film techniques in staging, and the increasing presence of film directors working as opera directors, the advent of film has had a profound influence on opera production values. The film auteur experiments with different

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5 McGillivray (2004) contends that theatricality depends not the substance or manner of a presentation but upon the relationship between spectating and performance (McGillivray, 2004, p.228).
6 There is a number of possible spellings of Regietheater/Regitheatre/Regitheater. Translated from the German, this thesis will use the term “Regietheater” to describe this movement.
7 First discussed in relation to jazz (Roesner, 2014), the discussion has broadened to the devised nature of modern theatre and changing perceptions of direction in the modern world.
8 Mise-en-scène translates as all the elements set or placed on the stage, including the placement of bodies. Mise-en-scène represents the difference between seeing and hearing, this French-inspired understanding of theatre can be contrasted with the German roots of Regietheater in ways too numerous to unpack in this thesis. For the purposes of this discussion, Regietheater gives the director increased authority and authorship to justify the appearance of a particular mise-en-scène.
9 This word, directly translated as the noun ‘contemporaneity’ (Schroeter, 2016), describes the contemporaneous responsibility for theatre that participants have at any given time, referencing the world a particular piece of theatre represents or inhabits, translating and commenting on that world for, and with, the tacit agreement of the audience as to the appropriated meaning.
10 Boenisch defines Regietheater through Hegelian dialectical thinking.
11 Recently co-opted by critics, the term has come to be used disparagingly to describe a directorial vision perceived to be at odds either with the intention of the composer or the librettist, either with intent to shock with sex or violence, or embracing a concept that is perceived to defile the original staging intention of a work (Helyard, 2014).
12 Particularly since the advent of high definition opera broadcasts in cinemas.
13 Filmic techniques, together with the demand for authentically realistic acting, have transformed both opera and operatic monodrama.
views and perspectives, from panoramic to close-up. This manipulation of point of view when framing the narrative allows for a greater range of internalized discourse.

Monodrama emerged as an operatic sub-genre during this same period. Operatic monodrama is a work for one principal singer, delivering a sung and/or spoken, cathartic narrative from the protagonist’s point of view. As a new operatic sub-genre, monodrama nonetheless avoids solid adherence to the conventions of opera. The development of monodrama as a form is contemporaneous with the increasing dominance of Freudian psychology, the rise of individualism and the embrace of capitalism (Haiven, 2012). Monodrama also provides an opportunity to present a new definition of the Zeitgenossenschaft, a possible antidote to both Regietheater directorial dominance in opera and to the proscriptive historical productions dominant prior to Regietheater. This fascinating hybrid utilizes operatic vocal production, theatricality and primary character catharsis to provide a close-up on the point of view of the protagonist. It is instructive for the development of music theatre form into the future. In monodrama, operatic subject matter manipulated through the mind’s eye of the protagonist goads the audience into tacitly accepting the infallibility of their examined internal life.

This thesis examines monodrama and its unique contribution to music theatre, focussing in on the ethnography of a monodrama rehearsal process. The writer uses the frame of complexity theory to analyse rehearsal dynamics involved in the development of a monodrama for performance. In giving equal status to performer, conductor and director in rehearsal, the creative process in developing a monodrama is an example of Zeitgenossenschaft, elucidating the possibilities for the future of opera and music theatre. The study will provide evidence that monodrama rehearsals comprise a triumvirate, with roles of singer, director and conductor given equal but changing weight and significance in the rehearsal process, as distinct from opera rehearsal conventions and traditions. The monodrama rehearsal is an emergent process that may be viewed as a complex adaptive system: a true heterarchy in which no one participant dominates the creative process. In viewing this process first-hand, in close-up, the psychology and physiology of this emerging art-form is laid bare.

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14 Boenisch’s view regarding the concretisation of text and the authority of the Regietheater director is challenged by the equal input of all participants in the creation of a monodrama, despite often using operatic subject matter of mythic or historical protagonists. The advent of modernism is the historical dividing line for a new conception of theatricality where transformational, visionary work driven by the director is opposed to a sound world driven solely by a conductor (Lindenberger, 2001). As a result of Wagner’s profound influence on the staging of opera, accepted rehearsal practice and performance outcomes now placed the director in a powerful position of influence. The concept of Gesamtkunstwerk has exerted huge influence, emphasizing the director’s overarching idea or conception unifying both musical and dramatic concerns, leading to the development of a Regietheater or director’s theatre (Boenisch, 2004).

15 Rather than an example of Regietheater or historically accurate nods to composer’s perceived intentions.

16 Numerous commentators (Klaic, 1994) bemoan the rise of the director’s power in America and Europe at the expense of both musical and performer concerns.
Monodrama is studied through primary research and participation in three monodrama performances. These performances are combined with interviews with active operatic professionals to analyse current perceptions in the industry on rehearsal dynamics in both opera and monodrama. The advantages of utilizing complex adaptive systems for rehearsal collaboration in general are discussed. Both the performance practice research and qualitative research herein supports the hypothesis that a monodrama rehearsal is a collaborative triumvirate functioning as a complex adaptive system, contrasting with the power structures and political dynamics commonly observed in opera rehearsals. Monodrama is a salient example of the way music theatre processes and outcomes are changing in response to the Zeitgenossenschaft, reflecting that particular contemporaneity in practice.
2. Monodrama – definition and literature review

Whether one calls oneself conservative or revolutionary, whether one composes in a conventional or progressive manner, whether one tries to imitate old styles or is destined to express new ideas - one must be convinced of the infallibility of one's own fantasy and one must believe in one's own inspiration. (Schoenberg, quoted in Shifrin, 1975, p.180)

Monodrama – a one-character work with orchestra or ensemble – demands the solo performer represent the narrative from the mind’s eye of the protagonist, whether externalising the psyche or representing other characters through a subjective lens. Vital to the success of monodrama is the ability of composer, director, conductor and singer to establish the supremacy of the protagonist’s point of view.

Georg Benda’s *Pygmalion* (1766) was the first work to be described as a monodrama (Strong, 1996); (Taroff, 2005). A term co-opted from theatre, monodrama was discussed by composers as early as Mozart (Smith, 2008). As a work for a single protagonist with sung and spoken narrative over music, the form has only truly developed as a fully-fledged sub-genre of opera over the course of the last century. As it captures the philosophical and psychological zeitgeist, along with the pragmatics of relatively low production costs, monodrama is performed with increasing frequency in established opera houses. It is a flexible medium, not confined to the traditional proscenium thrust stage. As an art form, monodrama questions the artificial constrictions of practice imposed by an historical operatic art form.

Monodrama developed in a period of rapid change during the twentieth century, a small form contrasted with the grandiose imagery of Romanticism (Schorske, 2006), (Albright, 2004). Turn-of-the-century symbolists Saint-Pol-Roux (1909) and Evreinov (1915, 1916 and 1917) contributed to the development of a genre heavily reliant on audience involvement in the protagonist’s action.

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17 Benda’s work was followed by Cherubini’s *Pygmalion* in 1809 (Carter, 1965).
18 Some conjecture over the definition of monodrama led the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Sadie & Tyrrell, 2001) to develop a rather broad conception:

“*In its narrow meaning, a form of melodrama which features one character, sometimes with chorus, using speech in alternation with short passages of music, or sometimes speaking over music...In modern times, the term has lost its exclusive association with the combination of speech and music characteristic of melodrama and is most often used as a synonym for a one-character staged dramatic work for singer and orchestra, as in Poulenc’s La voix humaine (1958); as a non-staged dramatic work for singer and orchestra, as in Poulenc’s La dame de Monte Carlo (1961), Floyd’s Flower and Hawk (1972), Rocheberg’s Phaëdra (1973 – 4), J.E. Ivey’s Testament of Eve (1976) and Peter Maxwell Davies’s *The Medium* (1981).”
(Schneider, 2010), exploring the depths of the protagonist’s psyche (Taroff, 2005). This reflected a trend towards the power of the individual: a dominant ideology in twentieth and twenty-first century liberal democracies.

During the 1920s, when the work of Freud and others gave the talking cure relevance and prominence (Carpenter, 2001), symbolists in art and music increasingly gave high value to the externalisation of psychological states (Spector, 1999). Formalism was coupled with radical harmonic innovation from composers such as Schoenberg (Gloag, 2012) and the inner dialogue of the character gained prominence and relevance (Yerushalmi, 1992). Monodrama is able to compartmentalise and fragment aspects of the individual, presenting a worldview which the audience tacitly accepts as believable and coherent. Musical expressionists such as Schoenberg pushed the boundaries of musical composition (Hamilton, 1989), directly emulating ideas proposed by the Viennese school of Freud and others (Carter, 1965), (Carpenter, 2010). As Hermann Hesse remarked in 1918; “Freudian thought was more discussed and more widely accepted among young artists than in professional medical or psychiatric circles.” (Sharp, 1978, p.94)

Although the development of modernism has not followed one sole trajectory (Schorske, 2006), symbolism and expressionism have given new impetus to the expression and creation of objective validity for subjective individual perspective.

The turning point in the musical map appears to be Schoenberg’s pioneering monodrama Erwartung, closer to monodrama and cabaret than to the melodrama preceding it (Payette, 2008) and, in a few cases, following it. Schoenberg’s experiment reverberated widely across the twentieth century musical timeline (Payette, 2008), reflecting the Viennese school’s stated desire to externalise subjective experience (Parker, 1997).

While all dramatic art is, to some extent, concerned with individual struggle, the growth of monodrama reflects a newfound understanding of the value of subjective experience, as well as its emotional and psychological significance, above the collective narrative:

Common to all manifestations of creative imagination in the first place, is subjective experience...a further common element concerns not the subject’s experience but the reaction of others to him. Wherever creative imagination is at

19 In championing monodrama and other small forms, the early symbolists imposed their particular analysis on an existing canon of work for solo performer (List, 1945).
20 Schoenberg’s radical experiments with atonality and the twelve-tone scale were matched with a recognisable structure based on the song cycle.
21 For example La Voix Humaine may be better characterized as a melodrama for solo performer (Kaye, 2013).
work, for better or worse, it tends to establish a distinction between the one and
the many. (Kris, 1953, p.334)

The subjective view was wholeheartedly embraced by modernism and the avant-garde (Murphy &
Murphy, 1999). Over the course of the twentieth century, experiments in art, literature and music
combined individual perspective and the reflected self. This distinction is the strongest evidence for
a link between the protagonist narrator in monodrama and the patient in psychoanalysis. The
therapeutic relationship is the subject of the patient’s experience, with the reported reactions of
others to this experience framed within the patient’s constructed worldview. Monodrama, even
when the protagonist plays other characters, manifests and delineates elements of the protagonist’s
psyche alone, with the intention of eliciting a sympathetic response from the audience (Carpenter,
2010), convincing the audience of the infallibility of the protagonist’s perspective.
Three distinct historical and cultural developments can be seen to have dominated the development of monodrama over the century, as represented in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1** – The three periods of monodrama development from 1900 to the present
The early monodramas were highly experimental, with the use of unfamiliar tonalities and structures. Between the wars there was little development of the form until mid-century, when monodrama’s second period was tied to modernism. In the last period up to the present, monodrama has embraced post-modern elements of eclecticism and neo-Romanticism. Each period of monodrama development has had a distinctive geographical centre, moving from the European diaspora to America and finally gaining increasing legitimacy worldwide as a sub-genre. Monodrama is most recently tied to American neo-Romanticism. The development of monodrama clearly resonates with political and social influences spanning the last century.

Despite the relative youth of the genre, Kurt Taroff identifies three distinct types of monodrama, single-character (from the early period at the turn of the century, including Shoenberg’s *Erwartung*), “divided-self monodrama, depicting the fragmented parts of an individual psyche at war within and individual”, and “multi-character monodrama”, where the protagonist’s world view is omnipresent, compelling in their representation of other characters (Taroff, 2005, p.5).

The monodrama audience is entreated to accept the protagonist’s externalization of emotion as an authentic, authoritative narrative. Figure 2 below illustrates how composers (and, in production, directors) effect manipulation of the audience towards tacit acceptance of the point of view of the narrative:
Figure 2 - The audience’s relationship with the monodrama protagonist

This model assumes the audience has a high degree of implicit knowledge and acceptance of Freudian psychology. Monodrama externalises the internal struggles of the protagonist in a language pioneered by Freud. The externalisation of subjective experience, a central tenet of Freudian psychology, is explicitly discovered in monodrama, quite in contrast to the majority of operatic narratives. This uncovering of the secret inner life, observed and chronicled, has become a pervasive trope in Western culture, reflecting the rise of the individual over collectivism.

Monodrama occupies an increasingly important place in classical vocal repertory (Pascoe, 2002). The THESPIS International Monodrama Festival in Kiel, Germany, the Solo Opera Project (American Opera Projects) created at the Guggenheim Museum’s Works & Process Series, and particularly the Metropolitan Opera Monodrama Festival are all strong indicators of the growing

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22 Artists using media such as YouTube could be broadly categorised as developing a branch of monodrama. Monodrama is linked with Freudian psychology through the notion of *perspective shift.*

23 As mentioned earlier, the original term is *Solospiel* in German.
relevance of operatic monodrama.\textsuperscript{24} The emergence of monodrama is concurrent with modernist and postmodernist movements in the arts and with the struggle of the operatic art form to retain cultural coin into the twenty-first century:

\textit{Opera is always said to be in one sort of crisis or another, and early vocal burnout may not even be the most serious one facing an art form that moves further into anachronism with each passing year. (Crutchfield, 1986, p.1)}

As revenues stagnate and audiences are reduced, opera companies are looking for ways to revive their economic and artistic interests. Monodrama is a multi-contextual small form (Miller & Page, 2004) that enables opera companies to embrace change in their season offerings. “Starvation pressure and perspective shift” (Snowden, 2012, 6’58”\textsuperscript{25}) are key conditions for adaptive change or \textit{exaptation}\textsuperscript{26} in human systems. Against mainstream opera’s struggle for currency and some evidence of funding \textit{starvation}, the emergence of monodrama itself is evidence of an adaptive process at play.

The current medium of choice for known “actor-opera singers” such as Karita Mattila, Dawn Upshaw, Frederica Von Stade and crossover music theatre-cabaret artists like Audra MacDonald and Ute Lemper, monodrama is increasingly performed by traditional opera companies (Mabry, 1990; Eberle, 1999). Far from replacing the “museum works” of grand opera, monodrama fills the void of creative programming and production for established companies. Born partly of pragmatism, monodrama is a relatively inexpensive “star” vehicle that, quite by accident, is showing signs of radicalism and eclecticism in an art form struggling with a conservative and \textit{bourgeois} image.\textsuperscript{27} Many high profile singers at the end of their careers are eager to consider new works that suit the current functioning of their instrument, which may no longer be suited to the extremes of range or the performance of, say, a full three-hour opera. Many monodramas comprise less than an hour of music, making the art form the perfect vehicle for a double or triple bill in a technological age where audience concentration spans are limited.

Monodrama is not always through-composed.\textsuperscript{28} In fact, it may be based on a song cycle, as in Ricky Ian Gordon’s \textit{Orpheus and Euridice} or Peter Maxwell Davies’ \textit{Eight Songs for A Mad

\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, monodrama is prevalent in Asian musical culture, particularly as a political theatre (Diamond, 2008).

\textsuperscript{25} Video recording, quote at 6’58” minutes.

\textsuperscript{26} ‘Exaptation’ is a term of evolutionary biology that refers to the adaptation of a source for another evolutionary purpose.

\textsuperscript{27} Radicalism of this kind is evident in Frederica Von Stade’s 2014 creation of Ricky Ian Gordon’s \textit{A Coffin in Egypt}. Other notable examples include Karrita Mattila’s \textit{Émilie du Châtelet} in Kaija Saariaho’s \textit{Émilie} and Phyllis Curtin’s Eleanor of Acquitaine in Carlisle Floyd’s \textit{Flower and Hawk}.

\textsuperscript{28} A continuous work with musical segues between narrative chunks.
Monodrama also differs from a staged song recital in the manipulation of the audience to accept the protagonist’s elevated point of view in a cathartic narrative journey (Taroff, 2010).

Instrumentation can consist of a small or even a large ensemble in monodrama, but is rarely limited to piano alone. Conductors are prevalent in current monodrama performance practice and play an important role in the rehearsal room, particularly for a work’s premiere. A recital is not necessarily a defining narrative based on a character in catharsis. The protagonist in monodrama must entreat the audience to sympathise with their constructed world-view, the audience being manipulated to be complicit in their “infallibility”. Yet there are certainly works straddling the divide between the recital and monodrama. It is expected that in the future these artificial delineations will be further challenged as both genres evolve, change and perhaps merge.

While growing in stature and importance, monodrama cannot be said to be thoroughly mainstream. It can function in black box and other unique venues outside the opera repertory framework. Major companies who program monodrama have used unique spaces and conditions to mount productions. It is primarily marketed as a vehicle for a particular singer, but is also a subject of academic interest, leading to a range of performances in academic institutions. Monodrama is providing a window into future possibilities for operatic music and drama.

2.1 Monodrama as gendered small form

Monodrama is a genre whose emergence coincides with the emancipation of women. The majority of monodramas have female subject matter and performers. As such, the use of psychoanalytical language to describe women has led to many monodrama heroines who display Freudian traits, including hysteria. Yet many monodramas of the first and second period (see Figure 1), detail the inner turmoil and emotional instability of women, reinforcing historical stereotypes of the hysterical woman. The female protagonist who is subject to hysteria does not provide a new and unique representation of women. Later monodramas are more nuanced in portraying externalised

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29 A song recital most often uses piano as accompaniment, with a familiar theme or unifying element to the songs. Narrative or character development may or may not occur.
30 However, recitals with an evident directorial vision are becoming more prominent, increasingly blurring the lines between the song recital and monodrama. They are performed with a dramatic element, different colourations of the vocal instrument, varied accompaniment instrumentation, and/or the use of sets and props. Such recitals have recently been described as “monodrama” or “performance art”, further blurring distinctions.
31 Monodrama seasons have occurred at Brooklyn Academy of Music and Berkeley Performances, classical music venues, yet despite being produced by opera companies, are rarely performed in traditional opera theatres. According to Kaye’s thesis, place, position and manner create the semiotics of performance (Kaye, 2013). The use of unique spaces in monodrama clearly delineates it from opera both in the eyes of producers and performers, allowing new and different theatrical techniques to be used.
32 Works that present the hysterical protagonist include Poulenc’s La Voix Humaine.
33 Interestingly, Citron (1990) notes that psychoanalysis can be a valuable tool for analysing women’s contributions in music, citing the work of Dr Anna Burton on Clara Schumann.
thought and emotion in women,\(^\text{34}\) often using historical characters to provide legitimacy to the necessity to reveal the protagonist’s inner life. Recent monodramas, even if they present female *hysteria*, pair it with manipulative narrative tools to legitimise and universalise her story for the audience, to render the protagonist complex, relatable and authoritative. In addition, traditionally gendered portrayals of emotional life are now being applied to male protagonists in monodrama.\(^\text{35}\) Yet there remains a heavy imbalance in gender, with the majority of works being created for women.

This heavily gendered small form of monodrama, despite its’ fascinating new representation of mostly female narratives, is subject to the “hierarchization of genre” (Citron, 1990, p.109). Citron describes a hierarchization of musical forms, ascribing higher status to larger genres such as opera. Smaller forms are described in gendered terms, as female. By the end of the nineteenth century, women had contributed to musical activity but were “for various reasons submerged and absent from present-day eyes” (Citron, 1990 p.114). Yet, “reviewers regularly made a gender/genre association and as a result invariably cast negative aspersions on pieces in smaller forms” (Citron, 1990, p.110).

The preponderance of female protagonists in monodrama is matched by increasing numbers of female composers, conductors and directors involved in operatic art in general.\(^\text{36}\) Along with the dominance of female protagonists in the sub-genre, the work of more recent composers such as Emilie Saariaho and Eve Klein overtly aim to contextualise women’s stories, challenging Freud’s stereotypes to create nuanced portrayals of female characters with complex inner lives:

*The Pomegranate Cycle’s narrative offers a direct challenge to the way operas have been composed around violent and sexist librettos, with patriarchal narrative.* (Klein, 2011, p. 206)

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\(^{34}\) Later monodramas of this kind include such works as *Émilie* by Kaija Saariaho.

\(^{35}\) For example, *Diary of a Madman* by Michael White and *Ravenshead* by Rinde Eckert.

\(^{36}\) Musicologists Karin Pendle (Pendle & Boyd, 2010), Catherine Clement (Clement, 1988), Susan McClary (McClary, 1991) and Marcia Citron (Citron, 1990), (Citron, 2007), are at the forefront of gendered discourse in music. They analyse the role of women in music and the social, cultural and philosophical conditions that have led to their underrepresentation and indeed misrepresentation in the canon.
As a predominantly ‘female’ form, monodrama on the one hand provides increased opportunities for female protagonists in a operatic form, but particularly in the first period, is prone to stereotyped representations of female emotion and hysteria informed by Freudian psychology. As monodramas are increasingly written for male protagonists in the third period, depictions of madness and hysteria common in early monodrama are becoming less common.

2.2 The pairing of Monodrama and American Neo-Romanticism

By the mid-twentieth century, postmodernists were portraying the visceral experience of art in the context of everyday existence. Monodrama became a testing ground for modernism and postmodernism, reflecting and radiating a period of great change and progress. Everyday and popular elements began to be incorporated into composers’ scores, reflecting contemporary concerns and complexities. This opened up the possibility of an emerging eclecticism, pastiche and even parody in monodrama of the second and third periods (see Figure 1):

The goal of exploring and processing experience was given ever-fresh stimulation through the dramatic changes overtaking modern society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leading to intense individual experiences and passionate, frenzied expressions of subjectivity and anxiety, such as are paradigmatically represented by Edvard Munch’s ‘The Scream’ (Best and Kellner, 1997, p.134).

Further developments in monodrama can be tied to American expressionism, the Zeitgenossenschaft being America’s own reworking of psychoanalysis and the cult of the individual (Sharp, 1978). American monodrama has, in the past forty years, developed a repertory and an audience as a predominantly neo-Romantic form.

The desire of the modern audience to know the performer when deciphering narrative meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988) assumes that the text or subtext in some way reflects the inner life of the performer. In a work primarily for one performer, heavily populated by known opera “stars”, the current cult of celebrity creates a conundrum of authorship. The performance is received through the audience’s filter: their perception of the known life of the performer and how that reality intersects with the libretto.

Monodrama specialists are becoming more prominent in America, all of whom began their careers in opera houses. Rinde Eckert, John Dykers, Dawn Upshaw and Frederica Von Stade collaborate with twenty-first century composers such as Ricky Ian Gordon, Jake Heggie, Steve Mackey, Carlisle Floyd and Alison Bauld. Many current monodrama composers use highly accessible neo-Romantic musical structures and elements of pastiche and eclecticism in their monodramas as the form gains prominence. Contemporary vocal production also embraces pastiche, pushing the limits
of classical vocal production in favour of myriad colour choices: from Sprechstimme, to un-pitched spoken vocalisation, to straight tone and flutter-toned singing.

Neo-Romanticism uses chromatic and related tonalities, with text and music proferring an affinity with nature. American neo-Romanticism of the last forty years is partly born of pragmatism and social conditions, reinvigorating the musical language of the Romantic period (Payette, 2008), (Lewis, 2003), alongside nineteenth-century aesthetics of subjective emotional truth (Simmons, 2006) which match perfectly with the presentation of an infallible, authoritative protagonist. The Romantic technique of statement, alienation for emotional or dramatic purpose, followed by a return to the known or familiar has been co-opted by American neo-Romanticism (Simmons, 2006). Drawing from Wagnerian ideals of the oneness of dramaturgy and music, American neo-Romanticism as expressed in monodrama of the third period is overtly visceral and accessible, dovetailing with dominant elements of contemporary American culture. Composers also use varied instrumentation and elements of abstract and absurdist thinking in a reimagined but familiar musical language.

American neo-Romanticism has co-opted Romantic concerns such as the cult of genius, its untimely nature, and the notion that compositions were seen to be fragments of autobiography, whether accurate historiography or not (Dahlhaus, 1980). American monodrama also represents a nostalgia for old forms in its attraction to neo-Romantic style (Dyckman, 1962). Overt expression of emotional truth underpins American acting methods and film aesthetics. As a new form, neo-Romantic monodrama is recognisable, accessible and emotionally transparent, allowing for the kind of close-up on the protagonist that dominates film, television and popular culture in America. The development of monodrama as an American neo-Romantic movement may, along with the pragmatic financial considerations of production costs, account for its growing popularity.

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37 In a capitalist society with limits on public funding of the arts, productions need to be both supported by large audience numbers and donors. The wholesale rejection of commercialism by established composers early in the twentieth century led to an “abyss” between “public taste and compositional quality” (Adorno, 2004). Most monodramas from the recent neo-Romantic American school are created by composers who already have a high profile as opera or musical theatre composers: The singers attached to the premiere are, in almost every case, singers with high public profiles.

38 The pursuit of individual achievement and excellence, colorations of the voice placing heavy acting demands on the singer, the notion that solo performance requires a great amount of self-belief and the exercise of personal power are all American values.

39 Each of the six American composers studied by Simmons either came from Europe or were heavily influenced by that aesthetic (three of them are Italian New Yorkers).

40 Simmons argues that critics undervalued these composers due to the accessibility of their music.

41 With operas such as Susannah by Carlisle Floyd, Dead Man Walking by Jake Heggie, Nixon in China by John Adams and Streetcar Named Desire by Andre Previn having a firm place in the repertory. All these operas feature popular music elements and contemporary themes.

42 That is, the ability to contrast with the dominant cultural ideology of the time.
2.3 The unique nature of Monodrama rehearsals – “inside out” or “outside in”

Developments in acting techniques also coincide with the rise of monodrama. Mechanical acting has historically been associated with operatic performance, with gestures approximating emotions and matching the musical cue. The need for an empirical understanding of the relationship between emotion, physiology and the mind in performance, has been intrinsically understood by successful actors, but has only recently been the subject of scientific study (Kemp, 2010). Monodrama, in mining the inner life of the protagonist, provides a forum for exploring this process in rehearsal.

The classical singer is presented with more challenges than the stage or film actor in conveying emotion. Technical and physical demands on the structure of the face, throat and body necessitate certain constrictions during vocalisation that have the function of maximising the singer’s formant. These constrictions impact on the ability of the performer to use some gestures and vocal colours to convey emotion in opera. Furthermore, certain emotions elicit breath and heart rate responses: physiological responses that may interfere with effective vocal production. Classical singers are, however, assisted by aural cues eliciting emotion in the music, which help the audience comprehend the content of the scene where there are limits on the singer’s emotional engagement due to technical restrictions.

This externalisation of inner life in contrast with traditional operatic acting is reflected in Diderot’s famous treatise on the outside-in or inside-out quandary in theatre (cited by Kemp, 2010, p.8). On the outside, monodrama opens up vocalism to include Sprechstimme, speech tones, vocal fry and straight tone. These techniques colour the voice in more extreme ways than traditional classical vocalisation, with certain dramatic and emotional effects. The internal struggle of the protagonist, the unhindered expression of inner thought and emotion, brings the inside out. This

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43 Bloch’s research (Bloch, 1993), which eventually became the Alba Emoting Method, showed that certain emotions are signified by certain physical changes such as body, breath and posture, but these could in turn bring physiological changes, identifiable as one of six basic emotions. Bloch’s research did not consider other elements, such as characterisation. Ekman et al (Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen, 1983, p. 20); (Ekman, 1993) noted that moving the facial muscles in certain positions could signify particular emotions, but more importantly, it would have an effect on the actor’s physiology – heart rate, temperature and breathing would be affected. Schechner (Schechner, 2013) sees this as a mechanical form of acting and notes it is more definable and reliable than any system of emotional recall, such as that of Strasberg or even early Stanislavski. These emotional truths as expressed both in text and physicality underpin our perception of the protagonist’s “truth” or “authenticity” and draw a line between Freud and American neo-Romanticism as expressed in monodrama.

44 The Singer’s Formant is the spectrum peak occurring at approximately 3kHz in classically trained singers (Sundberg, 2001).

45 Singing creates its own contortions and gestures as the singer aims for the perfect formant through ‘open-throated’, neutral larynx position and relaxed phonation (Mitchell & Kenny, 2004) With the range of vocalisations and gestures (Birdwhistell, 1952) available to the singer in monodrama, there are more possibilities to express these natural processes and bring the inside out more readily.
emergent approach reveals the protagonist in all their complexity, as the audience is drawn to tacit acceptance of the protagonist’s view.

Method acting, based on principles Stanislavski developed over one hundred years ago (Stanislavski, 1904), relies in part on the actor accessing gesture through a mind pathway and genuine emotional engagement. Beattie (2004) found that gesture is involuntary and driven by emotion; something unable to be simplified into a physically learned response (Krasner, 2010). If operatic acting uses a series of gestures to show action and emotion from the *outside-in*, monodrama, with its Freudian roots, is unique in showing a distinct preference for drama propelled from the *inside-out*, indebted to Stanislavsky, Diderot and even Freud.

The nuanced female narrative also speaks of the renewed power of the female, of the interior life, despite developing post-Freud’s depiction of female *hysteria*. With the predominantly female protagonist, vulnerable and emotionally nuanced, more recently represented by a neo-Romantic musical language, the monodrama rehearsal is poles apart from an opera rehearsal. Likewise, the process of preparing a monodrama for performance creates a unique set of sociological conditions reflecting postmodern concerns and modes of engagement.

Monodrama rehearsals will be shown, in this research, to favour a collaborative *triumvirate*, a unique rehearsal dynamic where roles and boundaries are porous and the rehearsal process is emergent, or *inside-out*. Singer, conductor and director all have equal agency in the process, as opposed to the supremacy of the director’s vision in opera’s current dominant *Regietheater*, *outside-in* process. As a unique and new genre, monodrama is flexible and reflective of its place in musical history. Monodrama rehearsals form a complex adaptive process, with authorship of a monodrama performance shared between composer, conductor, director and singer in a radically new, truly collaborative, heterarchical system.
3. Complexity theory and performance practice

_The great and late quantum physicist Heinz Pagel has said; 'Science has explored the microcosmos and the macrocosmos: we have a good sense of the lay of the land. The great unexplored frontier is complexity.' (Mitchell, 2013, 1'27")_

In 1977, at the nexus of the information technology boom and postmodernism, computer analyst Donald Knuth published a tongue-in-cheek article applying computational principles to the analysis of popular song (Knuth, 1977). Quite unintentionally, it opened up the computing algorithm as a metaphor for other fields. Knuth’s article also had a mirroring effect: academics began to use the formulae found in song repertoire as a teaching tool for explaining algorithms in computing studies (Chavey, 1996; Dougherty, 2008). Investigations by the influential information technology think-tank, The Santa Fe Institute (Mitchell, 2011), describe both the algorithmic calculations and the radical new management systems of computer technology companies after the 1970s. These were young companies, built in garages and university dorm rooms, which utilised a heterarchical structure to build their organisations; a non-hierarchical, democratic structure, where independent elements interact differently with one another. In the USA in particular, over the past forty years, increased collaboration and the adoption of creative heterarchical structures were principally driven by new technology firms. The Santa Fe Institute became interested in how large systems with “simple components, limited communication across components, no leader or boss, give rise to organized adaptive behaviour,” or complex adaptive systems (Mitchell, 2013, 5'35”). By using complexity theory as an operating framework, this research hopes to provide an entrée for further research into the application of complex adaptive systems in the creative arts.

Complexity theory lies at the intersection of philosophy and science (Freeman, 2013). Management theory, science, computing, technology, social sciences and many other fields have co-opted complexity theory as an apt descriptor of adaptive states in a range of human systems and non-linear human interactions. Complexity theory does not concern itself with complication, but with how simple rules, or interactions of individuals, combine to form emergent complex structures:

_The more complicated you make a machine, the more likelihood that it will fail due to something absolutely unexpected... (Perony, 2013, 4'06”)_

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46 Heterarchical structures are non-hierarchical structures where groups are either unranked, or ranked in ways distinct from common hierarchical assumptions, for example by group or type. Heterarchical organizations avoid or limit levels of management that propel hierarchical movement, and work on an adaptive, linear process.
Complex is not complicated...complex systems have many interacting parts which behave according to simple individual rules and this results in emergent properties. (Ibid, 1‘05")

Complex systems develop through an adaptive process from the fragments of information, knowledge base of the participants, and interpersonal dynamics at play. Perony (2013) sees collaboration as a human example of a complex system where simple individual rules influence social engagement in the service of a goal: “Simplicity leads to complexity which leads to resilience” (ibid).

Complex adaptive systems are made up of myriad interacting elements47 which, until the advent of mainframe computers, had been difficult to map (Glattfelder, 2012). Complexity theory focuses on identifying patterns of interactions between individual parts, and the internal rules that guide their behaviour, eventually emerging as systemic behaviours. System components, including the skills required for collaborative performance and the participants in the system, are described as nodes. The links between nodes and the manner in which they occur are social interactions.48

Never so prescriptive as to be stagnant, complex systems are in states of continuous change, mostly but not always incremental, highlighted by moments of radical movement.49 This concept is a departure from the reductionist thinking dominant in hierarchical models. Human systems contain stated hierarchies and unstated or shadow systems of power which are dependent on the “sphere of influence” (Berlow, 2010) occurring at important nodes:

Order emerges at the boundary between the organization’s legitimate and shadow systems. (Houchin and MacLean, 2005, p.149)

Complexity theory is defined by three basic tenets:

1. Any complex system evolves, or adjusts to circumstance, over time;
2. The complexity of a system is based on how hard it is to predict outcome based on the structure or inputs to the system (and not on the level of complication of the structure itself);
3. Some structures do not produce the best outcomes when subjected to great rates of change in inputs or environment. Hierarchical structures do not do well when unpredictability of outcome is high; heterarchical structures thrive better in such circumstances.

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47 Examples of this kind of phenomenon are swarms of bees or schools of fish.
48 These are often drawn as web-like structures by complexity theorists.
49 Complex systems can also be destabilized, chaotic and self-destructive.
3.1 Monodrama and complexity theory

A traditional opera rehearsal, unlike monodrama, is hierarchical, with power shared between director and conductor flowing down through the hierarchy of the production table. There is also a clear hierarchy between production team and performers, as demonstrated by the physical placement of the production table in front of the performers. In the case of an opera rehearsal, perhaps it is not the nature of opera, but strictly the large numbers of singers and supernumeraries present that dictates the organisational structure used.

A monodrama rehearsal process lacks volume density by definition. There are three principal participants, or nodes, influencing the process: director, conductor and performer (D, C, P). Yet with relatively few nodes, an organic, complex system of heterarchy develops, which values contributions without regard to node origin. The monodrama rehearsal is an excellent example of a naturally occurring system. A monodrama rehearsal can test the utility of low-density complex adaptive structures in music.

Musical performance practice research has historically focused on musical preparation and not the social dynamics of the rehearsal room. Exceptions would include Davidson’s action research into rehearsal structures (Davidson, 2004b), (Davidson & Williamson, 2002). This method provides useful evidence of the complexity of social structures at play in musical rehearsals. The following research expands on Davidson’s process, noting the simple rules that participants use when making connections between nodes in monodrama rehearsals. The research also expands on the work of Ames, whose experimental collaborative operas at the Hartt School of Music (Ames, 1993) attempted to create an emergent process, but found that a singular driver or “organizer” would inevitably propel the project, effectively performing the function of artistic director.

It is my submission that complex adaptive processes in rehearsal do create mutually beneficial collaborations within heterarchical systems, with participants performing equal but distinctive roles. This is possible to test in collaborations such as monodrama where there are few nodes and processes can be easily observed. While there is very little research on complexity theory in classical music generally, jazz improvisation is described as a form of “combinatorial complexity” (Sawyer & Sawyer, 2014, p.7). Performance outcomes are shown to be dependent on the conditions

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50 Occasionally a singer’s status may be elevated due to their public profile.
51 Mitchell (2011) notes a phenomenon observed in nature where the more fireflies join the group, the faster they synchronize, organize and fly in formation. The speed with which fireflies adapt and fall into formation has been shown to have a direct correlation with density or the numbers of participants in the system.
52 Davidson (2004) is a notable exception to the relative dearth of primary research in this area, advocating for notated primary practice research, such as that found in Berlioz and Wagner’s diaries.
or constraints imposed in rehearsal (Sawyer & Sawyer, 2014). Sawyer’s work shows the relationship between the rehearsal set-up and the desired outcome. Complex adaptive processes can also influence the level of authorship attributed to the performers in performance.  

All musical interaction is assumed to be goal orientated with outcomes measured in performance success. One of the key studies of group musical collaboration was the research of Murnighan and Conlon (1991) into string quartets. It was found that success correlated with the quality of inter-group interactions, repertoire choice and perceptions of the relative skill of each player and was reported in qualitative studies interviewing individual ensemble members. Despite assumptions from current practice that implicit leadership lies with the first violin, Murnighan and Conlon reported the second violin’s role in the group dynamic to be highly correlated with the success of the ensemble. They saw this as a “leadership versus democracy paradox”, citing the research of Smith and Berg (1987). Smith and Berg particularly concentrate on abnormal group processes that sit at the edges of a spectrum of behaviour within a group. Fascinatingly, Smith and Berg found that string quartets contain forces at the extremes that inevitably move towards the centre in the interests of a successful collaboration. In framing a quartet as a highly fluid democratic process that normalises towards the centre, Smith and Berg describe an emergent, adaptive dynamic where individual needs are canvassed before adaptation occurs.  

Mitchell (2009) also noted a preferential attachment model in complexity theory, or a bias towards the centre. She found that in an organism there is a natural preference to create links to nodes that already contain connections. In other words, there is a naturally occurring bias towards certain connections or nodes. In fact, a range of simple ideas are introduced, repeated, discussed in musical rehearsals, and in some cases, they are dismissed in preference to other, more acceptable repeated patterns of behaviour. In working towards the artistic goal of performance, useful patterns towards the centre are repeated through a feedback loop of performers and production team, and then repeated to build pattern regularities (see Figure 3 below).

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53 Composers are regarded as the first author, but some part of the narrative is provided by the performance itself. In jazz, a high level of authorship is certainly ascribed to the performer where improvisation is used.

54 Smith and Berg’s research can be said to support a complex process driven by the desire for heterarchy. Yet a string quartet is assumed to be a non-hierarchical grouping. Opera traditionally sets up clear hierarchies and stratas of authority.

55 This can be seen to occur in synapses and in social systems, such as social media, where members seek large friendship circles first, the cycle making “the rich get richer” (as described by Mitchell, 2009).
Figure 3: Rehearsal pattern-making through adaptive processes and the creation of unique norms via repeat visits to recognised, acceptable nodes (shown as circles).

Each rehearsal process can therefore be said to be unique; subject to number of variables, the most notable of which is human behaviour. Patterns then emerge and are repeated, skewing towards recognised or repeated nodes, culminating in public performance of acceptable, historically and culturally informed practice:

*Artists are people who constantly seek new insight and are much more likely than others to be familiar with chaos as well as the states one must journey through to transcend a current state of consciousness. An artist’s creative process requires frequent encounters with chaos, marked by psychic swings back and forth between purposeful intellectual activity and passive receptivity. Careful nurturing of such states results in artistic creations. (Butz, 1997, p.127)*

Complex systems that continue to thrive frequently involve chaos or disruption. Zausner (1996) analysed chaos theory to reveal that artists inhabit an open system in which each process and sub-
process is unique and unpredictable (Gleick, 1988). In contrast to the lay definition, *chaos* in a system is constantly moving towards organisation (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Snowden (2012) describes *chaos* as a system without interdependence and coherence. As nodes create regularities and patterns emerge, the system moves towards coherence:

*Chaotic phenomena can also settle into stable attractor regions. The transitions from inspiration through consolidation, and then to working out a single creative solution may correspond to bifurcations into systems with different sorts of attractors. (Schulberg in Runco & Pritzker, 1999, p. 267)*

These attractor regions, or places to which a dynamic system evolves, have been variously described as ‘nodes’ or ‘hubs’, to which collaborators are drawn. For example, Conservatory trained performers will lean towards the conventions of classical musical education when rehearsing. Yet, in opera, strong established hierarchies can create anxiety and impede collaboration, as director and conductor vie for authoritative position in a large rehearsal room.

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56 Expressly acknowledging the human elements that up until now have been assumed in systems is one of the radical elements of complexity theory (Snowden, 2012). Miller and Page (2004) explain the complexity inherent in the decision of audience members to give a standing ovation. The predictors of behaviour in this case are complex and heavily influenced by social factors: where one is sitting, with whom one is sitting, and even the purpose of the performance.

57 The primary driver of a creative process is the creation of a performance, as unpredictable as that may be, although secondary drivers may include financial viability and/or success (Grant, 1996), (Gold et al, 2001). Increasingly in the arts, commercial realities are allied with the primary artistic goal (Paglia, 2012). Sawyer (2014) sees all music making as a collaborative act, an unstated conversation between composer, performer and, eventually, audience. Musical rehearsals invariably involve an ensemble: a group of musicians working towards a single creative goal.
The keys to “success” of a complexity model or system are threefold:

1. The creation of a limited structure with the ability to design and improvise. The key to success is adequate and extensive communication;

2. Constant testing of futurist models by “low cost probes into the future”:

3. Linking the present and future through rhythmic processes or steps between past and future (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997).

![Figure 4: Principal conditions for successful complex adaptive systems](image)

Repeated communication and repeated actions, including actions of failure (“low cost probes into the future”), lead to node regularities, with past behaviour influencing future behaviour in both positive and negative ways. It is easy to see how a musical rehearsal conforms to this theory.

In any given performance, opera subscribes to certain conventions of performing space, timing and rhythm and favours a hierarchical system to achieve this (Greenwald, 2014), (Roesner, 2014). Monodrama questions many of these assumptions as earlier stated. The small number of participants (N=3) allows for performances to be moved out of traditional spaces, without the long tail of historical tradition guiding expectations for process or performance. Low-cost probes into the future are achieved by rehearsal repetitions, testing different ideas for saliency.

3.2 The heterarchy of director, conductor, performer in monodrama: the notion of a triumvirate

[In] heterarchical structures where the expression of power actively shifts among team members to align team member capabilities with dynamic situational demands [it] can enhance team creativity. Our results indicate that this positive effect of power heterarchies on team creativity is contingent on the team perceiving the shifts in interpersonal power expressions as legitimate. (Aime et al, 2014, p.327)
As long as director, conductor and performer perceive power shifts to be related to their area of expertise, heterarchy is possible in a monodrama rehearsal. Gardner proposes a series of nodes in the triangle of creativity: the relationship between the child and master, the relationship between the artist and their work object, and the relationship between the creative and their peers (Gardner, 2011). Each monodrama participant (D, C, P) functions as a unique node. These relationships then form web-like connections that mirror other kinds of non-hierarchical systems.

This new conception of rehearsal relationships can be called a triumvirate: a triangular, interdependent structure in which there are three defined but flexible roles, with each participant playing a vital agent in a collaborative, emergent process of power and idea sharing. Heterarchy, as opposed to hierarchy, forms multiple connections and shifting categorizations, making use of unranked as opposed to traditionally exercised power structures (Crumley, 1995). Participants constantly adapt to these connections in rehearsal to create patterns that lead to effective performance.

Figure 5 shows the relationship as a triangular prism, grounded in the composer’s score, with each participant in the triumvirate revealed in the three faces of the prism. When their area of expertise is needed, the prism turns to reveal their dominance. The prism constantly turns, moving between the nodes of activity of the three participants.
Figure 5: The monodrama triumvirate in action: a spinning pyramid showing the flexibility of the system to move from node to node and from participant to participant.
4. Methodology

This research aims to test the hypothesis that complex adaptive systems best describe the monodrama rehearsal process. In contrast to a traditional opera rehearsal, monodrama appears to reorganise its structure on the fly, repeating emergent patterns and culminating in performance. This study is a performance-led enquiry, a combination of performance practice research with three monodrama performances and an exegesis based on interviews and surveys conducted with practitioners in the operatic field. The research aims to:

1. Define monodrama as a sub-genre of opera with three primary relationships (Director/Conductor/Performer) functioning in a triumvirate;  
2. Consider authorship and how it is constructed in the monodrama performance; and  
3. Show how directors at play in monodrama rehearsals, regardless of the style or method, employ complex adaptive systems.

*Complexity results from the inter-relationship, inter-action and inter-connectivity of elements within a system and between a system and its environment. (Chan, 2001, p.1)*

The central question of this research is whether current rehearsal practice in monodrama provides evidence for a unique way of rehearsing: one that may be instructive for other creative collaborations. Where an individual goal overrides artistic collaboration, a lack of harmony threatens the success of the collaboration and performance. If ego or anxiety trump artistic aims during the production rehearsal period, as measured and reported by other participants in the process, the structure necessarily and organically becomes static and hierarchical, role boundaries become solidified, and participants report negative outcomes.  

In the first part of this study, participants’ perceptions of the monodrama and opera rehearsal process are examined through semi-structured interviews and surveys with thirteen subjects (N=13), four directors (D=4), four conductors (C=4) and five singers (P=5), currently working in Australia or the United States as opera professionals. Self-reported “successful” performance in opera and monodrama is canvassed, considering the role of collaboration between director, singer and conductor – the three principal stakeholders in the process – and the performer’s own perceived skills and talents (Subotnik, Jarvin, Moga, & Sternberg, 2003). Semi-structured interviews, administered either in person, on Skype or via email ascertained the rehearsal process in opera and

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58 Including noting the changing role of the director in opera and monodrama rehearsals over the past hundred years.
59 See 5. Results.
monodrama, how the dynamic functions in each genre and each participant’s perception of their role within the process. All participants were given a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and a Participant Consent Form (PCF).60 Participants were asked to provide demographic particulars relating to age, gender, geographic location and relevant experience.

The use of both qualitative methods (part 1) and performance practice research (part 2) provides this study with complementary perspectives on rehearsal dynamics in monodrama. Qualitative research represents a superior method for understanding human beliefs and practices (Patton, 2005), (Silverman, 2013). The semi-structured interview questions allowed for specific issues to be explored more fully and with experts, where appropriate. Further, qualitative research focuses on the relations and similarities between cases, which parallels the aims of complexity theory in analysing relations between nodes in a web. Despite the terminological difference between the term case for qualitative research and the term node for complexity theory, both terms indicate that the focus of this research is on relationships between agents, not the capacity or efficacy of a particular agent. Obtaining perspectives from participants with distinct roles in the process allows for comparison across responsibilities. The differences that had been teased out between the perspectives of director, conductor and singer in interview (part 1) were then tested against actual performance practice (part 2). Combining ethnography and auto-ethnography with semi-structured interviews provided valuable complementary data.61

The interview process provided evidence that participants in the process are aware of the boundaries and borders of their roles, yet expect that roles will adjust and change based on the personalities and conditions within rehearsal. Conductors and singers gave the least surprising and contrasting answers to questions, indicating that their roles are more clearly understood and defined by all research subjects. Directors’ perspectives varied, particularly in terms of understanding the director’s methodologies and responsibilities. This led to follow up questions and research in this area, focusing on the responses of Robert Lepage and Willene Gunn in particular. These two directors provided evidence of the different approaches directors take to rehearsal process.

Primary research is also conducted through the author’s participation as director and singer in three monodrama productions from the three possible schools of monodrama indicated by Taroff (2005) and from the three periods of monodrama development indicated by this research (Figure 1): Pierrot Lunaire by Arnold Schoenberg; The Seven Deadly Sins by Kurt Weill; and The

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60 See Appendix.
61 As a working professional in this area, the author is subject to Conservatory trained conventions and modes of practice tacitly accepted by directors, conductors and singers in rehearsal. This research will not critique the source of these assumptions due to space. There is a need for further research into how conservatories establish rehearsal conventions and modes of practice.
The research analyses rehearsal elements conducive to “successful” performance, providing a matrix for young professionals to better function in the opera or monodrama rehearsal room. This research questions both historical and current perceptions of power and purpose, both in terms of rehearsal collaboration and performance outcomes, leading to conclusions regarding the unique conditions and rehearsal dynamic specific to monodrama and the efficacy of heterarchical structures within the creative arts.

4.1 Current practice

French and Raven’s (1959) five modes of power are coercion, reward, legitimacy, expertise and reverence. Most theoretical discussions of power skew heavily towards conflict or coercion (Dahl, 1957), yet the interdependence of the different skill sets in monodrama allows the possibility of collaborative power, since these complementary skills function as a dependent relationship (Emerson, 1962). There is a certain assumption of perceived power of any solo performer. The status of director as auteur, and the reverence with which classical conductors are perceived also elevates their personal power in the triumvirate of monodrama. Each participant, director, conductor, and singer obtains power and agency in the process through their distinct skill set and the need for each participant to perform a distinct role in the rehearsal process.

In the operatic rehearsal, there is an assumption that the expertise of the conductor and director elevates their status above the performers, a perception reinforced by their physical position at the front of the room at the production table. Singers in an opera rehearsal room are in competition for both roles and status. By contrast, in a monodrama rehearsal, the singer’s expertise and personal power as the sole performer gives her or him increased agency in the process. Each of the three collaborators has a distinct role in service of the artistic goal and their power is constantly changing (Figure 5).

In monodrama, behaviours of the group can be established, norms accepted, adaptive behaviours become possible and mutations occur towards the goal of successful performance. The mutations that appear to have the best chance of fostering the production’s success are adopted and nodes become patterns.

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62 The philosophical construct of coherence is tested here, the idea that one does not know the outcome tests of coherence: “You can’t absolutely know what is the right thing to do…there is enough evidence to indicate that this is going in the right direction but we don’t know if it’s true or not” (Snowden, 2012, 3’20”).

63 The Prisoner’s Dilemma (Poundstone, 1992) presupposes that deviant behaviour in the outsider can be punished and brought into line with the primary objective by other participants in a coercive process. The triumvirate of a monodrama rehearsal expands the Prisoner’s Dilemma into three players, but success is measured by the adaptability of each participant to the established, adaptive norm driven by the repeated patterns to the node, driven by a positive goal of performance rather than coercion.
5. Results

Three performances of monodramas were undertaken and semi-structured interviews were conducted with professional conductors, directors and singers (N=13). After answering basic demographic questions, the topic questions dealt with the structure of an opera rehearsal as differentiated from a monodrama rehearsal. Further questions considered the collaborative skills involved and their perceived impact on the success of a performance. Finally, participants were asked their opinion on the extent to which these skills may be taught or trained.

Structured interviews were sought with directors, conductors and singers from all age ranges and experience levels through email contact. Where interviews were not possible, a survey with interview questions was sent to respondents. Responses were received from four directors, five singers, and four conductors, a group ranging from 20 to 70 years of age. All were working professionals with varying degrees of international success. All but two had experience working on a monodrama as well as in opera in general. All the respondents were working in opera production either as a director, conductor or singer at the time of interview.

The directors were Willene Gunn, Andrew Morgan, Kate Gaul, Lindy Hume and Robert Lepage (3F, 2M). The conductors were Tom Woods, Stephen Mould, Jonathan Khuner, Sarah Penicka Smith and Kathleen McGuire (3M, 2F). The five singers were Alexander Knight, Jimmy Kansau and three anonymous respondents (2M, 3F). For the purposes of this exegesis, identifying features have been removed from all interview transcripts to protect anonymity for those who requested it.

Participants were asked their opinions on the production rehearsal process in both operatic and monodrama rehearsals and were asked to identify any differences in rehearsal structure for opera and monodrama. They were then asked to identify whether the skills required for adequate performance in a rehearsal context were innate or learned. Finally, participants were asked their opinion as to the relative power structures involved, whether there is a rubric for success, and how such success is measured.

All participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and consented to the process by way of a Participant Consent Form. 76.92% agreed to be identified in published work. Statistical data can be seen at Appendix 4. Participants reside in Australia (N=8), the USA (N=4) or Canada (N=1) (see Figure 2) and were divided between conductor (N=4), director (N=4), and singers (N=5) (see Figure 3). All participants were trained in a recognised Conservatory or higher education faculty of music, drama, or both.
Questions 1-9 collected biographical and statistical data on respondents; questions 10-13 referred to the dynamic experienced in an opera rehearsal; questions 14-16 compared this with the dynamic and conditions experienced in a monodrama rehearsal; and questions 17-20 considered outcomes; whether the performance outcome reflected their perceptions of the success of the rehearsal collaboration. These questions led the author to test complexity theory against monodrama rehearsals and in contrast to operatic rehearsals.64

5.1 Respondents’ opinions about relationship structures in operatic rehearsals

There was ample discussion of the differences between an opera and monodrama rehearsal. All participants noted that, in an opera rehearsal, both director and conductor had elevated status. The director took a central leadership role where the rehearsal was a production call, and the conductor took a central role only at music calls and performances unless the issue was musical in nature. In an opera call, the singer was seen primarily as responsible for fulfilling the demands of director and conductor, but possessing power in performance to individualise their performance. Power relationships were differently described when discussing monodrama, with terms such as “ideas” and “collaboration” being used by greater than than 30% of respondents when discussing the three participants (Director, Conductor and Performer). All participants saw the dynamic between director and conductor as of primary importance in both genres, with a healthy collaboration needing to be established at the beginning of the process:

*In an ideal scenario, I would almost say it’s effecting a rather unlikely marriage... It’s facilitation. A starting point. It depends on style, physicality, experience of the singers, the type of director. Increasingly we are encountering directors from other disciplines, for example, straight plays...they are more choreographers than directors. Depending on which discipline they come from, they can be less aware of the nuts and bolts of the process.... What actually communicates to an audience in a straight play, becomes different in opera. A lot of work of a conductor is behind the scenes – performance is different to preparation. (Participant 11, a director)*

All participants arrive at opera and monodrama rehearsals with certain expectations of role and process. As processes are repeated, patterning begins to occur which results in adaptive behaviours. In monodrama, all respondents displayed an understanding of the need for these relationships to be carefully managed in order to allow each participant to fulfil their specific responsibilities.

64 See Appendix 4
From all but one of the respondents, there was an assertion that, in order to service the singer’s needs, conductor and director must first establish a good working relationship in both opera and monodrama. Then, during the course of the collaboration, they must further adjust their own behaviour in order to work collaboratively towards a common goal. The desired outcome is to influence the behaviour of other collaborators, yet to allow porous boundaries of expertise to be respected, affecting a rather tentative dance:

Well, what’s interesting in opera is that you are not the sole director in the fact that there are two directors. There is the conductor and there is the stage director. So you have to know your place in the production. It’s an interesting collaboration and you have to get along of course with your conductor and both of you have to share a common vision. The thing is you are not both responsible for the same aspect of the production... So our concerns are not the same concerns but we are working with a common vision. The important thing is that we are working with the same material, which is not only the libretto and the musical score but we are also working with singers, who tend to be confused if they get contradictory information from both sides. (Willene Gunn, director)

The relationship between the director and conductor is fluid, yet certain conventional behaviours of each role are assumed by respondents; directors work primarily on movement around the space or the visual world, conductors work primarily on the sound world, and singers characterise both worlds through their physicality and sound. These understandings of role separation come from learned behaviours and conventions taught in Conservatories, reinforced by work in the industry, respecting a long opera tradition and performance history. In a positive collaboration, these roles appear more flexible and boundaries between roles appear more porous:

[The conductor is]...thinking more than anything else about the sound world. The director is thinking more than anything else about the visual world. Obviously if someone devotes their whole life to drama as a director, you naturally have a much deeper understanding and interest on that side of it, than a conductor. But also the people involved may not be aware of their limitations. I find in that space the biggest obstacle is ego – everybody’s – one’s own and everybody else’s. The best rehearsal processes I’ve been in are the ones where everyone recognizes that they have a limited field of understanding or interest, yet they have a desire for the whole to work. There should be a certain amount of creative conflict. It’s not necessarily good to have no conflict in a rehearsal. But it’s hard to keep everyone in check. As soon as there is any conflict it is hard to keep egos in check. In the dynamic of a production rehearsal we are trying to keep everyone focused and find ways of achieving this musically without disturbing the flow of the rehearsal. In
production it is fundamentally the director’s rehearsal – and the conductor has to try and get done what they need to get done around the edges of it. As long as you are prepared to be second violin, you have to submit to it. (Participant 8, a conductor)

While conflict is not necessarily a hindrance to the artistic process, a lack of understanding of the porous limits of each role and a lack of mutual respect and understanding will derail a process and outcome. All participants in the survey recognised that there are limits to the authority and agency of each of the participants. There was also recognition that, in order to optimise the success of any production, the relationships between the director and conductor involve quickly determining boundaries of respective responsibility and the extent to which those boundaries are porous. This posturing for agency is a vital part of the early process and establishes the dynamic for rehearsal. The idea that the map of responsibilities changes according to the situation and conditions of production rehearsals is one that participants repeatedly referenced in both opera and monodrama.

In an opera rehearsal, the structure of the relationships between the director, conductor and singer are seen as hierarchical, driven by the supporting organisational structure, or by the perception of influence in the opera world by one or more of the participants. The following excerpt from Participant 3, a conductor, shows the circumstances under which the dynamics can change without derailing the process:

The political relationships derive from external power structures, in that the D(irector), C(onductor), and S(inger) will be at different heights of the power structure within the company or the opera world at large. This is not always a tangible component, but can be powerful in influencing people's behaviour and the actual artistic result. The second, artistic, can be (and usually is) defined by the label of the rehearsal (e.g. "musical" or "staging" or "sitzprobe" or "stage/orchestra" or "notes session", etc). In almost all cases either D or C is in charge, and S is subordinate. Occasionally, however S has the initiative, for example if S has requested a special rehearsal to clarify details of music or staging. However, even in this case, the artistic relationship usually assumed (tacitly) is that D is in charge of the expressions of dramatic energy, C is in charge of all musical issues, and S must obey the dictates of C and D. However, since in performance S actually conveys the thoughts, feelings, intentions and actions of the character whose persona is at issue, D and C cannot hope artistically to be more

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65 In fact, reviews of opera inevitably turn on the visual and aural world – or the world of director and conductor. As the recent Bayreuth controversy showed, audiences and critics are able to separate these two worlds and see them as polarities: “Overwhelmingly, the Bayreuth audience liked what they heard. It was what they saw that they hated.” (Kettle, 2013, p.1)
than enablers or advisors, no matter how much they prescribe details of S's execution. Not to be left out is the composer, whose actual work is being recreated (improvisation and performance art excepted, of course). Usually all 3 (D,C,S) profess allegiance to the composer, but only rely on this during arguments. In my experience there usually is a great deal of dissonance between the nominal artistic power structure and the most practical and creatively honest way to preparing a satisfactory performance. Thus the third aspect or relationship, personal, comes into play as each of D, C, and S communicate their actual wishes and responses to the other two's ideas. Thus a conductor may interpose a contrary element in the stage director’s series of directions, but in such a way as to show collegial attitude and the desire to be constructively critical. Or S may express doubt/reluctance/puzzlement over a direction by C or D, but using interpersonal skills so as not to seem to be injuring the lines of power. Or D may take an entirely collaborative attitude towards working out of details, so that the initiative passes to S for moment-to-moment physical actions. I have observed that when there is a deficit of interpersonal skills on the part of any of the three (D,C,S) rehearsals become tense, and if more than one has issues, then a rehearsal can become painfully constrained and even completely ineffective.

Several interesting assertions are at play here:

- The map of responsibilities and authority change according to situation (or point in the trajectory of the production);
- The behaviours of the participants change due to circumstances that are unpredictable (for example, the special rehearsal, because the singer did not grasp some detail);
- The behaviours of a participant change due to their own experience or how they perceive others (for example, “D may take an entirely collaborative attitude”);
- The default organisational structure appears, in an opera rehearsal, to be an inverted triangle with the director and conductor at the top and the singer at the bottom, up until the actual performance, when it flips to favour the singer and conductor.
- Interpersonal skills are correlated with perceived success in rehearsal and performance. Further, all participants must possess those skills for best effect in the rehearsal room.
- Participant’s reporting of successful performance is highly correlated with a successful rehearsal process.

This research clearly shows that interpersonal skills amongst all three agents are vital skills tied to the success of a musical collaboration, alluded to by all respondents. This does not necessarily mean that there will be agreement, but simply an ability to communicate disagreement or different intentions appropriately and succinctly.
5.2 Respondents’ views of monodrama as a collaborative process

If monodrama is in essence a three-pronged creative collaboration:

...the most successful collaboration occurs when all three parties are highly skilled/experienced in general, and deeply prepared as to the dramatic content of the particular work/scene being rehearsed, if they are committed to a particular point of view, but completely open to hearing sensible and perhaps more sensitive/true/cogent/powerful ideas expressed by a colleague, even if that colleague is nominally lower on the power chain. Besides this, a genuine respect/admiration for the expertise and insight of the particular collaborating colleagues always will manifest itself, and to the degree it does, trust will develop and creativity will flourish. In other words, authority becomes merely a point of departure, and all contribute positively to the best of their abilities. It goes without saying that a friendly, respectful atmosphere, including plentiful moments of good humor, allows positive participation to be maximized. (Participant 3, a conductor)

Most respondents (N=9) describe the best choice of a dynamic process as an open environment, where discussion from any of the three agents is possible and all parties to the discussion have agency and gravitas. Discussion should not be lengthy and reference to each participant’s area of expertise should be paramount. One respondent noted that an overlong discussion would be an indication of a lack of collaboration, but short discussion from all parties would indicate a healthy environment.

Most survey participants could recall rehearsal environments in which this healthy collaboration did not exist. Two of the conductors interviewed highlighted the danger of the expanding ego of an individual undermining the artistic imperative of the triumvirate. Personal power is exercised based on traits and interpersonal dynamics that must be individually measured against the objective of the group. Once agency is obtained, there is an assumption that each participant in the triumvirate will work in service of the artistic imperative.

There is an acceptance that roles are broadly defined, yet some adherence to convention is helpful:

The most fruitful dynamic state is when there is the habit of a (brief!) three-way discussion on any controversial issue, and a (brief) three-way expression of agreement on non-controversial issues...To speak more to the point of the question, a healthy ebb and flow of initiative, where the S listens to D’s ideas, augments/counters them verbally, demonstrates them physically, receives C’s ideas for musical adjustment in order to better express/focus those ideas, sings together with staging, expresses satisfaction/dissatisfaction, re-discusses etc, all with
positive encouragement and constructive guidance from both D and C, is generally the accepted goal, at least in ... my experience. It is fairly easy to sense in the rehearsal room whether all three are committed to a constructive session. It’s also obvious when minds are closed, personalities opposed, or psyches damaged.

(Participant 3, a conductor)

Most participants saw this dynamic as situational; highly dependent on personnel, physical environment and circumstances. This is further evidence that adaptive behaviours are central to this flexible model. In opera, the singer’s role is seen as responder to input received from director and conductor, until the performance where the singer takes primary responsibility for how these ideas are presented onstage. In monodrama, the singer’s role in rehearsal is equal to that of director and conductor.

Directors interviewed saw their responsibility, in broad strokes, as providing a vision for the work. Directors provided myriad reflections on their role, from practical methodologies for directing to philosophical underpinnings for expressing their vision. The research showed that most directors (N=4) favour presentation of an overarching idea or element, a framework, an outside-in view, which is justified to the conductor prior to the commencement of the process. This framework then becomes a part of the conditions of engagement. This must be paired with an ability to collaborate, to communicate effectively and adapt in rehearsal, setting the personal, artistic and political tone of the rehearsal period. The directors interviewed saw their major contribution as articulating a vision, bringing all collaborators on board with their vision, and establishing a mode of working to achieve said vision. All directors saw the need for a “central narrative”, a “clear proposition”, “concept idea”, and “chief proposition”.

Conductors also recognised this need, but did not necessarily see it as the mantle of the director alone. Likewise, singers saw this central narrative as propelled from director and conductor in the first instance. Directors also remarked on the importance of obtaining consent from conductors as to the central narrative prior to rehearsals beginning in earnest. It is worth noting that the director believes he or she is driving the tone of the rehearsal process, but conductors also believe this to be his or her role. Despite these competing conceptions, the belief that each party has a role in propelling the work, whether true or not, has positive consequences for collaboration in all three realms: organisational, artistic and personal:

I’d say that a stage director takes care of what you call space and a conductor takes care of what you call time. He’s all about metronics and music and using the

66 These phrases were responses to semi-structured interviews for this research.
concept of time. So our concerns are not the same concerns, but we are working with a common vision. (Robert Lepage)

5.3 Differences in structure between opera and monodrama rehearsal

In any monodrama, in my experience, it is a much more intimate process, about a particular artist and a particular role. There are long discussions with the director before you get there, also maybe with conductor – so all have a certain history behind them before day one. (Participant 9, a singer)

While there is no clear agreement on how a rehearsal should be structured, there was unanimous agreement amongst respondents that there needs to be an ordered, clear plan in place prior to rehearsal, with a high level of understanding between each member of the triumvirate as to what should be achieved in a given call. There should also be a respect for each individual’s concerns or differing perspectives.

Further research could be instructive as to whether this ‘prior plan’ is a rule followed by each individual in order to start rehearsals from an agreed position. Some of the respondents aim to continue to hew to the initial plan throughout, and a few seem static in their outlook, but the constant among respondents (N=10) is the desire to enunciate a clear plan. As mentioned, this indicates a rule or operating guidance is favoured prior to rehearsals, but does not presuppose an outcome. This is interesting from the point of view of complexity theory, as it indicates that conditions of engagement may need certain patterns, structures or rules to be in existence at the initiation of the collaboration.

The structure of an opera rehearsal is broadly defined by conventional patterns of behaviour and a clear sense that the table at the front of the room signifies status importance. Yet, in a monodrama rehearsal, the singer can greatly influence both the pattern of the rehearsal and the physical structure of the space. As one singer noted:

You now have an artistic conversation at a level with another artist. This is the most exciting place to be. (Participant 2, a singer)

The singer’s agency in monodrama is expanded since only a charismatic singer can maintain an audience’s gaze for this length of time:

Monodrama becomes very scary – most of those works, the repertoire... generally... the less protagonists in the work, the more confronting it is

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Permission to quote from the interview for this research was granted by the interviewee.
and with quite deep psychological experiences. The person has to be really up for it. (Participant 9, a singer)

Not only does the singer have more responsibility, they are also more exposed psychologically. The singer, possessed of the ability to perform this narrative, must then be more engaged in creating that vision. For the singer, the stakes are obviously higher in monodrama, giving her or him greater authorship to match this responsibility:

In monodrama, the energy is focused on one person. It can take more time because you’re not having to control so many people or keep so many things in the air...Composers wrote these monodramas with one person in mind – it has to be someone who is really interesting to make it work. (Participant 10, a director)

Two of the participants described monodrama as a more democratic process in which the singer’s needs must be paramount, instead of attention being focused on herding a large, disparate group of musicians towards a particular vision or goal in opera. Other participants did not see this as a significant difference, but the language changed markedly, with comments on monodrama rehearsals involving terms such as “need”, “think” and “believe”, all lexicons of empowerment, as opposed to terms of control or power, which appear more frequently in comments on opera rehearsals:

It’s an extraordinary responsibility for one person to carry a show. (Participant 9, a singer)

5.4 Performance outcomes in relation to rehearsal collaboration

Agency and role of the singer is enhanced in monodrama. The system is more flexible. The participants also acknowledged that in complex systems such as monodrama, the process is adaptive from the perspective of all parties; moveable and subject to discussion from each party’s perspective in an authentic three-way conversation, so long as expectations are set prior to rehearsal.

My rehearsal process typically goes from ordered to chaotic then back to ordered. (Participant 6, a director)

Speaking as a conductor, it makes a great difference whether issues have been discussed and resolved collaboratively. To the extent they have been, I can conduct with more trust, assurance, and passion. When not solidified by a good group process (at worst with unresolved disagreements or acquiescence to dictatorial directions, under duress) I can't expect or lead/accompany a well-centred, unified,
and predictable performance by the singer. A huge, pervasive, and sad truth is that many (perhaps most) artists, directors, and conductors simply don’t have the experience, talent, education, or preparation to bring a high level of artistry to the rehearsal dynamic. They are trained to be just one element, to the impoverishment of the entire collaborative enterprise. (Participant 3, a conductor)

This conductor expresses the core of complex adaptive processes: all participants assume and expect a level of competence from each fellow participant. Following that, it may be said that performance outcomes have been reached when an effective collaborative process has occurred between all three participants, setting parameters for engagement involving mutual respect and some structural delineation. This was followed by an organically produced collaboration, as each participant focused on the artistic product rather than any other competing interest. When collaboration is prioritised during preparation and planning, then adaptation is a natural part of the process. When gaps in domain knowledge exist and then somebody has to fill the vacuum, problems occur. These findings support the view that complex adaptive systems in monodrama are not necessarily successful unless these conditions of engagement are met.

5.5 Teaching dynamics and collaboration in Conservatories

The study considered whether the singer’s successful contribution to the rehearsal process is an innate skill or a trained response able to be taught in Conservatory settings. Three respondents noted that Conservatories do not teach interpersonal or collaborative skills, so these must be learnt in an ad hoc fashion in rehearsal. Two respondents saw that singers are taught the skills to sing in a rehearsal, but not the extra-musical skills required that are precursors to a collaborative process. Three respondents asserted that the extra musical skills that are required to facilitate a successful collaboration.

Monodrama rehearsals require each member of the triumvirate to check ego and minimise anxiety in service of the collaboration. Performance skills were thought to be teachable, but respondents also felt that the communication and collaboration skills vital to an effective rehearsal process were teachable, but not currently being taught in Conservatories. These extra-musical skills, including controlling the ego, are as critical as musical ability in a heterarchical environment such as a monodrama rehearsal:

*I find more and more that learning anything... if someone can play violin well, they have taken time doing it and they have also completely taken themselves out of the picture. If an artist can paint really well, they have taken themselves out of the picture. (Participant 8, a conductor)*
One respondent’s response adequately addresses this dichotomy, by noting the skills that can be taught:

*Absolutely all except for the three most important ones: vocal gift, musical sensitivity, and dramatic acuity!* (Jonathan Khuner)\(^6\)

### 5.6 Conclusions

Respondents pointed to successful collaboration in monodrama (30%) as evident in performance outcomes (40%). Participants consistently raised the need for adaptability and flexibility between roles in the triumvirate. 80% of respondents considered that audience perceptions, critical acclaim and cast and crew perceptions together provided the best indicator of a successful performance. Owing to the influence of a range of uncontrolled variables, including personal taste, success is not easily measured. Interestingly, respondents’ perceptions of success were based on rehearsal dynamics far more than on the performance itself. All respondents (100%) perceived a correlation between effective management of the rehearsal model and successful performance.

Respondents understood the difference between the dynamics of an opera rehearsal and a monodrama rehearsal. The extent of the adaptability revolved around competency, lack of ego and setting up the rules of engagement effectively in a monodrama rehearsal. Despite the small numbers of participants, the variables that qualify monodrama rehearsal as a complex system are the complex repeated patterns established and the changing dynamics in which differing expertise is required. The group-devised artistic goal involves a complex web of engagements and actions (nodes) that impact upon patterning. The roles of conductor and singer are the easiest to clarify, with their value measured in the performance outcome. The role of director is less well understood and requires further unpacking in a further study.

Two directors stood out as polar opposites in describing their process. Firstly, Robert Lepage’s *transformative* mise-en-scène begins with a grand idea or structure, develops detail through experimentation, and constantly evolves with reference to the grand opening design idea. This could be termed an *outside-in* approach. Willene Gunn’s *layering complexity* moves from detailed mechanics of movement to complex characterization and narrative flow, which can be described as an *inside-out* approach. Both techniques, despite their polar opposite origins, reflect complexity theory in practice, providing a broad structure but space to collaborate and adapt throughout rehearsals. These two directors’ approaches, while contrasting, give insight into the possibilities for complexity theory to describe many different practices and rehearsal methods.

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\(^6\) Permission to publish was obtained by Mr Khuner, who was interviewed for this research.
6. Monodrama *Outside-in or inside-out: Robert Lepage’s transformative mise-en-scène and Willene Gunn’s layering complexity*

Once all the elements coalesce in the rehearsal room – text, music, history and tradition, context of performance, physical and financial limitations, individual skills and talents – the job of the director is to pull those elements towards the centre to create a cohesive narrative. Of all the interviews for this thesis, the directing philosophies of Robert Lepage and Willene Gunn appeared to sit at the opposite ends of the spectrum of language. These two directors’ responses are considered as case studies for complexity theory, and show that, despite the choice of directing style or method, complex adaptive processes remain an apt metaphor for the creative process in monodrama.

Robert Lepage is a director, creator, designer, and performer working in opera, theatre and monodrama most easily linked with Regietheater. Lepage may act, create, write, design, and direct any particular work. He could be described as a performance artist or auteur, working in many modes of opera, theatre and film. Lepage terms his approach “global”. Willene Gunn is a career singer, director and academic who has devoted her career entirely to opera directing. She was Director of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Opera Program for some thirty years and directed over ninety major works by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Bernstein and other major composers for Nevada, Sacramento, Arizona Operas, Rogue Opera and the San Francisco Opera Center. Ms. Gunn also performed extensively in the USA as a dramatic mezzo-soprano. Her directing emerged from her singing career. These different paths to opera directing inform Lepage and Gunn’s contrasting philosophies.

The current trend in opera involves a director imposing a global view, usually overtly expressed in design. Subsequently, the director teases out the relevant detail supporting this larger narrative. The term Regietheater also has connotations of a radical reworking of the source work, sometimes deliberately to shock and offend, particularly in German-speaking theatre and opera. The Regietheater director, akin to the auteur in film, presupposes that the director is authoritative; the sage or fount of knowledge. This is now the dominant operatic aesthetic, with major directors in Europe including Christopher Alden, Robert Lepage, Barrie Kosky and Calixto Bieito being classified by reviewers as Regietheater directors. The outside-in, “long-shot” or panoramic perspective of Lepage hovers over the narrative. The narrative is “played large” and subtext is

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69 *Brava! Opera Theater and James M. Collier Young Artist Program* website, 2015
70 Lepage has used this description for his work.
overtly stated in the design and director’s vision. Lepage’s style sculpts the *mise-en-scène* from large to small, as the central narrative is expressed in pervasive, recognisable design elements.

In contrast, the *inside-out* director authors an emergent process through detailed character work, which in turn propels an overarching narrative for the work. This focus on the micro, on the character and moves of each individual performer in the space, moves from a formalist approach to an emergent larger narrative. There are no media interviews of Willene Gunn’s directorial process to be found, despite directing some ninety operas in her long career. This is partly a function of the traditional director’s own deference to the composer’s authorship and overt separation of the ego from the work. Directors like Gunn, as revealed through their own comments, focus on the work as a whole and not on the profile of the director, preferring to engage as would a *Hausdirektor* in German opera theatres.

Both Gunn and Lepage have excellent directing pedigrees, yet their rehearsal processes differ significantly. As a singer, Gunn is aware of the opera master-mentor system with deference to the composer’s intent. Lepage also was extensively schooled in various traditional acting methods, including LeCoq, through master teachers both in Canada and Europe. Both directors have a pedigree of mentor-student relationships, one in theatre and one in opera.

Lepage does not categorise himself as a *Regietheater* director, but sees himself as a creative:

*I also consider myself a multi-disciplinary artist - because I do touch on other disciplines and medias. So at times I’m a film director, at times I’m an actor, at times a writer.* (Robert Lepage)

Lepage built his reputation and a body of work as a collaborative theatre director. His process at this time was emergent, showing elements of the “inside-out” frame at an early time in his career with *Ex-Machina*.\(^{71}\) Lepage has stated that he developed his craft from the perspective of the outsider. When he moved into opera, he maintained this perspective, yet perhaps due to his lengthy film resume, his opera directing is more recently heavily influenced by an *auteur* statement or gesture, encircling the visual narrative. Lepage’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (the *Ring*) at the Metropolitan Opera faced criticism\(^{72}\) for a lack of *Personenregie*, or character direction, built from the text:

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\(^{71}\) *Ex-Machina* formed a process which was highly experimental, moulded by Lepage as director, but with narratives developing through a group process of improvisation and collaborative theatre building.

\(^{72}\) “The real question is why more wasn’t spent on fixing glaring problems, from the many clumsy entrances and exits to the stunningly inept conflagration. Those tiny heads popping off mysterious statues provoked laughter and the underwhelming funeral pyre couldn’t fry a little girl scout much less the greatest hero of heroes.” (Hoelterhoff, 2013, p.1); “Patrice Chéreau’s centennial staging of the cycle at Bayreuth is now
Mr. Lepage has been defensive about the criticism that he brings no point of view to the “Ring.” Defending his vision, he said in a recent interview that he was trying to tell the story in vivid detail and present the work as Wagner conceived it, without the psycho-philosophical trappings that have accrued to it in recent decades. (Tommasini, 2012, p.1)

Reviews of Lepage’s Ring may prove to be harsh, but they do point up the inherent danger in Regietheater direction – that in creating the large vision or view, the smaller character details can be less well drawn. Lepage is one of the most prominent examples of Regietheater directorship, despite his reticence to self-describe as such. He constructs a strong and bold narrative framework, with grand design gestures and performers functioning in the space through the creation of a worldview or a panoramic shot. Gunn, conversely, appears to delve into the performer’s specific skills in order to draw out the larger context. Gunn creates close-ups and uses them as building blocks to ground the work, pulling back to reveal the grand design.

To characterise either of these great artists in this way is most certainly simplifying the nuance within their work. Both methodologies, one auteur- or Regietheater-based, one Personenregie-based or character-built, move from their respective process (inside-out or outside-in) towards the middle, where repetition, experimentation and adaptation in rehearsal ultimately sees the realisation of the narrative. The way in which equally valid work arises from each end of the spectrum demonstrates the utility of complex adaptive systems in opera and monodrama by whichever process the director works.

Despite the crisp framing of a Lepage design, his rehearsal room is resolutely experimental. Through the use of play and experimentation, Lepage’s improvisatory frame adds to the narrative. In contrast, Gunn has carefully plotted the character development required, but her rehearsal room is also improvisational once detailed movement maps have been set. This is a more formalist approach, one which first focuses on completing the action, followed by deeper experimentation in character development when the performer is ready. In a sense, Lepage’s formalism relates to the view of a grand structural frame, allowing the organic development of the rehearsal room to occur, and Gunn’s formalism is one of deference to the frame provided by composer’s expressed or imputed intent. Gunn’s approach affords the musical world great authority in her directorial frame.

acclaimed as the great Wagner feat of the modern era, yet at the time it elicited howls of rage. Will Robert Lepage’s version of the “Ring,” which finishes a run at the Met this week, recover from the drubbing it has received in the print press and on the Internet? Anything is possible, but probably not. This “Ring” has few defenders, and they are far exceeded in vehemence by its detractors.” (Ross, 2012, p.1)
In both methods, how the performer interacts with the space is pivotal to the success of the directorial vision. Lepage, of course, researches extensively. His process justifies directorial decisions with a strong stated sense of belief in the sanctity of the grand idea or frame. Gunn and Lepage serve as examples of directors at the pinnacle of their art, well contrasted in so many ways and both creating work of the highest calibre. Gunn does not see herself as imposing an authorship over the piece, but working in the service of the composer:

_I always just try to create something that I think the composer would have liked...something where the characters are alive and relating and are one with the music. Opera is so majestic in that it brings us such truth about the passion of our lives. It also is an art form where all elements of art come together as one. Music, voice, storyline, dance, design in all forms. It is a joy to be given the opportunity to create within so many disciplines._ (Email exchange with Willene Gunn, 17/3/2015)

Gunn’s stated deference to composer and conventions of process provides her with a justification for her directorial choices:

_Often when directors want to put their own stamp, their own personality unto a work, this is done with design. Not too many opera houses can afford this, and it is often distracting...dominating the production...with the great music and dramatic thought lost in all of the "look how clever I am" element. This is not always the case...but...[mentions a recent performance]...I could hardly concentrate on anything except the fear that some of those older singers were going to lose a foot or fall as the set constantly moved. When people left the theater were they thinking about the great theater, the great music? Or the tricks the set did. It is a fine line._ (Email exchange with Willene Gunn, 21/3/2015)

Yet, in any rehearsal process, the art of compromise is at work. It is perhaps the only certainty in preparing a creative work that it never turns out in exactly the way it was planned. Lepage respects this dynamic by specifically creating work with a process of continual adaptation in mind, devising processes and systems to allow a work to be adapted and changed after the opening. This may explain the clear and static quality of his grand gestures; within that structure, smaller gestures adjust and change at will without losing the larger sense of narrative flow. In Lepage’s world, if the larger picture is effectively set, detail can be adaptive. In Gunn’s visual world, character movement is effectively set, with the presumption that certain movements or placements on the stage will signify certain textual and contextual ideas that enlarge the narrative.
In Lepage and Gunn’s differing modes of operation, there is an adaptive process in rehearsal in collaboration with conductor and singer, “effecting an unlikely marriage”. Lepage and Gunn show that, from seemingly opposite perceptions of authorship – the former in long-shot, a global view with overt properties of re-authoring; and the latter in a close-up or micro view – these pre-rehearsal rules or modes of engagement allow for adaptation occurring in rehearsal that can be described as a complex adaptive process. Despite a differing philosophical approach to direction, adaptive processes in rehearsal appear in both methods.

6.1 Lepage and transformative mise-en-scène

Kowalke describes Lepage’s oeuvre as transformative mise-en-scène (Kowalke, 1995). It is the stated intention of Lepage’s production company Ex-Machina to inject a particularly Quebecois vision of performance art into the global village. There is a high degree of collaborative change and improvisation encouraged to occur both in rehearsal and production. Works are designed and encouraged to develop and change while touring, a process which creates a sense of a living, breathing piece of performance art, rather than a static historical artefact. Lepage sees theatre as personally transformative (Lepage & Charest, 1997). He also views both the rehearsal and performance as continually evolving; a “becoming”. In this way, his work is highly political, democratic, and transformational. This idea of never “fixing” a work into a particular time and place is a lens rarely visited by traditional opera. At times, the Lepage audience has been allowed into rehearsal to participate in the narrative process, blurring the lines of completeness and collaboration. Lepage uses a collage of media and texts and visuals to create his mise-en-scène; in other words, he matches the visual to the discovered text through the performers.

Lepage’s works play with plurality of language, communication, and miscommunication, fleshing out the difficulties of traversing and defining identities. This form of inter-cultural appropriation has drawn some criticism as a kind of artistic global tourism. Lepage is unabashed about this focus, claiming “All my work is about geography”, with xenophobia and nationalism being common themes. Lepage’s mise-en-scène has characters inhabiting and discovering an unfamiliar world, often from a place of naïveté. This may form the essence of Lepage’s own perspective on opera, a perspective informed by his theatre roots, with collaborations that actively avoid hierarchical processes and are constantly changing, with works evolving and developing long after their first performance. Lepage exhibits an outsider’s perspective that has tested the utility of historical operatic conventions.

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73 This quotation was taken from the transcript of Lepage’s interview for this research.

74 ‘Inter-cultural appropriation’ is used to refer to appropriation that transposes cultural elements of one culture, easily recognized as defining that culture, and places them in another cultural context.
The constrictions and conventions of working at the Metropolitan Opera could have unravelled the transitive and buoyant properties of Lepage’s work. Instead, the constraints forced him to simplify ideals and imagery. The result was almost universal commendation for his Metropolitan Opera stagings prior to Der Ring Das Nibelungen in 2012. With a nod to his Commedia dell’Arte and LeCoq acting training, Lepage values improvisation, continual transformation and change. His theatre rehearsals are a voyage of discovery, not confined to a preordained script as occurs in opera. Exercises blur the lines of rehearsal with the involvement of all stakeholders, often including the audience:

At the heart of this transformative mise-en-scène are performers’ fragmentary individual and group experiences, shaped by the audience’s reception (Dundjerovic, 2007, p.26).

In the rehearsal process, Lepage creates a space for improvisation and play to occur, letting the show move and change through improvisation and subsequently reflecting this back to the performers. The structure of his rehearsals mirrors that of concentric circles, where ideas are constantly revisited and redefined (Dundjerovic, 2007). Structure develops organically out of this model. Both of these methods are clearly visible in Lepage’s ability to structure the large design idea, identify the performer’s core idea and move these two elements together collaboratively, as shown in his recollection of his first monodrama experience:

It was “Erwartung” by Schoenberg and “Bluebeard’s Castle” by Bartok. So it was a double bill. There were only two singers in the first piece, in the Bartok piece, and I was working with a solo singer and three mimes for the “Erwartung”. Now in the case of “Erwartung” it was quite interesting because it’s a very very complex, abstract piece and you really have to do a lot of analysing to understand exactly what the story is about. What you end up finding that it’s the troubled mind or the troubled recounting of a woman who obviously has killed her lover. She surprised him having an affair and she kills him, and how she eventually tries to piece together the different parts of her memory to see, you know, what happened. She finds his corpse. She hides into the forest. She mistakes a log or a bench for the body of her lover. So she is obviously a character that is confused and doesn’t remember what she has done. So this was written in the time of Freud

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75 Commedia dell’Arte is an Italian folk theatre method established in the seventeenth century. The LeCoq School in Paris is a form of improvisation and mime that has become extremely popular as a physical theatre method.

76 This follows the tradition of both his mentors: Halprin’s model involved a series of yoga-like poses which focussed on the spine as the core or centre. Lessard’s “repère” takes its origins from the French word meaning reference point or landmark (Dundjerovic, 2007).
and certainly it’s a piece that is straight out of the Viennese scene of that time. So once I kind of discovered what the chronology of the drama was, even though it is not sung in that chronology, I imposed that to the singer. I said to the singer “I think the story is told upside down. It has no beginning, middle or end. We have to start at the end and backtrack.” It is kind of an odd way to work for a singer and for a conductor, but they agreed that that was the best way for us to understand exactly what the dramaturgy was about. So we rehearsed it backward. We started by staging the end, and then the penultimate scene, and then the previous scenes before that, and eventually got to the opening scene. Then everything was so limpid and clear in everybody’s mind that it gave a really great result. So even though it might seem that the piece is a very abstract, surreal piece to the audience, it made so much sense to the conductor and to the singer that it transpired to the performance.77

In opera, Lepage develops a starting resource or reference point, which becomes the global vision for the work. Lepage then encourages the performer to improvise and develop:

What fascinates me about the art of creation is that you fill a space with objects that have no relation to each other, and because they are there, ‘all piled up in the same box’, there is a secret logic, a way of organizing them. Each piece of the puzzle ends up finding its place. (Dundjerovic, 2007, p.28)

Lepage views this as the most honest way of deciphering the internal logic of the work. The lack of preconceived ideas in the detail of the work invites a comparison with Peter Brook’s directing mantra, to render the invisible visible (Knowles, 1998). In this way Lepage “assumes the function of a scenic writer” (Dundjerovic, 2007, p.34), creating a grand visual frame on which to hang the narrative. Like an auteur, he applies collaborative discovery onto a large, sprawling canvas of philosophical and narrative ideas.

6.2 Layering complexity – a traditional methodology with current application

Willene Gunn was schooled in opera as both a singer and director. Gunn’s method respects the important elements of traditional opera direction, yet creates a layered process, building character with a heavy reliance on the composer’s cues as gleaned from the musical score. This process is an example of layering complexity:

I have always felt that the composer wrote the music while being absorbed in the emotional world of the character…that the orchestra tells us the truth of what the

77 This quotation was taken from the transcript of Lepage’s interview for this research.
character is thinking ... where they may be singing one thing, but in reality thinking, or suffering another. I also feel that the character, at one with the orchestra, creates the dramatic thought, like a great ballet dancer. They create the rhythmic, the key changes. It is not that these happen and they react. They create them. I have no aversion to placing the opera in a new time and place than that of which it was written. As long as it can be justified with the music. Any movement or dramatic thought that goes against the music gets one in trouble.⁷⁸

Vital to the rehearsal process in this method is an opening formalist statement of objective grounded in historical research, a ground plan that is clear and repeatable, followed by adjustments and adaptations depending on the talent level provided, layering the visual world. In response to a discussion about her process, Gunn states:

Text and music driven emergent layering comes close [to my process]. For me it is the union of music and text that brings the production to life. They are not separate, but a union. I do not think the composer heard the orchestra as an accompaniment, but that the word and the music were one in his creative brain. I also think that while creating, he saw those little people running around. Look at how Verdi used to always have a sore throat from singing the roles as he created them, and how Puccini used to weep when people such as Mimi died.⁷⁹

Gunn’s process is formalist and practical, heavily reliant on sound cues to propel the visual world. Her opera singing background clearly informs her early process:

I first listen to the opera with the score many times, sort of “living” the characters, no set plans yet etc. As the director you get to sing all of the roles. From the union of the music and text, I begin to see color and movement and emotion, sort of like watching television in my head. Then I go to listening with the addition of the set plans. So the movement and character relationships become more specific. I pre-block before going into rehearsals, so that I can work quickly, as opera rehearsals are always very short and condensed and intense. This blocking is often changed when I meet the cast. Either they are very creative and have brought a lot with them, which is wonderful, or they need help, or it is a mixed bag. I believe a singer has to have the movement down first combined with some characterization, as a singer does not have as much freedom as an actor in straight theater. They are basically choreographed emotionally, and the brain can only absorb so much at once. So...I block first...and then with that out of the way

⁷⁸ This is an excerpt from Gunn’s semi-structured interview as part of this research.
⁷⁹ Email exchange with Willene Gunn, dated 21/3/2015.
have a lot more time to concentrate on building the character and the characters’ relationships to each other.\textsuperscript{81}

Gunn doesn’t credit any one influence for her process, but notes that there is an interdisciplinary approach that reflects her background as singer, actor and her love of technical theatre. Gunn’s language in interview minimises her role in service of the composer, making authorship clear. This flows into her emergent process, set up as if the composer’s intention will emerge when conditions, research, authentic approach to text and music, are all in place. Following these pre-set conditions, the layering process begins in earnest, constantly adapting to the talent and skill levels of the performers, bringing;

\textit{...a welcome return to a focus on what the Germans call Personenregie – in other words, a production style focused more on subtlety of acting and the psychology of characters than on concept and spectacle. (Christiansen, 2014, p.1)}

Willene Gunn’s rehearsals develop from the mechanics of placement onstage towards complex elements of characterisation. Highly individualised, her rehearsals allow for experimentation and emergent techniques in which performers are highly capable, through to a situation which simply allows for the music to provide the bulk of the characterisation for a less skilled performer, constantly building and developing the \textit{Personenregie}. In this way, Gunn’s process is “inside-out”; she overtly removes herself from the narrative or authorship, allowing performers to explore their characters within the frame of defined movement. Gunn’s method is therefore also collaborative, adaptive, and emergent; the level of layering highly dependent on the skill level of the performers.

6.3 Conclusion

Both directors approach their roles from different ends of the emergent spectrum, creating processes that reflect the ideals and principles of complex adaptive systems. Lepage intends for adaption to occur, approaching the work with a grand view capable of accommodating a range of experimental detail. Gunn grounds the work in character detail and clear movement, which then develops into the larger view. Both methods owe a debt to film concepts of close-up and panorama. Both methods are highly dependent on competent performers who do not allow ego to derail a process, as well as a successful, respectful relationship with the conductor in partnership.

The fascinating outcome of this research is that, despite approaching their work from seemingly opposite positions, both these skilled directors create work of high value using complex adaptive processes to achieve their aims. Working either \textit{outside-in} or \textit{inside-out}, both directors frame the

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
rehearsals a certain way, then effect an “unlikely marriage”\textsuperscript{82} as the adaptive process between all participants realises the work for performance. This qualitative research shows that vastly different directorial methods can successfully apply a complex adaptive process, particularly in the case of monodrama, as evidenced in the work of both of these brilliant directors.

\textsuperscript{82} Interview with Lepage for this research.
7. Performance practice research

This exegesis is underpinned by performance practice research gathered while directing and performing in three contrasting monodrama performances, spanning the historical and stylistic range of monodrama over the past hundred years. Evidence was gathered through observation, diarising, and analysis of the rehearsal method, along with performance outcomes in Schoenberg’s seminal monodrama *Pierrot Lunaire*, arguably the first true monodrama and still considered radical even today; Eve Klein’s *The Pomegranate Cycle*, a postmodern pastiche-based, electronica monodrama with heavy use of multimedia, first performed at the Brisbane Festival, with dancer and singer; and finally Kurt Weill’s *Seven Deadly Sins*, a mid-century monodrama collaboration with small ensemble, dancer and singers, with libretto by Bertolt Brecht, and an example of the didactic modernist approach to monodrama.

In order to address all the questions posed in the qualitative research, rehearsal conditions differed for each project. Methods favoured by both Gunn and Lepage were used, with the author taking on roles including singer and director. *Pierrot Lunaire* was an intensely democratic collaborative process with two singers sharing the role of Pierrot. The production used a small ensemble as scored by Schoenberg, but not a conductor. The direction of the piece was propelled by the author, but had the aim of deploying an experimental, transformational, and collaborative rehearsal process in the spirit of Robert Lepage.

My goal was to experience music making of the highest order with no real sense of propulsion of the collaborative dynamic from a single source. In a sense, this failed: despite my desire to allow improvisation and flow, I propelled most of the dramatic ideas in consultation with the other talented singer, Wendy Dixon. Without a conductor, the orchestra’s role combined to function as a group as the third participant in the process. Perhaps unintentionally, all parties to the process assigned authorship to me for the sole pragmatic reason that the project comprised part of my doctoral studies. The lack of a conductor produced an alternate triumvirate of Ensemble / Singer / Singer.

This experiment in collaborative dynamics was arguably unsuccessful in the sense that I continually influenced the look and feel of the piece. However, on the contrary, the atmosphere in the rehearsal room was certainly collaborative and contemplative from all angles, truly propelled by adaptive norms and the individual contributions of each participant. There was a sense of improvisation and play and yet, despite my desire to influence the project using Lepage’s model, I found myself prescribing staging in the manner of Gunn.
In The Pomegranate Cycle, the role of director was complex, representing the challenges faced in preparing a new work for performance. The collaboration was complicated by the fact the singer was also the composer, assigning her increased agency in the process. There was room for a directorial vision, but the collaboration in this process was carefully managed to respect the fact that Eve Klein as composer and performer drove the project. This project most accurately represented the ebb and flow of a monodrama rehearsal when a work is created anew. Inherent to this kind of rehearsal were considerations of the rehearsal conditions, discussions about the collaborative process, and questions about authorship and agency. Klein’s work was approached from the “outside-in”, an apt metaphor reflected in the ripening and opening of the pomegranate itself, central to the plot.

For the Brecht/Weill Die Sieben Todsünden, I drove the production as director, designer, and performer with a strong nod to Brechtian didacticism and political theatre. Functioning like an auteur, I arranged this rehearsal process with a strong geographic and historical choice, positioning the work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina with projection featuring heavily in the set design. Rehearsals were clearly structured, following the method preferred by Willene Gunn, but allowed for improvisational transformation, as long as it complied with the ‘mise-en-scène’ prescribed at the beginning of rehearsal, following Lepage’s lead. This combination, alongside my roles of singer, director and producer, aimed to test complexity theory in rehearsal dynamics from the point of view of director and singer. Primary observations of the monodrama rehearsal dynamic across these diverse collaborations will be filtered through the prism of complexity theory.

7.1 Pierrot Lunaire

One critic at the October 16, 1912 premiere of Pierrot Lunaire saw the performance as “the most ear-splitting combination of tones that ever desecrated the walls of a Berlin concert hall” (Auner, 2012, p.1). Despite the numerous accolades and commendations it received, Korngold saw in the piece:

...an agitated lady before us, who abandoned herself to Albert Giraud’s bizarre, neo-romantic-satanic-hysterical impressions with veritable convulsions of recitation (Pedneault-Deslauriers, 2011, p.604).

One hundred years on, composers, critics and performers consider Arnold Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire Opus 21 to be a highly modern masterpiece. Yet, the work traces Schoenberg’s own

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83 With so many roles to fulfil, and straddling two competing directorial philosophies, the researcher in this rehearsal process needed to be practically infallible to successfully complete this particular performance practice research.
struggle to assimilate the traditions and gestures of the past into his ideas of music for the future (Matthews, 2012).

Giraud explored the *Commedia dell’Arte* character Pierrot’s hysteria, androgynous sexuality and complex discussion with the Moon by way of twenty-one symbolist poems translated from Giraud’s original by Hartleben. Giraud was a symbolist poet and an aesthete, having once fought a duel over the question: “Art for art’s sake?” (Joseph, 1966); such was his belief in the primacy and eloquence of artistic expression.

**Rationale**

The first true monodrama following Freud’s research into the *talking cure*, the development of *Pierrot Lunaire* had been initiated by a commission from Viennese actress and soprano Albertine Zehme. Along with her teacher, Zehme had devised a system of *Vortragsstil*, a recitation method using rhythmic speech (Matthews, 2012). She commissioned Schoenberg to write a vehicle for her in this style. He was passionate about the task, declaring it “a marvellous idea” (Gorrell, 1998) and, following the premiere, finally admitted that the work pleased him (Joseph, 1966).

Schoenberg’s work meets Mabry’s definition of modern music in all elements: rhythmic complexity, unorthodox vocal techniques and unfamiliar notation (Mabry, 2002). Fellow composers, critics and performers refer to *Pierrot Lunaire* as “original” (Dunsby, 1992). The work is so complex, and remains so avant-garde, that any informed performance will require perfect or relative pitch, musicality, intelligence and powers of deduction (Bryn-Julson & Mathews, 2008). The psychological journey of the work, as well as the journey taken by Pierrot through his fractured, hysterical mind, are reflected in the process for the singer in deciphering Schoenberg’s notation and intention for the work (Menerth, 1967).

Schoenberg’s musical ideas as expressed in *Pierrot Lunaire* form a historical barrier between past and future musical styles. His musical ideas leave Romanticism well behind, and his dramatic form is credited with being the first modern monodrama. Melodrama – the art of reciting spoken text to music – had become extremely popular in the Victorian era. Historically, Mozart’s *Zaide*, Weber’s *Der Freischiitz* and Beethoven’s *Fidelio* incorporated elements of melodrama (Branscombe, 1971). Humperdinck had wide success with spoken text in melodrama in *Die Königskinder* (1897), and while preparing *Pierrot Lunaire*, Schoenberg described the work as a melodrama. Thus, antecedents to the Schoenberg experiment stretched over at least the previous hundred years. At the time of *Pierrot Lunaire*’s preparation, *Commedia dell’Arte* was enjoying resurgence in popular culture and puppet shows were also a popular form of street theatre.
Expressionism and popular culture both embraced the meme of the sad clown Pierrot, with no past and no future, of dubious or androgynous gender, and prone to hysteria. In fact, references to Pierrot fill the annals of popular culture and composers’ notebooks in the late 19th century and early 20th century. This meme found expression in the Punch and Judy shows so popular in England during this period. Most forms of street theatre, puppetry and populist entertainment in this period offered a Pierrot-like character.

Relevance

Pierrot Lunaire is known as a complex modernist masterpiece for many reasons: atonality; dissonance; character and tone of the protagonist; and the externalisation of internal thought. It is also the Sprechstimme: Schoenberg’s efforts to control the pitch and rhythm of speech sounds over music.

Somewhat of a challenge to commit to memory and sing, the vocal line of Pierrot Lunaire is highly complex. The vocalist must decide where on the spectrum of speech to singing one’s voice should reside. Most critics prefer a close rendering of pitch approximations (Bryn-Julson & Mathews, 2008), yet, in Schoenberg’s own 1940 recording, the Sprechstimme is barely pitch-dependent and even the arcs of some phrases conflict with the notated pitches.

Schoenberg’s constantly evolving view of how to perform the Sprechstimme reveals his obsession both with perfecting the invented form and the way in which he would be viewed in posterity (Auner, 1997). A critical study of Schoenberg conducting two performances of the work shows that context and performance conditions were highly influential, affecting, in particular, tempo and Sprechstimme sound quality and colour (Byron, 2007).

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84 Debussy’s Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915; originally titled "Pierrot angry at the moon"); "Pierrot’s Serenade", from Marionettes, III (1913) Poulenc, Francis: "Pierrot" (1933); Foote, Arthur: "Pierrot" and "Pierrette" (1894); Reger, Max: A Ballet-Suite for Orchestra (1913; #4: "Pierrot and Pierrette"); Lehár, Franz: "Pierrot and Pierrette" (1911). Menotti, Gian Carlo: The Death of Pierrot (1923) (Soder, 2006)

85 As seaside holidays became more affordable in England in particular with the introduction of Bank Holidays in 1871, the topical and adaptive nature of Punch and Judy shows endeared itself to a wider British and European audience.

86 This Schoenberg-devised term places the instrument in an amorphous zone between speech and sung text, describing a combination of speech and sung vocalisation. For the most part, Schoenberg wrote the notation for Pierrot with crosses. He himself noted that this was necessarily more exact than the mere crosses used for Gurrelieder and thus required more exact pitch rendering (Goltz, 2006). Despite the wealth of scholarly writing on the subject over the past eighty years, the development of a performance practice for Sprechstimme has been outlined (Soder, 2006) primarily through an analysis of authoritative recordings, including those of the composer himself.
How one performs Schoenberg becomes the dominant question in any Pierrot Lunaire rehearsal process. Discussion and collaboration in this rehearsal period focused on the difficulty of the music and directorial vision in some ways took a backseat to musical complexity. Performance clues may be gleaned from historical recordings, some of which have taken on authoritative status, including, of course Schoenberg’s own recordings. Rapoport (2004) provides a spectral analysis of five artists’ approaches to Pierrot Lunaire and, in combination with recordings of Schoenberg’s own speech, concludes that the text is highly influenced by the flow of intonation in German speech. Indeed, Schoenberg requested that the singer “consider the nuance of the speaking voice, which gives a pitch but then leaves it immediately by rising or falling” (Bryn-Julson & Mathews, 2008, p.xiv). Despite this, the artists’ representations of the work are unique and varied, reflecting each performer’s mental process in decoding the colours and contours of the text (Stadlen, 1981). Following his first performance, Schoenberg’s own intentions changed and would continue to evolve over the following twenty years (Pedneault-Deslauriers, 2011).

Despite myriad markings in the score and preface explanations, performances of the work are diverse, ranging from the composer’s own to Phyllis Bryn Julson’s recent authoritative performance, to Erika Stiedry-Wagner’s performance with Schoenberg in 1940; pop performer Björk’s fragmentary performance, and even Japanese anime cyborg Pierrot Hatsune Miku, who electronically manipulated the sound to mimic a vocaloid. All the conditions for these performances informed the style of Sprechstimme used in my resulting performances. Pierrot can be played many ways (Keathley, 2006), but is commonly presented as a self-dramatising artist prone to hysteria. Pierrot’s gender is ambiguous; he appears as a dandy with an effeminate taste in women’s clothes, and his penchant for hysterical outbursts reflects the Freudian view of the female prevalent in the first years of the twentieth century (Pedneault-Deslauriers, 2011).

Pierrot Lunaire is one of the most complex and difficult pieces of music in the repertoire to release from the page (Rapoport, 2004). The great duality in the work is that, despite detailed and exacting inscriptions and directions in the score, every performance is new and different. Schoenberg’s markings in the score require detailed academic work to decipher and apply. For example, where on the spectrum between spoken and sung vocalisation does the Sprechstimme lie? In Downes’ review of Schoenberg’s own 1940 conducting of Pierrot Lunaire in New York, problems of performance interpretation were raised:

But the fact is that music is not really released from the page – “recreated” after all, is a perfectly accurate and just description – unless it is brought to life by the intuition and re-creative power of an interpreter who reads far back of the signs on the printed page to the actual thought of the composer. (Downes, 1940, p.X7)
Even Schoenberg, known for prescription, adapted the work, depending on conditions and personnel.

Reinvention

The researched performance was conducted as a semester-long project with Sydney Conservatorium of Music ensemble students. Experientially, the research felt like an investigation to unlock its musical meaning. Two singers shared the role of Pierrot, the author and soprano Wendy Dixon. Ensemble members met twice weekly for the rehearsal period of six weeks. Rehearsal observations and weekly coachings were diarised, noting the particularly democratic rehearsal dynamic due to the lack of a conductor. Post-performance reflections were obtained.

Having sung a range of avant-garde, twelve-tone and serial music without pronounced difficulty, I was confident in approaching this work. However, as soon as I began to study Pierrot Lunaire, I realised that a distinct set of problems would beset me, and indeed any singer of the work: lines are chronically difficult to recall; memory structures seem to function in opposition to the regular learning process as motifs are initially difficult to decipher (Bryn-Julson & Mathews, 2008). Schoenberg’s prescriptive markings seem to open up more, rather than fewer, questions of interpretation.

The most unnerving element of the rehearsal process was the time that it took for motifs and musical ideas to gain traction in the memory. This occurred late in the preparation process, when ensemble rehearsals began and cues were able to be obtained from ensemble members. Cues from other ensemble members became significant markers. Where musical complexity increases in a work, so does the significance of interplay between participants in the rehearsal process. In this rehearsal process, a triumvirate developed but the agents differed from the expected model, as the ensemble formed one corner as a group. The three corners of the triumvirate were Director / Singer / Ensemble (led by the pianist Patrick Keith).

Diarising this research showed the author the complex and unfamiliar character of this vocalisation, the way in which memory is challenged by an unfamiliar process, and finally, how the collaborative triumvirate is modulated by singer-driven process. The value, duration and style of phonation can all influence how “sung” or “spoken” the Sprechstimme is. Questions included, for example, whether or not to use portamenti to release from a given pitch into the next note. This

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87 Using an unfamiliar vocal system inhabiting a zone between singing and speech disrupts normal mental memory processes for the singer. The psychological impact of this discomfort leads the performer to seek new avenues of musical understanding. It is ultimately a positive process, allowing for self-reflection regarding the anatomy of musical learning, and the harmonic, rhythmic and melodic markers upon which one relies.
relaxation process liberated the interpretive process, but firstly a clear knowledge of the known pitches and harmonies was adhered to before freeing up the interpretation. These details became the important elements for collaboration and discussion in rehearsal. Working with another singer to present aspects of Pierrot’s symbolist narrative was inspiring, bringing different bodies, styles and perspectives to the work. It felt like a rich philosophical conversation propelled primarily by the singers. As one node of the triumvirate, the singers increasingly took responsibility for explaining narrative ideas to the ensemble.

Singers found challenges with pitching certain entries, while the ensemble had other difficulties understanding the linear progressions and the way each line functioned within the ensemble and narrative. The singers’ increased power in the rehearsal room influenced many decisions, including tempi and dynamics. The fact that both singers hold teaching positions may have also influenced the dynamic in the rehearsal room.

Technical issues were resolved using a team-based approach, with other players weighing in on how to resolve given issues within a single line. Difficulties in learning and retaining these musical lines formed the basis of an easy camaraderie amongst the ensemble. As all the players were students, there was also a certain breezy naiveté and enthusiasm that flowed through the practice period, despite challenges. There was a lack of a hierarchical structure but a tacit recognition that, on matters of narrative, the singers were authoritative. While it is collaborative, the position of assumed authority naturally adjusts to the power base and dynamic. As they were members of teaching staff, the dynamic was bound to favour the singers in authority. The author set the rules for staging and the minimal discussion on staging was more of a practical, pragmatic nature. The process here adapted to the musical challenges posed and the ensemble worked together to find musical solutions.

**Conclusion: Pierrot Lunaire**

Performing this work required a great understanding of symbolism of Giraud’s poetry and the complex and dense composition of Schoenberg. In this process, participants adapted to solve a complex puzzle of modern music collaboratively. The decision to avoid using a conductor represented a risk, given the complexities of the work, but it did allow open discussion of the difficulties of comprehension. A consensus on musical meaning was repeatedly reached through group discussion, and solved collaboratively.

The rehearsal period manifested itself as a true example of heterarchical problem-solving at its best, one that followed agreed outcomes, but respected the knowledge base of other members of the ensemble. It was a process primarily driven by the singers, who perhaps due to age and experience, but also given the absence of a conductor, took a natural lead in discussion. While the singers
provided the lead as principal interpreters, there was a sense of group-centred investigation into the complex meaning and structure of the piece. The author, taking up dual roles of director and singer, created a visual world with minimal set and lighting to reflect the lunar metaphor. Direction was achieved with a light touch: the small ensemble and increased agency of singers had already given greater authorship to the singer, so steps were taken to encourage musical problem-solving to counter this.

The lack of a conductor went unnoticed in performance, and the group communicated well due to ensemble placement and the social dynamic developed in those rehearsal investigations. The lack of a conductor did not weaken the triumvirate, as the two singers formed one corner, the ensemble another, and the director a third. There was a healthy back and forth conversation between instrumentalists and singers. This felt tied organically to the struggle all the performers faced in comprehending Schoenberg’s intentions and the myriad levels of meaning present in the piece. It became an easy conversation, seeking artistic integrity rather than any sense of power relationships.

This is the ultimate complex adaptive process, in which the creative goal is utmost in each contributor’s mind. In the absence of a conductor, the adaptive process was primarily a relationship between two groups: singers and instrumentalists. At the end of the process, each of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the democratic outcome of the rehearsal process, with a corresponding sense of achievement within their own ability to adapt, learn and finally understand this seminal work.

While the Freudian hysteria of Pierrot the character is much discussed in academic circles, that hysteria does not translate to the creative process, which feels less emotive and far more an intellectual argument on a set of rational decisions (for example, use of vibrato, portamenti, dynamics, text, and context). Those rational decisions drove a unique collaborative experience centred around musical problem solving. As these elements began to coalesce, a form of Gunn’s emergent layering occurred quite organically, with continued complexity occurring as musical understanding grew.

Works of symbolism are effective examples of complex adaptive systems as so many elements of the work are subject to interpretation. Composers like Schoenberg create a framework of musical formalism in which experimentation can occur. This performance was intended to test Lepage’s transformative mise-en-scène, but the sheer complexity of the work itself led to the need for a layering of complexity, like that favoured by Gunn. Place, space, rhythm and melody were established first, followed by increasingly complex questions of staging and meaning of the work. The Pierrot Lunaire experience shows that complexity in the work itself influences and dictates the order and structure of the adaptive process, moving organically from simple to complex when all
participants have understood a particular small element. As collaborators adapt and comprehend each element, a group understanding of the work emerges. Thus, *Pierrot Lunaire* became a salient example of *layering complexity*, evident in the group’s ability to problem solve musical challenges together.

### 7.2 The Pomegranate Cycle

**Rationale**

> The utilisation of other sound cultures within the context of opera enables women’s voices and stories to be presented in new ways, while also providing a point of friction with opera’s traditional storytelling devices. (Klein, 2011, p.3)

As part of the 2010 Brisbane Festival’s “Under the Radar” series, *The Pomegranate Cycle* was conceived and devised by Eve Klein as part of her doctoral thesis at the Queensland University of Technology. Klein is an operatic mezzo-soprano who has a particular interest in technological innovation in music, having taught Electronic Music at Macquarie University. She is interested in establishing future directions for the operatic art as it overlaps with popular idioms, transplanting the trained operatic voice into contemporary settings. As she composed *The Pomegranate Cycle*, she sought traditional text sources and settled on Greek myth to explore her interest in feminist discourse. Klein approached me to direct this work for the Festival.

**Relevance**

> The Pomegranate Cycle establishes that a singer can be more than a voice and a performing body. She can be her own multimedia storyteller. Her audience can be anywhere. (Klein, 2011, p.4)

A virtuosic work for solo classical singer with intensely dramatic subject matter, *The Pomegranate Cycle* uses multiple colourings of the voice and extraneous vocalisations including speech in the narrative. Sharing some traits with the programmatic song cycle, this work departs from recital format in the intensity and force of its dramatic pulse. Its imagery and grand sweeping vocal lines render the work operatic, yet the range of textual colours in both orchestra and voice, the intimate treatment of the mother-daughter relationship and the destruction of the child’s psyche make it well-suited to the small form of monodrama.

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88 The work is separated into ‘songs’ of varying lengths, often with through-composed joins between them. In a song cycle there is a unifying element but, in the case of a dramatic work, there is a narrative trajectory, as occurs in Klein’s work.
The Pomegranate Cycle is loosely based on the Greek myth of Persephone, described alternately as an exploration of the bond between mother and daughter, or a treatise on female initiation rites (Lincoln, 1979; Kulish & Holtzman, 1998). The bulbous pomegranate's bittersweet redness is ripe with metaphor for female subjugation. In the Greek narrative, Kore, the daughter of Demeter, dares to eat forbidden pomegranate seeds, violating the laws of nature. She is then taken by Hades, raped and dragged into the Underworld. Now known as Persephone, Queen of the Dead, she is imprisoned in hell while her mother Demeter searches, in vain, for her daughter on earth. The mother’s grief is so great that her tears render the earth barren and hostile, forcing Hades to allow Persephone a reprieve and some time to reunite with her mother on earth. When mother and daughter are finally reunited, the earth blooms again, initiating the cycle of spring. The myth holds that each year, Persephone is granted a reprieve on earth, spring revives the land, and the barren becomes bountiful again.

Reinvention

The use of Greek myth provides an operatic text for Klein’s lyrical composition. The Pomegranate Cycle eloquently searches the symbolic depth of mythic structure and operatic pathos, tied into the complex landscape of electronica. In reinterpreting opera for the twenty-first century, this work attempts to strike a balance between virtuosic performance and subtle musical painting of subjective experience, allowing the audience to gaze into the possible future of operatic monodrama. Yet, this work functions within contained parameters, designed for an intimate space – petite and feminine, if one were gendering the work. Fragmentation of the narrative into small, separate elements is a key postmodern technique (Taylor, 2002). Klein also blends high and low art forms easily into her pastiche, another indicator of the work’s postmodern nature (Huyssen, 1986). Klein blends electronica instrumentation with traditional operatic vocal production seamlessly.

With a limited production budget, there were significant issues in the development of the project. The Brisbane Festival provides production assistance, personnel and performance space, but grants are generally not provided for production expenses and rehearsal costs. Although technically a monodrama, the work also required a dancer/actor. Liz Evans is a dancer and actor with many years of experience performing in both drama and dance. Evans’s silent role as dancer/actor was

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89 Klein articulates questions of female constructs in the work and questions her own influences: “It is difficult for me to recognize what might be a woman’s compositional voice from all of the masculine codes of femininity which I have consumed...Perhaps if we reach a critical mass, where the work of female composers is commonplace and available...feminist aesthetics in composition might be easier to define.” (Klein, 2011, p. 204)
ostensibly to provide a psychological counterpoint or foil to Klein’s character. Both actors played aspects of Persephone’s character, and depicted the mother-daughter relationship. The fluid nature of the characterisation meant that symbols needed to be applied liberally to enable the audience to follow the action shifts. Imagery included water for cleansing and atonement, a swinging vine for innocence and youth, and a range of colours to denote states of mind and their intrinsic relationship to the seasons.

In a collaborative process, establishing ways of ascribing motive for each significant moment are vital (Atkinson, 2010). Just as the value of the protagonist’s experience is important, so too is the relative value of the individual performer’s contributions to the rehearsal process as they engage with it. When the lines between director and performer are blurred, there is a danger that the loss of front-of-house vision of the action will result in a lack of objective perspective.

The rehearsal process was fluid and collaborative between singer, dancer and director (Klein herself functioning as producer and conductor). Conflicts with the dancer, the talented Liz Evans, were few because of the clarity of her role. Three women worked together in our own triumvirate of skills and experience as director, composer/auteur/performer and dancer. Discussions between Klein as auteur, and the director, centred on differing views of the intent of the piece. The composer has the closest perspective of the work, but may not have an objective view of how that text is interpreted by an audience. In this production, the author chose to take a firm stand on some narrative points while deferring to Klein’s perspective on others. Due to a lack of role clarity in early rehearsals, this give-and-take began with some difficulty, but came to feel organic closer to performance. The adaptive process became a fascinating study into managing necessary conflict in collaboration, without creating anxiety for participants. As shown above in this dissertation, anxiety and ego can derail a complex adaptive process. As rehearsals continued, roles were better established, removing anxiety and allowing adaptation to occur through repetitive patterning.

The key to the success of this collaboration was defining nodes and then creating linkages that were effective in rehearsal. As driver of the collaboration, Klein was placed in an elevated position in early discussions, allowing her to assert an active composer’s frame on the rehearsal structure. As rehearsals continued, the director was able to separate discussion between composer/director, performer/director and conductor/director, with Klein filling multiple roles, yet compartmentalising discussion to keep role boundaries separate. Forming these artificial sub-nodes meant that linkages between participants were easier to establish. By the time the work relocated to Brisbane for performance, Evans had also quietly established her importance as the visual frame for Klein’s character, Persephone. Thus, a functioning triumvirate arrived quite late in the rehearsal period.

90 mirroring the role of Anna II in the Weill.
Generating sub-nodes for Klein’s roles removed any conflict, as each role was perceived as separately valued in the collaboration, with these sub-nodes providing clarity for Klein that her original intention and authorship would be respected.

With a heavily metaphorical text, other elements of the physical performance become important in establishing the narrative line in *The Pomegranate Cycle*. The performance space was a cage-like structure with indoor and outdoor elements, with a small proscenium extension into the audience. Ravi Glasser’s projections framed the set and created the ambience of an installation, contouring the landscape with vivid, pensive imagery, and moving between large and small natural forms to reflect the psychological states of the protagonist. Small set pieces were added, including a large pomegranate-like centrepiece, which rotated and opened to reveal the protagonist and the torn pomegranate seeds: a metaphor for female initiation. Also present was an expansive, flat, water structure at the front of the proscenium. The water was used in various ways to represent innocence and redemption.

These larger elements were imposed on the design with an outside-in approach, giving clear and consistent directorial authority to the visual frame. The narrative was established with a combination of narrator and subject roles, these roles moving from singer to dancer to singer at various moments in the monodrama. At times, the dancer alone would present the emotional heartbeat, with the singer narrating the action; at other times, the two performers interacted in real time, or in contrast to each other. At other times, the singer presented a monologue and the dancer provided a counterpoint to the story. This fluid relationship placed high demands on the artists and demanded a close relationship between performers. Norms of rehearsal were established over a lengthy development period, allowing natural adaptation to take place, moving from dancer/singer to conductor/director to composer/director to singer/director, with the director in particular acting like a hinge within the triumvirate model. These pairings came to the fore and subsided depending on the element which was being rehearsed.

Monodrama demands virtuosity and flexibility in the voice to achieve the requisite musical and dramatic intensity to sustain solo work. Klein’s composition was strongly lyrical, the legato line easily matching her richly flowing vocal tone, but there were fewer moments of conflict expressed in the largely lyric score. Dramatic tension therefore was punctuated in the staging. The dancer performed sharp and awkward movements, creating rhythmic pointillism and adding a necessary arc and contour to create dramatic contrast.

*Conclusion: The Pomegranate Cycle*

The very fact that a monodrama hybrid using opera and electronica was programmed at an international festival shows a level of acceptance of the emergence of the genre. The small form
also allows for complex dynamics to adapt and change constantly. Separating Klein’s roles and speaking to each role distinctly became an important part of the adaptive process, creating extra nodes for Klein’s multiple functions and assuaging any doubt that her vision would be respected. Through robust discussion, also including dancer Liz Evans, roles that had been unclear became more defined, allowing improvisatory play to occur. Managing anxiety was vital to the collaboration. When participants relocated to Brisbane for performance, the change in geography also assisted in the collaborative process. The production truly began to feel successful at that point with a heterarchy of mutual respect evident. As the interview data shows, perceptions of successful performance are highly correlated with positive views of collaboration in rehearsal.

The female triumvirate in this case was a new and rare dynamic, examining the feminine within a triumvirate of shifting power relationships among women. This rehearsal process felt like an experiment in *compensatory history* as described by Citron (1990), expressing the feminine in expanding narrative and metaphor, using the related notion of the “exceptional woman” and her accomplishments. Such a presentation functions as an important and necessary first stage in a discipline’s “serious exploration of its forgotten female figures” (Citron, 1990, p.103). The collaboration took longer to establish due to anxiety associated with establishing the limits of roles and separating them into nodes. This was a necessary precursor to the triumvirate functioning adequately as a complex adaptive system.

While monodrama is increasing in visibility and frequency of performances, the experience of developing *The Pomegranate Cycle* showed that the genre is fluid, experimental and expanding in its very definition. Klein’s work was a fascinating study in the changing dynamics of monodrama preparation and performance; a study into the workability of a collaborative model in rehearsals; and the present state and future development of monodrama as a legitimate high art form.

In her thesis, Klein (2011) acknowledged the power and agency gained by her joint roles of producer, composer and performer. There were artistic disagreements, often solved in the composer’s favour. Yet, a functioning triumvirate formed between director/singer/dancer and the patterns adapted as rehearsal norms organically developed. Where stakeholders have increased agency in the process due to multiple roles, this project provides evidence for seeing each role as a separate node within the system in order to maintain the heterarchical structure.

This collaboration was heavily dependent on the changing notion of authorship during rehearsals. Klein changed elements of the composition during rehearsal as a result of discussions between the triumvirate and, more importantly, Klein’s own reflections and musical edits. This work has continued to be transformed in subsequent iterations, as Lepage has also done on many occasions. This fluidity reflects one of the most interesting elements of complexity theory: that is, the freedom
to adapt the work based on personnel, space and time. Klein’s work is a brave experiment in monodrama composition, rehearsals were an example of complex adaptive systems in practice, showing the importance of establishing roles and responsibilities before creating nodes and pattern regularity. The performance illustrated *transformative mise-en-scène* in practice.

### 7.3 Die Sieben Todsünden

The final project of this thesis brought together all these elements in an exploration of complex adaptive systems, using a combination of *transformative mise-en-scène* (Lepage) and emergent layering (Gunn).

Weill’s first opera had yet to be premiered when he noted:

> ...musically and vocally our opera singers are fit for new tasks, but in terms of acting—be it facial expression or body language or general movement—opera performances lag far behind the accomplishments of today’s theater. The lack of genuine, natural performances is especially painful. (Juchem, 2009, p.1)

The possibility of ascribing equal weight to nuanced acting and vocal quality in opera was a radical concept in the early twentieth century. Weill was interested in developing a new aesthetic of opera and music theatre, developing a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Kowalke, 1995) where acting and singing held equal importance; where vocal colour could be influenced by the dramatic demands of the role. Weill’s substantial and unique output, traversing opera, musical theatre, cabaret and popular song, demands excellence in vocal technique and dramatic ability, while pushing the boundaries of music as theatre. His wife and muse, Lotte Lenya, exemplified his approach. Her voice was marked with jagged edges, a range of colours and weight coupled with the ability to show beauty and pathos. Lenya’s talent and popular appeal personified Weill’s intention to marry music, theatre and popular idioms (Albrecht, 2000).

In the summer of 1933, having fallen out with Brecht, Weill approached Jean Cocteau seeking a libretto of weight and political significance, exploring the Catholic notion of the Seven Deadly Sins.91 When Cocteau was busy, Weill was forced to beg Brecht to complete the project for him, and it became their final problematic collaboration. Their mutual history had been both impressive and highly fraught, culminating in their famous fall-out over *Mahagonny* in 1928. They were the creators of a political theatre, yet after three months of detailed collaboration on the new project, Brecht appears to have lost interest, and uncharacteristically left Weill essentially rudderless to complete the work.

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91 The ‘seven deadly sins’ were medieval canonical constructions, loosely embellished from the Bible, but having their roots in Hellenic astrological rites of the fourth century (Bloomfield, 1941).
Die Sieben Todsünden seemed a pertinent metaphor for Weill, who, having already moved to Paris and being Jewish by birth, watched the deteriorating German political and social conditions from afar. Weill was a leading musical figure in the early Weimar republic, yet Nazism was rapidly rising in Germany, ultimately leading to Weill’s move to America in 1935. Brecht and Weill’s work is famous for its spirited satire on totalitarianism and consumerism, its Marxist leanings and its political agenda (Juchem, 2009). Brecht’s focus was on moral provocation (Ziolkowski, 2009), “not the straining towards a climax but the cumulative effect of the scenes” (Juchem, 2009, p. 20). Weill’s completion of the work lifted the narrative away from Brecht’s political dogma, and into dramatic musical scenes tinged with sarcasm.

Weill, throughout his career writing for German and American stages, expressly sought to break through the walls separating high art and popular music. Like Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess of the same period, Die Sieben Todsünden is deceptive with its simplicity and use of popular idiom, but its treatment of that idiom is complex. His experimentation with waltz, foxtrot, popular song and march elements serves to delineate personal suffering on the one hand, and the ‘other’. Brecht used the split personality metaphor in many of his works as a tool to compare deals of personal desire and collective good (Demetz, 1962), which reflect the challenges of the complex adaptive process itself.

Weill was opposed to the hedonistic nature of nineteenth century opera, and aimed his theatre squarely at the bourgeois (Juchem, 2009). Described as a ballet chante or satire with music (Heisler, 2006), but in fact a monodrama with four part chorus cameo, Die Sieben Todsünden became an experiment in genre and gender bending: Anna’s mother is played by a baritone. The two protagonists, a dancer (silent) and a singer, presented the two sides of the female, and Anna I has historically been played with some androgyny, following the lead of Weill’s wife, Lotte Lenya.

Weill professed a lifelong goal of transforming opera and musical theatre, and espoused his own conception of Gesamtkunstwerk.92 Die Sieben Todsünden is socio-political satire of 1930s Germany. The discussion currently heard on the political left that America’s excesses are responsible for rampant materialism and the destruction of core values, coupled with religious piety, has clear and present parallels with Brecht’s own views on America in the 1930s (Ruland, 1963). It allows the presentation of two sides of any story. Some of the work is set in New Orleans. Similar social conditions could be found in the USA during 2005, as Hurricane Katrina decimated the city.

This production sought to bring Weill’s idea of New Orleans into a new century, lifting a potentially nostalgic, period cabaret to a bitter analysis of the failures of protection, of faith and humanity that occurred so recently after Hurricane Katrina. This updating revives the political

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92 Gesamtkunstwerk is defined as a complete or total work of art.
saliency of the work, honouring the express intent of Brecht and Weill. Though minimalist due to the constraints of space and funding, the production attempted to personalise the story of the Annas, and personalising politics (Ziolkowski, 2009).

Perhaps unintended by Weill and Brecht, a feminist reading of the work also can be seen. Anna faces choices of great spiritual weight. She survives, battered, to return home from her excursion into a man’s world, chastened by life in the outside world, even when not following her foolish desires. This metaphor has clear parallels with Eve Klein’s *The Pomegranate Cycle* in its consideration of female transgression of expected mores. This is also a repeated trope in opera heroines. Klein’s libretto is overtly grounded in feminist discourse while Weill’s is a transgressive and salient political tale. The two Annas represent two expectations of the female, two choices of path, two destinies. Yet, as the libretto states, women share a past, a future, a heart and a pocketbook. This dichotomy is at the core of Weill’s cynicism: Anna will experience suffering even if she denies herself that which she seeks.

At its core, this story details the enculturation of a woman in a world dominated by bourgeois materialism and religious piety. This performance was an attempt by the author to present the journey of Anna as a slow descent into the inevitable trials and choices of living in “entitled” America. Hurricane Katrina brought to life the significant parallels between the world of Weill and Brecht in 1933 and current-day America.

**Rationale**

This is a *tour de force* for the soprano, essentially functioning as an extended monologue with dance mirroring the sung action and internal dialogue of the protagonist, with cameos from her dysfunctional family. The didacticism brings challenges for the director in creating a coherent narrative through the episodic structure.

In historically accurate performance, singers attempt to emulate a Berlin cabaret singer of the 1930s. This brings a certain harsh and biting colour, following the tradition of Lotte Lenya, Ute Lemper and Theresa Stratas. The tessitura is low for the soprano and there is a good deal of guttural chest singing required. Colour and tone are vital dramatic tools and the voice must convey the ugliness of life as well as its simplicity and purity. Duality is a common theme for Weill (Heisler, 2006), reflected in the two sides of Anna’s personality in the libretto. The singer must display the complexity of the two Annas’ journey and transformation through both vocalisation and physicality. As a singer who values beauty as well as truth, this performance aimed to express *chiaroscuro*, expanding the sound possibilities to include moments of light touch and deftness in the voice, along with heft and harshness, creating a more modern sensibility in the voice, using a range of colours and styles that are also reflected in the visual world.
Despite the large ensemble, this work is described as a monodrama due to the dominance of Anna I’s music and the way the narrative is framed through her eyes. None of the other characters exist, except as constructed by Anna I. Anna II is a reflection of her choices and her family are her memories. It combines extremely accessible music, with dramatic narrative propulsion, complexity and humour. Its very popularity and use of eclecticism led to charges that Weill was not a serious composer, charges that continue in some operatic circles today. Academia has, on the other hand, recognized the pivotal role Weill’s music has played in the march to postmodernism and the development of this sub-genre of monodrama as well as his contributions to modernising opera (Albrecht, 2000).

Relevance
The sins are loosely derived from the ten commandments, but were in essence a theological construction of religious monks of the Middle Ages, designed to further oppress and control the growing bourgeois classes by imposing further religious order on them (Bloomfield, 1941). Satirically, this work speaks to, and of, the petit bourgeoisie. The Annas fall into each of the Seven Deadly Sins and must repent of each in turn. Whether or not preordained, there is little rationalism or moral justification for the punishments meted out when a sin is committed. Cynicism and humour in the libretto show that the bourgeois don’t ever really suffer (Knight, 2004).

Brecht and Weill’s work is famous for aiming its spirited cynicism of the political structure, its Marxist leanings, and its agitation-driven agenda directly at the bourgeoisie. Brecht’s stated subtext of social revolution (Martin & Bial, 2000) led to his influence growing in the USA (Ruland, 1963). Weill, too, found his career and musical style/idiom changed substantially and consciously upon moving to the USA. His musical language began to reflect the confluence between 1930s Berlin cabaret and a burgeoning American musical theatre (Kemp, 1973).

Brecht’s influence on acting theory in the USA continues, despite his relative lack of popularity in the home of his birth (Demetz, 1962), (Ferran, 1994). When preparing this work for performance, the relevance of Brecht’s polemic for the present time raised issues of authenticity and socio-cultural context. Brecht’s stated view that there should not be a focus on narrative flow but a focus on didacticism (Demetz, 1962) presents challenges for staging as the narrative needs to be drawn out in rehearsal.

The seven vignettes contain stark contrasts, yet a narrative pulse frames the work through the seven years of Anna’s journeying. This production honoured Brecht’s intention to criticize the empty materialism of the bourgeoisie and empty religiosity through the metaphor of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It was equally vital that the work delivered the intended cynicism of Brecht and Weill. Brecht’s tendency to resort to dogma (Juchem, 2009) was reduced by finding the humour in
his cynicism, accessed through Weill’s subversive music. This challenges the collaborative emergent process, tending to favour a strong rhetoric and individual vision.

**Reinvention**

This collaboration was intended to be an exercise in performer/director as *auteur*. The *mise-en-scène* was firmly established in the opening rehearsal with a clear vision statement by the director. Despite the collaborative feel of rehearsals, stage directions were given in an *emergent layering* process, following the model of Willene Gunn, where external decisions are clearly elucidated and performers assimilate these ideas into their own conceptions of narrative and character. The work was realised with minimal lighting and little budget for set or props. Despite the strength of the director’s vision, a collaborative spirit was evidenced in a number of ways. The director asked each performer to proactively develop their character’s dramatic arc. Minimal changes were made to these characterizations and always with a light touch. Each performer sourced their own costumes within the established brief set by the director, given budget constraints. As in any cooperative theatre project, there was a high degree of individual contribution encouraged, balancing out the extra agency given to director/performer with dual roles to keep the process as collaborative as possible. A triumvirate organically formed with Director/Conductor/Other performers.

This work was imagined as a black box *transformative mise-en-scène* production, with heavy use of projections for scene locations. The set, while minimal, reflected the American dream – a house in the suburbs, consumer goods and chattels, preponderance of red, white and blue coloration bleeding onto the set and referencing nationalism in America. The set projections and hard set pieces also included a repeated motif of a moving capital “I” to reflect the narcissism evident in the sisters’ subtext. The use of projections clearly located the work and made its socio-political message explicit. The lack of an elaborate lighting rig was overcome by simplification and innovative use of lighting with the projections. The director also relied on excellent supporting actors who all had experience in collaborative theatre. Casting Anna II as a pole dancer and gymnast was both a nod to the cabaret roots of this work and the contortions the sisters performed in seeking wealth and fame. Following the *Regietheater* model, the overarching visual narrative was intricate and proscriptive. Performers were asked to reflect on this frame to create an *outside-in* response to the given directorial stimulus. Practically, however, once the frame was introduced, the directorial style resembled Gunn’s emergent layering. For example, the family scene

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93 The cast comprised Michael Halliwell, Javier Vilarino, Simon Halligan, David Commissio and Suzie Q as Anna II.

94 Performing the work at Slide Bar in Darlinghurst, Sydney, also allowed for contemplation of the different performance spaces available in a new subgenre. Slide Bar was the perfect venue for this work, with a known reputation for cabaret and a dark, brooding Paris nightclub fit-out.
developed organically from a heavily scripted staging to a cynical comedy, as each character was encouraged to develop their own subtext for the scene.

Peter Sellars’s famous 1993 reading of the work teeters between symbolism and hyperrealism, an approach that may have suited Brecht’s didacticism (Heisler, 2006). Although minimalist due to the constraints of space and funding, this staging tried to personalize the story of the Annas, exploring the dicta the personal is political (Hanisch, 1978). True theatrical motion was created by juxtaposing Hurricane Katrina onto a through-line of the sisters’ journey into metaphorical hell and back. Largely unintentionally, this allowed a feminist reading of the work to open up.

The cynicism with which Brecht presents this worldview can derail nuanced acting, but this performance presented the journey of Anna as a slow descent into the inevitable pitfalls of living in an entitled America. In weaving popular idiom into complex musical structures (Taylor, 2002; Kemp, 1973), Weill placed the libretto firmly in his time. This production gave the same overt Zeitgenossenschaft in focussing on Hurricane Katrina. This brought to life the significant parallels between the world of Weill and Brecht in 1933 and contemporary America. Creating light and shade in narrative, symbol and in voice was the aim of this production, achieved through metaphor, humour, cynicism and genuine narrative flow, placed onto the Regietheater mise-en-scène of a failure of government assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The process became truly adaptive, collaborative and character detail became more emergent as the process continued.
Conclusions on performance practice research

Didacticism always assumes a strong author’s voice which was reflected in the authoritative directorial stamp, yet this production showed that narrative can be adapted by any and all collaborators, without compromising Brechtian ideals or threatening authorship, theatrality or performativity. Didacticism is the perfect fit to experiment with *transformative mise-en-scène*, as didacticism gives a strong external frame for the work, within which experimentation can occur. Brecht’s intent is highly authoritative and drawn in large strokes, yet experimentation is possible within the detail of the narrative, which is not as prescriptive.

This modernist mid-century iteration of monodrama, using multiple performing techniques, naturally led to the project trying to emulate the directing style of Lepage’s *transformative mise-en-scène*. Despite the clear authority the director/singer had over the project, a willingness to allow experimentation, improvisation and a clearly articulated respect for the roles of all contributors formed a very successful, emergent rehearsal process with a triumvirate formed between director/conductor/ensemble singers. Conversations and improvisations moved easily between the three groups, with the director propelling the large idea or frame and others contributing detail within it. Anna II physically reflected the subtext of Anna I.

There are always struggles for interpretation when directing oneself, due to the loss of the distinct perspective of the “other” and the inability to sit outside the proscenium to observe one’s own characterization. This lack of objectivity also may mean the framing of the work is compromised as the intricacies of playing a role compete with the direction. This certainly occurred at times in development, yet the use of a Regietheater design set a strong agenda for rehearsals, with detailed discussion at the initial call and a call for experimentation in rehearsal with the strong set elements acting as a frame or rule for the adaptation that occurred. This avoids chaos in rehearsal and minimises anxiety for participants.

While the rehearsal period was relatively free from conflict, this may have in part resulted from the elevated status of director/performer. There was an informal and unstated hierarchy that sprung from multiple roles played by the author. Surprisingly, this did not undermine the complex adaptive process, just as Lepage’s elevated status as lauded director does not appear to undermine the flat structure of his rehearsal room. In fact, self-assessment and adaptive thinking were demanded of the performers as the director was not always available to observe their visual world directly. The result was an ensemble that functioned as a unit (including dancer), adapting and

95 Such a process occurred for the organiser Ames (1993) in his experiment on building a collaborative opera project.
THE INFALLIBLE PROTAGONIST

responding to problems and challenges through one’s own impetus, yet drawn back into the visual world of the director when necessary. Stepping inside and outside the frame gave a visual cue to performers that I was functioning as either director or singer. Other performers adapted to this visual cue without any discussion that this would occur. The conductor’s role expanded and contracted as necessary. Particularly while the author was onstage as Anna I, the conductor would comment on the visual world as he had a good sense of the frame of the narrative. This was a perfect example of complexity theory in practice, with an organic set of adaptive norms developing between participants based on the author’s movement in or outside the performing space. There is an important element of trust that must be established before any rule changes such as this can occur. Positive relationships between all participants were established early in the rehearsal period to enable this.

Despite the dual director/performer’s role undertaken by a single participant, this rehearsal took on a very straightforward triangular structure. This did not diminish the power of each performer, due to the freedom and self-direction afforded them in the rehearsal process. Making bold place and time choices when creating a mise-en-scène builds a large visual frame around the piece. Within that frame, the rehearsal process established adaptive patterns encouraging noise, improvisation, collaboration within three clear nodes – director, performers and conductor. Due to the large orchestra required, the conductor was authoritative and active in rehearsal, never usurping the director’s vision but showing that density provides its own challenges and groups functioning together need prescriptive rules to function collaboratively.

The director’s overarching need to convince the audience of protagonist Anna I’s world-view rendered all characterisations as constructs of Anna’s frame. Thus the larger aesthetic was always referenced back to Anna and her journey. Geographic movements were metaphors for Anna’s internal conflict, worked out between Anna I, Anna II, the supporting characters, the orchestra, conductor and sound world, space and place. Participants saw this work as entirely authored by the director/performer, yet within the larger frame all participants had great freedom to create complex characterisations and orchestration. This performance was an excellent example of the usefulness of Lepage’s framing method. Within a bold frame or vision, authorship was established with the director. Strong authorship of bold political ideas in a transformative mise-en-scène gave way in rehearsal to a truly collaborative emergent process that was highly successful as measured by participants.

The accompanying recording of this performance is evidence of the success of this collaboration. Despite the numbers of performers being large, the concept of a triumvirate with the ability to adapt and change to collective established norms was not lost. Patterns of behaviour and boundaries between roles were highly fluid. A combination of directorial techniques was also
possible, while taking on myriad roles and moving between them with cover from other members of the triumvirate.
8. Conclusions and suggestions for further research

In creative collaborations with fewer vectors, such as monodrama rehearsals, complexity theory is an apt metaphor for how the rehearsal period is structured. Since no one agent can bring the performance to fruition, monodrama rehearsals make collaboration and adaptation possible. Creating a framework that recognises and defines each role early on in the process reduces anxiety and ego, both of which are anathema to effective collaboration. Complexity theory is the best descriptor of a creative process moving from an established set of rules of engagement, through chaos to the establishment of nodes. Repeated patterning around acceptable nodes leads to successful performance. Rehearsing for monodrama performance is always an emergent process. Roles expand and contract organically depending on the requirements of the system. All these parameters make monodrama a fascinating creative iteration of the complex adaptive process, easily analysed and essentially flat in structure.

Brown and Eisenhardt’s (1997) keys to “success” of a complexity model or system (see Figure 4) can be applied to monodrama:

1. The creation of a limited structure with the ability to design and improvise. The key to success is adequate and extensive communication between the three members of the triumvirate;
2. Monodrama tests futurist models using low cost, low risk methodologies; and
3. The steps taken in a rehearsal process link past and future, showing progress and change that is driven from repetition of adaptive norms.

If this process is applied, this research indicates that self-reported successful performance can occur in monodrama. In each of the three monodrama performances discussed within this dissertation, the level of discussion, collaboration, adaptability of roles and collaborative patterning for performance was shown to be greater than in an operatic rehearsal. This may simply be for pragmatic reasons – time, numbers of participants - or that the norms of practice in monodrama are more conducive to heterarchy. Power relationships were also less complicated when norms (or rules) were set up in early rehearsals and then adjusted through open communication and adaptation. All the projects involved improvisation and adaptability and in each project participants perceived that systems were negotiated and emerged as patterns were tested and repeated in rehearsal. Where the collaboration was perceived to be successful, resulting performances were correspondingly successful.

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96 Sheer numbers of participants, for example.
97 As a sub-genre of opera without all the constrictions of tradition and convention, monodrama is able to test new ways of producing music drama, including performing space, instrumentation, style, vocalization and narrative structure.
The relationship between conductor and director varies widely in a rehearsal room, although all respondents emphasised the importance of boundaries being fluid, based on personalities and rehearsal requirements. It is easier to weaken those boundaries when the collaboration is successful; boundaries are drawn strongly when interpersonal relationships are less functional. This proves that adaptability is central to the complex model which can easily be undermined when ego or other anxiety-producing conditions occur. Reasonableness is a central tenet of a complex adaptive system.

Organisational tools as different as collaborative transformative mise-en-scène, pioneered by Robert Lepage, or layering complexity, as practiced by Willene Gunn, are both shown to function effectively as complex adaptive systems in monodrama. Either of these methods, when filtered through a process of respectful creative collaboration, demonstrates how complexity theory can be instructive in the creative workspace. As evidenced in the work of Lepage and Gunn, applied in the author’s own performance practice research, monodrama rehearsals are appropriate models for the use of complex adaptive systems.

The infallibility of the protagonist’s view in monodrama performance is also reflected in the importance of the performer’s contribution to the rehearsal process. It equals that of conductor and director in the triumvirate: in a departure from the hierarchy of other musical collaborations such as opera. Monodrama rehearsals represent a relatively new and unique dynamic: complex adaptive systems may be instructive for other kinds of creative collaboration. It is hoped this research contributes to a currently under-researched area of performance and its possibilities for use in the creative arts.

Increased interest in monodrama should lead to further development of programs and commissions devoted to the exploration of this unique sub-genre. Encouraging composers to write in this form allows performers to experience the demands of virtuosity and the possibilities for unique and complex collaborations. Monodramas are relatively inexpensive for companies to produce within a uniquely complex, eclectic, dynamic, democratic and transformative framework.

Further research is required to test other creative applications of complexity theory, including in larger ensembles and performing environments, as authority and order become more valuable assets for group control the larger the ensemble. Opera rehearsals are evidence that the more performers involved, the less agency they obtain in the process and the less collaborative it becomes. Even so, participants in this study note that where conditions of rehearsal encourage collaboration, adaptive processes can occur and complex norms are seen in repeated patterning of positive outcomes. Further study is needed to show a wider application in other creative workspaces and for greater numbers of participants such as in an opera rehearsal.
The move from chaos through a complex adaptive system to a successful performance outcome has been shown to be effective in monodrama where ego or anxiety are kept from overriding artistic aims. Complex patterning in monodrama relies on creating well-defined nodes and linkages that reflect the style, traits and skills of each participant in the process. Further research is indicated to test the usefulness of complex adaptive systems in larger creative collaborations.

Students of opera and monodrama and young directors should be expressly taught the importance of collaborative skills and the artistic imperative as part of their coursework in conservatories. The importance of programming conditions of mutual respect and establishing roles early in the rehearsal process cannot be understated and may equip them for the reality of collaborative performance practices. Creative use of complexity theory requires flexibility, adaptability, creativity, a high degree of specific knowledge and respect for other participants’ roles. A monodrama rehearsal is truly unique: a modern iteration of a heterarchical system. It challenges traditional operatic structures and opens up the possibility for new understandings of process and performance.

A complex adaptive system takes these disparate elements, finds the linkages that exist between nodes and repeats successful patterns. It is hoped that this research will provide a rubric for configuring effective, creative rehearsal norms or frames that encourage collaborative, complex adaptive processes. Results from both qualitative and performance practice research in this study show that complex adaptive systems regularly occur in monodrama rehearsals. This unique example of complexity theory functioning in the creative arts is shown to be effective when the audience tacitly accepts the infallibility of the monodrama protagonist.
9. References


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http://doi.org/10.2307/1691002


http://doi.org/10.1215/01610775-25-2-9


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrSzPOu6JIA&feature=youtube_gdata_player


THE INFALLIBLE PROTAGONIST


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http://doi.org/10.2307/832549


http://doi.org/10.1353/ccs.0.0000


10. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Cover letter

Associate Professor Michael Halliwell
Conservatorium of Music
University of Sydney
NSW 2006

August 1, 2013

Dear Sir or Madam:

RE: DOCTORAL PROJECT
THE DYNAMICS OF OPERA PREPARATION, INTERVIEWS WITH DIRECTORS,
CONDUCTORS AND SINGERS

One of my doctoral students at the University of Sydney is currently conducting a study on the unique rehearsal process required to prepare an opera for performance. As part of the research, Narelle Yeo is interviewing eminent opera professionals about the way their rehearsal process is structured. She would very much like to interview you as a part of this study, to gain insights on your view of the role of [conductor/director/singer] in this process. The interview is semi-structured in nature and would last for approximately 30 minutes. The interview would be audio and/or video recorded and then transcribed. Narelle is planning to conduct interviews at a time suitable to you. If you are willing and able to be a part of this research, please contact Narelle Yeo on 0411104905 or at nyeo5742@uni.sydney.edu.au. She will follow up with a phone call within a week to answer any questions you may have.

I would be so appreciative if you are able to assist in this important study. Attached is a participation information statement (PIS) for your information. Thank you in advance for your assistance,

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Michael Halliwell
93511408
Michael.Halliwell@sydney.edu.au
(1) **What is the study about?**

This project aims to analyse the complex dynamics at play in the preparation of an opera and an operatic monodrama for performance. The roles of director, conductor and singer are studied through semi-structured interviews with all major stakeholders in the operatic rehearsal process. Results will show the unique sociological structure specific to opera, in contrast to other live art forms, and draw out important elements which lead to superior performance.

(2) **Who is carrying out the study?**

The study is being conducted by Narelle Yeo, under the supervision of Michael Halliwell, for the degree of Doctorate of Musical Arts.

(3) **What does the study involve?**

This project involves your participation in a semi-structured interview, which will be audio and/or video recorded and transcribed for analysis. The study can also be completed online through email should that be more suitable to your time constraints.

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview about the opera rehearsal process.

(4) **How much time will the study take?**

Interviews should last 30 minutes, with an added 5 minutes for collection of demographic data.

(5) **Can I withdraw from the study?**

This study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with The University of Sydney. If you withdraw, your interview will be removed from the study and any transcriptions and audio recordings will be destroyed.

(6) **Will anyone else know the results?**
All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

It is hoped this study will demystify aspects of the rehearsal process for opera and operatic monodrama, in much the same way as a wide body of recent literature has for theatre.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes.

(9) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Narelle Yeo will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Narelle Yeo at 0411104905 or narelle.yeo@sydney.edu.au, or Supervisor Dr. Michael Halliwell at 9351 1408.

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on 0011 61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); 0011 61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ...............................................................................[PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in the research project

TITLE:  
Opera and monodrama in rehearsal: the triangle of influence in preparing for operatic performance: intersection of director, conductor and singer.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Sydney now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

6. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the audio/video recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

7. I consent to: –
   i) Audio-taping YES ☐ NO ☐
   ii) Video-taping YES ☐ NO ☐
   iii) Being identified in published work YES ☐ NO ☐

Signed: ........................................................................................................................................

Name/Date: .....................................................................................................................................
Appendix 4 – Statistical data

"THE INFALLIBLE PROTAGONIST"
A STUDY OF COMPLEXITY THEORY
AND REHEARSAL DYNAMICS IN
MONODRAMA
Wednesday, January 07, 2015

13
Total Responses
Date Created: Friday, November 28, 2014
Complete Responses: 13
Have you read and understood the Participant Information Sheet?

**Answer Choices**

- **Yes**
  - Responses: 13 (100.00%)

- **No**
  - Responses: 0 (0.00%)

**Total Responses:** 13
At any time if I do not wish to continue, my answers will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. Do you consent to participating in the study?

Answered: 13  Skipped: 0

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<th>Answer Choice</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Powered by SurveyMonkey
at any time if I do not wish to continue, my answers will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. Do you consent to participating in the study?

Answered: 13  Skipped: 0

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<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>
Q3: Do you agree to being identified in published work?
Answered: 13  Skipped: 0

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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23.19%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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Q5: What is your age?
Answered: 10  Skipped: 3

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<td>17 or younger</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
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<td>50-59</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or older</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
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</table>
Q6: Are you male or female?

Answered: 13  Skipped: 0

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<th>Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 (46.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 (38.46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
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</table>
Q7: In what country do you currently reside?
Answered: 13  Skipped: 0

Answer Choices | Responses
---|---
Australia | 81.54% 8
United States | 38.77% 4
Other (please specify) | 7.69% 1
Total Respondents: 13
Q8: Demographics: Are you a singer, conductor or director? (select all that apply)

Answered: 13  Skipped: 0

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<th>Responses</th>
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<td>Singer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>38.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>38.00%</td>
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Q20: Which of the following is the best indicator that an operatic performance has been successful?

Answered: 10  Skipped: 3

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<td>Positive audience feedback</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical acclaim</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast and crew perceptions</td>
<td>58.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>52.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>52.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SurveyMonkey