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**AN ENQUIRY INTO THE RELEVANCE OF THE  
PRACTICES OF COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE TO  
CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEATRE MAKING**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts by research**

**The University of Huddersfield**

**NOVEMBER 2014**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This practical research project seeks to explore specific performance techniques employed in Commedia dell'Arte performances (I will henceforth abbreviate Commedia dell'Arte to CDA), and to consider whether they have relevance to feminist theatre making in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Initially, I made a performance piece entitled *Save Me*. I have now analysed the process of construction and performance of my work. My particular focus is on the use of CDA techniques in relation to third wave feminist ideas, and their relevance to contemporary feminist theatre making. I will draw conclusions relating to my enquiries.

In Section Two, I examine in detail the significance of CDA's use of mask and stock characters. I review both CDA's own practices, and those who claim (or are claimed by others) to operate in their tradition. I explore how the techniques that CDA employ create distorted stereotypes, and relate these practices to twentieth century concepts of alienation and disturbance. This analysis provides evidence as to the extent to which CDA practices informed and assisted me in my devising of a contemporary performance exploring notions of feminist identity.

In Section Three, I relate my feminist perspective in devising *Save Me* to the history of feminism and the emergence of third-wave feminism towards the end of the last century. I examine a range of feminist theatre practice, and consider how this relates to the use of theatrical devices and techniques that link to the CDA tradition. This analysis provides evidence as to whether the feminist perspective I have espoused, and the fractured female identity I sought to portray, is able to be articulated using the lexicon of CDA related techniques.

In Section Four, I report on how *Save Me* was actually devised and the extent to which I did engage with CDA related techniques. I provide a detailed example of the devising process; constantly referring to specific episodes in *Save Me*. In addition, I discuss the disturbance techniques I employed, explaining how and to what effect I intended to use them. In exploring my own practice, I provide a synthesis that offers an analysis of the various transpositions that I have identified that relate my practice to that of CDA. This section concludes with a review of my finished work and a detailed analysis of the theatrical devices that it utilised.

Finally, in Section Five, I review the objectives set for this project, in the light of the experience of completing it. I attempt to draw together the various strands of work and draw firm conclusions.

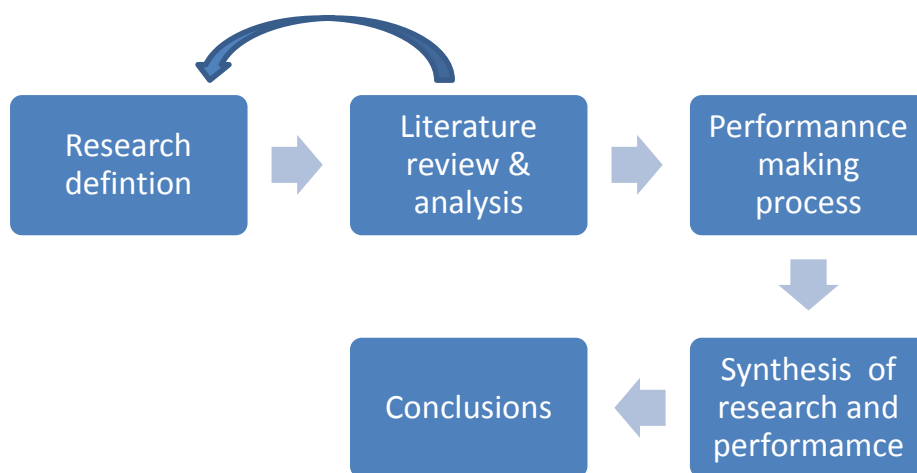
## 1.2 Methodology

### 1.2.1 Summary

This dissertation is only part of my research project. The other part is the devising and performance of a one-woman show *Save Me*. The full script for *Save Me* is reproduced as Appendix 1 to this report and a recording of a performance is also available.

There were five distinct stages to the development of the project as shown in the figure below.

**Figure 1 - Project Process**



### 1.2.2 Development of research aims

At the outset (2011), when the research proposal was originally framed, my ideas were primarily focused on the parodic nature of CDA's stock characters and masks. I planned to create my own parodic performance to 'expose' the various nonsenses of popular gender stereotyping.

However, as I studied the place of CDA in the evolution of European theatre practice, I began to appreciate that CDA had a wider significance. For example, CDA's practices are now seen as a significant pre-cursor to physical theatre forms. This prompted me to review how physicality and physical humour could be engaged to stimulate understanding of gender issues.

My research into feminist ideas affected the gender issues that I wanted to explore in my devised piece. Initially, I intended to focus on revealing gender as a cultural construction. However, considering CDA's link with modern subversive theatre this seemed insufficiently ambitious. Such an approach would imply lampooning ideas that were already out of fashion. In 2013, how many young British women still see gender as the defining element of their identity (an essentialist perspective)? Taking my cue from CDA, I sought to target the current aspirational orthodoxy and therefore changed my target and aimed at the 'empowered' modern woman.

The key to re-connecting my evolving ideas on CDA's significance, with my new target for parody, evolved from thinking about CDA's stock characters and masks. These were devices that provided a symbol of identity. In my one woman show I would be representing one person's (although identified clearly representative of a particular post-feminist stereotype) incongruous identity aspirations, and using physical theatre to convey meaning to the audience.

Whilst I acknowledge the difficulty in claiming, as historical fact, any subversive effect that CDA had upon its audiences, I have made a case (addressed in section 2) that implies the subversive potentialities that exist within the form. Thus, despite the absence of any substantial evidence that CDA triggered serious social unrest, there is an absolute possibility of subversion associated with the parody of the status quo.

I have sought, through *Save Me*, to trigger audience unease with the circumstances of the 'empowered post-feminist' woman. I have not used mask at all, but I explored other means, mainly relying on physical theatre techniques, and a self-written performance text, to distort and make grotesque various recognisable identity elements of contemporary young women.

### **1.2.3 Literature review and analysis**

In order to commit fully to my modified research aims, I have identified two strands of literature research that informed and assisted me in devising and analysing *Save Me*. The first strand of literature research concerns Commedia dell'Arte's practices (particularly the use of stock characters and masks) and their significance and influence on subsequent theatre practice. The second strand relates to the various ways that feminist ideas have been promoted through theatrical performance. (Aston, 1995, p.93).

Unfortunately, there is little in the way of direct linkage between CDA and feminism. This is unsurprising as the origins of modern feminism are too recent to have intersected with CDA practice. Diamond has suggested that Bertolt Brecht's 'cornerstone' theory *Verfremdungseffekt* (referred to in this report as *alienation theory*) can provide a useful framework towards understanding the significance of CDA's practices, as well as contributing toward the development of ideas within feminist theatre practice (Diamond, 1988). I have leaned on Diamond's analysis, and also linked Brecht's theories to Aston's 'spheres of disturbance' (1999, p18). The link between CDA and feminist theatre practice is therefore a very practical one. Both utilise theatrical devices that are identified by Brecht and Aston as distancing or disturbing audiences.

### **1.2.4 Performance-making process**

The performance making process is not merely a vehicle for assessing the relevance of the ideas gleaned from the literature research. It also has independent validity as a means of action research for me as the creator and performer of *Save Me*. This dissertation focuses attention on relevant extracts of the performance making process. The relevance is determined by the links to CDA practices and to the feminist ideas relating to identity that are being explored in the work. The performance process is recoded in three phases reflecting the chronological sequence of events.

- a) The conceptualisation stage where the 'experiment' was designed. This reflects the identification of the ideas to be promoted.
- b) The development phase involved rehearsal and development and the means (narrative structure choreography etc.) by which the intended effect on the audience was created
- c) The performances themselves, three in total represent the third stage followed by a final retrospective evaluation and analysis of the total process

### 1.2.5 *Synthesis*

The experience of the performance-making project inevitably affected the perception of relevance of certain findings from the research of literature. Whilst it may be unwise to generalise from a single production experience, the intensity of my involvement (with the production) compelled me to ponder the significance of certain performance techniques in relation to certain feminist ideas.

Whilst I had other critical concerns, such as to be entertaining and to demonstrate professional production standards, I was able to focus on the relevance of my practice to CDA related techniques and to my feminist perspective. CDA's stock character and mask, has encouraged me to seek a wider scope for techniques of *Alienation (Brechtian)*. Aiming towards that which Elaine Aston refers to as 'the sphere of disturbance' I have drawn from multiple sources, incorporating the need for paradox in my work, and what is essentially a commitment to developing a functional relationship between theory and practice.

### 1.2.6 *Conclusions*

I expected my conclusions to be tentative. However, I have been surprised by the unambiguity of the research findings. Whichever perspective is adopted, whether looking at feminist ideas, the linkage of various theatrical devices to CDA practice, or my own experience in devising and performing the work, the conclusion is the same.

Commedia dell'Arte practices remain relevant and useful for modern feminist theatre-making.

What I cannot say, and is properly beyond the scope of this project, is whether the audience for my work was stimulated to ponder any of the same issues of feminine identity that I was attempting to expose. However, the validity of my conclusions about CDA's relevance is not jeopardised by this uncertainty.

## 1.3 *Context*

### 1.3.1 *The Life Cycle of the CDA Art Form – sixteenth to eighteenth centuries*

It is hard to overestimate the significance of the Renaissance in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This was a time of economic growth, development of ideas and artistic achievement.

Commedia dell'Arte emerged as a distinct performance form during the same period that other forms of theatre were developing (Neoclassicism and Renaissance Drama). Whereas these other forms of dramatic art were scripted and performed inside with elaborate sets for the privileged few, CDA was, in its initial period, almost entirely unscripted, frequently performed outside with few props and accessible to those without means.

The popularity and success of these early troupes attracted patronage and attracted imitators. By the second-half of the sixteenth century the practice of Italian Comedy (as CDA's work was known outside Italy) had spread widely in Western and Central Europe

CDA had its late-flourishing in the mid eighteenth century when Italian playwrights Goldoni and Cozzi provide scripted works closely linked to recognisable CDA storylines. Thereafter, although its practices have never been entirely extinguished, it represents a sideline or footnote to the mainstream development of theatre practice.



### 1.3.2 Key elements of *Commedia dell'Arte* (CDA) performance practice

Emerging sometime in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Rudlin, 1994, p.23, Philips, 1954 p.18) CDA is thought to have been the populist theatre of its day. Described by Rudlin as 'an oral tradition and not a literary one' CDA remains a relatively 'elusive' form (Rudlin, 1994, p.2). Despite its elusiveness, scholars recognise that CDA players would have been highly skilled in the art of improvisation (Grewar, 1993, p.21). In his book *Tricks of the Trade*, Dario Fo describes CDA as a 'genuinely revolutionary approach to theatre making'. He explains 'the actor-performer is author, producer, storyteller, director...' and 'the entire theatrical production rests on their shoulders' (Fo, 1987, p.13)

Notwithstanding the level of creative responsibility assumed by its actors, CDA has a distinct repertoire of hierarchical stock characters, each of which is represented by a distinctive mask and costume. Unlike the Greek masked theatre tradition, CDA's masks are always half masks and therefore the actor is always required to speak. Dario Fo explains CDA is a form of theatre based on a combination of dialogue and action, on spoken monologue and performed gesture' (1987, p.12). Furthermore, CDA masks are designed to resemble animals, as Rudlin observes 'such animal mimicry is at the source of many, if not all, of the masks of *Commedia Dell'Arte*' and therefore a predictable element of most of CD's stock character. The consequent distorted reality presented by the CDA stock characters provided an entertaining means of lampooning the established social hierarchy, whilst avoiding too close a resemblance to any real person.

The literal translation of *Commedia dell'Arte* is *Comedy of Art*; an indication of the nature of the form, famously recognised for producing 'popular farces and parodies' (Duchartre, 1966, p.18). According to Rudlin 'it has been fashion to proclaim the *Commedia dell'Arte* as a theatre of the proletarian protest against oppression' (1994, p.9).

Despite the controversy surrounding CDA's political intent (Henke, 2007, p.229), it should be noted that CDA is a significant point of reference for political theatre giants Franca Rame and Dario Fo. Furthermore, it is through their practice that links between Bertolt Brecht and *Commedia dell'Arte* begin to emerge. Although Brecht did not acknowledge any connection between his alienation theory and CDA, it is plausible to make this link. Many of the theatrical devices used in CDA practice are ones that Brecht identified as being effective to disrupt naturalistic communication with audiences.

Among its various aspects of appeal for contemporary theatre makers, CDA has been acknowledged as a significant strand in the evolution of European theatre practice (Wright, 2006, p.278) particularly those emerging around the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Anderson, 1998).

'*Commedia dell'Arte* seemed the ideal antidote to the theatre of emotion and the naturalistic play, and it also spurred the actor towards physical, movement-based performance.' (Anderson, 1998, p.169)

This external non-naturalistic approach emerging from the practicality of wearing a mask has since been translated into unmasked performance, making a significant contribution to the category of "physical theatre" and physical comedy in particular (Le Coq, 2009, xi, Wright, 2007, p.278 ). The mask was not the only non-naturalistic device employed in CDA's work. According to Crain the term slapstick originates directly from the CDA tradition. A slapstick was a hinged wooden bat used by Harlequin to 'beat posteriors or those he didn't like' (Craine, 2011, p.511).

Seeking to understand the relevance of the CDA form to this research project, I have looked specifically at how to mimic the effect associated with the use of stock character and mask, without actually employing masks. I have proposed other means (properly comparable to CDA) to reveal identity as a construction. Despite not using an actual mask in this project, the levels of 'disturbance' (a term discussed in greater detail in section 3) created through physical techniques, allied to a quick-fire non naturalistic acting style, will be seen to function in the same way as a mask in performance. The performance of *Save Me* does not seek to mimic CDA's every practice but to test the relevance of its tradition in a contemporary context.

### **1.3.3 A CDA innovation – Women performers**

The typical CDA troupe (10 strong) usually included three women. Invariably one was a member of the ruling class and two were servants (*servetta*). This gender diversity was an innovation, because other contemporary theatre forms did not offer women the opportunity to participate.

Furthermore, as befitted an art form that majored on comic role reversal the portrayal of the weaker sex was contrary to the normal expectation in society. The two most popular female stock characters were Columbina and Isabella. Columbina, a *servetta*, is usually portrayed as smart, observant and a man-hunter. Isabella, the daughter of a master, was one of the lovers and, in her renowned piece 'The Madness of Isabella explored the madness of unrequited love before returning to sanity by the operation of magic.

These women negotiated patriarchy in the similar fashion to the way that the servants negotiated the established social order. They paid lip service to convention, whilst demonstrating their skill in subverting it or circumventing its constraints

### **1.3.4 Feminism**

I have provided an extensive context for the feminist basis of this research in Sections 3.2 to 3.5.

If CDA's practice is diverse, and spans almost 250 years and at least three countries (George & Gossip, 1993, p.2), then feminism, despite its relatively recent origins is, if anything, more diverse. As befits a movement, or an umbrella term for ideologies, there is no acknowledged central authority. The word feminist now prefaces a range of subjects from art to economics to sociology and, of course, theatre.

I have confined this research to the well-trodden paths of 'mainstream' feminist theory, but even in this domain, there are some dense thickets of ideology that are not directly relevant to my aims. I take comfort from the fact that CDA succeeded without any convincing underlying alternative proposal for a new social order. It was sufficient for them to reveal the potential for absurdity in the status quo.

I have a similar aim with regard to the feminist perspective that I bring to *Save Me*. I have not developed a prospectus for a new feminist theory that, if applied, will right all wrongs. I simply wish to draw attention to the absurdity of the burden of irreconcilable expectations that young British women seem happy to accept.

## **2. COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE**

### **2.1 Overview**

In this section, I will attempt to deconstruct and contextualise CDA'S approach to characterisation, in order to better understand how it affects communication with audiences. Although scholars have been unable to discover any evidence of a political purpose that informed CDA's practice, some commentators regard them as providing early examples of Brecht's epic theatre (Jenkins, 2001, p.16). This analysis has assisted me in framing a strategy to create a similar effect to advance a feminist cause.

### **2.2 Making the preliminary case for CDA's significance as precursors of modern subversive theatre**

In the context of dominant early 20<sup>th</sup> century European theatre practice, CDA's approach to characterisation was, to some, particularly refreshing (Anderson, 2009, p.169, Clayton, 1994, p.51- 52). Unlike the highly individualised characters found in naturalistic forms, the stock characters and masks of CDA prefer 'typicality over personality' (Rudlin, 1994, p.34).

Boso explains that each of the stock characters in CDA represent a 'social class' position (Boso, 1994, p.67). The hierarchy of characters is based on their economic status and demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the organisation of power relations in society.

Despite speculation surrounding CDA's political purpose, (as mentioned in the introduction) there still remains a degree of ambiguity, and therefore many scholars have been hesitant in describing CDA as a 'directly political theatre' (Rudlin, 1994, p.9, Henke, 2007, p.229). Furthermore, Pickering notes the (unwelcome) impact of social categorising, suggesting it is a practice that could impede flexible thinking and reinforce the audience's prejudices (Pickering, 2001, p.3).

Is it perverse, therefore, to imagine that CDA's practices are a direct lineal antecedent of elements of modern theatre that are generally acknowledged to be subversive? For the purposes of this dissertation, Bertolt Brecht and Franca Rama are taken as primary exemplars of modern subversive theatre practice. In section 2.4.1 I explore the similarities and differences between CDA's, Brecht's and Rame's practice. Looking specifically at Brecht's play *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and Rame's *Waking Up* I aim to suggest the extent to which CDA might bare some relevance to contemporary theatre makers who like me intends to speak out of a particular political (in my case feminist) ideology.

Despite having completed a course in mask work, and spectator re-enactment of CDA performances at Lispa in 2011, I have found it difficult to assess how CDA's use of stock character and mask is received by contemporary audiences. This may reflect the difficulty for contemporary audiences of recognising those being parodied. However, what is absolutely certain is that CDA represents and plays upon the incongruities of their characters. For example, the rich and powerful are often portrayed as dim-witted whilst those in humble positions are shown to be smart and cunning (Rudlin, 1994, p.97).

### **2.3 Stock characters and stereotypes**

There is some interchangeability between the concepts of stereotypes and stock characters. Stock characters who appeared in CDA performances were recognisable stereotypes to their audiences. The word stereotype is generally interpreted as necessarily involving some distortion or exaggeration of the person portrayed, and this certainly matches well with the stock characters who appeared in CDA performances.

In similar vein to CDA, classic fairy tale literature often has its own cast of stock characters who usually perform to type. For example, Zipes notes that in the world of fairy tales there is usually at least one of the following stock characters: 'King, Queen, Prince, Princesses, soldiers, peasants, animals, and supernatural creatures (witches, fairies, elves, dwarves, goblins, giants)' (1998, p.19).

The stock characters in both fairy tales and CDA represent a shorthand approach to characterisation. In comparing and contrasting the role of stock characters in CDA and classic fairy tales, it is possible to distinguish between those that absolutely reinforce stereotypes (fairy tales), and those (CDA work) which, on some level, appear to undermine them.

For example, classic fairy tales are interpreted as having a didactic moral purpose therefore given that fairy tales "operate ideologically" and are 'more or less constructed to follow and to reinforce dominant social codes' it is no surprise that many fairy tale characters can 'be divided into two distinct groups based on gender' (Zipes, 1998, p.23). According to Zipes by 'focusing on the exemplary qualities, which distinguish the heroines from the heroes' it is possible to see how the 'dominant social codes' (from the time of their creation) have been woven into the fabric of fairy tales and stereotyped ideals have been implicitly reinforced through the characters behaviour (1998, p.24). For example, looking at the heroines of Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*, Zipes identifies a 'distinctly limited view of women'. He notes 'she lives only through the male and for marriage. The male acts and the female waits' (1998, p.24-25). Despite the shifting patterns of gender roles in contemporary society, classic fairy tales are familiar cultural texts that can be seen to work within strict (albeit dated) codes of gender stereotyping.

In CDA there is a more playful attitude toward social relations, for example the humorous role reversal between the master and the servant. The master does not behave masterfully; and it is he and not the servant that is represented as a fool (Rudlin, 1994, p.97). This is characteristic of what Charney recognises as a distinctly belonging to the CDA tradition (2005, p.238). Thus, CDA's work illuminates some of the paradoxes in the status quo. The character's function within in the narrative demonstrates a distinct contradiction to the conventional stereotyped iconography presented through the way in which they are dressed. Comparatively, the classic fairy tale characters operate on a much more predictable basis, reinforcing audience's expectations of the stereotypes. Therefore, although both CDA and fairy tales employ stereotypes, the CDA presentation encourages the audience to imagine a different reality.

It is probably misleading to claim that this aspect of CDA's practice was seriously subversive, especially when considering that CDA stock characters are fixed and are not, at the end, promoted or demoted above or below their initial social rank. Furthermore, there is no evidence that CDA performances were perceived as threatening the social order, but instead it is reported that some CDA troupes were popular with those from all strata of society (Henke, p.230).

However, despite its lack of investment in representing or resolving of any serious matters of abuse of power or the harsh realities of society's many inequalities, CDA is renowned for its light-hearted and playful representation of characters that exist within social hierarchal conventions (Trethewey, 1993, p.72). Thus, even without a serious investment in subverting social conventions, CDA's practice suggests they were aware of that these conventions existed and were not afraid to play outside of or contradict them.

Thus, unlike the (gender) stereotyping in Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*, CDA does not give "one sided representations in the interests of order, security and dominance" (Pickering, 2001, p.4). Instead, it defies the expectation of stereotype, using it (through costume, physical gesture) as a spring board from which to form a contradiction, giving access (whether intending to or not) to a more 'complex vision a more open attitude, a more flexible way of thinking' (Pickering, 2001, p. 4 - 5).

Furthermore, CDA's stock characters (master/servant) are given a narrative function that plays with, rather than reinforces, the idea of stereotype. The CDA stock character is therefore made complex through its paradoxical relationship with the stereotype. Exposing the paradox within itself, the CDA stock character is neither "simplistic" nor "reductive" of life (Brooks, cited in Rudlin 1994, p.35, p.236).

In distorting and playing with the class-based stereotype, CDA can be seen to be fundamentally subversive. The stock characters, whilst they represented recognisable stereotypes of sixteenth and seventeenth century society, were sufficiently different to be an effective means to explore a transient but different world order. The use of masks and animal characteristics provided a fantastical element that stimulated a fresh perspective.

In this section, I have begun to discuss some of the complexities present in relationship between the use of stock character and stereotype in CDA. However, merely observing the subversive potential in CDA's playful approach, and distinguishing its use of stock characters from a more conventional use of stereotypes, is not fully to understand whether and how it relates to current theatre practice. This is a critical issue for this research because without this knowledge it is unlikely that CDA's approach can be effectively transposed to the modern era.

## **2.4 CDA's legacy**

### **2.4.1 Roots of 'Epic' Theatre**

Unlike CDA troupes, Brecht and Rame had an overt and documented political agenda. Franca Rame was a feminist performance maker who shared a common Marxist ideological perspective with Brecht (Cottino – Jones, p.324). Despite the differences in their focus, both Brecht and Rame were interested in being openly critical of the political and social system in power (Cottino - Jones, 1995, p. 324). Although CDA's practice pre-dates Marxism and feminism, some of their stock characters reflect and parody the hierarchical nature of their society.

Furthermore, according to Jenkins, Rame often referred to Brecht's ideas. Furthermore, Rame acknowledged the significance of CDA in terms of providing earlier examples of what is most commonly identified as Brechtian Epic theatre. (Jenkins, 2001, p. 16)

Brecht's coining of the term 'Epic' theatre was built around the essential idea of promoting social change; appealing 'less to feelings than to the spectator's reason' (Willet, 1964, p.23). In his writings, Brecht explored the mechanisms by which the performance can engender predictable effects on the audience. Many of the techniques that he incorporated into his performances mirror those used in CDA. For example, the emphasis on communication with the spectator. Instead of ignoring the spectator Brecht (and Rame also) wanted to address them directly (Tretheway, 1993, p.71, Benjamin, 1966, p.16, Cottino –Jones, p.324). Furthermore, an examination of the characterisation in Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (I will henceforth abbreviate *The Good Woman of Setzuan* to GWS) and in Rame's *Waking Up* highlights notable similarities with CDA's type based approach to characterisation.

Esslin notes that for Brecht 'the character emerges from the social function of the individual and changes with that' (Esslin, 1971, p.88). In GWS, the character Shen Te represents a business owner. In *Waking Up*, where a woman is portrayed talking to her 'baby' (a doll), the protagonist (who does not have a name) represents a housewife, factory worker and mother. In both plays, it is the social role of the characters that drives the narrative and shapes the characters' experiences.

Focusing on the social dimension of character supports the Brechtian notion of Epic theatre whereby the 'social being determines thought' and not the other way around (Willet, 1964, p.37). In GWS good-natured Shen Te becomes a product of the capitalist establishment and is therefore forced to take on the identity of ruthless business type Shui Ta. In *Waking up* the protagonist is a product of patriarchal and capitalist social/political conventions, and is forced to take on numerous overtly conflicting social roles (Cottino- Jones, p.325).

Although Brecht and Rame do not make use of stock characters, they use other techniques to similar effect playing with the contradictory and paradoxical identity of their characters. Silberman explains the use of paradox in Brecht's work; 'constructing paradoxical situations became his method of demonstrating the incongruities of capitalist social systems' (Silberman, 2012, p.2). Thus, a technique aimed at deliberately evoking a critical response and encouraging the audience to question the permanence of the social order.

For example, Shen Te and Shui Ta overtly contradict each other. Shen Te becomes an embodiment of the conflict between communist and capitalist ideologies. Through Shen Te's (and her identity conflict) Brecht questions how personal morality can be upheld in a capitalist system. In *Waking Up* a similar self-conflict arises. The protagonist is torn between multiple social roles, none of which are easily managed simultaneously.

Both Brecht's and Rame's characters are forced to go to drastic lengths to fulfil conflicting social roles. For example, Shen Te is forced to wear a disguise and create a whole new identity. Rame's protagonist farcically attempts and fails to uphold her various social positions. Thus, both characters struggle to cope with the paradoxical nature of their social existence. Whereas CDA's stock characters are blissfully unaware of the several paradoxes they represent (Connon cited in George & Gossip 1993, p.131) the characters in Brecht's and Rame's plays are all too aware of their predicament (Cottino - Jones, p.326). Rudlin explains the presence of paradox in CDA, not as something that is to be understood by the character, but as something for the actor to master and physically express to the audience (1994, p.35). In Rame's and Brecht's work, the character's self-awareness causes them to be more seriously affected by the paradoxes in their identity. Their characters internalise the social paradoxes, and suffer angst accordingly, whereas in CDA the social paradoxes of the stock characters are externalised for the immediate pleasure and delight of the audience.

The foregoing analysis does not seek to demonstrate that Brecht and Rame followed CDA's performance practices. However, the legacy of CDA's approach can be detected in their work. Their shared non-naturalistic exploration of paradox, and their focus on social hierarchy and power, provides plausible evidence for the claim that they inherited and adapted critical elements of CDA's approach.

### **2.4.3 The significance of CDA's use of mask**

CDA's use of mask provides a distinct dimension with which to portray the stock character. In order to effectively portray a masked character the actor must rely more on conveying information through precise physical expression and gesture. Furthermore, in hiding the face, the mask heightens the theatricality of the performance and denies the spectator critical visual prompts for an 'automated' 'natural' or 'realistic' reading of the character being portrayed. Each CDA masked stock character exhibits features that associates it with a particular animal (e.g. the peacock is associated with 'The lovers' and a rooster is associated with 'Il Capitano'). Therefore, each represents the social type in a bizarre manner.

CDA's stock characters may be seen as grotesque representations of reality. At various points in this study, the use of grotesque representation is referenced as being an element of the non-naturalistic representation that may create a defamiliarisation effect. In Section 3.5.7 modern theatre practices involving fantasy are related to practices involving grotesque representation.

To be grotesque, the representation does not stray entirely into the realm of fantasy but it includes fantastical elements. Grotesque representations distort or exaggerate natural features or behaviour and transgress the boundary between the real and the imaginary. This grotesque approach to characterisation in CDA provides another link with Brecht. Although Brecht himself did not publicly specify a particular interest in the grotesque, scholars have recognised it as a significant force in his work (Silberman, 2012: 169- 170, Schevill, 1977, p.1). Thomson (In his study of the grotesque) describes a process of *alienation* where ‘something familiar and trusted is suddenly made strange and disturbing’ (1972, p.59). Thomson’s definition is not far removed from discussions surrounding Brecht’s defamiliarisation effect; an applicably broad term that characterises the fundamental approach of Brecht’s Epic theatre (Diamond, 1998, p.84, Willet, p.121, p.140).

The effect (on the audience) of this blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality can be understood in Brechtian terms, as a form of *alienation*. Thus, it invites the spectator to distance themselves from reality and imagine a world where the existing certainties (divisions of social class and power) might be varied. According to Clayton CDA ‘allowed fantasy to return to the stage’ during the sixteenth century when theatre was trapped in the ‘stultifying and (politically and aesthetically) conservative trammels of realism’ (Clayton p.51- 52).

CDA’s association with fantasy feeds a significant strand in the development of ideas to have emerged from Vsevolod Meyerhold and his theatre practice. According to Rudlin, CDA fuelled Meyerhold’s fascination with the grotesque. Meyerhold described the use of the grotesque in theatre as a ‘highly theatrical style which plays with sharp contradictions and produces constant shifts in the planes of perception’ (Rudlin, p.172, Clayton, p. 142). Despite not using the CDA mask in any of his productions, Meyerhold’s approach to characterisation was heavily influenced by what Braun insists was the ‘psychological complexity’ of the mask (Braun, 1991: 109). According to Braun the CDA mask not only encouraged Meyerhold to seek a new style of acting but an exploration of paradox and contradiction in his approach to character psychology (1991, p.108-109). Rudlin notes that in CDA mask work, ‘the body is required to be doing something different, working contrapuntally or even paradoxically’ (1994, p.40) Thus CDA exposes the paradoxes of identity and through mask work, and is able to isolate these paradoxes, extenuate and exaggerate them for comic effect.

According to Pitches the grotesque approach adopted by Meyerhold was ‘naturally mischievous, even satirical...stretching the natural to the extent that it becomes unnatural or stylised, revelling in fantasy and mystery’ it ‘transforms things’. For Franca Rame (and Dario Fo) the ability to ‘transform (through paradox, absurdity and inversion) one reality into another’ is subversive and should ‘not be used as a trick, but so people understand that reality is not flat but is full of contradictions and reversals’ (Jenkins, 2001, p. 8).

Through his study of CDA, Meyerhold was not only able to locate the grotesque and ‘stimulate the imagination of the audience’ but utilise it to support his own artistic socio-political endeavours. This was not merely an intellectual exercise as Meyerhold himself ‘was condemned and executed for the political implications of his artistic transgressions as manifested in his pursuit of the grotesque’ (Tian,1999: 1). It is not necessarily the animalistic characteristic of the mask, or even the actual object itself that should be considered subversive, but rather how the mask functions as a tool of distortion. It stretches the natural to a stylised form and challenges the viewers’ perceptions.

#### 2.4.4 Summary

In this section, I have sought to establish the links between CDA and what is understood as Epic theatre. Using examples of Brecht and Rame’s work, I have identified common factors between CDA and subversive theatre practice. More specifically through a discussion of mask, I have highlighted the significance of the grotesque (and the use of paradox) as a potentially subversive approach to characterisation.

Furthermore, I have proposed that CDA's practice could be seen to be effective as an antecedent form of 'alienation'. Their use of masks (as grotesque devices), coupled with paradoxical behaviour of the stock characters, might be expected to disturb their audiences.

## 2.5 Relevance to feminist agenda

Any feminist agenda is likely to want to contest the predominant patriarchal orthodoxy. Certain feminists, such as Zillah Eisenstein have perceived analogies between the position of women with that of servants in class-ridden social systems and workers in capitalist systems. (*Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism 1978*) If CDA and its more politically motivated successors (Brecht and Rame) could harness the disturbing effect of the grotesque, and the presentation of paradox, to prompt audiences to question the fixedness of the status quo, then there is encouragement for me to use this approach.

I have considered the extended uses of the grotesque/paradox to deliver 'alienation' effects. Rather than the exploration of the social order, could this approach be applied to an individual grappling with the nature of identity? For the individual, the dominant conventions (to be subverted) might be represented in the internal psychological pressures and processes evolving from external pressures and dominant socio-political practices.

My feminist perspective is explored in the section 3 and the means by which *Save Me* delivers what it set out to do is reviewed in section 4.

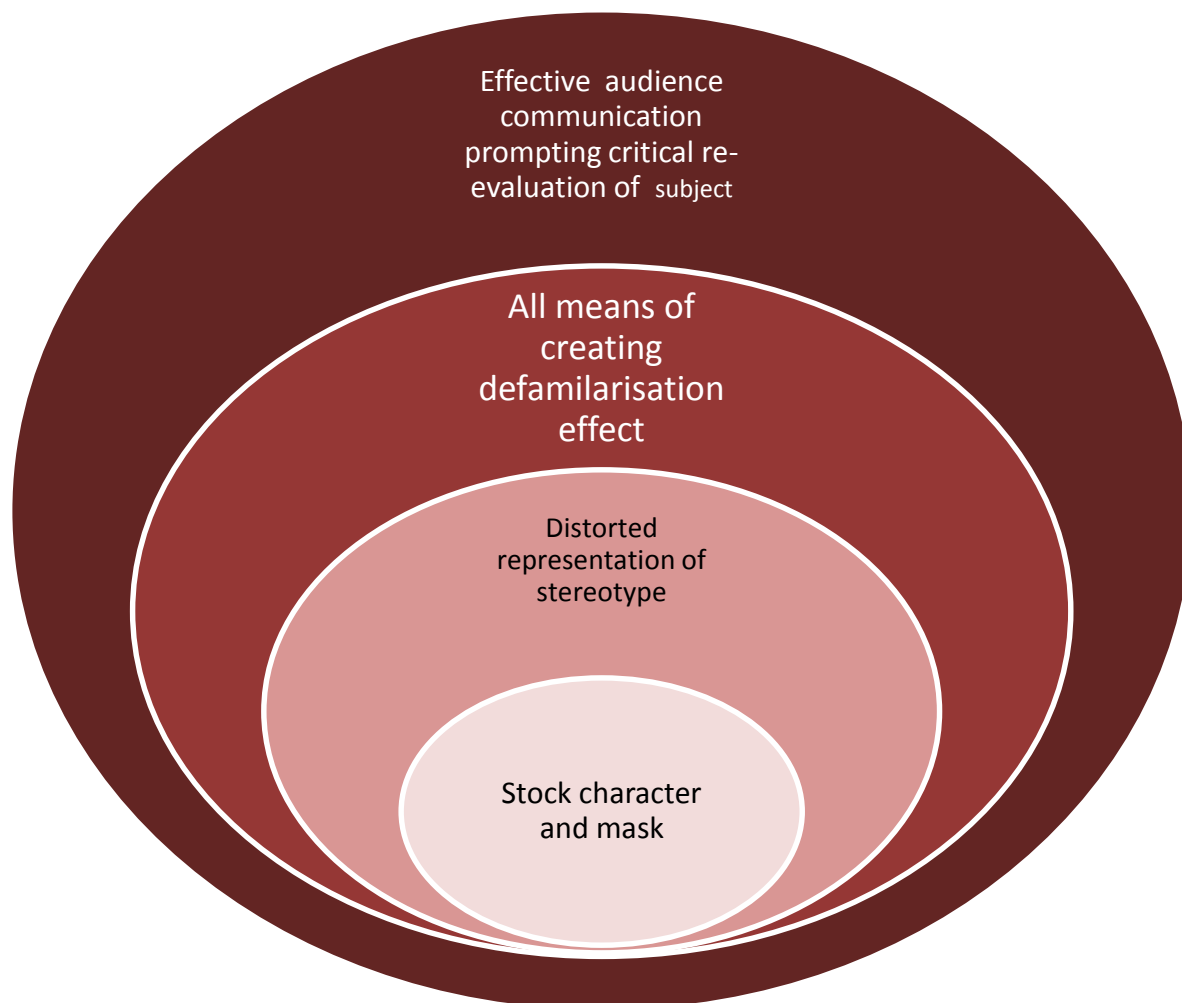


## 2.6 Summary and recapitulation

The above analysis seeks to place CDA's use of mask and stock character as the innermost element of a nested series. Their work represents an antecedent practice illustrating Brecht's defamiliarisation effect on audiences.

The overlapping Venn diagram below represents the various layers and progression of ideas that relate to CDA's use of stock character and mask.

**Figure 2 – Relationship between stock characters and other Brechtian techniques**



The inner spheres represent subsets of the outer spheres. For example, any form of unnatural physicality or other forms of fantasy can be effective in distorting a stereotype. Moving outward, direct address is an acknowledged means of creating a defamiliarisation effect, but is not part of the subset of stereotype distortions. There are many means of reaching the outermost sphere and not all of these are contained with the category of defamiliarisation effects.

### 3. FEMINISM

#### 3.1 Summary aims and overview

In this section I discuss my interests in the expansive field of feminism, highlight the particular issues that are relevant to my research and, finally, attempt to draw a supportive and coherent link between current feminist theatre practice and my work

Feminism is an umbrella term for movements and ideologies that seek to analyse and promote women's interests. The suffragette movement, and its campaign for women's votes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a leading exemplar of first-wave feminism. Subsequently, the second wave movement during the 1960s and 1970s famously championed its cause with the slogan 'the personal is political', and fought for equality for women both in and outside the home (Aune & Redfern, 2010, p.106. Krollock, 2006, p.9).

In light of the increasing diversity in women's roles in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Western societies, it might appear that the feminist goals concerning political rights have been largely achieved. For example, Women have reached the top positions in many institutions; Margret Thatcher, Vicky Featherstone and Christine Legard just to name a few. However, the quest for fairness and equality has not been fully realised. In a report by IMF *Women, Work, and the economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity*, it has been documented that with regards to receiving equal pay, women in many parts of Europe are still undervalued (Elborgh-Woytek, 2013).

#### 3.2 Post feminism and third-wave feminism

In addition to continuing to oppose discrimination and bias, feminist ideas have continued to evolve so as to remain relevant to contemporary society. According to Adriaens (a researcher from Ghent University), 'neo-liberal society' has already transitioned to a post-feminist state. She asserts 'post feminism is a new form of empowerment and independence, individual choice, (sexual) pleasure, consumer culture, fashion, hybridism, humour, and renewed focus on the female body can be considered fundamental for this contemporary feminism' (2008).

Post feminism is understood as a version of the third wave movement. According to Krollock "third wave feminisms are not defined by a common theoretical and political standpoint(s)" (Krollock, 2006, p.18). In an essay from a collection of third wave feminist discussions, Lotz asserts that a distinction between the terms post feminism and third wave feminism is relatively uncertain (Lotz, 2007, p.75). However, there are a set of distinctive ideas that underpin most third wave writing that distinguishes it from earlier (second wave) feminist ideas.

- a) Third wave feminists reject the binary classification of identity as between men and women, and instead emphasises the multifarious and contradictory nature of personal identity, of which gender is only one part (Krollock, 2006, p.18).
- b) Third wave feminists acknowledge the '**constructedness**' of identity; recognising that gender is subject to many influences some of which are not inherent but are cultural/economic constructs.
- c) They embrace differences between different socio-economic groups of women and see gender as being one element (albeit an important one) of many significant components of identity. They do not claim that gender solidarity is a pre-eminent cause; thereby they are anti-essentialist; rejecting the universalization and categorisation of women's experiences (Stone cited in Gillis 2007, p.21, Krollock, 2006, p.16).

Some third wave feminists have supported a hybrid approach named **strategic essentialism**. This is a pragmatic approach first advanced by Spivak in 1984 in an interview with Grosz (Ray, 2009)

Spivak suggests that, for reasons of expediency, there are times when it is advantageous to emphasise the commonalities between members of a minority group. Thus, the essentialism of earlier waves of feminism is now downgraded to a useful tactic rather than a fundamental truth. According to Stone strategic essentialism is a controversial approach that 'enables us to engage with, and resist, the social practice of treating women as if they constituted a unitary group' (Stone cited in Gillis, 2007, p.21)

### 3.3 Feminist perspective of *Save Me*

*Save Me* was intended to illustrate, mainly through the use of parodied stereotypes, various elements of modern female identity. However, the use of stereotypes should not be taken to imply that I support an essentialist view of female identity. Rather, as Stone observes, I use recognisable stereotypes as a ready means of engaging with the audience (this is explained more fully in Section 4.3.3). I believe my practice is therefore consistent with a strategic essentialist approach.

However, this is not the end of my engagement with feminist ideology, but rather it is a platform for a critique. There are, in my opinion, serious problems that flow from widespread adoption, in advanced western economies, of the idea that women should respond to societal pressures and 'consume' their identity. Cole and Crossley go as far to suggest that the third wave feminists have prostituted their ideas becoming seduced by the blandishments of consumerism/capitalism.

'What we find troubling about this trend is that when discourses of consumption and women's independence intersect, they do so in a manner that equates independent womanhood with consumption. The conflation of women's independence and consumerism raises important questions about the shifting nature of feminism and feminist identities. The implications for this changing terrain of feminism are exhibited in many third wave feminists' embrace of consumerism as both a choice and a source of women's empowerment.'

According to Cole and Crossley this is a fundamental problem for feminism. For them capitalism is an inherently exploitative and oppressive system and therefore if consumerism is 'the cultural logic of capitalism', then consumption in a capitalist context is a fundamentally un-feminist thing (Cole & Crossley 2009). Contemporary feminism has become increasingly diverse and does not support a narrowly defined credo; therefore it is not an easy target to aim at. Furthermore, I must acknowledge that *Save Me* will tend to reflect my own situation and the socio-economic group which I both wittingly and unwittingly represent.

### 3.4 Feminism and consumerism

'Feminism is out there, tucked into acts of riotousness and self-respect...for our generation feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it - it's simply in the water' (Baumgardener and Richards 2000 cited in Synder, 2008, p.4)

It is somewhat ironic that feminism, essentially an anti-establishment movement, should now itself be represented as being the orthodox view. This is not to suggest that the present generation of young adults have imbibed and internalised feminist theory. However, there is clear evidence, provided mainly through a study and analysis of popular film and television, that young women are identifying with fictional persona whose behaviour exemplifies certain third-wave post-feminist values (McRobbie, 2004, p.261).

It is essentially paradoxical that feminism should indirectly be providing justification and support to capitalist and consumerist values (Adriaens, 2009). It could be argued that the substantial success of early waves of feminism in empowering women, both politically and economically, has enticed the movement into the warm capitalist embrace. Because some Western third-wave analysis shifts the focus away from an oppositional stance (against men), to a quest for self-fulfilment, this creates the appropriate pre-conditions to support consumerism (Bunting 2009).

Unfortunately, consumerism has few underlying ethics. My concern however is not primarily an ethical one; it is instead to highlight the paradox where many women (only some of whom are economically empowered) are being encouraged to follow a consumerist approach to self-fulfilment. Firstly, for many women without privilege or good fortune, the aspiration that they can fulfil their gender potential in many spheres is, in reality, a mirage created by the advertising industry (Redfern and Aune, 2010, p.175)

It might be argued that it is a fairly tame criticism merely to highlight the difficulty many women face in realising their potential. Such is the continuing condition of many disadvantaged groups in modern society. However, the second criticism that flows from this analysis is more telling. It is that the consequences of setting up unreasonable expectations, and promoting fulfilment through consumption, is seriously damaging to the individual psyche (Bunting, 2009). If religion was to past generations 'the opiate of the masses' (Marx 1843), then third wave post feminism encourages women to seek their own salvation in the present through the exercise of choice as consumers.

We 'sell' ourselves in various social markets in order to have intimate relationships, social standing, jobs and careers. The material and symbolic resources through which we produce and sustain our identities increasingly take the form of consumer goods and activities (Lury, 2003, cited in Hanlon & Carlisle 2007 p.11)

Through *Save Me* it was my intention to explore the shortcomings of consumerism with regard to fulfilling female identity and women's mental health issues such as stress, depression and anxiety. It is beyond the scope of this study to seek to establish the case that consumerism is the root cause for the significant increase in women's mental health issues. However, for my purposes it is sufficient to postulate that there is a plausible link between mental health problems (such as depression and anxiety) and consumer culture to seek to explore this in the performance piece.

### **3.5 Feminist theatre practice**

#### **3.5.1 Theoretical framework**

*'Feminist theatre practice 'steals from wherever and whatever is necessary to create the desired disturbance' (Aston, 1999, p.17)*

According to academic Aston, feminist theatre should not be categorised as belonging to 'one type or style of theatre'. However, it should be geared toward working within a 'sphere of disturbance' (Aston, 1999, p.16-17). Aston admits to borrowing this term from French playwright/director/feminist Simone Benmussa's notes in *Benmussa Directs* (1979). In her own words Aston summarises her understanding of the phrase 'sphere of disturbance' as involving 'disturbance of the process that engenders meaning and representation' (1999, p.18),

Because theatre practice is itself diverse, there is no straightforward correlation between feminist theory and its practical expression through performance. However, feminist theories such as those concerning representation and the cultural construction of identity, have prompted feminist theatre makers to regard realism as a somewhat suspect and untrustworthy form of representation.

Dolan suggests realism is like a mirror and 'a mirror implies passivity and non-involvement, an object used but never changed by a variety of people who hold it up' (Dolan, 1991, p.16). Thus, realism is not considered a particularly useful strategy for disturbing 'the process that engenders meaning and representation' (Aston, 1999, p.18).

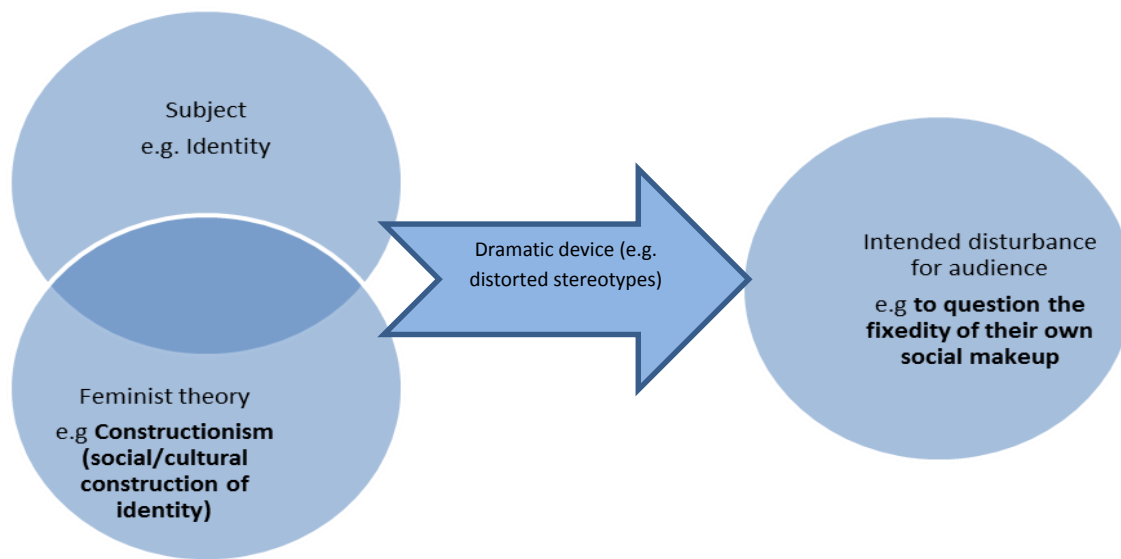
This approach (using disturbance) may be shared by any who seek to oppose the prevailing hegemony. In her essay, *The Dramaturgy of Disability* Lewis has commented on the necessity for 'disturbance' in the dramatic representation of disabled people. According to Lewis borrowing ideas from feminist theory (strategic constructionism and strategic essentialism) can help to disturb dominant and socially constructed dimensions of disabled identity (Lewis, 1998, p.5). In the same vein feminist theory can be applied directly into theatre practice and make significant contributions towards the development of dramatic techniques that work within spheres of disturbance. In her definition of *spheres of disturbance*, Aston does not directly reference Brechtian doctrine. However, Benmussa's most celebrated work, *Albert Nobbs*, is considered Brechtian (Dolan, 2012, Feminist Spectator).

Brecht's ideas, have appealed to feminist theatre makers, because of his rejection of naturalism and (as mentioned in section one) 'the cornerstone of Brecht's theory...the *verfremdungseffekt*' (V-effect), which overtly supports the notion of *disturbance*. Effective disturbance may be triggered by a variety of techniques, many of which were familiar to CDA. Brecht's V-effect analysis provides a widely acknowledged theoretical framework to understand how this effect works.

According to Diamond, 'Brechtian theory and feminist theory need to be read intertextually' (Diamond, 1988, p.84). Brecht's practice can therefore be harnessed by feminists and used to support feminist theories of identity and representation. Indeed, despite Brecht's 'Marxian blindness to gender', Brecht's practice is undoubtedly an influential force in feminist theatre making (Diamond, 1988, p.83). However, whilst it is important to acknowledge the significance of Brecht's practice, it is also possible engage with alternative modes of disturbance some of which, such as the use of physical theatre, are not directly alluded to by Brecht in the context of alienation theory.

In the following sections, I identify a range of dramatic devices that have the potential to create a 'sphere of disturbance'. These approaches and techniques are relevant both to the design and the performance of *Save Me*. Before considering these devices individually, it is helpful to summarise their critical function in mediating representation of ideas to the audience

Figure 3 – Summary of role of disturbance generating devices



### 3.5.2 Episodic structure

Commonly recognised as a shared feature of both Expressionism, and of Brecht's work, episodic structure has been identified as an important feature in prominent feminist theatre works. For example, Caryl Churchill's plays *Vinegar Tom* and *Mad Forest*. (Young, 2012, Skylar, 1980). For Brecht episodic structure was useful because it enabled each scene to stand on its own without the need for complicated character development or back-story. The episodic nature of Brecht's work is characterised by Willet as 'a sequence of incidents or events, narrated without artificial restrictions as to time, place or relevance to a formal 'plot' (Willet, 1960, p.169).

According to Reinhelt, Caryl Churchill's use of episodic structure in *Mad Forest* communicates 'the social construction of personal, interior life, its contradictions and its failures' (Reinhelt, 1996, p.102) Similarly, Roberta Sklar asserts that Brecht's ideas regarding episodic structure, can be translated to support what she believes is an understanding of reality that is not fully explored in the conventional male dominated linear approach to playwriting. She states "episodic structure has to do with expressing inner life" for her it allows reality to appear as "a constant three ring circus rather than some linear tale adventure" (Sklar, 1980, p.29).

According to Murray and Keefe a theatre that disrupts the conventional linear patterns of storytelling, forces the spectator to engage with and work at 'the construction of meanings' (Keefe, 2007, p.93). They describe the benefits of a non-linear approach to storytelling whereby 'an audience is given scope for interpretation, and expected to work at' (as opposed to being spoon-fed) the production meaning (Keefe, 2007, p.93).

### 3.5.3 Physical theatre

'What makes us believe that gestures and movement are the side dish, the salad, while the word is the main course, the meat?' (Fo, 1987, p.35)

Physical Theatre is commonly understood today as a movement based approach to theatre; one that rejects forms of naturalism often associated with text based theatre. Although it has become popular in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, physical forms of theatre have existed for centuries and can be traced back to Greek theatre and the Commedia dell'Arte tradition (Murray, p.19, 2007).

In the relationship between physical theatres and politically charged theatre-making, it is possible to identify how movement can play a significant role in creating *spheres of disturbance*. For example, in a discussion of Pina Bausch's work, Murray and Keefe draw a link between a Brechtian style of acting and movement based theatre. They assert that 'through repetition the presentation or showing of actions' Bausch engages with Brechtian doctrines of *gestus* and epic theatre (Murray, 2007, p.80). The result, according to Murray is an exposition of 'the politics and social realities behind every day actions'; things that without the intervention of (exaggerated) movement, might otherwise go unnoticed.

Having spectated Lloyd Newson's recent piece *Can We Talk About This?*, I observed how movement is used as a means of inviting the spectator to question their understanding of multi-culturalism, Islamic extremism and freedom of speech. A review of the show in *The Independent* states 'Of course you can't dance a political discourse. But in Newson's hands the physical provides a surprisingly subtle subtext of hesitancy, indecision, unease, that helps open up that discourse (because frankly, without it, this would seem like a rant: you're most definitely being told what to think)' (Gilbert, 2012).

Unfortunately, the efficacy of movement or any form of communication in general is largely subjective. A review of the same performance in the Telegraph states "the stylised movement that accompanies the plays riveting verbal content adds almost nothing" (Spenser, 2012). In a feminist context Aston discusses the potentialities that arise from using 'physical theatre' and the extent to which it can be harnessed as a means of finding imaginative ways to engage an audience. She states 'physical theatre...is not itself a political practice, but does offer political possibilities' (Aston, 1999, p.14). Thus, it is not contentious to observe that movement can be a powerful tool of communication. If, for example, its impact is designed to create a non-realistic effect, then it harnesses this result to engage the audience to think afresh about the issues of the piece.

#### **3.5.4 Directly addressing the audience**

Before actors were placed behind an imaginary fourth wall by French director Andre Antoine in the nineteenth century, it was impossible to break the forth wall separating actors from audience; it did not exist. The actor could allude to the walls around him...but the illusion of being a character in a separate world, in a space cut off from the audience, was not actively pursued or sustained (Schechter, 1985, p.12)

According to Zipes, the fourth wall has contributed to a false dichotomy between the actor and the storyteller. For Brecht the eradication of the fourth wall was important because he felt it 'duped audiences and lulled them into political inertia' (Zipes, 2006, p.49). Actors who play under the illusion of the fourth wall, allow themselves to be observed by the spectator. For female actors, the experience of playing the role of the observed is more than just a dramatic illusion in a performance. It is a historical reality, describing the passive role imposed on women by society.

In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey, 1999, p.837)

In feminist performance work it is common to find the female performer directly addressing the audience. Historically systems of representation have refused women the opportunity of representing themselves, refused them agency, subjectivity and identity (Aston, 1999, p.18).

In the *Vagina Monologues* the female performer is given agency and is the subject of her own desires. Similarly, in Franca Rame's monologues placing the female at the centre of theatrical enquiry (as opposed to an object who is only recognised through male desire), can be viewed as a politically motivated act. According to Goodman, monologist plays that give access to an exclusively female voice 'involve the audience in a provocative relationship that questions the exclusively male outlook in order to create a context wherein 'to think about issues differently' (Goodman, cited in Cottino- Jones, 1995, p.330).

### 3.5.5 Paradox

*PARADOX - One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons, A natural perspective, that is and is not! (Duke Orson in Twelfth Night*

There are multiple ways in which to use paradox in performance. In Marcel Marceau's famous mime sketch (The Mask Maker), there is a virtuoso demonstration of how paradox can be created in the body of actor. After playing with multiple facial expressions, Marceau cannot remove the mask with the exaggerated happy expression. After several failed attempts to remove the mask, his other gestures and movement convey his frustration and his performance becomes paradoxical. This is both funny and tragic.

In a more conventional linear narrative paradox can be located as a leading component in the work of Shakespeare. Hirsh states

Unlike works that provide solutions or answers and therefore discourage independent thought, Shakespeare's plays dramatize paradoxes that raise challenging questions and encourage playgoers to think for themselves (1990, p.225)

However, the ability of such conventional use of paradox to create a 'sphere of disturbance' is restricted because it is often communicated in a naturalistic playing style. In the modern era, Brecht used paradox as a key element of his approach to make the familiar appear strange to audiences (Silberman, p.2, 2012). For example, in GWS Brecht creates two personas that in the body of one character represent a discordant set of ideas.

The independent thought that is required to perceive the true nature of gender, existing underneath the veneer of the dominant cultural construct, requires a more fundamental re-booting of audience perception. Caryl Churchill exemplifies how a more wide-ranging and varied use of paradox can stimulate this process.

'Churchill's plays enlist a wider range for multiple, diffuse, and paradoxical meaning to confront the audience with deconstructions of artificial unities. Juxtaposition rather than integration of related episodes, overlapping dialogue and action as well as time shifts and visual paradoxes, for which Churchill has become known, give the stage plays their complexity' (Kritzer, 1989, p.130)

This multi-dimensional application of paradox to stimulate a disturbance therefore involves other forms of visual communication alongside, or sometimes deliberately set in conflict with, the textual narrative. In a discussion on Meyerhold's work, paradox is explored through the relationship between movement and text and is understood as a significant characteristic of the grotesque acting style that Meyerhold developed out of the CDA tradition (Braun, 1998, p.108-109).



The practice of paradox is not restricted to the visual arena. It can also apply to the use of music and other non-speech sounds. Morrissey has reviewed the work of three modern feminist playwrights to study the linkages between materialist feminist theory and their practice. In Sarah Daniels' play *Masterpieces* she has observed the two significant occasions where the paradoxical use of sound effects succeeds in creating an 'alienation' effect.

As was the case at the beginning of the play the mechanised sound of the train screeching to a halt functions as an alienating device with which to demonstrate, through *mise-en-scene*, the reconstruction of a status interaction. It also is the point at which the sound effects can be read as defamiliarisation effects in that the private moment becomes a social and public moment (*Morrissey, 1994*)

We have observed that paradox is a versatile and effective stimulus to audience engagement. However, the extent to which its application is successful in creating a sphere of disturbance depends also on the characteristics of the audience. It might be argued that young audiences in the twenty first century are less susceptible to disturbance because of their experience of other forms of popular culture. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the range of opportunity for paradox is wide enough to generate sufficient prompts for the spectator to attempt to synthesise a fresh take on the meaning of what is presented, that at least some will be taken up.

### **3.5.6 Comedic techniques – parody and physical comedy**

Laughter is for Fo a political issue, and potentially a political act, whether reactionary or progressive, most of his work has been constructed for or out of forms of clowning, buffoonery and farce. As with the traditions of *Commedia Dell arte*, collaborating with an audience to generate laughter has enormously subversive potential for Fo (Keefe & Murray, p.114)

There are, according to Aristophanes, fourteen theatrical conventions that use humour to entertain and communicate. My focus here is on two comedic techniques, parody and physical comedy and both of these would be recognisable to Aristophanes and are part of the CDA tradition.

The essence of parody is presenting a familiar stereotype in a way that distorts a realistic representation so as to create a comic effect (Menand, 2010). There are several (non-exclusive) ways to create the distortion involving mostly exaggeration, literalisation, and/or using incongruity or role reversal. The intended effect on the spectator is that the thing being parodied is in some sense devalued and undermined. People, places, institutions and ideas are all potential targets for parody.

Physical comedy, involving variations of clowning and slapstick, relies for its impact on less cerebral and more instinctive sense of humour. How and why is humour potentially subversive and therefore a useful stimulus to the creation of a sphere of disturbance? This is not well understood, as research in this area is thin. However, Jarrett (2013, p.245) has noted that recent psychological studies have suggested that humour has developed (in evolutionary terms) to provide a pleasurable incentive for the brain to keep validating its assumptions and checking its perception of reality against the available sensory/logical evidence. The implication of this theory is that when something is found to be funny the brain is actively engaged in checking out the 'anomaly' that provoked it. As this cerebral double-take effect is involuntary, it bypasses conscious prejudices and thereby a message is delivered that would otherwise be filtered out.

More directly, humour can also be a sharpened tool, used for political lampooning and cultural commentary. In the exhibition, 'Backflip: Feminism and Humour in Contemporary Art', curator Laura Castagnini comments on how a collection of artworks, whose mission is wit and comic playfulness, can function as an arsenal to provoke and criticise (Soderlind, 2010). She states 'this disruption of the status quo (occasioned by humour) often creates space for a viewer to rethink their position on the role of women and other feminist issues. Humour also entices people, and can be an effective strategy for engagement.' (Soderlind, 2010).

Franca Rame created parodies as a means of commenting on the absurd role of women in society. In *Waking Up* parody is created through farce and the exaggerated representation of 'a rather, scatter-brained mother and housewife who forgets her baby in a closet' (Cottino-Jones, 1995, p.331). In taking on multiple social roles and in trying to fulfil them all, Rame's character mocks herself as a product of the establishment and doing so mocks the establishment that insists domesticity is a woman's major social function in life' (Cottino-Jones, 1995, p.331)

The use of physical comedy by feminists is less common than the use of parody. In the UK Bridget Christie is an award winning feminist comic presenting her material with a strong physical comedy element at the 2013 Edinburgh Festival. In the US playwright Carol Triffle has recently directed her own work *Beaux Arts Club*, at the Imago Theatre in Portland Oregon, leaning on physical comedy to engage the audience. In her book *Feminist Theatre Practice* Aston talks specifically about revealing 'the monstrous ways in which women's bodies have been forced into different shapes' she explains 'this lends itself to an 'overlapping' style of exaggerated, grotesque comedy, which combined with a high degree of physical exertion in performance, makes visible the pain inflicted on the body through ideologies of femininity' (Aston, 1999, p.68). Aston's description of this sort of grotesque comedy is particularly relevant to episode 10 (under the surgeon's knife) in *Save Me*. In section 4 I discuss this scene in more detail.

The examples and analysis above provide convincing evidence that parody and physical comedy are being used by feminist playwrights to engage audiences. Current psychological research offers an insight into how the brain engages with certain humorous situations. Ashton has commented on how grotesque humour can help to reveal truth that might otherwise be undetected. Taken together these elements offer a plausible account of how and why the use of humour in theatre might be commandeered to support a feminist cause.

### 3.5.7 Fantasy

'The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent' (Jackson, 1981, p.1-2)

Understood by many as a 'genre of subversion' (Meany, p.85, 1993), fantasy has an interesting relationship to feminism. Through feminist works by Angela Carter and Franca Rame (*The Passion of New Eve* and *The Same Old Story*), it is possible to identify the extent to which fantasy has been harnessed as a means of playing with second wave feminist concerns, particularly those relating to patriarchy and the biological reality of womanhood. In his book *Critical Discourses of the Fantastic* Sandner claims,

The fantastic not only offers but might be said to threaten us with transcendence, worrying the proposed limits of culture and reality, of self and society, not only based in, but also revelling in, the materiality of language, the strange, the hard kernel of otherness that persists in any ideological construction of reality...the fantastic comments on a reality it can neither affirm or deny, or rather can both affirm and deny impossibly tracing new limits, while refining even affirming old ones, appearing by turns both subversive and reactionary with everything and nothing up for grabs. (Sandner, 2011, p.5)

In the Montreal Gazette in 1988 Carter was described as the queen of *magic realism* (McCormick, 1988). According to Aldea, *magic realism* is a controversial term (in post-colonial theory), however, one that essentially describes the blending of the ordinary with myth and fantasy (2010, p.3). As seen in Carter's *The Magic Toy shop* and Rame's *The Same Old Story* there is a deliberate amalgamation of fantasy and reality. In the narrative story of both plays, toys come to life and interact unexpectedly with human protagonists.

'Fantasy's relation to reality is one of negation. Fantasy embodies a negative subjectivity - that is fantasy is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it' (Meany, 1993, p.85)

In *Save Me* the character is constantly shifting between dream and reality (discussed in more detail in section 4). According to Thomson 'the hallmark of the grotesque in the realm of the fantastic is the conscious confusion between fantasy and reality' (Thomson, 1972, p.24). Thus, if the grotesque is understood as an inherently disturbing style, then the amalgamation of fantasy and reality is a potentially disturbing.

Despite being employed as literary term I have found Spindler's description of 'metaphysical magical realism' (cited in Aldea, 2010, p.3) to be particularly fitting in terms of defining my use of the fantastic in *Save Me*. According to Spindler, *metaphysical magical realism* is characterised as a 'technique of defamiliarisation, creating an uncanny and disturbing atmosphere but without an element of the supernatural'.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This research encourages the view that:

- a) There is significant resonance between contemporary feminist theories concerning the nature of gender, consumerism and popular culture. Accordingly, it should be possible to devise a range of recognisable stereotypes to embody these ideas.
- b) There are a wide range of devices, some of which have a lineage that derives from the Commedia dell'Arte tradition, that might be employed in a devised piece to stimulate the audience to focus afresh on female identity and the stresses created by unfulfilled expectations.

#### 4. PERFORMANCE MAKING RESEARCH

##### 4.1 Save Me

###### 4.1.1 Introduction to *Save Me!*

My devised piece, *Save Me*, served several purposes. The creation and performance of the work provided me with a laboratory with which to explore the efficacy of theatrical devices linked to CDA, in the context of contemporary feminist theatre-making. Furthermore, the initial feminist perspective that I brought to this project was modified and influenced by the devising process. More generally, taking full responsibility for all the aspects of the production from conception to performance, made *Save Me* my intended journeyman's master work piece.

*Save Me* is about a person like me, a young white British woman in the early twenty first century. My initial concept was for a one-woman physical theatre production that caricatured a modern young woman's life through a series of humorous excerpts. I had no initial narrative thread with which to join up the episodes. I wanted to explore and expose the various paradoxes between ideological feminist views and everyday living.

I acknowledge that, at least in part, *Save Me* is autobiographical. Because my own background and experiences are not atypical, I believed that the piece would resonate with others. As I worked through a series of individual vignettes in the studio there was, initially, no sense of the passage of time. The episodes did not rely on each other and there were no external reference points by which to determine their sequence.

However, by the time I had created a full suite of episodes I had grouped them into two main sections. The first section represented events where the young woman was attempting (generally unsuccessfully) to deal with her challenges. The second section dealt with situations which reported the character's detachment from reality and evidenced her psychological instability. For instance, characters playful approach in her search for love (Episode 6) differs greatly from her gloomy interaction with the doctor (Episode 11).

Working through a suitable ending for *Save Me* proved difficult. I identified the character's suicide as a feasible ending and devised a scene where she jumped from a tall building. However when I debated options with my director, we agreed that it would be better to take a more incremental development that portrayed increasing alcohol and substance abuse as a prelude to suicide. Adopting this approach provided the opportunity for the suicide attempt to emerge unannounced and therefore to be more disturbing.

###### 4.1.2 The intersection of feminist ideas and CDA linked theatrical devices

*Save Me* seeks to reveal the many practical difficulties that a young woman faces in attempting to fulfil the aspirations that flow from the adoption of a post-feminist viewpoint. We (young women) want to control our lives; we want to relate to men on our terms; we want to realise our potential. To achieve these goals requires a combination of good fortune, men willing to relate to us on acceptable terms, and resources to participate fully in the consumer society.

*Save Me* seeks to portray the multiple dimensions of a young woman's identity and reveal the extreme consequences that flow from a complete failure to achieve any of the above aspirations. The psychological breakdown enacted in the piece is intended to be an indictment of the failure of modern feminist theory to offer a practical vision for personal fulfilment that does not rely on a consumerist approach to identity.

My intention in devising the work was to use a range of theatrical devices to encourage the audience to think afresh about female identity. Although the character portrayed is intended to be a recognisable stereotype (a modern young white British woman), the intention was to distort the representation so that it became strange version of the original. I sought to achieve this distorting effect by employing several devices that pervade almost all aspects of *Save Me*. The structure is episodic throughout. There is also a constant play between fantasy and reality including various references to the classic fairy-tale genre. There are also numerous attempts to explore the paradox of fulfilling higher order needs without a secure underpinning of basic economic security (Herzberg).

Furthermore, each scene, apart from those with the narrator, seeks to parody the character. It is a physical theatre production with significant physical comedy elements. The various paradoxes associated with her aspirations, especially those associated with relationships with men and with paid work, are exposed. For instance, the paradoxical aspirations are explored most clearly in Episodes 2, 6 and 7 where the character both fantasises and rebels against traditional gender roles.

In episode 6, I used the salsa dance as a way of talking directly about this paradox. For example, traditionally in Salsa, the man leads the woman. In this particular episode, I wanted to reveal the paradoxical desires of a woman who is more comfortable leading than following, yet still desires the chivalrous and traditional gender stereotype ideal in a man. Although the character herself is intended to be a recognisable stereotype, the intention was to distort (through exposing paradoxes) the representation so that it became strange version of the original.

#### 4.2 Research methodology

Like Arclecchino in Goldoni's most famous play, the devising process for *Save Me* attempts to serve two masters. My initial focus was on developing and presenting an effective and memorable performance. With hindsight, this same devising process has been dissected to provide some useful insights as to the continuing relevance of Commedia dell'Arte's practices for contemporary feminist theatre-making.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I am not concerned to evidence any external objective validation of the performances, as this is subject to separate direct assessment. I have however identified three non-exclusive approaches which, taken together, provide a comprehensive evaluation of the relevance of CDA to my devised feminist theatre piece, *Save Me*.

Firstly, I present below a conceptual synthesis that relates my devising practice to that employed by CDA. Because I did not seek to mimic CDA, my analysis relies on significant transpositions to facilitate comparison. Secondly, having reflected on my experiences in devising, I have explored the way the work evolved and analysed the process. I have provided a summary evaluation of creation of the whole piece, looked at the detailed devising process for a single episode, and reviewed my use of certain theatrical devices throughout the work. Finally, I have undertaken a detailed review of the seventeen scenes of the final version of *Save Me* to draw out the extent to which various theatrical techniques were employed.

### 4.3 Conceptual synthesis

#### 4.3.1 Overview

The following synthesis is a critical reflection of my practice. This dissertation was completed eighteen months after the performances of *Save Me*.

My analysis relies on a number of transpositions in order to be able to relate CDA practice, and its contemporary social environment to the present day and to the approach adopted in *Save Me*. There are three primary parallels that I attempt to demonstrate to link my work to CDA's practice.

**Figure 4 – Transpositions from CDA to *Save Me***

Element	CDA	Save Me
Target for parody	Social hierarchy	Post-feminist woman
Stereotyping method	Stock characters	Recognisable identity elements
Main disturbance techniques	Humour (mainly physical comedy), Use of grotesque (use of masks)	Humour (mainly physical comedy), Use of grotesque (in several ways)

#### 4.3.2 Parody

Parody is central to both CDA's work and to *Save Me*. To be effective the subject for parody must be recognisable. The contemporary audiences for CDA performances would have found the master/servant relationships that were portrayed easily recognisable as they followed predictable conventions in their use of masks and costumes. I sought to design my work so that audiences would recognise the post-feminist woman being portrayed.

For instance, an obvious example of the post-feminist stereotype can be found in episode 2. The character identifies herself as an 'independent woman' 'a woman of the new age' yet she still lives at home and her mother still asks her if she 'has any whites for the wash' (p,3). Furthermore, although post-feminist views are of recent origin, they are already established as the new orthodoxy (Section 3.4) Therefore they are as legitimate and accessible target for modern theatre as the hierarchical structure of society was for CDA.

The importance of parody in aligning my work with CDA's tradition extends beyond the choice of a target. Parody is a comedic device that encourages audiences to imagine a different world to the status quo. It undermines its target by disrespecting it. It is therefore, as discussed in Section Two, a device that supports audience alienation. It achieves this effect by distorting a stereotype that represents its target.

A constraint arising from the selection of a one-woman show format was that it was difficult to parody multiple characters and so *Save Me* applied self-parody. This self-parody mimics the parodic style with which CDA lampooned some of their stock characters, particularly for example Il Capitano (Rudlin, 1994, p.119). His pomposity and self-aggrandisement was always exposed and he was humbled. In a similar vein, my character's ambition to demonstrate that she is in control of her life is not realised.

#### 4.3.3 *Stereotyping techniques*

CDA established a tradition. Accordingly, its audiences became versed in its conventions. In the CDA form the stereotyping operated on two levels, the representative group (master, servant and lover) and the individual character (Arclechinno, Capitano, Pantalone etc.). The characters' costumes and (where applicable) masks followed conventions so that they were easily recognised. In the CDA tradition this stereotyping extended to their manner of performing and their character.

In devising *Save Me* I did not have the benefit of such a tradition to enable me to rely on assumed recognition by the audience. Furthermore, I was not attempting to impersonate any living person. At the same time, for reasons explained in the following section, I was not presenting a naturalistic representation of reality. I was attempting to present the audience with a distorted stereotype that they would easily recognise without recourse to special costume or props.

I therefore alighted on what I intended would be familiar aspirations of young women. These elements of modern identity became, for me, the 'characters' of my piece. If CDA troupes were seeking to represent contemporaneous society through the portrayal of stereotypical personages, so I was attempting to represent an archetype modern woman through recognisable elements of her identity and personality.

Whether this transposition from the societal to the personal, from multiple characters to a one-woman show, and from masks and costume conventions to a quick-fire episodic structure, is so drastic as to sever any meaningful link with the CDA lineage is debateable. However, from my perspective as the theatre-maker I believed I was working to an essentially similar agenda. I was intent on presenting a distorted stereotype to the audience in a manner that would prompt them to re-evaluate the sense of the orthodox view. Even without substantial evidence that supports the view that this was an intention of the CDA troupes, there is enough evidence in the politically motivated work of Rame and Fo that suggest the CDA form was working (whether intentionally or not) with a range of disturbance techniques and therefore had the tools to prompt a re-evaluation of the orthodox view (Jenkins, 2001, p.11, Fo, 1991, p.10).

#### 4.3.4 *Use of disturbance techniques*

Brecht's theory of alienation and Aston's reference to spheres of disturbance are twentieth century concepts, unknown when Commedia dell'Arte work was practised. In section one I have attempted to show that certain aspects of CDA's work were pre-cursors of the practices that Brecht identified in his seminal work *Verfremdungseffekt – The defamiliarisation effect*) and which Aston later described as spheres of disturbance.

It is not contentious to observe that physical comedy was a significant element of the CDA form (Wright, 2001, p.278). In his book on physical comedy *Why is that so Funny?* Wright talks specifically about Lecoq's work and his 'playing down of the social context' and his 'refusal to engage directly in political issues' (Wright, 2001, p.318). Hence, physical comedy is not itself recognised as a directly political act; however Brecht himself was an admirer of Chaplin, and is reported to have been directly influenced by Chaplin's work (Michaels, 1980, p.170).

In *Save Me* I have developed a number of physically comic routines. My purpose in this regard has sometimes merely been for its intended comic effect. However, in some scenes I have employed physical comedy to highlight apparent incongruities and paradoxes in the personality being portrayed. For example, In episode 12 portrays a physically comic horseback journey but the narrative is focused on daydreaming about the perfect man (Prince Charming (.

I have previously noted that, in contrast with fairy tale stories which generally employ stereotypes for the purpose of reinforcing moral or social orthodoxy, the CDA stock characters are enlisted to parody the social order they represent. The use of masks, and their associated animal representations, transforms the characters into grotesque versions of the original.

In analysing the theatrical devices that deliver disturbances, I have identified the use of the grotesque as a versatile technique sometimes associated with parodic humour, physical theatre and comedy and paradox (Wright, 2001, p.258). Almost by definition any grotesque representation is disturbing. It jolts the audience from its conventional passive role and encourages a double-take.

In *Save Me* I have not employed masks. However, I have used a range of other techniques, as set out in Figure 4 above, to similarly affect the audience. I have attempted to distort the representation of the stereotype so it becomes grotesque and therefore encourages audience engagement.

My piece regularly flips between reality and imaginings. The physical comedy and the use of paradox and direct address are intended to keep the audience a little off balance. The combined effect of these techniques is intended to create a grotesque representation of the various identity aspirations that, when they are unmet, trigger mental breakdown. The actual representation of the process of mental deterioration is intended to be surreal (having the disoriented hallucinatory quality of a dream).

Is the approach I have adopted to create audience alienation in the CDA tradition? I believe it is for the following reasons.

- The prominence of parody and a physically comic style
- Use of the fantastic and the combined effect of making the character(s) grotesque
- A playful attitude toward the exploration of paradox and identity

Although there are many differences between my production and CDA practices, such as the use of masks and improvisation, I believe my work retains significant elements of CDA's practices. This connection supports the assertion that CDA's tradition retains relevance for contemporary feminist theatre making



#### 4.4 Devising process

##### 4.4.1 Introduction

I have already set out (Section 3.1) my general purpose in devising *Save Me* and related it to the feminist ideas set out in Section 1. The immediately foregoing analysis provides a comprehensive account of my intentions in using parody as a primary disturbance technique and explains how this relates to CDA practices.

This section offers a review of the various influences on the devising process at a more detailed level. I have documented and explored how I constructed an episode. Although each episode reflects a unique combination of ideas and performance techniques, there is enough commonality between the scenes to suggest that this analysis is representative of the whole work.

Although the nexus between ideas and performance techniques is centrally relevant to the devising process, I was also influenced by a number of other considerations.

- Personal life experience (in identity development sense)
- Personal performance skills 'toolkit'
- Constraints of available production resources
- Initial selected format of solo show
- Expectation of socio demographics of intended audience and need to entertain
- Academic requirements

Of these other factors, the most significant was the opportunity that *Save Me* provided to explore and test my own performance skills. In order to provide a detailed insight into how this affected the process, I have set out a more detailed account of how I applied physicality techniques and wove them into several of the vignettes.

##### 4.4.2 Devising an episode – Under the surgeon's knife

Scene 10 is the last scene in *Save Me* before the portrayal of the character's progressive mental deterioration. The scene might itself be interpreted as indicative of the character's increasing desperation to validate her self-worth. I sought to apply techniques that would encourage the audience to engage with the comic undertones of the situation whilst maintaining focus on the absurdity of aspects of female self-fulfilment.

Inspired in part by Orlan's disturbing work, *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan* and Virginia Blum's poetic article, *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery*. I wanted to parody the constructed elements of identity relating to body image.

In Orlan's work, she undergoes a series of plastic surgeries whilst remaining fully conscious. Despite the already disturbing nature of witnessing someone undergo surgery, Orlan's work managed to heighten the overall level of disturbance, because of her active participation throughout the procedure (reciting poetry and looking directly at the camera). Without being able (or indeed willing) to emulate Orlan's methods, I was interested to explore different ways to evoke disturbance in relation to body image concerns.

As in Orlan's work, the *Save Me* character is fully conscious throughout the procedure; the difference however is that this is unintentional. Her reaction (as the script extract indicates), to seeing her body being pulled apart is a traumatic and disturbing experience.

‘Stop! Please stop! I think I have made a mistake! I said I think I have made a mistake! I was confused! I would like you to stop now please! I have changed my mind! I like my body. You’ve got the wrong girl! Stop it. Stop it! Stop that this instant! I don’t want fake bosoms! Just sew me back up and let me out of here!’ (Horley, 2012, p.15)

For this particular scene I adopted two primary disturbance techniques; physical comedy and fantasy. According to Cox ‘Fantasy allows the writer to represent extreme experiences without having to cope with the real life repercussions’ (Cox, p.85, 2005) This was certainly true in *Save Me*. Whilst the surgery was significant in terms of representing a stereotyped idea about body image, I did not want to commit to further development of the theme. Neither did I wish to delve into any direct consequences arising from this particular incident throughout the rest of the play.

Thus, in framing the surgery as a dream, it was my intention to move the character swiftly on, whilst simultaneously using the transition itself to augment the audience’s disturbance. The disorientation of shifting between dream and reality was designed to work on two levels. Firstly, it was to reflect the disturbed psyche of the character and her mental instability. Secondly, it was intended to disrupt the audience’s perception of reality, enabling them to visit extreme and absurd territory in a relatively ‘believable’ or ‘ordinary’ context.

Using physical expression as a comic device was another important aspect in the delivery of this scene. In a theatrical setting, I decided that stylised physical expression (in conjunction with the verbal) would help to represent surgery in a grotesque and humorous manner. The awkward positioning and physical restriction of the body on the operating table, combined with the direct verbal expression of the character was designed to both heighten awareness of, and lampoon, the character’s lack of agency within this activity. The character’s consciousness is not recognised by the imagined surgeon, who proceeds with the surgery despite her pleas. The character’s physical and verbal reactions go unnoticed, as she unwillingly witnesses the reconfiguration of her body. Through stylised and mechanical physical movements of the legs, arms and the head, it was my intention to use the character’s body to give comic expression to physical trauma. In so doing I aimed to highlight the absurdity of this activity (surgery) and alienate the position of the subject who willingly participates in her own mutilation.

#### **4.4.3 The process of devising – themes and techniques**

The stimulus for the cosmetic surgery scene was particular, but whatever the stimulus, the intention was to develop a representation of a discrete element of identity. In devising *Save Me* I adopted a thematic approach where all of the early scenes (up to and including the imagined surgery experience) focused on one of three aspects of identity aspirations.

- Achieving fulfilling intimate relationships (primarily with men and as a mother)
- Self-image issues in connection with career, body image
- Economic means to support independent living

The core element of representation was usually physical with the verbal component being designed to complement the choreographed movement. In this context, the complementarity was defined by reference to the distorted representation that was intended. Therefore, in some cases the spoken words were exaggerated and made strange through movement and gesture. For example, in episode 3 the character explains ‘I am a very proactive person. I am very confident in my ability to succeed. I have a range of transferable skills and I am great with people. I believe in me’ (Horley, 2012, p.5).

The gestures that accompanied this movement were intended to expose her weaknesses, as by overly expressing that she did not have any, she displayed the opposite. Most of the individual vignettes reported the character's initial intention to acquire some attribute or positive achievement. In all cases the intent was not fulfilled.

The scene in *Save Me* portraying cosmetic surgery illustrates how a disturbance in the mind of the audience might be triggered. The aim is to create a dissonance between the familiar stereotype and its representation in the performance. Initially the stereotype is established – in this scene it is of a young woman obsessed with perceived imperfections with her appearance. I intended the distortion of this stereotype to be achieved through three devices, parody, physical comedy and fantasy (the dream state portrayal).

There is a didactic opportunity occasioned by the 'disturbance' as the audience is prompted to make a mental 'double-take' on the validity of the orthodox view of the stereotype. In this scene my aim was to encourage focus on the collateral psychological damage occasioned by the pursuit of unattainable goals.

The overall narrative structure of *Save Me* was designed to reflect a progression in the mental state of the character. The early scenes reflected a person who was bouncing back from disappointment but, progressively, the character presented increasing signs of mental instability. The final third of the performance documented a mental breakdown which climaxed with a failed suicide attempt.

A consistent recurrent feature of the performance is the representation of the character's concerns over the passing of time. Time is generally represented physically as the moving arms of a clock. The pressure of time provides an ever present link between the recurring failure of the character to meet her psychological needs and her deteriorating mental state.

#### **4.4.4    *Physicality***

Working towards the creation of a piece of solo work, encouraged me to maximise the potentially for communication with my own body. Having developed *Save Me* from a series of physically lead solo improvisations, the physical language was a significant part of my interaction with feminism.

In identifying how the use of the CDA mask creates levels of distortion, I was able to grasp the significance of movement as a primary tool of disturbance. For example, the extent to which movement can (in a stylised fashion) be used to construct instantly recognisable personas. During vignette 3 (introduction of time pressure) I used stylised movement to represent multiple stereotyped ideals relating to the young British Woman.

- *Time for a career.*
- *Time for this female to find a mating partner...*
- *Time you got on the property ladder. That's right I said the property ladder.*
- *Time to go travelling. Don't you want to see the world!?!*
- *Time to have babies...ahh tiny little babies...*

It was through my physical embodiment of these stereotypes that I was able to wear multiple personas, moving swiftly from one idea to the next without the need for character introductions or costume change. This was useful to the idea of constructed identity I was exploring, particularly in terms of highlighting the absurd idea of identity being an object of consumption.

Furthermore, from looking at the CDA masks, I am aware of the comic value in exposing the paradoxical nature of identity. In *Save Me* I was interested in how I could use physical comedy to reveal the comic/tragic state of her psychology in her quest for identity.

One of the ways in which I sought to physically explore the comic/tragic paradox was through the use of mime. Using circus music in Episode 12 I choreographed a stylised sequence, that was intended to represent the external facade of happiness whilst simultaneously reveal the underlying reality of depression.

#### **4.5 The finished work**

##### **4.5.1 Basis of review**

This analysis of the finished work does not involve any audience research to underpin a qualitative assessment of the efficacy, or otherwise, of the various theatrical devices employed in *Save Me*. Instead, I have identified three measures which, taken together, are useful proxy indicators for assessing the contemporary relevance of the CDA tradition for feminist theatre-making. This provides a useful counter-balance to the phenomenological approach adopted above.

There are three measures that I have used to evaluate the extent to which *Save Me* suggests that the CDA tradition is useful for contemporary feminist theatre-making

- a) The extent to which CDA devices are employed
- b) The degree to which the employment of those devices is relevant to an exploration of post-feminist orthodoxy
- c) Consideration of the extent to which other approaches are adopted that are not consistent with the CDA tradition

At Appendix 2 a summary tabulation of the seventeen scenes of *Save Me* is presented, identifying the narrative stages of the piece and referencing the frequency of the use of techniques to which CDA practices

It is accepted that this static analysis has its limitations. For example, in the performances other unintended effects may have been created. However for the most part the analysis that follows is not controversial and supports a holistic analysis of the extent to which *Save Me* was designed to rely on various theatrical techniques

##### **4.5.2 Extent of use of CDA devices**

For CDA the primary techniques used were humour (physical comedy and parody) and this was usually allied with the use of the grotesque (see Section 2.4.2 for a discussion of grotesque representation)

For *Save Me* without the use of masks I sought other techniques to create a grotesque effect. As revealed in the earlier detailed account of the imagined surgery scene, fantasy and physical theatre were employed to provoke a grotesque representation of the stereotype.

Out of fourteen vignettes, six used physical comedy, or relied on some form of parody as the main stimulus to disturbance. Of the other eight scenes, five utilised some element of parody or physical comedy to support another disturbance technique.

Five scenes involved the use of fantasy or physical theatre as a primary means of creating a grotesque effect and a further two scenes included these technique to support another disturbance technique.

Therefore, almost every scene made direct use of a theatrical technique that was commonplace in CDA's work and two thirds of all scenes relied predominantly on techniques used by CDA. Although I do not claim to have consciously engineered *Save Me* to achieve this degree of convergence yet the practices of CDA were in my mind throughout the construction of the piece.

In the light of this analysis, it is fair to conclude that the practices of CDA were influential the development and design of *Save Me*.

#### **4.5.4 Aspects of the production inconsistent with the CDA tradition**

Apart from differences already discussed at length previously (the absence of masks and stock characters); there are three potentially significant differences between *Save Me* and a representative CDA performance. Firstly the whole of my work was scripted whereas most elements of CDA's practice were improvised; CDA had set choreographed pieces performed by Zanni. My performances were not street performances and did not use any props (apart from the platforms). CDA troupes would have mainly performed outside and using slapsticks and other props.

Finally, the narrative in *Save Me* reaches a climax and at the end of the piece the state of the woman (having attempted suicide) is quite different from her apparently positive state of mind at the start. CDA narratives often ended with the characters in much the same position as at the start of the performance. The masters and servants retained the formal status that they enjoyed previously. Whatever befell them in the performance did not affect their character. For example, in his book *Commedia dell'Arte the Actors Hand Book* Rudlin describes the fixed identity of mask, stating 'it is returned to the box unaffected by the game which has been played with it' (Rudlin, 1994, p.35). Furthermore, not only is the stereotype represented by the mask immutable, but also in a CDA plot the characters are not transformed or affected by the happening of events. For example, servants are not promoted to masters and masters are not demoted to servants (Connon cited in George & Gossip 1993, p.136).

These differences are not so significant that they cast doubt on whether *Save Me* is a devised piece that can trace important elements of its approach back to CDA. I have demonstrated that in devising *Save Me* I have borrowed extensively from the CDA tradition. I acknowledge that, such is CDA's influence on subsequent theatre practice, that it would be difficult to be entirely unaffected by CDA's work. Indeed in her training work at the National Theatre, Didi Hopkins, asserts that CDA 'has given us the roots and the grammar of European theatre' (<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/a-brief-history-of-commedia>) Training video

However, whereas CDA's general influence on performance-making is not always acknowledged, I have explicitly recognised that my work is in a direct lineage from CDA's tradition.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Ambition of initial objectives

Although my fundamental objectives relating to the exploration of the continuing relevance of CDA practices to contemporary feminist theatre-making have remained constant, this research project has evolved significantly from its original conception.

I have found two aspects of the research particularly challenging

- a) Analysis and exploration of the links between CDA, contemporary theatre practice generally, and my own experience in devising and performing experience with *Save Me*.
- b) Contextualising my personal feminist perspective and exploring the extent to which my feminist perspective for *Save Me* is analogous to the way that CDA work reflected a perspective on the societal norms of their day.

Notwithstanding the relative longevity of the CDA practice, and its undoubted popular appeal in its day, there have been so many changes in both society as a whole, and in theatre practices that it is a rather tortuous path that links then and now. Although there continue to be contemporary CDA performances and SAT (an Italian Cultural Organisation) promotes CDA day on February 25 each year, it is no longer a major contemporary art form.

As I commenced this project my feminist perspective was instinctive rather than academic. My performance sprang from my instincts, and it is through researching this thesis that I have been able to place my views in context of feminist theories. Accordingly, my analysis of how CDA's practices relate to contemporary feminist theatre practice has been through several iterations. In spite, or perhaps because, of this extended process I am now confident in the conclusions that I have reached, and also clear about matters on which this research does not cast much light.

With regard to the matters that this dissertation does not illuminate, the most significant is any matter connected with the assessment or measurement of the effects on the audience for *Save Me* of applying various theatrical devices. This is a matter that would only be able to be addressed in a totally different research exercise and one that would require some kind of control procedure in order reach secure conclusions.

### 5.2 Subordinate conclusions

#### 5.2.1 CDA practices and their place in the pantheon of theatre-making

I have adopted a two-pronged approach in relating CDA's practices to the modern day.

Firstly, I have focused on two distinctive features of CDA performances (the use of stock characters and masks), and sought to analyse how these devices were exploited in their time. Secondly, I have explored the links between CDA's practices and contemporary practice, showing how the use of stock characters and masks is consistent with Brecht's alienation theory and Aston's spheres of disturbance.

This research has provided me with a sufficient understanding of the significance of CDA's practices that I have been able to devise an appropriate reflective research approach (based on a phenomenological method) to analyse my own practice with *Save Me*. This has been combined with a structured analysis of *Save Me* to compare and contrast it with CDA's work. Together these approaches have also served a direct purpose in helping me to relate CDA's work to contemporary theatre-making practice.

I conclude that I have convincingly demonstrated that CDA's tradition is not a remote or largely defunct branch of historic theatre-making. Its practices represent precursors of Brecht and later practitioners' practices.. Although practice has developed, and our understanding has advanced, CDA's work is that of a mainstream antecedent of my practice in devising *Save Me* and of Fo and Rame.

### **5.2.2 Is the CDA tradition relevant for a contemporary feminist theatre-maker?**

In order to reach the gist of this question, it is necessary to understand the range of modern feminist perspectives and postulate the how these relate to CDA's tradition.

Fortunately, as a good starting point there is a near unanimity among feminists today that most aspects of gender identity are a social and cultural construct. It is also not contentious to observe that performances in the CDA tradition were lampooning the contemporary social order. Although audiences at that time would not have known, or necessarily agreed, that social hierarchy was similarly a construct, nonetheless they enjoyed CDA's parody of it.

The most convincing evidence in relation to CDA's relevance to feminist theatre is seen when reviewing in some detail the range of techniques employed. When analysed through the lens of modern theories, such as Brecht's 'alienation' theory or Aston's 'spheres of disturbance', it is apparent that the CDA form employs a wide range of techniques and devices that would have stimulated their audiences to contemplate a different world order.

There is convincing evidence not only that there is an opportunity for feminist theatre-makers to use techniques from the CDA tradition, but also that these techniques will serve their purpose well, and also that they are being used in practice right up to the present day for example by Triffle (mentioned previously in section 3.5.6).

### **5.2.3 The practical test – *Save Me***

This dissertation is one part of a practical research project. The devising and presentation of a one-woman physical theatre piece, *Save Me*, is the other part.

In devising and performing *Save Me* I sought to apply theatrical devices in the CDA tradition with the aim of stimulating the audience to think afresh about aspects of female identity. With hindsight, I have reflected on the devising process considering the extent to which it was stimulated by, and related to, the CDA tradition.

Ironically, as a feminist, in *Save Me*, I have sought to parody the priorities and concerns of a stereotypical post-feminist woman. In my reflection of the performance-making process I have attempted to map the relationship between the various theatrical devices I employed and the CDA tradition. I have also demonstrated (Section 3.3 above) that my critique of feminist orthodoxy resonates with the views of other feminists.

In the light of the how *Save Me* was devised, the feminist perspective it reflects, and how I have reflected on the making, I believe that it constitutes a useful practical test of whether or not the CDA tradition has practical use and relevance for contemporary feminist theatre-making.

Reviewing the structure of the *Save Me*, its reliance on physical comedy, and its attempt to present a grotesque representation of its target, I believe that the debt it owes to the CDA tradition is readily apparent.

### 5.3 Summary conclusion

It is customary to hedge conclusions with suitable caveats. However, this does not seem appropriate in this case. My research aim was to *explore the relevance* of the CDA tradition to modern feminist theatre-making. Firstly, I conclude that it is relevant. Its relevance is supported by three principal logical arguments

- a) CDA's practices and tradition sit centrally within a tradition of theatre-making that continues to the present day. Theatre that is accessible and entertaining. Theatre that presents a deliberately distorted view of the world. Theatre that seeks to use a range of techniques to prompt thought and enquiry.
- b) It might be expected that feminists will not be satisfied with the world as is, and will wish to highlight any aspect of the status quo that is prejudicial to women's interests. The CDA tradition remains relevant; suggesting ways to stimulate awareness and debate about whether the orthodox perception of social constructs, such as gender, should be questioned
- c) Finally, by presenting a transparent account of my own 'laboratory experiment' in devising *Save Me*, and by reflecting on my own practice, I can offer useful practical insight into whether CDA remains relevant.

It is difficult to summarise, in a few sentences, the results of my exploration of all aspects of CDA's relevance. This is because what I have discovered is not a narrow intersection between the CDA tradition and contemporary feminist theatre-making. Rather, there are many connections and opportunities to follow up. The use of physical comedy, and transforming the familiar into a grotesque form to parody it, then applying these theatrical devices to lampoon the prevailing orthodoxy – such an approach has a timeless relevance to those seeking to promote change in society.

I have found that the reviewing and analysing how CDA operated has provided a useful stimulus to my devising. I have been able to practically employ directly comparable or related techniques and believe they served my purposes as a feminist theatre-maker well.



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APPENDIX 1 – SAVE ME FINAL SCRIPT

***Save Me!***

*Written and performed by Rachel Horley*

**Episode 1**

Once upon a time in a faraway land, there was a tiny little girl who lived in a tiny little kingdom. It was peaceful-some times, not so prosperous, but it was rich in romance and tradition.

**Episode 2**

At the blooming age of 15 I was growing up faster than I could ever have imagined, my hair was short and frizzy but my breasts hadn't grown much at all. I learned lots of fascinating things about fashion, boys and make up (*she holds a pose*). Once I remember walking down the street - it was a warm summer's day and the sun was beaming on my back. Then all of a sudden out of the blue I hear this voice, this loud, deep, vibrating voice somewhere in the distance behind me. I looked round and to my surprise, there he was, this tall, dark, handsome man stood on top of some scaffolding. He's looking at me and I'm looking at him and then just like that he says to me,

"Oi you get your tits out".

I beg your pardon?

"I said, get your tits out".



Well that was it, I couldn't hold it in any longer. I ran right up to the scaffolding and once I got to the top I stood there (with the wind in my hair) I stared him right in the eye. We shared a moment. I grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and I said to him "prince charming would never talk to Cinderella like that!" and as I loosened my grip I watched him go flying through the air like superman. Like superman soaring through the sky! Only not...he landed with a thud. "Oh no!" That was a hard fall. I didn't mean to hurt you. It's just - well you were being ever so rude and well somebody had to tell you. Lucky for him I was used to playing doctors and nurses. I knew all about mouth-to-mouth resuscitation (*kisses him*). I was very diligent, I even checked for ear infections. Hmm this definitely wasn't an ear infection. Eventually he woke up and so I helped him to his feet. And as I gazed into his deep brown eyes. I had an urge. So I grabbed him and kissed him. And then he turned into a frog?! I hate frogs! Why a frog? Why a dirty slimy horrible frog?! Why not a prince? Why not a tall dark handsome...

### **Episode 3**

You what?! Dinners ready? Right I'm coming. That's my mother calling. You wouldn't think I was in my 20's. You see I am still living at home with mum and dad.

"Do you want a brew love?"

I can be anything I want to be.

"What do you want for your dinner coz me and your dad are off to the shops?"

The world is my oyster.

“Don’t be back too late remember you’ve got work in the morning”.

I CAN because I believe I can

“Right have you got any whites for the wash because I’m putting on a load”.

I AM AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN. I AM A WOMAN OF THE NEW AGE. No mother, I don’t need waking up because I have an alarm clock! And I’m running out of...

#### **Episode 4**

- Time for a career.
- Time for this female to find a mating partner...
- Time you got on the property ladder. That’s right I said the property ladder.
- Time to go travelling. Don’t you want to see the world!?!
- Time to have babies...ahh tiny little babies...
- Too short of time. I have lots of time. Time flies. Time is of the essence. I have lots of time. Time flies. I have lots of time. Time Flies. They say time waits for no man. I have lots of time. Time flies. Time of the essence. I have lots of time. Too short of time. This is just going to take a little time!

*The sound of a ticking clock*

I can be a successful business woman. I must be a successful business woman. I will be a successful business woman! I need a car - but I don't have a license. And what about a baby! I've got to have a baby! Prince Charming!? I take thee to be my lawful wedded/Shit! I'm late! Is it alright if I go part time? Only you know what it's like when you've got a baby! Sh sh sh go to sleep. You got to have money and you've got to have a house, you can't live in a cardboard box! Wakey wakey rise and shine! Lend us a tenna. Got no money. Until next week? Insurance!? I forgot about insurance! It's an arm and a leg! A to B. B for Baby. Buggy! I need a buggy!

*She freezes and stares blankly out for several seconds. Finally she walks awkwardly and stands before the audience.*

I am a very proactive person. I am very confident in my ability to succeed. I have a range of transferable skills and I am great with people. I believe in me. After all I have a degree in Drama....

## **Episode 5**

*Knock knock knock* Are you hiring? Give us a job then!

Hot Bird Hot bird! Come and get your Hot Hot bird! Rump steak!? Rump steak?! Anyone for some fresh rump stake!? Come on don't be shy - I know you're hungry! This is a bargain! An absolute bargain! Ah you're a tough crowd to please. How's about some thigh then ey?! Can I tempt you with a bit of thigh? C'mon don't be shy for a bit of thigh! I tell what I'll do you a deal - I'll even throw in a bit of breast meat! You can't beat a bit of breast meat. Here we go 2 for 1! Breast and thigh - don't be shy! Tender succulent breast - the finest in the North

West! You look like you could be a breast man sir or do you prefer a bit of the old rump?

Fired?! Can you believe it!? The butcher fired me. I just don't get it! Everything was going so well, I was moving up the corporate ladder! The customers loved me, at least I thought they did. The butcher had been receiving complaints from female customers regarding my sales technique, apparently it's "degrading to women". Yeah right, more like one of the seven deadly sins...JEALOUSY. Anyway, I wasn't going to let that stop me from being proactive. It's not all about career is it? Well it is- but it's also about Prince Charming- Right. Coz I know. I know! that my prince charming is out there somewhere. I've just got to find him - you know at some sort of event - yeah - like some sort of Salsa night! I like salsa! Salsa!

## **Episode 6**

*Salsa music begins to play and she starts to dance*

The men at these nights are complete gentlemen. They actually ask you if you would like to dance instead of just creeping up behind you and whispering dirty words in your ear. "I only know a few basic steps", I said. It soon became obvious that I was not a girl who could be easily led, he kept trying to lead me one way and then another, so I kept trying to lead him one way and then another. But then he tried to spin me around. So I span him around. But I don't think he liked that very much because the next minute he had me right up close to his chest. He put his hands on my hips and began moving them side to side. It was as though my hips had become an extended part of his own body.

Then, all of a sudden without warning my whole body went completely stiff. It Refused, Repelled, Revolted! Against the will of his touch.

*The salsa music softens into a faint background noise*

"I'm sorry" I kept saying "I am just not used to being led" And it was at this moment that I was reminded of an old childhood memory. You see when I was a little girl me and my little brother used to play fight in the back garden, he was always one of those daleks from doctor who and I was always Superman! It was my job to save the day. I would wrestle him to the ground and sometimes I'd miss, but I was relentless, and I Never Ever Ever gave up.

*The salsa music loudens once more - she reverts to dancing*

But somehow tonight was different, I was different, this man was different! I let myself be lifted up in the air I let him spin me around again and again! I let him carry me across the floor and literally sweep me off my feet! He was fantastic. So passionate! He knew exactly what he was doing! He made me feel like a real woman!

## **Episode 7**

*She wakes up, gesturing a headache. She notices the man sleeping next to her.*

Oh no what a terrible mistake! There wasn't even any courtship!

*She attempts to sneak off without being seen muttering to herself.*

Maybe I can just sneak off without anyone even noticing. Just because someone is good at salsa it doesn't mean you have to sleep with them! Oh you stupid girl! You stupid silly stupid girl! Oh

great *(she starts searching for something she appears to have lost)*  
now I can't lost my- oh no I can't find my *(realisation dawns on her)* my virginity! I have LOST my virginity! No no no no- this is not happening. This is not me. I am not this girl. I'm not Samantha, I'm Charlotte! I'm the girl who put the hula-hoop on her finger and the pillowcase on my head. I'm the girl who has spent hours and hours imagining that day- that fateful and glorious day when I say "I do". Just me and my husband in a world full of love. He brings me flowers (roses in fact) and I pick off the petals one by one. He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not!? *(There are no more petals left so she caresses the stem)* he loves me!

*Becoming more excited*

We have children too, a boy and a girl, Malcolm and Isabella. Malcolm is a little terror! Once he trod mud all up the stairs - all over my brand new carpet and when my loving husband found out he was livid!

"It's alright love it's only a bit of mud, I'll clean it up".

Sometimes our domestics get really ugly! Once I had to call the police.

"Me and my children have locked ourselves in the bathroom, my loving husband has gone quite mad with a sledge hammer. Come quick!"

*Once again she notices the man sleeping in the bed - she has a change of thought*

Wait a minute, this could be my prince charming - I mean, if you think about it we met at a ball and we danced all night - well technically it was more of a club, but that is the modern day equivalent right!

And I didn't lose my slipper but I definitely lost something. Plus he is ever so handsome, maybe I'll just stay a little while longer - you know, wait until he wakes up.

*She creeps back into his bed and lays down beside him*

"Morning!" I said. And he's looking at me like he has seen some sort of ghost. And then, just like that, out of the blue, I don't know what came over me but I found myself asking him, "Sooo what do you think about marriage?" He started to edge his way toward the corner of the bed and then he says to me, "but I don't even know your name". Truth was I couldn't remember his but seeing as we had at this point shared much more than a kiss I felt it was only right to proceed in establishing what kind of future we might have together. "Would you like to meet my parents? If we leave now we can catch them before they leave to do their Sunday morning grocery shop."

*She listens to his response.*

'Oh well never mind, we don't have to do it today there is always tomorrow. And the next day! Oh well it's very sweet of you to offer me a lift but I wasn't planning on leaving just yet. We haven't even had breakfast! I like croissants by the way - just in case you were wondering. Anyway I was thinking (when you were sleeping) that me and you, we're like Romeo and Juliet. We're like this (*she entwines two of her fingers*). We can die together!'

(*Aside*) He obviously wasn't familiar with any of the great classics.

'You know, you have a lovely pair of eyes. And when we have children together they will be REALLY good looking! The door? Yeah of course

I know where the door is. Well obviously, I know how to use a door silly!’

*A look of realisation crosses over her face as she finally understands his meaning.*

Oh...Ohhhh....Dis-a-poin-tingggggg! Really disa-pointing...

*Attempts to pull herself together.*

Assume position.

*She takes a deep breath and sits up with good posture.*

I am fine. I’m great. Honestly I’m wonderful. Things are going so well. I’m just so blessed. So fulfilled. I’ve just got to focus on me, myself and my- career- yes my career. Speaking of which I have just got a new job and I am REALLY happy.

## **Episode 8**

*The sound of 8 fast ticks of a clock*

That’s it children come and sit down and let’s make a nice circle. Not a blob, a circle! Now I know you are all very eager to make your papier-mâché masks but afterschool activities are not all about papier-mâché. Now, I would like a brief recap about what we were discussing last week. Does anyone remember what we were discussing last week? Yes Joshua? Yes we can run around outside but first of all I think it would be really fun if we revisited what we were learning last week about **Drama**. Yes Philipa? You need a wee right now? Right well hurry up because you don’t want to miss out on learning all about **‘Characterisation’** do you! Now, who remembers what I do for a living?



Yes Billy? No not an astronaut. It does begin with the letter A though so good effort. Anyone else? I'll give you a clue, A - C - T, actor! Remember, I am an Actor? What's an actor? Now that is a very good question! You see children an actor is somebody who...

*She goes into various different character voices/physicality's // represents a change of voice-physicality.*

*(Slapped in the face)* You bitch! You're gonna pay for that! Take that and that and that! *(Her head is repeatedly slammed against the floor)*  
// I've wanted you from the very first moment I saw you! Come here and give me a great big kiss! Mmm you are a really good kisser! Yeah that's it...a little further down...and a little bit further. That's it, now you're talking! A little bit to the left and a little bit to the // Right you Bastard shithead cocksucker I am only going to say this once you fucking asshole....

*She suddenly freezes and looks up at the children.*

...Of course if these words were written in a script it would be perfectly OK to use them. But don't repeat that word. Or that one. And definitely not that one! Stop it. That language is disgusting! Do not repeat that word. Alright children just calm down, there's not too long now before your parents come and pick you up. Right everybody all eyes on me, fingers on lips. Lips!

Terminated! My contract was terminated! Just like that. Finished. Finitio. Long gone. See ya later! No more. Asta la vista baby! Gone just like that. No more funding. I mean they're saying that they have a problem with the way I teach drama but I'm not stupid, I know what has been going on. I know there has been funding cuts in the arts. This isn't personal this is political. It's the kids I feel sorry for. Not me! I'll be fine! They're the ones who are going to suffer. I mean I was their vessel - their creative vessel. I was feeding - nurturing - encouraging - guiding their creativity. What are they going to do now? I mean of course there are other drama teachers out there but are they as good as me? (I don't think so) cause let's face it right, I am not the problem. Drama is! Drama is the problem! I mean it's about aesthetics isn't it yano and err, well it's about ethics, and its... moral... some might say...look the point is its practical isn't it and I am a practical person and I need to practice things like- meditation! Yeah I need to practice meditation- spiritual guidance- that is me.

## **Episode 9**

*She sits in a meditation pose and takes a deep breath.*

Deep breaths. Now empty your head of all your thoughtsssssss

*She leans forward breathing an outward sssssssss and then sits up abruptly*

The other night I dreamt that I was drowning/

Shhh/

Drowning/

Shh/

Yes I said drowning-I couldn't keep my head above water/

Shutup/

It was as though I was back inside me mothers/

Shhh/

inside my mothers/

Back inside my mother womb. I could hear the muffled sound of her voice  
and her heart beating

(she makes the sound of a heart)

*The sound of an alarm interrupts she switches it off.*

*She holds back tears*

Lately getting out of bed has become a Real Struggle...I don't know  
what's come over me. I just can't stop crying. This is getting  
ridiculous something has to be done!

## **Episode 10**

Yes doctor. I am quite aware of the risks. Reaction against  
anaesthetic, wound infection, blood clots, scarring, ah yes and NO  
breastfeeding should I ever decide to have children. Yep I am  
absolutely fine with all of those risks. Just make me beautiful. No  
pain no gain, eh!

Wait! Before you put me to sleep doctor I'd like to say a little prayer  
if you don't mind. Dear Lord, please don't let me die and please watch

over the surgeon and make sure he doesn't make any mistakes! Amen. Oh and I'm Sorry for not being happy with the ones that you gave me!

Count backwards from 10? Righto. Will do! 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2.... HeLLLO Doctor! Am I still supposed to be awake? Excuse me! I said I am still very much awake!

Stop! Please stop! I think I have made a mistake! I said I think I have made a mistake! I was confused! I would like you to stop now please! I have changed my mind! I like my body. You've got the wrong girl! Stop it. Stop it! Stop that this instance! I don't want fake bosoms! Just sew me back up and let me out of here!

*She sits up suddenly and feels her breasts - making sure they're still there. She sighs in relief.*

## **Episode 11**

The dreams are getting worse! It's like I can't tell my dreams from my reality. Which is which?

*She stares blankly at the audience for a moment*

I need a doctor. A real doctor. Someone who can give me advice and support.

Yes. I have been sleeping a lot. And sometimes crying a lot and also mood swings, really heavy mood swings. Depression? Right. Medication? Ok. Therapy? How long have you been a doctor?

*(Aside)* Therapy?! Do I look like I need therapy? I don't think so!

I mean let's give it a try shall we? Go on ask me a question about my childhood. Anything you like. Go on. Like have I always hated garden peas? Or was that only after my father started hitting my mother? (He hasn't by the way-or has he? No I don't think he has). Look the point here, is that we all have issues. Right? I mean if you don't mind me saying so you look like a man with a few issues - and that's fine coz that is normal - we are normal! He's trying to say that I Abnormal! Abnormal is this (*She makes an silly clown like body position*) This is Abnormal! If I was to walk around like this that would be abnormal. But that's not me. I'm fine. I'm like this - yeah - this is me.

*She physically exaggerates a series of confident body positions*

I don't need medication, I don't need therapy, I don't need a doctor.

*She stares blankly for a good few seconds at something that has caught her eye*

I don't need medication, I don't need therapy, I don't need a doctor.  
What I need is...

Boy on the platform smiles. Girl thought/

Confidence is a journey/

...because your worth it, you are you're worth it. You are really worth it/

Have you had an accident at/

Borrow the money you need today and pay it back on your next/

As we age our skin loses its/

As we age our skin loses its/

Loses its/

Its/

Its/

Borrow the money you need today/

*slowing down like a robot running out of battery power*

This is our most amazing destination yet/et/et/et/et/et

Crickets! I want to eat crickets! And cats and dogs! You know like they do in places like Thailand and France! Only then can I really discover who I actually am. Coz that's all it is, I'm just a little bit lost, just a little confused - that's all. I just need to see the world. You know on my own. Find myself, discover who I really am. Travelling! I am going travelling...

## **Episode 12**

*Music - a physically comic journey of her travels and 'self-discovery. She ends up on the back of a horse...*

Dear mum and dad, I am riding on horseback up the rocky winding twisting roads of the English countryside. I am currently wondering what it would be like to be whisked away to some far off land by a handsome...

Woo, woo easy boy...

*Falls off her horse. Disorientated she sit ups slowly*

## **Episode 13**

Who are you? Did you just say your name was Prince Charming? Yeah right, do I look like I was born yesterday? You can't pull the wool over my eyes. I've been down this road before, yep been down this road before.

Oh yeah that's it- go on tell me- tell me more- yeah that's it! I'm the most beautiful thing you have ever seen am I?! Yeah right! And I've got no makeup on! *(mocking)* Prince Charming..

...And by the way can you stop smiling coz your teeth are really bright and their giving me a headache.

Ah are you going now are you? Ahh I've hurt your feelings! I'm sorry I didn't mean to hurt you. That's it walk away- on your bike- off you pop, like all the rest. Fuck off!

*Aside*

Iv'e got bigger fish to fry...wasn't really my type anyway

*She takes some 'medication' and sips her drink- she pauses*

*The lights is dim*

*5 clashes of thunder as she strikes 5 poses.*

#### **Episode 14**

Hello! Over here! I'm over here! Can you see me? Mr fireman! My windows, my doors, my whole world is caving in! Come and save me!

*There is smoke and the sound of a fire engine in the distance.*

*She enacts the following scenario*

"Don't worry - I'm coming to get you! Everything is going to be just fine. Did you hear me I said you're going to be just fine. That's it stay with me. Stay with me! Never mind about me. I'll be fine. That's it just keep breathing. Keep breathing!"

*Rousing music*

And the award for bravery goes to - Thank you thank you are very kind. It was nothing! Honestly I just did what any self-respecting person with Ovaries would do! Ovaries - ovaries - I have ovaries!

*Music stops*

### **Episode 15**

Woah woah - I am having eureka moment. All of a sudden things are starting to make sense. I have found that thing, that Ting, that Bing moment has gone off in my brain - I know I was self-medicating but I'm fine now. I was just riding the avalanche you know, sailing through the tsunami. But not now. Now, finally, I have found the lines that connect all the dots. I have figured it all out. I have arrived at my destination, like a train pulling into a station, From this day forward trains will run on time. People will see each other and shake hands in the streets. Pigeons will be more careful. Everyone will pick up their own dog poo. There will be no more extinction, Rivers will never run dry, The dodo will come back, everyone will live in a detached house with a garden. The sun will always shine on Manchester! Facebook. A virtual revolution! I'll organise an event - I'll call it That Takes Ovaries! There will be music, poetry, spoken word and monologues- about courageous women! I'll do the monologues...

*8 fast ticks of a clock*

### **Episode 16**

Hello good evening everyone I would like to welcome you all to this evenings event 'that takes ovaries!'. We are going to open this evenings with a few important facts.

Did you know that "The clitoris has 5000 nerve endings, which is twice twice twice as many as a penis!" and now for some cheerleading from the Woods End Girls academy.



*She begins a cheerleading Chant.*

"C - U - N - T, you feel M - T, what does your vagina say, let it speak to you today! C - U - N - T, praise your PMT!

And now just incase you forgot here comes that all important fact again!

"The clitoris has 5000 nerve endings, which is twice twice twice as many as a penis!"

*An awkward silence*

Lovely, and now for a few words from the special lady behind tonight's extravaganza - would you like to say a few words?

*(with sheer disappointment)* I'd like to thank everyone for coming tonight even though it has been an utter utter failure. *(with irritation and anger)* Sorry can I just say that - I didn't actually set up this evenings event - well obviously I did but it wasn't my idea to have biological cheerleading or any of the pointless vaginal facts during the intervals! Thank you!

*She begins to breakdown into tears*

When I set up tonight's event I had a vision - a eureka moment! Personally I think it's a very slippery slope putting your vagina on a pedestal! I am not my vagina and my vagina is not me!

*Sound of lots of ticking clocks*

Time! Ticking. Can you hear that ticking? I can hear that ticking. There's hundreds of them pestering me, taunting me, I Can't take it

anymore, I can't take it, somebody make it stop. Please stop Please  
somebody make them stop!

*The light begins to fade into a tiny dot - Blackout*

*Sound of Ambulance Sirens and then the sound of paramedics...*

*Lights come up*

### **Episode 17**

Some might say that this woman was just plain crazy, others might say that she was just young and naïve and stupidly she believed in the lies - in a dream that was sold to her, ideals of perfection. And so this woman lost sight of who she was and who she could be - how she should live and what she should dream. Sometimes the most dangerous of lies are those we tell ourselves.

This woman's dream finally came true and she was saved - by the doctors, the nurses, the paramedics. What is that old adage 'beware lest your dreams come true' She is lucky - she'll get to see another day - but will she LIVE it, or will she just carry on dying day by day?

*THE END*

## APPENDIX 2 – SUMMARY SCENIC STRUCTURE OF *SAVE ME*

[illegible]

NOVEMBER 2014

The figure at Appendix 2 provides a summary representation of Save Me. It offers an analysis of the scenes and narrative stages, identifies the identity element explored in each scene, and specifies the main theatrical devices employed.

Apart from the opening and closing scenes addressed by the narrator, there is one main division in the narrative structure. Scenes 2-10 deal with various challenges posed to the young woman. In all cases she fails the test. Scenes 11-16 report her progressive psychological deterioration which climax with the suicide attempt. The challenge faced in each scene reflects one of the three identity aspirations

- Achieving fulfilling intimate relationships (primarily with men and as a mother)
- Self-image issues in connection with career, body image
- Economic means to support independent living

I have reviewed each scene in turn to identify the principal theatrical device employed in each scene to promote disturbance (selected from the list below). I have also identified the techniques used as supporting techniques where applicable.

- Physicality
- Physical comedy\*
- **Parody\***
- **Fantasy\*\***
- **Paradox**
- Direct address

\* CDA favoured technique

\*\* Surrogate measure for mask