CHANGING IN PUBLIC:

Addressing the invisibility of menopause for working women in South London, using scenographic practice and ethnography-based theatre

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of Liverpool Hope University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

Whilst registered as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, I have not been registered for any other research award. I certify that this thesis is of the result of my own work and investigation, except where indicated by references, and this thesis has not been previously submitted for an award of this University or any other institution.

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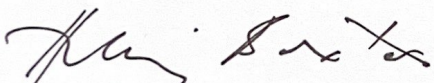
Signed: 

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Abstract:

Menopause has until recently been somewhat of a taboo subject, particularly in the workplace where it is typically represented as a problem to be dealt with by individual women. Over the four-year timespan of this research project (2017-21) there has been a steadily increasing amount of media interest in menopause, mainly written by menopausal women themselves, which indicates both the timeliness of my research and its immediate relevance to the emerging discourse around all aspects of Menopause, specifically for working women.

This is a cross-disciplinary practice-based PhD inquiry in Drama and Healthcare (Scenography and Menopause) which used ethnography-based theatre-making methods (Ethnotheatre) as a line of enquiry into Menopause for working women in the UK, geographically focussed in South London. My Drama research is Scenography, emerging from my previous Theatre Design practice. The four scenographic performances staged the research questions, contextualised by literature and other performance practices, and the subsequent reflective analysis further developed the questions, which, in turn, became the foundations for the next performance. The first performance *Prólogos* (June 2017) was a short site-specific performance at St Mary's University. The second performance employed both scenographic and ethnotheatre methods (verbatim use of interview material) to create *Puzzled*, shown at Croydon Council's Diversity Awareness Conference (April 2018). *Women of Brockwell (missing statue),* the third performance (June 2019) was a public installation in Brockwell Park, South London. The final performance (January 2020) synthesised both scenography and ethnotheatre outcomes into a theatre production CHANGING IN PUBLIC in St Mary's University Theatre.

This investigation has used a 'bricolage' of research methods, employing ethnographic methods of interviewing (spoken, written and visual) as the tools from which to create scenographic ethnotheatre, using 'make-reflect-remake' iterative cycles to develop the practice, which has been further refined into 'make-reflect-re-contextualise-remake'. The questions for my research are concerned with public expressions of the menopause (both cultural and personal) and how a form of applied scenography can be extended to develop an ethnography-based performance within a post-dramatic theatre framework, allowing for a primary language of visuals and other sensory experiences to engage the spectator, rather than privileging the dramatic text. My research deals with real world cross-disciplinary problem-solving and the practice outcomes represent a new direction for Scenography and Ethnotheatre.

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INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with the real-life menopause experience of contemporary women[1] examined through scenography practice. This is a practice-based research project in which the discipline of scenography is used as the locus for a cross-disciplinary enquiry into menopause, using Ethnography-based research methods including interviews. My research addresses the absence of menopause experiences from mainstream discourse and culture, by extending applied scenography practice through three iterations of practice that culminated in four performances.

The overarching aims of the research were to address the absence of menopause representation for working women from a feminist standpoint that informed an applied scenography practice. This is articulated in the three research questions: 1- How can the absence of menopause representation be addressed through scenography? 2- How can ethnography-based methods be used to develop an applied scenography? 3- How can a feminist scenography reveal new perspectives of menopause within patriarchal structures? Secondary research questions were identified from emerging insights after each performance which were then addressed through being staged in the next performance.

Scenography

As an academic theatre arts subject, Scenography research has grown rapidly in the UK in the twenty-first century following the opportunities afforded by higher education initiatives and funding. Scenography may seem to be closely related to other forms of arts practice such as choreography when used as a descriptor – e.g. 'the choreography' or 'the scenography'. But choreography is also used as a verb, e.g. choreograph-ing, whereas the current use of scenography does not include 'sceno-graphing'. Instead, the use of scenography is closer to the word bibliography (the study of a subject area), although scenography also encompasses practice and praxis, which embodies theory, lessons or skills within practice. A practitioner might self-define as a scenographer academically or in professional practice. In this research, I have chosen to use the descriptor 'practitioner' for

[1] In this thesis I have used the term woman/women to reflect sex rather than gender. Given that menopause is connected to the female reproductive system and changing levels of oestrogen, there are trans-men who will also go through menopause, to a lesser or greater extent depending on hormone levels.

consistency as a link to practice, rather than designer or artist, which might also be substituted.

In contemporary British professional theatre performances, scenography is generally referred to as performance or theatre design[2] in programme credits, but individual theatre practitioners can choose nomenclature that fits with their own design work; there is no required consistency in usage. In this regard, Augusto Boal, founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, suggests that naming is an attempt to 'immobilise' (ibid.) meaning, which interrupts the ongoing development of ideas:

> The name is the fixing, in time and space of that which is fluid, that which actually cannot stop or be stopped in time and space. (Boal, 2006 [1979]: 13)

Working definitions of scenography practice are held closely by individual practitioners (Howard, 2002: xiii , Howard with Drábek, 2019: xx), who integrate their thinking into the fluidity of a creative process. This process culminates in a live performance within a defined space, sometimes a theatre. Rendering theatre arts practice into language is a complicated process, debated, contested, re-defined and sometimes overly ornamental or 'obfuscating' (Freeman, 2010: 23). Because of the ephemerality of performance practice, images and written language must evidence the 'traces of performance' (Nelson, 2013: 30). In this thesis, these traces of performance are embodied within the accounts of my four performances: the praxes. The performances themselves also evidenced the 'trace' of thoughts (Arendt, 2018 [1958]: 20) in responding to the menopause subject, the performance environment and the contextualising research. Once a performance is recorded 'it turns into that document – a photograph, a stage design, a video tape' (Phelan, 2005 [1993]: 31) or, in written form, a paper or report. It has been immobilised, concretely fixed as a reference point for scholarship and research. However, in this report on my

[2] Within mainstream professional performance-making, there are three visual design elements: set(tings), costume and lighting. These can be credited separately, as in the US theatre or combined into theatre design, the most usual pairing being set and costumes. A fourth element – sound design – will often be credited separately depending on the style of performance; similarly, the basic framework is often added to if other visual elements are included, such as animations, puppets or make-up. In the UK, the credit 'Theatre' or 'Performance' Design(er) will denote that one designer has created both set and costumes, a development that was instigated as a response to budgeting restrictions in the mid to late twentieth century, whereas in the US the tradition continues of each design element having a dedicated designer.

research, both images and writing should be regarded as evidencing scenography practice as 'traces of performance' that are also 'traces of thoughts'.

The relatively recent academic profile of Scenography research, which only began to take recognisable shape in the early years of the twenty-first century, was closely related to twentieth-century theatre practice developments. Those were built upon the foundations of Western theatre tradition, descending from the plays of Aeschylus and recorded in the writings of Aristotle and Plato, developed over centuries of professional theatre performance-making. It is unsurprising that the transition of Theatre Design practice into academia that is signalled by the emergence of Scenography research has been dominated by intense debates over definitions, variations of practices and outcomes. Since 2015, the key developments in Scenography research have followed the 'expansion' of the subject area (McKinney & Palmer, 2018 [2017]) amidst competing definitions emerging from other academic subject areas (Hann, 2019: 45).

Contextualising scenography for research purposes means considering how a potentially vast number of theatre practices, which can be concurrent, convergent or divergent, might contradict or overlap others and sometimes relate to practices that are now invisible because they were undocumented. There is no single repository where scholarship or research on Scenography might live, such as a professional organisation or society collection. This means that Scenography research is often founded on multiple interpretations, with researchers emphasising their single interpretation as one amongst many: 'an arrangement… what *might* have happened' (Baugh, 2005) rather than the portrayal of established 'truths' or recognised traditions, which might be found in other design histories. However, embracing multiple possible interpretations is also fundamental to how theatre practice has developed over centuries:

> For historical change has not meant the replacement of one kind of convention by another but the accumulation of a repertoire of conventions... Thus, the theatrical tradition is not merely the transmission of a code of rules… but a store of possible modes… which accumulates over the generations. (Burns, 1972: 4)[3]

The importance of avoiding a single narrative of succession is achieved by emphasising that all modes remain in use, as an accumulation of conventions that can be used according to taste, need, circumstances or effect. This understanding leads towards forming a repertoire of conventions, from any era, to use in any individual performance, which might be very different (or not) to the next performance, even when created by the same practitioner.

As I articulate the process of my own repertoire of conventions, I will draw on the legacy of scenography context for this cross-disciplinary research into menopause. My conventions will include the postdramatic concept of 'visual dramaturgy' (Lehmann, 2006: 93) as a dynamic impetus for my practice, whilst also creating my own distinctive feminist approach to applied scenography.

Feminism and Patriarchy

The word 'patriarchy' has come to the fore again in America and Europe over the timespan of this project, which ran concurrently with the US presidency of Donald Trump. The day after Trump's inauguration in January 2017 saw the Women's March on Washington, a world-wide protest against patriarchal behaviours across all seven continents. This was the first time in decades that the word patriarchy had come back into everyday language and was being utilised by feminists, even by women who might not have considered themselves feminists.

In this regard, the description of different popular feminist movements as 'waves' is problematic, but useful:

> We creep closer to equality, before something drags us back… As soon as one argument against women's rights becomes useless, another takes its place. (Lewis, 2020: 320)

[3] In *Theatricality* (1972), Elizabeth Burns, a social scientist, drew material from three different subject areas to identify the overlaps between the phenomena of the 'self' performing in social life and the 'role' played in performance. Burns' work pre-dates and anticipates, to some extent , Judith Butler's insights into the "performative" in social life. (Carlson, 2002. 238-250).

The arguments from the 'waves' of feminism are broadly categorised as follows: First Wave: suffrage and property rights; Second Wave: equality and discrimination; Third Wave: intersectionality, including considerations of race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender and nationality. There are ongoing disagreements over what might constitute a Fourth Wave of feminism, but it is likely to be centred around the use of social media to address concerns such as sexual harassment.

Second-wave feminists such as Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer and Kate Millet, who were closely associated with the 1960s and 1970s 'women's liberation' movements, were engaged with exposing the inequalities within patriarchal social structures. However, according to Jill Dolan, by the end of the 1990s patriarchy had become 'something of an old-fashioned word, which had been replaced by the more gender-neutral phrase "dominant culture" to mark the axis of social power and ideological control' (Dolan, 2012 [1988]: xx)

In the 1990s, the gender-neutral 'dominant culture' had replaced the language of popular feminism, because it seemed that 'patriarchy' had been dealt with and 'Gender Studies' had become an academic subject. Perhaps younger women didn't need those embarrassing older feminists, but it is also worth noting that identifying sexist ageism has significantly long roots in feminist thinking. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote 'A lively writer, I cannot recollect his name, asks what business women turned of forty have to do in the world?' (Wollstonecroft, 1792 :7), commenting on prejudices she had encountered where mid-life women, being no longer fertile, were regarded as redundant. In the early 1900s, male physicians reported concerns about the loose morals of post-menopausal women, previously of good character, who were indulging in sexual activity because they had been liberated from the fear of pregnancy. The patriarchal positioning here swings between two extremes: one extreme thinks that older women have 'undue sexual excitement' (Foxcroft, 2010: 158), whilst the other has designated the menopausal body sexually dysfunctional, offering to 'cure' it (Bedor, 2015). Either way, this is derogatory sexist ageism. But identifying ageism *within* feminism was first observed in the 1980s, with the attitudes of young feminists 'shaped' (Macdonald & Rich, 1984: 40) by patriarchy (their fathers) to separate themselves from old women. Older women were becoming invisible within feminism. By the early 2000s this split was defined as a 'post-feminist' stance:

> goals that both second wave feminists and postfeminists claim are envisaged differently, and thereby second wave notions of collective, activist struggle are replaced with more individualist assertions of (consumer) choice and self-rule. (Genz & Brabon, 2009: 24)

The individual post-feminist woman could 'have it all', enjoying the feminist gains of freedom: sexual liberation, contraception, abortion, divorce, professional employment, high heels and lipstick. It seemed to some that these gains meant that equality for women had been achieved, but this was a patriarchal mask. It was only the obvious threat to these freedoms that Donald Trump's election represented, which triggered the collective feminist protests against patriarchy.

Image 1: Anti-patriarchy demonstration *© photo by chloe s. on Unsplash.com*

This is the cultural context of the timespan within which the interview data was collected and the practice was being made between 2017 and 2020, and frames the discussion of menopause, feminism and patriarchy in this research. It is also a timespan that has seen an increasing public awareness of menopause, the setting up of this project in 2017 being part of this zeitgeist. But where concerns about menopause have traditionally been focused towards private individual experiences, my concern is with the 'invisibility' of women in their mid-lives and the lack of representation of menopause in public cultural forms. The premise of my research was that the ability of scenography to address the visual languages of menopause in an accessible public form would resolve invisibility through performed

representations, whilst the use of ethnography-based methods would give voice to those same female life experiences.

Menopause:

Menopause is a part of the female mid-life experience, when the monthly periods (menses) cease. Menopause refers to the final menstrual period (FMP) (Panay, Briggs & Kovacs, 2020 : 2) of the human fertility cycle, when there are no longer eggs in the ovarian follicles for fertilisation. This causes the levels of hormones to change; oestrogen and progesterone levels fall, whilst follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinising hormone (LH) increase. There is no 'adequate biological marker for the event' (IMS, 2021 [1999]) so menopause is generally only confirmed retrospectively after 12 consecutive missed periods[4], one calendar year. The absence of periods indicates the absence of fertility, which is a permanent natural life-cycle change in all human females (Davies, 2015: 15, et al.). The lack of definitive markers and length of time needed to establish menopause, means that individuals confirm their menopause rather than professionals (doctors, gynaecologists). Natural menopause can therefore be considered a liminal space- about to happen, or happening, but never experienced in the moment.

The average age of natural menopause in the UK is 51 years (NICE, 2015a) and globally is reckoned to take place during a woman's early fifties (Panay, Briggs & Kovacs, 2020: 1) In Ancient Greece, menopause was placed in the 49th year (Foxcroft, 2010: 37), a negligible drift over millennia. As the average female life span is currently around 83 years, with women's UK statutory pension age now 68, this positions menopause as a 'mid-life' rather than an old-age experience, with women estimated to live 'at least one third of their lives after menopause' (Heffner & Schust 2014: 56). The increase in the State Pension age[5] for women, means that at least ten years of female working life are post-menopausal. Since around 2018 the effects of menopause in the workplace have begun to attract more focus and consideration.

[4] In reality, periods usually become more irregular before stopping. After any number of months, a further menstrual period will reset the calendar year count until the cessation is permanent. This adds to the confusion around confirming menopause, and adds to the length of time taken to confirm postmenopause.
[5] In November 2018, the UK retirement age for women was lifted from 60 to 65 and now at 67 is the same as the male age.

The menopause context for my research is the real-life experience of individual working women in South London, reflecting the accessibility of menopause knowledge, menopause support provision, and the emerging research coalescing around menopause in the workplace. My focus on working women's experiences of menopause means that the side-effects of menopause (both natural and induced) can be identified within a successful working life pattern. This will allow specific insights into the effects of menopause and make recommendations drawn from the research.

The history of menopause knowledge can be traced back into the classical world. Aristotle considered it a life stage without a specific medical name, which could be disregarded as it required little or no management, unlike childbirth or menstruation (Mattern, 2019: 259). In Louise Foxcroft's *Hot Flushes, Cold Science* (2009) a history of the modern menopause, many historical inaccuracies are exposed, such as women not living long enough to experience menopause. Foxcroft's study reveals that 'as many as a quarter of the population reached menopausal age.'(2010: 28) from studying the surviving medieval records.

> medieval physicians are all describing a transitional phenomenon that fits into the natural order of the physical world, in tune with classical medical teaching… it needs no cure because it is not an illness.' (ibid.: 47)

The shift from a 'natural order' to the medicalisation of the modern menopause began during the eighteenth century (ibid.: 2) with menopause described as 'a dangerous, pathological condition with many symptoms, some of them dire' (Mattern, 2019: 258). Naming this condition resulted in the adoption of the conjoined word from menses and pause 'ménèspausie' credited to the French physician and writer Charles de Gardanne in the early 1800s (ibid.: 272), which he later simplified to 'ménopause'.

Menopause is expected to occur between the ages of 40 and 60 years (Hunter, 1990: 4), although it often runs over a five to ten year timespan (Gannon, 1999: 71) and sometimes as long as 15 years (Panay, Briggs & Kovacs, 2020: 7). Menopause between the ages of 40 and 45 is generally considered 'early' (Raynor, 2015: 33) and is determined by blood tests

for FSH levels. FSH tests are not recommended to confirm menopause over the age of 45 (NICE, 2019). Approximately 1% of women go through menopause before they are 40 (NHS, 2018) either genetically or for medical reasons, which is called premature menopause, or *premature ovarian insufficiency/ failure* (POI/POF). The only known causes of early menopause are smoking and medical or surgical procedures (Panay, Briggs & Kovacs, 2020: 1). 'Induced menopause' (IMS, 2021 [1999]) refers to a sudden onset of menopause triggered by surgical procedures[6], which without preparation, can feel 'overwhelming' (Robinson & Malhas, 2019) as the sudden side-effects of menopause can be severe.

Once the FMP plus one year is completed, this is described as postmenopausal (IMS, 2021 [1999]). All physical and mental side-effects experienced by women that lead up to FMP +1 year are referred to as perimenopause, or menopause transition and afterwards as postmenopause. These definitions refer to reproductive stages within medical terminology, defined in 2001[7], which was preceded by the menopause-related definitions approved by the Board of the International Menopause Society (IMS) meeting in 1999 (IMS, 2021 [1999]). The totality of stages of the menopause is sometimes referred to as the climacteric[8], which marks the 'reproductive phase to the non-reproductive state' (ibid.). However,

> there are no universally accepted definitions for the reproductive stages of a woman's life, including the menopause itself and menopause transition. This creates confusion and makes studies difficult to compare. (Brewis, Beck, Davies & Matheson, 2017: 6)

This confusion extends to the definitions of side-effects or 'symptoms'. Not all women going through menopause have the same experience, so not all will have severe side-effects, however the UK NHS (National Health Service) website warns that most will experience them and that they 'could have a significant impact on your everyday activities' (NHS, 2018). There is currently no consensus on the numbers of side-effects. In the 2014 edition of the

[6] Such as an oophorectomy or hysterectomy, sometimes as a treatment for endometriosis.
[7] 'In 2001, the Stages of Reproductive Ageing Workshop (STRAW) met to propose criteria for defining the stages of reproductive life. They generated a staging system which provided guidance on ovarian aging in women. Prior to this, there was no generally accepted staging system.' (Panay, Briggs & Kovacs 2020: 3)
[8] The current use of the word climacteric is medical, and refers to menopause. The roots of the word are in Ancient Greek philosophy which divides life into seven year steps, with the 49th year (menopause) often considered to be a grand climacteric.

medical textbook *The Reproductive System at a Glance*, Linda J. Heffner and Danny J. Schust comment: 'Functionally, menopause may be considered an 'oestrogen withdrawal syndrome'' (Heffner & Schust 2014: 56).

> recognizable by the loss of menses and for most women, by the appearance of signs and symptoms such as hot flashes, insomnia, vaginal atrophy, decreased breast size and reduced skin elasticity. (ibid.)

The key points to note here are the list of five key signs and symptoms other than missed periods, the designation of a 'syndrome' which implies an underlying disease, and the clustered identification of problems in the function or working of the body. There are seven 'common symptoms' listed on the NHS website[9] which contributes night sweats, low mood or anxiety, reduced sex drive (libido), and problems with memory/concentration. In the 2019 *Guide to Navigating your Menopause*, Bristol Women's Voice describe twenty five menopause signs in some detail[10]. Hot flushes and night sweats, the 'vasomotor symptoms' (Panay, Briggs & Kovacs, 2020: 7) are the best known menopause signs 'approximately 75% of postmenopausal women, with 25% of these being severely affected'. (NICE, 2015). These can adversely affect women's lives, causing fatigue and sleep disturbance for up to ten years (Griffiths & Hunter, 2014: 112).

Medical language is widely deployed in accounts of the menopause within academic research, by the media, in health and social care and by mid-life women themselves. However, there are also notable cultural differences in naming and reported experiences e.g. the Japanese word 'kōnenki' (Lock, 1993) which appears to refer to menopause, but has significantly different characteristics[11]. There are also other cultural/ linguistic challenges to standardising language, such as the notions of female modesty encountered by Mwenza

[9] The NHS site only concurs with three signs from Heffner & Schust, it does not list breast size or skin elasticity (NHS, 2018).

[10] The 25 signs are: Changes to menstrual cycle, hot flushes, vaginal dryness, the increased likelihood of (i) vaginal infections (ii) urinary tract infections (ii) pelvic organ prolapse, stress incontinence, overflow incontinence, decrease in sexual desire, effects on mood and mental health, sleep disturbances, fatigue, headaches, migraine, memory lapses, skin changes, dryness and irritation. hair thinning or loss, changes to finger and toenails, osteoporosis, reduced muscle mass, joint and muscle aches: mouth and teeth changes, dry/watery eyes, weight gain and slowed metabolism, changes to breasts. (Bristol Women's Voice. 2019. A Guide to Navigating your Menopause. [Accessed 15/12/20].

[11] Lock comments that there was 'no easy consensus' (1993: 4) about the meaning of kōnenki'. Although it refers to the same life-stage as menopause, it does not carry the same experiences of vasomotor symptoms and distress, seeming to indicate part of the broader natural ageing process together with a meaning of renewal.

Blell in her ethnographic study *'The Timing and Experience of Menopause among British Pakistani Women'* which inhibited her research discussions about menstruation or reproduction (Blell, 2009: 178). It is also the case that Western medical ideas of menopause have spread widely into other cultures. In *The Slow Moon Climbs (2019)* which deals with the science, history, and meaning of menopause, Susan Mattern identifies how 'menopausal syndrome' was introduced into Chinese traditional medicine as a modernising feature, by comparing updated versions of the same textbook. 'As one scholar of Chinese medicine puts it, 'Menopause, which did not constitute a medical problem in the classical literature suddenly became one in 1964.'' (Mattern, 2019: 306).

Feminists writing about menopause, such as Germaine Greer (1992, 2018) eschew medical terms, often using the colloquial expression 'the change of life' abbreviated to 'the change'. Similarly, whilst menopausal physical effects are commonly referred to as a 'symptom', meaning condition of disease, this problematises natural menopause experience. Medical textbook descriptions use 'signs and symptoms' (Heffner & Schust 2014: 56) whilst recent feminist preferences substitute the word 'signs'[12], which links better with the descriptors also used in puberty (the beginning of fertility) as a comparable inverse life stage. In this research, I have used non-medical descriptors such as 'signs', 'side effects' or 'challenges' as the best fit for my feminist lens, using the word 'symptom' only in direct quotations.

It is widely reported that women access menopause support from different sources, with three-quarters of women seeking advice about how to 'manage their menopausal symptoms' (Griffiths & Hunter, 2014: 111). Women consulting their GP (general practitioner) may not be aware that they are perimenopausal and that their physical or mental challenges issues are associated with menopause. Here women are relying on the professional diagnosis of their regular doctor to inform them that they are now menopausal and direct them towards available support.

[12] Cornish, N. 2020. The signs of menopause a GP sees most in her surgery. Red [Online]. https://apple.news/A-RybEbbKTA6C4z-dHflkfQ [Accessed 12/03/21].

Menopause training for GPs is voluntary according to the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP). Nor are there plans to make it mandatory, despite menopause being experienced by 51% of the population (Davies, 2015).

> Menopause is included in the RCGP curriculum which all GP trainees need to demonstrate competency of in order to practise independently as a GP in the UK. GPs have the broadest curriculum, yet shortest training programme of any medical specialty, which aims to expose trainees to the full breadth of conditions they are likely to see in general practice. Introducing additional mandatory training courses for some areas of medicine and not others would be unworkable.[13] (Connelly, 2021)

GPs are expected to 'demonstrate ongoing learning across the curriculum to continue to practise' (ibid.) and the RCGP recommends educational resources on women's health developed with their partners the British Menopause Society[14] (BMS) and Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG). The faculty of RCOG which deals with menopause is the Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH), an independent, multi-disciplinary and cross-speciality organisation. The BMS, RCOG and FSRH are all closely linked in terms of the delivery of menopause medicine delivery. The BMS is also linked to the International Menopause Society[15] (IMS) and offers specialist menopause training for healthcare professionals intending to become consultants. An overview of GP menopause training can be found in the May 2021 survey[16] by the website Menopause Support which found that only 59% of medical schools have menopause as a mandatory study.

> Where lectures are delivered they vary from 1-hour, taught by 7 universities[17], to Birmingham University who spend 8 hours on the subject and Edinburgh around 10 in total. (Danzebrink, 2021)

Medical students are often expected to gain menopause education through placements with GPs or within Obstetrician and Gynaecology (O&G) departments. The expectations from placements relies heavily on the menopause knowledge of the GP host and the

[13] Clinical lead for Women's Health, Dr Anne Connolly.
[14] Founded in 1989.
[15] Founded in 1978.
[16] The Menopause Support survey was based on a Freedom of Information (FOI) request sent to 33 UK medical schools in November 2020, which posed four questions: '1-What they taught about menopause and HRT?, 2 - How much time was spent on it? 3- If it was mandatory? 4- How it was taught?' (Danzebrink, 2021)
[17] E.g. 'Glasgow University told us that they teach the physiology of menopause, symptoms, long term consequences, premature menopause, HRT-modes of administration, sequential, continuous and combined, risks and benefits of HRT, alternative therapies, OTC remedies, POM options, CBT, lifestyle modifications. They claim that all this content is delivered in a one hour session.' (ibid.)

reliability of the host's menopause training. More recently, BMS research has considered the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. 'Menopause education and training was largely put on hold during the early period of the pandemic' (Hamoda & Moger, 2021: 3) indicating a further setback in current provision.

Menopause is part of the Core Curriculum for O&G[18] (RCOG, 2020 [2019]) covered in Capabilities in Practice (CiP) 11, which describes the doctor as a Clinical Expert who is 'competent in recognising, assessing and managing non-emergency gynaecology and early pregnancy' (ibid.: 5) and 'Manages menopause and post-menopausal care' (ibid.: 24). The menopause capabilities are:

- Performs focused history, appropriate examination and orders appropriate investigations.
- Formulates an appropriate and individualised management plan taking into account patient preferences including complimentary therapies and lifestyle modifications.
- Appreciates the impact that the menopause may have on other aspects of wellbeing. (ibid.)

Whilst other components of CiP11 such as 'subfertility' and 'sexual wellbeing' also contain elements of further medical treatment (IVF) or advice (contraception), there is no specific mention here of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) advice. Complementary therapies e.g. acupuncture & homeopathy[19] as well as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and pharmacological alternatives are bracketed together with lifestyle modifications (commonly diet and exercise).

Specialist menopause modules are both recognised and offered by the BMS[20] for Health Care Professionals (HCPs). To become a BMS menopause specialist, O&G trainees undertake

[18] 'The curriculum provides a framework for training by defining the standards required to work at consultant level and at key progression points during training.' (RCOG, 2020 [2019]:4)
[19] E.g. Borelli, F., & Ernst, E. 2010. Alternative and complementary therapies for the menopause. *Maturitas* [Online], 66. [Accessed 26 October 2021].
[20] The BMS Advanced Certificate in the Principles and Practice of Menopause Care; the RCOG/BMS -advanced training skills module in menopause care; the Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH)- Advanced Certificate in menopause care or certified completion of the FSRH Community Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare curriculum (or the equivalent standard as assessed by the GMC). There are also some equivalent qualifications i.e. the menopause and premature ovarian insufficiency module of the subspecialty training programme in reproductive medicine. See: BMS. 2021. BMS Menopause Specialists [Online]. https://thebms.org.uk/menopause-specialists/overview/: Women's Health Concern. [Accessed 26 October 2021].

the Menopause Advanced Training Skills Module, generally over a year or more. The theory component consists of five modules called Menopause Capabilities in Practice (MPCiP). In MPCiP 2: 'Understanding the benefits and risks of HRT and alternative therapies', the focus shifts towards prescribing HRT (RCOG/BMS, 2021 [2009]). Research suggests that approximately half the women who consulted their usual GP about menopause were disappointed with the level of care received, whereas 81% reported that the most helpful healthcare professionals were NHS clinics/hospitals (Newson, 2019).

NHS Menopause clinics are part of the UK medical support, and easier to find since the launch of the BMS website '*find a BMS-recognised menopause specialist'* in October 2018. This website provides details of both NHS and private clinics. Many NHS clinics require referrals from GPs, whilst private clinics often allow self-referrals but are expensive.

According to the BMS website[21] by mid 2021, there were 81 NHS menopause clinics and/or specialists in the UK; one in Northern Ireland, five in Wales, eleven in Scotland, and the rest in England. There were twelve with a London address, five in South London. The 80 clinics on the British mainland were unevenly spread across the country[22]. Only 42 out of the 81 clinics included menopause in the name of the department/clinic. The other 39 either listed the practice/hospital name, or were included within Gynaecology, Psychosexual, Sexual & Reproductive Health or Women's Health provision.

Also in 2021, the BMS website listed more than 120 private menopause clinics: Three in Northern Ireland, four in Scotland (three in Aberdeen), none in Wales. There were four in the South West previously identified as lacking provision. There were none in England north of Leeds, and 28 in London. Private and NHS provision often overlapped with the same named specialist offering both types of clinic. There was one online clinic, launched in

[21] https://thebms.org.uk/find-a-menopause-specialist/ Accessed 01/07/21

[22] There were no menopause specialists in the south west beyond Poole, Salisbury, Bath or Bristol and in Wales the provision clusters around Cardiff in the south and the English/Welsh border in the north. Similarly the north of Scotland and the north of England were poorly served. There were no specialists between Leeds and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a distance of approx. 80 miles.

March 2021. This was the formal provision to support approximately 13 million women[23] going through menopause that year.

There are also many menopause support websites. Two of the most influential public-facing medical websites were set up by doctors. Dr Heather Currie set up Menopause Matters in 2002 with a magazine of the same name launching in 2005; Dr Louise Newson set up Menopause Doctor website, now renamed 'Balance' after the mid 2020 launch of the 'Balance' menopause app. Both Currie and Newson recommend using HRT.

The confusion surrounding the safety of HRT stems from the reports of two large scale studies of women's health. The Women's Health Initiative (WHI), a USA clinical trial [24]which started in 1993 and the UK questionnaire based Million Women Study (MWS) which started in 1996, were both focussed on women's health and HRT. In 2002, the WHI stopped the combined estrogen and progestogen HRT part of the study early, because of the health risks they had identified[25], which were widely reported. The patient-facing website of the BMS, Women's Health Concern reports that by 2003:

> Both doctors and HRT users are confused regarding safety issues. Many doctors advise their patients to come off HRT. Some women stop taking HRT immediately. Such actions were, and continue to be, unduly influenced by a high level of media interest which has tended to attract some health scare headlines. (Robinson, 2020)

Between 2003 and 2007, HRT users in the UK halved from two to one million users, a small percentage of menopausal women. Criticisms have been levelled at these studies, resulting in reviews of the original data. In 2015, NICE published their first formal guidelines for prescribing HRT, commenting that 'Women whose lives are being affected by the symptoms of menopause should not feel they have to suffer in silence' (NICE, 2015b). The 2019 NICE guideline states that menopausal women should be prescribed HRT rather than anti-

[23] Bowling, G., & Street, B. 2021. *Not just 'women's issues': supporting menopause needs in the workplace* [Online]. https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/not-just-womens-issues-supporting-menopause-needs-in-the-workplace. [Accessed 27 October 2021].

[24] The WHI looked 'at the health effects on women taking either estrogen-only HRT or combined HRT, compared to women taking an identical placebo.' (Robinson, 2020)

[25] 'A small increased risk of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke and blood clots.' (ibid.)

depressants for anxiety[26]. Dr Louise Newson's Menopause care for women survey of 2920 women (2019) about their menopause care found that 40% of them had been offered anti-depressants for menopause low mood, 66% of whom said that anti-depressants were offered instead of HRT, in direct contradiction of the NICE guideline.

Women who have realised that they are in menopause, and 'suffering' might seek help from a doctor to access HRT or a menopause clinic, after finding information for themselves through self-help sources such as books, TV programmes or more recently from the internet. The absence of a public information strategy on menopause, has resulted in a proliferation of self-help sources offering information, advice and recommending treatments (often at a price). Newspapers also contribute to this ad hoc public information by reporting new initiatives, from the *Telegraph*'s suggestion that 'Men should say "menopause" three times a day to show solidarity with women, academic says' (Marshall, 2018)[27], the *Guardian*'s report on 'tissue harvesting' to delay menopause (Bennett, 2020); and repeating the key menopause tropes, e.g. 'Whether to take HRT?' (Boseley, 2017), the 'signs' of menopause (Cornish, 2020) and 'body clock' infertility (Ramsden, 2019). There have been two celebrity TV programmes on menopause, broadcast during the timespan of this research, from journalist Kirsty Wark (2017) and T.V presenter Mariella Frostrup (2018) as well as the development of celebrity menopause support websites such as Meg Mathews' 'Meg's Menopause'.[28]

Of the non-medical support groups for menopause, the most often mentioned are the series of Menopause Cafés, set up in 2017, which run as informal tea parties, open to all, to discuss the menopause and eat cake. Attendance is on a one-off basis, and there are

[26] The NICE guidelines stress that risks and benefits should be discussed with the patient first. See Nice. 2019. Menopause: diagnosis and management [Online]. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK552590/: NICE. [Accessed 22 October 2021].

[27] This headline seems to come out of an initiative at Leicester University focused on how to start conversations in the workplace about menopause (Brewis, J. 2018 *How to start conversations around the menopause at work* [Online]. https://employeebenefits.co.uk/issues/june-2018/jo-brewis-menopause-work/: DVV Media HR Group Ltd. [Accessed 12/03/21].

[28] Meg Mathews is the former wife of Oasis frontman Noel Gallagher, now menopause campaigner. Her website MegsMenopause.com was launched on World Menopause Day 2017. (Mathews, 2019) Actress Gwyneth Paltrow also began to talk about menopause for her 'Goop' brand the following year. (goop)

restrictions on advertising products, with the emphasis on sharing experiences and information.

The menopause research context for this project concentrates on two main sources, the evidence-based research papers and guides that report on the changing situation of menopause in the workplace, and the public domain literature, books, news reports and websites that women access to understand menopause and support their personal experience. The information circulating in the public domain draws upon attitudes and information mixing medical information, evidence based research studies, commercial promotions, personal experiences and opinions. The core non-medical literature that was initially used for my contextual survey, came from the twentieth century writers whose publications could be described as cross-overs from medical or academic study into the mainstream consciousness and which sold in large quantities (best-sellers). In this way the progression of ideas and attitudes through the twentieth century could be mapped against twenty-first century menopause experience evidenced through recent publications and literature recommended by my menopausal interviewees.

In 1936, birth control pioneer and scientist Marie Stopes wrote her book on menopause '*Change of Life in Men and Women'* addressing the similarities and crucial differences in both sexes. Stopes offered an informed view of menopause as a natural part of the life-cycle. She considered that women should not anticipate problems but 'carry on exactly as though nothing special were happening' (Stopes, 1950 [1936]: 134) recommending sexual activity, and sometimes calcium supplements.

Simone de Beauvoir, although entertaining ideas of a post-menopause 'third sex' (Beauvoir, 1997 [1949]: 63) welcomed the relief from pregnancy in her best seller *The Second Sex*, but personally feared the losses she connected with ageing process. Once she became postmenopausal, her opinions changed, and menopause became simply the harbinger of old age, the latter defined by inflexibility or the resistance to change (of all sorts).

The best-selling success of *Feminine Forever* written by Dr Robert A. Wilson in 1966 to promote HRT, firmly posits menopause as a 'deficiency disease' (Wilson, 1966: 17) with a

cure (HRT). Like Stopes, Wilson addressed both male and female audiences, but Wilson's aim of sexually active 'wifely' femininity is from a patriarchal viewpoint. Subsequent feminist writers have routinely castigated Wilson's book for its negative pejorative language on 'the living decay' of menopause.

The final two twentieth century best sellers were both by feminist writers and both published in 1991. American journalist Gail Sheehy's *The Silent Passages*, was a follow-up to her hugely successful academic study/popular theory hybrid text *Passages* (1974). Sheehy's account of the 'conspiracy of silence' around menopause, drew on her own challenging experiences showed that women can seem to 'know' about menopause, but unprepared for their own experience (Sheehy, 1998 [1991]: xiv). Sheehy's approach which can be summarised as 'take responsibility' and take HRT, but be cautious, is diametrically opposed to that of Germaine Greer, the UK based feminist writer and provocateur whose definitive study *The Change: Women, Ageing and The Menopause* (1991) contextualised natural menopause. Greer's feminist lens critiques the history of medicine and menopause with an erudite approach that ranged freely over history, science, anthropology, folklore, personal experience and literature, commenting that the 'utter invisibility of middle-aged women in English literary culture is baffling' (Greer 1992: 21). Greer's call that women should embrace their 'change' effectively agrees with Sheehy, by emphasizing the potential of menopause as a gateway to personal transformation with opportunities for personal growth.

These five approaches to menopause experience: ignoring it, fearing it, 'curing' it, managing it and embracing it, reflect the cultural contextual shifts in women's lives during the twentieth century. Only Germaine Greer's book has been revised and re-published in a new 2018 version with around 40% of new material. However, it is clear that none of the fundamental menopause questions Greer posed in 1982 have been substantially answered in nearly 30 years of academic endeavour and research projects.

One of the most significant developments in menopause research since 2015 has been the increase in workplace awareness of menopause, mandated in Chapter 9[29] of the 2014 Chief

[29] In Chapter 9 entitled *Psychosocial Factors and the Menopause: The Impact of the Menopause on Personal and Working Life* [29] by psychologists Amanda Griffiths and Myra Hunter.

Medical Officer's Annual Report, *The Health of the 51%: Women* (Davies, 2015). Davies allocated responsibilities to employers about the provision of menopause information for their staff to 'contribute to employee engagement, productivity and retention.' (Davies, 2015: 15). However, responsibilities were also allocated to healthcare workers as well as the women themselves (Griffiths & Hunter, 2014: 110), despite no public information being available to inform women about menopause.

In 2017, two important documents were published. Firstly the UK study *'What do working women want? A qualitative investigation into women's perspectives on employer and line manager support'* (Hardy, Griffiths & Hunter, 2017) began to identify useful menopause strategies. The second was a report commissioned by the government's Equality Office and the Secretary of State for Education,[30] *'The effects of menopause transition on women's economic participation in the UK'* (Brewis, Beck, Davies & Matheson, 2017), critically reviewed 'the English language evidence base from 1990 to the end of March 2016' (ibid.: 6). The research report identifies a series of absences, including the lack of understanding and support. They found that workplace attitudes indicated 'a widespread gendered ageism in organisations' (ibid.: 75) and ended their report with the observation of 'gaps' that they encountered:

> the relative absence of studies which focus on the UK… the absence of any estimates at all for the costs of transition in the UK for women's economic participation…. whether organisational initiatives succeed. (ibid.: 76)

The report concludes by commenting that these 'costs' are potentially 'very significant' (ibid.), not just for the women affected, but also in their workplaces and more broadly across society too. Following this report a general 'business case' (Women's Business Council, 2017: 37) was developed regarding the costs of £30,000[31] to employers of replacing an experienced mid-life female rather than supporting her through menopause. Since 2018, there have also been an increasing number of support documents written by academics offering 'guidance' (Brewis, 2020), 'how-to' tools (Hardy, 2020) and personal experience blogs (Woodfield, 2019).

[30] The Right Honourable Justine Greening MP.

[31] See *The Cost of the Brain Drain: Understanding the financial impact of staff turnover* [Online]. https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/my-oxford/projects/264283: Oxford Economics: 38. [Accessed 26 October 2021].

Typically, trade unions have represented menopause as an individual's problem. The booklet 'Supporting working women through the menopause: Guidance for Union Representatives' (TUC, 2013) positioned employers' responsibilities within health and safety and the 2010 Equality Act, highlighting the difficulties faced by women in communicating menopause issues in the workplace. The 2017 publication from Wales TUC, a 'toolkit' that took a more nuanced approach to the complex issues faced, still highlighted the individual nature of menopause but considered the effects on a wider range of working women. The toolkit continued to lean heavily towards supporting the negative side-effects of menopause by emphasising health and safety concerns, and issues around equality. By 2021 there were ten employment tribunals referencing menopause in the first half of the year, a year-on-year increase from five in 2018 (Murray, 2021). Companies were being recommended to introduce menopause awareness to avoid expensive grievance cases.

The question of the origin of menopause has resulted in an astonishing amount of academic research: 'dispute, investigation, testing, and theorizing' over recent decades (Mattern, 2019: 39). The menopause question, it seems, goes to the heart of the origin of *Homo sapiens* as a successful species (ibid.: 136), challenging assumptions of patriarchal superiority constructed from simian studies (Haraway, 1991). The underlying conflict is mapped thus:

> If menopause is an epiphenomenon, the 'menopause as disease' approach that pervades much of modern medicine might make some sense. If it is adaptive[32], however, then it is more appropriate to see menopause as a normal, even healthy development that calls for little, if any, intervention. (Mattern, 2019: 39)

If menopause is a normal mid-life experience, an opinion often held by feminist writers, then any side effects can be disregarded, they are natural so can be 'suffered in silence' (NICE, 2015b) which means that women are left to cope individually with the fallout of distressing experiences: hot flushes, night sweats and 'brain fog'.[33] Alternatively, if

[32] Adaptive traits help the survival of a species. 'Menopause is probably adaptive. That is, it's not a mistake or an artifact of modern life whereby women live past some natural test of usefulness.' (Mattern, 2019: 17)
[33] The description of menopausal memory loss began to be described as 'brain fog' just before the start of this project at the end of 2016. It is beginning to be mentioned more regularly in personal writing about menopause. E.g. Comedian Jenny Éclair's book *Older and Wider: A Survivor's Guide to the Menopause* (2020: 165).

menopause can be regarded as a disease needing a 'fix' for 'symptoms', from a deficiency of oestrogen or of sanity (Foxcroft , 2010: 174), then medical treatments can offer remedies. Both attitudes satisfy the patriarchal viewpoint, fascinated by dominance and fertility.

But there is a third, more invidious and widely held viewpoint: that menopause problems are a question of self-control; i.e. character, and that 'negative expectations' of menopause become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Mattern, 2019: 352). This is a continually recurring theme through the twentieth century, and comes very close to the accusation of it being 'all in her head' that haunts menopause study. These observations are almost always directed towards 'leisured' middle-class women who can afford doctors and gynaecologists and that 'hardworking, self-sacrificing, self-controlled women suffer less' (Mattern, 2019: 352). This common fallacy is contested by the recent research from the TUC, yet still persists. Female doctors[34] in the early twentieth century were struggling with their own diminished professional status. 'By challenging the notion that women were at the mercy of their bodies, these female physicians found themselves blaming women for their own misery' (Houck, 2006: 37). It is easy to overlook the fact that women doctors are themselves in a medical workplace, which itself still needs challenging on the grounds of a 'sexist and ageist' work culture (BMA, 2020: 10). The operation of an un-official 'taboo' (ibid.: 1) preventing open discussion, often leads to women 'ending their positions as clinical leaders and directors' (ibid.: 8) an indication that professional women are still being sidelined by their menopause experiences.

This sidelining of women's menopause experiences has been accompanied by a near total absence of cultural representation provision.[35] In the National Portrait Gallery, to take one important example, menopausal women are largely absent.[36] In popular visual media such as television, fifty-something women have been removed from presenting roles (Singh, 2020). Performed representations are either played for 'gallows humour' in large theatres,

[34] 'Twenty of the roughly two hundred physicians writing about menopause between 1897 and 1937 were women.' (Houck, 2006: 33).
[35] There have been increasing numbers of celebrities commenting on menopause. In 2020 the celebrities speaking about menopause were Caitlin Moran, Davina McCall and Kristin Scott Thomas, amongst others.
[36] One rare exception to this is the small collection of Victorian female writers, all portrayed in their mid-lives. These portraits were likely used as the frontispiece images for their published books.

or the bitter sweet interweaving of comedy and tragedy and/or consciousness-raising fringe performances. In films, theatre productions, on television and in art collections and public statuary, mid-life (menopausal) women are rarely represented as complex characters. That there is an identifiable absence of representation for more than half of the population in the middle of their lives is not a new situation. That patriarchal disregard of menopause might be at the root of this disregard brings a feminist lens to the debate. When this disregard operates within workplaces as a form of sexist ageist prejudice, it becomes a significant barrier for women's employment, which in turn becomes a factor, already noted, in the low income of women during old age.

Over the four years of my research project, there has been an increasing amount of social/ cultural menopause-related news that has substituted for the absence of preparatory public information. A headline announcement in 2019 was that menopause would be introduced to the school curriculum from September 2020. This first menopause information directed towards the general public was aimed at secondary school pupils: 'It is hoped that pupils can support their mothers, sisters and partners in later life' (Daily Mail Reporter, 2019). This introduction, although welcome, confusingly leaves mid-life women uninformed about their own life-cycle change, whilst their teenaged children 'know' all about it. There have been no announcements about introducing education for women about their next significant life change, or any support offered to those already experiencing peri-menopause. This lack of public information provided to mid-life women must be seen in the context of the activity, and funding, devoted to specific academic menopause-related debates.

The public presentation of the menopause is both confusing and shape shifting, in that it seems impossible to comprehend as a complete experience. Mid-life women navigate a complex system of randomised news reports, medical opinions, treatments and friendly advice, without having been informed that there is a significant likelihood of some disruption in their lives during their personal menopause transition. Natural menopause is a liminal space, it cannot be defined or identified instantaneously so it is never 'itself'. Using performance, which like menopause can only leave traces of itself, allows menopause experiences, (more than one interpretation) to be presented publicly. The 'traces' of my performances are both part of a grand narrative of the menopause, and also construct an

alternative non-literary response to its presence by using scenography practice. The visual languages of menopause become an integral part of the performance, and the absences can be perceived and mediated.

Making performances about menopause addresses the cultural absence I have identified. Given that this representational absence is of long duration and involves multiple layers of collusion across different subject interests, it requires a complex approach, capable of showing multiple interpretations. A theatre performance has the advantage of both 'showing' and 'telling' material to an audience and is appropriate as a means to address the absence of representation. As a designer/theatre-maker, my research outcomes would always be linked to theatre practice, but here performances can both mediate this absence of representation and force a reconsideration of feminist theatre-making to include menopause. Furthermore, using mid-life female actors in character development, rather than portraying stereotypes, meant that menopausal women would speak for themselves. Their dialogue could articulate their own life experiences, drawn from real-life testimonies. New narratives of women's midlives would connect the older woman to the younger without rupture. As a result of this, in this research, scenography is diverted away from the spatial considerations that increasingly dominate it, reasserting a primacy of the human experience within scenography with an 'intervention' (Baugh, 2011: 48). In tackling this real-life problem of menopause for working women, I am therefore arguing for new applications of Applied Scenography.

Applied Scenography

Applied scenography, a term defined by Melissa Trimingham for her *Imaging Autism*[37] project, has a very limited profile within Scenography research. The description of theatre as an 'applied' practice 'gained currency' (Nicholson, 2005: 2) during the 1990s for drama or theatre performances that were made in non-conventional theatre spaces and that were specifically intended to benefit individuals or communities. In these productions, community participants are often drawn into performance-making:

[37] *Imagining Autism: Drama, Performance and Intermediality as Interventions for Autistic Spectrum Conditions* (2011-2014) a project run at the University of Kent.

> For both practitioners and participants there may often be an overt, political desire to use the process of theatre in the service of social and community change. (Prentki & Preston, 2010: 9)

The change referred to here is generally viewed as a positive aim of making the performance for the community, but consideration of the double edge (present or poison[38]) of this 'gift of theatre' (Nicholson, 2005: 161) means that the ethics of performance-making and the motives of the creator need careful scrutiny throughout the process. In my research, the key influences emerging from applied theatre are Joan Littlewood's Fun Palace and Paulo Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1996 [1970]). However, rather than considering the 'aesthetics' (White, 2015) of participation, I have engaged more deeply with participation outside of performing, by linking ethnography-based methods with scenography practice to tackle the inequity and cultural exclusion of menopausal women. My claims for Applied Scenography are founded on both 'showing' and 'telling' the layering of the contemporary menopause experience, engaging an audience in active spectatorship 'seeing something familiar, as if for the very first time' (Howard with Drábek, 2019: 193).

Practice-Based Research

Before considering the relationship between professional arts[39] practice and research, it is important to understand that the majority of current arts practice exists in professional contexts such as advertising, fashion or entertainment, which value the commercial product over the articulation of production methods. Despite influential twentieth-century movements such as the Bauhaus[40] (1919-93) or London Theatre Studio[41] (1935-1953), which bridged arts practice and research, it was only in 1999 that theatre arts practice PhDs were instigated:

> In the dying days of the 20th century, the Arts and Humanities Research Board made a public announcement concerning a pilot… award to fund the PhD in the Creative and Performing Arts. While the award merely formalised existing PhD provision in many creative arts[42] practices (albeit in a relatively small number of institutions), it set the university Theatre and Performing Arts sector… scurrying to establish *the terms and conditions for* a practice-based PhD in Performing Arts, which might

[38] Here Nicholson is referencing Marcel Mauss' 'gift' theory here (Mauss, 2016 [1925]).
[39] The terms 'artists' and 'arts' here are used to describe all arts practices – for example, art, design, drama, and dance. Where individual practices are referenced, they will be named, e.g. fine art, scenography.
[40] The German art school founded at Weimar in 1919.
[41] The drama school with Michel Saint Denis as Director opened in 1935 and ran for three years.
[42] Predominantly in Art & Design.

> satisfy Academic Boards and be acceptable to Quality Review Boards. (Melrose, 2002: 1) (my italics)

Here, Susan Melrose identifies the key characteristics of the context for theatre arts research practice, noting that this development closely followed a definition emerging from academia, prompted by funding initiatives: recent and expeditious developments that had put in place suitable university conditions for theatre and performance research.
This opportunistic development may have consolidated the place of arts practice within the academy, but the ramifications have been enduring:

> The hasty academicization of the creative practice community has had a disruptive effect. The phenomenon has caused the coherence between values and actions to be broken and each community finds itself judging activities that did not emerge from their own values. In response… the practice community has adopted some of the conventions and actions of the academic community in order to produce research of the academic kind. (Biggs & Büchler in Biggs & Karlsson, 2011: 89)

The disruption cuts into both the individual's art practice and the articulation of theoretical foundations that support the practice. But in a practice-based PhD such as mine, theory cannot be fully developed before practice, or else practice becomes reductive, an illustration of ideas. The 'traces of thoughts' that appear within the 'traces of performance' in my research demonstrate the organic evolution of the scenographic process.

The Art & Design practice/research debates are rooted, inter alia, in the 1950s work on art education by Herbert Read (Frayling, 1993/4: 2), and can traced in the UK through the developing descriptions of higher education (HE) provision. The question of whether 'art *can* be research' (Jones, 1980: 91) (original italics) makes a distinction between *all* art practice and that framed within a research discourse. A rarely mentioned aspect of the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise[43] was the acceptance of *all* arts practice submitted by institutions *as* research,[44] without contextualisation. This was unsustainable academically in evidencing quality for funding purposes, and initiated fierce debates about definitions

[43] The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) started in 1986, became the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014. As funding is attached to the institution's score, UK HE institutions have challenged and or adopted the descriptions, leading to an ongoing development of arts practice research descriptors.
[44] For full-time design lecturers in 1996, professional practice was included in the research audit without any qualifying contextual information being required.

ranging from ‘no way is practice research’ to ‘practice is research equivalent’ (Gray & Malins, 2004: 3).

This historical lens is useful, because it identifies the values being embedded within the nomenclature of arts research:

> The issue with putting practice ‘in front of’ research (syntactically and as a way of generating theory) in a university context is often that a practitioner’s research is evaluated and validated by academics who seemed to be linked almost umbilically to traditional scientific research paradigms. The argument tends to be that theory/methods needs to precede doing, and in that way practice can be seen easily as ‘anarchistic’, something where ‘anything goes’. (Schroeder, 2015: 347)

This ‘essentially transgressive’ (Biggs & Karlsson, 2011: 405) criticism of arts practice suggests vulgar irresponsibility and a lack of method and rigour. It is a criticism that has also been used to disparage Action Research and Grounded Theory methodologies. But Shroeder is both challenging the traditions of positivism within older subject areas and obliquely referencing *Against Method* (1970) by scientist Paul Feyerabend:

> it will become clear that there is only *one* principle, that can be defended under *all* circumstances and in *all* stages of human development. It is the principle: *anything goes.* (Feyerabend, 1970: 25-26)(original italics)

Feyerabend explicitly encourages an open-minded approach and attacks a scientific mindset that holds tightly to ‘rules’ and criticises other research strategies as too *laissez-faire*. This fixed mindset confirms the rightness of one set of methodologies and suspects improper action within other strategies, a suspicion that is often magnified when brought into close contact with the reality of arts practices, particularly those that are ‘unwritable because unwritten’ (Melrose, 2002), such as live performances. As I have noted, these unwritable practices do not exist in stable, documented forms, but through performance ‘traces’ (Nelson, 2013: 60). Clearly, unwritten practices might threaten the status quo of ‘proper’ research, unless disciplines, through interaction, can be encouraged to respect differences:

> Though we were fundamentally asking the same questions as the scientists… as artists we were operating in a different world with different freedoms and limitations… the methodologies are going to be different. (Paris, 2010: 48)

Here, theatre-maker Helen Paris collaborated with a biomedical scientist[45] and built a respectful 'reciprocal relationship where both science and art would benefit from the dialogue and exploration' (ibid.). The benefits are not all on the side of the artist researcher. Scientists too could embrace some of these freedoms considered an integral part of arts practice research:

> Where the artist has difficulty persuading people of the connection of art with research, the scientist (whose research expertise has until recently been taken for granted) has exactly the same problem with creativity – which is generally seen as the prerogative of the artist rather than the scientist. (Frayling, 1993/4: 3)

Both scientists and artists stand to gain from these new relationships. The creativity involved in social sciences research is sometimes accounted for as the 'messy' part.[46] It raises questions such as: 'Exactly how does this all fit together?' 'How can I show how this new thinking emerged?' Research is being referred to as 'messy' when it does not conform to original expectations of 'good' research, and can be adjusted for a better fit with these expectations rather than acknowledging the creative sleight of hand that occurs in 'hard science' subjects.

So why is an arts practice 'mess' regarded as more problematic than others? Arts practice allows for 'research that might be so new that it could not be assessed by referring to precedents' (Jones, 1980: 90). The problem can be located in the cross-over from the familiar to the new:

> Especially pertinent to artistic research is the realization that we do not yet know what we don't know. Art invites us and allows us to linger at the frontier of what there is, and it gives us an outlook on what might be. (Borgdorff, 2011: 61)

Here Henk Borgdorff positions a view of the future being revealed within arts practice research. The present is always in the process of being transformed into a series of possible futures, creating difficulties in assessing outcome (or product) alone. One of the key tenets

[45] Dr Upinder Bhalla, a leading expert on the neurological connections between smell and memory.

[46] I analysed the interface between qualitative research methods and ethnography-based performance-making in my paper 'The myths of messiness: A reflection on Ethnographically based drama'. Published in the course of this research, my paper works through the tensions of using Ethnotheatre as a research method within the 'messiness' of arts practice research and examines how the competing demands of 'truths' and performance are balanced (Baxter, 2019: 93-104)

in arts practice is starting from a position of not knowing but beginning creative practice anyway, utilising new thinking (praxis) rather than previous thinking (illustration):

> not knowing what happens next is in the nature of the making and the ambiguity of chaos is something to be embraced rather than feared. (Freeman 2010: 61)

Theatre arts practitioners are well accustomed to starting without preconceived ideas, as befits the honest researcher, but in order to satisfy the questions of academic rigour, an appropriate structure including context, method, critique and, usually, questions must be fully evidenced to allow the potential future to emerge in a way that can be followed by others. The agreed forms of this evidence (artefacts, documentation, thesis) are well-established models in arts practice research. Keeping track of the origin of creative ideas, methods and process is not considered important in most professional arts practice, which is normally only concerned with the qualities of the final artefact and critical reception. However, this research project necessitated that these elements were considered at all stages of development. Addressing my research questions formed an individually negotiated relationship between the practical and theoretical elements, which has allowed me to define methods to investigate the research questions and communicate the insights that I have produced through this research. By making the first performance within five months of this project commencing, the first cycle of practice was built upon the foundations of the contextual research, as a way to understand the immediate circumstances of menopause for working women. The insights which came from making the first performance identified key questions were taken forward as secondary research questions, contextualised by further literature and performance reviews, to make the second performance. In this way, each performance was formed from the previous one, as an ongoing continual engagement with both the menopause subject and my scenography practice.

Performances

The four performances addressing representations of the menopause were created to address the research questions by positing the relationship between spectator, Scenography and Ethnography in four different spaces, the final space being a traditionally equipped large theatre:

- ***Prólogos:*** Drama Studio 2, St Mary's University, Twickenham – June 22, 2017

- ***PUZZLED:*** David Lean Cinema, Clocktower, Croydon – April 23, 2018
- ***Women of Brockwell (missing statue):*** Brockwell Park, South London – June 30, 2019
- ***CHANGING IN PUBLIC:*** St Mary's University Theatre, Twickenham – January 11, 2020

The resources that I could attach to making the four performances were sufficient rather than infinite, which is one of the general characteristics of theatre-making in the UK. Acknowledging this situation means that practical decisions are entwined around creative ambitions and the dramatic choices are often a blended confection of both, which becomes manifest as the performance. Working with professional actors would only be viable if I could pay minimum hourly rates, which meant reducing rehearsal times. This allowed for ideas to develop late into the production process, but meant that scripts were used during the performance. This was the case in the two text-based performances developed from interview transcripts, to keep the verbatim accuracy of the original. The script-holding was also intended as an alienating device, reminding the audience that these were real reports of experiences, not dramatic confections of the theatre-making.

It should also be noted that between February 2017 and January 2020, there were significant developments in the public discourse about menopause, particularly in relation to the workplace[47]. The a priori intention of the Ethnographic methodology was to build knowledge of menopause as experienced by contemporary working women, supported by literature in the public domain, the cultural context. A chronological account of this literary/cultural context is included here in each section of this report, which provides context and praxis. The sections build towards the exposition of the four scenography practice elements, reflecting the cultural positioning of menopause at the time of the performance.

Structure

The structure that I employ in this thesis is that each section is followed by a report on practice evidencing praxis,[48] so Section One includes Praxis 1 and so on. This arrangement

[47] More employers were actively addressing the well-being of their workforce by introducing menopause awareness staff development sessions e.g. The first hour-long *Menopause Workshop* by trainer Julie Dennis, presented by St Mary's University staff on 11/03/20.

[48] Praxis – the process by which a theory, lesson or skill is enacted, embodied or realised.

emphasises that practice has its own methodological concerns, assuming a shape and form that works differently with the same ideas, articulating the research question in particular ways, so it is not an illustration of theory or a stand-alone theatrical statement. Here theory and practice are linked through the progression of the research project, with neither taking precedence; each has their own status in this thesis. The writing style in the sections differs from the practice report, reflecting the more individual processes of practice and theatre-making.

SECTION ONE deals with the methodology, the beginning of the contextual reviews (literature and practice), and leads into the foundational ideas for the first practice: *Prólogos*, which staged the first research question as a site-specific immersive performance at St Mary's University (June 2017). Praxis 1 is the report on the process of developing the scenography, the performance narrative itself and then the reflection on the methods used, analysing the emerging insights, which go forward into the next section.

SECTION TWO centres around the staging of a scenographic ethnodrama on menopause in the workplace, using three semi-structured interviews from members of the Croydon Council Menopause Awareness Group. This culminated in Praxis 2: *PUZZLED* which was performed for Croydon Council (April 2018).

SECTION THREE reflects on the tensions between scenography and ethnodrama, and the move towards looking at mid-life women outside menopause, building a new set of interviews using photo-elicitation. This was part of the development of the living statues shown in Brockwell Park (June 2019) – Praxis 3: *Women of Brockwell (missing statue)*, which also continues analysis into the audience responses.

SECTION FOUR carries forward the emerging insights and all key ideas into Praxis 4, the theatre performance synthesis: *CHANGING IN PUBLIC*. This was performed in January 2020 and used the theatre as a reclaimed site for a performance dealing with an epic positioning of mid-life female menopause experiences, bringing together visual and spoken languages from both sets of interviews as a proposal for Applied Scenography.

Finally, the CONCLUSION deals with the emerging insights from each of the performances; how the relationships between the scenography and ethnography based-materials were negotiated and the emergence of an 'Applied Scenography' from the final performance, the synthesis. This synthesis addressed the overarching research questions, and contextualised the absence of mid-life women from both menopause and scenography, identifying potential future developments from this research project.

SECTION ONE: STAGING MENOPAUSE

My decision to make a performance within the first few months of this research project meant that the practice would not follow the research review (literature or performance), but be used to inform its development. Emerging questions would be addressed through practice, by staging them. This is not to underestimate the inherent difficulties in contextualising Scenography practice-based research in the context of the vast history of theatre-making practices, in which, rather than replacing old conventions with new ones, a production can combine state-of-the-art projections and engineered platforms with martial arts and traditional circus skills (Lepage, 2004), or innovate immersive theatre experiences using Commedia dell'arte Doctors' plague masks (Barrett & Doyle, 2007/8). This ability to accumulate conventions supports 'bricolage' as my methodological choice, making an 'emergent construction' out of what is already to hand.

A bricolage approach could be discerned in Christopher Baugh's *Theatre, Performance and Technology: The Development of Scenography in the Twentieth Century* (2005). Baugh explains his approach to chronologically mapping twentieth-century scenography through the advances of technology, by using an analogy of childhood button-sorting play: 'The desire to make order… was in constant confrontation with their histories and meanings' (Baugh, 2005:xiv). Baugh reminds us that theatre-making practices, like buttons, present as complete entities in themselves. They may match, contrast, be differently composed or be the remaining part of a vanished set. As was mentioned in my introduction, there is no simple history of succession to be established, neither do individual practices build towards one cohesive shared theory of theatre practice.

This accumulation of theatre conventions should not be confused with a lack of substance, but instead acknowledged as specific forms of practice through which a selected repertoire will be identified for use. Echoing Baugh's analogy, other costume-related metaphors have been proposed to elucidate relationships between practice, research and the documented narrative:

> My own writing thus exists as the string on which the pearls of practice-as-research case studies are hung. As with a necklace, the string creates a form and imposes a certain length but almost all that counts and has lasting value are the pearls. (Freeman, 2010: 8)

Freeman also described a strategy of randomised ordering of his selected case studies, emphasising the individualistic nature of contemporaneous arts practices; whereas Robin Nelson, in *Practice as Research in the Arts* (2013), suggests that a 'clew'[49] can be used in 'specifically drawing attention to the thread of the researcher's doing-thinking' (Nelson, 2013: 10). The complex layering of ideas is often a feature of Theatre Arts practice-based research, and this can be noted particularly in my cross-disciplinary project, which necessitated a menopause subject 'clew' in addition to the Scenography enquiry. Making connections between two such different subject areas required that I seek clarity in the relationship between performance-making (practice) and the written contextual analysis (theory).

Context: Scenography and Performance

The contemporary use of the word scenography comes from the Czech word *scénografie*, conceptualised by influential mid-twentieth-century scenographer Josef Svoboda:[50]

> He was not concerned with 'decorating' the stage but with creating a three-dimensional context in which the agreed concept of the work could be synthesized and communicated. (McKinney & Butterworth, 2010: 65)

In Svoboda's view, scenography is a fundamental part of theatre-making, concerned with all elements of the theatre space being put to use, with the audience included in the spatial context as 'witnesses'. Svoboda makes an important distinction here that not all visual design for the theatre is scenography: some will be accounted as 'décor' where it does not attempt to be synthesised as part of a whole work. Here we can understand a rationale for separating scenography from the purely decorative 'set' design, but not necessarily from theatre design practice as a whole. Svoboda complained about the superficiality of terms like the German *Ausstattung*, 'stage outfitting', the English 'stage design' or the French '*décoration*': 'These terms reduce a designer's collaboration to "framing" the dramatic work, rather than sharing in its complete creation' (Burian, 1993: 14). Rather, Svoboda looked to the traditions of Italian theatre, which considered designers as 'joint authors of the theatrical action'(ibid.), and his preference for the term scenography (Aronson, 2018: 2)

[49] A clew, derived from an old English word, is a ball of thread, wool or string.
[50] Josef Svoboda, 1920-2002.

began to redefine what was previously an ambiguous descriptor. Here Svoboda's definition connects with the writings of Bertolt Brecht,[51] who criticised the German designation '*Bühnenbildner*' (stage designer), asserting that this approach delivered a too-complete vision of the play's interpretation:

> The scenographer as Bühnenbauer, on the other hand, believes that the job is to build a scene as an integral component within what Brecht termed the 'practical dramaturgy' of the play in performance. (Baugh, 2013 [2005]: 74)

Scenography, here, does not offer a complete picture of the world of the play, but contributes to the dramatic composition of the production as a whole. Brecht and Casper Neher[52] embody, for many, the 'ideal' creative theatre-making relationship (Aronson, 2018), with Neher credited as the 'progenitor of what is now understood as scenography' (Howard, 2002:31).

Pamela Howard's book *What Is Scenography?* (2002) immediately frames Scenography as a research question, by opening an ongoing series of debates reflecting the concerns and practices from which Scenography research has developed. Howard provides a cornerstone of theatre design practice for current definitions of scenography from her own creative methods, emphasising the importance of drawing in communicating her practice, which involves multiple layering of cultural and visual ideas to the final design work. Howard's book began by listing definitions of scenography collected in one-sentence answers from a cohort of international theatre design practitioners, which are used as the context for her own interpretation of scenography:

> Scenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation. (Howard, 2002: 130)

Howard has developed Svoboda's concept further, describing the elements of her own scenography practice, but including spectators as part of the synthesis. Howard here essentially straddles the practical detailing of technical Theatre Design books (Benedetto, 2012 , Donger, 2018 et al.) and Scenography research. Multiple 'truths' therefore, whilst sometimes inconvenient, are not considered problematic, either within theatre-making

[51] Bertolt Brecht, 1897-1962.
[52] Caspar Neher, 1897-1962.

generally or more specifically within scenography. What matters most is how these are worked through in performance, where they become contextualised.

The emerging research areas in Scenography before 2010 can be briefly summarised as beginning to map the research territory: new technologies developing twentieth-century scenography (Baugh, 2005), scenography as mise-en-scène (Aronson, 2005) and linking scenography to other cultural discourses (Collins & Nisbet, 2010). The ambitious *Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (McKinney & Butterworth, 2010) posited a chronology of scenography pioneers (all of them male) and introduced approaches to scenography that included semiotics and phenomenology, concluding with an analysis of potential future directions, specifically regarding the inter-relationship between audience and scenography.[53] Here Jocelyn McKinney and Phillip Butterworth's useful (and widely cited) definition of scenography refers to assembling the performance environment:

> scenography is defined as the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment. The means by which this is pursued are typically through architectonic structures, light, projected images, sound, costume and performance objects or props. These elements are considered in relation to the performing bodies, the text, the space in which the performance takes place and the placement of the audience. (McKinney & Butterworth, 2010: 4)

This definition builds upon Howard's ideas, by naming the placement of the audience as one element separating the passive theatre design experience from a dynamic one, in which the performance environment has been arranged (by one or more others) and all elements of production, including the spectators, are considered in relation to each other. This positioning informed my development from theatre design practice to scenography research, placing the experience of spectators in the centre of my first cycle of scenography practice on menopause, which would culminate in my performance *Prólogos*.

It was theatre director Richard Schechner's call in 1990 for more inclusivity within university Theatre Drama departments that presaged the conscious shift from 'Drama' (theatre based) to 'Performance':

[53] This built upon ideas from Joslin McKinney's PhD: *The nature of communication between scenography and its audiences* (2008).

> Performance is about more than the enactment of Eurocentric drama. Performance engages intellectual, social, cultural, historical, and artistic life in a broad sense. Performance combines theory and practice. (Schechner, 1992: 9)

Here, Schechner is clear about the benefits of such a shift, and the broad opportunities that would ensue. More inclusive performances, Schechner argued, would expose the ideologies of multiculturalism and their languages of 'equal opportunities' and 'respect', to concentrate on the actuality of creative inter-cultural resolutions worked through in performance. As an example, Schechner commented on the power imbalance he observed in the 1990 Los Angeles Festival, a multicultural showcase:

> Do the folks who decide America's spending priorities, who run its biggest corporations, who decide its foreign policies really want Chicanos or Korean Americans or Native Americans or African Americans or gays or *feminists* to have as much power as they themselves? (ibid.: 7) (my italics)

The funding that was provided, Schechner implied, neuters the power of representation, through emphasising the individual distinctiveness of groups rather than empowering these groups through the collective actions of the whole against the dominant culture. The inclusion here after ethnic groups of 'gays' and 'feminists' as cultural groups is particularly interesting, as all have been excluded from the realms of societal influence. This expands upon Jill Dolan's arguments in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988), in which Dolan critiques the near total exclusion of feminist playwrights in the accepted literary canon, the basis for Broadway and other US mainstream productions:

> Canons, by implication, exclude not only worthy plays but worthy spectators on the basis of their ideological perspectives. (Dolan, 2012 [1988]: 40)

Although there are, and have always been, many gay and/or feminist theatre-makers, the canon of writings and performing methods has a default mechanism: an in-built bias towards the dominant culture, male, usually white and heterosexual. Schechner predicted that staged dramas would become 'the string quartet of the twenty-first century: a beloved but extremely limited genre' (Schechner, 1992: 8). But the first 20 years of the century have been marked, not by supplanting older forms of drama, but by accumulating new conventions. Performances now co-exist alongside theatre productions, with a fruitful interchange between marginal conventions such as immersive theatre, playable spaces and site-based performances introducing new hybrid forms into established theatre company repertoires. Nonetheless, the National Theatre announced a spring programme for 2019

without any women playwrights and only one female director (for the children's show). Large-scale performances formed the theatre design base from which pioneering ideas of scenography were seeded. Feminist performance practices have long been positioned outside the mainstream theatre,[54] performing 'personal forms of dialogue' (Case, 1988: 46) in small spaces and fringe venues. Small spaces mean small audiences with limited public impact and correspondingly small budgets. Small budgets do not necessarily mean no visual design opportunities, but money helps. In contrast, productions that attract more money, gain more status, use bigger venues and have more influence/power also offer increased scope for the development of visual languages of performance.

This shift from theatre to performance, sometimes in tandem with with Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theories, engendered new possibilities for performance-making that resulted in a rapid increase in numbers of productions. These used a wide range of different sites rather than theatres, and when theatres were used, the performance could extend off the stage into other parts of the building. This proliferation of performances, both public and private (Lotker & Gough, 2013), has expanded the understanding of scenography as mise-en-scène, the spatial-built/environmental/immersive/landscape, together with the temporal and/or the kinetic; these descriptors may be used singly or in hybrid combinations. Scenography can be concerned with technological advances or the use of materials. It often prioritises new working relationships and aims to attract diverse audiences, with new understandings that are often worked together with existing conventions, which continue to 'accumulate' rather than replace previous practices.

The expansion of 'contemporary performance design' (McKinney & Palmer, 2018 [2017]: 19) has led to rapid proliferation of claims to establish scenography practices that are often unaccompanied by consensus on the 'underlying principles or strategies' (Ibid.:1) that underpin these claims. Sometimes the shift that signals a claim on scenography practice is a turn away from documenting the intentions of the performance-maker to a focus on understanding the spectator's experience. But this, I suggest, is a research discourse prioritising the spectator by excluding the performance-maker/designer, and overrides the

[54] Feminist theatre-makers such as Split Britches or Liz Aggiss, with international academic credentials, attract enthusiastic feminist audiences, but rarely if ever play the large theatre spaces in the UK.

scenographer's articulation of creative practice with which my research project is concerned. Rachel Hann asserts that 'the holistic implications of the contemporary approach render scenography a trait of all theatre' (Hann, 2019: 2). This resonates, paradoxically, with the position argued by Kate Burnett in *Modern British Theatre Design* (Aronson, 2018: 478-502). Burnett links theatre design practices within scenography, somewhat interchangeably, through a discussion of UK HE provision and key practitioners. She suggests that scenography approaches are embodied within UK theatre design practices, promoting a relationship of 'equality' (ibid.: 484) within the director-–designer collaboration.

Scenography also carries meanings outside theatre or performance-making. There are four other uses of the word: in architecture as a somewhat derogatory term, in classics, in museology and in spatial design, such as exhibitions and museums (Hann, 2019: 45). And it is the architecture-spatial design influence that has incrementally begun to dominate the academic debates within Scenography:

> After examining the forms of urban activities which reinvent urban places by producing alternative meaning and encouraging alternative scenarios of behaviour (e.g. flash-mobs and all kind of urban rituals, such as bridge love padlocks), it is worth examining urban structures as modifiable scenography in connection with everyday scenarios and citizens [sic] bodily and emotional experience. (Lavrinec, 2013: 22)

The response from the spectator here is behavioural and emotional, but the emphasis has shifted away from the citizen's life experiences, which might have been the subject of a drama, towards an understanding of how space influences the behaviour of the citizen and what behaviour has been enabled. This is a tangible shift that has progressed the discourse in certain directions, but not without consequences for others. The experience of the performance is being understood through a response to spaces and away from intimate human concerns, other than as a body or bodies within the spatial environment such as: *This Building Talks Truly* (Jovanovski, 2015) the winner of the Golden Triga at the Prague Quadrenniel in 2019.

Much of the current Scenography discourse on creative practice has been concentrated on advanced forms of aesthetic awareness through architectural space, environment,

materials, technologies and the agency of scenography beyond conventional theatre-making, in tandem with increasing demands on audience commitment (active not passive spectatorship). The interests here are about 'affect not effect' (McKinney & Palmer, 2018 [2017]: 10), with the expectation that any theatrical conventions will be employed in increasingly complex, hybrid forms of performance-making located in varying sites. But Dorita Hannah re-affirms the case for scenography within a theatre space:

> most profoundly experienced in theatre's concentrated event, which negotiates the site of lived reality with the more inventive territories of myth and the imagination. (Hannah, 2018: 122)

Hannah's definition here of the 'concentrated event' in theatre performances is extremely important, in that the performance site is focused on the stage as the playing area. This is a prompt for the audience to look at the show without distraction, which might lead on to audience passivity. But active spectatorship really relies on the nature of the relationship between audience and performance – we can readily believe that the seated audience of the theatre productions by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop were as emotionally engaged as the immersive theatre audience of Punchdrunk, perhaps more so. But, by appropriating Hannah's statement about theatre architecture and relating it more closely to the real space on stage and the imagined space of the developing performance narrative, I can describe my scenography practice as the transfer from a real space to an imagined space and back, which is also a recurring experience for the spectator. This imagined space bears the trace of thinking (Arendt, 2018 [1958]: 20), often accompanied by emotional and/or physical responses from the audience. One of the consequences of the drift towards spatial definitions in scenography is the weakening of concerns other than those connected with abstractions such as 'Climate' or 'Sustainability'. This has resulted in the cultivation of a somewhat generalised approach to both race and gender, which I suggest has had difficulty in interrogating the real biases of racism, sexism and ageism inherited from the Western theatre tradition.

Applied Scenography: Real-life Problem-Solving

Whilst Christopher Baugh's 2011 paper on *Scenography with Purpose: Activism and Intervention* opened up the real-life possibilities of using purposive scenography, it was Melissa Trimingham's scenography in the *Imagining Autism* project that began scoping the possibilities of an 'applied' scenography. Real-world problem-solving 'has been little understood, identified or exploited within education or artistic practice' (Trimingham, 2018 [2017]: 183).

Trimingham's account of making the scenography for (and to some extent with) autistic children explains the use of carefully selected sensory elements within the designed environment, which also allowed the drama to be led by the children, once the actors had stopped trying to control the outcomes:

> by comprehending their potentially transformative sensory modes, we can empathise and move alongside them in mutual trust rather than blundering in with insistent demands that they share our vision of the world. (ibid.: 193)

Here it is the agency of the spectators that is the key point. The scenography has been carefully developed through the empathy of the performers, observing how spectators interact with the work, working towards a shared understanding of the world. Trimingham's material-based scenography works as part of an integrated collaboration to investigate the 'potential impact of immersive drama' (ibid.: 183) for small groups of children with particular needs. But her suggestions regarding the possibilities of 'applied' scenography can, I suggest, be opened up further still to embrace real-world problem-solving across a much greater proportion of society, and a different kind of problem, albeit one that requires a respectful relationship between audience and theatre-maker to be developed.

Working towards a shared understanding, an empathy from the performance-maker about the spectator's situation, rather than a demand for emotion from the spectator, is a key part of my theatre-making practice and the one that is most significant for my research project, which brings scenography together with ethnography-based methods to address the real-world issue of menopause.

Research Strategies

The legacy of the perceived need to establish legitimacy for theatre arts practice PhDs in the early 2000s often meant the adoption of structures and terminology from other disciplines, rather than a dynamic organic development from within arts practice. This created complexity for the arts practitioner researcher and suspicions that arts practice was less rigorous unless anchored firmly to the existing philosophical definitions of paradigm, ontology and epistemology. Additionally, the qualitative research methodologies Action Research (Gray & Malins, 2004: 74) and Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1968 , Charmaz, 2006), which have some potential in arts research, already attract the de-legitimising criticism 'anything goes' because of the '*relativism*' (Denscombe, 2012: 123) associated with the interpretative paradigm that acknowledges the existence of more than one (subjective) interpretation of the data, not one (objective) truth; commonly the gold standard scientific method.

Building upon existing academic language within arts practice theory can become overly complex or confused by overlapping usage from other disciplines. My research not only deals with multiple individual interpretations of truths, but uses scenography to layer these truths, juxtaposed, within a performance to better understand modern menopause. To avoid confusion over academic terminology, I am adopting Martin Denscombe's terminology of research strategies (interviews, ethnotheatre) rather than using the term methodologies, as my strategies are drawn from both arts practice and qualitative research, selecting appropriate methods (as tools) and constructing instruments[55] for collecting material/evidence/data.

My practice-based research 'involves a multi-mode inquiry drawing upon a range of methods' (Nelson, 2013: 98) described through text and images. The methods I employed are associated with Scenography, Ethnodrama and Qualitative Research. This combination may at first seem disorderly or 'messy', insofar as it involved mixing visual and written forms

[55] I also used research 'instruments' to refer to the interview schedules and permissions forms, adopting terminology used by St Mary's Ethics Committee.

of data collection for use within a performative scenography practice. This 'messiness' can be encompassed within the research as a 'bricolage'[56] strategy in which:

> The various methods chosen, adapted or invented are related, often forming a developmental set, which is coherent. By acknowledging that research takes place in the 'real world' – is complex and sometimes 'messy', open to change, interaction and development. (Gray & Malins, 2004: 74)

In arts practice, 'bricolage' allows for a creation 'that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world' (ibid.: 74). This 'emergent construction' (ibid.), which allows methods and tools to be developed for utilisation, rather than working within prescribed methodological constructs, is key to understanding arts practice research. It rarely generates the kind of results that can be understood within a positivist framework, but it nonetheless offers new insights into (interpretations of) existing situations. This is particularly important when reflecting upon ephemeral artefacts such as theatre performances. The 'bricolage' descriptor is a particularly useful one for theatre-making:

> Most plays, in fact, are *bricolages* of rhetorical conventions; some plays such as Brecht's of Shakespeare, go beyond bricolage to invention. (Burns, 1972; 107) *(*original italics*)*

This is a cogent reminder of the theatrical interplay between conventions, here of rhetoric, but elsewhere of technical practices and performance styles; of visual languages or physical objects. Bricolage has also been deployed in feminist theatre practice to bring together such 'found' objects as memories and domestic experiences (Harris, 1999: 136). It is the nature of the resulting 'emergent construction' that will be analysed as the made-theatre artefact in the reporting on my performances. The rationale for my choice of methods is their appropriateness and fitness for purpose for addressing my research aims in the Scenography/Ethnotheatre presentation of the menopause. The research questions have been staged and further defined through a scenography practice underpinned by the 'diverse theoretical and philosophical understandings of the various elements encountered in the act of research' (Kincheloe, 2001: 679), drawing upon Donald Schön's critique of question and method:

[56] Related to the French name for a 'jack-of-all-trades', the bricoleur also carries associations of construction. The utilisation of this term in research strategies has been inspired by Lévi Strauss's analogy of mythmaking and the 'bricoleur', who uses whatever is to hand for his constructions, a fusion of different elements. (Strauss, 1966 [1962]).

> In real world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens… In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense… i.e. the way of phrasing the problem also enables the strategies. (Schön, 2011 [1983]: 40)

This issue has been addressed in my research by staging the problematics of menopause as a contemporary problem, using a Scenographic bricolage strategy to make a series of four emergent constructions.

In this way, fully articulating a question through arts practice can lead to new insights rather than simply finding an answer. These insights inform the further development of the enquiry, which can be re-questioned through successive cycles of the creative process and acknowledges the debates around 'embedded', 'situated' and 'tacit'[57] knowledge that have emerged as a feature of arts practice discourse:

> Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. (Borgdorff, 2006: 18)

The embodied knowledge here referred to takes me towards a definition of praxis rather than practice. To explain the structure of my research enquiry, I have adapted an existing interpretative model of theatre practice research: the ''hermeneutic-interpretive' spiral paradigm model' (Trimingham, 2002: 56).

[57] Donald Schön elaborates on Michael Polyani's phrase 'tacit' learning for a practitioner: 'Through reflection, he can surface and criticise the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialised practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness.' Schön, D., A, 2011. *The Reflective Practitioner,* Surrey, England, Ashgate Publishing Limited. p52.

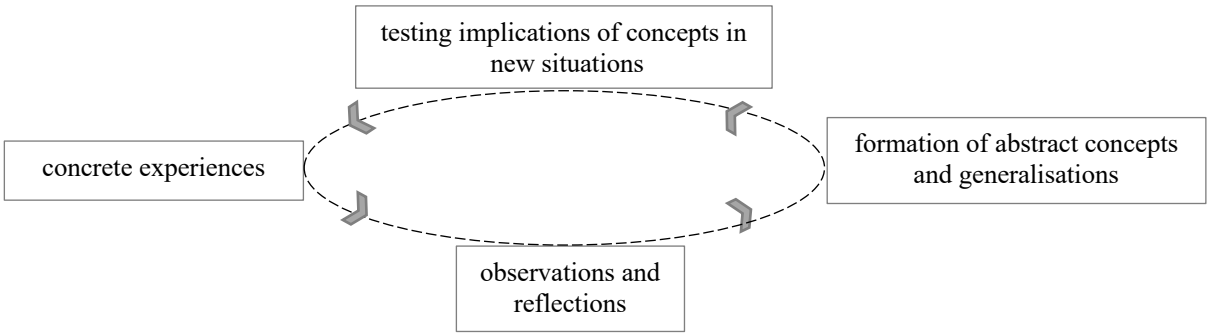


Figure 1: The Lewinian experiential learning model based on the adaptation by Kolb [1984].[58]
Configuring the model in this way is probably a simplification of Kurt Lewin's ideas, suggesting only one set of relations between actions, because he also discussed fluidity of movements, but it is easy to identify the cycle between abstract 'concepts' and concrete 'experiences'.

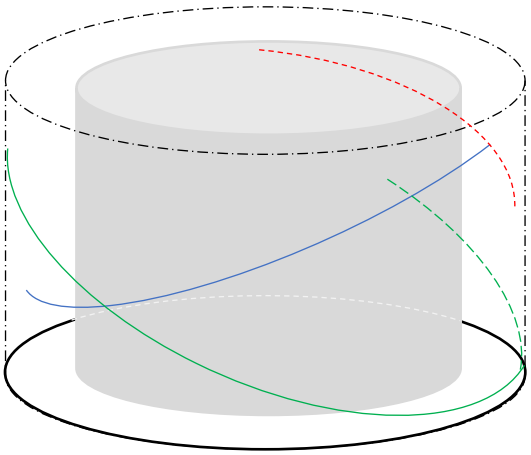


Figure 2: Diagram of the description of the "hermeneutic-interpretive' spiral paradigm model'
Developing Trimingham's idea of the hermeneutic circular process into a spiral paradigm model, for the purpose of explaining how different theatre arts research investigations into the same subject can relate to each and the whole as they advance.

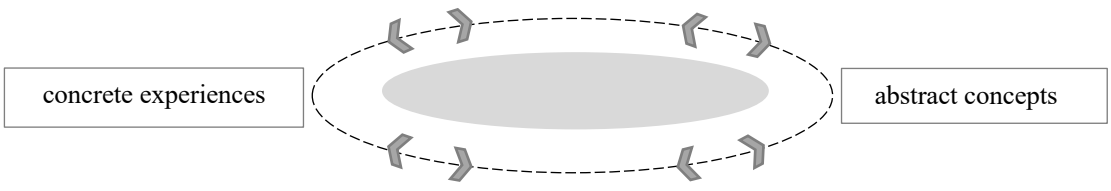


Figure 3: The plan view of Figure 2
Showing how investigations can move in either direction between concrete experiences and abstract concepts, as Trimingham suggests, with the subject held within the investigation.

[58] See Kolb [1984] in Dennison, P. 2009. Reflective practice: The enduring influence of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching* [Online]. [Accessed 12/03/21].

Figure 2 when aligned with Figure 1 above, shows that investigations can move between practice and theory with seemingly arbitrary starting and ending points, according to the specific question of the individual researcher. Here the central core represents the subject material clearly defined within the series of investigations. Concerns about 'messiness' are an ongoing criticism of bricolage research from some disciplines and often have to be addressed (Kincheloe, 2001: 7). By representing the structure of the enquiry here in diagrammatic form, the accusations of 'mess' that the bricolage attracts, can be countered:

> The in-built dynamism of the spiral is the only paradigm model that can account for such change in theory in relation to the on-going practice, whilst also successfully defining the area of research, and preventing it spiralling out of control.
> (Trimingham, 2002: 56)

Here, it is the character of the spiral itself that keeps the investigation relevant and adaptive to new ideas and other contextual works. This spiral can be entered at any arbitrary point for investigation, according to the developing research questions, which might be an informed supposition, a hypothesis or an 'undeclared hunch' (ibid.: 58). The spiralling movement continually defines the enquiry in relation to the subject of the research (at the centre). Questions are deliberately kept 'open' and based on previous knowledge, aiming to understand problems better rather than resolve them. Beginning the research with what is acknowledged to be prior knowledge differs significantly from the 'Tabula Rasa' of a Grounded Theory approach, which would then continue the line of enquiry until no new answers were being generated that would create the new theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). But Trimingham's model does not offer any end points, as the spiral continues refining questions ad infinitum.

Figure 5 acknowledges the process of creation and (simultaneously) is a reminder that the narrowing is an informed decision (based on time, material/data collection and resources) for the purposes of defining the research at this stage, marking the emergent construction, which can be used as an end point in itself or to redefine the questions. A further iteration of these same elements, which might narrow at a different time/position (on the cone) with different resources and a different configuration, is possible, but the evaluation of this work focuses on the emergent construction; in other words, what was achieved at the time, in performance.

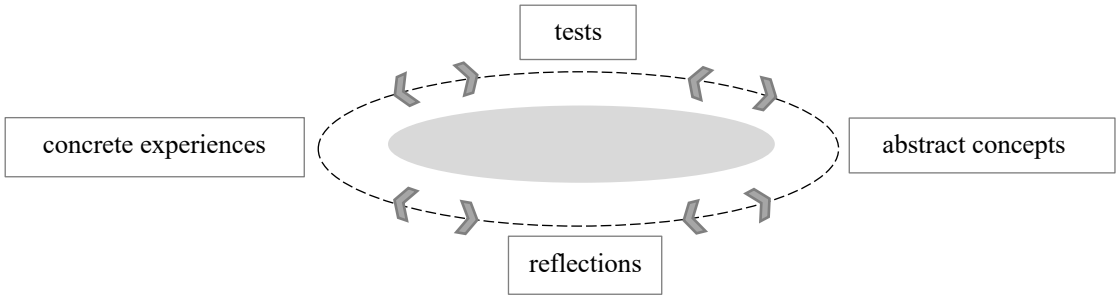


Figure 4: The 'hermeneutic-interpretive' spiral paradigm model & Kolb
This diagram incorporates 'test's and 'reflections' from Kolb with 'concrete' and 'abstract' from Trimingham. The two way arrows show that investigations can move in either direction.

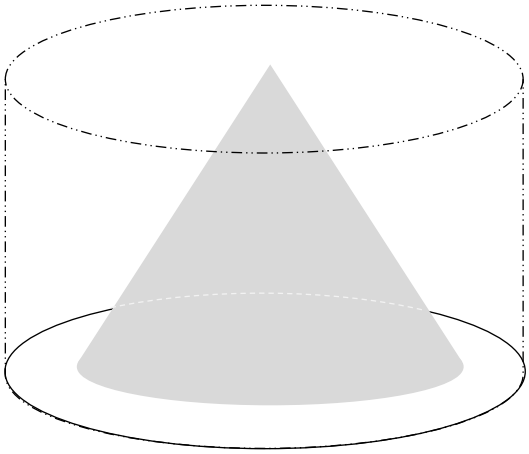


Figure 5: The bricolage strategy as an 'emergent construction'
My diagram defines a bricolage strategy held within Trimingham's paradigm by redrawing the spiral into a cone, again formed around the core subject (menopause), with multiple entry points/possibilities for investigation. The cone is open at one end, allowing the widest possible start for the enquiry, but the other end narrows into a point, the 'emergent construction' that is employed for performance/analytical purposes.

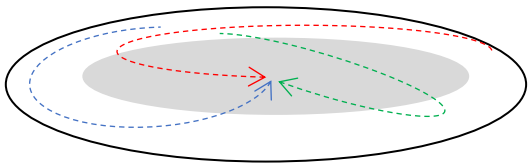


Figure 6: The plan view of the 'emergent construction'
Here the separate investigations are brought towards the centre of the subject area, which form the 'emergent construction, the performance, keeping the movements between experiences and concepts, moving in either direction between them.

The spiral provides the parameters for the bricolage, and retains Lewin's practice/theory elements as opposing positions. The four cycles of scenography practice in this project move through a process of test and reflection using the familiar make-reflect-remake process, often connected with Action Research, noted in postdramatic theatre arts practice (Harvie, & Lavender, 2010: 243). The cone represents how all three cycles of practice can be drawn together, for the purposes of performance-making both theory and practice, into one emergent construction (the top of the cone) where all ideas are embodied, to a greater or lesser extent. The emergent construction is the final performance of this research: *CHANGING IN PUBLIC.*

Figure 5 shows how each cycle of practice produced an emergent construction, through the narrowing process, which was released and subsumed back into the spiral for the first three productions. This was a practice-driven process of problem-staging, which, once staged, led to insights that then moved into problem-identifying, leading into the next iteration of practice. Taken together, these iterations of practice defined the real-life issues of the menopause subject.

Context: Menopause in Literature

Evidencing the absence of information and understanding in menopause literature is important, because there is a large body of non-academic publications in use by the general public, which co-exist with menopause as an area of academic study with its own sub-fields in different disciplines such as medicine, psychology, anthropology, history and biology, which all engage with disparate menopause elements:

> The amount of dispute, investigation, testing, and theorizing that has gone into the question of the origin of menopause in recent decades is staggering… it is clear that the issue is an important one currently exercising some of evolutionary biology's best minds. (Mattern, 2019: 39)

Whilst the meaning and gestation of the menopause are an ongoing topic of professional debate, this picture of academic rigour has to be juxtaposed with the real-life situation of a woman in her mid-40s beginning peri-menopause with no information, and therefore no preparation for what might be a half-decade (or more) of challenging physical effects. In this regard, the specificity and exclusionary tendencies of the academic perspective on the

menopause might be convergent within a feminist analysis of gender, ageing and sexuality, such as *It's Not You, It's Your (Old) Vagina: Osphena's Articulation of Sexual Dysfunction*[59] (Bedor, 2015), which analyses the 'dated and clichéd depictions of female sexuality' used to sell pharmaceuticals directly to the US public.

Image 2: Osphena advert 2013

On the other hand, menopausal women might also be used as a data source, as occurs in '"Chaos, restitution and quest": one woman's journey through menopause' (Nosek, Kennedy & Gudmundsdottir, 2012). Mid-twentieth-century medicine posited natural menopause as a 'deficiency disease' (Houck, 2006: 3), and 'the new science of endocrinology—the study of hormones—came to understand it as a pathological deficiency of estrogen' (Mattern, 2019: 258), which could be 'cured' by hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Medical terms for menopause often carry pejorative connotations: oestrogen *deficiency*, vaginal *atrophy*[60] and ovarian *insufficiency*. In contrast, psychologists are more interested in the emotional well-being of mid-life women, developing cognitive behavioural interventions (Ayers, Forshaw & Hunter, 2011 , Hardy, Griffiths, Norton & Hunter, 2018) to deal with menopause-related hot flushes and night sweats, the two most common menopause signs. The psychologists' adoption of medical language indicates overlaps in

[59] Osphena offers women relief from vaginal atrophy in non-estrogen tablet form.
[60] Atrophy means wasting away.

disciplinary interests, but there are significant gaps between subject areas, which contribute to the absence of public-facing information previously noted.

Since there has been little or no public sharing of information about menopause, this literature review focuses on what is known about menopause in the public domain. Identifying the public-facing literature and authorial intentions will give the contextual background of this research, by looking to establish the cross-over between academic study and 'best-seller' publishing. The nature of this cross-over is something I have experienced personally during this PhD, when I was asked to write a foreword (as a PhD candidate) for a small 'stocking-filler' menopause book (Bunch, 2019). This publication, and many others of its ilk, form the foundation of how women learn about menopause.

The longevity of a best-seller cross-over book differs from that of an academic publication. The volume of sales indicates a wide readership in the first instance, but, if accessed by other or younger members of a family, children or grandchildren might read it some or many years later. So cross-overs can be argued to have a long legacy of influence. For this reason, it is worth referring back to Marie Stopes' 1918 book *Married Love*, which sold more than half a million copies with more than 26 editions. It may seem that Stopes' book is beyond public memory, but it is significant insofar as she identified an absence of knowledge in the public domain about the female body and informed young middle-class couples about natural female sexuality.

Stopes, now better known for founding a family planning clinic, was a palaeobotanist[61] and her cross-over book encouraged consensual sex within marriage 'before every separate act of coitus' (Stopes, 1918). In her later book, *Change of Life in Men and Women* (1936), Stopes dealt with the climacteric for both women and men, making deliberate links across the gender divide, but emphasising the differences in female menopause. Women, she wrote, should not anticipate problems but

> carry on exactly as though nothing special were happening. This is revolutionary because so far as I can discover almost everyone who publishes advice on this

[61] Marie Stopes (1880-1958) was the first female science faculty member at Manchester University; her controversial stance on eugenics has adversely affected the legacy of her promotion of birth control.

> subject emphasizes the need of all sorts of restrictions that the woman must impose upon herself. (Stopes, 1950 [1936]: 134)

Stopes dismissed the admonitions of medics and, marking a probable first in menopause literature, encouraged sexual activity rather than restraint. She also acknowledged difficulties during menopause, recommending calcium supplements and giving advice for women who had challenging experiences. Based on the letters she received, Stopes reported that female sexual urges improved after menopause, introducing the post-menopausal 'healthy woman… fully sex-potent and vitally attractive' (Stopes, 1950 [1936]: 118). Stopes offered an informed approach to menopause, as a natural part of the female life-cycle, strongly connected to the reports from her correspondence. This has some traction with my theatre-making approach, which seeks to understand menopause from the experiences of contemporary women, and shares these accounts publicly through performance to improve female experiences. But far from taking Stopes' pragmatic advice not to worry about 'the change', many women continued to dread the onset of menopause.

Writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote about menopause in her best-known work *The Second Sex*:

> Woman is now delivered from the servitude imposed by her female nature, but she is not to be likened to a eunuch, for her vitality is unimpaired. And what is more, she is no longer the prey of overwhelming forces, she is herself, she and her body are one. It is sometimes said that women of a certain age constitute 'a third sex': and, in truth, while they are not males, they are no longer females. Often, indeed, this release from female physiology is expressed in a health, a balance, a vigour that they lacked before. (Beauvoir, 1997 [1949]: 63)

Beauvoir's positioning here is interesting and indicative of her time, in that she uses the euphemism 'women of a certain age' rather than the 'menopausal' descriptor. The idea of not being 'prey' (getting pregnant) was a huge relief for women. The relief on the cessation of periods and fertility as a benefit of menopause is now rarely heard because of the widespread use of safe contraception. Dwindling fertility is more often voiced as a contemporary concern, which overshadows the positive benefits of menopause for those with conditions such as endometriosis,[62] 'so grateful when the bleeding was finally over'

[62] Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to womb lining is found in other parts of the body, which causes a series of painful symptoms, particularly at the time of menstruation.

(Barnett, 2019: 246), or who do not want any or more children. Beauvoir's book, although undoubtedly influential in the foundation of feminist theory and widely read in translations, was not a best-selling 'cross-over'. The idea of the 'third sex' was only developed in later feminist texts. But Beauvoir is more contradictory in her views on menopause than initially seems apparent.

Beauvoir comments on the balance of the post-menopausal woman, later defined as 'post-menopausal zest' by Margaret Mead,[63] but personally she feared the ageing process, the loss of her youthful face in the mirror, her sexuality and relationships, as well as her abilities. Her early works associate menopause with loss/death, concentrating on the repulsive nature of women in their 40s. But in Beauvoir's *Old Age* (1970), menopause merits a single mention: it 'takes place well before old age' (Beauvoir, 1970: 325). Beauvoir reflects a complete change of opinion: menopause, although dreaded, once lived through is no longer an issue for the individual; it is as the harbinger of old age that it is feared and women who were 'inflexible, resistant to change' (Ladimer, 1999: 103) were those she depicted as 'old'. Simone de Beauvoir 'obviously valorized a very conventional masculinity' (Ladimer, 1999: 95) and yet her 'transgressive' writings imagined a woman fully outside of the patriarchal construct.

The patriarchal viewpoint on menopause emerges in *Feminine Forever* (1966), written by Dr Robert A. Wilson to persuade American women to take estrogen replacement therapy (ERT)[64] to keep their marriage/sex life healthy. Wilson's book was a huge best-selling success in the US and UK, contributing to a widespread distribution of medicalised menopause language:

> The menopause, far from being an act of fate or a state of mind – is, in fact, a deficiency disease. By way of rough analogy, you might think of menopause, as a condition similar to diabetes. – i.e. like insulin, missing hormones can be replaced. (Wilson, 1966: 17)

[63] 'The famously energetic and ambitious anthropologist Margaret Mead, then in her late fifties, first spoke of women's prolonged "post-menopausal zest", in an interview with Life magazine in 1959.' (Segal, 2013: 26) Mead also claimed to be the first person to mention menopause on British television in an interview with David Frost in 1970 (ibid.).

[64] For a full account of Dr Robert A. Wilson and his nurse wife Thelma's energetic promotion of ERT, see *Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America,* (Lock, 1993: 346-9).

Wilson's sales promotion is clear, backed up by his medical credentials and accounts of satisfied patients. But he is wrong here in bracketing menopause with diabetes; menopause is a natural life transition, whereas diabetes is an illness requiring medical treatment. Wilson also addresses two other commonly held views: a dreadful 'fate' or a 'state of mind'. The designation of menopause as being all in the mind (imaginary) is quickly dispelled, as Wilson is interested in promoting medication, which only a real disease would require. But this is a passing acknowledgement of an opinion that frequently emerges, that women imagine themselves afflicted. By promising that ERT[65] would help women retain their youthful looks and libido, Wilson, like Stopes, wrote for a married audience hoping patriarchally 'for a femininely fulfilled happy ever after' (Wilson, 1966: 86). Despite the ongoing public concerns over the safety of hormone therapy and 'an increased risk for endometrial cancer' (Lock, 1993: 360) that emerged in 1976 and undermined his premise, the enduring legacy of Wilson's contribution to the public debate can be found on the Amazon website, where second-hand copies can be purchased, with a positive review being left as recently as 2013.

Most twenty-first-century women writing about menopause routinely criticise Wilson for his pejorative language: 'the dry, unyielding vagina' (Steinke, 2020 [2019]: 58) and 'living decay' (Foxcroft, 2010: 199). But Wilson's book has been contextualised in the US amongst the consciousness-raising of 1970s feminism, for trying to reconcile the short-term benefits (reduced menopause effects) against long-term hormone treatments (continual medication):

> Feminists realized that menopause marked a social as well as a physical transition; as a result, they insisted that the real solution for menopausal difficulties required changes in women's relationships with their aging bodies and in their roles in society. (Houck, 2006: 218)

These feminists were the 'Baby Boomers' generation and they were objecting to the gendered expectations of females to 'keep their man' by remaining feminine. In the feminist view, menopause wasn't only about losing fertility, it represented an opportunity for change in societal roles. The American journalist Gail Sheehy argued that Erik Erikson's popular eight-stage psychosocial theory (resolving identified needs of the individual conflicting with

[65] The ERT that Wilson recommended is derived from the urine of pregnant mares (Primarin) and therefore considered a natural source. Primarin is now described as an estrogen-only HRT.

the needs of society), which re-modelled Freud's controversial theory of psychosexual development, was only concerned with male experience. Sheehy rendered the idea of 'stages' into life 'crises' and wrote her book *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* (1974) for married couples, identifying where relationships might encounter tensions/crises.

Sheehy's *Passages* is an influential[66] cross-over book: an academic study/popular theory hybrid about American modern adulthood. Sheehy continued the same theme, two decades later, with her book on the menopause, *The Silent Passage* (1991), also hailed as a 'best-seller'. In *Passages*, the mid-life point for women is set at the age of 35, when 'moms' go back to work after childrearing. The hetero-normative married, middle-class mother is the default example for many mid-twentieth-century studies. Sheehy deals briskly with menopause towards the end of her book stating that:

> The symptoms of menopause also affect almost all women to some degree, but only about 10 percent of them are obviously inconvenienced by these problems'.[67] There are important reasons that percentage has dropped so low. *Menopause has been studied for many years. A woman knows what to expect.* Volumes of information are now available to educate her further. Hormone replacement therapy, although controversial because of the uncertain cancer connection, is nonetheless well along in clinical use. (Sheehy, 1976 [1974]: 315-6) (my italics)

Sheehy's move here is to swiftly embrace HRT as a future solution, and therefore enables her dismissal of the small percentage of women affected. It is worth noting as a clear example of one woman minimising the experience of other women, made all the more remarkable by Sheehy's volte face about her own experience of menopause, described in 1991 in *The Silent Passage*: 'I was sure I would just "sail right through it". Instead I… almost capsized' (Sheehy, 1998 [1991]: xiv). This is a such a significant change of position regarding 'knowing about' and a personal 'experiencing' of menopause from a high-profile journalist and successful student of Margaret Mead, which highlights the curious conundrum of contemporary women's menopause experience and the difficulties of communicating

[66] *Passages* is widely reported as being one of the ten most influential books of the late twentieth century in the US, from a 1991 survey for the Library of Congress and the Book-of-the-Month club asking readers 'which book had made a difference in their lives?' It was tied in ninth place with four other books, including Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

[67] Menopause statistics obtained through early academic studies should be viewed with caution, because of the difficulty of ensuring that the results are unaffected by researcher bias. Sheehy's' percentage is slightly lower than other studies.

menopause-related information usefully. If Sheehy was so well informed, why did she 'almost capsize'? Betty Friedan commented on Sheehy's unexpectedly bad menopause and offers an observation from Bernice Neugarten[68] that if an expected crisis (menopause) was 'anticipated and, in effect, "rehearsed" as part of the life cycle' (Friedan, 1993: 120), then it would not be experienced as a crisis. This 'rehearsal' of crisis connects closely with the aims of practice here, to rehearse menopause through a scenographic performance, making it publicly visible.

Sheehy contextualises her own less-than-optimum menopause with over 100 interviews, mainly with North American women[69] in different stages of menopause: 'A new generation of women – baby boomer – may be reinventing the taboo[70] around menopause' (Sheehy, 1998 [1991]: xi). Sheehy's is an energised 'do your own education' and 'take responsibility' approach, recommending the use of HRT whilst also counselling caution. But, crucially, Sheehy, as a working woman, builds on her *Passages* position by writing for women in the workplace and home-makers, reflecting a distinct societal shift.

However, Gail Sheehy's was not the only menopause best-seller of 1991. *The Change,* by feminist writer and provocateur Germaine Greer, offered a definitive study contextualising natural menopause, diametrically opposed to Sheehy's informative and HRT fuelled approach. In the UK, Greer is a household name (Hirsch, 2018) because of the international best-selling success of her first book, *The Female Eunuch* (1969), widely credited as bringing feminist ideas to a mainstream audience. Greer herself described *The Female Eunuch* as 'conscientiously unacademic' (Greer, 2007: 294) but making serious commentary. As a cross-over text, *The Change* brings a raft of academic research into the public domain, but where Sheehy concentrated on analysing data collected from interviews, Greer developed a new feminist perspective on menopause: a highly intelligent, erudite approach that ranged freely over literature, history, science, anthropology, folklore and personal experience.

[68] Berenice Neugarten was an American psychologist who specialised in the areas of human development and gerontology.
[69] The preponderance of the middle-class experience described in menopause texts is generally noted by authors.
[70] The use of the word taboo is not strictly accurate given the Polynesian etymology of the word, which may relate to menstruation referred to as being either sacred or forbidden. But the word has been frequently linked to menopause female writers in relation to menopause over the lifetime of this project.

Writing during her own experience of the 'grand climacteric',[71] Greer began by reporting that the 'utter invisibility of middle-aged women in English literary culture is baffling' (Greer 1992: 21). Greer's assertion rests upon her extensive knowledge of classic texts, quoted liberally in her prose. Throughout *The Change* there are shifts backwards and forwards in time and cultures, which is often confusing. In a survey of attitudes and all matters menopausal, Greer gleans information from across multiple academic disciplines in biochemistry, gynaecology, psychology and medicine, which includes 1980s papers from medical anthropologist Margaret Lock, part of the foundation work for her academic publication *Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America* (Lock, 1993). Greer uses her feminist lens to critique the history of medicine and menopause. *The Change* is often referenced by recent non-academic menopause writers who have contributed their own menopause accounts, e.g. *The Stranger in the Mirror* (Shilling, 2012), *Middlepause* (Benjamin, 2016), *Why We Can't Sleep: Women's New Midlife Crisis* (Calhoun, 2020b), *Flash Count Diary* (Steinke, 2020 [2019]) and *More Than a Woman* (Moran, 2020).

Greer's book is only used as a touchstone by feminist academic writers: that menopause is a 'time for mourning' (Foxcroft, 2010: 34) whereas references to *The Change* in academic papers (Komesaroff Rothfield & Daly, 1997 , King, 2013 , Segal, 2013) are more perfunctory:

> Both Greer and Sheehy emphasized menopause's potential as a gateway to personal transformation and an opportunity for personal growth. Like many authors of the past, they also saw menopause as a chance to escape from some of the constraints of womanhood, of femininity, and of sexuality. But for both of them, the means of escape was biological; the woman's changed body altered who she was, and what she cared about, and how she was viewed. Note the difference from the discussion of liberation in the 1940s and 1950s, when menopause allowed women to take up new challenges without changing their identities. (Houck, 2006: 235-6)

Here, medical historian Judith A. Houck contextualises both Greer and Sheehy within a twentieth-century cultural shift for post-menopausal women, offering real possibilities of a Second Adulthood (Sheehy) or a Third Age (Greer), echoing Beauvoir's 'third sex' definition. But there are other, more concrete convergences. Despite their obvious differences, Sheehy and Greer come to similar observations regarding where responsibilities lie. Greer's 'With

[71] Greer prefers to use the name 'grand climacteric', an older term from the Greek language, rather than 'menopause', first used in the nineteenth century (Greer 1992: 25).

the onset of menopause one thing becomes clear, that is *we* must work at being healthy' (Greer, 1992 [1991]: 246) reflects Sheehy's 'keep yourself healthy' advice, which reverberates across the twentieth century (Houck, 2006). In other words, the responsibility for women's menopause health comes back to women *themselves* rather than doctors, academics or pharmaceutical companies.

Despite the plethora of menopause writings (both academic and non-academic), there have been no new cross-over best-selling books since 1993. Sheehy's *The Silent Passage* was last reprinted with updates in 2010 and a new revised *The Change* was published in April 2018, which repositions Greer's menopause study as a primary menopause resource[72] currently in the public domain. These cross-overs, which span the last century, indicate in broad brush strokes the differing approaches to menopause: ignoring it (Stopes), fearing it (Beauvoir), 'curing' it (Wilson), managing it (Sheehy) and embracing it (Greer). All five approaches reflect the cultural contextual shifts in women's lives during the twentieth century and form the basis for menopause knowledge in the twenty-first century. All these best-selling cross-overs directly addressed women and four of the authors were working women, closely connected with the feminist movement. To some extent, these opinions were all encountered and represented within the interview data collected in this research. However, it is the patriarchal positioning underlying these opinions, now surfacing, which has denied any formal preparation or information for menopause, whilst holding women responsible for their own menopause.

Context: Patriarchy and Feminism

The exigency of education for women runs through the feminist movement as a 'clew' in the struggle for equality. Mary Wollstonecraft, widely acknowledged as one of if not the first feminist philosopher, published her groundbreaking book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* under her own name in 1792:

> To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character: (Wollstonecroft, 1792: 14)

[72] Lambeth Library Services currently have the 2018 copy of Greer's *The Change* on their catalogue. Accessed: 25/02/21.

Wollstonecraft's phrase 'the tyranny of men' would later be defined as patriarchy, and her radical proposals on schooling and co-education for both girls and boys predicted an ideal school system that is largely in existence today. But where general education is now provided for girls, preparatory menopause education has not been provided for women.

That patriarchy was historically rooted within the individual family unit, using the Roman terminology *paterfamilias* (head of the extended family) and the legacy of that social order, is central to Friedrich Engels' 1884 work on the origin of the family. Engels (as a Marxist theorist) directly connects the Greek idea of woman as household breeding wife/slave with the Victorian monogamous family, which was 'founded on the open or disguised domestic slavery of women' (Engels, 2014 [1884]: 70).

Engels' observation that the modern slavery of married women is disguised is important, because it identifies concealment as an important aspect of patriarchy, controlling fertility (monogamy). Engels opens the possibility of considering what these disguises of patriarchy might be. In the case of the non-working-class Victorian woman, we can infer that these involved security and status with fashions and personal grooming. These patriarchally approved disguises masked repressions, but were attractive enough to render wives 'soft' (hooks, 1982: 152), camouflaging the restrictions of education and sexual freedom in the overarching aim of the next generation of family-making. Engels' history has resonated within feminism (Millet, 2000 [1970]: 110) by positing a pre-patriarchal society, an idea that has been regarded unfashionably for 'many decades' (Mattern, 2019: 158) but has recently been re-evaluated as being more plausible (ibid.).

Engels drew heavily from Johann Jakob Bachofen's 'Mother Right'[73] (1861), in which Bachofen claimed that classical society was originally structured with mothers' rights, leaving residual traces that were 'alien and unintelligible to the era of patriarchy' (Marx, 1967 [1926]). The mother's rights had preceded those of the father (the patriarch). Patriarchy cannot envision systems outside itself. The shift from the older matriarchal

[73] *Das Mutterrecht*.

values to patriarchy is evidenced by Engels via Bachofen's reading of *The Eumenides,* the third play of Aeschylus' Oresteia:[74]

> the dramatic description of the fight between the vanishing maternal and the paternal law, rising and victorious during the time of the heroes. (Engels, 2014 [1884]: 8)

The conclusion of this 'fight' in *The Eumenides* is the representative formation of the first Athenian court, composed of 12 citizens, a patriarchal jury-style court system still in use today. This court of citizens tries Orestes for the consanguineous murder of his mother, accused and relentlessly hunted by the Furies (the Erinyes) seeking revengeful justice. The Furies 'are finally persuaded to accept a new office under the new order of things' (Engels, 2014 [1884]: x). This new 'office' is situated in an underground cave in Athens, and the Furies now renamed *The Gracious Ones (The Eumenides)* as a sop to being defeated ignominiously:

> In Aeschylus' dramatization of the myth one is permitted to see patriarchy confront matriarchy, confound it through the knowledge of paternity, and come off triumphant. Until Ibsen's Nora slammed the door announcing the sexual revolution, this triumph went nearly uncontested. (Millet, 2000 [1970]: 115)

Here, in *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet, a second-wave feminist writer, further develops Engels' interest in the Furies as part of the matriarchy/patriarchy pivot, by contextualising it with Ibsen's Nora leaving her husband to fulfil herself. Millet collapses nearly two and a half thousand years of society (and theatre) into two exits. The first is the exit from the public stage in the fourth century, as the Furies move into their underground cave. The cave then turns into the house from which a nineteenth-century woman, both wife and mother, exits with a firm but polite 'Goodbye' (Ibsen, 1981 [1879]; 86). The patriarchal control of women's sexuality has been subverted from dependence to independence by women leaving, absenting themselves from the scene of patriarchy.

Kate Millet revealed the politics of these patriarchal structures in twentieth-century male-authored literary works,[75] aiming to liberate women from the subjection of their immediate patriarchs (husbands). 'In general, the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence,' she noted (Millet, 2000 [1970]; 40), but not all

[74] The Oresteia is composed of three separate plays: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides*.
[75] DH Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet.

feminists agreed with her literary approach. Criticism of Millet's pedantry and accusations of 'the "soft" white women's life – part consumer, part pampered doll-girl' (hooks, 1982: 152) implied that entitled white educated middle-class women could not speak on behalf of all women. Contemporary patriarchy contains significant 'rollovers' from slavery, with 'gains' by black men and white women grafted on, but reduced gains for others. Black women find themselves in the intersectional bind of othering: race and sex.

The recurrent situation of groups of feminists raging at each other rather than the patriarchy is so prevalent that it should be assumed to be another facet of the patriarchal disguise – groups of women set against each other, not in dialogue with each other. So accusations of ageism within feminism (Woodward, 2002), with younger women often siding with the patriarchy (the oppressor), began to surface in the 1980s:

> All my life in a man's world, I was a problem because I was a woman; now I'm a problem in a woman's world because I'm a sixty-five year old woman. (Macdonald & Rich, 1984: 30)

Barbara Macdonald is rendered powerless and raging by her experience, but reserves her anger for the patriarchy, which she holds responsible. And it is the 'negativity' (King, 2013: 58) projected towards menopause, because it acts as the switch between young and old women, which means that female mid-life is disregard-able and invisible. Post-feminist discourse in the early 2000s was concentrated on 'individualistic assertions' (Genz & Brabon, 2009; 8), with 'having it all' narratives of choice and consumption associated with girl power's emphasising of sexual freedoms. It is mid-life that offers 'individuation, autonomous self-definition, and conscious choice' (Friedan, 1993: 113), but this is obscured by the experience of menopause, and therefore shaded from view. And, just as patriarchy was re-invigorated in 2017, so too was feminism.

The individualistic approach gave way to public group demonstrations, increasingly communicated through social media campaigns. In 2016, a Fawcett Society report, *Sex Equality: State of the Nation*,[76] commented: 'Only 7% of people across the UK would

[76] From an online panel of 8165 UK residents aged 18+ polled by Survation from 30 November to 3 December 2015, with a sample size of 4346.
https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a9a69875-749a-4482-9a8b-5bffaafe3ee7 Accessed 12/10/20.

describe themselves as feminist' (Olchawski, 2016: 10). But by 2019, a report for the Young Women's Trust[77] found that

> 67% of young women aged 18-24 now identify as feminist… This is up from 60% last year… In addition, a third of young men identify as feminist' (Young Women's Trust, 2019: 1)

There have clearly been significant increases in feminist discourse between 2016 and 2019; like the horse and carriage, feminism and patriarchy are yoked together. But the patriarchal prejudice against female mid-life remains within feminism, with the consequence that menopause is often experienced as a 'crisis' rather than alleviated through preparation.

My decision to produce menopause-related performances can be linked to the ideas of 'rehearsing' expected life-cycle trauma as a key preparation to prevent unnecessary suffering. The existing forms of menopause information are either didactic (books and websites) or consumption based (pharmaceuticals and aids); often both. Other ventures have included the sharing of experiences (Menopause Café, Menopause Matters). But there are none that are focused on ideas of rehearsing the experience. The decision to make a performance comes out of my professional Theatre Design practice, my own creative language. By extending this to the fullest possible scenographic performance, I addressed absence through public performances (representations) on menopause and the mid-life women who go through it.

The decision to focus on the workplace and working women rather than menopause generally in this research was a way of delimiting what amounts to over half the population into one specific group, because mid-life working women are managing both employment and personal life, in order to function at employable capability. It was also, in part, because as a working woman I had 'skin'[78] in this game. This emphasis on the workplace within the larger framework of the public understanding of the menopause was intended to counter the 'all in the mind' accusations that haunt the menopause literature, because changes due

[77] From a survey carried out for Young Women's Trust by Populus Data Solutions from 25 June to 11 July 2019 with approximately 2000 young women aged 18-30 in England and Wales, alongside a comparison group of 2000 young men. https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0001/2668/Activism_2019.pdf Accessed 12/10/20.

[78] Augusto Boal suggests that to make theatre about social justice requires having 'skin' in the game, running the same risks as everyone else (Boal, 2000 [1995]: 3).

to menopause transition may be more easily identified within regular life patterns such as work. It should also be noted that women who are not in the workplace may have existing health problems that complicate their experiences of menopause.

Considering the absence of public narratives of menopause, and how representations of absence could be achieved through scenography, led me towards representing both the positives and negatives of menopause as well as the mid-life women themselves, who were absented by the onset of menopause. These shifts were marked through four cycles of practice, each of which staged the secondary research questions through performance. Consideration of these different performance elements led me towards a final overview of menopause situated within patriarchal structures, applicable within both the workplace and society, as a final synthesis. This final performance both situated and rehearsed menopause in public, for an audience.

Praxis

Understanding the relationship between practice and theory within arts practice research is important, particularly for a public-facing research project like this one, addressing a real-world absence of menopause representation. The reporting structure for the performance practice I have adopted is concentrated on identifying the praxis; that is, the process by which theories have been enacted or embodied or realised within my practice. These embodied traces of practice evidence the praxis.

Because of the individualistic nature of arts research practices, there is currently variance in the use of descriptive terminology. In 2004, the singular identity of arts practice research was named either 'practice-led' or 'practice-based' research (Gray & Malins, 2004: 5). Two years later, Henk Borgdorff reported on three variations:

> *Practice-based research* is a collective notion that may cover any form of practice-oriented research in the arts. The AHRC currently prefers the term *practice-led research* to denote research that is practice-focused, and many are now following that example. The most explicit term of all is *practice as research*, as it expresses the direct intertwinement of research and practice. (Borgdorff, 2006: 7) (original italics)

These three descriptions – 'practice as research', 'practice-led' and 'practice-based' – are commonly but inconsistently used (Schroeder, 2015), both in the UK and internationally.

These inconsistencies suggest that individual researchers can self-determine the best descriptor for their practice/research relationship.

In theatre arts, practice as research, 'PaR' (Nelson, 2013), is also inconsistently used[79] in PhDs by theatre-makers (Beck, 2016 , Wilson, 2016). Theatre designers' scenography PhDs have also used the 'practice-based' descriptor (McKinney & Butterworth, 2008 , Shearing, 2015). The adoption of the PaR terminology likely fits best for the researcher where the arts practice initiates the enquiry, but clearly the usage of terms across the subject is negotiable. It is in the 'overlap between freedom and focus that the creative practice-based PhD has begun to establish its academic claims' (Freeman, 2010). This resonates within my cross-disciplinary research, where menopause research, ethnographic data collection and scenography practice were all contextual starting points for developing the scenography performances based in my design practice and adoption of the 'practice-based' descriptor.

[79] Scenography as process: 'research into practice' (Hickie, 2009); reflective scenography: practice-led research (Søndergaard, 2010).

Praxis 1: *Prólogos*

Context

The idea to make an early piece of performance practice came out of the desire to develop my initial research ideas through practice as well as in written forms, so that the two strategies would inform each other. This would initiate a cycle of making, reflecting and remaking; an Action Research method identified and used by other Scenography researchers engaged in practice-based PhD projects (McKinney & Butterworth, 2008 , Shearing, 2015). But as a contextualising 'stand-alone' piece, it would not dictate future developments. Extending my theatre design practice further into scenography meant that traditional role boundaries could be blurred. Using the 'porous' boundaries (Lotker & Gough, 2013: 4) between writing, designing and directing allowed me to develop a holistic scenography, closer to a piece of performance art such as *Inside Pussy Riot* (Harris, 2017), whilst retaining the sense of the theatre-making 'bricolage'.

The Ethnography-based source of this scenography was a St Mary's University workplace observation, recounted by a member of university staff during the first months of my research project. This situated my practice within the menopause/workplace subject area, and suited a ten-minute lunchtime performance. The observation concerned a meeting where an (unknown) woman was seen lying on the floor, having a hot flush, whilst everyone else in the room was avoiding her, getting coffee and so on. Nobody was paying her any attention. This resonated with other found descriptions of encountering 'invisibility' (King, 2013) and would therefore represent the 2017 workplace menopause experience as the 'before word': a prologue. This choice situated my practice fully within the classical Western theatre tradition. I briefly considered Shakespeare's use of theatrical prologues, but quickly shifted to the original use in Greek drama, where the prologue contextualised the forthcoming dramatic events, often catastrophic. I named the production straightforwardly 'Prologue' to keep this focus, but used the anglicised Greek work *Prólogos* for distinction. In Dario Fo's *Prologue* (Prentki & Preston, 2010: 1), the 'jongleur' is introduced as the entertainer who demolishes power by making fun of it: 'these rulers must be broken, they must be crushed' (Fo, 2010) p6), which resonated with the humorous telling of the original anecdote. Using humour to undermine serious exertions of control employed by the male characters reacting to an escalating situation became a key feature of the performance. A

line from Shakespeare: 'How easy is a bush supposed a bear!' (1600: 5.1:22), was the inspiration for misdirecting the audience's attention away from reality.

This was a site-specific immersive performance that I devised as a response (Wilson, 2016: 45) to the site. The performance ideas were related to, and could only exist within, that particular space, Drama Studio 2 (DS2), previously a chapel, on a very hot mid-June day.[80] But unlike other immersive theatre companies, I used the space in a version of its real use – as a lecture room – thus overlaying reality with narrative forms of invention. The audience immersion started in the foyer by engaging the audience through their senses, using herbal and flower scents to welcome the spectators (guests) on a hot day to a 'corporate' event, a lecture on the menopause. As the guests entered the darkened DS2, this 'lecture' was immediately disrupted. The spectators were then invited to watch the disruption outside, using the French window opening as a small proscenium frame, narrated by the (male) Speaker, who both explained and obscured the spectator's full view. This rendered a real woman experiencing peri-menopause signs on a side table as 'ignorable' and immersed the audience into a performance that significantly overlapped with real life.

This practice provided the foundations for collecting workplace/menopause Ethnography-based material, through interviews, to begin the second cycle of scenography practice. The process of situating this piece of practical work within the framework of contemporary scenography and immersive/responsive performance-making practices both embodied the initial theoretical perspectives/praxis and made a contextual statement, a prologue, developing the secondary research questions. The insights emerging from *Prólogos* opened up the problem-identifying for the next cycle of development.

[80] The five days before the performance were excessively hot, peaking the day before with 34.5 degrees recorded at Heathrow, approx. six miles from St Mary's University, Twickenham.

Image 3: Performance details; *DS2 seen through glass door, courtyard lawn exterior to DS2, helium balloon, bubbles, courtyard bush, foliage detail, skirt detail, 'She' bush-cover over balloons, smoke test and cast identity badges.*

Secondary Research Questions

The secondary research questions were not used as the starting points for practice; rather, I used the contextual review in menopause literature and scenography practice to begin to create a performance. This was a way to understand a real event, the workplace observation (ethnography-based material), through the process of making scenography, articulating questions by staging them. I started by asking: How visible is menopause in the workplace? How can scenography begin to work with ethnography-based material? and also: How can an audience be positioned to a better understanding of the effects of menopause on women? These three questions were addressed in this 'before word' and contextualised this cycle of practice as 'praxis'.

Image 4: Prólogos poster

Details

Performance in St Mary's University stairwell, DS2 foyer and DS2 on June 22, 2017 (10 minutes' duration). Immersive site-responsive scenography with promenading audience. Collaboration with three actors (one female and two male).

Performance Account

The audience, composed of university staff and PhD students, were personally invited to attend a ten-minute lunchtime performance. They gathered in the stairwell outside DS2, a bright white-walled area decorated with posters and strongly scented herb/flower displays; a pleasant sensory realm. The 'guests' were welcomed by the Assistant (male actor one[81]) and, whilst being served with homemade biscuits and iced herbal water for the first few minutes, encouraged to talk to each other. The posters were for *Prólogos* without show details and NICE[82] menopause posters. There was also a TV monitor showing menopause-related materials. *Prólogos* appeared to be an events company engaged to deliver a menopause event in DS2. This event would definitively explain the difference between a menopausal woman and a witch, but this was only partially communicated to the waiting audience by the 'Assistant' vaguely referring to a 'bit of a talk' and an 'amazing opportunity'.

The Assistant drew the audience[83] together into the small foyer for the airlock[84] briefing and gave them a sprig of rosemary.[85] As the audience entered DS2 they were asked to smell the rosemary and cover their eyes. When they entered DS2 the atmosphere abruptly changed to a darkened interior, a smell of sulphur and smoke swirling through the open window. The narrative unfolded as a menopause lecture-gone-wrong. One of the two female exhibits (erratically emotional) had been so affected by the excessive heat that 'She' – part witch,

[81] Played by Woody Franklyn.
[82] National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.
[83] The maximum possible size of audience was 7 to fit round the window. There were three productions with numbers of 5, 2 and 3 attending. In total 10 spectators came out of a total of 30+ who were invited.
[84] An airlock is used in immersive theatre productions immediately before the entry point to the performance. It briefs the audience on how to behave generally, or what is expected of them if there are moments of intended interaction. It frames the audience's experience rather than just delivering health and safety (H&S) information.
[85] Rosemary is reputed to be beneficial to memory loss, and it can be used to alleviate menopausal 'brain fog'.

part Fury – had exploded out of the French windows, and established herself as a bush in the middle of the large lawn surrounded by real bushes, amidst a large amount of smoke.

'She' was actually a bunch of silver helium balloons under a fabric bush cover with two different stage effects. The first effect, smoke, was used as a visual metaphor for a hot flush, whilst the second produced streams of soap bubbles, described as a manifestation of foul breath.[86] The open window became a tiny proscenium arch, with the 'Speaker' (male actor two[87]) positioned to prevent the audience having a clear view of events. The Speaker controlled the narrative, telling the audience what they could not quite see: that 'She' needed to calm down, and that 'She' might burrow too far underground. These fragments of back story all connected to Aeschylus' 'Furies' living in caves under Athens, whereas the second exhibit, a real Mid-Life Woman,[88] was being ignored, lying on a transparent table top and appearing to float in the dark lecture room.

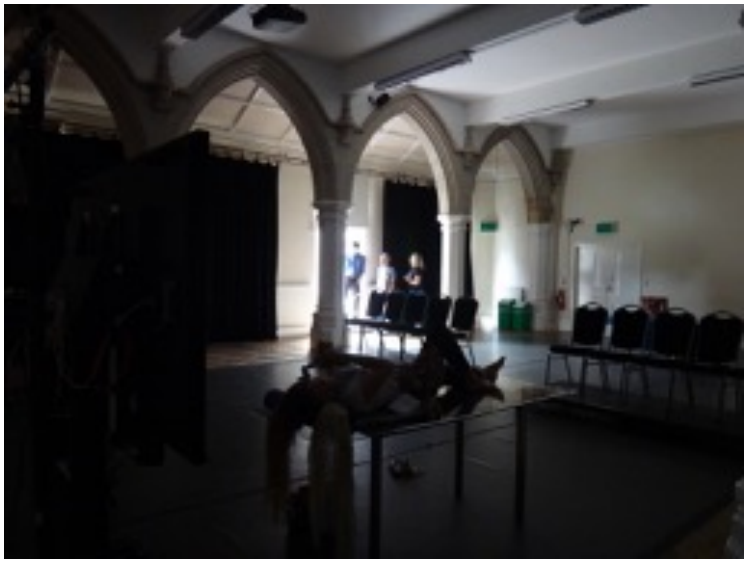
If the spectators were watching events inside DS2 and outside, they would have seen that all the behaviours being attributed to 'She' outside were also being experienced by the real Mid-Life Woman inside. These were linked to signs of the menopause that were being referred to in the speech of the 'Speaker'. In order, these were hot flushes, bad breath, chewing gum (to remove bad breath) and finally relaxing. So the Mid-Life Woman used a small hand-held electric fan as the smoke effect filled the doorway and blew bubbles from a hand-held pot simultaneously with the bubble machine effect outside. Once calmed down, 'She' floated away now clearly a bunch of balloons, being chased across the garden by the Assistant. Since the lecture was no longer possible, the audience were asked to leave, walking past the real Mid-Life Woman still lying on the table as they exited.

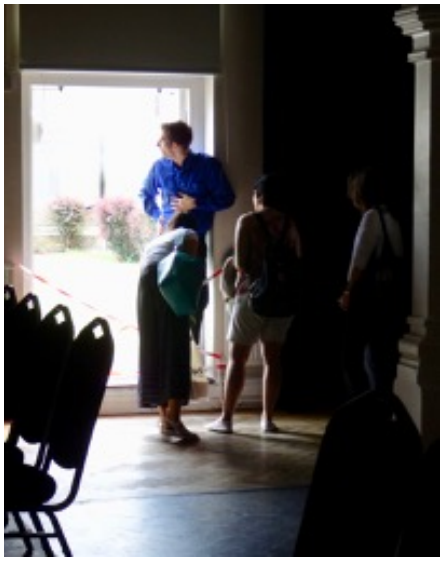
Essentially, the performance dovetailed with reality, whilst being fully contrived. The excessive heat (weather) was used as the explanation for the subsequent events, the effect of over-heating. Cooling ice drinks were used to relax the audience (because it was so hot)

[86] One possible sign of the menopause is a 'dry mouth, bitter taste and bad breath' (Davies:117). Here this was linked to the foul breath of the Furies.
[87] Played by Ronan D'Albert.
[88] Played by Jennifer Hanah.

and to provide a sense of a high-end corporate 'event' with 'nibbles', like a book launch or private view. Within the assumed reality of the lecture situation, by introducing elements of fantasy and theatricality I was emphasising that it seems to be more possible to deal with an imaginary fantastical character, a non-human made from balloons, than it is to cope with a real woman in the room who might be experiencing symptoms of the menopause.

The audience were intended to experience something of menopause disruption, a switch accompanied by disorientation, a slight shock in expecting one thing and getting something else (misdirection). My intention was to avoid a sense of didactically imparting information, preferring that the audience might question their own reactions to both menopause and performance.





Images 5: Prólogos *with the Mid-Life Woman lying in the foreground and audience looking through doorway over the courtyard lawn.*

Reflection on Methods

Using the workplace anecdote as the Ethnography-based source resonated with ubiquitous accounts of managing troublesome flushes in overheated offices and the general stigma surrounding menopause in the workplace. Also, as local evidence of the current culture of menopause in the workplace, it suited investigation through an introductory performed scenography. The emphasis was on the invisibility of the woman's distress, which entailed a deliberate misdirection of the audience's attention away from the real woman.

The link between the audience and the university workplace was a crucial element of my ethnography-based strategy, as well as the scenography:

> The process of making theatre is only complete when the spectators become part of the event, and a new phase of the work begins as the production moves from the subjective to the objective. (Howard, 2002: 105)

For Pamela Howard, the presence of an audience moves the performance to a new state of reflection, whereas Jocelyn McKinney is more 'concerned with audience reception and engagement' (McKinney, 2008 , McKinney & Butterworth, 2010: 4), which has led to a re-negotiating of creative roles to the spectator as well the designer, by further blurring the boundaries. My own scenography method for this performance was closer to Howard's position than McKinney's.

As this performance scenography was primarily a response to the DS2 site together with the visual languages of illusion and 'corporate' events, the actual spoken narrative was developed through the introduction of characters and casting, to ensure that text did not dominate. The final words were developed in rehearsal by the performers and never recorded as a script. This preference removed my language from the performance and allowed the actors more spontaneity with their characterisation. This kept the fluidity of the piece close to a real event, only possible because the piece was so short and the actors willing. The two speaking characters, Assistant and Speaker, delivered informative monologues whilst needing flexibility to respond either to audience behaviour or to the special effects (the Speaker). The three actors were the main collaborative relationship for this performance, with some technical support.

Reflection on the Scenography

Having decided to make a performance on the St Mary's site to draw in a workplace audience, I considered all the large available spaces, drama studios, sports halls and lecture rooms. I began to develop an idea about the audience looking out from one performance space into another, being guided to see things in a different way. This could bring together ideas of a natural world (outside) and natural behaviour deemed unacceptable from a woman. DS2 offered opportunities of opening one of the French windows, together with the small foyer that also looks across the lawn, and triggered an immediate visual idea of a shrieking witch/woman with flowing hair running away across the large grassed space towards the trees beyond. This site initiated the performance ideas, site-specific and site-responsive: to immerse the audience in the real room and use theatrical un-reality, smoke, and props as visual languages for menopause.

DS2 is a lecture room (overhead projection screen, blackout blinds, strip lighting) and a performance space (black drapes, black lino floor) with the detritus of rehearsal props and mismatched chairs. When dark, with light only coming through the French windows and the detritus cleared, the space could immediately be understood as a lecture room (albeit one that had the architecture of a chapel). A space that was a working environment for many female lecturers defined the basic premise of the performance. Anticipating a small audience, I used one single-windowed door as the only light source and proscenium arch, keeping the large room darkened, with the window-sill step as the tiny stage for the Speaker, who, as the controlling male, embodied patriarchal values.

Once the performance was named *Prólogos,* both name and purpose of the piece, the heritage of classical Greek theatre was already acknowledged before performance ideas were developed. The scene being played out was layered upon a real sense of a lecture that had gone wrong, an all-too-familiar experience within a university workplace. This allowed the second layer of information to be given to the audience in fragments by the Speaker, positioned by the open window, who both facilitated the audience's understanding of what was going on outside and physically stopped them from going outside to see for themselves. The Speaker was initially conceived along the lines of the 'jongleur' (Fo, 2010), the trickster selling a patriarchal 'truth' to playfully subvert the audience's understanding of menopause.

Fragments of the Speaker's dialogue were interspersed with looking out of the window, as he explained[89] what the audience should 'see' outside, but also designating the real older woman as uninteresting, absented from her own experiences, which he was narrating.

The development of a fantastical narrative with a witch-type character used familiar imagery habitually associated with older women. Harnessing elements of the real outside space linked the performance into the existing natural elements. The large grassed lawn outside the French windows was edged by small bushes, but too far away for impact on the window sightline for the audience. The suggestion that 'She' had disguised herself (rather badly) as a bush in the middle of the lawn directly referenced Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> Or in the night, imagining some fear,
> How easy is a bush supposed a bear!
> (Shakespeare, 1600: 5.1:21-22)

Drawing fully on this well-known quote, I linked the inability to see clearly, which contributes to a misattribution from fearfulness and emphasised the panicked response of male characters, to excessive menopause-related behaviour. The ridiculousness of this risible bush-disguise idea with a low-tech realisation exposed a patriarchal fabrication, which successfully diverted attention from the real Mid-Life Woman (MLW) in the room.

The original ideas of a recognisable female 'witch' character also carried unhelpful close associations of the Christian Church's demon obsession and persecution of old women. The witch as outsider/victim persona was a less powerful menopause construct than I intended, and potentially distracting because of too familiar stereotypical imagery. But by drawing heavily on ideas of patriarchal society already identified in Aeschylus' Furies through the literature review, I blurred the distinction between the Shakespearian ideas of the supernatural magical world and classical Greek theatre using a humorously fantastical narrative. So the imagined 'She' was both witch-like and part Fury, never identified by name. The boundary here between real objects and invention was deliberately blurred to distract spectators from the 'real' menopause experience by substituting theatrics. The only

[89] Mansplained, even (Solnit, 2014: 14).

actual menopause information was outside in the foyer, so the audience could access menopause information before entering DS2, to experience the disruption of expectations more keenly.

As the performance quickly became immersive and site responsive, due to the potential of the room and use of outside space, it was important to settle spectators into the immersion as soon as they arrived in the foyer. The expectation of the audience was that the performance started when they entered DS2, but really the performance had started when they were welcomed by the 'Assistant' as special guests attending a private event. This was the driver behind the foyer performance. The provision of iced water drinks was to facilitate attention, with some spectators who would be rushing from or on to meetings. Where some forms of immersive scenography require a state of 'mindfulness' (Shearing, 2015), or disorientated doubt,[90] I wanted to make the audience as accepting and comfortable as possible, welcomed and refreshed, before switching the atmosphere to something upsetting and misdirecting.

I worked with some of the herb-lore recommended by menopause self-help books. Even Germaine Greer has a chapter on 'alternative' treatments (Greer, 1992) using herbs and spices as natural 'remedies' to alleviate menopause experiences. I flavoured iced water with sage and lemon and homemade 'nibbles' (biscuits) with fennel or rosemary, to emphasise the special hospitality on offer, and for spectators who may not have had time to pick up lunch before attending. Herbal scents (basil and sage) and flowers were used to perfume the small foyer and, because of the enclosed nature of the stairwell where the audience gathered, could also be smelled as the audience walked down the corridors towards the event. The naturally scented air acted as a sensory indication of the event and worked towards calming the audience, whilst heightening their awareness of the event, before entering the performance space. As a ten-minute performance time had been promised, the time allowed for the menopause performance was actually only around six or seven minutes.

[90] Punchdrunk's aim to thoroughly unsettle the audience at the moment of entry to the performance was explained by Colin Nightingale from Punchdrunk International at SANDBOX, A Gunpowder Plot Symposium in September 2019.

The different visual languages of the whole scenography overlapped – a quasi-realistic company setting with corporate identity conveyed in the familiar language of identity badges and printed information, later extending into hi-vis jackets, coloured hazard tape and safety helmets. DS2 was set up for a lecture, two digital display screens and an extra projection screen. There were reserved signs on seats for an audience of ten and a table dressed with the Speaker's briefcase, lunch remains and menopause books, with all the drama studio paraphernalia removed, whilst the hysterical menopausal woman was represented by a series of theatrical props – bush, silver balloons – and special effects – smoke, bubbles and sound effects.

The responses from the audience were gathered from observing the audience's behaviour and from comments made and questions asked as the spectators left. Immersive theatre relies on close interaction with the audience:

> It's the empowerment of the audience in the sense that they're put at the centre of the action… the creation of parallel theatrical universes… forget that they're an audience, and thus their status within the work shifts. (Machon, 2013: 159)

But Punchdrunk's 'empowerment' described here is in reality strictly managed. The audience do not play as themselves, often being given masks or partial costumes, and the success of this strategy is divisive. Some spectators really enjoy dressing up to feel intimately connected with the performance, whilst others really dislike it. This same split was reflected in the immediate informal feedback about *Prólogos*: some really enjoyed the experience, whilst others were confused by it or reluctant to engage.

My observations of the three performances were firstly in the foyer, when I met the audience briefly at the allocated start time to thank them for attending. The response from the first audience, the largest group (mixed female and male), was positive, with enthusiastic munching of herb 'nibbles', seemingly relaxed and chatting to each other, achieving my primary aim. The second audience (also mixed) had only two attendees, and they appeared much less relaxed with no chatting. The final audience of three (all female) had to wait for one guest, so the start was slightly delayed, with the Assistant/guest interactions becoming over-stretched for two spectators and non-existent for the third.

The audience were not escorted into DS2, as I was already in the shadows of the room, observing the performance. At the end, I led the audience from the exit door into a separate room, also set up with refreshments, to gather the informal feedback.

Comments from the largest audience of five suggested that it was hard for all of them to see at the window, even though there was not much to actually 'see'. However, as it was left to the audience to make a connection between the 'MLW' and the events outside, some of this audience in the first performance did make a connection between outside and inside. At least one person in this largest group positioned themselves so that they could see the real Mid-Life Woman. No one did in the two smaller groups, as all could easily stand by the window. Most spectators did not notice the real woman until they walked past her to exit, by which time she was also in a low spotlight.

Insights Emerging

The first insights emerging from *Prólogos* were connected to the success of the strategy to devise a performance as part of the research process, using the found materials (site, literature, weather) to inform the ideas rather than to fully form a performance on paper first. In this way the first part of the make-reflect-remake cycle had been enabled, with no real intention to carry forward specific ideas from the production, other than the reflection afforded. It was a 'stand-alone' prologue. In this regard, the performance was entirely successful.

The openness of the question (Trimingham, 2002: 58) 'How visible is menopause in the workplace?' had been simply answered with the workplace anecdote: it is ignorable. But this ignorability opened up (in performance) questions of 'Who is doing the ignoring?' and 'How is this being achieved?' Both of these have to be addressed in concrete terms for live performance. For an audience to 'ignore' a real actress, their attention must be deliberately diverted with something else. By using the (male) Speaker to do this, as the jongleur or 'trickster who juggles with simultaneous realities' (Prentki & Preston, 2010: 20), this opened up the possibilities of imagining a fantastical 'reality', literally outside in the natural world, which diverted from real menopause events with tales of terrible women 'acting up'. This also highlighted the inadequacy of 'masculine language' (Collis, 2005) for explaining female

life experiences. With the Assistant (also male) facilitating the fantasy, this positioned the diversion as a response to menopause within male behaviour, which had rendered the real woman both passively voiceless and 'invisible'.

Inventing a Menopausal Woman character rather than a cultural stereotype meant considering who would be playing this part. This led to a name change, to the Mid-Life Woman, which not only positioned the actor in the middle of her life (menopause is commonly regarded as part of old age), but meant that menopause was no longer the only character focus. She had life narratives outside her menopause. This idea would be forcefully picked up later in the third praxis cycle, but here it was used to cast a young-looking mid-life woman, wearing a flower-patterned mini-skirt, subverting preconceptions of 'old', asexual women.

The second question – 'How can scenography begin to work with ethnography-based material?' – was answered by selecting the workplace anecdote as the source. This had the advantage of being both short and indicative of general attitudes towards menopause, whilst referring to one specific workplace. But this identified the next set of questions: 'Are there other workplace experiences to consider?' 'Where are they?' 'Who does them?' The scenography deliberately focused upon the non-textual elements of production to engage the audience in sense-making, but more explanatory text might have aided the audience with this. By making a visual performance, the original source material was interrogated rather than reproduced.

The third question – 'How can an audience be positioned to experience (understand better) the effects of menopause on women?' – explained the driver behind my decision to make an immersive performance. I wanted to pitch the audience into a situation that they didn't immediately understand, meant to be the unknown territory of what menopause is 'like'. This aim was successful to some extent, in that the audience followed the diversion away from the real woman, but were left very confused. The audience had clearly expected more information on menopause during the performance, rather than before. So they clearly needed better signposting in terms of what they should expect to get out of the experience.

Identifying the question of the relationship between the individual spectator within the audience and the menopause performance was taken up as the next part of the praxis cycle.

The advantages of the scenography were that it set the context of the practice both dramatically and academically, that the performance came together and that invited spectators attended. There were no adverse reactions to any of the events, and the overlap between real events and invention was seamless enough to carry the audience into following the invented narrative. However, the fantastical elements to some extent overshadowed the workplace construct, and the overlaps with real life were too close for some of the audience to register the separation. This seemed to confuse them. Equally, my expectations of the university audience were too reliant on broad theatre-going experience, which was not universal enough. Some spectators were not happy with the level of sense-making demanded and expressed a preference for a more didactic approach. On reflection, it seemed that the audience would have liked a post-performance discussion, which was built into the next performance.

SECTION TWO: VERBATIM MENOPAUSE

Developing Questions for Praxis 2

The two questions that came out of the first practice cycle would drive the second cycle of research. The relation of the audience to the performance, which formed the basis of my scenography practice, would be carefully appraised both in existing practice and during the creative process of the second performance. As I had revealed in *Prólogos,* being ignored was a common experience of working women going through menopause in 2017. There is a general recognition that women have been prevented from reaching the higher levels of management in the UK, and I would argue that the absence of a means of understanding the impacts of menopause upon the mid-life of women often reduces their ability to stay in the workplace. However, there were also new workplace initiatives emerging that suggested better practices, and my interest grew in finding an example of good practice within the workplace from which to make the second performance and in identifying the literature that supported these interventions.

My a priori interest in using Ethnography-based methods to collect real menopause experiences from women had been strengthened through the first cycle of practice. Having made *Prólogos*, where the experiences of women had been narrated by male voices, I was very keen to work with female accounts as the foundation of the performance scenography, developing and exploring a new hybrid form of ethnography-based performance.

Context: Ethnography-Based Theatre

The definition of ethnography-based theatre as a 'live performance event of research participants' experiences and/or the researcher's interpretations of data' (Saldaña, 2005: 1) is often contracted to 'Ethnotheatre' (Knowles & Cole, 2008). The use of qualitative research data[91] within performance is often seen, from social sciences, as a way of reaching a wider audience, either as a cultural interpretation, say a performed autoethnography (Spry, 2001) or Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Mienczakowski & Morgan, 2002), or as aiming to bring about social and political change (Denzin, 2003). Although I would agree with the aims of bringing about change in understandings of menopause, for this research the emphasis

[91] Such as, but not limited to, interview transcripts, field notes, observations and artifacts such as newspaper articles and other documents.

lies on the connections that can be created with an audience through performance rather than opportunities for broadcasting research findings.

There are numerous variations in naming this genre of drama, which include 'documentary theatre', 'living newspaper'[92] and 'verbatim theatre' (Saldaña, 2011: 13-14). The inclusion of the word 'theatre' here presupposes a theatre performance, whilst the term Ethnodrama only refers to the written play script. Verbatim is a term that 'continues to be negotiated by scholars and practitioners alike' (Beck, 2016: 19), but it generally refers to using dialogue that stays particularly close to the interview source material, which was my approach in creating the performance script. Because I have used large sections of the interviews as far as possible, I have adopted the term 'verbatim' to refer to the script.

Erwin Piscator's theatre is generally acknowledged as the inspiration for contemporary forms of 'documentary' drama, but making performances inspired by local news stories is a very old theatre convention. Itinerant theatre troupes such as the Italian Commedia dell'Arte companies produced new shows very quickly:[93]

> On some occasions they would put on a completely new work based on a novel or on a report in that day's paper… they did everything by improvisation. (Fo, 2006 [1991]: 10)

This improvisation included set pieces and well-established characters to make entertaining interpretations. The use of visual comic performances rather than spoken language achieved shared understandings with the audience, and it is the shared understanding that informs these performances and was an important consideration in my second performance.

Documentary theatre emerged from Soviet Russia in the 1920s, where the 'Blue Blouses' 'dramatized contemporary news headlines with the intention of educating workers' (Beck 2016: 23) in what are now known colloquially as 'living newspapers'. Both Irwin Piscator and

[92] A recent 2020 'lockdown performance' at the Royal Court employed a 'living newspaper' format, using the whole theatre building as a socially distanced performance space for *"Living Newspaper": A Counter Narrative Edition 1*. (Bhatia, Ince & Morrison, 2020)

[93] Dario Fo described how the Commedia heritage of his actress wife Franca Rame traced back three centuries: 'they were all actors in her family, and generally performed in Northern Lombardy' (Fo, 2006 [1991]: 10).

Bertolt Brecht experimented at this time with different forms, but it was Piscator's influence, through his 1920s 'epic' productions focusing on multi-media dramatisation of social problems, that were considered to be 'the starting point' (Basten, 2014: 42) for Peter Cheeseman[94] to make a series of documentary dramas.

By the late 1960s, new portable technology (cassette recorders) enabled Cheeseman to record the people of Stoke-on-Trent (UK) to make a 'locally-inspired series of plays' (Beck 2016: 23) for Stoke-on-Trent's Victoria Theatre, to connect directly with local audiences.[95] Dereck Paget is generally credited for utilising the term 'verbatim' theatre in his article 'Verbatim theatre: Oral history and documentary techniques' (1987), focusing on the work of Cheeseman and his collaborators, and discussing the methods and 'boundaries of Verbatim theatre' (Paget, 1987). Here we see the difficulties in identifying innovations in theatre conventions, because this relies on when individual theatre performances were first seen. The link between Peter Cheeseman's 'painstaking use of primary source material' (Paget, 1987: 318) and the work of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop is contested by Paget, whereas John McGrath credits Littlewood's *Oh! What a Lovely War*[96] as the key production that inspired a whole generation of documentary theatre-makers, Cheeseman included.

The legacy of verbatim work that has emerged from Cheeseman's productions, working together with Littlewood's Fun Palace[97] and her proposals for 'democracy' in the arts to create a theatre of the everyday, both contextualise my practice. Making theatre about an everyday issue (menopause) and using verbatim Ethnography-based material to create the performance were aimed at connecting with a female audience who had never seen representations of their experiences in public performances:

[94] Peter Cheeseman (1932-2010) was the artistic director at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, and later the New Victoria from 1962 to 1998.
[95] *The Jolly Potters* (1964), *Staffordshire Rebels* (1965), *The Knotty* (1966).
[96] *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963) was a hugely popular and successful theatre production (later a film) that drew upon conventions connected with music halls and pierrot seaside shows. It also 'drew on the medieval Italian commedia dell'arte tradition that Littlewood returned to throughout her career' (Holdsworth, 2018 [2006]: 86).
[97] Joan Littlewood worked with architect Cedric Price on the 'Fun Palace'. Although the ideas were never realised, they influenced other architects, notably Richard Rogers.

> I mean something like that helps you… Just because of the catharsis of it. Seeing it be recognised and see people, just noticing. (Burke in Beck, 2016: 308)

This 'just noticing' validates experience, which otherwise goes unnoticed and absented from public discourse. The validation of female menopause experience through being staged was an integral element of this second performance, and my PhD research as a whole.

One of the earliest and widely performed Ethnography-based theatre productions is the musical *A Chorus Line,* which was later made into a film (Attenborough, 1985) and revealed the not-so-glamourous personal lives of Broadway 'gypsies'.[98] It was worked up from recorded sessions and later mired in ethical authorial controversies. More recently, and also beginning as a theatre production and filmed later, is *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 2002), which documents the aftermath of the homophobic murder of Mathew Shepherd in Laramie, Wyoming, USA. Similarly, a series of murders in Ipswich featured in *London Road* (Norris, 2015), a musical theatre performance written by Alecky Blythe and made into a film by Rupert Norris, the original director. Blythe uses a particular form of verbatim performance known as 'recorded delivery',[99] where the interview material is edited into audio tapes and relayed to the performers during the performance via an earpiece. *London Road* documents the local community's reactions to the murders, arrest and court case through a heavily stylised theatrical approach and an uplifting ending, which nonetheless hints at the complexity of social issues. Another version of verbatim theatre were the Tricycle Theatre's 'tribunal plays' (Hammond & Steward, 2008: location 1123) in which public inquiries were dramatized. Both *The Laramie Project* and *London Road* chronologically follow the series of real events unfolding, whilst *A Chorus Line* used an audition concept to elicit the characters' individual stories, before unifying them in a chorus line number as identically dressed chorines. The identification of an individual within a large anonymised group has clear links to my project. By focussing on individual narratives, I aim to find whether there is any resonance with other women's experiences in my performance.

Between 2017 and 2018, there were three new mainstream ethnography-based theatre productions shown in London. In the Southwark Playhouse performance of the musical

[98] Broadway ensemble players who work on successive shows as a member of the singing/dancing chorus.
[99] Recorded Delivery was also the name of Alecky Blythe's verbatim theatre company set up in 2003.

Working (Sheppard), based on Studs Terkel's mid-twentieth-century radio interviews/oral histories about the everyday working lives of Americans, the individual stories were heartfelt, but the format became repetitively predictable, with the generalised American-flavoured setting being 'set' design rather than scenography. Also closer to set design than scenography was *My Country; a work in progress in the words of people across the UK and Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy* (Norris, 2017) at the National Theatre. This Dorfman Theatre production unevenly explored the attitudes to Brexit from interviews collected across the country, contextualised with political speeches and news reports, but using non-naturalistic characters such as Britannia and 'regional' political representatives. Although this may well become an interesting performance in future because of its historical significance, in 2017 the play lacked definitive focus. But despite the flaws, crucially it did connect with the audience by reflecting the immediate experiences of the British public and establishing an emotional resonance. Here, the difficulty of connecting with a 'live' issue which, because of its immediate relevancy in people's lives, cannot be fully be comprehended, was relevant to my practice. A focussed overview could be difficult to achieve because of the newness of the interview material.

In sharp contrast to *Working,* Anna Deavere Smith's *Notes from the Field*[100] (Foglia, 2018 [2016]) at the Royal Court in 2018[101] used a direct documentary approach. Smith herself performed a series of monologues created from 250 interviews, describing her play as a 'social justice project' (Smith, 2019; xvi). Smith's political agenda is explicit and clearly relevant to my practice. Smith's production, the latest play of a series *On the Road: A Search for American Character,* used a backdrop of documentary films and photographs with significant quotes and headings to focus her questioning of the American justice system and the experience of Black Americans caught up in a pipeline from 'school to prison' (ibid.: xvi). Smith challenged her first theatre audiences for *Notes from the Field* to acknowledge their own attitudes, 'how proximate to the problem' they were, aiming to inspire political action. But later, Smith retreated from that stance to more straightforward theatre (and then film) presentations, although retaining the projections of film clips and quotes. The call to action

[100] Smith's title references a classic Ethnography text that focuses on the data collection and subsequent interpretation: *Tales of the Field* (Van Maanen, 2011 [1988]).
[101] Now also a film from HBO.

from the stage to the audience has often been sounded, but rarely followed through to political change.[102] This however does not denote passivity on behalf of the spectator, but rather opens consideration of what 'active' spectatorship might be.

CONTEXT: Menopause in the Workplace

On August 28, 2020, a menopause news report briefly topped the most shared list on the BBC news website, announcing the first national public information on menopause. This information would be included in the national secondary school curriculum from Autumn 2020 and was aimed at teenagers.

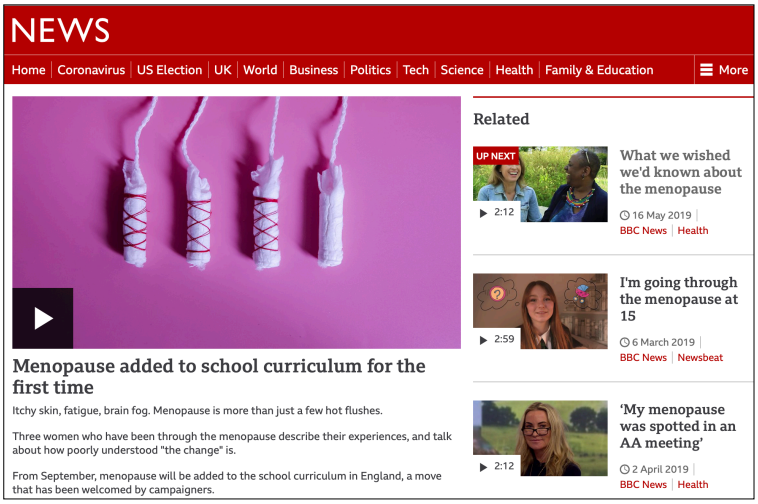


Image 6: BBC website screen shot 28/08/20 *see https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/stories-53938931*

Notwithstanding this new provision of teen menopause information, there remains an absence of public education about menopause. There is no public responsibility to furnish adult women with information about menopause. This has been abrogated to individual women, who use multiple informal sources: self-help books, Google, family and friends as well as GPs, much as Gail Sheehy suggested. However, in 2014, in Chapter 9 of the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report, *The Health of the 51%: Women* (Davies, 2015), some responsibilities for providing menopause information were allocated to employers.

[102] Augusto Boal's political theatre-making in Brazil led to his imprisonment and years of exile under the military dictatorship.

In Chapter 9 entitled *Psychosocial Factors and the Menopause: The Impact of the Menopause on Personal and Working Life* [103] by psychologists Amanda Griffiths and Myra Hunter, the responsibilities for menopause well-being are defined in this order: 1- women (themselves), 2- healthcare workers, and finally 3- employers (Griffiths & Hunter, 2014: 110). The Chief Medical Officer Professor Dame Sally Davies summarises:

> Evidence-based advice for employers and women at work will help women working during the transition to the menopause. With an ageing national workforce, positive action by employers would benefit those with symptoms, and contribute to employee engagement, productivity and retention. (Davies, 2015: 15)

Clearly the workplace should pick up the menopause education remit for the benefit of profitability. Davies is calling for more evidence-based advice to support this innovation and references women experiencing 'disabling symptoms while going through menopause' (ibid.). This is unsurprising given the psychology context of the written chapter, but problematic in describing menopause experiences with medical terminology. But for Davies, Griffiths and Hunter, the first responsibility remains with women themselves, despite no public information being widely disseminated.

Typically, trade unions have represented menopause as an individual's problem. 'Supporting working women through the menopause: Guidance for Union Representatives' (TUC, 2013) is a ten-page document that highlighted the difficulties women face in communicating menopause issues, and how they attracted 'criticism, ridicule and even harassment from their managers'[104] (ibid.: 7). The TUC positioned employers' responsibilities within health and safety and the 2010 Equality Act, seeming to suggest that HRT was a solution for workplace menopause problems:

> Nearly three-quarters of the women who had tried HRT reported that work was one of the main reasons they had decided to try it, and 91 percent of these said it had helped. (ibid.: 6)

This is an uncontextualised statistic,[105] since 78% of the women interviewed had never tried HRT, so the real figure is a less impressive 15% (91% of 75% of 22%). A similar but more

[103] Drawing from research studies centred on occupational health and menopause.
[104] About 20% of their interviews with 500 TUC safety representatives.
[105] This statistic is drawn from research in a 2010 report from the University of Nottingham, which draws advice from interviews. (Griffiths, Maclennan, & Wong, 2010).

sinister pro-HRT suggestion comes out of the special issue on work of the *Journal of the North American Menopause Society*: that failure to use HRT 'when indicated affects work ability' (Sarrel, 2012). The public perception of HRT, negatively influenced by the widespread reports concerning safety issues,[106] was only formally addressed in 2015 by the first NICE guideline on menopause.

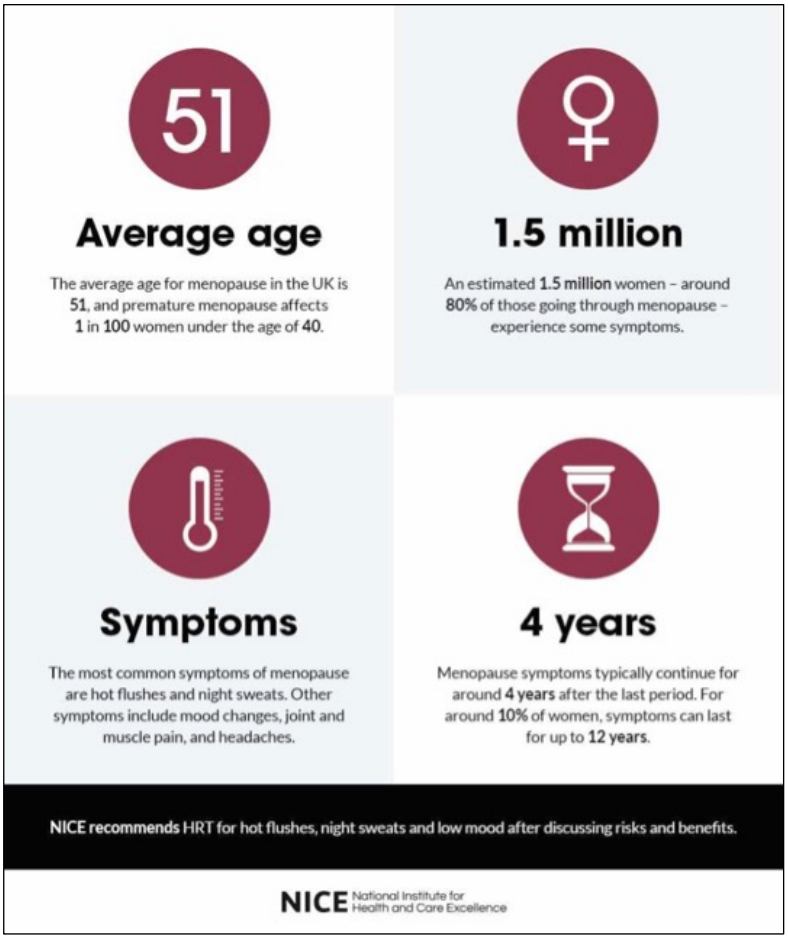


Image 7: NICE 'first guideline on menopause' 2015[107] *was announced with the headline 'Women with symptoms of menopause should not suffer in silence' (NICE, 2015b). It was primarily addressed to doctors.*

[106] Safety issues with HRT were first publicised in early 2002/03 with data emerging from the large Women's Health Initiative in the US and the Million Women Study in the UK. The concerns with safety issues are around increased risks of breast cancer and heart disease.
[107] Last updated in 2019.

In 2017, the first UK study of workplace and menopause, which used qualitative interview data from 137 women, began to identify 'helpful and unhelpful' (Hardy, Griffiths & Hunter, 2017) menopause strategies. This 'tell us what you want' approach (ibid.) has since permeated the culture of providing menopause support in the workplace. Also in 2017, the government published 'The effects of menopause transition on women's economic participation in the UK' (Brewis, Beck, Davies & Matheson, 2017), a report compiled by academics in the Business and Management area from the University of Leicester. Commissioned by the government's Equality Office and the Secretary of State for Education,[108] this report critically reviewed 'the English language evidence base from 1990 to the end of March 2016, covering 104 publications' (ibid.: 6), which included the TUC 2013 document. The research report identifies a series of absences, commencing with that

> there are no universally accepted definitions for the reproductive stages of a woman's life, including the menopause itself and menopause transition. (ibid.: 6)

This continues with the lack of understanding about menopause and the paucity of provision[109] within workplace culture, which compares menopause unfavourably with pregnancy. The problem lies with the attitude of managers and colleagues: 'Their lack of knowledge, understanding and support indicate a widespread gendered ageism in organisations' (ibid.: 75). By comparing the negative attitudes of menopause with positive views of other female life stages (pregnancy), I would agree that 'gendered ageism' could be the root cause of problems for menopausal women in the workplace. In their summary of evidence 'gaps', Brewis et al. drew attention to the absence of UK studies and the difficulties of drawing hard data from samples of different sizes and in other countries. The confusion of this situation can be attributed to the way menopause is studied in academic silos, as has been previously mentioned, as well as a general lack of funding for women's health (Greer, 2018).[110] The government report culminates with: 'there is no work in the evidence base that estimates the cost of the menopause transition for women's economic participation in the UK' (Brewis, Beck, Davies & Matheson, 2017: 67). From that we

[108] The Right Honourable Justine Greening MP.
[109] The three workplace examples of menopause training good practice used as case studies here: Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital (1994), Marks and Spencer (2010) and North Lincolnshire County Council (2013).
[110] 'The endocrinology of femaleness has never commanded sufficient attention or sufficient funding to make a tenth of the advances made in, for example, sports medicine.' (Greer 2018: 88).

conclude that the costs of menopause are absent from public economics in the government's view.

Resolving the issue of negative attitudes towards menopause suggests the need for a fundamental change in workplace culture, supported by policies and training rather than tokenistic efforts. The complexity of the issue is indicated in another 2017 publication from Wales TUC, a 'toolkit' accompanied by a two-day training provision (TUC, 2017). The 2017 toolkit took a more nuanced approach than the 2013 booklet (68 pages rather than 10) and was based on the results from a survey of 4,000 workers. The toolkit contained much more detail of individual experiences and highlighted the individual nature of the menopause transition, discussing differences for Black, Asian and minority ethnic women, LGBT[111]+ workers, trans people, and women with disabilities, pre-existing conditions or those who have undergone female genital mutilation.

There were 16 workplace issues identified in the TUC booklet, which ranged through provision such as 'poor ventilation and air quality' (TUC, 2017: 27), inflexible systems and unsympathetic work colleagues, but still seemed to recommend taking HRT: 'many women find these treatments helpful for alleviating symptoms' (ibid.: 8). In the report, case studies are included that express negative menopause experiences to demonstrate existing prejudices and how union interventions could work, including information on how to begin negotiating a menopause workplace strategy through the use of surveys and body mapping[112] discussions:

> Many health and safety activists use body and workplace maps to see how workers are injured or experience ill health in the workplace. (ibid.: 42)

Together with a proforma 'menopause risk assessment' (ibid.: 58), the toolkit leans heavily towards explaining the negative effects of menopause. Whilst claiming to create greater awareness of menopause as a workplace issue, the toolkit is for a trade union, concerned with diversity and equality as well as health and safety, but the emphasis is on the latter. There is one further key element to the menopause discussion in the workplace: the cost to

[111] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.
[112] Body mapping starts with an outline of the body, and annotations are added as issues are considered. It is a holistic approach to fully understand complex problems.

employers in their current treatment of menopause transition has not been taken seriously enough.

As we have seen, despite the large numbers of women making up a significant percentage of the workforce, their economic participation has not been identified. On an individual level, when menopause experiences are ignored in the workplace, this can have a debilitating effect on a woman's professional life (IPAI 1), through under-promotion or leaving employment (ibid.), interruptions that affect women's income both immediately and through lower pension contributions into older age. But, despite the absence of economic data, some UK employers[113] had already begun to consider the impact of menopause upon their workforce and introduced individual workplace menopause policies. By March 2020, menopause workshops for the workplace were more common, although not ubiquitous. The Menopause Awareness Group at Croydon Council, with whom I worked for my next performance, was a 'grass-roots' initiative that started in 2017. They had complied their own set of resources[114] and persuaded their manager to approve by identifying a 'business case'[115] (IPAIs 2&3): that the costs of not supporting women through menopause could be substantial. Costs to individual employers, we see here, can be quantified.

Menopause Awareness at Croydon Council

In December 2017, I arranged to interview three founder-members of the Menopause Awareness Group at Croydon Council. Having met one of them at an unrelated research event, I had been asked to talk to the group about my PhD research at one of their regular meetings in September. I was then invited to run a short informal drama workshop with them on World Menopause Day (October 18) of the same year. The three interviewees were recruited as a small 'snowball' sample: the first participant recommended the other two. The three interviews were conducted at Bernard Weatherall House (Croydon Council

[113] E.g. Nottingham Trent University (2011), Severn Water (2017) and West Midlands Police (2019).
[114] This comprised: An Infographic from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine Fom. 2016. Guidance on menopasue and the workplace. [Accessed 09/03/21]. A report from the Work Foundation on mental health, no longer available online and two grey literature guides for menopause support.
[115] That 40% of women consider leaving their jobs during menopause. For an employer with a large number of female staff over the age of 40, there could be recruitment and training costs to replace these women, even if only a small number actually resigned.

offices), with permissions granted by the Council and the University Ethics Committee at St Mary's (Appendix A).

The interviews were time limited, allowing an hour in total, with 40 minutes designated for questions, to respect the workplace setting. Only one interview ran longer. Anticipating that there might be pre-rehearsed (professional) answers to familiar questions, I used a semi-structured question plan (Appendix B) with short questions using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The short questions were designed to elicit rich discursive answers. The strength of using IPA is that there is no pre-determined hypothesis, so the participant speaks from their own experience and their perception, rather than the researcher asking what they might know. The researcher supports the sense-making for the participant, so I used questions such as 'Can you put into words your own experience of menopause in the workplace?' and 'What has the response been to your initiative from your management?', interspersing the answers with encouragement to extend their answer, e.g. 'What did you think about…?' 'How did you feel?' etc. The answers given were a balance of the personal within the workplace, such as a description of a first hot flush (IPAI 3) or being unable to give a public talk (IPAI 2), together with the appearance of supporting characters: mothers, doctors, partners and line managers.

I personally fully transcribed all three interviews. I included notations of pauses, breaths, other noises, and hesitations and repetitions, to keep the timbre of their response as close as possible to their original spoken rhythm (Appendix C). Each participant was anonymised throughout the transcript. The weaknesses of IPA are perceived to be the 'double hermeneutic' (Smith & Osborn, 2007) of a researcher making sense of a participant's sense through the subsequent qualitative analysis. But this, I suggest, was averted by firstly identifying thematic patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in the transcripts (first experiences, mothers, HRT and doctors) and then using the segments verbatim. My interpretation rested on these theme groupings, using interviewees' own responses, as far as possible within their original context. This was aided by the dialogic form of the original interview.

Each participant signed a permissions form before the interview and their experience of the interview was also discussed during a short recorded 'pick-up' session a few weeks afterwards. All three interviewees agreed to the inclusion of their interview material in the performance and this was checked again the weekend before the performance was shown. One participant was concerned about the use of sensitive material and so was given a copy in advance of the sections used. She was then happy to agree to the use of her interview material. The sensitive material in question was not about menopause and therefore not necessary to include in the performance. But this drew attention to the difficulties of operating within one particular identifiable workplace. In this cycle of practice, this was entirely manageable, but I became aware that in-depth observations of workplace practices might have unintended repercussions for those participating.

Two questions emphasised the intended performance outcome within the interview. Each interviewee was asked what debates on menopause should be included in the final performance and how they saw themselves; which famous person could 'play' them? The name of the famous person they chose became the anonymised codename for their transcript, two of which were used as character names – Helen and Opal (adjusted from Oprah). The answers to my question 'Which debates around menopause do you think important/would like to see staged?' (Appendix B) were taken verbatim into the end section of the script. These three interview transcripts formed the ethnography-based material for my performance *Puzzled.*

Scenography and Ethnography-based Performance

There may be seem to be irreconcilable tensions between scenography as a visual theatre form and ethnography-based performance rooted in interviews dealing with the realities of testimony; this research project deliberately set out to address these tensions as part of the cross-disciplinary enquiry. The Croydon interview data as testimonies of menopause experience would be respected as one source of material whilst being shaped into a performance script, and would, ideally, be one of several languages of performance, but would not dominate dramaturgically (Lehmann, 2006: 38). The visual languages would have equal if not more value in the development of the scenographic ideas.

Scenography refers to a holistic approach to performance-making, in which different elements of production are brought together into a cohesive whole, which chimes with Hans-Theis Lehman's 'de-hierarchization' of postdramatic theatre practice, but also extends the creative possibilities:

> The concept and practice of scenography does not promote existing hierarchies of roles and functions in the creation of theatre, dance or performance. Scenography and its production sit uneasily within the existing functions of writer, director, choreographer, designer and performer. (McKinney & Butterworth, 2010: 5)

We can therefore say that the practice of scenography relates to, but is outside of, mainstream theatre designations of director, performer, designer et al., although often, in real terms, these roles can be blurred, or combined for artistic or other reasons. The scenographer can move across traditional role and creative boundaries between visuals, text and performing. This allows practitioners with a particular expertise (as a designer in my case) to work in the related areas of performance-making: dramaturgy and direction as well as all areas of design. In addressing the widespread absence of female menopause experiences already identified, a scenographic approach to my performance-making allowed an approach that integrated visual representation and spoken testimonies: a holistic strategy to encompass female mid-life experience. The performance ideas emerged from considering how to re-present the context of the women's menopause experiences rather than a detailed illustration showing what they had achieved. I was invited to show this performance at the Croydon Council Wellbeing and Health Staff conference in April 2018, a workplace staff development event. Engaging with the audience was of paramount importance, as they were both subject and spectators.

Context: Active Spectatorship

The identification of 'active' spectatorship as a key element in scenography has been progressed to the widespread consideration of the audience as an 'active agent' (McKinney & Butterworth, 2010: 165). Both Jacques Rancière's theories of spectatorship that aim to 'overcome the gulf separating activity from passivity' (Rancière, 2009: 12) and Hans-Thies Lehmann's identification of new forms of theatre in *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006)[116] have been enthusiastically embraced and developed within scenography research. Lehmann, like

[116] First published in German in 1999.

Bertolt Brecht, was seeking to move away from Aristotelian forms of theatre-making, and described a universal principle of postdramatic theatre as a 'de-hierarchization of theatrical means' (Lehmann, 2006: 86) that does not consider text to be the primary language of performance. This opened a different dynamic in the relationship of audience to performance and differentiated expectations:

> Each project for us is an attempt to find a new and appropriate solution to the situation of standing up and trying to speak before a crowd of people whom one does not know and cannot trust. (Etchells, 2001)

This distrust of the audience is a distinctive feature of the postdramatic theatre company Forced Entertainment's performances, which expect the audience to make their own meanings. Similarly, international touring theatre company Complicité expects an audience to respond intuitively to all elements in the performance: 'It's not a logical thing… it involves the imagination of the audience' (McBurney in Harvie & Lavender, 2010: 59). Dance-maker and live artist Liz Aggiss integrates feminist dance practices, text, humour and music hall physicality (a bricolage) using 'the personal and historical as reference' (Aggiss, 2017) framed through the programme notes with extensive contextual research and written exposition. The spectator makes their own sense of complicated performances, becoming a co-producer of meaning, engaging in 'productive participation'. This also means that the spectator must be comfortable with or inspired by this level of abstract complexity.

This poses questions for the practitioner in terms of the artistry of the performance and the creative choices that underpin the development of the performance. If the audience is not chosen or deliberately restricted, what of the intended sense? How much does this matter? I suggest that the answer is more than one would think: that the makers expect that the audience should operate within the defined parameters that they have set and that interaction with the performance is within definite boundaries, often outlined in the programme text, so that an audience will be permitted to do some things (play games, move, have sensory experiences) but not others, such as destroying the set or assaulting the actors.[117] The audience is generally only an active collaborator in the creation of ideas that

[117] Such as the rumours of sexual assaults by spectators on the performers during the immersive performance *Gatsby*, (Burnell, 2018).

have already been programmed by the theatre-maker. This can also be the case in more mainstream theatre productions:

> The term 'productive participation', then really names a romanticism, modification and enhancement of an audience's inherent productivity, rather than a discrete category of audience engagement. (Alston, 2016: 4)

This 'new' co-producing simply articulates an existing part of the audience's experience, but here refers to performances where it is expected that there will be many overlapping ideas rather than one dominant narrative (text) that is supported by all the other elements of production. The commonality in these 'new' co-producing performances emerges as 'Make work in phases – Show work to audiences – Seek and act on feedback' (Harvie & Lavender, 2010: 243). The audience-showing is part of an iterative working process, which continues to performance and sometimes through the run. But this is hardly radical. This description can be applied to productions by Bertolt Brecht and Joan Littlewood, to those by Forced Entertainment and Complicité, or to Ethnography-based theatre such as Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* and any provincial try-out for a run in the West End. The conventions of production across theatre of performance-making are remarkably consistent, but it is the dynamic between a specific audience and the performance that shows understanding of what those spectators might expect or will engage with. Recognising that even a university audience could struggle with abstraction, as in my first performance, meant that I brought different considerations into creating the second performance for a workplace audience.

As I intended to represent real female experiences in the performance, pushing beyond biased expectations to forms of representation for the general public, I also had to consider whether an audience would be accepting or repelled. Although a repelled audience might be considered to be 'active' by leaving the theatre, it soon stops being an audience. The questions emerging were: What would be the most useful form of spectatorship to engage an audience with the experiences of menopause? Were there already existing examples? Was there an existing approach that I could adapt as part of my bricolage?

The postdramatic interpretations of active spectatorship often overshadow a fundamental distinction: a seated audience cannot be assumed to be passive. The conversion of an audience 'from passive acceptance to active criticism' (Burns, 1972: 199) is credited to critic

and dramatist George Bernard Shaw[118] at the beginning of the twentieth century. Brecht esteemed Shaw's theatre work because the conversion of an 'entertained' audience to a 'critical' one laid down the foundation for 'Verfremsdungseffekt' (Brecht, 1965 [1964]: 99),[119] alienating the audience rather than eliciting empathy, 'a little emotion safely spent to make themselves feel better' (Ridout, 2009: 44); the legacy of the Aristotelian 'catharsis'.[120] Brecht's work has an important legacy in scenography through his exemplary collaboration with artist and designer Casper Neher and also in feminist theatre-making. But it is worth considering the connection between Brecht and 'his' audience more keenly. Brecht wrote his theatre for a 'scientific age'; for workers who lived in the suburbs. Aware of how different his alienating epic theatre might seem, he also wrote to prepare audiences for his new work and the Marxist politics embedded therein. But there were huge contradictions between Brecht's intended audience and his real one, as there were for his 'most radical' (Brecht, 1965 [1964]: 130) contemporary and sometime collaborator Erwin Piscator.[121]

Piscator considered that theatre should be clear in its intention to educate by elevating 'the events on the stage onto a historical plane' (Piscator, 1980 [1929]: 188). He produced his 'epic' performances to be visually impressive using film and projections as well as sound, music and heavily edited texts, to promote Marxist dialectics:

> the educative elements were so to speak built in: they were not an organic consequence of the whole, but stood in contradiction to it; they broke up the flow of the play and its incidents, they prevented empathy, they acted as a cold douche for those whose sympathies were becoming involved. (Brecht, 1965 [1964]: 132)

Information deliberately countered empathy by interrupting the narrative flow. Piscator's productions were more concerned with the message than its reception by the audience: 'art for the producer, not art for the consumer' (Brecht, 1965 [1964]: 80). Piscator's preference for debate rather than applause finds some resonance in the educative approach of 'consciousness-raising' feminist theatre of the 1960s and 1970s. But crucially, Piscator's

[118] George Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950.
[119] 'Verfremsdungseffekt' is first mentioned in an essay by Brecht in 1936, published in English according to John Willet, Brecht's translator. (Brecht, 1965 [1964]: 99).
[120] In his *Poetics*, Aristotle introduced a medical term, catharsis, to describe how audiences dealt with their emotional responses – ' the proper purgation of these emotions' (c330: 6). The use of the term 'catharsis' was further developed by later writers, but the audience's empathy with the lead actor is still referred to as Aristotelian catharsis.
[121] Erwin Piscator, 1893-1966.

audience were the despised bourgeoisie, whilst he accused the proletariat, his ideal audience, who 'ought to see this theater as an expression of its own will' (Piscator, 1980 [1929]: 324), as being too weak to support him. Piscator's Total Theater[122] project was designed in 1926 by Walter Gropius[123] to have 'scenography and architecture alongside new technologies that would together serve, in turn, to inspire new dramaturgy' (Baugh, 2013 [2005]: 160). New theatre-making would engender political revolution. But his ideological disregard for the reality of the relationship with actual audiences proved disastrous for Piscator's productions, as the audiences abandoned them. Yet it is from Piscator's theatre legacy that the main elements of this research come together – scenography, ethnography-based theatre and its application to real-life problems, but not his lack of ability to connect with his intended audiences.

The influences of Brecht and Piscator can be seen in Joan Littlewood's[124] theatre-making, which rejected the conventions of the English text-based theatre as being out of touch with its audiences. Like Piscator, Littlewood did not initially reflect the concerns of her audience and they were not interested in the messaging she thought they should want. Beginning to understand the interests of the audience through practice is a matter of trial and observation of reactions and behaviour, which generally takes time and reflection. It was not until she produced new plays by non-middle-class writers[125] using an 'eclectic' combination of elements and emphasising the new importance of visuals, designed by John Bury,[126] as well as the dramatic use of space and lighting techniques, that Littlewood connected fully with her audiences:

> This group of people were telling the story—they were mediating contemporary reality, but in a way The Royal Court or the West End or the repertory theatres had not dreamt of: they were telling it the way the working class saw it, and in a way that working class could enjoy, and, what is more, did enjoy. (McGrath, 1996 [1981]: 46)

[122] Piscator considered that only the best ideas were good enough for the working man, but this meant a constant fundraising effort that ultimately failed him, so Gropius' design was never realised and exists only through plans, models and drawings.
[123] Walter Gropius, 1883-1969, architect and founder of the Bauhaus.
[124] Joan Littlewood, 1914-2002.
[125] Such as *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney, premiered in 1958.
[126] Littlewood's designer John Bury (1925-2000) brought new forms of visual language into British Theatre Design through his work with Theatre Workshop. He went on to work closely with Sir Peter Hall, becoming Head of Design at the RSC in 1964 and subsequently the National Theatre.

Littlewood had finally satisfied her working-class audience by representing their experiences as they saw them, in a way that they liked to see themselves. And here questions begin to be defined for my performance: How do mid-life women see themselves? How should menopause be represented? How much menopause information should my performance deliver? Given that I would have very limited development and rehearsal time, how could I structure potential connections with the audience?

Like Littlewood, writer and director John McGrath and his theatre company 7:84 looked to understand working-class audience expectations cross-fertilised from TV, films and pantomimes. They did this in the 1960s by touring British working men's clubs: 'we have to be very careful before consigning one audience and its values to the critical dustbin' (McGrath, 1996 [1981]: 3). From these clubs McGrath identified nine features of working-class performances: directly addressing the audience, comedy, music, emotion, variety, effect, immediacy, locale and a sense of identification with the performer. On this feminist theatre academic Elaine Aston comments:

> we have found ourselves constantly returning to the 'features' McGrath lists… because it has invited us to think about how far many and sometimes all of these might be key features not just of the commercial mainstream shows… but of so many of the 'alternative' and experimental/ political/ performance art shows we have seen in the last thirty years. (Aston & Harris, 2013: 13)

This identification of McGrath's list of features within the broad range of theatre produced over the past three decades, including feminist theatre productions, encouraged me to use it to inform the connection I wanted to make with my audience. In this way, I could redirect my approach to making theatre, towards considering what my audience might respond to and enjoy.

Praxis 2: *Puzzled*

Context

The second iteration of the practice cycle began with the invitation to talk about my PhD research at a lunchtime meeting of Croydon Council's Menopause Awareness Group. The group then invited me to run a drama workshop session on menopause[127] for World Menopause Day on October 18, 2017. Following the workshop, I arranged to interview three of the founding members of the Menopause Steering Group[128] as the Ethnography base for the next performance. When the interviews were completed in January 2018, I was invited to show a performance at the Croydon Council Annual Staff Conference for the following April. This would be a half-hour workshop performance about menopause, using material generated from the three Croydon interviews, in Croydon's Clocktower David Lean Cinema. This cinema is a small room with approximately 40 seats and a limited playing space in front of the large screen. It is often used for lectures and has drop-down cinema seating installed, so it best fitted my intention to work within a 'lecture room' context, which was carried forward from *Prólogos*. Once this booking was confirmed, the ideas for practice were directly connected to this site and how to connect with the Croydon Council audience.

Secondary Research Questions

The two questions identified from Praxis 1 were again open and straightforward: What is an example of good menopause practice within the workplace? What will the audience get from the resulting performance? As I worked through my selected methods, interviews, visual dramaturgy, script-writing and actor rehearsals, a third question was identified: What are the tensions in making scenography using ethnography-based data?

Once I had identified Croydon Council as an good example of workplace menopause initiatives, I was able to build a positive relationship through visits before making the three interviews. The semi-structured questions (Appendix B) prepared for the interview had emerged from identifying the workplace menopause literature. My questions were short

[127] This workshop was based on a game of 'pass the parcel', explained as a metaphor for menopause experience. The unknown layers of the parcel contained information, anecdotes, jokes and surprise gifts. There were five attendees, three of whom were the founder members whom I went on to interview.
[128] A subgroup of the Women's Network.

and straightforwardly phrased, with my aim being to identify how the women had negotiated the initiative within the workplace structure, and how they had personally negotiated their menopause both before and after the initiative. Because I had confirmed in advance that the interview would be used to make a performance, I was concerned to give the interviewees as much time as possible to give a 'rich' answer. I was much less concerned to collect answers to my exact questions, reasoning that their long answers were covering some of my short questions and that interrupting their flow of speech would bring my positioning to the fore rather than theirs.

The initial question of the relationship between audience and performance was expanded further by the possibilities offered through reviewing existing examples of practice, leading to questions including: How could I engage the audience with difficult subject matter? How much menopause information should I include? How would I evidence active spectatorship? What would the audience make of a scenographic approach that was essentially about their lives? What would be important to them?

The emerging question concerning the relationship between the scenography and the ethnography base of the text would, I surmised, be addressed by prioritising the development of the visual dramaturgy as the primary language. However, respecting the interview material meant that the text could not be fully subordinated. When the actors started to rehearse the script, their close focus on delivery the verbatim text dominated the later stages of production, which was an unintended shift. This resulted in a more equal balance between visual and script ideas, rather than visual primacy.

Developing Ideas

Before confirming the relationship with Croydon Council, there were two different theatre-making methods that were under consideration, but then not taken forward. The first was to make a fully PAR performance 'to negotiate and construct understandings and meanings with its participants and audiences' (Mienczakowski & Morgan, 2002: 219). But this process suggests a community that is willing to perform and has the time to participate. From the limited attendance at the drama workshop, there was no immediate interest in performance-making, and my observation of the larger group meeting was that they were

fully involved with their professional commitments. This was a workplace and they were looking for help to support their work, rather than publicly to discuss their menopause challenges. This was also apparent in the interview transcripts when female managers were mentioned: 'she was very adamant that it was a personal issue you just go ahead and deal with it, it's just something you have to deal with' (Appendix C: 31). As this practice is concerned with supporting women and not inadvertently undermining them in any way, I chose to work collaboratively with two professional female actors and merged the three interviews into two characters taking different positions. No text was used from the transcripts that might compromise the interviewee professionally. The first position (Helen) was the experience of going through menopause chronologically: starting from a first hot flush experience in peri-menopause, then considering treatments and finally an expression of pure menopausal frustration (anger). The second position (Opal) was more resigned and reflective, post-menopausal even.

I also considered working with Augusto Boal's theories from the *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2000) to make a Forum theatre performance. In this approach the menopause/workplace issues would be thoroughly addressed through the audience's 'spect-actor' involvement: 'participation in this work seems to bring with it some ease, in the context of a dissatisfaction' (Jackson in (Boal, 2000 [1995]; xxiv). The production aims for the spectators to understand the whole of a problem through 'difficult-ising'[129] it, by explaining all elements underpinning the issue, rather than offering solutions. Boal suggests that this activity of the spectator-as-actor changes the audience's empathic responsive to 'sympathy' (Boal, 2000 [1995]: 42). But Forum performances require a careful introduction of the audience to the method, and the performance needs time to be run through at least twice. The first performance sets the dilemma, escalating to a point of potential disaster; the second interrogates the situations by asking 'What could have been done differently?'[130]

[129] This term 'difficult-ising' was used by the Cardboard Citizens' 'Joker' in the workshop session in St Albans that I attended in July 2018. It was used as a descriptor for the process, which is to understand all the elements of the problem to fully understand what is holding the situation as an 'oppression', in this particular case homelessness in St Albans.

[130] The scene is then replayed with 'spect-actors' playing a new solution and the actors presenting difficulties arising from the new solution.

Forum theatre might offer an interactive, problem-understanding method of active spectatorship, but it can de-legitimise some spectators' responses, so it works best within a situation where the problem is shared, but where there are also competing interests, say within a company or community.

From close work with the interview transcripts, there was no sense of an escalation of events that might lead towards finding different solutions, because the solutions already found had been supplied by the women themselves. This situation thus adhered to Paolo Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (Freire, 1996 [1970]), in which the oppressed educate themselves and then their oppressors, on which Boal's approach is founded. It also risked undermining the gains already made by establishing the Menopause Awareness Group through them seeming overly critical to their peers.

Once the interviews had been recorded, and before the long process of transcription was started, the creative process began. The developing visual language drew two competing strands together: one was the familiar language of the workplace, the other was a physical and visual metaphor for the menopause – eventually a jigsaw puzzle. Using a puzzle metaphor allowed evocations of solitude and limited problem-solving. A jigsaw using small pieces but with a large picture suggested a tediously time-consuming and often individual pastime. One without a picture guide takes much longer. The sense of women piecing together menopause information, to support themselves in the absence of clear public information, had come out of the interviews. The centrality of the visual metaphor was taken into the name for the performance: *Puzzled.*

Having developed the first visual language of the performance, I then explored the potential of using the transcripts verbatim, to connect closely with the expected audience. The workplace references within the visual language were only introduced after recording the interviews and photographing the offices. This formed the initial creative process, with the work on the script starting later, after the transcribing the interviews. Identifying the key visual metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle for menopause experience contained both visual and performative potential. Over 90% of the performance text was verbatim, concerning experiences of menopause and the workplace, but some speeches were edited. The

benefits for menopausal women in getting support and information through sharing in the workplace, through which individual voices and personal experiences could be voiced, was the guiding principle.

***Images 8: Developing ideas**. Croydon Council building exterior, set drawing, council worker's desk, jigsaw puzzle-ing.*

Menopause Verbatim

Croydon Council's 'grass-roots' initiative had put information together to support their co-workers, collected from many different sources, but these were a support to their main idea, which was to meet together to provide support. Both fact sheets and handouts were, they considered, sub-optimal to meeting in the support group. The following excerpt from my *Puzzled* script indicates how my question 'what do you think about the fact sheet approach?' (Appendix C: 24) and how the answer it generated was taken into performance (Appendix D: 6-7). The invented parts are shown in grey:

Helen:
(as line manager)
Did you get a fact sheet?
Opal:
you might as well just Google it.
(jigsaw pause)
I can't find that bit, I think it might be missing
(Helen finds the piece and puts it in the jigsaw)
Helen:
ha!
(They both work on the jigsaw during this section)
Helen:
I think the real value of the work that the support group are doing, is the contact, the human contact, and sharing of I experiences, um and feelings, and acknowledgement of feelings.
Opal:
And this goes here
(puts jigsaw piece in)

In this way, the majority of the final text was taken from the transcripts, with very short new script either used to move from one idea to the next, as in the first scene with the slides, or connected to the jigsaw puzzle. The context of the original transcription was also considered, as here with the Google comment responding to the fact sheet mention.

The development of three secondary characters emerged from long answers that interviewees gave to the short questions. By splitting one answer into conversations rather than the original reported speech, three different characters emerged: mother, line manager and interviewer. The interviewer acknowledged my own part of the interview process and reinforced the ethnography base of the verbatim script. The line manager was a single speech extracted from a much longer one:

> do what you have to do, if you need to go away for your treatment or whatever, do what you have to do, if you don't want to come in today, that's fine just let me know and what you're doing. (Appendix D: 6)

For *Puzzled,* I had set the parameters of using as much of the interview transcripts as possible and to keep large segments intact as verbatim text, which included my interjections as interviewer, which often provided support to the long spoken answers. Despite the occasionally unwieldy phrasing of some of my questions, I kept to the original transcripts, as the awkwardness of text also indicates the thought processes at work in conducting an interview, and I felt it disrespectful to exercise authorial privilege to make myself sound better, a privilege that was not extended to the interviewees:[131]

> the lack of polish found in some performances actually succeeds in adding a dimension of believability to the characterization. (Gorman in Harvie & Lavender, 2010: 181)

Here Sarah Gorman is specifically commenting on Richard Maxwell's postdramatic methodology challenging 'the enduring dominance of Method-based acting' (ibid.: 180-201), but the rejection of this convention can also be found in feminist theatre productions, and should be held in mind for all the performances in this research project.

Images 9: Croydon Council office pictures- *projection slide and completed jigsaw with menopause references.*

[131] The verbatim sections that were used in performance were agreed with the three interviewees before the performance was shown.

Using the screen representation of the Council offices as the basis for the menopause jigsaw picture, but including specific menopause references that had come out of the interviews – for example, HRT (IPAI 2) cite and Thyroxin (IPAI 1) – linked the photograph with the text. Representing a version of their office workplace setting reassured the Croydon audience with familiar office tropes: corporate-style banners and a PowerPoint presentation used with more abstract theatrical elements such as the jigsaw puzzle and the use of slides. But where for *Prólogos* I blurred the boundaries between reality and installed elements, in *Puzzled* the screen representations of the workplace kept the focus on the context. This led to the use of the screen becoming a character for the first part of the textual delivery, directly addressing the audience by issuing instructions and inducing the first action from Helen S. Johnson (actor one), embedded within the audience, propelling her to the playing area, which triggered the performance.

Actor two was seated onstage working on the jigsaw throughout the performance. A live video feed on the TV monitor to one side showed a close-up of her hands and the jigsaw pieces. The jigsaw image used showed the Croydon workplace with text references to the menopause support group, book titles (two were interview recommendations) and other menopause expressions. The PowerPoint also showed the same photograph of the workplace without text. Here familiarity for the audience was important, so that what was happening onstage related to their own experiences. The reality of the workplace setting butted up against theatrical abstraction. But the real menopause information only came from the women's testimonies; the premise here was of an absence being painstakingly filled piece by piece by individual women.

It was also important to remember that this performance drew on the generosity of the female participants, who agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of sharing their initiative helping to support their own peers, who were the audience. This had to be respected throughout the process of development and meant that I moved away from the community/audience critique process of Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* tools to focus on the Ethnography-based material collected. I therefore made a creative decision to work with two professional female actors, to more securely establish the potential of the verbatim material. To respect the sexual and ethnic diversity of the women interviewees

and Croydon Council as a workplace, the professional actors were both female and over the age of 40. Actor one was black and actor two white, although the parts were actually composites containing dialogue from all three interviews.

I also consciously moved away from immersive performance, but still wanted the audience to experience the sense of being picked on randomly by menopause, similar to the experience at Les Enfants Terribles' 2017 production of *Inside Pussy Riot* (Harris, 2017), in which one audience member was singled out to strip her clothes off as a prisoner, then deliberately revealed to be an actor. In *Puzzled*, the actor was not revealed by stepping outside the 'world' of the play (Fuchs, 2004), as this would have disrupted the narratives. But by picking up her script, the audience was left to conclude that this was probably an actor. The scenography was intended to settle the audience to concentrate on the verbatim speeches. The interaction between the audience and the slides meant that when the audience were finally seated, they were already personally involved in the performance events and engaged in the narrative outcome. Using the conventions of the actual lecture room, the PowerPoint slides were more accessible to a workplace audience (maybe *not* theatre-going) and did not exclude them through language or theatrical elitism.

The first monologue spoken by each actress set the character's overarching narrative. Helen started with a description of her first hot flush: 'so it was the last bank holiday, I remember it vividly, and I was in the hairdresser's' from IPAI3 (Appendix C: 36), which carried overtones of familiar female experiences, particularly for black women. But it was the opening verbatim line spoken by Opal (sitting silently onstage for some time) that I intended to connect powerfully with the audience: 'I see myself as a very resilient and resourceful person' from IPAI2 (Appendix C: 27). This is a woman's view of herself as empowered and capable, rather than a societal view of her as 'old'. My characters would speak for themselves, representing their audience as they did so. I had some concerns that the number of monologues generated from my verbatim method would be overly didactic for the audience. However, I was interested to explore the potential:

> A few lines into my first long monologue, I became aware that the audience was listening. And not just listening, but *really* listening… After just two paragraphs of text, they were deeply and personally engrossed in the story. (Soans in Hammond & Steward, 2008: 22)

This deep connection with the interview material was the aim of my performance. As I adopted the verbatim transcript material into the script, my interviewing interjections became more apparent. By keeping as much verbatim as possible, an auto-ethnographic element[132] emerged that became a second voice. This could have enabled the character of the interviewer-author to develop, which has been incorporated structurally into ethnodramas such as *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman, 2002) and *Black Watch* (MacLeod, 2007). But I preferred to focus on the participants and break the monologue structure into conversations between two women. Two separate characters (mother and line manager) were created by splitting reports of conversations into dialogue and playing them as mini scenes within the performance. Here the text is verbatim, but edited and some of my comments removed to keep the conversation flowing:

Helen:
(upbeat)
I mean I certainly know from um other, and from other girls that um and they more or less say the same as me 'we didn't know anything' basically, 'we didn't know anything'
(laughs)
it's really sad and because our parents don't tell us anything, you know, that they haven't you know my mother didn't say anything to me, she said 'Oh you had a bit of a hot flush'. It was really interesting my mum cos she was very open, when I was growing up,
(overlapping speech with S)
really keen to tell me about periods, and about

Opal:
(as mother)
really keen to tell you about periods, and about having children, because I was brought up not knowing this myself from my own mother, so the minute she hit eleven, I told her the whole works,
Helen:
you know before I had anything, she'd told me everything, so I said, you're so diligent telling me about periods and whatever, so I knew exactly what was going on,
Why didn't you tell me these things? why didn't you tell me anything about the menopause?
(laughing)
Opal:
(as mother)
I sort of thought you'd just get on with that really, so never really thought anything of it, but then mine was bit different, I had a hysterectomy, went straight on to HRT had quite bad hot flushes, people don't tell you how long it lasts either, cos even now, still have the occasional hot flush, came off the HRT years ago, but there we go. (Appendix D: 5)

[132] As a post-menopausal woman myself, this could have been a possibility, but my own experience was not the focus of this research.

My use of humour within the performance was a deliberate choice, as I would argue that the use of comedy can relax the audience to feel more deeply moments of pain that follow, and that the use of real truths (of the interviewee) can express deep concerns and insights about their own lives and concerns. The ideas of comedy and gallows humour have saturated the subject of the menopause in popular culture (Aston & Harris, 2013 , Wyer, 2013 et al.), and elicited the following heartfelt comment from IPAI 1 (Appendix C: 9), which ended the performance (Appendix D: 12):

Helen:
no not really,
I would just like people to think more about the mental disaggregation, the mood, the deep grief, and distress, that kind of makes everything really hard, to find solid ground again, and the length of time it goes on for some people and I know it's only some people,
(pause)
and that the disability side of it, I know that's a real hot potato, but I would say nine years is well in excess of two years, which is the normal disability thing that they talk about, umm so yeah, and not just humorous, cos, most of the stuff that's out there artistically is humorous,
Opal:
(quietly)
mmm
Helen:
and I can understand, we do have a laugh in the support group as well, people told horrendous stories and funny stories,
Opal:
mmm
Helen:
but it's not all funny ha ha, it's just not, it trivialises it to some degree, it's a tragedy,
(pause)
with funny moments, there's not all that many funny moments, some in the sense of solidarity, and the relief of being able to share, some of the tragedy with somebody else,
Opal:
mmm
Helen:
(pause)
it's not that funny, a lot of the stuff that goes on,
(long pause)
yeah.

This wholly verbatim section expresses the complexity of representing menopause, which as a lived experience within the everyday lives of women has not yet been explored through performance. By making a verbatim performance about menopause, exploring the different languages available in performance, the taboo around menopause in the workplace could be challenged.

Details

***Puzzled*:** First performance[133] for Croydon Council's Annual Staff Conference on Diversity Awareness, in Croydon Clocktower's David Lean Cinema on April 23, 2018 (30 minutes' duration). End-on staging with seated audience; some elements of audience participation. Verbatim text. Collaboration with two female actors.

Performance Account

This was performed in a darkened cinema space with end-on staging and a shallow performance space in front of the large screen for a seated audience of around 20, mainly composed of Croydon Council employees. On entry, the audience were given a jigsaw puzzle piece, invited to take their seats and asked to follow the instructions on the large projection screen at the back of the shallow stage, which at the beginning said WELCOME. Helen (actor one) was seated amongst the audience as if she was a council employee. Opal (actor two) was seated stage right at a small table with a live camera feed focused on her hands working on a jigsaw puzzle, projected on the large TV screen behind her.

The change of slide on the projection screen began the performance by asking all the audience to stand. At this point, the projections began to issue a series of demands to the audience, which allowed them to sit back down again, e.g. 'If your name isn't Helen, please sit down.' After several questions following this line, only the actor was left standing, identified now by her full 'name': Helen S. Johnson.[134] At this the projection screen insisted that 'Helen' came down onto the stage. When she arrived at the front of the stage, a spotlight came up on the stool down stage left, on which there was a parcel addressed to Helen S. Johnson. After some hesitation, she revealed herself to be an actress by taking out her script, and then opened the parcel to reveal a gift box containing a second set of jigsaw pieces. The jigsaw pieces were contained in a plastic bag jigsaw puzzle, but not accompanied with a picture guide. The implication was that the picture would only be known by

[133] The second performance of *Puzzled* was intended to be at *Flushfest*, The Menopause Café Festival in Perth, Scotland on May 29, 2020, but this was cancelled due to Covid-19. I have been invited to present the work as a short film for the re-arranged festival in April 2021.

[134] The character had a full name to identify her as the proper recipient of the 'parcel', in case there were any other Helens in the audience.

completing the jigsaw, a task taking some considerable time judging by the size and number of the pieces.

The performance unfolded through a series of verbatim monologues connected by short interchanges. Helen's monologues started with 'not-knowingness' about menopause and initially rejected the jigsaw, then watched Opal putting pieces in her jigsaw, and finally joined with her to work together on Opal's puzzle. Helen's monologues followed a progression from starting peri-menopause transition, whereas Opal's monologues were more reflective of post-menopausal experience. Three other secondary characters were Mother, Line manager and Interviewer. The performance was followed by a brief informal audience discussion. Finally, the audience were invited to come to the stage to add their own jigsaw piece to the puzzle; only one piece was not returned.

Images 10: Puzzled

Reflection on the Scenography

The nature of the conference event meant that not all attendees knew each other and it was therefore possible for the actor to 'pass' as a member of staff, before the performance started, getting coffee, waiting outside etc. Developing ideas from the corporate culture I had first used in *Prólogos* led to the use of the PowerPoint projection becoming a controlling character for the opening scene. The presentation directly addressed the audience and issued instructions – stand up, sit down etc. – which induced the first actions from the actor embedded in the audience. The screen directed her to come onto the playing area to collect her parcel, which started the performance, and linked menopause to an experience that arrives unexpectedly for women, wherever they are, whatever they are doing.

The scenography embraced the idea of the large projection screen, which linked to ideas of the lecture room used in the first performance, by developing a series of projections to 'talk' to the audience, giving them directions and confirming that the right woman had been picked by showing a picture of her work desk.[135] Using real images (my photographs) from the Croydon workplace, both for the desk close-up and the office projections, sited the imagery within the recognisable office-scape of the Croydon audience. Two printed banners were also used as side masking, one continuing the office-scape, the other showing the outside of the Council building with closed windows, which were referred to in an invented line: 'uh, it is really hot in here, do you think the windows open?' (Appendix D: 4).

The use of the projection screen as an omnipotent character in the first scene meant that the actor placed in the audience could be drawn out of her seat, by forces outside of her own control, to be presented with an unexpected parcel, a 'present' of the menopause. This 'present' appeared in jigsaw form, recognisably familiar in all stages, from the box containing a bag of pieces that Helen discovered when she unwrapped the 'present', through the close-ups of by Opal's hands solving the jigsaw shown on the smaller screen, to the completed jigsaw of Croydon offices with menopause references projected as the final

[135] After one of the interview sessions, the interviewee insisted on showing me round, and suggested I photographed her desk, which was covered in work and had few personal touches. That inspired the idea to use a picture of a personal working area to confirm the choice of woman (Helen) as the right target.

image. The screen did not show any menopause information – this was contributed by the verbatim dialogue between the two performers. This positioning reflected the 'not-knowingness' that came out of the interviews, and how women have to assemble information piecemeal for themselves, which in Croydon Council was then shared into their workplace. I did not want the audience to feel excluded from the performance by either language or theatrical elitism.

The familiarity of the jigsaw puzzle was important as a means of settling and engaging the audience, who could watch Opal beginning to solve the jigsaw whilst they waited for the performance to start. The link here to children's games with its roots in eighteenth-century map-making, now an engaging but passive pastime for adults,[136] allows for a single person but can also be easily shared as a group endeavour. Crucially, however, a jigsaw has a pre-determined outcome that must be acknowledged to resolve the puzzle. This journey through acceptance to resolution, combined with the general sense of painstaking problem-solving, resonated with twenty-first-century menopause experiences.

The cinema space informed the development of the visual languages through the use of different screens: the large cinema one and a TV monitor. Two printed screen/banners were used to mask the open side and focus the space. The tiny size of the playing area meant that the two performers were close together, and the introduction of two theatre lighting stands reminded the audience that this was a performance. Both actors[137] were recruited specifically for this performance and paid the minimum wage for their time; this resulted in a play reading rather than a full performance, which suited the developmental nature of the performance.

Brief notes were taken of the topics discussed during the short informal discussion with the audience. The immediate feedback from the audience was positive. It was warm and

[136] During the 2020 Covid-19 UK pandemic lockdowns, pastimes such as jigsaw puzzles increased hugely in popularity as a way of coping with the reduction of outside recreations and entertainments.
[137] Pamela Jikiemi played Helen S. Johnson and Rose Akroyd played Opal. The character names were based on the names used for the transcripts, based on the answers to the question 'Who would play you?' The difficulties for my Black and Asian interviewees in answering this question was indicative of the reduced opportunities for Black, Asian and minority ethnic female actors in mainstream culture.

appreciative, with the discussion thoughtful and indications that they were continuing to think about some of the points raised. Surprisingly, for a performance centred in and performed for the workplace, the first comment was about mothers and circled back to mother/daughter relationships, as at the end. The following bullet points were the individual comments from members of the audience:

- Mothers not being proactive about giving information to daughters, educating them. The play has made her think about how menopause was taboo with her own mother. Thank you for this resonance.
- Would be good to have a film version of the play, for teenage girls in schools as peri-menopause can start in in your thirties.
- Hadn't heard about peri-menopause before and how early it can start.
- Peri-menopause not in much clinical literature.
- There may be more experiences than those covered in the play.
- Interesting that doctors don't have enough info. They should look at a woman's health issues holistically.
- Menopause can be controversial. It doesn't define someone and how do you know what is just you rather than menopause symptoms, e.g. if you are autistic? How can the differences be determined?
- Mothers not sharing or acknowledging menopause issues.

The importance of this post-show discussion, which was in line with the other conference sessions, was paramount in evidencing the personal nature of the connections the audience had made with the performance material. One suggested future development, which came out of the use of screen projections, was that I cut this material into a short film to show in schools to raise menopause awareness at a much earlier age. This pre-dated the schools initiative that has since been rolled out.

In my research project, the adoption of the female participants' voices is primarily for their own peers, so it was important to note that the focus was all on the verbatim dialogue rather than other aspects of the scenography. My own observations of the audience were that they accepted Helen as a member of the audience and were willing to participate. One spectator spontaneously read the beginning screen directions out loud, and all the audience participated willingly and in a spirit of curiosity. The emotional journey of the piece

engrossed the audience's attention, they responded with a start to Helen's 'gremlin' outburst, and then with laughter and attentiveness followed the poignancy of the narrative arc to the end.

Insights Emerging

As with *Prólogos,* the immediate reflections on *Puzzled* were concerned with the success of the bricolage, the methods I used to bring ethnography material into a scenographic performance, and the showing of that performance to an audience. This concluded the first make-reflect-remake cycle, positioning me in the middle of the second. Although I had regarded *Prólogos* only as a contextualising piece, it became clear that some ideas had carried forward, particularly in the development of the lecture room space and dynamic use of the PowerPoint. Arranging a short audience discussion immediately after the performance enabled a snapshot of the audience's responses to be taken and confirmed that they had been actively spectating.

By focusing on the question of menopause experience within Croydon Council, I had found a way to reconcile the competing demands of professional behaviour and personal experience. My interviewees were speaking of how they had achieved an awareness of menopause that they themselves had needed. This is otherwise absent from the workplace-facing literature, which only considers how to implement such a strategy. The absences that the interviewees themselves identified were the importance of training managers, and the lack of information from doctors. Their common experience was of being unprepared, their 'not knowing-ness' and that information had been withheld from them. This shifted the emphasis from menopause being a situation that could not be known to one that was being deliberately obscured. The questions emerging from this, which would not be fully answered until the final fourth performance, were: Who can be held responsible for this obscuring? What implications does this have in broader society?

Furthermore, the audience's explanation uncovered some adherence to Marie Stopes' position 'It's part of life' (Appendix C: 20) and demonstrated Gail Sheehy's 'fix yourself' approach. IPAI2 had taken HRT to improve her married life (Appendix C: 25) (as Dr Robert A. Wilson advised) but none had embraced it (Germaine Greer), and it seemed that 'not-

knowing' had replaced 'fear' (Simone de Beauvoir). However, it was clear that employment was important to them, whether they were really enjoying their work or simply earning money. There was also consideration of the reluctance of some senior female managers to highlight menopause as an issue within the workplace, with women diminished as 'victims' of their biological cycles. Identifying these two problems meant that I was reluctant to push further to make a deeper connection into one specific workplace. The strength of their initiative had relied on women coming together to share understanding and experiences. By only giving menopause information in verbatim speech, I positioned information[138] as coming from the women themselves, not from a screen or in a handout.[139] And this was what I wanted the audience to 'get' from the performance: that informed female solidarity in operation could mitigate against individual tribulation through ignorance.

One insight that emerged strongly from the audience discussion was the lack of communication about menopause between mothers and daughters. The reluctance of mothers to share their experiences was commented upon, and one spectator remarked that she was going home to tell her daughter all about it. The potential of cross-generational relations between women as mothers and daughters emerged more potently at the end of the third performance.

But there was one main question that arose from the experience of forming the interview material into a script, which needed to be answered in the costume design for the scenography. Who are these women? Where are their individual characters? Outside of menopause, what are their lives? This was followed by the realisation that this was impossible to discern from the workplace interviews, and that there are few existing positive cultural representations to draw upon. Menopause now defines women's mid-lives, rather than being a separate, albeit sometimes significant, experience. Menopause has effectively absented women's mid-life experience and has been absented itself from public view through the withholding of information. This triggered a series of questions that would

[138] This was evident during the brief discussion following the piece, where younger members of the audience commented on the unfamiliarity of the phrase peri-menopause, having no idea what that was or what they might experience during it.
[139] The flippant references to handouts and Google used in both *Puzzled and CHANGING IN PUBLIC* came from this belief.

define the next cycle of practice. What are the interests and experiences of mid-life women? How could they be presented in a scenography?

By linking with Croydon Council, the focus of my research now began to centre on working women in the broad South London area, which also fitted with my university base in Twickenham. This lens enabled a closer look at individual women within this area, either living, working or both. But having made two performances for invited audiences, I began to question the restrictive nature of this. An invitation meant that spectators were, to some extent, filtered and could therefore be argued to be within an 'elite' group. My issue was that this filtering did not allow for full general public access, and in terms of making menopause more public, I began identifying questions that would help me attract people to an open-access public performance. Where could this happen? How could I develop a scenography for the general public that would put representations of female life into the public gaze?

The advantages of the scenography included the audience's engagement with the screen at the beginning, standing up and sitting down when asked. The arrival of the menopause as an unexpected 'parcel' was a believable workplace event, with the audience surprised by the emergence of actor one from amongst them, as intended. The jigsaw puzzle as a visual and performative metaphor was useful in connecting the different verbatim scenes in the short performance, and gave opportunities for both playfulness and stillness. The end-of-show discussion evidenced a clear connection for the audience with the performance, which had made them think and reflect (active spectatorship). There were no adverse reactions to the subjects raised or the language used.[140] There was most discussion about the mother/daughter scenes.[141] There was also nearly total engagement, with almost all the audience remembering to come onstage to add their jigsaw puzzle piece to the table before leaving.

[140] One of the interviewees' excerpts included a swear word, but the organiser also warned that other words such as 'periods' might trigger a reaction.
[141] One of the recurring features of the actors' rehearsals was how they reported thinking about events with their own mothers – sometimes relating particular events, which they were now re-considering in the light of other people's accounts of menopause.

The relations between the visual and spoken languages changed in the latter stages of production. Although ideas were worked up visually from the outset before putting text with them, this was not enough to prevent the written text assuming more dominance during the actor's rehearsals. Audience responses were all centred on the spoken themes rather than the visual, and there were no queries identifying any of the production elements, which suggested that it was read as a holistic performance (scenography). The central jigsaw puzzle metaphor might have had potential for development, including more development film inserts rather than the live feed. But equally, this might have pulled too much focus towards the screen and away from the intimacy of the two actors.

I realised that although the visual language was the primary driver for the performance ideas, the audience were actually most interested in the details from the verbatim material. As I was already aware of balancing competing tensions between visual, spoken and performed languages, it was interesting to consider that, generally, audiences are less comfortable when considering visual languages rather than spoken ones. This identified a further problem to consider in the next performance: How could a general public audience be persuaded to respond to a performance centred around visual languages?

SECTION THREE: REPRESENTING ABSENCE

Developing Questions for Praxis 3

There were a number of identifiable questions that had emerged from *Puzzled* as insights, which I began to cluster around the three 'clews' now forming my research enquiry. These clustered questions would be addressed by staging the next performance. The first clew focused on the visual representation of mid-life women, to address absence with representation. The enquiry that developed from this concerned making performance scenography for a general public audience, which would place mid-life women firmly into the public gaze, with visuals as the primary language of the performance. An associated challenge concerned persuading members of the public to actively consider the lives of these women.

The second clew involved further use of ethnography-based methods to inform the scenography, which would concentrate on defining the individuality of female mid-life outside of menopause and the workplace. Finding out what interested women was likely an important constituent in their representation. I chose to maintain the focus on working women, as salaried work has obvious importance in women's lives, and to keep the geographical area within South London. I decided to collect a second set of interviews as the ethnography base for the scenography, but actively sought different groups of women to interview, rather than one single source as previously.

The third clew involved considering the questions of responsibility. Who could be held responsible for obscuring the menopause? As this can be regarded as an oppression that has serious consequences for many women's experience of menopause, it was important to consider how such oppressions could be identified in real life, to comprehend the situation as a complex social whole.

In this second practice cycle, I wanted to foreground the visual languages of the scenography, but still respect the integrity of the interview materials. The relation of the developing ideas to the main research questions through the clews meant it was still being held within the 'spiral model' (Trimingham, 2002), in which the enquiry returns to the same

point of the cycle, but is advanced in the spiral by new thinking, testing, making and reflecting. Now the emergent construction from this cycle would be performance three.

Scenography in Public Space

My choice to use public space for performance three, with a general audience rather than a ticketed event, opened up the issues of the invisibility of mid-life women in public cultural expressions. I aimed to create a visual dramaturgy that would now be based on female character development supported by costume design. The idea of making a 'living statue' performance had emerged from considering the most accessible types of performance for the general public, moving away from the eliteness of regular ticketed performances. Even theatre companies that use non-traditional performance spaces such as immersive theatre or landscape-based performance might seem to be large and therefore inclusive. But these frequently rely on 'shared' understandings of theatre practice and can seem intimidating, often unwelcoming. A participative 'flash mob' was one possible idea, which I did not develop at this time, partly because it could not be fully inclusive, being only selective group participation, and also to avoid the mob's potential to 'unsettle' (Brejzek, 2010), which might set up a barrier to engaging with the scenographic ideas.

The use of a 'living' statue performance with costumed non-speaking characters linked to the early forms of female performances in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century salons, of which the 'attitudes' by Emma Hamilton[142] as 'interpretations of muses and goddesses were famous' (Warner, 2000 [1985]: 238–239). Salon performances could also use 'enactment' (Case, 1988: 47) of personal dialogue rather than the mimesis of the theatre, which resonates within my own performance-making as a whole. But while the salon performances had been the preserve of the drawing-room elite, in the twenty-first century living statues have become the domain of public space. The statues have great potential for making an immediate 'human connection' (Palmer, 2014: 2) with spectators. This familiar and under-valued form of street performance would be enhanced by the intimate nature of the Walled Garden park site, and could be presented to highlight the under-representation of women generally in public art and mid-life women in particular.

[142] Emma, Lady Hamilton 1765-1815 was a model, society actress and muse. She was married to Sir William Hamilton and, most famously, was the mistress of Lord Admiral Horatio Nelson.

In her ground-breaking feminist analysis *Monuments and Maidens* (2000), Marina Warner considers the allegorical female image in public:

> Woman, as the prime subject of art, participates in art's exaltation; but the condition also empties her of her humanity. The conflict can be seen in a pastime of the eighteenth century, inspired by the classical revival: striking 'attitudes'. Society occasions would invite its female ornaments to pose, as mythological or historical figures of antiquity, as if they were works of art. (Warner, 2000 [1985] 238)

Warner's emphasis here is that female subjects are presented devoid of personality and individuality, preferring the allegorical presentation or historical characters such as Athene or Britannia. This relates to contemporary campaigns such as that raised by Caroline Criado Perez[143] and the *InVISIBLE women* campaigns for more 'Women On Top of plinths',[144] seeking gender equality in representation. Less than 10% of UK public statuary is of ordinary women. In London, currently only two statues portray a woman in her menopause years: Martin Jennings' *Mary Seacole*[145], outside St Thomas' Hospital, and the new statue of *Millicent Fawcett* in Parliament Square.[146] My objective became to make a 'living statue' performance of and for mid-life women, located in a South London public park. Three parks were considered for the performance: Burgess Park, Camberwell, the Italian Garden in Cannizaro Park, Wimbledon and Brockwell Park in Brixton. A visit to the Walled Garden in Brockwell Park in February 2019 confirmed that this would be the most suitable performance site.

The reasons for using the Walled Garden were both creative and practical. The garden is used as a secluded and reflective place, with distinct paved paths and flowerbeds. The wall completely surrounds the garden space, with one gated access, which both gave safety during the performance from disruptive park users and clearly defined the space for the performance. Furthermore, the paths were wide enough for general access, the garden is

[143] In 2016 Perez started a campaign for a female statue in Parliament Square. This resulted in Gillian Wearing's bronze *Millicent Fawcett* being erected there in 2018.
[144] https://www.invisiblewomen.org.uk/theworks
[145] Mary Seacole was born in Jamaica as a 'free person' of mixed-race. She became famous for her care of soldiers wounded in the Crimean War, at her hotel near Balaclava.
[146] In 2020 Maggi Hambling's commemorative statue for *Mary Wollstonecraft* sparked controversy over the non-representational form of the sculpture. Public opinion divided over whether the statue should have been a likeness of Wollstonecraft herself.

continuously maintained, and the hedges around the paths are only of shoulder height, which meant that a 'statue' could stand on a small plinth and be seen from across the garden. The relatively intimate size of the garden also meant that five or six statues could be presented and still neither seem to overcrowd the garden nor appear to be too few. In late February 2019, I began the process of negotiating the use of the Walled Garden with the events team at Lambeth Council. By mid-March I had settled on the female roles of all five statues and on submission of the plans received the first go-ahead from Lambeth in mid-April. Final permissions were not confirmed until June 12, which delayed the casting of actors and finishing the costumes for the performance on June 30, 2019.

Community Data Collection

Concomitantly with choosing the site, I had begun to develop connections with community groups that were local to Brockwell Park, whose women members I intended to invite to interview. I concentrated on three different approaches: a Lambeth Library reading group, a Camberwell Timebank exchange and St Matthew's Estate Residents and Tenants Association, Tulse Hill. These three constituencies would give a proper diversity to the interviews, reflecting the local park users.

This new interview data was to inform the different statue personalities. My intention was to recruit several participants from each group and ask the participants for further contacts (snowball sampling) to build connected but separate networks of diverse socio-economic groups of women. Each group would contribute to one statue, making a distinctive participative outcome for their involvement. But as the relationships with these different community groups developed, it transpired that to create a group of mid-life female participants in this way would be an imposition (from me) on top of what were already complex life-coping strategies. To recruit participants who were completely through post-menopause, or before peri-menopause, would subvert the ethnography parameters of the project. Despite setting up requests and visits well in advance, the cancellation of one recruiting event[147] and the difficulty of getting some of the groups[148] together for an introductory menopause awareness session meant that interview data was collected late in

[147] A planned workshop at the Croydonites Festival of New Theatre on May 17 , 2019 at Croydon Arts Store.
[148] St Matthew's Estate Residents and Tenants Association.

the production process. The most successful event was the Menopause Reading group I instigated at West Norwood Library,[149] which generated three immediate interviews and two 'snowball' recommendations. Camberwell Timebank generated two further interviews, which were both after the park performance but were used in the final synthesis performance. All participants were working women or had been recently employed.[150]

Photo-Elicitation Interviews

To support the decision to move away from collecting text-based data in the second set of interviews, but keeping to a similar format and length of interview, I created a new research instrument. This instrument was a second interview schedule that retained the same beginning and end questions as the first, but used a form of photo-elicitation (PE) in the middle section. By adapting 'photo-elicitation' (Harper, 2002) as a method, visual images became an integral part of the interview, intimately linking the spoken response with image choice.

The different adaptations of PE allow for personal responses in an interview akin to the IPA method used previously. PE is often used to encourage participants to share their life/circumstances/interests/world view through the taking of photographs, which are then discussed in the interview. In this way, the autonomy of the participant is asserted, in that they can set the terms of the discussion, which otherwise will have been framed by the interviewer. The shift here is from an interviewee answering my (previously decided) questions to more dynamic participation in directing the focus of their responses. My adaptation asked interviewees to respond to a large number (100+) of pre-selected images

[149] I pitched this idea to Lambeth Libraries in February. The session was run as part of the Lambeth Libraries' 'Readers and Writers' Festival on May 29, 2019 at 7 pm at West Norwood Library, and it was agreed that I would be able to recruit participants for my PE interviews from those who attended. Three interviewees were recruited from this session.

[150] All the PE interviewees had worked in London. One had worked professionally as a carer, another as a senior manager in the Health Service until recently. Two were self-employed: one was writing a book and another owned two small bookshops. One worked for a charity, another two in different financial services, and the final one had worked in several offices. One lived in the Home Counties, the rest all in London. One interviewee was born in Asia, one in Germany, one in Scotland. Of the others, one identified as being from the north of England, one was a Londoner and another as having had a 'traditional English' upbringing whilst living abroad. One participant was autistic and two participants had a shared health problem, one of whom also had a progressive disabling disease. Some of the interviewees knew one other; one recommended two others as part of the 'snowball' sampling technique I employed.

by initially sorting them into two sets: 'likes' and 'hates'. They were then asked to re-sort each set into two subsets: one that would be a very strong feeling about the image (like or hate) and the second subset containing the images generating less strong reactions.

The pre-selected images were from a complete set of issues of the *Radio Times* between April and November 2019, chosen because it is a widely available printed magazine related to culture. It is aimed broadly at the UK population, but more often reflects the dominant[151] culture. The *Radio Times* is read by older generations rather than young people and does not have any left/right political affiliations. The interviews used this PE instrument to generate individual participants' responses concerning positive and negative visual languages about the mid-life woman. The menopause was discussed at the beginning of the interview, but the focus was to generate discussions with mid-life female participants by using the images. Ethical approval was granted in April by the University Ethics committee as a Level 2 proposal (see Appendix F).

The process of double sorting by the participants generated two sets of 'likes' and two of 'hates'. Concentrating on the images in the strong response sets, the participants then explained why they liked or hated this set of images, as I laid out each image from the set on the surface in front of them, making an instant collage of their responses. The immediate response was photographed as a record and then later re-staged in studio conditions. The interviewee was recorded and partial transcripts were also made (Appendix G).

By using images from two years before the interviews, the first six months of this research project, I wanted to avoid current trends and fashions that might trigger a 'now' response and to open up longer discursive answers that could be used to inform the character developments. The focus of this interview was how the women would define themselves, positively, in visuals and spoken language, giving a rich collection of likes and dislikes, together with specifics of their menopause experiences. The PE part of the interview was sandwiched between straightforward questions about menopause. The interview concluded with the same question[152] as the IPA interviews. (See Appendix B, question 6).

[151] Which in 2017 was predominantly white, middle class and patriarchal.
[152] 'Which debates around the menopause do you think important/would like to see staged?'

Site Response Visual Dramaturgy

On my second visit to the Brockwell Park Walled Garden in February, I realised that the empty plinth in the furthest corner from the entrance could be the central focus for the performance, which could be imagined as a 'competition' to choose a statue to go on it. This builds upon the existing idea of the Trafalgar Square *Fourth Plinth* commission programme, a familiar London event, but here the 'competition' was imaginary. Once I established the competitive construct of the scenography, I made the decision to design the statues myself, using the data collected from the photo-elicitation interviews (PEIs) to inform the characters. This would avoid any sense of real women competing against each other, which might have inadvertently come from developing statue designs from individual participants or groups of participants.

Finding the plinth confirmed the 'rightness' of the choice for the performance, and I submitted a written pitch to Lambeth Events for advice on February 25. They agreed to this use of the garden, which is not generally available for events. Following this, I submitted the application form in March. Permissions were granted in April subject to the submission of plans, a risk assessment and public liability insurance, and confirmed in mid-June (see Appendix E).

In scenography the experience of the spectator is paramount within the narrative, and therefore it was important in the performance to explain why the statues had been placed in the garden, circumnavigating a reasonable assumption that I was merely decorating the site. I also wanted to invite spectators to think deeply about the statues so that it would be a slow and contemplative experience for both performer and audience. The existing layout of the garden with benches and secluded corners, with some distance to walk between the statues, could facilitate the reflective thinking that was being triggered by the performance request to judge the statues, giving reasons for the choice. The active spectatorship would be evidenced through a paper-based voting system, collected outside the garden entrance.

To be responsive to the Walled Garden as a site for scenography, I carried out a number of site visits on a regular basis between February and June 2019. This enabled the

development process of the character work to deepen over the months, as the plants grew and the garden changed in colour and appearance. The juxtaposition of real garden elements and performance was intended to create a 'porous' border for the spectators, inviting them to make connections from the real into imaginary constructs (Hannah in (Aronson, 2018: 122). As I intended the spectators to come from the general park-going public rather than a theatre-going public, I was interested to see how much engagement spectators would have with the personalities of the mid-life (menopausal) women. There might be no appetite for the performance, and this would immediately be reflected in the nature of the feedback. I was also interested to see which ideas might be most appealing.

In addition to the empty plinth found in the Walled Garden, there were two park fixtures just outside the entrance that I developed into ideas for statue characters. To one side of the gate are three 1940s model houses[153] and on the other a white garden 'folly' known as the Temple. The models resembled doll's houses, which could be linked to character via Ibsen's Nora, and the Temple could reference the Greek goddess Athene. Both would be characters from literature and be linked with each other through Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), when Millett links the banishment of the 'Furies' by Athene at the end of *The Eumenides* (Aeschylus, 1956 [c 525 – 455 BC]) with Nora's final exit in *A Doll's House* (Ibsen, 1981 [1879]). Initially I envisioned using both fixtures as part of the performance, but the Temple proved to be too far away to use as an installation. Observing the behaviour of small children in the park, it was clear that they were used to playing in among the model houses and might not appreciate the additional narratives of a mother who leaves her children to go and 'find' herself.

[153] Originally part of a larger village, these are signed and dated on the inside by Edgar Wilson.

Image 11: Walled garden site photos taken between February and June 2019 *showing details of the park; Temple, walkways, view into the garden from Brockwell Park, wall sundial and empty plinth, entrance, spring blooms, model houses and olive foliage.*

From visiting the garden and looking at suitable places for the statues, which had to be on wide paths allowing wheelchair access rather than planted in flowerbeds, I chose five positions across the site, seeking out 'vistas' where the statue could be seen at a distance, amongst the plants, as well as from a closer encounter on the path. In addition to the first two statue ideas of Athene and Nora, I had also researched the history of Brockwell Park and found that a spinster called Mercy Cressingham had inherited the western side of the Brockwell estate in 1807. Cressingham was born around 1796, so was unmarried at the time of the inheritance, which automatically passed to Dr Thomas Edwards when she married him a few years later. The census records indicated that Mercy outlived her husband and died at the age of 55 years, so a middle-aged Mercie became the third statue.

The fourth statue, Helen, was one of the characters in *Puzzled*, and was most closely related to the women I observed walking through the park with dogs and friends on a daily basis. For the final fifth statue, I was interested in making a character based on the short story 'The Space Crone' (1989) by feminist writer Ursula K. le Guin.[154] Le Guin's Crone, although potentially older than a menopausal woman, represented a different female experience, who was family orientated and worked in Woolworths; this would intentionally represent a group of working women often excluded from middle-class feminist discourses, but fully representative of the local Lambeth residents.

Image 12: Walled Garden entrance with model houses left and 'Temple' folly right.

[154] The Space Crone. *Dancing at the Edge of the World.* (Le Guin, 1989: 3-6)

Living Statue Characters

The PEIs were used to flesh out the details of likes, interests and life experiences that make up complex personalities. 'Older' women archetypes with superficial stereotypical personalities dominate contemporary culture. In this context it is worth noting actor Juliet Stevenson's comment, as recorded in Lynne Segal's book *Out of Time*:

> She is asked whether there are fewer parts for older actresses compared with older actors. We know the answer. But she is quite precise: 'Yes, way fewer. And it becomes increasingly difficult. As you go through life it gets more and more interesting and complicated, but the parts offered get more and more simple, and less complicated. That's a battle we still have to fight. (Segal, 2013: 76)

Here Segal underlines the point that the premiss of the answer to her question is already known. But Stevenson's answer is very specific regarding the simplistic view of the characters of older women. Responsive to this issue, I wanted to develop complex characters and avoid stereotypical definitions that were only familial (mother, aunt) or professional (carer, teacher). The immediate research challenge was to find the characteristics of real mid-life women from the interviews, giving them depth by developing a backstory of personal details for each statue individually.

The statues' backstories were accessed during the performance from a dedicated website through the use of a Quick Response (QR) code displayed beside the statue. Spectators scanned the QR code and read the character description from their smartphone. Character ideas came mainly from the interview, and sometimes from the visuals of the interviewees themselves. Two statue names were influenced by interviewees' choice of actors.[155] The identification of an individual interviewee with a particular statue was avoided as undesirable because of the 'competition' context. Each of the five final statues had more than one element or personality trait generated from the PEIs.

The statue based on Mercy Cressingham was re-named Mercie to differentiate her from the real woman, as there is little information about her in the public domain. Historical research

[155] Participants were asked which actor or personality would 'play; them in the story of their life. PEI1 chose Olivia Colman and the name Olivia was used to anonymise her transcript.

from the 1841 census record suggested that the real Mercy was born around 1796, lived in The Grove, Carshalton, Surrey and died around 1851. However, the Cressingham Housing Estate, which borders Brockwell Park on the Tulse Hill side, was named after her, and this link was mentioned by some spectators in the park. Mercie's backstory combined her historical reality as a Victorian wife with elements from IPAIs which resonated with nineteenth-century female lives: mentions of patriotism (PEI3), her charitable works (PEI2) and the importance of family (PEI5) using the census dates placed the real Mercy in the menopause from 1841 to 1851, so Mercie wore the distinctive dome-shaped skirt from the 1850s period.

Olive was a modern version of an ancient statue of Athene, known to be missing from the Parthenon, but described in the mid-second century AD (Beard, 2010 [2002]). The description is of a gold-leafed wooden statue, which was assumed to have been burned away before the fifth century AD. In using the idea of this actual missing wooden statue to create an imaginary 'missing statue', I re-named Athene as Olive, linking with the olive tree (part of Athene's mythology) growing beside the empty plinth in the garden. Athene here had become 'the patroness of women's work… Ergane, Worker' (Warner, 2000 [1985]: 90), which I intended to side-step some of the allegorical and mythical baggage, moving her away from a purely patriarchal narrative. The actor playing Olive incorporated knitting into her performance (PEI5's craft hobby). PEI2, PEI3 and PEI4 all mentioned travelling overseas, intimated on one level by the journey undertaken from the Parthenon to Brockwell Park, but also in the widespread influence in British public statuary of interpretations of the classical Greek goddess as Britannia (Warner, 2000 [1985]: 47).

Nora's backstory, whilst linked to the original *A Doll's House* (Ibsen, 1981 [1879]), also drew from *A Doll's House, Part 2* (Hnath, 2018), in which Nora is aged 45 years and therefore arguably menopausal. The older Nora was now independent, having educated herself (PEI4), but had not yet been divorced and so was still married (PEI1 and PEI5). Young Nora is referred to by her husband as 'his' little bird, referenced in the costume through the suggestion of clipped feathers:

> You are not going to clip my wings, you shan't stop my flight. I'll free myself even if it means tearing you out of my heart. (Goldman, 2006 [1931]: 127)

Nora's costume had different detailing for the left and right sides of her body. One side reflected her married status, with an intricately coiffed hair style, puff-topped long-sleeved blouse and tight-boned waistband, whilst the other side was less formal, with bare arm and loosely plaited hair. An 1870s bustle shape was formed by male shirts tied by their sleeves, encasing her body to form the drapery, with feathers cut into the fabric of her dress.

Violet's name was taken from the performer Mary Violet Leontyne Price (PEI2), which, together with the violets found in the garden, influenced the colour choice for her statue's overall-type utility space suit. Her backstory referenced swimming weightless as a child (PEI2) as being similar to floating in space. Finally, her work as a carer (which had been updated from Le Guin's story as Woolworths is no longer trading), and her preference for 'cleaned' places both came from PEI5. There were numerous drifts of purple flowers in the garden during the spring and early summer, linking the statue closely with the colours that surrounded her in the flowerbeds.

Helen's statue (a modern park user) wore a version of 2019 summer streetwear: loose oversized shirt, trainers and a large cross-body bag. Helen's backstory had the most links with the interviews, which was appropriate given her 'park user' designation within the statue scheme. The 'copper' colour of PEI3's hair became the colour choice for Helen's statue, and the coloured band on the same participant's own skirt inspired a distinctive band on Helen's bag. The story of audacious youth also came from PEI3. Her self-care routine came from PEI2, her love of abstract art from PEI1, and carrying a big bag came from PEI4 and PEI5. Helen's description ends with a quote from PEI5 that if you talk to other people about your life experiences, it can make you 'feel a lot better' (Appendix G: 27).

Each of the statue costumes referred to a different material construction. Mercie, an actual historical person (aged verdigris copper); Olive (burnt wood) and Nora (white stone) related to the two park features at the entrance of the garden. Violet, the space crone (flame

opal[156]), and Helen (bright new copper) reflected the park users themselves. Through experimenting with stiffening and colouring materials, I first considered a highly realistic statue-like finish for the costume. But this changed to a more familiar stylised 'living' statue costume approach, so that spectator choices would not focus on the technical accomplishment of paint effects or costume construction, but on the overall combination of visuals supported by narrative details.

Image 13: Drawings, notes and colour tests

[156] Real Violet Flame opals are found in South America, which reflected the non-European background of PE2. Opals have been found on other planets and are considered to evidence water residues, which form the colour and patination of the different colours and patterns.

Praxis 3: *Women of Brockwell (missing statue)*

Context

Praxis 3 emerged from the previous cycle of practice *(Puzzled)* as a related but new enquiry, intended to focus on the individual character traits of mid-life women, which are often obscured when focusing on menopause experience. This shift in focus revealed the absence of mid-life women in contemporary culture, particularly in representational imagery such as portraiture and public statuary. A new enquiry could also consider how a general public audience could be drawn into responding to a performed scenography by using public space and welcoming all spectators, rather than confining responses to regular exhibition/theatre-goers. This exposure to public opinions would indicate whether interest in narratives of female mid-life could constitute a point of reflection for an audience.

Within the scenography context, the choice of the Walled Garden site became the principal driver for both the visual ideas and the character narratives. The site also informed the choice of local community initiatives from which the second set of interviewees were to be drawn (Camberwell, Lambeth/West Norwood and Tulse Hill), the ethnography base for the performance. This performance was therefore site responsive, in that neither the scenography ideas, the character narratives nor the PEIs would have been the same if one of the other South London parks had been chosen.

The site responsivity and immersivity of the performance became more embedded elements as the ideas came to fruition; this site-specific collection of 'living' statues covering the span of history (Ancient Greece, Victorian times, 1870s, 1960s and present day) would also be reflective of other urban parks and could feasibly be re-staged elsewhere. The immersive nature of the installation was mitigated by the fact that some of the garden visitors would be likely to choose not to engage in the performance by voting, but still form an unpredictable part of the experience of those who were engaging. Immersive theatre practices are predicated on controlled environments,[157] whereas the park visitors were able to behave as they wished. The only control measure in place was the existing garden

[157] This is the case, I would argue, even when different experiences are offered within a production, for example in those that are closer to 'playable' spaces and incorporate role play. These different scenarios are generally prepared in advance through rehearsals, e.g. in *A Small Town Anywhere* (Coney, 2009).

regulations, prominently displayed on the gate. These ensured a basic level of safety for the statues and promoted the secluded, reflective atmosphere that the performance required.

The development process commenced with the use of familiar design methods: historical research, site photographs and observational drawing, which led into drawing ground plans and making models. These methods were all used to interrogate the first ideas, and develop them into finished designs incorporating the details from the PEIs. The choice of statue colours could not be decided until May (because the planting scheme was being changed by the gardeners). The site responsiveness continued throughout the latter stages of preparation, with the position of each statue only confirmed during June as the changing colours of the flowerbeds developed.

Secondary Research Questions

The secondary research questions had emerged from showing *Puzzled* and the audience discussion that followed it. The first question I had identified was 'Who are these women?' Where are their individual characters, since there are few cultural representations? Outside of menopause, what are their lives? Having decided to move away from a specific workplace, how could I keep the focus on women who work, whilst not being in the workplace? This was followed by questions around the nature of women's work: What historically would be the kind of work that women could engage with? Charitable works? Writing? Shop work or caring? In developing characters for highly individual women, questions such as What are they interested in? What do they like? What do they hate? could be posed through the use of the PE method, and this fleshed out longer answers than direct questions might have done. The question of how the interests and experiences could be presented as scenography formed the principal driver for the performance.

The visual languages of the performance brought together ideas from multiple sources: literature, the PE interviewees, elements of the park, public statuary and observations of the garden itself, in terms of the seasonal changes as the plants grew and flowers bloomed. The colours of the planting informed the final visual languages of the statues and their placement in the garden. By moving the text to a digital space, the visual dramaturgy of the statues was the pre-eminent language of the scenography. By utilising the existing empty

garden plinth as an imaginary 'Fourth Plinth'-type competition, it was possible to concentrate on explaining the details of the statue characters in greater depth. This competition is a familiar concept to many Londoners, and as long as the imaginary basis of the 'competition' was completely understood, then spectators could enjoy the process of 'judging' each statue and ranking them in order of preference, rather than engaging with the politics of garden ownership. This addressed another secondary question, which was how a scenographic performance could put representations of mid-life women before the public gaze and create active spectatorship.

The scenographic performance employed ideas that were drawn from history, literature and contemporary life, woven together into a performance that prioritised visual responses. The idea of the 'competition' was clearly understood, with a wide age range of spectators taking part, engaged in making individual reflections upon the statues and actively spectating.

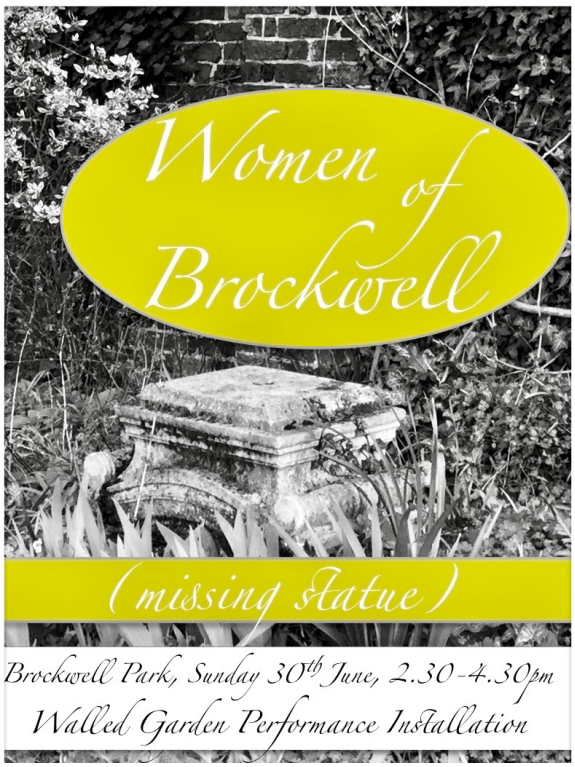


Image 14: Women of Brockwell (missing statue) poster

Details

***Women of Brockwell (missing statue)*:** Performance installation in the Walled Garden, Brockwell Park, South London on June 30, 2019 (120 minutes' duration). Site-responsive scenography with promenading spectators giving written feedback on voting forms. Collaboration with five female actors[158] and five female ushers. The performance lasted approximately two hours, with 55 voting forms collected.

Performance Account

The five female living statues were installed in pre-arranged places in the Walled Garden. At the gated entrance to the garden, visitors were invited to partake in the performance. All garden visitors were invited; this was not a ticketed event. The premise of the performance was an imaginary competition for a 'statue' to be placed on the real empty plinth in the far corner of the garden. The spectator was asked to view all five statues and then complete a voting form to rank them in order of preference, giving reasons for their choice.

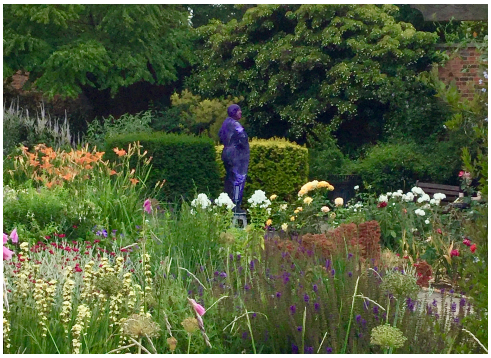
Each statue stood on a temporary plinth, raising them above the hedges in the garden. The information about each statue could be accessed by scanning a QR code at the base. Each statue was accompanied by an attendant (for health and safety purposes), who also helped spectators with the technical scanning process. The QR code took the spectator to a specially created webpage about the statue, which described the personality and backstory of the mid-life woman who was the subject of the statue design. A second information point was situated outside the garden entrance, displaying printed versions of the statue webpage details, and was where the voting forms were collected.

The statues performed for two sets of 40 minutes with a short break between. The 55 voting forms were counted on the day and the immediate 'winner' of the plinth 'competition' was announced as the end of the performance. The full results, which were the scores using the numerical scoring system outlined below, were loaded up on the website soon afterwards.

[158] *Mercy- Angela Harvey, Violet- Georgie Talbot, Nora- Claire M. Perriam, Helen- Janet Naghten Olive- Pamela Jikiemi*








Images 15: Women of Brockwell (missing statue)

Performers and Ushers

The statue performers were mid-life women actors recruited through a combination of previous work together and word of mouth, as the advertisement placed on a casting website (Mandy.com) did not attract applicants. The performers were rehearsed during their fitting. They were asked to develop an interior narrative for themselves, based on the character descriptions on the website. As the statues were not busking, they were asked to engage through looks and posture. The statues were allowed to shift position when needed, rather than being triggered by money as they would on the street, and were not allowed to make any invitation for physical contact or to give anything to spectators. Several descriptions of performing in the street were shared with the performers as preparation for their statue performance:

> On the street, artists succeed or fail by virtue of their raw ability to create a show in unexpected circumstances, to thoroughly entertain an audience that did not expect to be one, and to make random people care for a few minutes. (Palmer, 2014: 29)

What I was hoping to achieve was in the nature of 'sudden, powerful encounters with people' (ibid.: 30). The success of this aim can be evaluated in the analysis of the comments by spectators, overwhelmingly positive on the day. Two performers introduced actions involving props into their characters: Olive was knitting a small square as part of her 'craft' backstory, and Nora using a small folding fan. Whilst there are many different types of living statues seen in the public space, usually busking, the majority are either young and/or male performers. In 2019, 'floating' statues such as Yoda were often seen. Sometimes there were more individualistic styles, but none were of women who looked older than 30. The deliberate choice of presenting a mid-life woman in the public space and asking the audience to consider not just the visual presentation but also elements of her life story underscores the absence of narratives of ageing in public discourse. My collaboration with the female actors allowed them autonomy from the responses of the spectators. Given that the premise was not based on busking, movements could not be triggered by cash, and spectators had to attend closely to the performer to see how and when they moved.

Each statue was accompanied by an usher, to help them on and off the plinths, who was sitting near them during the performance. This was originally for health and safety purposes, to ensure the welfare of performers and garden plants. The ushers were teenage

girls, a younger female 'daughter' generation supporting the performance of mid-life women, the 'living' statues. My choice to use teenagers[159] as the attendants/ushers for the show contributed a new layer both visually and performatively. They were not costumed, to save drawing focus away from the statues, but each carried a tote bag[160] printed with the performance poster. Practically, they were a necessity to support the actors' performance, and the actors reported warm relationships with 'their' teenagers, which opened potential for further daughter/mother interaction in the next cycle of practice. But the ushers also engaged with the spectators, helping them access the QR codes and explaining some of the details of the performance, which supported the spectators' experience of the performance.

Feedback Collected from Spectators

The feedback from the spectators in the park was formally collected as part of the 'voting' process of the scenography. Spectators were invited to vote and provided with equipment, pencils and clip boards to facilitate this. The voting box was outside the garden on the display stand and clearly visible from the garden entrance/information table. The forms were printed on non-dazzling yellow paper, chosen to be user friendly and easily identifiable, and linking with the colour of the poster and other visual display material.

In total, 55 voting forms were collected in the box.[161] The form was designed to facilitate the speedy counting of first-choice votes within the time frame of the performance and simultaneously collect feedback comments for analysis to indicate what level of engagement had taken place. The forms asked for a ranking order from one to five for each statue, where one was 'liked the most' and five 'liked the least'. The most popular statue on the day was Nora (white stone), which received 21 first votes and was announced at the end as the overall 'winner'. The form also asked for two written answers providing discursive reasons for the choice of favourite and least favourite statues. The voting forms were numbered, scanned and the data uploaded into a spreadsheet (Appendix I).

[159] My then 18-year-old daughter and five of her friends.
[160] Containing bottles of water, suntan lotion and touch-up make-up.
[161] The actual numbers attending were slightly more, as not all the garden visitors chose to vote.

Analysis of Spectators' Voting Forms

The performance concluded for the spectators when they put their voting form in the box, having decided to leave the garden. All the forms recorded a first choice, although one (no. 2) chose four first choices and one second, and another gave two names as first choice (no. 36). Four forms numbered the first choice (nos. 3, 25, 28 and 55). One form had given only first and second choices (no. 49) and only 49 forms used the full scoring system. As the voting forms were an essential part of active spectatorship, there was no assistance in using the form, so no mechanism to ensure consistency in completion. However, it was the written comments that were important to the analysis, the rich soft data, which gave insights into the success of the scenography.

The voting system was mainly used to establish whether any of the statues had been unsuccessful in connecting with the spectators. Nora was the most preferred with 38% (21 votes) of first choices, with Helen in second place getting 25% (14 votes). Violet was the least preferred first-choice costume with 6% (3 votes), but this order was not simply reversed in the choices for least preferred statues. Here Violet was the middle choice with 20% (11 votes), whilst Mercie and Olive were tied with 25% (14 votes) each. There were five forms (nos. 3, 25, 28, 49 and 55) that did not complete all the voting choices, so the least preferred statue votes were distorted. However, a better understanding of the spectators' preferences can be obtained by considering the total number of points attributed to each statue in a numerical system.

Each spectator could cast 15 points, which meant that 55 spectators could have cast a total of 825 points. The total points recorded were 792, a 96% completion rate, suggesting a high engagement with the performance. This suggests that my aim of audience engagement through the scenography indicating active spectatorship was successfully accomplished.

A further question can also be asked of the data, which is to do with the individual statues: What level of interest did each one inspire? When all the points were considered, the overall ranking followed that of the first preferences, but the percentages indicated a much more subtle response to all the statues. When the total points were considered, Nora had

202 points (26%), Helen had 168 points (21%), Mercie had 151 points (19%), Olive had 137 points and Violet had 135 points, so the latter two tied on 17%. These overall vote percentages show a much closer spread of marks overall, with the top two over an even share (20%) and the remaining three remarkably close. My interpretation here is that all five statues were found to be interesting by spectators, who related to different strengths and qualities, and interpreted them as a positive affirmation of the mid-life narratives. This indicated that all the characters had the potential to engage interests, so could be take forward to a further stage of development in a subsequent iteration of the practice cycle.

The rich data that the forms offered was in the written comments, where the responses ranged from single words to short paragraphs. Three forms had no written comments (nos. 17, 26 and 51), two forms had one-word comments (nos. 6 and 12) and 18 forms had single-point comments. More than half of the forms therefore offered several comments on what they had liked or not liked about the statues, of which eight forms had ten or more comments. Four forms also offered a general comment on the project, written in the space at the bottom: two offered thanks (nos. 52 and 53) and two commented that it was hard to choose a favourite statue as they liked them all (nos. 5 and 35). There were no disrespectfully critical comments, which was impressive for a show open to the general public. Three of the forms (nos. 12, 14 and 22) were in children's handwriting and older spectators were observed taking part (not possible to identify by handwriting), evidencing that a wide range of ages were involved in the voting and enjoyed the performance.

My interest in the rich data was to understand how the spectators had responded to the statues, and I identified two questions that could be asked concerning the reception of the scenography and the level of spectator engagement with the statue characters. The first question was about how much of the statue's backstories was mentioned in the spectators' reasoning. This would indicate engagement with the text accessed through the website rather than how the statue looked. The second question asked whether the spectators expressed emotions or feelings about the statues or the performance as a whole.

There were 18 forms (32%) in which the reasons for preference referred to backstory information. These were mostly referencing details of their favourite statue, 'Nora's interest

in education and willingness to embrace life' (no. 43), or sometimes their least favourite as well: 'Mercie seems weak and without character, seems to settle without argument or opinion' (no. 29). Only one form used the backstory negatively: 'I don't like the ursula le guin' (no. 44).

The second question was around how the spectators were moved emotionally or 'felt' about the performance. This can be answered by identifying emotions expressed in the comments:

- I **love** this statue, it was beautiful. My choice is based on the likeness to a statue (no. 1)
- It was the most statue effect, less human. **Love** the expression on the face (no. 4)
- … I would **love** to see all of these statues as a permanent fixture in the park & in other public locations… (no. 5)
- She's **scary** (no. 7)
- Very beautiful & l**oved** that she (Nora) spoke many languages & travelled (no. 13)
- of the **scary** model! (no. 23)
- Less interested in the costume although still **love** the presence of the statue herself (no. 32)
- NB. I like all of them, there are aspects of all these women that I love (no. 35)
- the white created a sense of space and she was highlighted as she was clear to see against the gardens backdrops of green colours. I **loved** her attitude and the frills of the costume. It felt both traditional + contemporary at the same time (no. 39)
- the background for the statue really resonated with me And I **love** the style of the statue. Statue 2 was a close second for the same reasons (no. 46)
- I l**ove** the idea of a statue based on Ursula le Guin – not a type of character you often see as a statue (no. 48)
- Thank you for creating a thought provoking work and adding a wonderful element to a relaxing Sunday walk around the gardens. **Love** the highlighting of women from this age group. Good luck with your thesis (no. 52)

This can only be an indicative approach of how emotionally involved the spectators had become. Two responses are negative, but use the word scary rather than hate; the rest are enthusiastic about the character or performance, expressing strong emotional responses (love) from the audience. From this grouping, we can also see that three spectators expressing emotions (nos. 5, 35 and 52) understood the performance as scenography, the

whole experience. There were also three other forms that referred to the event as a whole collection rather than individual statues (nos. 36, 46 and 53).

The responses indicated different reactions to the connections formed with the performers. Two of the children voters (nos. 14 and 22) negatively commented that they didn't like the statue that 'stared' at them. Two forms (nos. 3 and 30) revealed that the actor playing Olive had winked at them. This was part of the actor's development of Athene's 'flashing eyes' (Homer, 2003 [1946]): 323) described in *The Odyssey*, and was given as the reason for getting a 'favourite' vote. Form no. 47 offered the most critical comment:

> I am programmed to recall Athene as goddess of wisdom, justice, warfare etc (even maths!) rather than "just" traditional craft skills and was a bit disappointed that none of the above were associated with "Contemporary mid-life women"! However maybe this is a telling limitation and unfair evaluation on my part of traditional craft skills! Interesting.

This criticism is couched in terms of being thought-provoking and a sense of self-reflection prompted by the work, which is an excellent example of spectator engagement. Also, the comment revealed that Athene has a considerable presence in classical history, which was unreferenced in the statue. Although my argument here, from a feminist viewpoint, is that Athene, as a representative of patriarchy, has only a limited resonance with mid-life women, this was also remarked upon in the comment. Still, I was reminded that classical references can only be deployed with care within the scenography, because of the complexity of their multiple reference points. Form 28 only voted for Olive and commented 'I am a socialist', which showed that they had completely understood the political context of the performance, which was also indicated in the references to Nora being 'independent' (nos. 29 and 37): Mercie emanating 'power' (no. 32), Helen reflecting 'calm modernity & confidence' (no. 5) and Violet as 'an older looking woman being able to represent the human race' (no. 47).

The importance of the written comments collected from the spectators both evidenced the connection of the spectator to the scenography and confirmed adjustments that might be necessary in the next and final cycle of practice. I decided not to encode the soft data, which might cause a rupture in the practice cycle, because new thinking would be generated by my choice of analytical tools, rather than identified through my practice. This could mean that a close reading of audience feedback might assume too great a part of the

synthesis process, subverting the final praxis outcome towards pleasing an audience. This isn't necessarily a negative thing, if pleasing the audience is an aim, but in the synthesis my emphasis rests on answering the research questions, which the audience feedback was not immediately geared towards.

The unusual event of mid-life women as living statues did not elicit any negative comments from the public either about the ages of the women or the fact that they were only women. I did not describe the living statues as a response to the paucity of female statuary in the UK, and only one form (no. 52) commented 'Love the highlighting of women from this age group', noting the unusual feature of the performance. Menopause was not named in any statue's backstory, and the mid-life age of the characters was not specified other than through the performer herself. Two backstories included some references to husbands (deliberately referencing patriarchy) and one of grandchildren, indicating that these were not young women. The feedback indicated that all the narratives were enjoyable and that for some, it was difficult to choose a favourite. The combination of visual languages with some narrative had proved important to facilitate deeper understanding of the ideas. A few spectators referenced the visuals only for their choice. The feedback evidenced a high level of positive engagement with the scenography, through active spectatorship.

Reflection on the Scenography

The scenography had addressed the absence of female statuary in the UK, and of mid-life women in particular, through making a intervention: a performance of 'living statues' in a public park space. Using a popular form of 'street' performance within the familiar 'Fourth Plinth' public culture concept enabled a public audience to actively engage with and respond to the performed scenography. The identification of a 'missing' statue through the empty plinth, and subsequent redressing of 'absence; by creating competing visual narratives, connected positively with the Walled Garden visitors. One form (no. 39) commented that Nora's statue 'created a sense of space and she was highlighted as she was clear to see against the gardens backdrops of green colours', and this linking of creating space with the addition of the statue and the combination of visual languages showed the achievement of the scenography and evidenced a high level of engagement through active spectatorship.

Spectators behaved respectfully to the statues, and were observed reading the information aloud in front of them, often to share with their companions. Using teenagers as attendants facilitated the use of QR code technology and also introduced a new and significantly different layer of energy into the scenography, that of the younger working women and their relationship to the mid-life statues.

Whilst the visual language was the primary dramaturgical driver of the performance, the support from the written narrative accessed on an individual basis through the spectator's smartphone was an important element for many spectators. However, the feedback forms suggested that for other spectators it was the look or material that had been the basis of their judgement, the visual language rather than the written narratives. The visual language of each statue made each one a complete visual statement, whilst the group of statue colours – copper, wood, white stone, blue/green and violet – could be interpreted as including some reference to the suffragette movement.[162] The inclusion of narratives from the PEIs contributed a more real sense of personality to the statues' backstories – 'hoping that the spaceship will be clean!' (no. 47) – whilst not distracting from their presence in the garden. The stillness of the statue performances highlighted the restraint (and physical stamina) of the actors, which this time did not overpower the visual language of the scenography.

Reflecting on the spectators' feedback informed the next stage of the practice development in terms of strengthening narratives and exploring possible tensions. The next stage of practice did not intend to 'fix' the character ideas for the audience's approval. However, reflection on the scenography together with the way in which spectators had interacted with it (including their comments) became significant elements in the final practice cycle. That would synthesize ideas from all three performances, the three 'emergent constructions', into one final performance.

[162] Suffragette colours were green, white and violet, often worn as tricolour ribbon accessories by women at Suffrage marches in the early twentieth century.

Insights Emerging

Because *Women of Brockwell (missing statue)* (*WoB*) included requests for written comments on the voting forms, the insights emerging from the production were, in the first instance, connected to how the audience had responded to the performance.

The positive feedback about the installation, the statues and their backstories suggested that there were no perceptible barriers to representing mid-life women in this way using cultural forms. Using the abstractions of statue forms, strong colours and standing on plinths together with the colours of the garden meant that the women were very visible in the garden space. The spectators expressed connections that they had made with the backstory themes: freedom, self-education, travelling and speaking many languages were all mentioned in comments. The 'least preference' statue comments referenced a lack of connection with the backstory. So I had developed narratives of female mid-life that could interest audiences, but were not universally enjoyed. By concentrating on the visual language as a performance, new representations of mid-life characters had been created that were both understandable and relatable. As the audience had reacted so positively, it was possible to ask how this could be developed further in performance. If this statue did speak, what would she tell us about her life? What perspectives could she bring from her historical viewpoint? The connections made by spectators with the character narratives encouraged the possibility of further development into a performance where the statues could also talk.

The link between the PEI data and the statues changed over the development of the scenography. Once the interviews were underway, and intending to rebalance the performance towards visual dramaturgy rather than the verbatim text in *Puzzled*, I decided that I would again blur the identity of individual contributors, so that no one interviewee would be able to identify themselves only with one statue. In this way, interview material was used to develop depth of characterisation, rather than the main narratives that were informed by the elements of the park. But the questions emerging here were about how the PEI material could be interpreted more closely into the scenography as an integral part rather than as details of life experience. How could this be achieved without losing the

visual dramaturgy? How could this ethnography-based data be re-interpreted into scenography?

The question of representing menopause had clearly been put to one side in *WoB* to concentrate on representing the women who go through it. But the questions that could immediately be identified here were about highlighting menopause as an issue. If there is no problem in finding relatable narratives of female mid-life for an audience, does menopause prevent that connection? In what way is menopause regarded as unknowable? Does it repel the gaze? A further question began to form around the role of the young women attendants in the performance. One written comment (no. 53) referenced the positive contribution of the 'interpreter' giving the backstory details, whilst the statue performers themselves showed a warm appreciative regard for the attendants' support during the exhausting performance. In reflecting upon this, questions about cross-generational relationships between older and younger women (usually configured problematically as mothers and daughters) began to be identified. How do these cross-generational relationships function? Where are the connections? How are they operating if women find themselves unprepared for menopause?

Individual Narratives of Menopause

The individual narratives of menopause experience had been put to one side during the making of *WoB* to focus on understanding mid-life narratives that were being masked. Once the performance was shown, and before the synthesis of ideas for the final practice cycle commenced, I considered the menopause self-help information that had been referenced in both sets of interviews. Not all interviewees had made recommendations, but where they had, their self-help choices reflected not only the diversity of offerings, but also their individual interests. To indicate the complexity of the self-help menopause literature, in 2019 the Lambeth Libraries collection[163] listed 36 menopause books held across 10 different sites. The dates of these books ranged from 1987 through to 2018, and included the 2018 edition of Germaine Greer's *The Change*. These self-help books included information and self-management generally with an individual slant such as 'natural' menopause, i.e. not

[163] Accessed on 21/03/19.

taking HRT (Stoppard, 1998), or embracing post-menopausal life, i.e. not having Botox injections (Ruddock, 2015 [2011]). Information is also offered by websites such as Menopause matters,[164] also in journal form (Currie, 2019),[165] and more recently TV programmes such as Kirsty Wark's *Menopause and Me* (McCubbin, 2017) and *The Truth About … the Menopause* (Frostrup, 2018). Menopause Cafés[166] were started in 2017 by Rachel Weisz, inspired by Wark's programme, and have been successfully rolled out across the country. A Menopause Café is, uniquely, an opportunity for women to meet and talk about their menopause with other women, often strangers. They are explicitly run on a 'not-for-profit basis' (Menopause Cafe, 2021), in that no product promotion is permitted.

That the absence of public information about menopause was being filled by a complex system of self-help guides and personal narratives was one of the insights emerging from the interviews. Of the TV programmes[167] and websites[168] that interviewees mentioned, again it was Kirsty Wark's programme, cited by IPAI-2 and IPAI-3, which provided the 'business case' (Appendix C: 4, 21) that convinced their management team that menopause-related resignations might prove such a financial drain in recruitment and training costs that a menopause awareness group should be supported. Walk's programme is currently not available for viewing on iPlayer.

There was no single text or programme that all interviewees had read. None referenced any of the best sellers previously discussed, and although Germaine Greer's writings were mentioned, none mentioned *The Change*. Individual interviewees recommended books that they had found useful. IPAI3 recommended *Making Friends with the Menopause* (Rayner & Fitzgerald, 2015), a self-help guide that she strongly connected with; similarly PEI8 had found *The Autistic Menopause* (Michael, 2015) because she had a recent diagnosis of being

[164] Started in 2001/2.
[165] In 2005 Dr H Currie co-wrote a guide called What Is the Menopause for NHS Dumfries and Galloway. This was available in 2017 as a Menopause matters web-based resource, now no longer available. The guide did not achieve national distribution.
[166] The Menopause Café festival FlushFest 2020 was to have been held in Perth, Scotland in May 2020, for which I was invited to show my performance *Puzzled.* The festival was cancelled due to the pandemic lockdown and re-arranged for April 2021, as a virtual event.
[167] The Radio 4 menopause series, *Loose Women* on ITV, *The Tonight Show* and *The One Show* were all briefly mentioned in the interviews.
[168] Both Meg's Menopause website/conference and Oprah Winfrey's show and website were mentioned.

on the autism spectrum.[169] PEI1 connected with *Creative Menopause: Illuminating Women's Health and Spirituality* (Sharan, 1994), because she liked the perspective of preparing for the creativity of elder years, using natural treatments and emphasising the individual nature of menopause experience. This individuality finds resonance in *Red Moon Passage: The Power and Wisdom of Menopause* by American journalist Bonnie J. Horrigan. Horrigan eschews information of favour of menopause essays from female academics and writers, interwoven with her own menopause journey account. The emphasis here is on accepting ageing and becoming a wise old woman, drawing from

> folklore, fairy tales, pagan mythology and divination systems like the tarot and the I Ching, whose original versions date back to a matriarchal world view. (Walker in Horrigan, 1996: 61-62)

This encompasses virgins, nuns, priests, crones, grandmothers, goddesses and gardens: 'After she has her voice, and she's reclaimed that person she was before puberty, the garden flourishes' (Arrien in Horrigan: 205). The preference for the apologue language of Horrigan's *Red Moon Passage*[170] rather than the medical terminology of symptoms and deficiencies was expressed by IPAI1 and referenced by two artists at the Crassh[171] Menopause conference in September 2018.

The preference identified here, for finding un-medicalised narratives of ageing and life cycle transition, should be noted, as the exact nature of menopause transition is a very individual experience. Exploring this individuality had been enabled through the choice of PE for the second interview method, and the potential of developing visual languages that these generated would be picked up in the final cycle of practice, the synthesis. By developing scenography from the real interests of mid-life women, I would be able to open reflections on the individuality of the statue characters, and also the commonality of shared interests in a feminist staging of menopause. I would also begin to consider how menopause could be removed from the medical discourse, to find new expressions of the female life cycle.

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[169] Menopause and autism are significantly under-researched, because autism in females has only recently been recognised, and many mid-life autistic women have experienced menopause without knowing that they were on the autism spectrum.

[170] Horrigan's own phrase.

[171] I was invited to give a presentation about *Puzzled* at the *Reinventing, Rethinking and Re-presenting Menopause* conference held at Crassh (Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Research) in Cambridge. This was an inter-disciplinary event.

SECTION FOUR: CHANGING IN PUBLIC

The final practice cycle of this research project was conceived with the ambition to synthesise the ideas and insights that had emerged from the first three performances, with the secondary questions emerging from *Women of Brockwell (missing statue).* These clustered around the three strands (clews) of my research questions that would conclude my PhD project, and extend the definitions of applied scenography. Over and above these structural demands, I intended to use the large St Mary's University theatre to continue to explore the narratives of contemporary menopause experience both visually and performatively.

This ambition was challenging in terms of resources and finish, which is absolutely the norm in theatre practice. However, prioritising ambition of scale and the development of ideas, I chose to present a work-in-progress that was aligned with my research aims, rather than a fully finished production. This decision reflected the future (post-doctoral) potential of the work, and confirmed the 'emergent construction' through practice by making a performance at this stage rather than later.[172] Showing at an 'in-progress' stage meant that all elements of performance, visuals, text, sound, lighting and acting, were realised to similar levels of completion. This opens up the reflection beyond the immediate achievement, but also the potential development in any future iterations. That there was a risk of failure in attempting such an ambition should be noted, but the greater risk here was of focusing mainly on the immediate performance goals, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing production but with only limited future potential.

The decision to use an established theatre space was connected to a desire to claim the large stage theatre as a site for work about mid-life female experiences. Feminist theatre practice has customarily been quartered in fringe theatres or irregular performance venues and I envisioned the possibility of a take-over of a traditional theatre space, as a found 'site' that could stage menopause narratives to situate them within the patriarchal institutions of society, including workplaces, which I have established as one of the main challenges to

[172] The closure of all theatres from March 2020 until September 2020 and then again from November 2020 until the submission date in March 2021 meant that the decision to show the work-in-progress in January 2020 was sound, as the lockdowns would have significantly impacted my practice in this PhD project.

representing menopause. I conceived of the performance on an epic scale, which would establish the right of women to use the theatre stage to discuss life experiences (the change) and fully connect with an audience (public). The performance was named to reflect this and also named the PhD project: *CHANGING IN PUBLIC (CiP).*

Synthesis

The synthesis of practice began by considering what congruities or tensions might emerge from drawing the existing cycles of praxis. Given the importance of visual imagery, the primary dramaturgical driver, a balance would be established between the scenography, the 'post-dramatic' theatre-making practice, and the ethnography-based menopause material. The synthesis drew together ideas from the three previous performances, the two sets of interviews, the literature review and existing theatre performances and re-worked them in the context of prevailing societal concerns. It is unnecessary to try to remove theatre-making from what matters to people in particular times and in specific places. Individual spectators enter a performance with concerns from everyday lives, they form part of a collective audience and then they return to everyday life. So connections for the audience can be created, linking the world of the performance back to specific societal concerns, the real-world issues connected with the menopause.

Despite the existence of previous performance ideas, there is no pre-destined outcome in theatre performance-making. The parameters, the resources available, the current societal concerns and the choice of conventions – all impact upon an intended production that will temporarily form the performance 'bricolage'. As the synthesis of ideas from the previous cycles of praxis, it was nonetheless important to conceive of the final performance as having a discrete internal logic. The performance audience would be mid-life women and contextualise menopause experience broadly within society, but increasingly focus on experiences within the workplace, moving to the extremely personal and emotional experience at the end.

Feminist Theatre Practices

In choosing a large stage space as the fourth and final site for the practice, it was clear that the opportunities of scale (its size) and focus (theatre technology) opened possibilities of

using traditional theatre conventions. But these conventions also introduced questions of staged representations, i.e. imaginary spaces. This was a development from the preceding performances, where sites were used for their own qualities with imagined elements staged in relation to those qualities. Even though *Puzzled* had become a quasi-theatre space with lighting, the main narrative driver still focused on the presentational purpose of the cinema room site; this could be described as reality and unreality butting up against each other, with 'porous' boundaries (Lotker & Gough, 2013: 4).

Feminist theatre practice is usually associated with smaller studio-type sites encouraging intimate relations with the audience, such as Caryl Churchill's classic *Top Girls* (Churchill, 1993 [1982]), which is intended for a cast of six set in a series of intimate scenes.

> Materialist feminist theatre practice tends to demystify the representational apparatus by calling attention to, instead of masking, lighting instruments and the stage décor and follows a neo-Brechtian separation of actor from character. (Dolan, 2012 [1988]: xvi)

In *Puzzled* this materialist approach was very much in evidence, by drawing attention to the screen, the use of the backdrop and the jigsaw puzzle live stream. Using the verbatim 'real women's voices' included elements of menopause awareness, and presented older women as subjects in their own right, not the objects of a patriarchal gaze. But in *WoB* the references were to earlier forms of women's performance, 'salon theatre' (Case, 1988: 47), through the use of living statues.

The large space for the final production would re-connect with the real voices of mid-life women, but extend beyond the public boundaries of the workplace (IPAIs) into personal spaces (PEIs). It would also connect cross-generationally with the lives of younger women, emphasising the lack of communication and unpreparedness for menopause. This epic nature of the production would also afford the opportunity to reflect that, although the cross-disciplinary nature of this research project has been about resolving a real-world healthcare issue (menopause) through scenography performance research, the connection I had established between these two areas is something of a two-way street, because there is also reflection back into scenography from the impact of staging of menopause experience. This prompts the question: What is the resulting impact on understandings of scenography?

Image 16: Monument to the Women of World War II by John W. Mills situated in Whitehall.
Unveiled in 2005 as part of the 60th anniversary of the end of the war, the stylisation is intended to be universal. The choice of 17 uniforms hanging on pegs, celebrating the contribution of British women's work through the war, is said to refer to the way that women left work and returned to housekeeping at the end of the war. But it also means that women are absent from their own memorial, unlike animals or soldiers on other war memorials in London. An identifiable representation of absence. In CiP, the discarded costume pieces displayed hanging on the walls visually referenced this sculpture.

Patriarchy

The interrogation of Greek and Roman myths is a recurring interest within feminist writing, both for the theatre, such as *The Love of the Nightingale* (Wertenbaker, 1989), and more recently in prize-winning literature (Barker, 2019)[173] interrogating the patriarchal control and misogyny that form 'the foundations and scaffolding of the beliefs that shape our politics and our lives' (Morales, 2020: 2). This interest was already present in my own practice context (*Prólogos*) and represented in character form (*WoB*), which could be taken forward into the synthesis in the final production. By continuing to develop these ideas, the structure of this final performance shifted the presentation of personal experiences into a performance that could contextualise these experiences within the dominant patriarchal culture. This would open up the mechanisms of oppression for scrutiny and correspond with the 'epic' theatre structure espoused by Bertolt Brecht and Irwin Piscator (Brecht, 1965 [1964] , Piscator, 1980 [1929]).

Constructing a narrative from 'the Furies' in Greek classical myths not only connected with the change from matriarchal to patriarchal society, but also emphasised that mythology was developed through the writings of Aeschylus, the foundations of Western theatre tradition:

> The place where the myth is being narrated or performed may be in the narrative itself – perhaps the events of the myth are even set in the very place where the narrative is delivered. (Johnston, 2018: 79)

Referring to the specific nature of the Athens cave also draws attention to an obscured aspect of many Greek myths, that they were written to be performed in the theatre. This connection to an actual myth-site refocused my interest in Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* in which Athene persuades the Furies[174] to accept new patriarchal values and passively become the 'Kindly Ones' (Eumenides), to live in a cave under the city of Athens. This resolution is the pivotal movement from matriarchy to patriarchy, which, according to Bachofen, becomes the 'new' dominant structure within society. Aeschylus describes the moment when the old

[173] In Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, the Iliad is described as the starting point of all European literature. Barker's fiction is written from the perspective of Briseis, who was given to Achilles as his female war prize, and the reason for the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon with which Homer's epic opens.
[174] The Furies were chthonic Greek deities, daughters of the Night rather than Zeus, therefore pre-dating the patriarchal construct: 'the night cedes its primacy to the day'. Bachofen, 1967 [1954]: 110).

women can be bundled away out of society because their righteous anger and defunct reproductive systems were assumed to have no purpose.

> Classical plays and theatrical conventions can now be regarded as allies in the project of suppressing real women and replacing them with masks of patriarchal production. (Case, 1988: 7)

By making a direct link between the Furies and post-menopausal women on the basis of age, sex and emotions (anger), *CiP* would be staged as an epic synthesised composition. By rejecting the conventional masks of patriarchal theatre production, the theatre space could be responded to as a specific site and reclaimed for an epic representation of menopause experience.

Case's suppressing 'mask' of patriarchy can also be read as drawing attention to the operation of masking itself. It suppresses an existing element, to present it differently as another, but draws attention to itself as a cover to produce an effect (e.g. humour or terror). But for mid-life women, menopause is part of a double-masking patriarchal response.

Firstly, female mid-life is suppressed by a mask of ageism absented by patriarchy, but then a second mask of menopause experience covers the first. The menopause mask cannot be seen because there is a lack of education and conflicting information that renders the whole female mid-life invisible.

Contemporary Menopause Literature

By the final year of this research, a more public focus on menopause information was emerging in news reports and books, reflecting a new menopause experience: unpreparedness. This absence was reported by my interviewees and more generally through informal conversations as being something of a 'shock' and women not 'knowing' very much about menopause, other than that it is a life event.

Ada Calhoun's *Why We Can't Sleep: Women's New Midlife Crisis* (2020) received widespread publicity both in the US from Oprah Winfry's magazine (Pikul, 2020) and with an extract printed in *The Observer* (Calhoun, 2020a) in the UK. Calhoun marks the shift from Greer's

Baby Boomers' experiences to the next, Generation X, now encountering menopause, by inserting a new 'crisis'[175] in Gail Sheehy's construct:

> The contrast between our 'you can be anything' indoctrination and the stark realities encountered in midlife… has made us feel like failures at the exact moment when we most require courage. (Calhoun, 2020b: location 329)

The exposure of the raw nerves of anxiety about life achievements[176] for mid-life women in the US is echoed within the UK. Gains for women mean having both personal and career goals, a change from the either/or experiences of their mothers, but achievements accompanied by mid-life insecurities. Expectations regarding housing, relationships and income have fundamentally changed. Calhoun's generation are already stressed before encountering menopause, but it is shocking that three decades after Sheehy's confident assertion of women 'knowing what to expect', what we find is that absence of information has led to denial:

> For decades, women have had to argue that they could still work and function through those messy period-, pregnancy-, and menopause-related symptoms, and as a result we've minimized them, both to others and to ourselves. So as not to call attention to ourselves as women, we pretend it's not happening. (ibid.: location 2468)

This denial, implemented by women in the workplace, minimises not only their own experiences, but those of other women. In the Wales TUC menopause 'toolkit', a comment from a female manager – 'been there got the t-shirt – she will have to get with it' (TUC, 2017: 23) – rejects compassionate solidarity. The tension for professional working women as managers once through menopause is palpable. The reluctance to be viewed as 'victim' of their own biological make-up has been important for women breaking into traditionally male levels of management. One of the reasons why women may be under-represented at senior levels[177] is that only those who can self-manage their menopause within the patriarchal culture of the workplace are confident enough and able to keep their employment (Brewis, Beck, Davies & Matheson, 2017).

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[175] The 'mid-life crisis' was named by psychoanalyst Elliott Jacques as the title of a paper in 1957, later published, which looked at the experiences of great artists who entered a depressive period in their mid-30s linked to decline and death, which he explained in modern clinical language. Both the academic and the artists were male.

[176] Erikson's seventh life stage crisis between the ages of 40 and 65 is between Generativity vs. Stagnation, where being of use in the world, or becoming part of the 'bigger picture' and making lasting contributions, leads to feelings of success and accomplishment (Mcleod, 2018).

[177] The 'glass ceiling', which refers to the barriers that prevent women from advancing in professional roles, was referred to in my performance.

As with my own participants, Ada Calhoun's interviewees report that support from doctors is inconsistent at best, and at worst they are offered surgery without considering other solutions (Calhoun, 2020b: 879). The dissatisfaction with doctors (GPs) and what they knew or could offer was one of the recurring themes across both sets of my interviews. An inconsistent experience with doctors is frequently reported in the UK (Bristol Women's Voice, 2019: 36) with women also accessing further help having already seen a doctor, suggesting dissatisfaction (Beck, Brewis & Davies, 2019) suggesting that as many as 10% (ibid.) had not sought medical advice:

> These women decided for themselves whether menopause required medical attention, and even at the end of the twentieth century, many of them decided that it did not. (Houck, 2006: 10)

When women are offered medication (HRT), they do not always start taking it, (PEI1 had a prescription that she had never filled) and those who do start taking it, there is often low compliance (Gannon, 1999: 101); women do not always keep taking it. The usage of HRT (approximately one million users in the UK) is problematic, having dropped by 66% following health scares in the 2010s and not yet recovered (Robinson, 2020: 1) where that of its close neighbour, the contraceptive pill with over 3 million users, is not.

The most surprising inclusion in Greer's revised and updated 2018 edition of *The Change* is the repetition of the same list of 'unknowns' about the menopause that was in the first book, given that at least 40% of her first-edition material has been revised. Her updates concern contemporary points of reference – the Kardashians, Oprah Winfrey and Theresa May – as well as revisions of the scientific and academic debates. But Greer emphasises that nearly 30 years of academic endeavour has not substantially answered any of the fundamental menopause questions. None have been answered through academic work. Emerging from Greer's revisions to *The Change* is a new focus on the costs of menopause treatments, often considerable, which seems to indicate a shift in her consciousness that she is often referring to women with resources to pay for treatments. So Greer is sympathetic to journalist Marina Benjamin's *The Middlepause*, a personal and bitter account of menopause that rejects contemporary narratives of 'empowerment' (Benjamin, 2016: 34), but much less interested in discussing the 2016 revival of *Menopause The Musical.*

Greer is uncharacteristically veiled in her critique of the musical, merely (inaccurately) predicting box-office death, unwilling to consider cultural menopause experiences outside of her own milieu. Perhaps *The Change* should be regarded as the current state of menopause knowledge, comprising a slightly confusing composition of science, anthropology, fiction and opinions rooted in twentieth-century constructions of family and female empowerment, while embracing twenty-first-century popular cultural references. This confusion of multiple strands of subject-specific academic interests obscures rather than illuminates.

The absence of menopause, and mid-life imagery, is more noticeable in the twenty-first century than at any time in recent history. Menopause conversations between mother and daughter have been largely absent and workplace discussions, focused on difficulties, rarely compensate for the informal female fora of previous generations.

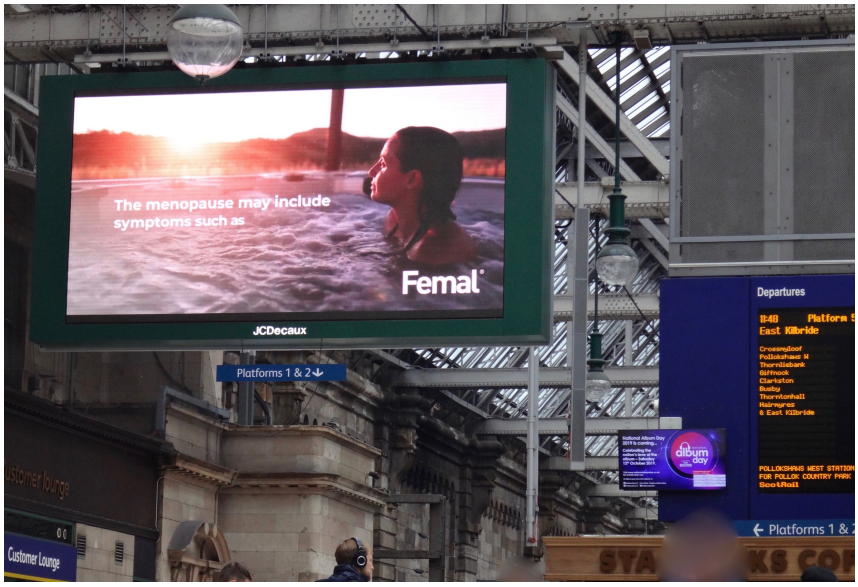


Image 17: Advert for menopause products. *One of the first sightings of a public poster in the UK, photographed in Glasgow train station in September 2019.*

Cultural Narratives of Menopause

Most narratives about menopause in theatre productions are foregrounded in the name of the show. The only commercially successful mainstream menopause drama is *Menopause The Musical (MM)*, written by Jeanie Linders in 2001. This was a cross-over from niche fringe audience to multiple international productions, a long Las Vegas run and a UK tour until the March 16, 2020 pandemic lockdown. *MM* was an American import that used familiar Baby Boomer pop songs with re-worked lyrics that referred to menopausal hot flashes[178], sleepless nights and weight gain, e.g. 'Stayin' Awake' (Stayin' Alive) and 'My Thighs' (My Guy). Linders wrote her show to entertain, 'a good night out for the girls' (Aston & Harris, 2013; 2), representing her own theatrical tastes. The show offered one-liner gags and powerful musical comedy mid-life female performances. It was panned by theatre critics, but attracted a menopausal audience that enjoyed the gallows humour of obvious tropes.

MM relied on the usual individual theatre conventions[179] rather than the 'porous' borders of scenography. The characters were two-dimensional and titled rather than named: Professional woman, Soap star, Housewife, Earth mother. This meant there was no personality beyond the stereotype and no previous relationship between the women outside an enforced menopausal sharing experience. This was a 'one size fits all' approach. The production aimed to convey escapism and camaraderie within the female domain of the shopping emporium.

MM did not offer menopause information and had no feminist position, given the adherence to the conventions of patriarchal culture: sanctioned feminine behaviour – shopping (temple of consumerism), squabbling over a black lace bra (cat fighting, provocative underwear: clichés of titillation), glamorous evening dresses (well-groomed consorts). These were 'masks of patriarchal production' (Case, 1988: 7) prominently displayed. All mid-life insecurities were played for laughs, with no interests beyond

[178] In the US and Canada the term 'flash' is used rather than the English term 'flush'.

[179] Murphy, B. 2018 [2001]. Menopause The Musical. Wimbledon Theatre: GFOUR productions. The setting is different departments of Bloomingdales store using four lift door fronts as the back wall. The design input (set, costumes, lighting) of this production did not merit a programme credit. The four mid-life women performers are all of equal status in terms of solos, duets and ensemble work. Without a chorus, the format is closely related to a musical showcase, with linking scenes.

menopause and societal roles. Catharsis (or orgasmic release) was almost mandatory in the build-up to the ending in evening dress reveal (walkdown frock) finale. *MM* is a pedestrian production using gallows humour to make a subversive theme commercially successful.

Gallows humour is a recurring feature of menopause narratives, in books (Wyer, 2013) and increasingly in menopause sets from mid-life stand-up comediennes such as *Invisible* (Beaton, 2019). This was popularised in the UK by the self-styled *Grumpy Old Women* of the BBC TV programme (2004–07), which later developed into several successful theatre tours.[180] The 'Grumpies' put forward a narrative of post-menopausal liberation and freedom from societal values; or, to put it more succinctly, from the masks of patriarchy. Resistance to 'the idea of keeping up ageless feminine appearances and behaviours' (Aston & Harris, 2013: 73) is almost always considered as subversion.

The commercial interest in the 'ageless' feminine appearance was revealed by Canadian playwright Judith Thompson, commissioned by Dove advertising (beauty products) to write an ethnodrama for and with 'real' women over the age of 45:

> It was subversion to even say pro-age instead of anti-age, and especially to showcase the voices, the stories of middle-aged and elderly women… Women who generally are invisible, and unheard. This was an act of revolution and I was very glad to be part of it. (Thompson, 2010: location 57)

Thompson's comment on invisibility clearly chimes with the overarching themes of this research, whilst her identification of acknowledging women's ageing as 'revolutionary' within an advertising business unmasks the patriarchal viewpoint that no one wants to see pictures of anyone who is visibly in their 40s or 50s. In her finished ethnodrama *Body and Soul* (2010), menopause merits a single-line reference: 'I was ravaged by my first hot flash but it was in the middle of winter' (Thompson, 2010: location 1161). Extra body heat on a cold day might be pleasurable and Thompson classifies this as 'bittersweet'.

Bittersweetness also runs through *Menopausal Gentleman* (Taichman, 1998) from Split Britches, with Peggy Shaw's butch lesbian lounge act interweaving comedy and tragedy,

[180] Written by Judith Holder and Jenny Eclair, the original show ran on the West End for four weeks in 2006. After re-casts, international tours and a second West End run in 2010, the most recent tour was in 2018.

maximising the lesbian menopausal experience in a double subversion of patriarchy. In Phoebe Waller-Bridge's short *Fleabag* menopause scene,[181] actor Kristin Scott Thomas muses on post-menopausal life: 'It is horrendous, and then it's magnificent. Something to look forward to…' (Bradbeer, 2019). A bittersweet reference, but in using the 'horrendous' descriptor from an older woman talking to a younger one, it conforms to the 'negative expectation' theory: that if women are expecting difficult experiences, their body will obligingly deliver one. In contrast, *Dun Breedin* (Sheppard, 2020), a web-based series, explored menopause and friendship between six female actors as the most recent public menopause drama. However, the group concept, combined with the restrictions of lockdown home-based film-making, framed a middle-class menopause, cushioned with wine and yoga.

Narratives raising consciousness of menopause, a feminist theatre convention, are featured in recent UK fringe theatre productions. *Of course I'm hot – I'm 50* (2018b) by Yellow Coat Theatre Company uses an 'every-mother' menopause approach. Via a layered clothing metaphor to represent the awkwardness of a hot flush, information about menopause punctuates mid-life family pressures. In 2019, two fringe productions dealt with the emotional shock of early menopause (POI): *Flushed* by Theatre Unlocked (2018a) examined a sibling relationship and *Dry Season* (Lyons, 2019) was an autobiographical one-woman 'journey' show. All three fringe shows developed menopause narratives around self-identity combined with factual information. The elements of autobiography that infuse them generate a sense of personal portrayal rather than universal representations.

The individual and personal female theatre voice was, in the early twenty-first century, monopolised by the internationally successful feminist ethnodrama *The Vagina Monologues* (*TVM*) by Eve Ensler. Like *Menopause The Musical, TVM* was also an American import, and it achieved high-profile success, being hugely popular with audiences but lacking critical acclaim. It is still (occasionally) performed in UK fringe venues.[182] Yet *TVM* claimed an

[181] Season 2 Episode 3.

[182] *The Vagina Monologues* is now mostly performed as a series of readings from women sitting in a line across the stage. The set background is unimportant: stages can be empty of set or use basic black drapes. High stools are often used to seat the performers, costumes are frequently the women's own clothes, predominantly in black, red or pink colours. None of the characters are named, but there are occasional indications of

avowed feminist agenda, breaking the 'fourth wall' theatre conventions by performing straight to the audience, with minimal movement. *TVM* celebrates the vagina and female sexuality by reading monologues worked from interviews. Some of these monologues are close to verbatim, some are composite and some have 'the seed of an interview' (Ensler, 2008 [1998]: 7).

The monologues vary in tone: most are positive but with elements of pathos, humour and irony. Some deal with traumatic sexual experiences, one is about war rape, another is about birth. However, Ensler does not cover the full range of female experiences. She has never written a monologue for menopausal women, despite claiming that it was an older woman 'saying contemptuous things about her genitals' (Ensler, 2008 [1998]: xxiv) that she credits as inspiration. Of the published monologues, only one, 'The Flood' (ibid.: 25) with its euphemistic references to 'Down There', identifies an older woman,[183] and no others suggest experiences of mid-life vaginas. This infers that there is an ageist mask in operation. The menopausal vagina has been absented:

> Whenever I have tried to write a monologue to serve a politically correct agenda, for example, it always fails. Note the lack of monologues about menopause or transgendered women. I tried. The Vagina Monologues is about attraction, not promotion. (Ensler, 2008 [1998]: xxvi-xxvii)

That Ensler overcame her strictures on 'political correctness' and fashionable feminisms to write a trans monologue[184] in 2004 only highlights the absence of the menopause more pointedly. Ensler's critics have been very vocal on her middle-class biases, but she contributes to the invisibility of the mid-life woman, despite being one herself. There is nothing in the show that opens an identifiable mid-life narrative. Clearly, even for radical feminists, mid-life pussy experiences are still not for speaking about or sharing. This brings us close to Gail Sheehy's original position: 'Menopause has been studied for many years. A woman knows what to expect' (Sheehy, 1976 [1974]: 315). In other words: nothing to see here, nothing to get upset about, everything will carry on as normal, you just need to be in

characteristics such as accents. The number of women performing can vary; they perform a monologue each or more, typically read from cards, rather than memorised. The monologues have been drawn from different women, but Ensler started by asking her friends rather than ensuring a representative spread of interviewees.

[183] Ensler prefaces 'The Flood' with an account of interviewing a group of women aged 65-75 years, most of whom 'had very little conscious relationship to their vaginas' (ibid.: 23).

[184] 'They Beat the Girl Out of My Boy… Or So They Tried'.

charge of your own vagina/sexuality. It is here that we see a mask of patriarchy slip into place. If there is nothing to see, then there is nothing to change either. Menopause doesn't need to be talked about if problematic middle-aged women's experiences can be disregarded as too 'political'. There is no real problem from the view of the patriarchal status quo.

That Ensler, as a 1990s feminist playwright, refrains from framing her work as any attack on patriarchal structures is interesting, but notable others such as Gloria Steinem suggest that Ensler offers 'alternatives' (Steinem in Ensler, 2008 [1998]: xvi)[185] to the division between parts (of life) that are spoken about and those that aren't. As the menopause has, until very recently, always fallen into a part of life that is not spoken about, and with mid-life sexuality affected for some, but not all, the lack of a feminist monologue on menopause or even 'post-menopausal zest' in *TVM* still retains a mask of patriarchy, that of biological ageism.

Developing Menopause Narratives

The impetus for the performance was to create an overlapping series of interpretations, which would move from the personal, through the workplace, consider both daughters and mothers and firmly posit the menopause as a feminist issue within an ageist patriarchal society.

It has previously been identified that menopause information is prolific, scattered, accessed according to personal need and rapidly expanding, through news reports, in the public domain. I therefore decided that menopause information would be kept within the verbatim scenes, as in *Puzzled*, and spoken in the testimonies of the interviewees rather than delivered in a new version as slides or handouts. This would avoid the performance becoming a purely didactic vehicle by keeping much of the original context of the discourse for the testimonies of experience. This also countered questions around objectivity – 'the less you include, the more subjective you have become' (Belfield, 2018: 89), so the verbatim material was grouped together rather than edited, and presented as a series of interrelated 'Work' scenes.

[185] As a second-wave feminist writer, Steinem has no qualms about using the word patriarchy, even in 1998.

In building towards this large 'menopause in the workplace' section, positioned just over halfway through the performance, it became an important part of the epic structure to present both younger and older women's experiences. So the medicalisation of menopause as a progression of historical attitudes was outlined by the three 'living' statue historical characters from *WoB*; a verbatim comment from IPAI2, 'the girls say they don't know anything' (Appendix C: 39), highlighted the ignorance of the Chorus of Young Women (CYW), a new set of characters. This knowing-nothing-ness comment was extended into a short exchange about menopause and emphasised by a flippant remark about whether someone could have 'caught' menopause off her aunty.

In the re-staging of the *WoB* living statues, the three historical characters – Mercie, Nora and Violet – were able to compare medical menopause treatments from their different historical viewpoints across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mid-Victorian Mercie spoke of taking to her bed and using 'herbs' (Appendix J: 14), whilst late nineteenth-century Nora talked of 'asylums', 'knives' and 'climacteric insanity' (Foxcroft, 2010: 170); Violet said that she had taken HRT and quoted Robert Wilson's 1960s advice, encouraging women to keep their husbands by staying 'young' (Appendix J: 14) and to avoid the tragedy of 'living decay' (Wilson, 1966b: 43).

Both sets of menopause interview comments (IPA and PE) were incorporated into the end of the *CiP* verbatim scenes in Act II, by using the interviewees' suggestions of 'What needs to be done about menopause?' These suggestions were used as a collection of direct quotes, giving a fuller insight into what women think needs to be improved about the current situation of menopause experience. The final menopause narrative of anger (Appendix J: 38) developed from part of the verbatim interview with IPAI1 (Appendix C: 12) with the post-menopausal 'zest' (Sheehy et al.) performed as a flash mob dance, which concluded the performance.

Visual Analysis of Photo-Elicitation Interviews

Before returning to the visual data collected as collages (the photo elicitation), I arranged one further interview from a volunteer recently diagnosed with autism, who was simultaneously coping with peri-menopause. This made eight PEIs in total. Using the photographic record of the likes and dislikes collages made during each interview, I recreated the collages and rephotographed them for better-quality images. In recreating the collages, it gave me the opportunity to consider the frequency of the images in terms of 'likes' or 'hates' relative to the group, which formed the basis of the visual analysis. There were no images that everyone chose, so there was no single unifying image. Of the images only chosen as 'likes', the glade photograph was the most repeated image (five likes) and was used as primary source material. The three 'likes' collages that did not contain the glade picture all featured the blue underwater whale picture (four likes), which was also used as a key image. Of the three other pictures with four likes, the fjord landscape was taken into production, but not the two pictures of animals.[186] Of the large number of images that were liked by some interviewees and hated by some, only one, the golden buddha, was taken into production. There was one single picture that was hated by all interviewees, the two boxers, again not developed further.

This analysis of images became the basis for organising the visual dramaturgy, the world and structure of the performance. However, this could not become a purely visual scenography, given the importance of the verbatim material collected from participants on the subject matter of the menopause. Still, the production ideas would, in the early stages, be directed by the visual language.

Visual Dramaturgy

The visual dramaturgy was initially driven by considering two of the three photographs that had come out of the PEI image analysis: the glade and the blue underwater picture of whales.

[186] The tabby cat and the panda photographs.

Images 18: The glade picture and screen projection *adapted from photo by BNW on Unsplash.com. The glade was subsequently re-interpreted using a copyright-free version of the original image (left) to be reproduced as a digital fabric print, for the costumes and in the projection during the performance (right).*

The glade photograph, a majority 'like', could be recognisably linked to the garden setting of my *WoB* statue performance, and the image of the natural woodland could be contrasted with the workplace scenes, experiencing a natural phenomenon (menopause) in an unnatural environment (the workplace). Furthermore, mid-life women could be closeted away from public view in a temporary holding place (or box) until they were allowed to emerge post-menopausally as old women. From this initial structure, elements from the previous productions were interwoven to develop this idea.

As the synthesis would be an epic production exposing the layers of menopause experience, the fundamental expression of patriarchal oppression would involve Greek mythology, previously used in both *Prólogo*s and *WoB*. By focusing on the dramatic banishment of Aeschylus' chorus of Furies, already remarked upon as the moment of patriarchal primacy by both Kate Millet and Friedreich Engels, this became the point at which the audience would enter the story. The cave in which the Furies *still* lived, having never been released, became a metaphorical holding place for menopausal women from which, in this version of the myth, they would emerge into public view.

This idea of starting from the cave at the end of the *Oresteia*, with the Furies imprisoned offstage, was inspired by Eaven Boland's poem *Listen this is the noise of myth* 'Invention. Legend. Myth. What you will. The shifts and fluencies are infinite' (1987 [1986]: 49). This creative plasticity confirmed the potential for extending beyond the mythic legacy of the Greeks rather than employing a narrative re-interpretation. With the audience 'placed' standing in the cave, it was obvious that they have to walk out of the scene to go and sit down. This real walking action linked to the reality of walking out of the mouth of a cave, towards the light. In the production, this became a reflected image of the glade picture presented as printed fabric on the kimonos[187] worn by the CYW, with their arms outstretched across the width of the seating bank. As the audience took their seats, the CYW moved through them onto the stage, and removed their kimonos to hang them on the side stage flats, as the screen projection changed to show the glade picture.

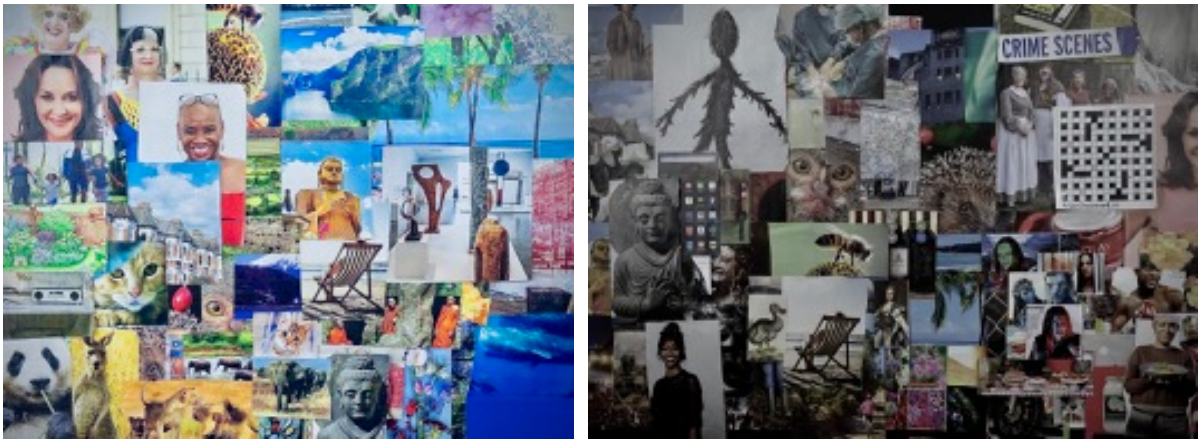
The glade of trees became the primary visual language for the CYW's scenes, later denied to the mid-life women boxed in the workplace scenes. The glade located scenes two, three and four, informed the direction of the CYW scenes and situated the living statues (scene four) within a specific natural environment to link with the performance in Brockwell Park. The CYW were firmly situated within the patriarchal structure of the classical world, a non-naturalistic chorus (Taplin, 1998 [1977]: 35), but individually characterised as modern embodiments of other myths: Echo (linked with the cave), Pandora (linked with a jewellery box mentioned in PEI5), Arachne (handicrafts mentioned by PEI1 and PEI6) and Daphne (running pastime in PEI8). The CYW characters were renamed as Ee, Peggy, Spider and Daff and dressed in contemporary shift dresses, digitally printed with photographic details of classical statuary.

Set between the two locations of glade and box was the 'changing' scene that culminated in the blue underwater projection, the second most popular 'likes' photograph. The 'changing' scene involved the full costume change of the statues into working women. Assisted by the CYW, the statue costumes were removed and hung on the flats, the glade kimonos were turned inside out to reveal a second printed image, and then worn as dressing gowns while

[187] Kimonos were chosen for their simple construction, potential for displaying coloured printing and because PEI1 referred to her love of all things Japanese.

the mid-life women removed statue face paint and applied street make-up. A literal changing in public.

Two of these three dressing gown prints were PE interview collages, one 'likes', the other 'hates', with the third print showing the blue underwater scene, which triggered the same image as a projection while the actor described a memory of being underwater from PEI2 (Appendix G: 9). During the 'changing scene' the dialogue was intermittent, and used verbatim comments from the PEIs. Two further layers of oppression were indicated in the dialogue. The necessity of removing statue face paint triggered a short interchange about advertising tropes and 'age-defying' face cream – 'It's so rude' (PEI2). PEI8 had complained about the hysteria around Christmas preparations, (Appendix G: 42), which in reality had taken place three weeks before the show so this began to blur the border between performance and real experience indicating the shift towards real-life concerns.



Images 19: Collages used for kimono prints 'likes' (PEI6) and 'hates' (PEI5)

The emerging synthesis of this structural idea with other elements already introduced in previous performances opened up more opportunities to move away from the realism of the ethnography-based material and accommodate the abstraction of the living statues, which would now be able to talk, along with the idea that menopause would arrive as a surprise parcel delivery. This idea was first used in *Puzzled,* but here also linked to PEI3, where a delivery was received during the interview, and some of the dialogue was used verbatim.

The abstractions also gave the possibility of repeating sequences to give different perspectives on events, such as in the living statue scene, which was played twice with the same movements. The first time only the CYW spoke, and the second time through, the statues spoke, commenting on the dialogue of the CYW, comparing their life experiences. Only the CYW menopause exchange about 'not knowing' was spoken during the statue dialogue, which generated the statues' discussion of historical menopause treatments. The first half of the play used the line 'I have a parcel for you' (Appendix J: 2) as the keystone of the repetitions accompanied by a rewind sound effect, at which point the action was reset. Across all the scenes laughter was used subversively, 'to break up the "truth"' (Cixous, 1981 [1976]: 258), starting in the CYW scenes and later as cross-generational solidarity. The intention was to emphasise the elements of the bittersweet gallows humour of *Prólogos* to focus more acutely on the difficult menopause experiences of a contemporary working woman.

Synthesis of Ideas

Not all the *WoB* living statues were taken into the synthesis. The character of Athene seemed too fixed in public discourse (comment no. 49) and compromised as the deciding vote for patriarchy for the original Furies. So the messenger god Hermes (a non-speaking role in *The Eumenides*) became the onstage patriarchal representative. Hermes,[188] the bringer of life experiences, now as a gender-fluid mythological remnant of patriarchal dominance, 'delivered' the menopause parcel.

[188] A name also adopted by a modern delivery company.

The copper-coloured statue, Helen, first developed in *Puzzled* and then a contemporary Brockwell Park user in *WoB,* became the main character of *CiP*. Helen, as a working woman, greeted the audience into the cave as a site and then invited them to be seated, breaking the fourth wall by interacting with the audience. As an 'every-woman' Helen received the menopause parcel and worked through the experiences and emotions of menopause experiences, first hot flush, uncertainty and anger, culminating in a 'meltdown' at the end of the verbatim 'Work' scenes that subverted the suppressive expectations that women should not become emotional[189] in public.

Helen's costume included the copper-coloured trainers and cross-body bag of the statue. In the statue scene, her absence was indicated by the copper-coloured plinth and described as 'invisible' by Hermes. In her 'changing' scene, Helen was also draped with a dressing gown/kimono printed with a 'likes' collage, then also projected on the large screen that began to follow Helen's utterances, shifting the screen images to representations of her thoughts.[190] As elements of costume were removed, they were hung on the side flats. So the statue garments with the kimono/dressing gowns, and Helen's copper cross-body bag, were a visual nod to the absent women of the Whitehall War memorial.

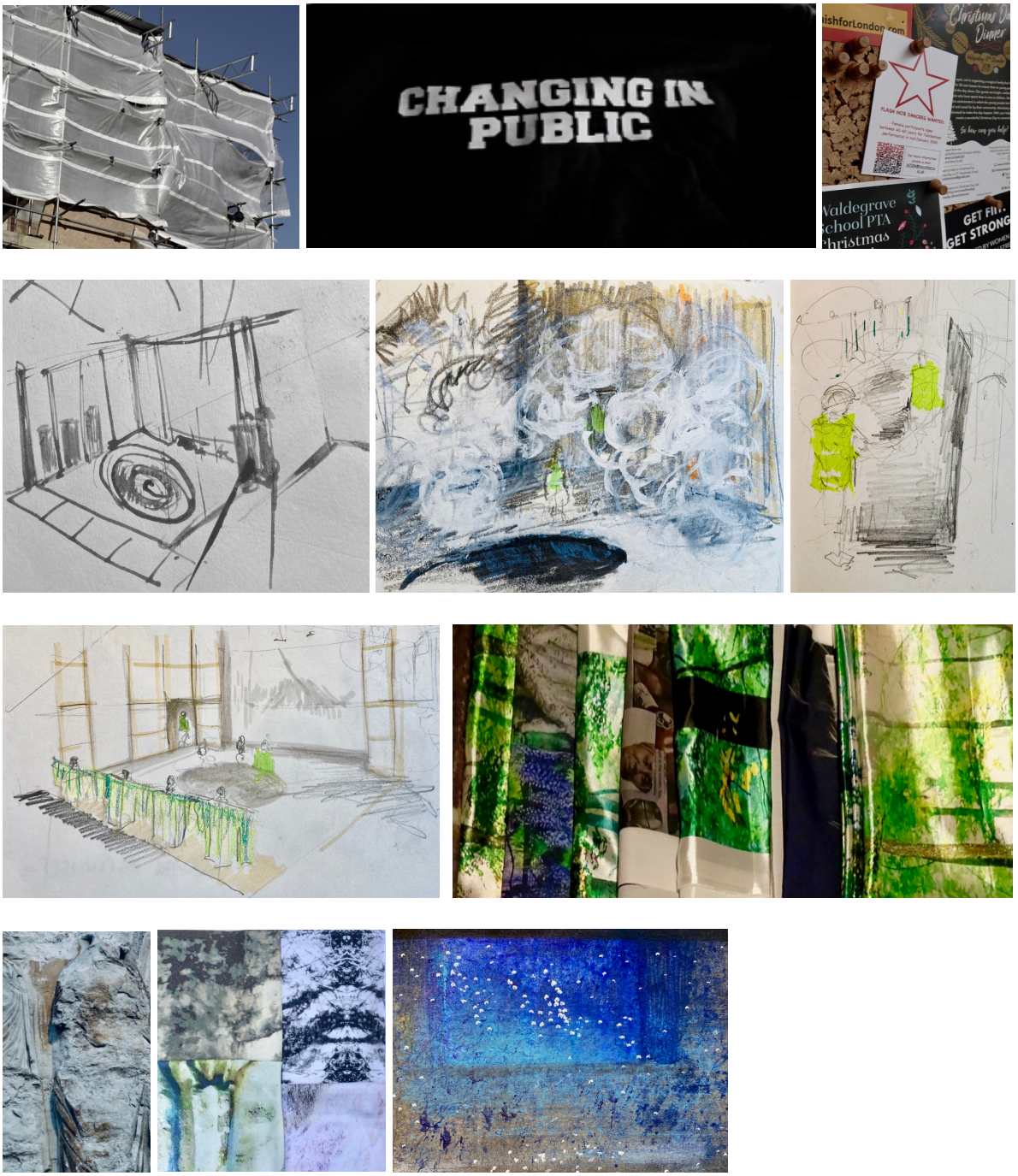
Images 20: Costumes hanging on set *referencing the Whitehall war memorial photos © Ana Escobar*

[189] In September 2020, Attorney General Suella Braverman accused Labour MP Ellie Reeves of becoming 'emotional', 'a term often considered a "misogynistic trope in an exchange"' (O' Carroll, 2020).
[190] Both the fjord and the golden buddha pictures were chosen during rehearsal by the actor playing 'Helen' as images that she felt a connection with in the 'likes' collage projection.

The three other statues, Mercie, Violet and Nora, were all used in the living statue scene. Following the feedback from the park audiences, adjustments were made to their personal stories, which were originally expressed through the website and now in their dialogue. Adding more detailed material from the PEIs made them more rounded characters and introduced the elements of patriarchal oppression: family, marriage, employment, as well as menopause experience.

The feedback from the park audience had suggested a general level of satisfaction with the look of Mercie's verdigris statue. Her backstory included two new strands – one about reading books and one about Jane Austen (from PEI3 and PEI4). The real Mercy Cressingham had lived with her brother (family patriarch) and her Brockwell Park property legally passed to her husband on marriage. But *WoB* spectators had commented on her passivity (comment no. 29), so an invented narrative of a girlish ambition to set up a school (Wollstonecroft, 1792: 135) on her inherited land opened a new feminist connection with the audience.

Violet, the Space Crone statue, was recast with a black actor and her narratives of the oppressions of poverty and the lack of opportunities for working-class women were explicitly included, emphasising that she represented an unusual choice as the 'representative of the human race' (comment no. 49). The third statue, Nora in white stone, had been the spectators' most preferred choice, but the comments appreciated her physical looks as well as the narrative. Nora was therefore recast with a new performer to be more physically similar to the other two statue actors, both of whom had performed in the park. Nora's narrative was one of 'finding herself', which introduced the theme of oppression within marriage leading to liberation through the sexual revolution. Patriarchy views the menopause as a state from which women can only be 'saved' by medicine. It is an unattractive state that, once passed through, will never allow a backtrack to youth. Menopause therefore renders women invisible, locked away from public view.



Images 21: CHANGING IN PUBLIC work-in-progress details and drawings

Praxis 4: *CHANGING IN PUBLIC*

Context

This final cycle of praxis was in preparation for three months from October 2019 until mid-January 2020. Initially intended as a public performance, my intention shifted to a more realistic quasi-work-in-progress presentation, allowing the fullest development of the ideas for an invited audience. No audience feedback was collected either during or after the performance.

The first theatre site visit in September 2019 confirmed that the theatre was equipped as a flexible black box space with a large seating unit, giving an 'end-on' stage configuration. My initial response was to put the comfort of the menopausal spectator[191] at the heart of the scenography, but to find ways to fully engage them in active spectatorship. This consideration led to the development of the first new performance idea, which was based on the idea of the Furies: a dancing flash mob of Furious Women emerging from the seated audience at the end of the performance. At the beginning of this 'journey' the audience would enter onto the stage itself, subversively using the 'pass door' (Baugh, 2013 [2005]: 202) and finding itself at the heart of the performance, closely interacting with the leading actor before being asked to take their seats.

This formed the structure of the audience experience: the audience would enter as visitors, welcomed into the performance like tourists. When seated, they would be introduced to the menopause layers, through scenes with young women, very old women (living statues) and then the contemporary mid-life woman, drawn in deeper and more personally through the use of the verbatim material. So *Puzzled* became a discrete section, contextualised within a larger epic construct. To respect the previous cycles of praxis within the synthesis, recognisable elements of both *Puzzled* and *WoB* were retained. The emergence of the flash mob from amongst the audience completed the audience's 'journey', emphasising that menopause is not a distant event, we are all involved, it happens to friends, family and us.

[191] Making an immersive performance for an audience of menopausal women who may already be experiencing physical challenges necessitated proper chairs and a degree of physical comfort.

Secondary Research Questions

From the insights emerging from *WoB*, the question that had been clearly identified was around the absence of connection with narratives of mid-life: Since there was no problem for an audience asked to connect with these, does menopause prevent that connection, and if so how and why? And who could be held responsible? Further questions clustered around a cross-generational narrative: What are the connections between younger and older women? How well are they operating if women are not being prepared for menopause?

One of my key secondary questions was how to avoid giving the verbatim text dominance over the visual. So by developing the performance structure from the real interests of mid-life women through revisiting the visual elements created during the PE interviews, I would be able to elicit the commonality of interests that thus far had evaded my research. Using the living statue costumes within the performance opened further reflections on the individuality of the statue characters, what their lives had entailed and what perspectives they could contribute to an understanding of menopause. How could menopause be removed from the medical discourse and expressed as part of the female life cycle?

As in the three previous performances, I responded to the site as a site rather than a theatre. By asking what were the 'epic' possibilities of the open space, I removed the black theatre drapes, exposed the brickwork and pillars and painted the floor white, leaving a central black 'island' of the original black floor. Additionally, there were found elements (existing theatre conventions) kept within the theatre: projection screen, flats, stock doors and rolls of hessian fabric. Painting the floor was the first creative expression within the space; a rollered first coat painted in different directions with patchy coverage was an obviously temporary switch from black to white.

This immediately called into question the material qualities of the floor: What did the paint represent? A painted finish is very different to the surface of flooring, so invented representation becomes an elemental quality. The decision to leave the floor as a first-coat 'paint' influenced the temporary and makeshift nature of the eventual stage space by using the back of the existing full-height theatre flats, three self-standing stock doors that, together with the theatre projection screen at the back, made a basic box structure

completed with infills of old hessian and rolls of cardboard. The resulting flimsy 'temporary shelter' box-type construction, dominated by a huge projection screen, was the resultant 'cave' for contemporary menopausal women. This resolution addressed the abstract question of where menopausal women are 'kept' away from public view.

The choice to use a large projection screen as backdrop related to the dominance of screens in contemporary life (TV and computer), very often the medium of choice for popular entertainment and news. In the second half of the performance, the screen had a material screen *qua* screen presence. Attention was drawn to this in the parcel delivery scene, when two PEI collages were shown on the screen and linked to Helen's positive ('likes' PEI6)[192] and negative ('hates' PEI5) mindsets, whereas in the verbatim scenes it was left blank.

In the first scene, the screen was used more conventionally, at first to present a representation of the cave as the audience entered, to situate the work in the Furies Cave, from which the audience left by walking towards the glade image reflected (printed) on kimonos worn by the CYW. As the audience took their seats, the glade photograph became the next scene imagery, projected on the full screen. This use of projections related to a Plato's Cave' (Plato, 1976 [c.4th century BC]: 207) reading of the scenography, in which reflected imagery (shadows) was understood as 'real' life by the inhabitants of the cave, originally the Furies in their cave, now menopausal women in a temporary box. In the final scene, the Furious Women, the flash mob, filled the projection screen with multiple colourful dancing shadows, ready to break out of both cave and box – a new expression of menopause transition.

Details

CHANGING IN PUBLIC: Performance in St Mary's University Theatre on January 11, 2020 (approx. 60 minutes' duration). Site-responsive scenography with an invited audience (approx. 20) promenading for the first scene, then seated. Collaboration with ten actors (all

[192] The same 'likes' collage was also printed on Helen's kimono, draped over her as she entered into the 'parcel' scene.

female[193]), a choreographer,[194] technical support from St Mary's technical support and three work experience assistants.

Performance Account

The audience waited in the foyer until the beginning of the performance. In small groups of ten or less, the audience entered into the small side entrance space and received an 'airlock'[195] briefing from Hermes, disguised as Angela, an usher. The briefing completed, Hermes then escorted the audience group through the backstage darkness and introduced the idea of the nearby sleeping Furies, who should on no account be wakened. Hermes then opened the 'cave' door, which took the audience onto the stage, where they were greeted by Helen, a mid-life working woman. Helen, like a tour guide, explained more about the cave location and demonstrating the 'echo' feature of the cave. After Helen had finished speaking, the audience were allowed to move towards the seating bank, where the Chorus of Young Women (CYW), who performed the echoes, were standing in a line across the back row of seats, with their arms held out showing the 'glade' print on their kimonos, reflecting the entrance to the cave. As the audience took their seats, the CYW came down onto the stage, and Hermes shouted across the stage from the upstage 'cave' door: 'Helen, I have a parcel for you.'

The storyline of the performance worked a series of repetitions from this moment accompanied by a rewind sound cue. Helen went to find Hermes to get her parcel, which was menopause. Immediately she found that she could no longer exit from the temporary holding space she had just entered. This narrative was interrupted by other scenes: the CYW (Echo, Pandora, Arachne and Daphne) oblivious to menopause experiences, looking for a glade with statues to take selfies; the historical 'living' statues of mid-life women talking about their lives and attitudes to menopause; and the verbatim scenes of reporting contemporary menopause experiences in the workplace. Helen finally lost her cool and had a meltdown, before appealing to Hermes for help. Hermes offered to wake the sleeping

[193] Cast members were Pamela Jikiemi (Helen), Beth Watson (Angela), Janet Naghten (Violet) Angela Harvey (Mercie), Alessandra Perotto (Nora), Elizabeth Scott (Peggy), Emily Clark (Spider), Aisling O'Shea (Ee) and Tashi Baiguerra (Daff).

[194] Flash mob choreography by Susan Kempster, cave sounds composed by Luca Tirraoro, with Mathew Keywood as St Mary's technical support staff.

[195] Health and safety and some preparation for the immersive experience.

Furies, now revealed to be mid-life female members of the audience, who joined Helen onstage as a dancing flash mob, which ended the performance.

Reflection on the Scenography

Developing applied scenography to embrace ethnography-based methods worked into an 'epic' performance meant that the mid-life female absence, both visual and spoken, has not only been highlighted and then filled, but contextualised within layers of patriarchal influence. This not only operates within the menopause subject area, but reflects back into theatre practice generally, and scenography in particular. Representing female biological experiences with my feminist scenography practice also highlights the residual patriarchal influences of current mainstream theatre productions, and underlines the subversion that underpinned the final production. In this praxis, the driver was the visual dramaturgy, which was drawn from the PEIs synthesised with elements that had been developed through the three cycles of practice. The scenography engaged with the audience through the initial use of immersive theatre conventions, then through the use of verbatim (rather than invented) dialogue, and finally surprise as the flash mob emerged from amongst them.

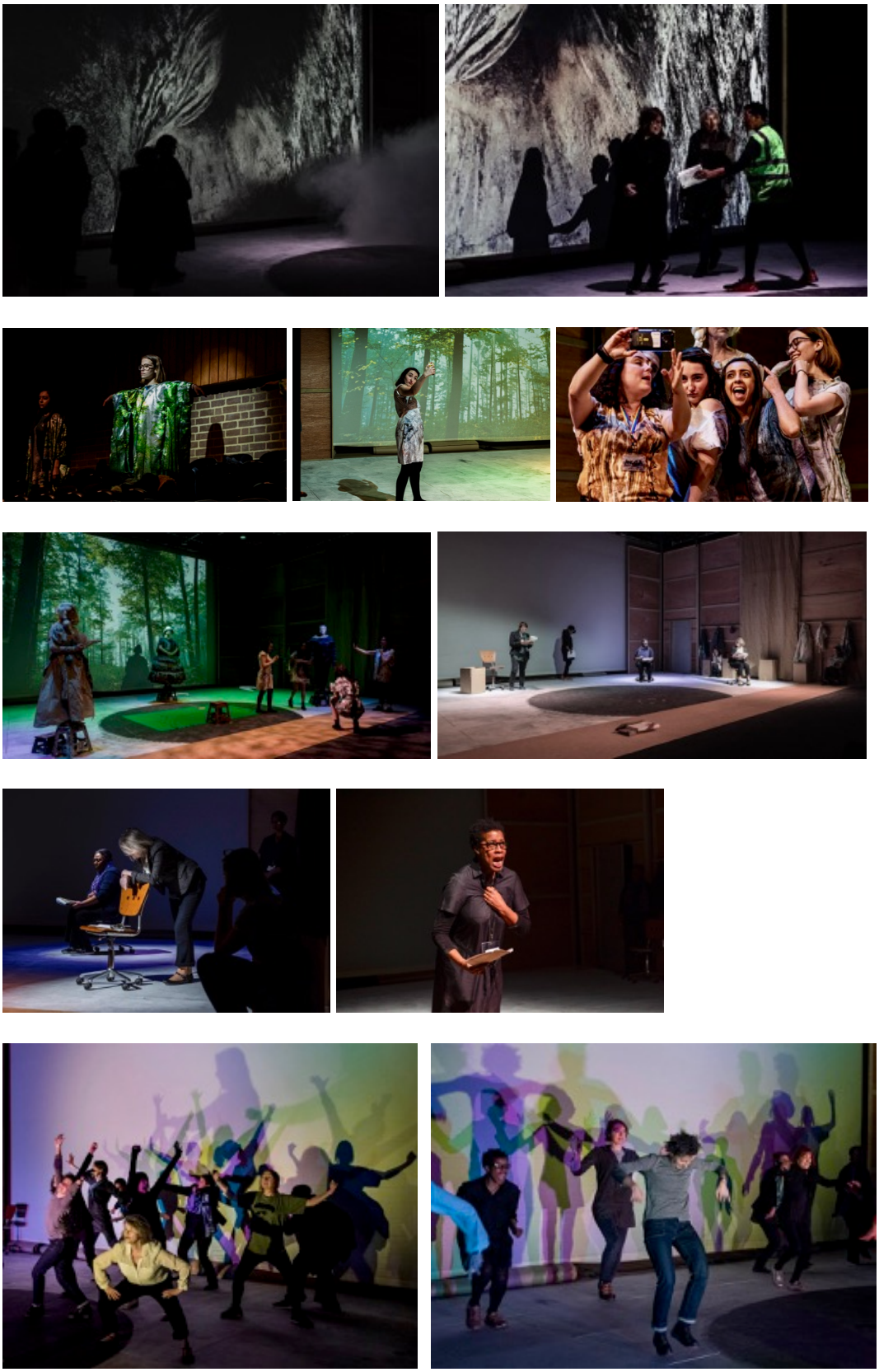
By starting the performance in the myth site – the cave – the emphasis was on an interplay between real events, dramatic events and real places, as an experience for the whole audience. The representation of cave reality was accomplished through projected images, smoke and echoing sounds. Using echoes as part of the 'cave' ambience opened up the idea of introducing the story of Echo for one of the new younger women. The large space of the theatre as a cave referenced an overarching meta-concept connection to Plato's Cave, as the underpinning philosophical positioning of the performance in the visual dramaturgy. The projected images referenced Plato's Cave dwellers understanding the world through reflections, so the CYW scenes were richer and more attractive than the working women scenes, where the screen remained unused. Finally, the screen was used for the flash mob dancers' colourful shadows, bringing energy back to the shadows referred to by Plato as poor representations of reality.

The idea to use a dance flash mob as a chorus of Furious Women[196] came out of a desire to add a feature of popular entertainment and referenced the celebratory procession at the end of Aeschylus' play. Finally, the Furious Women performed empowerment over their own menopausal state, claiming their change in a public place. Because the flash mob appeared at the end of the performance, the idea of 'waking' the Furious Women was referenced from the beginning of the performance, when the audience were walking backstage in darkness. During the statue scenes, references were made to Clytemnestra's ghost, who in Aeschylus' play wakes the sleeping Furies, and in *CiP* finally 'woke' the Furious Women. Using the large screen for colourful shadows of the Furious Women flash mob dancers increased the fill of the stage space, visually linking directly with Plato's Cave. The shadows (and bad reputations) of the Furious Women were exposed and the audience could see that these really were just ordinary women, not fearful monsters.

The inclusion of the flash mob as an element to be incorporated at the last minute was a dangerous decision, relying on recruiting a new group of non-performers to commit, come together and learn a dance that would be an important part of the end of the performance. Nonetheless, the appearance of the Furious Women stepping out from the audience as themselves,[197] with the dramatic use of dancing colourful shadows filling the back of the screen, insisting on inclusion rather the invisible existence in the dark shadows of the cave, was an important part of the visual dramaturgy.

[196] The term flash mob was coined by 'their self-appointed founder Bill Waslisk, Senior Editor of Harper's Magazine in 2003' (Brejzek, 2010: 113). By 2020 flash mobs had become linked to a rehearsed performance involved in weddings. The surprise element is important here, with dancers related to other wedding guests, and is a way of ensuring that the ensuing dancing starts enthusiastically.

[197] The flash mob consisted of one St Mary's employee and her friend, one design colleague and her friend, one interview participant and the choreographer. The three mid-life women actors joined the flash mob dance onstage. Finally, including the 'Flossing' dance (a contemporary sequence credited to the Backpack Kid in 2016) meant that the younger women and Hermes joined in at the end, totalling fourteen dancers.



Images 22: CHANGING IN PUBLIC *photographs © Ana Escobar*

My choice to use the rock anthem 'Bad Reputation' (Jett, Cordell, Laguna & Kupersmith, 2018 [1980]) for the flash mob dance was because of the big sound and its early relationship to punk rock (mentioned by IPAI1 and PEI4). Not only does Jett have the same values that were frequently mentioned by PEIs on climate, food etc., but the lyrics fitted with the designation of 'badness' that applied not only to the teenage rebels of 1980, but the menopausal 'furious women' that they have become in their 50s by 2020. The choreography of the dance used movements based on menopausal tropes (opening the fridge to waft cool air), elements of Greek folk dance (plate-smashing fooling the gods, keeping evil spirits away) and expressions of power (silhouetted warrior poses linking to Greek pottery decorations).

> Oh no, no, no, no, no, no
> Not me, me, me, me, me (repeats) (ibid.)

Both lines of the song's chorus were included in the script: 'it's just not me' was a repeated phrase used by PEI5 when asked why she didn't like some of the images, whilst the second repetition 'No, no, no, no, no' was used as a spoken rhythm in the denial phase of Helen's meltdown scene. The beginning of the track (a rewind sound) was used as the 'repeat' sound cue. The audience appeared to be genuinely surprised and the Furious Women participants reported that they were happy to have been involved, when canvassed later about their flash mob experience.

The introduction of the CYW offered a way to further develop the mythic layer, referring to the damage that patriarchy can wreak on younger women. Although strictly speaking tangential to the menopause subject, their value within patriarchal society (attractiveness, sexual fertility) was securely situated within the mythic world.[198] But their individual encounters with patriarchal powers often resulted in irrevocable change (metamorphosis):

> This may, indeed, be the most significant loss that the self experiences during metamorphosis: the essential self remains… but he or she is no longer welcome amongst (and usually no longer recognised by) those whom he or she used to hold dear. (Johnston, 2018: 216)

[198] The CYW were contemporary in modes (dialogue, taking 'selfies', fashion styles) but rooted in classical culture (mythological character bases, decorative visual language), as a reminder that they were (literally) the life blood of patriarchy.

Once permanently damaged, they are no longer 'seen', an invisibility that menopausal women comment on. Of the four CYW characters, three had narratives of metamorphosis: Echo, Arachne and Daphne. In *CiP,* the introduction of echoing voices in the cave scene not only introduced the idea of 'Echo' but separated her individual female tragedy from the usual co-joined myth,[199] the association with which promoted the development of a narcissistic through line (taking 'selfies') for the CYW. Change, once again, is irreversible.

At the beginning of the performance, Echo's story was underway, having already lost her voice;[200] Arachne's story was only intimated in her nickname, Spider;[201] whereas Daphne's story was introduced during Scene 2 by an incoming text message from her boss (Apollo) inviting her to a meeting. This introduced a potential '#MeToo' connection back into the myth.[202] In the original, Daphne, a nymph, refuses Apollo's sexual embraces and runs to her father, who changes her into a tree to 'save' her. The ensuing scrutiny of patriarchal privileges, in particular regarding sexual assaults (often within workplaces), across several generations of women has recently culminated in the #MeToo movement and the successful prosecution of an influential Hollywood producer[203] for 'casting couch' behaviour that was just disregarded until recently. Labour MP Harriet Harman comments on the 'blocks' operating within power structures:

> It's difficult for the new women MPs when men indignantly declare themselves to be feminists and every bit as much in support of women's equality as the women themselves and yet somehow still contrive to block change. This is the scourge of passive resistance. (Harman, 2017: 354)

The reluctance to change is indicative of the potential for oppressive workplace behaviours from a 'boss' figure. This was the rationale behind Daphne's personal narrative in Scene 4. Juxtaposition of the real (verbatim) with the known 'ficta' (Johnston, 2018: 155) allowed the

[199] Ovid first joined the two stories of Echo and Narcissus, now rarely parted. (Ovid c. 8 AD).
[200] Punished with muteness by Hera, queen of the Olympian gods, for distracting her with chatter, allowing Zeus to complete his seductions.
[201] Athene changed Arachne into a spider for challenging her to a weaving contest. According to different accounts, Arachne either won or lost, and metamorphosed as a punishment or having hanged herself. The narrative in Ovid is often linked to the perils of challenging power through writing entertainments.
[202] Helen Morales also links the #MeToo movement with the story of Daphne. But where Morales is most interested in the parallels between the metamorphic tales and contemporary identity politics of gender, my interest is in linking metamorphosis of young women with 'the change' in mid-life, menopause, both of which result in invisible women.
[203] In February 2020, in the Manhattan Supreme Court, Harvey Weinstein was found guilty on two charges: third-degree rape and performing a criminal sex act.

interweaving of ideas drawn from literature and the interviews, emphasising the complexity of female life experiences under patriarchy.

The fourth young woman character linked a description from PEI5 about a jewellery box[204] made by her friend. Pandora (Peggy in *CIP)* was created and 'gifted' by the gods as a dubious companion for man. According to the ancient Greek poet Hesiod (c 700 BC), Hermes, the messenger of the gods, gave Pandora the gift of lies, crafty words and a deceitful nature. By introducing Hermes as a character, rather than Athene, as an itinerant residue of Greek mythology looking for Helen, tension was introduced into the CYW scenes'[205] encounter with the patriarchal power. The correction to the general misnomer of the original Coptic jar as a 'box' was incorporated into the scene with a feminist slant. But the inclusion of this myth also allowed for a sense of warning:

> Not surprisingly, many women professionals are cautious about bringing menopause 'out of the closet' at the workplace, for fear of opening Pandora's box that could create a political backlash. (Sheehy, 1998 [1991]: 72)

In the verbatim 'Work' scene, this reluctance to open the menopause subject was related as a comment from a female manager. But in the warning here of 'a double-edged sword' (ibid.), this phrase is used to convey a much bigger problem, by becoming politicised and used against all professional women. Having Hermes played as a woman acknowledges the duplicity of women who, when young, enjoyed a privilege over older women within the patriarchal structure. With these differences magnified between old and young as if between different species, the rupture of menopausal mid-life was exposed, which has also led to the invisibility of mid-life women culturally. Later, when Helen appears not to recognise her menopausal age, Hermes already knows and comments 'you know what it is', dismissing her confusion with 'you mortals have no knowledge of your own biology', revealing their own not-mortal status and refusing to be further involved – 'you can always Google it' was one of Hermes' only verbatim lines (IPA2 and IPA3). As the agent of patriarchal control, Hermes could release the Furious Women because they were

[204] Pandora's box is a misnomer – the likely receptacle is a jar, which was referred to in *CiP* as the story was re-told.
[205] Hermes, the father of Hermaphroditus, was disguised in *CIP* as a female usher (Angela), who gave the airlock briefing to the audience and delivered a parcel (the menopause) to Helen.

imprisoned as a patriarchal defeat over matriarchal values, to provide solidarity and support, but could not change Helen's life experience of menopause.

The character of Hermes belonged entirely to the world of this performance and could offer comments that lay outside the knowledge of the characters. Hermes undermined Peggy when she enthused about her book, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*,[206] which gave Hermes the opportunity to express a negatively critical response: 'It's a bit binary, for you, isn't it.'[207] Hermes, patriarchally, was most interested in the CYW, joining in with their 'playing' whilst still demonstrating 'otherness', commenting outside the world of the characters. When Daff (Daphne) talked about running to her father, Hermes remarked that her father would turn her 'into a tree', the actual ending of the myth. However, in the scene the CYW treated this as a joke, which prompted hoots of laughter. Yet this accurate ending emphasised the nature of the unanticipated life changes, the unprepared-ness.

The use of gallows humour, the expression of joyful emotions by women, often characterised as threateningly subversive as in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (Cixous, Cohen & Cohen, 1976), was used in *CiP* as a cross-generational link. Laughter between women started in the CYW scene with Hermes ending Daphne's story and again in the Medicalised Menopause section with all the living statues joining in. Using group laughter as a scene ending was an important part of the *CiP* repetition structure throughout. So as the scenes layered, so the laughter rippled across both groups:

> To imagine the mother laughing as she plays brings a touch of lightness to what otherwise could appear as too solemn a dream. (Suleiman, 1990: 180)

The shared laughter brought a lightness of touch. The introduction of humour and women laughing at each other's jokes, rather than expecting the audience to laugh, punctuated the repeated scenes as the laughter was shared across the generations, becoming a recognisable coping strategy. Elements of gallows humour and consciousness-raising

[206] The book was used as a stage prop and quoted from in the Statue scene. This was not only a reminder of the literary context for the research project, but introduced a classic (albeit contested) feminist touchstone into the discussion. Quoting from the text in *CiP* not only emphasised the importance of Millet's writing to the research, but linked to the love of books mentioned by one of the participants, who owned a couple of bookshops.

[207] This pointed comment from Hermes reminds the spectators of the current debates around sex, gender and identity, which is where great tensions between older and younger feminists are currently located.

predominate in women's theatre-making about menopause; in *CiP* this was presented as an important part of an epic production.

Further reflection on scenography and women's experience of menopause

Reflecting more extensively on the opportunities for enriching and extending the performed scenography, to express the complexities, anguishes and delights of women's experience of the menopause, underlines the potential of an applied scenography. By pro-actively addressing the absence of mid-life female imagery, previously identified, and having understood the patriarchal position that averts its gaze. I can move swiftly from the position of 'how do other people see menopausal women?' (stereotypical) to the emerging position of 'how do we see ourselves?' now both as the subject and arbiter of the 'seeing'. Exploring these reflections visually, through diagrams, drawings and commentary, I am proposing further imaginable characterisations of presence.

In considering how menopausal women see themselves/ want to be seen vis-à-vis menopause experiences, I revisited both sets of interview data, identifying comments that reflected on personal menopause experience, including positive assertions and recommendations for action. Embedding this verbatim commentary within the visual imagery of the scenography, primarily the costumes, to emphasise the ownership of the words by the characters, reminds us of the verbatim nature of the performance. The two sets of interviews generated a series of comments in response to the direct question 'Which debates around the menopause do you think important?' (Appendix B, question six). The concluding interview question- 'Is there anything else you wanted to say on this subject?'[208] generated further reflective comments, by most of the interviewees. Considering the answers to these two questions as a discrete set, I identified 92 separate comments, only two of which were 'empty' in that the interviewee declined to add information (Appendix K: 1). This gave 90 insightful menopause experience comments, which were first situated into groups of responsibility: Workplace, Medical & other care, and Society (Appendix K: 2); and

[208] All interviewees answered question six. Three interviews did not have the concluding question: one interview was already over-lengthy, one was interrupted by a child joining the session and one interviewee was limited in her energy levels (PEI-1, PEI-5 & PEI- 6).

then, within those groups, into themes with insights and recommendations emerging (Appendix K: 3). Of the 90 comments, 54 comments were negative, and 36 were positive or assertive.

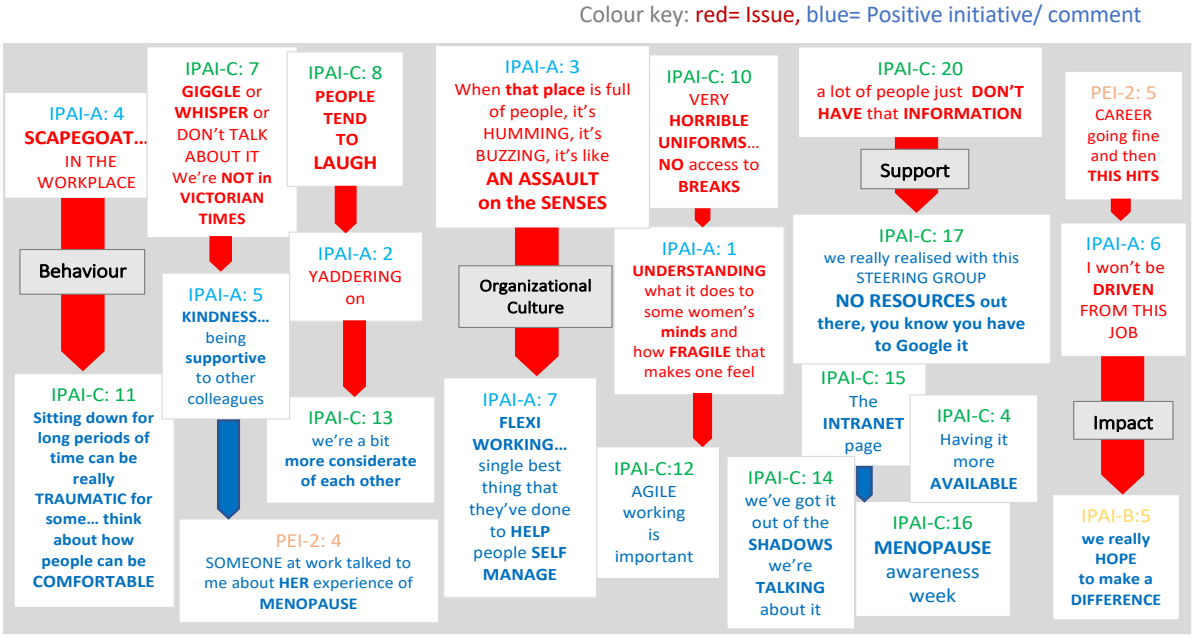


Figure 7: Diagram of Workplace insights for the scenography: *22 comments identified by interviewee comment number. More than half of the comments are positive or are initiatives.*

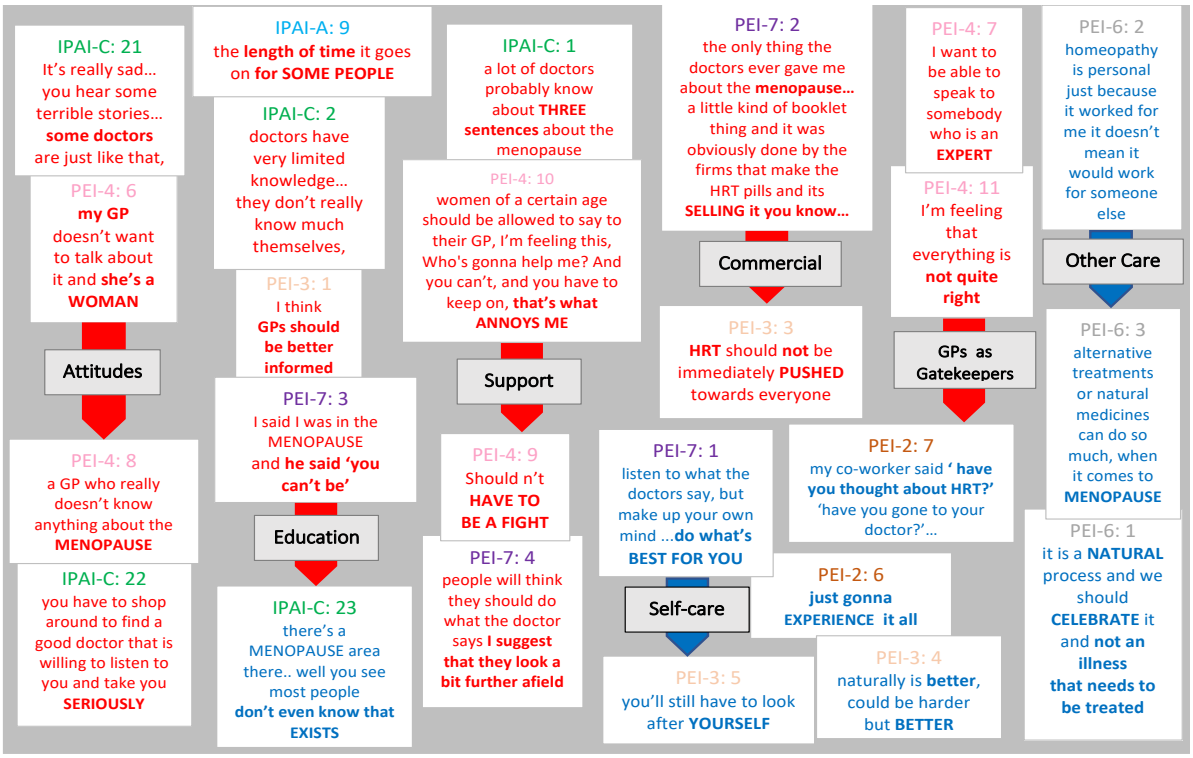


Figure 8: Diagram representing insights in Medical and other care: *25 comments identified by interviewee comment number. Only one comment about GPs is positive.*

Figure 9: Diagram of comments about Society: *43 comments identified by interviewee comment number. The diagrammatic form indicates how interview comments could be used as verbatim slogans, on costumes or prop placards.*

In this 'Society' group, the positive comments show how the interviewees would like to be seen, whereas the negative comments reveal their actual experiences. Deliberately shifting

the perspective from not 'being seen' (invisibility) to 'how do we see ourselves?', the impetus here is how to represent these experiences of mid-life women, relayed in interviews. Reflecting how costumes might tell this story, by layering individual narratives within temporary groupings, could present a series of different menopausal experiences, proposed here as drawn scenography, performing changing in the public view.

The complexity of menopause invisibility was evidenced in the FM scenography with the juxtaposition of the sombre costumed bodies and the dynamic colourful shadow patterns they generated with their dancing. The unremarkably modern clothes (costumes) worn by the FM dancers root this performed scenography in contemporary society[209]. Practicality is a priority, both for the dance itself and more generally in character terms 'You want to be comfortable…it becomes practical' (PEI-1: 5). The clothes are neither too long or short or tight or fashionable. This could be posited as the ubiquitous 'uniform' of menopause, somewhat unrelated to contemporary trends, like a sombre version of 'Menocore'[210]. The FM women are intending to be un-noticed, disguising the inappropriateness of physicality; their body that can no longer be trusted, with its disruptive leaks, heats and emotions.

Images 23a: Scenography: The complexity of menopause - choosing to be unnoticed. *Colour samples for the FM who are dressed in contemporary workwear, loose clothes in dark, sombre hues: off blacks, greys, browns, blues & purples. More colourful patterns are used as scarves and accessories.*

[209] In scenography, costumes can be considered to 'carry their personal history' which also contributes to the character's story. (Howard with Drábek, 2019: 236).

[210] The term 'Menocore' is attributed to fashion writer Harling Ross in July 2017, writing on the website Repeller. 'Menocore' references a style known since 2014 as 'Normcore', an anti-trend classic, relaxed fashion style. Ross describes the look as 'inspired by the aesthetic of a middle-aged woman on a low-key beach vacation', referring to someone who is older and confident enough to prioritize her own comfort over trends. See https://repeller.com/menocore-fashion-trend/

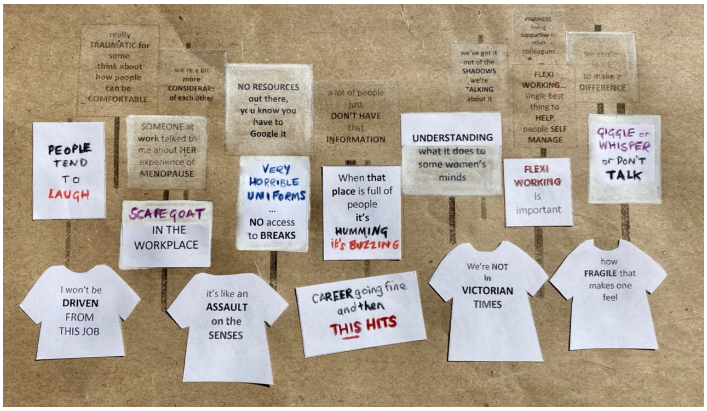
Images 23b: Scenography drawings: The complexity of menopause invisibility - new visibility. *While the costume manifests a desire to be unnoticed, the lighting intimates the experiences lived. The drab demi-mourning of the FM clothes, casts shadows on the blank screen behind, from the coloured footlights, during the FM dance. The stage space is continually filled with layers of moving colour and shadows; sometimes small and close to the screen, sometimes huge and pale.*

Images 24a: Scenography drawings: The anguishes of the menopause - demands. *The women seem to be wearing sashes, like the photographs of the Suffragettes, but these are revealed to be the straps of large cross-body bags. The bags contain placards and T-shirts, which are taken out to communicate their demands. The dark shapeless tops of the FM costume are either removed, revealing under-dressing with white T-shirts printed with comment slogans, or these T-shirts are put on over the original costume. The bags can also open out to reveal bigger banner type comments.*

The anguishes of the menopausal experience might build through 'defiantly visible' images in which the voices of the interviewees (pp X-X) are visually represented as comments performed as protests, reminding us of other womens' protests across the last century. Layers of complexity are retained by showing converging and differing converging opinions, both on their clothing and using familiar protest props, e.g. placards. First introducing bright red coloured headwear, a nod to the Red Hat Movement[211], but these soft caps are part

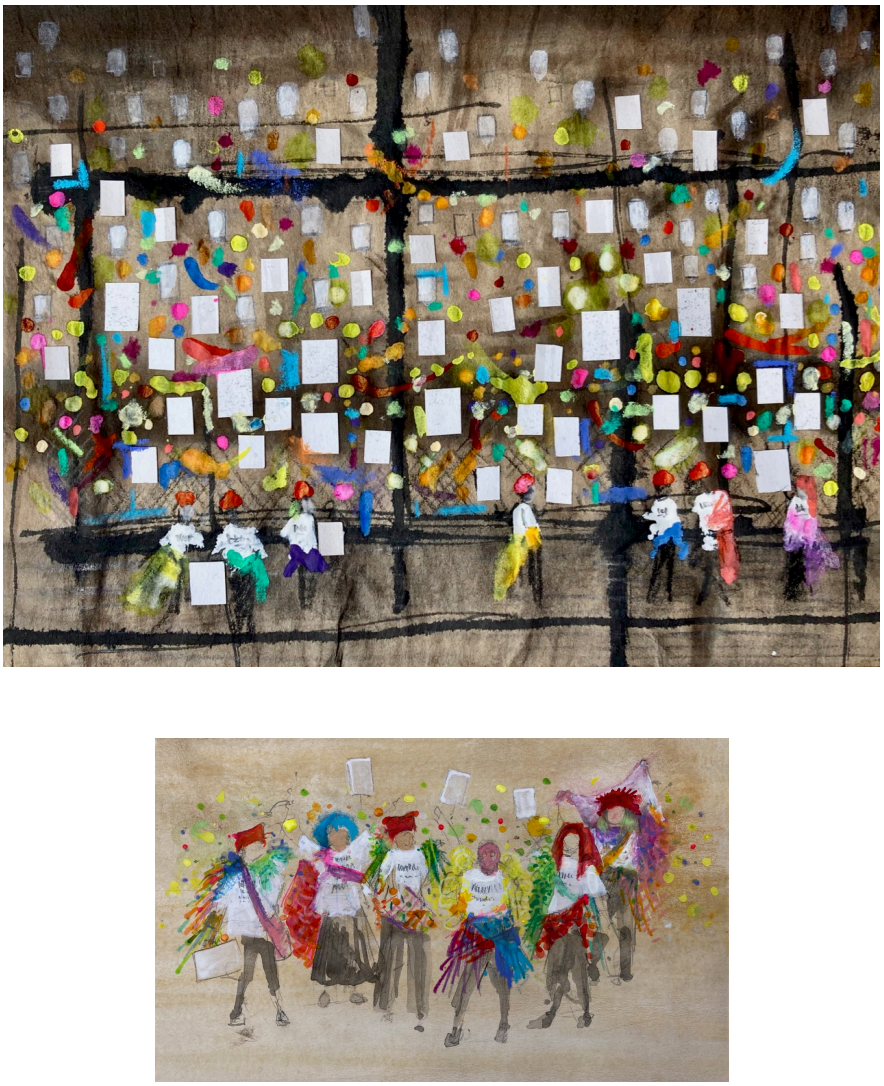
[211] The Red Hat Society, known in the UK as the British Red Hatters, are an international women's group for the over 50s, which started in the US in 1998 and came to the UK in 2001. Red hatters take their cue from

Phrygian/ Liberty revolutionary, part Women's March 'pussy-cat' knitted squares, with the younger women wearing pink Pussy Riot-type balaclavas.



Images 24b: Scenography drawings: The anguishes of the menopause - protests. *The placards can be held across their chests or above their head on sticks, seen here against the 'cardboard' box colouring, now covering the screen as well as the sides of the set. The placards use the highlighted comments from the interviews, to protest about menopause experiences in the workplace, in the medical profession and finally in the wider society. As new placard comments are added, the previous ones become projections, expanding the gaps between them to fill the screen space with placard squares.*

Jenny Joseph's poem *Warning* (1961) and wear red hats and purple clothes for fun and fabulous parties, the British website tagline is 'Live, Love, Laugh or how to grow old disgracefully'. https://britishredhatters2.weebly.com



Images 25a: Scenography drawings: The delights of the menopause - defiantly visible. *As the space fills up with projected placards, more and more handheld placards are uncovered. Bright colours are added firstly into the costumes, with women putting on brightly coloured wigs, hats, scarves, sashes and shawls. Some fabrics are draped around the women, some festoon the placards, until the scene is a riot of colour. This creates a fenced, web-like material structure, with weavings, banners, steamers and ribbons, visually linking to the Greenham Common Women's camp. The projections of placard/slogans stream backwards, diminishing in the distance.*

From the colourful mish-mash of previous image, the third and final image suggests the delightful release, enabled by the opportunities menopause makes available. Using the idea of the undyed cloth, fresh white fabrics are constructed into unfamiliar strange garments, mostly long coated shapes such as trench-coats or kimonos; an abstract mismatch of styles and periods. No longer simple shaped clothes but combinations of imagined garments referring to different histories and influences. Mixing sleeve styles, tutu frills, skirt lengths

and decorations. All of these garments are in shades of white on white with stripes, diamonds, lace edges, patterns with flowers, elephants, cakes, boats and comments all mixed together. These white processional robes are worn with the white slogan T-shirts and the actors crowned with laurel leaves and summer flowers. These are the delights of menopause, pleasing oneself. The delights of menopause experience; creating a new identity (or not) to parade now fully visible as oneself.

Images 25b: Scenography drawings: The delights of the menopause - self-pleasing. *Following the busy colourful costume props and dressing of the previous state, the costume is changed once again as the women put on large processional coat-robes in white fabric with textured decorations.*

Images 25c: Scenography drawings: The delights of the menopause - costume details. *These coat-robes, crowned with yellow summer flowers, are worn over the printed T-shirts, mixing different garment details, contemporaneous, historical and theatrical. They are sumptuously decorated with randomised white on white patterns and textures. The lower image shows part of the textile decoration with flowers, stars, birds and letters.*

Images 25d: Scenography drawings: The delights of the menopause- celebrational.

The women, robed in bright white, are now fully unmasked and visible, blazing in the theatre lights. A final flash of bright light behind the women silhouettes them, like rock stars occupying centre stage and establishing their own viewpoint. A celebration of post-menopausal zest.

Insights Emerging

Making such a large and ambitious 'epic' performance was an invigorating experience and complex in relation to previous performances. This complexity was manifest in a process of testing, reflecting and adjusting ideas to synthesise the previous performances, the use of verbatim material (both visual and spoken) and the engagement with feminist theatre practices, patriarchal oppressions and audience participation. Yet it was also invigorating to contextualise the menopause for South London working women on an epic scale, and to consider how this performance might be developed beyond the conclusion of this PhD project, in post-doctoral work.

My decision to focus the reflection on the overarching project research questions meant that I did not canvass feedback from the *CiP* audience, which would usually follow a preview or first workshop performance. But in this stage of the research, the emphasis was on how the scenography was intended to engage the audience in active spectatorship, employing the ethnography-based data collected to address the absence of menopause in cultural representations. Although Peggy Phelan has argued that 'There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal' (Phelan, 2005 [1993]: 247), I am countering her statement with the real-world situation of menopausal women, who have long been 'unmarked' and have found that they have no power or agency within a patriarchal construction of society, because they seem invisible. I have previously acknowledged that there is a political dimension in my development of an applied scenography 'in the service of' (Prentki & Preston, 2010: 9) societal change. There are identifiable workplace strategies that have emerged over the timespan of my project, aiming to bring menopause into public view, and my research project both contextualises these and forms a new strategy using scenographic theatre-making practice.

Addressing the absence of menopause representation could not be resolved by simple strategies because of the double masks of patriarchy in operation. The invisibility mask of menopause covers over an existing mask of ageism that hides mid-life women. So the performed representations needed to be contextualised within a patriarchal structure, here founded in Greek drama. This established the understanding that mid-life women have been excluded from public view, by utilising a feminist interpretation of Plato's Cave. The layers of oppression could be distinguished both in the development of new characters (Hermes and the CYW) and through the verbatim dialogue (familial responsibilities, medicalisation of menopause, advertising treatments). By creating a historical layer through the living statue characters, a discussion about oppressive medical treatments of menopause framed the not-knowing-ness of the younger women, in contrast to the verbatim real-life experiences of contemporary women in the 'Work' scenes, unprepared for female mid-lifecycle change. That work is an important feature of women's lives, which women sometimes 'love' (Greer, 1992 [1991]: 72), means that menopausal disruption can have serious ramifications for individual women.

The use of ethnography-based material within the performance, which informed the visual language as well as the spoken dialogue, kept the focus on 'applied scenography' to address the real-world absence of menopause, by making a series of interventions. My applied scenography used feminist theatre practices to disrupt traditional conventions of theatre performance, imagining a formulation of epic feminist scenography. Ideas were drawn from the three previous performances, reporting testimonies of menopause experiences, otherwise unrepresented in public cultural forms. My practice claimed a large theatre site to contextualise personal testimonies of female mid-life in which the performance could only be understood as applied scenography.

The mythological foundation of the epic performance pinpointed the patriarchal disregard of older women as starting at menopause, because patriarchy cannot imagine any use for infertile women. The inability of patriarchy to envision anything outside of its own structure and interests has been outlined previously. Johann Jakob Bachofen drew attention to customs of Roman law that 'could never have originated in a patriarchal society' (Campbell in (Bachofen, 1967 [1954]: xxviii), and it was Simone de Beauvoir writing *The Second Sex* in 1949 who 'imagined criticising' (Ladimer, 1999: 92) the official works included in the French canon, as Jill Dolan did again in her critique of the theatrical canon in 1988. The link made here between the dismissal of mid-life women's lives and the construction of patriarchal society that underpins the Western theatre tradition means that the feminist lens used to investigate menopause can be repurposed as a cross-disciplinary outcome, towards scenography. Scenography, as it has recently been configured, has struggled to accommodate real-human-life issues and is seemingly somewhat genderless. Yet there are many engaged in scenographic practice who clearly explore feminist themes (Wilson, 2016) although very few publicly label their scenography practice to be 'feminist'.

Redefining applied scenography to deal with menopause, a real-world sex-based issue, means that questions must also be reflected back into scenography, asking why a feminist scenography practice can be utilised as applied scenography, but has not featured in the expansion of the scenographic field and in scenography research. This also raises a question about how widely the deep roots of patriarchy in the Western theatre tradition have

permeated new forms of theatre and performance such as scenography, and whether these should now be further scrutinised.

Taking my main research aims into account, the advantage of this approach to applied scenography lay in its close connections to the intended audience of mid-life women and the discussion of menopause, between the characters, as a real-life problem. This was defined in the performance within the construct of patriarchy and located within the life cycle of a woman, by configuring cross-generational themes between younger female characters, historical characters and myths. The limits of the approach to applied scenography in the final performance inevitably lay in the resources available to mount an epic performance, whilst also still in the first process of devising the work. This could however be addressed in future stages of development with dedicated funding and further iterations of performance testing.

There were various performance conventions used to connect with the audience that were drawn from familiar classical myths, contemporary immersive performances, the use of verbatim interview material together with an adaptation of a flash mob, which saw the dancers emerge from the seated audience. The use of feminist theatre conventions was integrated into an epic structure that revealed the layers of oppression created by patriarchy and also offered an exit through female solidarity.

The solidarity of the flash mob group of Furious Women, supporting the individual woman resolving her own menopause problem, counters the mythological supposition that women must 'help' the heroes solve their problems (Saldaña, 2005: 59) but must independently resolve their own issues. This premise is reflected in the societal treatment of menopause and my resolution here is that support can and must be founded in the experiences of women, not the strategies constructed by patriarchal models. And when mainstream theatres make performances that more fully reflect the lives and interests of all their paying audiences, then the British theatre will have changed its current conventions and embraced the feminist ideals of equality in the public cultural arena by representing the full life cycle of women.

CONCLUSION

In this research I have, firstly, addressed the confusingly complex disarray that is the public understanding of the menopause using scenography and, secondly, re-thought the possibilities of applied scenography by using ethnography-based methods. I have done this through scenography practice by making four performances, each of which responded to secondary questions that were first identified and then staged. The staged questions (performances) were reflected upon, and insights emerging from this reflection were used to identify the next set of secondary questions, following the three 'clews' of the overarching research questions:
1/ How can the absence of menopause representation be addressed through scenography?
2/ How can ethnography-based methods be used to develop an applied scenography?
3/ How can a feminist scenography reveal new perspectives of menopause within patriarchal structures?

By using a bricolage strategy, I adopted research methods and instruments as I needed them to respond to the questions that had first been identified and then staged through my practice, an approach that I describe as practice-based. In this way, my scenography practice was supported by contextual underpinning in both scenography and menopause, the subjects of this cross-disciplinary project. By adapting Melissa Trimingham's spiral model to include temporary endpoints, the performances as 'emergent constructions' evidenced the traces of theory, and the four descriptions of praxis situated the traces of performance across three cycles of practice. Each performance was the beginning of a cycle of practice that ended in the insights emerging from the next. In this way, the performances were where the cycle began and temporarily ended, before starting again.

The cycles of practice–staging questions–insights emerging–identifying new questions commenced with the first performance and concluded each time in the next performance, starting again and finally ending with the fourth performance. In this way, the scenography practice spiralled around my developing subject knowledge of the menopause experience of working women in South London, which produced an 'emergent construction', a public performance at the beginning of each cycle. By using theatre-making practice and

particularly scenography, I could appraise the absence of menopause, and the silenced and invisible mid-life women, performatively. Scenography embraces visual languages as much as spoken ones, and aims at a close connection with the spectator.

The four-year span of my research project has been accompanied by major changes in public views of menopause. These changes, accelerating rapidly since March 2018, include new menopause narratives in books, newspapers, documentaries, fictional programmes and theatre performances, and have been accompanied by increased initiatives within workplaces, although these have significant flaws, such as the use of medical language and a heavy steer towards using HRT. Since the March 2020 UK workplace 'lockdown' as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, this discussion has shifted, as working from home allows more flexibility that can offset some of the distress of sleeplessness and hot flushes.[212] Yet public understanding of menopause is more relevant than ever, with pressures on women's employment mounting. In September 2020 menopause was put on the school curriculum for the first time, meaning that teenagers potentially had more information about their mother's experience than the mother did herself. Although an advance to be celebrated, this hardly represents joined-up thinking; currently menopause is a mishmash of initiatives, information sources, products[213] and advice that mid-life women struggle to resolve on an individual basis, without any preparation. By making performances about menopause I intended to bring this 'taboo' into the public view, and to use real-life experiences (interviews) within the scenography. But the scenography would not be unchanged by this cross-disciplinary research, because it would also be challenged on its ability to deal with a real-world problem concerning sexism and ageism, which would result in a new approach to applied scenography. This new applied scenography intended to forge close connections with its audience, a segment of the theatre-going general public audience

[212] At Croydon Council, the interviewees reported that the introduction of flexibility around 'presentee-ism' opened up opportunities to work from home. Although not introduced specifically for mid-life women during menopause, this had been the most beneficial innovation to date. It seems likely that the professional shift to home-working could be beneficial to menopausal women's working lives, post-pandemic.

[213] A recent development being the massive menopause market of 'FemTech' Das, R. 2019. *Menopause Unveils Itself As The Next Big Opportunity In Femtech* [Online]. https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucejapsen/2021/03/11/cvs-doubles-covid-19-vaccinations-to-pharmacies-in-29-states/?: Forbes. media LLC. [Accessed 12/03/21].

that is typically mid-life, middle income and often female, by staging dramatic subject material that reflected their own life experiences.

Insights Emerging from Practice

Prólogos presented the immediate workplace context of menopause experience, with the menopausal woman rendered 'ignorable' by being present, but seemingly invisible and non-speaking, and lacking menopause information. This contextualising performance also presented layers of patriarchal control, which utilised Greek mythological characters as a way of obscuring real-life experiences through imaginary constructions. The insights emerging from this prologue were primarily connected to the success of the strategy to devise a performance as part of the research process, using the found materials (site, literature, weather) to inform the ideas rather than to fully form a performance on paper first.

The openness of the secondary research question – How visible is menopause in the workplace? – had been simply answered in the original source, the workplace anecdote: It is ignorable. This opened up the immediate questions of 'Who is doing the ignoring?' and 'How is this being achieved?' The use of two male actors facilitated the imagining of a fantastical 'reality', which diverted from real menopause events and positioned the diversion as a response to menopause within male behaviour. By making a visual performance, the workplace anecdote was interrogated rather than reproduced, and this identified the next set of questions: Are there other workplace experiences? Are there better practices? How do they work? Where could they be situated?

The site-responsive scenography deliberately focused upon the non-textual elements of production, to engage the audience in sense-making, as they were pitched into a confusing situation relating to contemporary menopause experience. However, the fantastical elements to some extent overshadowed the workplace construct, and the overlaps with real life seemed to confuse the audience, some of whom struggled to make sense of them. It seemed that the audience would have liked a post-performance discussion, which was built into the next performance. Identifying the nature of the relationship between the individual

spectator within the audience and the performance, in terms of what they should 'get', needed to be addressed by the scenography as the first cycle of practice progressed.

The second performance, *Puzzled*, presented real-life menopause experiences within the workplace, with a script composed from verbatim interview material. Whilst I intended to balance visual and spoken languages, the production process favoured the text/performance over the visual. Furthermore, the female characters had become more interchangeable, because of the professional behaviour (from interviewing in a workplace setting) and the composite nature of the characters.

The insights emerging from *Puzzled* were concerned with the successful employment of a bricolage strategy, to bring ethnography-based material into a scenographic performance, with the subsequent audience discussion and then following the PowerPoint instructions, confirming active spectatorship. By focusing on the question of menopause experience within Croydon Council, I had found that the interviewees were speaking about how they had instigated awareness of menopause from 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' strategies. Their repeated experience was of being unprepared and not getting very much help from their GPs. This situation of not knowing also carried an implication that menopause information was being withheld, which shifted the emphasis. If menopause is an experience that can be known, why is it being deliberately obscured? The secondary question emerging from this was: Who can be held responsible for this obscuring?

The consideration of the reluctance of some senior female managers to highlight menopause as being an issue within the workplace, with women diminished as 'victims' of their biological cycles and the potential of unintended consequences undermining the initiative, meant that I was reluctant to push further to make a deeper connection into one specific workplace. The strength of the Croydon initiative was that women had come together to share understanding and support each other; the audience could understand that informed female solidarity in operation could mitigate against individual tribulation through ignorance of menopause.

By linking with Croydon Council, the focus of my research now centred on working women in the broad South London area. This lens enabled a closer look at individual women within this area, either living, working or both. But making two performances for invited audiences had ignored the broader public arena. To address the absence of mid-life women in public culture, I began to identify questions that would develop scenography for a broader public audience. One further insight that emerged from the audience discussion in *Puzzled* concerned lack of menopause sharing between mothers and daughters, which opened the potential of cross-generational relations in the third performance, fully developed in the fourth.

In creating mid-life female characters for *Puzzled*, it was imperative to consider their individual characters. Menopause has effectively absented women's mid-life experience and has been absented itself from public view, through the withholding of information. This understanding triggered a series of secondary research questions that would define the next cycle of practice. What are the interests and experiences of mid-life women? The audience discussion had been centred on the spoken themes and completely ignored the visual language. This insight identified the key driver for the scenography of the next performance: How could a broader public audience be persuaded to actively spectate a performance focused on visual languages? How could they encounter a scenography of mid-life women?

In the third performance, *Women of Brockwell (missing statue),* the previous narrative was reversed. Here, the menopause was invisible and the women's individual characters were highly visible. In the performance, the connection of the scenography with the spectator could be clearly evidenced and analysed through the integral use of written feedback. The positive feedback about the installation, the statues and their backstories suggested that there were no perceptible barriers to representing mid-life women in this way using cultural forms. The narratives of female mid-life presented clearly engaged the interest of spectators, but there was no universal agreement. The connections made by spectators with the character narratives encouraged the possibility of a further development into a performance, where the statues could also talk about their lives.

The ethnography-based PEI material was used to develop depth of characterisation, rather than the main character narratives that were mainly site responsive. The questions emerging here were about how the PEI material could be interpreted more closely as an integral part of the performance. How could this be achieved without losing the visual dramaturgy? How could this ethnography-based data become embodied within the scenography?

If there is no problem in finding relatable narratives of female mid-life for an audience, does menopause prevent that connection? In what way is menopause regarded as unseeable or as repelling the gaze? In reflecting upon the supportive relationship between the performers and their assistants, new questions about cross-generational relationships, usually configured problematically as a lack of communication between mothers and daughters, began to be identified. How do these cross-generational relationships function? Where are the connections? How are they operating if women find themselves unprepared for menopause?

The scenography had addressed the absence of female statuary in the UK, and of mid-life women in particular, through making a intervention: a performance of 'living statues' in a public park space. Using a popular form of 'street' performance within the familiar 'Fourth Plinth' public culture concept enabled a public audience to actively engage with and respond to the performed scenography. The feedback from the spectators gave insights into how they had understood the performance, and was used to adjust the narratives in the final performance. And while the visual language was the primary dramaturgical driver of the performance, and was referred to as the primary language by some spectators, the support from the written narrative was an important element for many others. The stillness of the statues in this performance did not overpower the visual language of the scenography.

The insights that emerged from the final performance, *CHANGING IN PUBLIC,* clustered around the 'clews' of the research, namely the overarching questions. The scenography addressed the absence of menopause representation, firstly by situating it within the mid-life of women through historical contextualisation and verbatim workplace scenes, and

secondly by using an epic structure to consider the visibility of younger and older women which established the premise of my feminist scenography.

This feminist scenography revealed new perspectives of menopause within existing patriarchal structures, identified from the two sets of interviews collected during the process of research. The development of an applied feminist scenography using verbatim material, both visual and spoken, connected with the mid-life women whom the performance was both for and about, expressing recommendations for social change.

The synthesis of the previous performances meant that the ideas were layered, and could be separated into distinct viewpoints and interpretations, which could be juxtaposed. By employing the mythological foundations of Aeschylus' play *The Eumenides,* and identifying the banishment of the Furies as the moment when patriarchy established its dominance, the absence of menopause that had been constructed within patriarchy could be contextualised and re-staged, with the banished women reclaiming public space in the first instance and the right to claim theatre space for the female mob.

Discussion of insights and recommendations emerging from interviews:

The interviewee comments, previously documented in diagram form as part of the *CiP* scenography reflection, can now be discussed further, working towards producing specific recommendations for action within Workplaces and improvements to GP menopause provision, together with insights for how society may be more satisfactorily acquainted with menopause issues and the necessary support.

The workplace grouping was the only one in which comments about positive initiatives outnumbered the negatives, reflecting that some progress is underway and emphasising the timely nature of this research project. The key issues emerging, which workplaces need to address with support, are: behaviour, organizational culture and impact. The specific restrictions of workplace culture, referred to easy access to toilets and breaks, uniforms made from uncomfortable (synthetic) fabrics, e.g. for security staff; over-long meetings and busy open-plan offices. These comments span the roles of a wide range of working women,

across all levels of a company. The inconsiderate behaviour of individual co-workers or teams of colleagues including scapegoating, whispering, inappropriate joking, or ignoring the subject, were all contributors to producing a toxic work environment for individual women. The resulting 'hit' or impact on menopausal working women, at any level of employment, might lead them to consider leaving or being driven from their job, which then impacts upon the employer in terms of lost experience and recruitment costs.

The comments which referred to positive initiatives indicate how menopause support could be fully integrated into the workplace. Improved behaviour would include consideration (kindness) and support of others, shorter meetings with frequent breaks and opportunities to move around. Workplaces should be aware of the challenges, within their organizational culture, that limited local temperature controls, inadequate ventilation, light coloured chairs (potential staining) and insufficient toilet provision are presenting for menopausal women to help them self-manage any side-effects. Flexi-working, either within the same building or from home, was considered to be one of the most supportive changes that a workplace could implement. Support initiatives included more discussion and dissemination of information, with support materials collated and made available, aiming for more general understanding by both men and women. This would contribute to supporting rather than stigmatising menopause. One interviewee reflected on her 'luck', in getting individual support from an older female co-worker when she was uninformed about menopause. This research offers recommendations to ensure that women do not need to rely on 'luck' to survive menopause in the workplace; a series of adjustments can be made to ensure support and wellbeing for groups of women, rather than designating it a health & safety issue for individuals. The visibility of menopause in the workplace is an important step in normalising menopause.

Recommendations to improve menopause support in the workplace:

The nature of menopause training within the workplace needs to take account of the existing culture of the company and be mindful of how adjustments can be introduced in order to improve support for the menopause. This puts the menopausal woman at the centre of the discussion rather than positioning her as a problematic individual. Information should be fact-based, offer practical solutions and facilitate discussions, countering sexist

and ageist attitudes towards mid-life women. To achieve this result, an employer should put in place the following recommendations for the nature and curriculum of menopause literacy at all levels of the workplace.

Recommendation one: All staff, both male and female, should have easily accessible menopause information. This would be visible, with posters and leaflets in common areas (not only toilets), virtual, through web-based intranet systems and open for discussion in staff development sessions. Menopause should be recognised as a normal life-event and not stigmatised through attitudes, behaviour or subject avoidance.

Recommendation two: There should be mandatory training for managers about the nature of menopause support that could be offered to female colleagues, and the adjustments that might be made within the working culture: e.g. over-long meetings, irregular breaks, presenteeism, poor communications. Changes could be embedded in annual objectives for teams and individuals. Indicators of a toxic environment such as scapegoating, whispering or giggling, should be acknowledged and addressed to improve morale.

Recommendation three: Managers of the working environment should be menopause aware when making arrangements and purchases. E.g. the stressing effects of over-crowded offices, controlled temperatures, limited toilet facilities, provision of drinking water, synthetic uniforms, inappropriate furnishings and outdated equipment.

Recommendation four: Flexi-working to be encouraged where possible and when needed, supported with digital systems and equipment. Similarly, quiet work spaces and other work arounds such as desk fans or natural fabric uniforms should be made available.

Recommendation five: A steering group/ senior sponsor to oversee and co-ordinate the strategy, updated on a regular basis. Cross-departmental and level menopause committees should be established, with senior management representation and owned by the female employees of the company, not just the Human Resources department. It should be recognised that female senior managers may need some additional training to negotiate

their own position. The company should aim to normalise menopause rather than expecting women to 'struggle through'.

Recommendation six: Senior managers need to understand the desirability of retaining older women in the workplace (the business case) and recognise that better support will alleviate the stress experienced or caused, which is a temporary rather than permanent change. Local awareness of how many women have already left their jobs during menopause, will indicate the scale of change needed.

It should be noted that flexi-working can benefit the whole staff team, not just menopausal women. This includes carers, people with disabilities and those seeking a better work/life balance. Many of the frictions caused by the workplace being the sole source of menopause information could be alleviated if the subject of the menopause was more broadly familiar in society, through public information, open discussion and cultural representations.

Medical and other care

The comments about Medical or other care such as natural medicines, alternative treatments or self-care, indicated that more than one third of my interviewees had encountered problems with their doctor. One Interviewee was positive about hospital gynaecological care, some recommended alternative treatments, homeopathy or natural medicines. Another positioned menopause as a potential disability because it could have substantial effects for more than a year, even though it is not a permanent condition. Other interviewees stressed the importance of being informed to be able to self-manage, looking after yourself, experiencing it as a natural, if hard, life experience that should not be treated as an illness. These results emphasise the differences between women's menopause experiences, which are often not taken account of.

The key criticisms of GP were: attitudes, education, the lack of support, the commercialisation of HRT, contradictory advice and the role of GPs as gatekeepers of treatment. GP's were criticised for attitudes that were dismissive and or inaccurate, reluctance to engage, and the difficulty of finding a GP who would treat you seriously. The

education of GPs was felt to be too limited, particularly in peri-menopause, treating individual symptoms rather than seeing the whole as part of menopause transition. GPs might have to inform a patient about menopause, if the woman hasn't already self-diagnosed, or be asked to prescribe HRT. GPs are also acting as gatekeepers for specialist clinic referrals, which circles back to whether the GP's own attitude to menopausal women is sympathetic or problematic. NHS menopause clinics are not always well advertised, even in their local area.

The lack of GP menopause training can undermine an existing relationship between doctor and patient. This lack of up-to-date knowledge is often exposed later by the menopausal woman, forced by necessity to self-diagnose treatments from other sources. The conflict between patient sourced information and GP's advice was described as a 'fight' by one interviewee. In the instances where women had found support during other gynaecological procedures or through alternatives, they commented favourably on their experiences. The medical care profession needs to comprehend that, whilst menopause can disabling for more than 10% of women, sometimes lasting more than a decade, it is not an illness. The majority of women are able to self-manage successfully but are often initially looking for information or support (to a greater or lesser extent) to enable them do so. The misdiagnosis of menopause was problematic both when too early, causing serious life problems or too late. The commercialisation or 'selling' of HRT was considered an issue in both private and NHS healthcare. One interviewee, who had been prescribed with HRT for a misdiagnosed early menopause, suggested that it was being quickly 'pushed' for profits. One insightful comment reveals that GPs and other doctors seem to be relying on identifying menopause from a woman's appearance. So the broader absence of public cultural visibility results in an unsophisticated ageist stereotyping of menopausal women, with the patriarchal mask obscuring the reality of what contemporary mid-life women look like, preventing the full understanding that would enable efficient treatment.

Recommendations to improve inadequacies of GP's menopause provision:

Recommendation one: Mandatory training on menopause for all NHS GPs, reviewed regularly for updating information and adjusting attitude bias. This investment would represent the significant numbers of women who go through menopause each year,

acknowledging the potential severity of effects. GP's knowledge is needed to support women to improve their experience by proffering HRT if needed, as it needs prescribing. NICE guidelines should be followed. Thus women with 'low mood' should be offered HRT or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) before anti-depressants. Menopause should be normalised as a natural event, that needs targeted preparation and support (like pregnancy). It is neither an illness, a failure of character, or an imagined experience.

Recommendation two: Each NHS doctor's surgery or group practice could actively work towards establishing mechanisms to offer all their female patients menopause information and support, preferably before side effects are experienced. Using noticeboards, posters and leaflets, local information should be made available about menopause clinics or support groups, where available. This would support those who wish to experience a non-medicalised menopause and well as those who needing HRT or clinic referrals.

Recommendation three: A holistic medical view of the mid-life woman should be taken, in consultation with the woman herself, which is already a requirement for specialist menopause doctors, but needs to be more widely disseminated. As an automatic presumption of menopause could be made for all women over the age of 45, not already going through peri-menopause. Most women could be prepared in advance for changes, such as extending fertility or dealing with the physical or mental side-effects of menopause.

Recommendation four: Menopause should not be left to commercial interests, whether private medicine, drug companies or those offering alternatives. More availability and visibility of NHS menopause clinics would improve women's experiences, as would opportunities to self-refer. GP support groups (without commercial interests) similar to Menopause Cafés could be instigated as a local support measure, for women to share experiences.

Recommendation five: More evidence based-research with large scale response numbers into menopause experiences would enable understanding of the issues faced, to improve attitudes, support women and mitigate against the negative effects of menopause.

Insights to better acquaint society with menopause issues and support:

To give wider society better acquaintance with menopause issues and provide better understanding of the support necessary, requires recognition of the restrictions currently residing within our patriarchal society. The general absence of cultural representations of mid-life women within society, which is the locus of this project, was the societal theme that attracted the most comments. Dissatisfaction was expressed with current cultural representations that only focussed on the humour, stereotypical 'big fat ladies' or trying to cling onto youth. The importance of creating new cultural representations[214] is summed up in one comment

> cultural representations are important because they, encapsulate the experience... might sow some seeds of things that they haven't coalesced in their minds but it might help those things come out…(PEI-8: 4)

Not only does representation validate the mid-life experience, but it promotes the 'coalescing' of thoughts, which in turn informs discussions and debates, which positions experiences within the framework of life expectations. Comments regarding the want of female street names or enough 'brilliant' role models, penetrates this absence by drawing attention to it. Comments on menopause invisibility expressed surprise and were offended by this patriarchal positioning. Interviewees suggested that there should be a change of attitudes towards menopause across society, achieved through discussion and debate, to gain public awareness. The general societal taboo that has surrounded menopause, is currently in the early stages of being dismantled, with an increasing number of news reports evidencing that progress is being made in the public recognition of menopause. Being able to talk to other people openly, in confidence or passing information from mother to daughter were all felt to be important, but there was also a demand for debate. This would signal a formal re-positioning, emphasising the normality of menopause within society, and bring about a change of attitudes; an openness and understanding of the untapped potential in the lives of post-menopausal women.

[214] The read/don't read reputation of the Daily Mail newspaper which is clearly aligned with mid-life women through the amount of menopause-related material published, is interesting to note, in that those who don't identify as a Daily Mail reader, might still access articles on menopause.

Normalising menopause within society would reduce negative attitudes and inaccurate assumptions, which should be replaced by respect for the gains, regarding the independence (from fertility) as enabling positive choices. New opportunities can be embraced, however post-menopausal women want to define them, to please themselves. Interviewees recommended that menopause support should be separated from the commercial, paternalistic 'outside' interests where bad experiences of menopause are exploited for profit. Securing more evidence- based information with support and provision, controlled by menopausal women themselves, would be a positive step in this direction. To achieve normalisation, menopausal women will need to be prepared to be more open about their own experiences. This needs to be enabled by education in advance of the menopause and better support during it.

Both education and support were felt to be needed and lacking across society. Peri-menopause itself is largely an unfamiliar term. Better education, based on research, about the whole female life cycle would be supportive in that women would know what they were going through, as early signs of peri-menopause can be de-stabilising:

> Everyone don't go through the same stuff, but everyone goes through the menopause- all women go through it, ya know, you don't realise, and it's scary, if you don't know what happening. (PEI-5:2)

Pre-menopause information would improve the current not-knowing-ness situation, giving women a better experience for menopause overall. Support groups for menopause are useful because friendship groups, in contrast, usually have different experiences at different times, which reduces the support value of confiding. Groups need not be focussed around either the GP's surgery or in the workplace, although both have possibilities in terms of introducing a range of support sessions. Talking about menopause and sharing information were both considered important to individuals, together with a deeper understanding of the difficulty of extreme experiences such as distress and grief. Positioning menopause information in school education, as per the most recent innovation, is only the beginning of what should be broadened into a full public information strategy around Women's Health.

Public information on menopause would mean that women were informed before they entered their peri-menopause and were therefore able to prepare themselves physically and emotionally for changes. This in turn would empower women to be more confident and better equipped to seek support strategies from divers sources, including GPs. A public information strategy might be primarily aimed at those in their forties likely to experience peri-menopause, but should be broad enough for all in society to become familiar with the subject, the language and potential effects. The seriousness of this current situation, the potential impact it has on women's working lives and general wellbeing, often leading to reduced opportunities and/or income in later life, is of the utmost importance for the well-being of society.

The attitudes of women themselves, as part of society, were reflected in comments from the interviewees, now in a position to reflect on their menopause experiences. They suggest that women themselves would still take overall responsibility, and that it was just one part of a busy life. These reflective insights recognised the importance of women being enabled to view menopause positively, once they have the information they originally lacked. That menopause could be viewed an opportunity to do or not to do what you wanted with more self-assurance. Menopause could be a celebratory event and the fact that it is not regarded as such, reveals the patriarchal structures operating in workplaces, as a microcosm, and across society as a whole.

Potential Futures

This research project is composed of three discrete layers, and as such the potential futures for this research stretch into two related subjects of scenography practice and scenography research, as well as, because of the cross-disciplinary subject matter, a third subject of the public understanding of menopause.

Each of these three subjects could be addressed through papers and post-doctoral research, emanating from this project either as distinct subject-specific works or by embracing the possibilities that are currently opening up in Higher Education Institutes (post REF 2021) for cross-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research.

As the performances in this research were intentionally public facing, the two text-based performances, *Puzzled* and *CHANGING IN PUBLIC*, both have the potential to be developed further as productions. A Zoom-based version of *Puzzled* is being shown at 'FlushFest' on April 30, 2021, and future evolutions are likely to involve developing the performance for workplaces. Similarly, *Women of Brockwell (missing statue)* has potential as a transferable performance installation, created with and for different communities. For all of these developments, future funding will be sought to maximise their potential.

In Scenography research, the progression of a feminist critique of scenography could form the basis of a monograph. This investigation might be considered timely, if not long overdue, and would differ from other existing perspectives of scenography, even as it continues to expand.

Potential avenues that I have opened within menopause would include consideration of the effect that a mother's menopause has on their female children. The relationship between mothers and daughters and the omission of menopause discussion from the conversation between generations was referred to by the actors as well as the interviewees, but such an interesting and potentially huge development could only be touched upon in this project.

Finally, my research has been engaged by necessity in the female experience and the absence of mid-life representation that is part of that experience. A further development would consider the experience and understanding of men, perhaps best expressed by one of my interviewees:

> for start men never want to talk about it in my experience, even my husband, he'll just go a bit quiet and put his arm round me or something, he doesn't really talk about it. (Appendix G: 20)

The absence of menopause in public understanding does not only affect women: the repercussions extend to partners, families and into the workplace. Language around and understanding of this life-cycle event need to be communicated by the 51% of the population who experience it to the 49% who don't.

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