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This essay, in which Malcolm discusses his work with Avid for Ovid - a group of performers who reinterpret ancient myth through dance and music – is based on his presentation at the colloquium ‘Remaking ancient Greek and Roman myths in the twenty-first century’, which was held at the Open University's London Centre on 7th July 2016.

An illustrated version of this essay, including audio and video examples, can be found on the PVCRS website at the following link:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/2017/atkins>

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“The musician is perhaps the most modest of animals, but he is also the proudest. It is he who invented the sublime art of ruining poetry.”

Erik Satie

Avid for Ovid ('A4O') is an informal group comprising three Oxford--based artists (dancers Susie Crow and Ségolène Tarte, and me [Malcolm Atkins] as solo musician) and Birmingham -based dancer Marie--Louise Crawley. In 2013 we participated in the Oxford University research project Ancient Dance in Modern Dancers ('ADMD'), bringing our practical knowledge as performers to explore the long forgotten form of tragoedia saltata, or ancient Roman pantomime, solo storytelling through dance and music. We subsequently formed A4O as a group of performing artists to explore from our perspective as artists the potential of using principles and ideas from ancient dance and music in contemporary performance.

As the musician for the group I will discuss my practice of creating music for a solo dancer recounting a known story that often involves multiple and sudden character shifts to convey the narrative. The constraints of the Roman practice have been used because this was such a popular art form (amongst all classes) and we as a group are fascinated by

whether telling narrative through solo dance can be popular and meaningful to us in a similar way. With the limited textual evidence that we have of the practice (which tends to focus on the reception of the dance) we cannot recreate the dance or music, and for us this would be meaningless as a method of contemporary communication. But we can assess the principles of communication that underlie this approach and assess what works for us (and what might have worked in Roman society). A key source here is the dialogue of Lucian (125 – after 180 CE) *De Saltatione* (On the Dance).

Overview of my practice

Although I have not attempted to recreate Roman music or instrumentation (for the reasons given above) I have been open to using melodies such as the Seikilos epitaph (contemporary to this dance practice) and have often used the text of Ovid as a starting point for exploration, focusing on the sound and resonance of Roman words. The use of Ovid as a basis for our work and of *Metamorphoses* in particular is supported by the arguments of Ingleheart (2008: 209-10) who points out that this work fits the needs of Pantomime dance as described by Lucian and refers to the quotes in Lucian's own work about how popular his work was for the dance (despite the fact it was not written for this). My main engagement with Roman practice has therefore been the attempt to use the interpretation of text as a framework for supporting the dancers in their creation of narrative. I have let the dancers decide on the narratives that they want to interpret and worked with them in exploring ways to do this.

In terms of music I would identify as follows the approaches I use to the creation of the music that supports the dance.

- Exploitation of the sound and rhythm of text and use of key items of text to unfold a narrative
- Using sound to denote character or emotion (ethos or pathos) or even a more general atmosphere.
- Spontaneous response to movement exploration and vice-versa.
- Established techniques of musical construction

These four approaches are linked to an overall practice of collaborative discussion with the dancer on how to realise a chosen narrative and are rooted in the way that music can be used to express narrative in contemporary Western culture and the legacy of film as well as contemporary music and dance practice in a multicultural society where we have tended to accept the validity and equality of all genres. In this the collaboration tends to be an equal creative partnership. It is not clear from the evidence we have whether this bears any relation to Roman practice and work with the celebrity pantomime dancer but I will try to assess each technique I use and consider whether there is any evidence for its provenance in Ancient Rome or likelihood of this. In considering this we need to step back from an automatic assumption that music and dance in the Ancient World was constructed on the same aesthetic bases as ours. A cross cultural perspective is useful here. Why should not Roman attitudes to music and dance be more similar to those in traditions such as [Pansori](#) (a Korean tradition of relating narrative through improvised and extended techniques of one singer accompanied by one percussionist) [Kathak](#) (a temple

dance from South Asia which has a dance vocabulary for conveying narrative) or No and Kabuki – two Japanese theatre traditions that combine ritual movement, mask and stylised recitation and vocalisation. The pre-industrial bases of all these art forms and their ritual power all have similarities to the mythological basis of Roman dance. When we talk of choral music do we immediately revision Roman music within the parameters of Western art music when the underlying assumptions behind our traditions are far more alien to Rome than are those of South Asia or Korea or Japan?

Techniques

1. The use of text

As a starting point to finding expression in music and movement I often recite, sing, chant or explore in some way the text of Ovid that recounts the narrative that we will perform (the choice of which I always leave to the dancer). I use the Latin text here because it has so much resonance and power that is lost in all translations, with the possible exception of Ted Hughes.

This is not about a metrical recitation of the poetry – which could be valid for some of the sounds created, but would be problematic because the duration of reading would be too rapid for the expression of music and dance in our culture and proved to be so when requested by ADMD in early experiments. Metrical recitation does seem to have been important in Roman times and Moore (2012) has emphasised the significance of meter in Roman comedy (as a dedicated music theatre genre). It does seem that Pantomime was accompanied by a libretto that unfolded the story to the viewer, and Zimmerman (2008) argues that Seneca incorporated the contemporary popularity of pantomime in his tragedies and highlights passages which could well be a backing for a danced interpretation – showing how tragedy at his time had adapted to include the most popular art forms in Rome (dance as well as solo singing). Seneca himself actually documents the unfolding of gesture matching the speed of words: ‘We are apt to wonder at skilled dancers because their gestures are perfectly adapted to the meaning of the piece and its accompanying emotions, and their movements match the speed of the dialogue.’ (Translation from stoics.com).

However, this is one area where I and the dancers choose not to attempt to follow ancient practice because as a group we do not believe the dance should rely on explication in this way and the constraints of unfolding a narrative at the speed of a metrical delivery does not work in our time. We cannot find a way to use this approach with credibility in our dance interpretation. Instead I use a range of techniques such as fragmentation, recitation and repetition to create a supportive sound world that can evoke the power of the words but leave space for interpretation in the dance and music that overlays this. I would summarise the techniques as:

- Use of rhythmic repetition of text fragments
- Recitation and incantation
- Creation of melodies to reflect a text as it could be sung.
- Exploration of the melodic potential of key words.

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In an episode that explored the danced rage of Tisiphone, for example, I developed the use of phrases in a simulation of the rhythms of South Asian music where the rhythmic urgency was required to support the dance – in conjunction with a string and simple off-beat rhythm. In this I simply took phrases from Ovid and transferred them into the rhythms of bols (the practice of vocalising tabla sounds).

Music Example: Theme for Tisiphone

In the creation of the plea of Myrrha to be made inhuman and escape the guilt of her incest I used the repeated chant of ‘mutataeque mihi vitam que necemque negate’ as a way of underpinning her plea to the gods. This chanting accompanied and enhanced her kneeling prayer as the music built to the point of her transformation into a tree.

Music Example: Chant in Myrrha

In Lycaon, Ségolène wanted the words of Ovid recounting his transformation into a wolf to be like ‘maggots in the brain’ and in a recording we made together they emulated the whisperings of a horror film.

territus ipse fugit nactusque silentia ruris exululat frustra que loqui conatur: ab ipso colligit os rabiem solitaeque cupidine caedis vertitur in pecudes et nunc quoque sanguine gaudet. in villos abeunt vestes, in crura lacerti: fit lupus et veteris servat vestigia formae; canities eadem est, eadem violentia vultus, idem oculi lucent, eadem feritatis imago est.

(Book 1 232-239)

He runs in terror, and howls as he reaches the silent fields, lost to speech. Foaming at the mouth, and just as desirous for killing, he turns on the sheep - still delighting in slaughter. His clothes become bristling hair, his arms legs. He is a wolf, but keeps some vestige of his former shape; the same grey hair, fierce visage and gleaming eyes. The same picture of savagery.

Music Example: Words like Maggots in the Brain

As a final example, for the grieving of Memnon for the death of her son I created a simple repetitive backing and improvised a melodic response over this. This was deliberately outside of the metrical constraints of the chosen text and I explored a lyrical sensitivity to extending words and a melismatic approach that could be seen as operatic but also bears some relation to traditions such as thumri in India (see below).

Non vacat Aurorae, quamquam isdem faverat armis, cladibus et casu Troiaequae Hecabesque moveri. cura deam propior luctusque domesticus angit Memnonis amissi, Phrygiis quem lutea campis vidit Achillea pereuntem cuspide mater; vidit, et ille color, quo matutina rubescunt tempora, palluerat, latuitque in nubibus aether.

(Book 13: 576-582)

Aurora had no time to be moved by the fall and ruin of Troy and Hecuba ..A deeper sorrow and personal grief tormented her, the loss of her son Memnon, whom she, his shining mother, had seen killed by Achilles's spear on the Phrygian plain. She had seen this and the bright morning light had paled and the sky was overcast.

Video Example: Death of Memnon

All these examples raise questions about how text may have been used in Rome. First of all, the use of the sound of words is inherent in all poetry and is especially prevalent in Greek and Roman poetry where public recital and singing of texts seems much more of a standard. There is an inherent musicality in most poetry but we have a tendency to ignore this and focus on script rather than sound. This does seem to be a particular phenomenon of our time but we have only to listen to Under Milk Wood or Joyce reading his own work (for example from Finnegan's Wake) to be reminded of the dangers of a scriptocentric obsession.

Ovid's words have a real resonance: in a discussion I organised at a music festival (Audiograft 2015, part of Oxford Brookes Music Festival) we compared readings of Ovid with those of translations. The resonance of his words was never equalled and only Hughes came close in comparing the violent transformation of Lycaon to a wolf (the Latin is quoted in the recording of the Lycaon passage below).

It seems pretty certain that sung tragedy, tragoedia cantata was used in pantomime. The text was sung and there was a regular rhythm (the scabellum) and presumably a metrical constraint. Although my use is deliberately not metrical I do try to explore the resonance of particular words and phrases and am happy to dismember text; I also use alternative timbres and approaches to the voice in doing this. This is all following the development of practices in the experimental and avant-garde relating to Cage and Berio amongst others; these musicians were reacting to the potential of words to express outside of the constraints of imposed form. Berio's use of Cummings in Circles is a good example and Cage's experiments with Finnegan's Wake in Roaratorio. But this approach – prevalent now in Western art music – has existed in jazz (think of scat) but more importantly traditions such as thumri where the resonance of a word can be the basis of extended exploration. Manuel (2008: 102ff) discusses how in this South Asian vocal tradition the use of a small number of repeated terms is the basis for extemporization. Other traditions show the ability to use a range of vocal timbres and effects (Pansori for example). There is a danger that the word cantata automatically encourages us to relate what happened in the music to that of our use of the term. But why not look at non-industrialised cultures for examples rather than revisioning Rome in terms of the way art practices in industrial capitalist societies have tended to develop in specialised isolation rather than as integral and ritual expressions of shared cultural values?

The resonance of words can often be enhanced by the use of rougher and experimental timbre – not the pure sound which in the West is often associated with art music, but the idea of a rougher sound that is natural to singing outside of the West. Again Pansori as a narrative singing tradition is a potential point of comparison; there is also potential for ritualistic chanting and repetition or a spechtstimme approach of half singing and half

talking as developed by Schoenberg in his melodrama Pierrot Lunaire. We just do not know how people sang in the Roman period but we should always question the assumptions we make from our unusual tradition. Factors such as the development of the market systems and the Christian legacy of dividing the material from the spiritual have made our musical culture unique and often quite limited within the world's musics. Contemporary music critics and musicians often trumpet the achievements of an avant-garde who are only doing what is prevalent in so many other cultures already (probably a result of a contemporary obsession with ownership and copyright).

All we can say for certain is that Ovid (just as any accomplished poet) constructed a text where the sound and resonance of words was a compositional element as well as the use of rhythm. As a musician I attempt to respond to this artifice with the tools I have at my disposal within my own cultural context (which as explained above precludes the use of simultaneous dance and metrical recitation even if this was achieved in Rome). I have yet to see any evidence that there is a better way of trying to recreate the power of danced narrative and using that as a basis for considering what an ancient musician accompanying dance might have done.

2. Using sound to denote character

Here I would summarise the techniques I use as

- Use of particular sounds to invoke a character.
- Use of genre reference to invoke a particular character.
- Western leitmotif traditions in creating raw material for particular characters from Ovid or particular scenarios.

In using particular sounds to invoke a character, quite often a simple change of instrumental sound or of rhythm is sufficient to denote character.

For Pan, a relentless off-beat pulse and the use of the harsh sonority of the melodica evoked some of the testosterone driven excess of his character. The theme played is no more significant than the brazen and relentless sound. The sound created does not match a particular genre (as far as I am aware) and melodic fragments are basically atonal exploration over a repeated and pulsed chord.

Music Example: Theme for Pan

In 'Daedalus and Icarus' the character contrast was achieved through the contrast of a more ponderous sound for Daedalus and a lighter bell sound for Icarus. This also had genre resonance as the bell was seen as referring to Peter Pan.

Video example: Daedalus and Icarus

In the use of genre for Myrrha I emulated the style of the Second Viennese School and the solipsistic misery of expressionist themes on creating a theme for her which recurred throughout the piece.

Music Example: Myrra Theme

This recording was for a pre-recorded performance and an example of how it could be varied in dynamic collaboration is below. It contrasts with the sound world of the ritual evocation of the chanting mentioned above.

Video Example: Myrrha Improvisation around Theme

With Lycaon I was persuaded by Ségolène to use a hammer horror organ reference for a stately march I had written for his entrance (I was reluctant at first but realised this was very effective after I tried it). My fears that this would be too melodramatic were unfounded as it accentuated the horror of Lycaon being taken over by his own barely suppressed bestiality and worked as a theme that presaged a collapse into nightmare – captured through disturbed atonal soundings and frantic whispering (see above) as she is taken over by the shadow.

Music Example: Theme for Lycaon

The Video Example of the transformations of Lycaon can show how the sound supported these although the theme does not appear here directly.

Video Example: Ségolène rehearsing Lycaon

In contrast, Susie Crow's Lycaon explored the idea of a contrast between a breezy welcoming theme (Greek in style and signifying the taverna of Lycaon) so that the descent into bestiality was more of a surprise.

Similarly, a Georgian theme was used for Medea and in a more playful mode a funk theme for a swaggering Apollo (wearing sunglasses) – in contrast to a more balletic style for Daphne.

I was initially resistant to using leitmotif ideas because they are such a filmic cliché. However, because of its ubiquity, it seemed impossible to avoid this approach as a compositional strategy. I initially explored this approach by writing a series of themes for different characters - [some example scores and recordings are on our website](#). Since then I have occasionally used these themes but quite often have to create a new theme for the character in context of the narrative chosen. Although I attempted to capture something archetypal about the character in the theme I write this aspect is not necessarily the one we decide to accentuate or explore in a narrative that we create. In fact, we tend to find new facets of character and for Ovid the deities are just as complicated as the humans they beset. The motif for a character is often accentuated through genre reference and through the use of particular sound worlds and the details of a motif are often less significant than pulse and sound. That said, there were specific motifs for many characters: Myrrha, Lycaon, (Ségolène and Susie), Mercury (in the Aglauros myth where he is particularly self-confident), Arachne and the characters referenced by her and Minerva in the myth.

The use of genre (such as reference to a particular style that has immediate connotations for the listener – such as referencing early music, church music, jazz etc) to invoke

character or emotion (ethos or pathos) is particularly prevalent now as a result of film music but the idea of genre reference and the subversion of expectations through using aspects of one genre in another is a feature of much ancient literature. I see no reason why this should not have been part of the music that accompanied it – especially when we consider that a particularly subversive poet like Euripides was a composer and choreographer. In fact Ovid frequently deflates genre – the depiction of Perseus slaughtering the wedding guests in Book V is almost a parody of epic as is the retelling of Aeneas' journey and the founding of Rome (Books XI and XIV) where he was taking a myth revitalised by Virgil under Augustus. The Satyricon is a stage further in parody – a punk Aeneid and road movie that could be a script for our time (just as Fellini used it). So, if other arts forms used genre reference, why could musicians not do the same? Added to this is the well attested nature of pantomime as a multicultural art form. Lada-Richards describes this as working within all areas of the empire, and suggests that it used techniques appropriate to each population that staged it: 'It cannot be stressed too strongly that no theatre audience can be considered a monolith...made up of individuals.. sharing exactly the same socio-political background, educational and intellectual panoply, aesthetic and cultural codes... (2007: 16). Does that resonate with our current multicultural approach to the creation of sound and dance?

The use of leitmotif is a tried and tested approach in Western art music and film music and can work in giving coherence to an interpretation. As a clearly defined approach it dates from the 19th century (Leitmotif, 2003). However the use of a musical symbol for a character or a style to delineate character and emotion seems to be a fundamental aspect of any staged performance even if it was only codified later in the Western tradition. There is repetition of key phrase and epithet from Homer and could it be that epithet was signalled sonically as well as textually? Is repeated resonance of phrase as integral to all ancient poetry and especially to Ovid?

In relation to dance we could see the codification of gesture as a forerunner of leitmotif as a set of gestures associated with a type of character (regal, seductive) or a mental state (grief, madness) are documented in relation to Ancient pantomime and are a constant point of debate for the Avid for Ovid dancers.

In terms of a range of sounds it does appear that the elaboration of staged performance in large venues – Apuleius' Golden Ass 10.30-34, for example, depicts a staged event including a number of dancers as well as musicians – encouraged the use of a real range of available instruments. Rhythm does seem to have been a key element in performance but it does appear that this was a tradition that was evolving to try all possibilities. Again this is similar to our contemporary approach and could be result of multiculturalism; the stasis of some Japanese traditions is an opposite extreme.

3. Spontaneous response to movement exploration

Because so much of the music I develop is through collaboration I have developed music in spontaneous response to movement exploration. This is an intuitive communication with the dancer to create a composite response in movement and sound. This can manifest as:

- Direct response to movement – such as a representation of dancer as a physiographic score
- The juxtaposition of particular sounds against what the dancer does – the creation of a parallel narrative

For example, Susie and I identified key phrases to use in the Shades of Tisiphone piece we created to reflect the narrative in Ovid IV. We used the following text for the first section:

*Styx nebulas exhalat iners, umbraeque recentes
descendunt illac simulacraque functa sepulcris.
Errant exsanguis sine corpore et ossibus umbrae*

In creating the music I feel there was a symbiotic relation of sound and movement that is captured in this rehearsal extract:

Video Example: Susie as a shade in rehearsal

In terms of creating a parallel narrative this was something that raised an interesting debate with Ségolène in Lycaon. For the music I wanted to restate a poignant version of the opening regal theme during a passage where she has descended into cannibalism. This layer of ambivalence – moderated sympathy for the anti-hero – was something she opposed initially as she wanted a pure depiction of bestiality. I suspect that my motivation here was partly through music and filmic traditions (although this is present in so much literature it needs no reference).

Music Example: Return of Lycaon Theme

Shedding light on Roman practice

Can these approaches suggest possibilities in Roman practice? We simply don't know whether musicians would interact directly with the dance, but a soloist quite possibly could and this does add considerably to the performance. Apuleius' account of the soloists accompanying dancers in the spectacle he describes does imply this. In addition, we have the research of Moore (2008) on the role of the tibicen in Roman comedy and he does argue for the flute player accompanying a large proportion of the drama enacted (over half in the plays of Plautus and Terence). There was clearly a strong tradition of creating music in extended performance that must have been extemporised.

In relation to the Western canon this is a more recent approach in art music but the linking of dance and music and their interchangeability was key to Greek ideas. In Grove Music Online (Ancient Greek Music) Mathieson describes melos as follows: Such pieces of music were called melos, which in its perfect form (teleion melos) comprised not only the melody and the text (including its elements of rhythm and diction) but also stylized dance movement. Given that tragoedia saltata was a practice derived from Greek dancers and that so much was performed in the Greek part of the empire it is reasonable to

suggest that dance and music were liked – much as they are in South Asian and African musics. In Kathak, dancers I have worked with have been musically trained and tend to be able to sing an entire piece that they have learnt. By contrast some ballet dancers work with music at a less conscious level – they are influenced but their steps are their immediate focus and these are supported by the music but seem to be their conscious focus.

Techniques of musical construction

Techniques for structuring our performance have been used but have generally been secondary to the unfolding of narrative as developed through the dance. That said this has often resulted in conventional systems of teleological organisation and climactic build that we could find in any Hollywood action film. Interestingly Ségolène quite early on raised the issue of kairotic time in discussing our work. Kairotic time is a contrast to a linear and measured time and represents the way our perception of time can change at key moments of experience. The concept was used in drama and is arguably a staple of contemporary film. I have seen this extension of time at climactic points of our work as a key structuring device – the slowing and suspension of the sound world as Icarus falls from the sky; relentless repetition of a threatening sound world and a ritual recitation as Myrrha transforms into a tree.

In addition I have been aware of what I would describe as a metaphorical ‘interrupted cadence’ in film or in some of this danced narrative. Just before the final resolution (tragic or salvation) there is an interruption of the flow – in addition the fate of the protagonist often looks to be different (either more positive if he or she is to fall, or more negative if to be successful). This corresponds in some way to a change in time frame. An example is the birth of Adonis which in the story of Myrrha is a huge sonic and motional shift from the preceding and succeeding transformation to a tree.

Video Example: Myrrha at Birmingham Dance Network performance

Outside of these narrative archetypes we were advised by Struan Leslie in a recent workshop that we should create a macro structure from which the narratives could run. In this we followed a ritornello style – a repeated framing device section for all dancers from which a single dancer would break off to create a solo narrative.

Music in Tragoedia saltata

The idea of collaboration with the dancer to create the work which underpins much that I do as well as spontaneous response and feedback to dancer is not apparent in any literature on Roman practice and this raises the issue of how important an element the music was in the performance; the implication is that it was one collaborating element amongst many (as opposed to the key element it is in Avid for Ovid): Karin Schlapbach summarises as follows (2008, p. 314)

‘Neither the music—provided by pipes, percussion, sometimes the cithara and a variety of other instruments (see above, this volume pp. 25–8)—nor the ‘libretti’ of the chorus or

solo singer that accompanied the performance receive any sustained attention in discussions of the genre’

Against this we have a number of testaments to the significance of music but these do not equal the eulogies of the dancer as star performer.

Also we have the account in Lucian (63) of the dancer dismissing the musicians and dancing solo in order to demonstrate his art.

However there are possible reasons for this ignorance of music which parallel what happens in our time and explain why the dancer is the focus of all of the ancient accounts we have.

Dancer as mediator with audience

One problem here on the ancient evidence we have is that the dancer was the mediator between the performance and audience and this could significantly confuse our understanding of the creative process. He (or she) was not the entire performance but would be seen in that way by many in the audience (and especially by apologists and denigrators) just as a review of a contemporary star performer focuses on the way that performer communicates to an audience in a performance. A review tends to focus on what the star did and accept the music as a given (unless it is particularly bad). The star as mediator of the performance to audience is always the focus. The pantomime dancer was the star in performance and as such took all the critical and audience focus. This does not mean that the work was not carefully crafted to reflect music and choreography as a whole.

Audience perception of what is going on is often focused more on dance – especially in our visually oriented culture. A recent write up of Avid for Ovid performing at Winterbourne Gardens failed to mention that there was live music throughout and simply recounted what happened in the dance. Initially, even the existence of a musician as part of the performing ensemble was forgotten. Given that the work we do is derived from collaborative exploration this is an interesting oversight. In fact it is also one more prevalent amongst academics than others. It took members of ADMD well over a year to realise the significance of music in what we do – although this could be because they came from the perspective of assessing dance because this is what ancient writers had done.

How we empathise with dance (and music)

This inability to notice the music as a component in performance is inevitably related to a modern focus on the visual (rather than aural) when appraising a performance but it also relates to how contemporary audiences empathise with a communicated narrative.

Although the dancer is other to an audience he or she challenges ‘otherness’ by adopting different roles that the audience can empathise with. When watching danced narrative we can be drawn in to a physical response to the story; this is something that viewers have

commented on with Avid for Ovid. They can feel the emotive quality more directly than through a spoken narrative. They often want to move themselves and perhaps here we see the why Plato feared the emotional power of mimesis against the rational control of diegesis (Huhn 2016).

The musician is 'other' and the music in most cases remains an alterity – a communication addressed to the audience. However, when singing, the musician is like the dancer in the way the body of the performer is the focus for communication with the audience. This is qualitatively different from the declamation of text because the actor speaks to the audience. In contrast and following ideas expressed by Zuckerkandl (2008) on folk music I see the singer and the dancer as speaking with the audience and expressing their sentiment through a direct interaction with them. The actor does this to some extent but the unfolding of words takes precedence over the empathic correspondence.

Following Barthes' (1977) ideas on the way the voice can embody emotion it could be that prior to the invention of the microphone – with its amplification of the emotive quality of the human voice and the subtleties of inflection it can support – dance was the most effective way of communicating with an audience. Since the development of the microphone we can experience the grain of voice of the singer – we can be drawn into their world – and perhaps this had taken some of the function that dance has had previously and explained the eclipse of dance by popular music.

In contrast reading or reciting a script can give a level of detachment, although the actions of the performer (as with the orator in the ancient world) can give a degree of empathy. It is a far more controlled empathy and explains a contemporary suspicion of communication through dance and music. We often denigrate through the term 'melodrama' but this elevation of scripted or spoken performance over one communicated through dance is also at the heart of Roman critiques of dance.

Lada-Richards (2007: 34) quotes a work on eighteenth century melodrama pantomime dance as a 'narrative aesthetics of embodiment where meaning and truth are made carnal'. This is a great summary but it still raises problems. For example, is the narrative created by each viewer the same or is it even more liable to personal interpretation by each viewer? How does Attic tragedy (as the best known attempt to realise tragic drama) operate in terms of the reaction of the viewer in comparison? Should we talk about tragedy as a narrative aesthetics of 'enmindment', where meaning and truth are made mental?

This all highlights the problems we have with a traditional dualism in our assessment but it does also suggest that there are qualitative differences in our appreciation of words, music and motion.

Externalised representation or internalised (or 'inspired') embodiment

Dance can be internal or external – as can music – and most performance has elements of

both or is on a gradation between both. By this I mean the contrast between the performer embodying and transmitting their own emotive reaction or else documenting and creating a representation.

In terms of dance, for example, Susie specialises in seeking out subtle and sophisticated representation of particular styles of movement appropriate to character or animal. Her Pan emulates the relentless libido of the goat but merges this with human male arrogance. The exuberance is catching and the audience feels like moving, jumping. But this is an externalised crafted representation. In contrast the portrayal of Lycaon by Ségolène is a traumatic experience of realising our own potential for bestiality and the horror of that degradation is felt internally. It is shocking.

Accounts of ancient dancers being taken over by the parts they play shows the internalisation of the role was part of the dance then. But the account of the madness of Ajax in Lucian (80) is given with disapproval and implies that a more detached style was seen as more professional. The dancer definitely needed to demonstrate a control of material and the parameters of performance. In particular, the catalogue of skill of the dancer shows the ability to externalise and describe and in fact Lucian seems to be attempting to elevate the dance to the level of diegesis.

Music often is far more ambivalent but the idea of the musician 'inspired', or taken over is often applied to improvisation. In our work I see the potential for a symbiotic feedback of emotive engagement with the character or emotion where music and dance can amplify one another. This is something I have developed in Butoh collaboration (Atkins 2010) and tends to be a development from joint improvisation. It is a reliance on finding character or emotion through spontaneous interaction and support. It can begin as externalised genre reference or sound that evokes character but at some point shifts to be a collective sonic and motional embodiment.

Given the close integration of music and dance in Greek music in particular it must be possible that this kind of 'inspiration' was part of dance collaboration.

Gender and subversion

One aspect of the power of Roman dance that we cannot capture is the subversive nature of challenging gender definition. The problem here is that the dancers are female and as such they are no challenge to patriarchal order. This subversive aspect of pantomime is one that is not necessarily dependent on music but it is significant that it has been predominantly through music that gender subversion has been explored within Western societies.

It may well be that a patriarchal society often incorporates subversion of gender and heterosexual values as a reaction to the imposed order and we have seen that in the macho 1960s and 1970s with artists like Warhol and Bowie, Queen or Boy George but gender ambivalence can also be traced back to the castrati as the celebrities of their time.

Tragoedia saltata: a collaboration?

The degree of collaboration in creating the Tragoedia saltata probably depends on a number of questions which needless to say we have no definitive answers for. It is possible that the singing of text (as is reflected in the way the genre of tragoedia cantata developed) was closer to our idea of composition in the ancient world because the text had to unfold in a defined way and there must have been conventions for this especially if there were more than one singer. However, even if a choral work was preset around the given text (just as a contemporary work is) it does seem likely that instrumental response was far more extemporised as the creation of any kind of set score for this is unlikely (and is unprecedented outside of more recent Western traditions). Given the amount of material presented in dance form and the flexibility of the form for performance at so many different venues it seems very likely that there were practices for spontaneous creation of composition – whatever rules and conventions were in place.

The creation of narrative by the dancer

The spontaneous response to movement through use of improvisation is a technique that I have developed through free improvisation and is based on the idea of equal communication between participants that is part of free improvisation in music. Treating a dancer as an equal partner in improvisation is just an extension of this approach where there is a consistent dialogue around an agreed aim (the interpretation of a narrative). This is something I first explored in my doctoral work (Atkins 2009) and is something I have developed in collaborations with dancers over the past ten years.

This idea of mutual collaboration is an area where my own practice of dance collaboration has encouraged an interest in Roman practice and enabled me to see potential ways that collaboration could have been achieved. There is no indication that the music for Roman pantomime worked in a collaborative way but in using the documented approaches of the dancers as a starting point and assuming that much music had to be improvised around text or agreed narrative it is a hypothetical approach to how this dance may have been supported by music in some parts at least. We do know that the creation of live music was integral to this practice and that there were an infinite number of scenarios that could be created. Assuming that there would have been minimal notated instruction for this work (if any at all) the music must have been created from some accepted practices of live construction. But whether these followed or led the dance (or swapped between these roles) we just don't know. The fact that the accounts do focus so much in the dancer is not conclusive that this was dance led – especially as key resources such as Lucian's work are focused foremost on the dancer - and we do know that rhythm was integral to this dance form (as the use of the scabellum proves) as was the choice of an appropriate libretto. Lucian (quoted in Jory 2008: 161) describes the importance of the pantomime discerning an appropriate text: 'he should be able to judge poetry, to select the best songs and melodies and to reject worthless compositions'. Jory argues for the importance of the libretto despite our lack of concrete evidence for the content of any.

Conclusion

The practice of telling narratives through dance and music is the focus of Avid for Ovid. In trying to achieve this, I believe that we can raise issues on how we could interpret what might have happened in the Roman world. But that work of interpretation and understanding is to inform and if necessary humble our creative process. We are not necessarily in the vanguard of a continual creative revolution as we so often like to see ourselves (or need to in order to justify the limited funding for creativity in our dedicatedly philistine and insanely competitive society). We may be just discovering truths about telling stories through dance and music that our ancient predecessors have already explored far more than we in our culturally backward world can ever imagine. We just do not know.

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The film at the following link is a community response to dreams of people in Littlemore by musicians and dancers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok3s-uit9dw>

The mass described is a community based composition using melodies from different communities – especially the displaced. It is being performed by all interested over the next few weeks

http://www.littlemorechurch.org/?page_id=2208