

# THE BAROMETER OF MY HEART

Visual Matrix Research and Evaluation project



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Artwork conceived and directed by Mark Storor, produced by Anna Ledgard in association with Artsadmin and in collaboration with Dr Leighton Seal.

Company
Babis Alexiadis – <i>animator</i>
Alex Anzemberger – <i>stage manager</i>
Max Beecher – <i>artist/contortionist</i>
Max Calaf Seve – <i>artist/trampolinist</i>
Pol Calaf-Seve – <i>production assistant</i>
Ian Cameron – <i>artist/performer</i>
Jessica Denning – <i>administration</i>
Tatiana Eikosidyou – <i>animation assistant</i>
Matt Huxley – <i>performer/musician</i>
Jesse Jeune – <i>production assistant</i>
Chris Keenan – <i>filmmaker</i>
Stephen King – <i>photography</i>
Sofie Layton – <i>design artist</i>
Anna Ledgard – <i>producer</i>
Andy Manley – <i>artist/performer</i>
Jules Maxwell – <i>composer</i>
Mwiza Mkandawire – <i>finance</i>
Tyrone Nester – <i>artist/performer</i>
Erika Poole – <i>artist/performer</i>
Alexa Reid – <i>design artist</i>
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# INTRODUCTION

This report is the outcome of an in-depth study of audience reception of an artwork which itself involved years of in-depth inquiry and prolonged collaboration between artist, Mark Storor, and consultant endocrinologist, Dr Leighton Seal. The work was produced by Anna Ledgard in association with Artsadmin and was supported by a Wellcome Trust Large Arts Award and the Arts Council England. The Barometer of My Heart is an exploration through visual art and performance of men's experiences of erectile dysfunction and impotence. In the popular imagination there is often a simple equation between the two that belies their complexity and diversity. Depending on circumstance and perspective, erectile dysfunction may be perceived as an issue related primarily to health, to intimate sexual relationships, to performance in other spheres of life, to male identities or to the condition of masculinity in late modernity.

It follows that although erectile dysfunction and impotence are related, they are not co-extensive. The former can be thought of as a bio-medical condition that afflicts individual men and has a wide range of physical and psychological correlates. It may be a symptom of a serious underlying health condition that demands assessment and intervention – the title of the work draws attention to erectile dysfunction as an early warning of developing heart disease. However impotence is also existential, psychosocial and societal in its ramifications. In the performative cultures of contemporary western societies it signifies powerlessness, loss of agency and a failure to play one's part. As such it is a challenge for men and women alike.

The Barometer of my Heart arose in part from the wall of public silence and private despair that surrounds these issues – only too often met with incomprehension and fear. In the absence of public health education, erectile dysfunction attracts negative projections that may or may not be internalised. Men may delay seeking help with potentially deadly consequences<sup>1</sup>. Impotence can be regarded as something to be worked through with professional healthcare and supportive relationships, or it may be experienced as a source of shame and a

psychosocial catastrophe. What then are the conditions for compassionate understanding and an enlightened public conversation? The Barometer of My Heart uses visual, acoustic and digital media in a performance to communicate matters that all too often have been shrouded in secrecy. It does this through a process of artistic enactment and symbolization, rather than representation – in other words it presents its audiences with forms for the inchoate and unspoken feelings that the subject arouses.

The audiences in our study made use of these cultural forms, mingling them with personal life experiences. We expected that their engagement would be accompanied by anxiety, fear, desire and perhaps hope – and that the scenes of the show would create a 'third space' where unacknowledged and unrecognized emotions could find expression and emerge into consciousness, perhaps for the first time. We had reason to believe that interviews or focus groups, relying on participants' verbal accounts of experience, would fail to capture this emergent process. For this reason we used a recently developed group based method – the visual matrix<sup>2</sup> – that gives expression through imagery and affect to what is 'known' but as yet 'unthought'.<sup>3</sup> When we began this study the method had already been used to assess civic engagement with public art, but not in such an intimate and private area of experience.<sup>4</sup> Whereas our primary aim has been to understand and account for audience engagement with The Barometer of My Heart, a secondary aim has been to determine whether the visual matrix is a suitable method to study an artwork that deals with a subject that is hard to think about, hard to speak of and very often hard to bear.

## Organisation of the Report

In what follows we depict The Barometer of My Heart as an overarching project that includes the performance as its final expression. We then present a short scenic composition<sup>5</sup> that describes the finished piece. Our description can only be an inadequate account of a

<sup>1</sup> Gulpinar J Androl, 33( 4) 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See Froggett et al (2015) for a full account of this methodology, together with its theoretical underpinnings.

<sup>3</sup> 'Affect' refers to the sense capacity of a body to register and respond to other bodies, whether human or non-human; it is closely related to feelings and emotions which it both continuously precedes and succeeds in levels of intensities of embodied experience. Affects may overlap and even 'contradict' each other and are in a state of constant flux.

<sup>4</sup> Other work with the visual matrix has supported its suitability for research on sensitive topics. For example, with homeless and vulnerable young men (Manley & Roy, 2016); and with people in recovery from substance misuse (Manley et al 2015).

<sup>5</sup> See Froggett et al (2014) for full account of this device, based on creative writing technique.

multi-sensory, multi-media, immersive artwork. Both the work itself and the data from our study are complex and unusual and better presented as a whole. Its themes cannot easily be resolved or classified without losing their rich interwoven character – something is lost if we try to impose more clarity than the art will bear. For this reason we have decided to summarise the answers to key research questions at the beginning of the report, as a guide to what we eventually found.

This summary is followed by an explanation of the innovative group-based visual matrix methodology we have used to explore audience engagement with The Barometer of My Heart, which for the sake of brevity we often refer to simply as the ‘performance’ or ‘show’. When designing the study together with Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard, we assumed that responses to erectile dysfunction and impotence would be highly gendered and so we gathered data from a men only group and a women only group, as well as a mixed one. The visual matrices were held shortly after participants had seen the show and each one consisted of between ten and fifteen people. It would have been interesting to include groups specifically composed of people with other gender and sexual identities but this was beyond our resources. At a mid-point in the devising we also conducted a visual matrix with the performers and crew in an effort to understand something of the artistic process they were going through. Each of these visual matrices is written up separately in a way that tries to convey its interwoven imagery, ideas, mode of delivery and affective ‘climate’. The women’s matrix, men’s matrix and mixed matrix are included in the main text of the report. Aspects of the company’s matrix are incorporated into the discussion of artistic process that introduces the final section of the report. The visual matrix is a process whereby participants respond imaginatively to a multi-layered aesthetic experience. We have tried to do justice to the rich and creative content of the sessions. Finally in the discussion we think across all four matrices to justify the conclusions of the study and consider what we have learnt about living with erectile dysfunction and impotence from this particular artwork; what we have learnt about the visual matrix as a method in this context; and what we have learnt about the value of the collaboration between art and medical science.

### **Bringing it all together**

Mark Storor’s own research process for The Barometer of My Heart spanned six years. He then worked with a company of eight performing artists and crew over a period of a month to devise the promenade performances and installation. They were ‘staged’ eighteen times in the Sir Ludwig Guttmann Health

Centre, a large NHS building of contemporary clinical design, close to the site of the Olympic Village in East London. Anna Ledgard worked intensively to negotiate access to this building. The symbolic resonance of the clinical setting and the building’s particular geography were vital to the outcome. She also worked alongside Mark Storor to manage the budget and logistics and, with the support of ArtsAdmin, the publicity, ticketing and recruitment for the visual matrices. Her ideas, observations and background knowledge were an essential contribution to both Storor’s artistic process and our research process.

Central to the development of this work were the sixty-four consultations Mark Storor observed in Dr Leighton Seal’s endocrinology clinic at St George’s Hospital, Tooting, London. Observations were consolidated with debrief sessions between Storor, Seal and Ledgard the next day. Storor also held four extended discussions with men outside of the clinical consultations. Over a number of years, beyond the hospital environment, he held conversations with men in settings where masculinity is invoked, interpreted and sometimes threatened. These included communities, occupations and environments that are male dominated both in terms of cultural values and personnel. These conversations added to the store of imagery and experiences woven into the final production and allowed further insight into how masculinity is lived and performed in social contexts where power and powerlessness are mediated by competition or collaboration – for example, where a man experiencing himself as impotent confronts peer groups and status hierarchies. By talking with men in both clinical and non-clinical settings Storor has positioned The Barometer of My Heart as a psychosocial artwork within a societal frame, greatly expanding its range and scope.

In the year running up to the performances, Storor felt the need to trial some of the material he was working with among invited audiences. He later referred to these as ‘soft performances’. As researchers we were able to attend two of these events. On the first occasion, a discussion followed the performance. On the second, the audience was invited to react through drawings that were posted on the wall. On both, Dr Leighton Seal was present and so were a number of people who were to become members of the company. The events were important steps towards the devising process and the final production, and we refer to them further below.

The devising process itself took place over the course of a month in September 2015, of which the last two weeks were in the Sir Ludwig Guttmann Centre. In this two week period, we attended the first day and a day

late in the process. We also experienced some of the actual performances, and spoke to both to members of the company and the audience. We were present at an expert panel discussion on 1-10-2015. Mark Storor, Anna Ledgard and Dr Leighton Seal were interviewed at length on the 5-01-2016.

The Barometer of My Heart had a continuation in the form of a multi-media installation and workshops called The Simplicity of Truth at FACT in Liverpool<sup>6</sup>. We hoped to conduct a visual matrix with members of the community who participated in its production, but this proved impossible for logistical reasons. Instead an ethnographer attended and observed public interaction with the installation over the course of a day.

### **The Barometer of My Heart: a scenic composition<sup>7</sup>**

The following two paragraphs are an impressionistic summary of the experience of The Barometer of My Heart written in the form of a ‘scenic composition’, which is a creative writing technique that can be used to provide a synthesised account of an object, event or situation seen through the lens of the viewer’s interaction affective and cognitive interaction with it

*A man in a suit, face covered by a black veil is holding a birdcage – the canary has flown. We pass a taxi with, doors open, hazard lights flashing. In an underground car park, a man and a woman cling together precariously trying to maintain their balance on a pile of mattresses, while being doused with pails of water. Howling fills the air. We wander through the Health Centre where the show is being performed. The atrium of the Centre is designed with sharp lines, primary colours and mercilessly bright lights on pristine white walls. Leading off it are the consulting rooms – empty and lifeless. There are few places to hide. The video screen shows a man in a white jump suit adorned with balloons, as if for a particularly messy party game. He stabs one of them with a knife and blood spurts over his white suit. A trombone plays a refrain and a man in a black hat passes a body sprawled on the stairs as he slowly descends. All the while a red-suited trampolinist is bouncing, emitting sounds that seem to be of pain. In one of the rooms, there is a pile of rolled up socks. In another, a man contorts himself impossibly as he pulls his socks with his teeth. A table is set with shattered crystal and spattered – is this also blood? We are mesmerized by another screen where a middle-aged man dances, self-absorbed and alone. We proceed upstairs to a large darkened room*

*passing through empty hanging suits. There is a sweet, indefinable smell.*

*Now we pass from scene to scene, never leaving the room. There is an old naked man wrapped up in cling film with vegetables that press against his skin. Two men are cutting it away with nail scissors. It takes time and they do it with precision and care. The man is released. He wanders between the scenes in his ‘birthday suit’, and later receives a birthday cake that reminds us of the passing of time and return to childhood. He wears a hat with candles, like his cake, and his face flickers with joy as he is handed a sparkler. Two men in flamboyant masks wrestle, the victor is adorned with regalia and prances in triumph. A woman, tarred and feathered, tries to wash away the marks of her shame. A man tenderly sponges off the yellow canary feathers which float in the filthy brown water. Another man sits abjectly, bare-chested, party-hatted amidst the mess and goo of another child’s birthday. There are sickly cakes and jam and peanut butter on the table. He smears the contents over his nipples, stuffs cake down the front of his trousers and rubs. The man who so carefully cut the cling film – in yellow boxer shorts and socks – offers him comfort. In front of another screen – wide, white and translucent – a couple are making love, or are they comforting or struggling with each other? Behind them are shadowy figures crawling and tending to a broken baby. A man stuffs his trousers with soil. He escapes to another place through a hole in a cardboard wall. There is earth and talcum powder everywhere. Sitting in a pile of dirt is another man playing with his broken china animals like small child. He licks one of them clean. A bandaged man is slowly unwound, again there are vegetables, again it is done with care. More vegetables are chopped slowly, deliberately, into neatly sized chunks. At the end there is movement in formation to music as rising and falling ribbons and fantastical digital figures are projected onto bodies and walls. A man is sumptuously bedecked with flowers. He is pulled on a bed as if it were a triumphal carriage, and we are left with questions and with hope.*

### **Research Questions**

The collaboration between artist and medical scientist at the heart of this project gives rise to two different but inter-related lines of inquiry

1. Did The Barometer of My Heart succeed in conveying the implications of erectile dysfunction and impotence for men’s health, and if so what can it tell us about the use of art for public engagement with such sensitive topics?

<sup>6</sup> Foundation for Art and Creative Technology.

<sup>7</sup> The scenic composition is a methodological device enabling a syncretistic account of the researcher’s relation to a complex process/event witnessed during data collection. For more detail on the use of scenic composition in the presentation and analysis in research see Froggett et al, 2014.

2. Did it enable audiences to engage with male impotence as an experience that bears on how contemporary masculinity is lived, understood and represented?

A secondary aim of the study was to determine whether visual matrix methodology was useful and appropriate for a topic of such complexity and sensitivity.

## Summary of Findings

We have broken our research questions down further for the sake of clarity. Given the complexity of the data and analysis that follow, we first summarise some of the key points in the study.

### How did the Barometer of My Heart convey experiences of men suffering from erectile dysfunction and impotence?

Barometer of my Heart 'gave voice' to the men who Mark Storor spoke with and listened to in a way that was nuanced and compelling, and conveyed the diversity of experiences of erectile dysfunction and impotence. The voices of these men were essential source material for the show, which was neither fiction, nor documentary, nor biography. What the audience saw is the outcome of a series of artistic transformations of the primary material, first by Storor himself and then through his work with the company. At the core of the work are the consultations between Dr Seal and his patients in the clinic where they have come hoping for, or despairing of, medical help. Storor's self-assigned role in these consultations was to be "totally present while utterly invisible"<sup>8</sup> and the eventual performance bore witness to what he saw and heard. The conversations between doctor and patient were structured according to the protocols of a professional interview, and accompanied by an examination. The clinical setting was designed to offer reassurance and safety and established bio-medical priorities. Yet Storor observed a great deal of stress, embarrassment and fear – conveyed through expression and gesture. For many of the men erectile dysfunction was a source of shame and anguish and for some symptomatic of a fatal condition. How can men be persuaded to speak about it when so much is at stake? What are the psychological implications?

Dr Seal's patients bring with them into the consulting room a range of emotions. They may be in existential crisis, relational chaos and deep psychological distress.

Some do not know how to continue living their lives. Some come with their partners, the majority alone. It is by sensing the mental and physical state of the person in the room and observing the often minute, moment by moment intensities and flows of feeling that Storor registered the affective climate of the interview and over time discerned significance and pattern in how unspeakable emotions are expressed. While Dr Seal listens to patients as a clinician, Mark Storor 'listens' as an artist. The men's stories could simply have been reported, but Storor's aesthetic attunement is to a wider complex of relations, feelings, and gestures, apprehended in the moment rather than related after the event. The 'voices' that permeated the artwork had many manifestations, of which the spoken word was only one. Rather than narrative, it seems that what was gathered was the lyrical form of the experience – how it felt in the 'here-and-now' of the encounter. The medium of expression was not so much the story of what happened (though some of this filtered through) as the scene wherein it became manifest. This is how a significant detail can take on symbolic resonance, condensing within an image a sensory and affective 'universe'. Words were used sparingly in the final production and there were no individual stories. Instead, the subject matter of the show was the crisis of the male self or its integrity in the face of impotence, and all that there is in-between. These experiences were in turn refracted through an artistic prism to produce a series of scenes that broke the taboos of silence and provoked the audience who were challenged to engage with emotional and aesthetic intelligence – to comprehend aspects of impotence that lie beyond words.

### Did The Barometer of My Heart make the experience of impotence communicable, and if so how?

Dr Leighton Seal has remarked on the difficulties of finding an adequate language with which to communicate the experience of erectile dysfunction and impotence. This is in large part because of the embarrassment the subject attracts, and the anxiety it causes. As a result, men suffering from the condition are more likely to resort to secrecy, disavowal, and other strategies of avoidance. Emotions may be unrecognized and the matter becomes literally unspeakable.

For example, when we see the image of a naked man caught like a 'rabbit in the headlights' page 31 of medical scrutiny we may re-experience embarrassments we ourselves have suffered and an overwhelming desire to hide; we may recoil from the objectivisation and intrusion of medical science into the bodily sites of

intimacy where the surrender of privacy compounds the loss of potency, doubling the defeat. All this unfolds within the context of institutionalised medicine. However sensitive the practitioner, the experience may be of infantilised dependency. Functional sexuality is a lived and culturally sanctioned mark of adult identity. To place its 'repair' in the hands of another is to call this into question and render oneself vulnerable.

Both Dr Leighton Seal and Mark Storor are aware of the value of metaphor, though it operates differently in the contexts of art and medical science. The Barometer of My Heart has created an elaborate language of visual metaphor with which to explore and communicate the experiences and consequences of erectile dysfunction and impotence. Through use of the visual matrix we have come to understand that the visual 'language' of the project, meaningful in its own terms, can, in the right circumstances, be expressed as figurative verbal expression. The power of this art form lies in the fact that visualisation and metaphor are neither explanatory nor descriptive, they mediate the relation between words and the body so that verbal language is sensualised and acquires vitality – the better to convey lived experience. This is the first indispensable step towards a nuanced and empathetic public conversation about the condition, which will make public health messages easier to hear and to act upon.

### Did it address the relationship between erectile dysfunction, impotence and the experience of masculinity in contemporary society?

Dr Leighton Seal makes the point that erectile dysfunction and associated perceptions of impotence among men are relatively common experiences, affecting many at some point in the life course, with the likelihood of occurrence increasing with age. He quotes studies that suggest prevalence increases by a decile with each decade so that roughly 40% of men over 40 will experience it in some form, 50% of men over 50, and so on.<sup>9</sup> He also commented in one of Mark Storor's pre-production events, that ever younger men and boys are attending his clinics. This may suggest that alongside the physiological causes of erectile dysfunction, there are significant psychosocial shifts in how potency and masculinity are linked in the development of male gender identities in contemporary Britain. A number of explanations have been advanced at one time or another, ranging from the accessibility of pornography via the internet; the educational under-performance of boys in school; changing gender roles within the family; the intensifying demands of the workplace; performative

cultures; low quality jobs and under-employment; the impact of feminism and 'disempowering' cultural representations of maleness within film and media. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the literature that bears on these trends. Our approach is data-led and our primary aim is to account for the perceptions and engagement of the audience. However, as we shall see, the artwork itself mediates interaction between personal experience and a wider cultural and political world.

The Barometer of My Heart aroused reflections on the relationship between masculinity, potency, gender and society in all of the visual matrices we facilitated. These were expressed as imagistic intuitions rather than as lines of argument or analysis in a sociological vein; as such, they had the quality of 'felt and imagined' relations to the artwork and the social, in which the participants sometimes perceived themselves as deeply implicated and at other times ambivalent, or avoidant. The method we have used to understand audience engagement reveals a range of reactions to the subject matter, many of them undigested and unsettled. The Barometer of My Heart did not aim to facilitate a spurious consistency, and neither did the research team. Instead, the performance opened up the complexities of thought in the audience, and the visual matrix then enabled the participant groups to re-imagine, associate to, and elaborate upon these responses. The men's, women's and mixed groups showed significant differences in the ways they did this, and it is worth commenting on why this might be have been so.

## Men's Matrix: short summary

The men worked overwhelmingly through cultural representations. They took cues from the show's scenes, either in terms of content or affect, and these stimulated a cultural commentary on hubris and failed machismo. They debunked the absurd 'hyper-potency' of male celebrity icons. The idea of potency was instead 'queered'<sup>10</sup> through reference to the exuberant camp video of Bowie and Jagger 'dancing in the street'. Impotence is disturbing and is a state of mind as well as a physical condition. The Barometer of My Heart brought it closer than these participants may have wished and implicated them all by virtue of their shared masculinity. It confronted them with how the condition is perceived and derided among men themselves, and therefore raised questions in their minds about where responsibility lies for the suffering it brings. For this group the show spoke to deep-seated biographical anxieties about performance, sexuality and what it

<sup>8</sup> Mark Storor interview 5-01-2016.

<sup>9</sup> NIH Consensus Development Panel. Impotence. JAMA. 1993; 270:83–90.

<sup>10</sup> Queer theory gained strength in the 1990s as a conceptual framework based around the idea that sexed and gendered identities are socially constructed and potentially mutable and fluid rather than fixed at birth. For example, Kosofsky 1990; Butler 1993; Turner 2000.

means to be a man, compounded by experiences in early adolescence. By returning in memory to adolescence, as a life transition that takes place before adult sexuality is fully established, any consoling fiction that this is a problem for 'other' men was dismantled.

Working through references to film and popular culture was a necessary defensive manoeuvre that attenuated the impact of painful realities brought to mind by the show. At the same time it was a 'soft' and knowing defence that kept these realities in view in a way that could be managed with humour. Super-heroes were de-bunked: Captain America is beaten up by 'Captain England ...with a can of Stella, wearing flip-flops'. When the video of the Bowie/Jagger dance routine finally emerged it marked an affective shift towards a queering of masculine stereotypes and an acknowledgement that the quest for male potency is not the only pathway to happiness. The humour and banter employed in this 'cultural defence' was in itself enjoyable and was stimulated by the iconic, and sometimes archetypal nature of imagery in the performance itself. It was also a functional defence that brought participants together and motivated them to continue working with the material. It allowed pleasurable engagement with a shared culture and ultimately a sense of shared humanity as a basis for male solidarity.

#### Women's Matrix: short summary

The women's matrix was very different in terms of both affective climate and critical consciousness. It moved towards cultural commentary, but very slowly, as it first needed to ground itself in the emotional fallout of male impotence, only accessible to women through empathy. The women's matrix therefore developed complex visual metaphors with which to explore the many-sidedness of impotence as an experience. Rather than approaching it through the carefully calibrated and self-protective 'distancing' of cultural material, their struggle was to get 'closer', and they did this through identification with the one woman in the show, with qualities typically regarded as feminine, and with the possibility of care as a capacity of men and women alike.

It was as if they felt a moral responsibility not to deflect the many faces of suffering presented in the performance and they therefore had to stay close to the scenes it presented, working through them thoughtfully and, as far as they were able, unflinchingly. Towards the end of the matrix, stimulated by the memory of the scene of a man slowly, 'domestically' chopping vegetables, they returned to a key trope and political-ethical dilemma

of second wave feminism – that men may perceive themselves as paying the price of emasculation for the chaos that is unleashed when the gender order is challenged. In a matrix that had hitherto made little use of cultural references, remaining closer to personally experienced emotion, a scene from Marco Ferreri's film *La Dernière Femme* (made in the 1970's) was brought to mind. It is an uncompromising film where the crudely misogynistic male central figure arouses little sympathy until 'he gets absolutely roaring drunk but very morose and he takes an electric carver, right, and it ends with him chopping off his dick'<sup>11</sup>. The horror of this realization of male suffering brought the women's matrix another step closer to empathy.

#### Mixed Matrix: short summary

All the matrices were able to find a 'third space' to situate thoughts and feelings, but in the mixed matrix it appeared to be less of a struggle. The participants occupied a third space with ease and consistency without defensive distancing, or the sense of merger implied in empathy. They were therefore able to produce original imagery more freely. The mixed matrix appeared to take for granted the absurdity of stereotypical male potency, concentrating creatively on its inversion so that sexualised power was de-mythologised by the human need for comfort, care, perspective and a gentle sense of humour.

This was perhaps unsurprising as the male and female participants in this matrix were compelled to reach beyond gendered conventions of communication that only 'work' in a single sex environment. At the same time heteronormative assumptions were unsettled by the show, and a gentle queering emerged. This was different in kind to that in the men's matrix insofar as in the mixed matrix generated distinctively new imagery and affect, rather than leaning on filmic images and popular culture already in the public domain. For example, the wrestling scene in *The Barometer of My Heart* prompted a combining and splicing of imagery in the performance to produce an affective appreciation of the absurd: 'men fighting and making passionate love at the same time – [for] some reason image of them in socks'<sup>12</sup>. We discuss the ingenious symbolism of the sock in the extended account of this visual matrix as an idea that has 'travelled' from the observed source material in Dr Seal's clinic, through to the performance and into the minds of the audience. The matrix played affectionately with the possibilities of socks as signifiers of a vulnerability, comfort and care that belied the presentation of the powerful macho self.

# METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

The methodology employed in our research on audience engagement with *The Barometer of My Heart* has been used in a variety of contexts, including other instances of gauging people's involvement, participation and experience of artworks that have been aimed at social as well as artistic and aesthetic ends<sup>13</sup>. *The Barometer of My Heart*, with its dual socio-medical and artistic aims defies standard methods of investigating of audience reaction – such as surveys, focus groups or semi-structured interviews or even narratively structured stories. This is largely because of the extreme complexity and sensitivity of its subject matter, the social taboos surrounding the subject of erectile dysfunction and impotence, and the nature of the artwork itself.

The stigmatization of erectile dysfunction presents an obstacle to public conversation and professional communication on the subject. It has been noted that the language used by clinicians and patients frequently becomes figurative, as if clinical discourse on its own is inadequate:

*We found that the consultant made use of metaphorical language when referring to potency, using terms like 'Raging Bull' and 'Faded Glory', and describing ED as: 'The Canary in the Mineshaft'. Participants in the research also turned to metaphor, reconfiguring their sexuality as 'a sleeping dog that was once ferocious', or as 'a peace lily'.*

**(Storor & Ledgard, Proposal)**

*The Barometer of My Heart* aimed to develop a visual and performative 'language' with which to communicate its subject matter. The promenade performances staged a sequence of scenes throughout the whole of the building where they took place. Many of these scenes were provocative and disturbing, making use of cultural archetypes while at the same time offering the audience a range of interpretive possibilities. The locus of our enquiry was the interaction between the audience and the artwork where an aesthetic and affective response was evoked.

The visual matrix method is designed to investigate these aspects of audience engagement. In this case it was supported by observation and in-depth interviews with Mark Storor, Dr Leighton Seal, and Anna Ledgard. Another researcher undertook ethnographic observation of *The Simplicity of Truth*, in Liverpool, and talked to visiting members of the public.

## The Visual Matrix

The visual matrix method engages a group of people in a process of shared association in relation to an experience. Participants are facilitated to 'think visually', around a topic, the idea being that expressing one's experience through images can give access to embodied experience and to some extent, bypasses the rational-cognitive representations of public and professional discourse. Instead, the visual matrix provides a setting in which unarticulated emotions which may even be disavowed or repressed can emerge into consciousness and find expression. This is especially so where anxieties provoked by the subject matter induce mental paralysis and border on trauma. In *The Barometer of My Heart* the visual matrix enabled participants to think about a difficult subject through a visual imagination that responded to the lyric rather than narrative of the experience of impotence. That is it afforded insight into the immediacy of immersive experience of the show rather than reactions to it delivered after the event.

The theoretical basis for the method and its application to art has been described elsewhere in detail<sup>14</sup>. Here we summarise key features of the method that are particularly relevant in this context:

1. It understands the communication of knowledge and learned experience through images and affect as being 'rhizomatic' in a Deleuzian sense, rather than linear. The visual images as they arise in *The Barometer of My Heart* are reinvoked in the visual matrices. They accumulate and interact as a collage of images, or rhizome, rather than as a sequential, discursive line of thought.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Quotation from the women's visual matrix.

<sup>12</sup> A reference to the wrestling scene in Ken Russell's film *Women in Love*, but in the matrix with socks added in to the scene.

<sup>13</sup> Froggett, Manley and Roy 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Froggett, Manley and Roy 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1988.

2. It conceives of the clusters of images that emerge from the artwork and the visual matrix as being 'scenic' in a Lorenzerian sense<sup>16</sup> where a scene is always produced out of an interaction between the life historical experiences of those who witness it and the shared cultural resources through which they make sense of it. Hence the 'scenes' in The Barometer of My Heart are always a combination of what is presented to an audience and what they evoke in each person's personal and cultural life. The performance is a complex whole that consists of the relations and interactions between the audience, the artwork and the socio-cultural context. The visual matrix provides a context where those relations and interactions are re-enacted in a research setting.<sup>17</sup>

3. It is open to the possibility of a shared, social unconscious as expressed in the process of the visual matrix. This is of particular importance where unacknowledged, disavowed or repressed feelings are at issue, as is likely to be the case in relation to impotence. This material can be detected through the iteration and presentation of imagery in the matrix which also depends on a state of mind that has been called 'reverie'<sup>18</sup> combined with an encouragement to 'free associate' to images and feelings as they arise among the participants in the matrix.<sup>19</sup> 'Reverie' in this context means a state of mind akin to day-dreaming that allows images to float to the surface; 'free association' refers to 'involuntary ideas' that are expressed spontaneously as a result of immediate stimulation as opposed to thought through ideas that may be discursively elaborated with hindsight.

#### Method

The following describes the basic steps of the method in application:

1. Between 10-15 participants in a room in the Ludwig Guttmann Health and Wellbeing Centre, where the performance took place. They were recruited through ArtsAdmin, the only condition being that participants had seen the performance at least once.
2. We held one female only matrix, one male only, and one mixed. There was a fourth matrix convened for the company only. A female researcher facilitated the women's matrix, a male

researcher the men's matrix and both facilitated the mixed and company matrices.

3. The stimulus and encouragement for the participants to start thinking visually was to recall the experience of having witnessed the performance. Participants were encouraged to allow their own images and associations to emerge.
4. Participants and the researchers in their role as facilitators sat in a 'snowflake' pattern, avoiding direct eye contact and speaking into the shared space rather than to one another. This feels very different to seating arrangements that encourage eye contact and face-to-face interaction.
5. The facilitators invited expressions of images, associations, thoughts and feelings as and when participants wished, without turn-taking. They emphasised that no judgment or interpretation would be made during the matrix itself.
6. Each matrix ran for between 45 minutes and an hour. The facilitator minimized the leadership role by participating in the associative process. Expression of images took precedence over discursive exchange as participants contributed thoughts and feelings. The researchers took notes of the contributions and the visual matrices were audio-recorded.
7. After the matrix there was a short break, chairs were re-arranged into a semi-circle around a flip chart and participants are encouraged to reflect on what had emerged, by identifying clusters of imagery and associated thoughts and feelings. The researcher took notes of these ideas helping to make sense of the matrix by linking themes, images and emotions as they were debated by the participants.
8. The recordings were later transcribed and further analysed by the researchers.

#### Analysis

The basic analytical process consists of a series of research panels consisting of two or three researchers analysing the transcripts over a period of time ranging from close in time to the matrix – when memories and sensations are still fresh in the minds of the

researchers – to later on, when the data can be viewed at a distance. During this process interpretations are put forward and discussed, developed or refuted until agreement is reached. The interpretations relate not only to content (what images and thoughts were presented) but to the 'performance' of the matrix (how they were presented) and to the social, cultural and political significance of the content and performance of the matrix in combination (why things were presented as they were). These are key protocols of a multi-dimensional scenic analysis.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of The Barometer of My Heart we felt that the especially rich and complex material of the artwork and the visual matrices warranted further attention. In particular, we felt that the range and depth of affect and the very distinct modes of rhythm and delivery of the gendered matrices, which were specific to this research, were particularly significant.

In the analysis of affect, direct expressions of emotions were extracted from each matrix and compared in intensity and quality to the other matrices, building up a sense of what was common and what was different and particular to each matrix. This was especially illuminating given the gendered constitution of the matrices and the focus on male experience in The Barometer of My Heart.

Similarly, each matrix was analysed in terms of rhythm and delivery, the 'musicality' of the matrices, so to speak.<sup>21</sup> We wanted to know if the delivery of each matrix corresponded in different ways to their gendered composition, and the expressions of affect and choices of images both from The Barometer of My Heart and from the participants' own imaginative responses.

<sup>16</sup> Lorenzer 1986, Froggett and Hollway 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Froggett, Manley and Roy 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Bion 1970.

<sup>19</sup> Freud 1900 [1991].

<sup>20</sup> Volmerg and Hollway, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> See Wotton (2012) for discussion of how a spontaneous and distinctive musicality develops in groups and can be an invaluable tool for understanding the emotional life of the group.

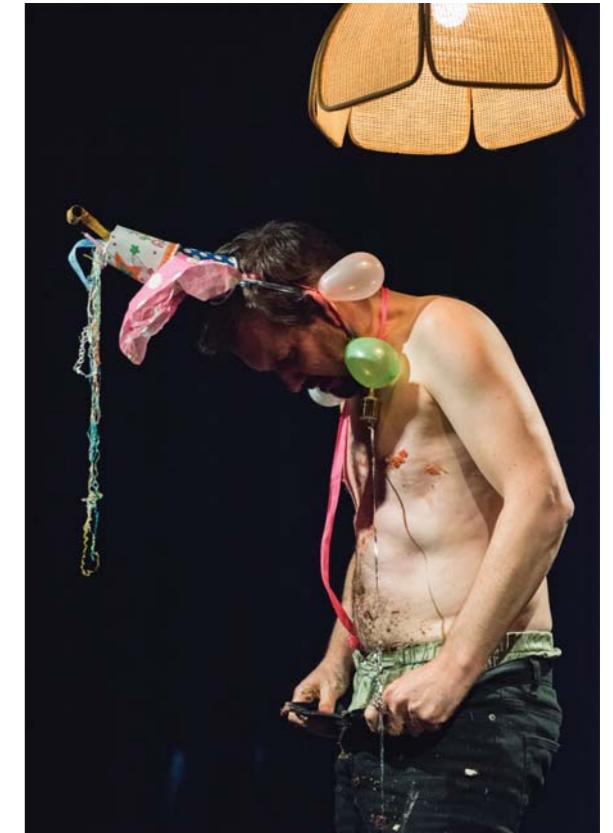
# THE MEN'S VISUAL MATRIX

## Introduction

The gathering of a men only visual matrix brings to light a distinctively male gendered complex of emotional reactions to *The Barometer of My Heart*. There is a constant struggle between authentic self-expression and avoidant ‘banter’, but the matrix creates a setting in which its participants are able to ‘stay with’ the experience of the show and explore their anxieties about impotence and the unsettling of male identities that it provokes. Our understanding of this is that the ‘laddishness’ of the banter (owned as such in the matrix) is a defence against the intense discomfort generated by the subject matter of the show itself and what it produces in the men. However the banter in the matrix – which is fast and witty, dense with cultural references and riffs of repartee – not only establishes a degree of self-protective distance from the fears the show arouses, it also achieves a release of tension and, reflecting the more hopeful notes in the show itself, a life-affirming male solidarity and enjoyment. As a result, the participants are motivated to continue with urgency and an incessant intensity of engagement that never falters, as they work their way through a collage of challenging images, emotions and associations that weave between the performance and the lived experience of each member of the audience.

Despite its apparent levity, the matrix works with major issues that bear on what it is to be a man today: power and masculinity; pride and the shame of impotence; the secrecy and privacy of erectile dysfunction; alternatives to traditional understandings of maleness; bringing up boys; expectation, failure and humiliation; male celebrity icons; race, power and sexuality; masculine care; aging, decline and the return to childhood.

These issues are not overtly ‘discussed’; rather the process works towards surfacing what psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas has called the ‘unthought known’<sup>22</sup>. Male impotence arouses inchoate fears, many of which are deeply embedded in the psyche, hidden and unacknowledged. The performance provides scenes and images around which these feelings can cohere, find form, and become available to thought. In other words it works to reveal what is known to us emotionally but is normally too traumatic to think. The performance brings the unthought known into the realm of



symbolisation so that feelings can be acknowledged in preparation for further creative elaboration.

The visual matrix reveals how much of a struggle this is. In a sense it continues the process that begins in the show, often ‘re-symbolising’ or transforming the material through association to produce imagery of its own in response to what the participants have experienced. The ‘unthought knowns’ are many and interconnected, and together they could increase the confusion and anxiety connected with impotence. However, the visual matrix provides a contained setting in which they can be expressed through imagery and affect. Key to this is a bonding among the group, enacted in the performance through the solidarity that emerges towards the end, and forged among the men in the visual matrix through the pleasurable virtuosity of humour and a multitude of shared references to film, literature, music and other forms of popular culture. In this way the matrix is able to face up to, process and find form for the ‘unthought’

<sup>22</sup> Bollas, 1987.

and the ‘unspeakable’, through an ingenious use of the cultural forms available to it.

The scenes in The Barometer of My Heart are not recalled in linear or dramatic sequence, but as images with meanings in themselves, which are linked, though not necessarily dependent on those that come before and after. They trace an emotional trajectory of the show from abject shame and self-contempt to a celebration of male physicality in many alternative forms. The first of the images to appear in the visual matrix is the painful sight of a man ‘pushing soil down his trousers’; while the final allusion to the performance refers to song and men dancing, reminding us of a captivating video of an older man in the show absorbed in the pleasure of his own dance moves, as well as the celebratory sequence of the final scene.

The purpose of The Barometer of My Heart was not to propose solutions to the problems of impotence, or in any straightforward sense, to convey information about its underlying causes and consequences, but instead to create an artwork which would render men’s experiences communicable in aesthetic form. However, the men in this visual matrix took from it two possible pathways towards resolution of the anguish that Mark Storor observed in consultations and conversations: firstly, a ‘queering’ of conventional masculinity through a questioning and subversion of its familiar manifestations; and secondly, an honouring of male capacities for care and nurture. Beyond these possible ways forward, the mere act of symbolisation – of discovering forms for feelings that would not otherwise be expressed – was itself a kind of ‘answer’, since issues that had once been taboo, or nearly so, were brought into the open in a shared space.

## Tone, rhythm and delivery of the visual matrix

Facing up to the anxieties associated with male impotence in a men only visual matrix had repercussions for the participants. There is often an unstoppable flow of thoughts and affect. The length of the session transcript is almost double that of the mixed group. The men’s matrix begins and ends with an outpouring of shorter associations that are punctuated by references to the performance and flashes of ‘laddish’ male humour that drop in and out of the flow of images, as in this extract from the beginning of the matrix, (images directly taken from The Barometer of My Heart are in bold):

- **Man sitting in his chair**
- **Coats**
- **Jam roly-poly**

- **A feeling of sadness and disappointment at a man with, well, pushing soil into his trousers.**
- **Mr. Creosote from Monty Python**
- **Dancing Queen**
- **A feeling of contrast between expectation and shame**
- **Frustration**
- **Escape**
- **Bulls like attacking each other**
- **Mattress dancing**
- **A feeling of shame, a disappointment in oneself**
- **xxx [clash of two voices, inaudible]**
- **Struggle**

In this opening to the visual matrix, unbearable images from the artwork are deflected by the humorous reference to Monty Python. The laughter this provokes releases “sadness and disappointment”. Associations then start to arise from the men themselves, eventually weaving back to a scene from the performance, “mattress dancing”. Meanings are allowed to emerge through periodic transformations of unbearable darkness into humour in a way that becomes a rhythmic feature of the matrix as a whole. This pattern enables the uncovering and owning of difficult emotion. In this example, generalised feelings of sadness, disappointment, expectation and shame become personalised and focused into ‘a feeling of shame, a disappointment in oneself’. The rhythm and punctuation of the flow gives form to the interchange and makes the unfamiliar confrontation with a taboo subject familiar and acceptable to the men as long as it is brought into the rhythm of the comfortable repartee of a male social group. In this way, the ‘delivery’ of associations in the matrix supports a growing sense of belonging and solidarity in the face of the most taboo of male anxieties. The visual matrix reflects the aesthetic and rhythm of the performance showing how – in Mark Storor’s words – “its beating heart [is] that of the participating men and their experience”.

## Key scenes, imagery and affect

### Impotence and shame

In the opening sequence of images, the VM immediately introduces powerlessness and inaction in the shape of a man who sits in his chair, followed by “coats” (a reference to the empty hanging coats through which the audience have to pass) in this context suggesting not only emptiness but “something to hide”; this in turn is linked to the unheroic sickly greed associated with jam roly-poly; and then significantly the image of the man stuffing soil into trousers and the naming of “sadness” and “disappointment”

- **Man sitting in his chair...**
- **Coats**
- **Jam roly-poly**
- **A feeling of sadness and disappointment at a man with, well, pushing soil into his trousers.**

“Sadness and disappointment” emerges through the links between the various images culminating in the soiling of the genitals, like some dirty secret, an image that confounds all that men believe about their sexuality, summed up a few lines later in the words

- **A feeling of contrast between expectation and shame.**

This is ‘expectation’ of sexual potency made shameful through ‘soiling’ and somehow linked to an incontinent excess of wanting and never having enough. This is extremely hard for the men in the matrix to think about and the discomfort is displaced by the grotesquely comical image of Monty Python’s Mr. Creosote<sup>23</sup>, a figure through which the men can ‘enjoy’ the idea of the stuffed and insatiable and the linking of the sickness of ‘jam roly-poly’ to the twisted humour of Creosote. They laugh together at what in reality would be horrific, which also suggests another way of coping with taboos. However, the laughter provides short-lived relief from the ugliness of the emotions. The matrix retreats further into an ambiguous and at this stage, apparently unrelated reference to the “Dancing Queen”, the meaning of which will become clear later on through further chains of association.

### Coping with shame: other male qualities?

Soil and dirt are reiterated several times in the show and the visual matrix uses this imagery to communicate its own sense of ‘contamination’ by the subject matter. The soil in the trousers is linked to an unmade bed and dirty bed sheets, suggesting a lack of love and care and an ambiguous soiling of the sheets. This image leads to mounting intensity and the naming of hidden shame, including the devastation of “self-loathing”:

- **An unmade bed**
- **Minotaurs**
- **Dirty bed sheets**
- **Hidden and shameful self-loathing of a friend, their hidden shameful, self loathing...**

The accumulating shame is partially coped with in this instance by being attributed to “a friend”, establishing a distance between the participants in the matrix. “Hidden”, “shameful” and “self-loathing” are repeated, so that we are left in no doubt as to its importance.

Later in the matrix, “dirt” is associated to the sexualisation of women and how this is transmitted to pre-pubescent boys, “aged 10”. The men express a feeling of “disgust” in the link between this crude female sexualisation and the twisting and perverting of boys’ attitudes to masculinity in the context of “on-line porn”, “secrecy” and the “manipulation” that leads to a narrowing of the definition of male identities. The struggle with “dirt” eventually finds a possible solution in the washing scene:

- **Images of dirty water I keep thinking of, keeps coming to my head from the show, woman being washed, black stuff on her back and the dirty water...**
- **mother-son relationship from that, child play, washing...**

The image is being used here to think through the shame and to challenge preconceived ideas of male behaviour. The dirt on the tarred and feathered woman, the shame of the couple, is transformed into tenderness as a man washes it off the woman’s back in an evocation of a son’s care for a mother – an inversion of the accepted order of things. Shame, therefore, can be washed away through a masculine capacity for care, internalised from a loving maternal relationship

### Coping with shame: unashamed

There is a challenge in this visual matrix to the potent celebrity of male icons: fighters, film stars and other heroes. These are often carefully, though unconsciously, chosen by the matrix to include multiple figures of masculine heroism. Among these are Muhammad Ali, who is both a fighter and a black male icon; Sylvester Stallone as Rocky, the American working class hero who achieves success through strength, discipline and perseverance; Arnold Schwarzenegger, an America hero and muscleman on film and in real life politics; Raging Bull; Captain America, whose very name connects the superhero with power and dream masculinity.

These apparently untouchable and archetypal icons of masculinity are questioned through a ‘queering’ of maleness, which is hinted at in the very beginning of the matrix with the reference to “Dancing Queen” that in this context takes on a double meaning. The dancing motif starts with “Mattress dancing”, suggested in one of the opening scenes where a couple, desperately clinging together, struggle to keep their balance on a pile of mattresses that resonate with the shame of the unmade bed. It moves on to “crap businessmen dancing in Monroe’s Night Club in Stockport” and “dad dancing at a wedding” – where virility looks ridiculous.

<sup>23</sup> The figure of Mr. Creosote is a grossly, impossibly obese man in Monty Python’s film, The Meaning of Life, who can’t stop eating and vomiting in the restaurant.

The moneyed status of the businessman is exposed as asexual while paternal authority is divested of the sexuality once possessed. In between these references we have another queering suggestion in “Jesse Jay’s music video Hard Out Here”<sup>24</sup> that includes the repeated line “Forget your balls and grow a pair of tits”. Might this, with its allusion to ‘hard’ in the context of the matrix and its feminization of masculinity, help impotent men to dance? The queering dance reaches its climax as a music video is brought to mind: “The outrageous, dancing in the streets that Jagger and David Bowie done”<sup>25</sup> a slick, joyful, camp and sexually ambiguous display of masculinity. The cliché of potent masculinity is subverted but there is no easy resolution here. Other musical icons who introduce elements of queer style, such as Gary Glitter, come back to haunt the matrix

- Long hair
- Brings to mind people like Gary Glitter, not what they seem to be, and kind of silver uniform, and heaving chest and it turns out he's er something else.
- A wolf in sheep's clothing.
- The seventies and everyone basically being a paedophile

#### The felling of icons

Early in the matrix two complementary figures are produced whose power, vested in their legs, is lost. They also introduce a theme which will recur – the questioning of potency and race: The first, “King Kunta by Kendrick Lamar”<sup>26</sup> is the story of Kunta Kinte, a fictional 18th century slave, who offered the choice between castration and losing his foot, sacrificed his foot, and with it the possibility of escape. The second, Oscar Pistorius, the white South African disabled athlete, convicted of shooting dead his girlfriend, had his legs amputated at an early age. King Kunta was a black hero in a white context, while Pistorius was a white hero in a black context. Kunta’s heroic defiance is ended by his stump, while Pistorius makes his fatal error standing on his stumps. These men who have overcome adversity are lone figures and vulnerable within their environments; neither can be what they aspire to. Impotence knows no colour boundaries, and neither does fakery. Other male heroes, black and white, turn out to be frauds

- A sportsman on a podium with a gold medal

- Lance Armstrong
- Black power, the men on the podium with the black glove.
- O.J. Simpson

Lance Armstrong represents the height of white male potency where despite an operation to remove a testicle as a result of cancer, he went on to win the Tour de France seven times, only to be exposed as a cheat. O.J. Simpson, the black American football player, turned out to a social ‘failure’, and, like Pistorius, was accused of murdering his partner, a white woman. The black power of the protest on the podium<sup>27</sup> is debunked by association to Simpson.

The only hint of racial distinction in The Barometer of my Heart was in the person of the one black actor. However the matrix takes picks up on a cue to imaginatively elaborate the black/white theme, exposing a largely unconscious racialised mythology of male sexual potency. The visual matrix takes this hint from the show and develops it into a reflection on the human condition.

#### Psychic danger, passion and lethal rage

As the Visual Matrix dwells on the case of Oscar Pistorius, we have the following exchange

- The complexity of a rape trial
- Oscar Pistorius shooting through a locked door.
- The intertwined nature of love and passion and hatred and frustration, and reliance

This uncomfortable invocation of a rape trial, brings out a dark sense of confusion. Complexity in a rape trial hinges on the necessity to prove or disprove consent. Pistorius’ trial was in fact for murder, but the copious media commentary generated a cloud of suspicion around his motive – was it sexual humiliation that so enraged him? The equal weighting given to the four ‘intertwined’ and yet contradictory emotions in the visual matrix suggests the impossibility of interpretation, compounded by Pistorius’ defence, that he could not see his victim through a locked door and responded to a sense of mortal danger. The insinuation is of a lethal psychic danger through the sense of annihilation that comes of sexual rejection. These aggressive and convoluted images and emotions are accentuated by their hidden nature – “behind a locked door”. There is no justification of rape and murder but at this moment

there is an attempt to confront the aggression that may emerge from extremes of impotent vulnerability and rage.

Rage returns in the matrix in phallic imagery of planes being brought down in vengeful self-aggrandising destruction, as a defence against insignificance – the 9/11 terrorists and the mentally disturbed Austrian co-pilot are joined in rage, as if impotent fury might strike us at any time, without warning, causing untold damage and destruction; and yet the primitive gratifying excitement generated by their acts is acknowledged

- I can just imagine the pilots in 9/11, try to imagine their faces as they go into the towers, and then recently, that German guy who smashed into the Alps, deliberately, and what kind of body and face they must have had and then I can't imagine it being a woman, just imagine only men doing that kind of thing.
- I keep imagining from that German pilot thing - the pilot trying to get in knocking on the door and his face...
- ...certainly the hijackers were still alive ... one of the big things that hit me, I never really realised that before. Proper rage, not just for the people who do ... but myself for being taken in by it.
- face by Francis Bacon
- When you said that of women, I thought of Myra Hindley and the painting that the artist did ....

#### Debunking or deconstruction

As already noted, these extremities of emotion are offset by laddishly humourous debunking of male potency. The icons are both cut down – symbolically castrated – and deconstructed with self-referential irony

- Captain America getting the shit beaten out of him by Captain England. – Even though Captain England does not exist.
- Captain England, a man in a vest, with a tin of Stella.
- In December...
- With flip-flops and shorts on just walking down the street.
- Laddish banter.

Captain America is the fantastic culmination of a parade of fictional superheroes – all very ‘un-English’ –

invoked previously in the matrix – Conan the Barbarian, Batman, Rocky, Raging Bull, Karate Kid.

One of the effects of this debunking is to lead the men in the matrix to consider the realities rather than the fantasies of male potency created in the media. The unlikely story of David and Goliath is turned into its probable reality

*I see a very vivid image of David and Goliath fighting but Goliath steps on David, crushing him, and then drops a rock on his head to make sure he's dead.*

#### Bringing up Boys

All the matrices include a reflection on childhood but because it is asking whether potency defines a man this one focuses on puberty: the crushing of the boy David’s head is a shattering image of innocent youth and courage, brutally destroyed by a crude and yet ‘real’ image of potency in Goliath.

The idea is linked obliquely to the other boys in the matrix, transitioning into manhood through a regime of shame developed in a pornography culture, beginning with “sneaking” looks at “girly” magazines and a chance glimpse of “soft porn” (Mayfair magazine) in a garden. These experiences are benign enough in their own way until confronted with the perverted morality of the teaching assistant who takes the boys on a school trip to the Sun and then tears out the page 3 nude, as they line up to collect their free paper

*- the other group to us being allowed to take home the Sun newspaper but the teacher assistant in that class ripping out the page 3 for each person before they took it away*

Adult supported shame is loaded onto the boys as they develop sexual identity. Images of women are associated with “smut” in an impasse of desire. The cultivation of the ‘lad’ as identity becomes the solution – the male in-joke as defence – funny, eternally juvenile, buffoonish, on the edge of offensive, often self-deprecating. Lad-bonding deflects confusion and isolation – “you’re not alone”.

#### Hiding

In the performance there is a man bandaged from head to toe being carefully unwound; for the matrix it evokes a sense of female faces obscured behind make up and the reality of wounds hidden from view

<sup>24</sup> Actually by Lily Allen.

<sup>25</sup> Mick Jagger and David Bowie, Dancing in the Streets, 1985.

<sup>26</sup> Song released 2015.

<sup>27</sup> The 1968 Olympics Black Power salute was a political demonstration conducted by the black athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico.

- *Geisha girls have their feet bound up with really tight bandages to make them smaller to get into shoes*
- *I don't know why but geisha girls made me think of blood and sores...*

Through a Japanese association, a contrasting link is forged to a wrestling scene in the performance to sumo wrestlers, possibly harbouring hidden disease and polar opposites to the slight figure of the geisha

- *Sumo wrestling*
- *Not understanding how sumo wrestlers live, 'cos, like, they should have heart disease.*

Is this impotence behind a ritual façade? The sumo wrestler is attractive through status rather than sexuality, while the geisha is full of unfulfilled sexual promise. The link between heart disease, erectile dysfunction, and male self-neglect and distress, obscured from view through rituals of male pride, is one of the 'messages' from The Barometer of My Heart.

#### Authenticity

This matrix could be regarded as an exploration of the many faces of shame associated with male impotence as expressed through a vast array of cultural forms and also through the debunking of the super-heroes, the futility and vanity of a mythologised potency.

The Barometer of My Heart ends in music and a coordinated formation among the actors as if we have been led through a series of scenes, both picaresque and grotesque. The elements have now come together in a combination of images from the performance as a whole to suggest resolution and hope through relief and joy in music and dance.

There is a long sequence near the end of the visual matrix where good feelings are marked by favourite songs that signal a change of affect and convey a sense that traumatic material has been worked through. The sustained nature of this change of tone is palpable in the men's commitment to developing the images of happiness, nostalgia and liberation from the angst of the first part of the matrix

- *Rock and Roll Suicide. The chorus 'You're not alone'.*
- *Great memories.*
- *I remember walking through the park just after I had finished work, I had my ipod on on, and a song by David Bowie was on and as I was walking it just went shalo shalo (sings) and then dies, creeps me, the ipod died.*

- *(sings) 'Letting the days go by, Let the water hold me down'*
- *Feeling better, just thinking about music. You get a sense of liberation from it. If you've got an ipod, right, any track on that, there's someone with you, someone else who felt like that.*
- *Sense of finding your icon when you hear songs that you like.*
- *Yeah*
- *This must be the place.*
- *That is home.*
- *I get the feeling from speaking about music when I'm sitting at home and I've written what I call a 'banging' lyric, and I start jumping around and running around my house singing the lyric constantly over and over again until I lose breath and I get told to shut up.*
- *Sense of accomplishment when you do finish writing a song and it's exactly what you wanted it to be. You're happy with every line in it. Feel great.*
- *I remember once I enjoyed myself and somebody gave me a CD of Beethoven's 3rd symphony and the note said 'listen to it on headphones very loud while eating crisps silently'.*
- *First time I got into a Pink Floyd album with a joint and me headphones on – just being taken away from reality, didn't even have to, didn't matter where I was...*
- *First Radiohead album, The Bends, loud... ...Getting pissed and dancing like Peter André... even though my belly was hanging over me belt....fully impressed with myself.*

This finally marks not a renunciation of male survival strategies but a compassionate acknowledgement of them as a source of quiet hope, shorn of pretense and grandiosity

- *Lad as an identity*
- *Opportunity*
- *At the end of the day if you've got a problem like that it's an opportunity to fix it, isn't it? Sense of hope. As long as one person feels like that, as long as there's one decent person in the world then it's not all over and it can sprout. Little seeds, and a plant growing out of it from nothing turns into a forest. Takes time. But it happens.*

# THE WOMEN'S VISUAL MATRIX



#### Introduction

The visual matrix opens with a sense of oppression and a reference to one of the show's scenes – the man wrapped in "cellophane". As so often occurs with opening images in the visual matrix this foretells something of the process that is about to take place. The scene contains the idea of extreme delicacy and potential for harm that will mirror the hesitancy of the matrix as it unfolds. A naked man is painstakingly cut out of his cling film wrapping where he lies like a mummy as if he were embalmed with food for the hereafter, and yet exposed, so that vegetables can be seen pressed against his skin. Already, the linked ideas contained in this signature scene have been hinted at and all will be elaborated in the matrix: death, nurturance and the maternal and the possibility of rejuvenation and re-birth.

Nothing in this scene is hurried for fear of damaging the man within who could be dead but comes alive when released from his wrapping. If this first image foretells the quality of the matrix process, and latently the idea of something dead, inert or quiescent coming alive, the next one (also from the performance) – the flown canary – warns of disaster (as erectile dysfunction does of heart disease). This is a direct reference to the opening of the show itself where the audience is led into the underground car-park by a sinister figure, whose face is obscured by a black veil, suggesting mourning, holding an open cage. The flown bird is a canary of shame, whose yellow feathers in a later scene, stick to the tar that covers a woman's body, and float in the filthy water of her wash.

All this prepares us for what is to come – anguish, suffering and self-harm – as if the matrix is steeling itself to contemplate one of the hardest scenes in the show

*One image that really stuck with me in the show, and ever since I've seen it, is the cardboard space with the man stuffing his trousers with soil and after that scene he was still there stuffing away and stuffing away. I think it was the way he was doing it – it really felt real. He was suffering, and in that dark place you go into in depression – it felt real and you think how do you help, how do you help someone get out of that place?*

### Tone, rhythm and delivery

The pace of the women's matrix is measured and slow. At the beginning there are unusually long pauses (up to 8 seconds) as participants take time to think. Often there is a feeling that thinking is difficult because the experience of impotence is hard for women to understand, or that the risk of misunderstanding is too high when such vulnerability is at stake. A little later this is described as

*...sense of hesitation and wanting to know what your going to see and be faced with, not knowing what you're going to see and whether ...if ... you want to, curiosity teamed with anxiety and hesitation*

In the thoughtfulness and care, there is also palpable perplexity in the face of this very masculine issue. The matrix copes with this through identification with the lone female actor. The slow delivery is punctuated at critical moments by shared laughter. There are also reflective moments (absent from the men's matrix). In the opening the timing of the pauses in seconds is included in blue

- **A man wrapped in cellophane with vegetables pressed against skin lying on a table**
- **2 pain and suffering**
- **2 self-harming**
- **5 the canary**
- **4 tarred and feathered**
- **4 General darkness, feeling of being down, oppressed feeling of being tied up in knots**
- **3 Relationships**

After the opening scene, initial reactions associate pain and harm with the male and shame with the female. It is the woman who is 'tarred and feathered' while the 'canary' warns the man of danger and death. Then the women's matrix gives its first overt reflection on a possible way forward – the drawing together of male and female in "relationships" and this establishes pattern. Rhythmically as well as thematically this is male/female/togetherness. This way in to male

experience through relationships is proposed after the longest pause of all

- **8 compassion and softness – the talcum powder and softness and the relationship of the male-female thing**

The rhythm of the visual matrix then becomes steadier; although long pauses persist the contributions are both weightier and more articulate than the opening.

Overall, verbal contributions are tentative for the first half of the matrix with a reluctance to associate freely – though this is respectful rather than 'blocked', as though the women were fearful of treading on this ground.

### Relief, Solace and Empathy

When the matrix does settle into an even flow there is still no rush to speak and very little interruption of one speaker by another. The tone is muted and considerate, both of one another and of the work. There is also a detectable feeling of strain that becomes more obvious when it releases into childlike laughter

- *that's when our relationship began ... was when the performer got up from the table and he had the cabbage imprinted on his bum made me giggle*

This laughter is of relief and amusement at the idea of an "inverted fig leaf". It reverberates for a while, loosening up the flow of associations.

After this and throughout the rest of the matrix audio-recording, participants can be faintly heard echoing one another and making responsive noises of agreement, appreciation and recognition. This expressive sympathy builds into an empathic matrix – empathic towards the suffering of impotent men, towards partners who suffer alongside them, towards the performers, and to one another. It is rooted in the shared experience of watching the performance

- *...an image of us standing in that room very close to each other, and there was physical warmth, a lot ease and comfort with their presence*

- *Mmm*

- *I actually wanted to hug a lady standing next to me and I think she wanted to hug me too. ... I think it did make us want to pull together a little bit. You needed comfort because you couldn't give it to the performers*

Empathy is an interesting state of mind when aroused in relation to an aesthetic experience. It implies not merger, but compassion or 'feeling with', which comes out of a struggle with the material, where a woman can be both 'other', yet deeply implicated. Through empathy, the matrix finds a solution to the problem of women sharing a space with other women while reflecting upon a male issue of which they have no personal, bodily experience.

### Care

Care is a dominant trope in several ways. Acknowledging the darkness, and at times unremitting bleakness of the show, the matrix alights on the moments of care as if these are a lifeline: the male figure who links the scenes through his quiet presence, offering solace to men in states of utter dejection; the woman cared for by her male partner who helps her wash off of the tar and feathers of shame; the intricate care with which the man in cling-film is unwrapped and the bandaged man unwound; the child-like care of a man playing in dirt with his broken china animals. The matrix alights on the theme of care and also enacts it through mutual attentiveness. The subject matter of the show could trigger retreat into awkward isolation, yet for this group it arouses solidarity through which they face up to the reality and the desolation of impotence.

### Identification with the female figure

The single female figure in the performance is a crucial entry point for the women in this matrix. They appear to 'cling' to her, not only because they can understand her experience better, but also because through her they perceive the possibility of reciprocity in a situation of shared impotence. She appears as partner, lover, and potential mother. She is implicated in the relational trauma of impotence, and she too is its victim and her partner's fellow sufferer in a crisis for the couple. This is not to say that the attention in the matrix is exclusively directed towards her, rather that in her suffering she offers a point of identification and a way of making sense of the affect. She is at the centre of a cluster of conflicting emotions and roles that are played out across a number of scenes: suffering, shame, powerlessness, solitude, relationships – but at no point do these include rupture or rejection.

She appears in peril at the beginning of the performance clinging together with a partner on the precarious mattresses in the cavernous underground, doused with water to a soundtrack of howling anguish. Later, when tarred and feathered in her underwear she takes on his shame – and in return he gently washes her clean. It is

an example of the synthesis that this show achieves: a moment of intimate solicitude and compassion that also evokes a larger canvass where the counterpart to men's shame is women's blame – followed by brokenness for them both. There is no world historical reparation here – only small acts of care

*... the feathers evoked tarring and feathering and blame – the historical sense of blaming women – an association to not having children – it would be the woman in society's terms who was at fault so I felt she wasn't a particularly empowered figure*

- *I had an image of an a dead bird on a beach after an oil slick and that awful suffering of creatures – and trying – with futility – to clean them off*

Later, the woman endlessly, slowly, turns and rolls with her lover but consummation is uncertain. They are overshadowed by a disturbing world of fantasy behind a translucent screen. Behind it figures tend to a baby that seems to fall to bits as if with the 'failure' of the primal scene nothing else can hold together. The matrix links the whole to the uncertainties of conception in the face of impotence. The baby talc used in the performance accentuates the fragility and longing of the infertile couple, its scent and texture carrying associations of comfort and nurturance. It was the baby talc that first introduced a note of softness into the matrix after its bleak beginning – but only after an eight second pause in which there appears to be a 'labour' to give birth to a different state of feeling and with it a glimmer of hope

- *compassion and softness – the talcum powder and softness and the relationship of the male-female thing*

However if hope is possible through a return to the originary site of parental care, there is no short-cut. The show offers moments of hope but not repose. A man crawls with infinite dejection through a floor of talcum powder as though it were cement – or dirt.

### Complex, extended metaphor

In the discussion that took place after the matrix the women identified the centrality of the cake scene, where a man sits, his dejection turned inwards, surrounded by the tattered and sickly remains of a child's birthday party, paper hat askew, until finally he smears his nipples with jam and stuffs cake into his trousers. In another scene it is dirt that is stuffed down trousers and the coupling of cake with soil leads to the idea of 'failed' potency, positioned symbolically between food and excrement. Cake in the matrix becomes a signature

metaphor for a complex set of desires and emotions of shame and self-disgust but also a return to childlike pleasures, with the suggestion that hope implicitly lies in the re-tracing of pathways to adult desire. There is a sense in these scenes of both insatiable excess and unfulfillment and 'regressive' release through a return to playfulness and the archaic bodily excitements of infancy where the primary pleasures are oral and anal, while the genital still holds unrealised mystery and potential. This impulse resonates and is recognized by the women's matrix as a creative illusion: stripped of delusional potency and re-tracing our steps could be a way of finding a more compassionate way to live with our own vulnerability

- [after 8 second pause] *The dirt and the trousers stays with me very strongly now it's been brought up but also stuffing cake down the trousers and that strikes me because it leaves me with images of myself as a child playing in the dirt, or at a birthday party (5)*
- *that sense of trying to find fulfillment and nothing satiating you, nothing bringing you to life and I think the way that was depicted was so difficult and painful and visceral and lonely and it felt like you were in a bedsit, a sleazy bed-sit with that person ... watching their discomfort really*
- *and then cake re-appears in a totally different way*
- *mm...mmm..mm..mm. m [musing, agreeing]*
- *Celebratory .. mm... for your birthday ...mm ... [very quiet]*
- *I suppose that there was lots of that – two sides of a coin, of a metaphor being – not mixed – but not straightforward*
- *Not a straightforward issue, is it?*
- *Cake – I went to the rehearsal on the first day, and there was cake, and cake in the kitchen just now when I went to fill up the kettle. There's even cake-like stuff here. Cake seems to be quite important [slightly manic laughter]*
- *cake – what sort of cake?*
- *It seems you can't have a birthday without a cake – you can't make a wish*
- *I think in day to day life cake is .... it's an offer, and something you hope is shared and is enjoyed and where I work is very very important ... complex ...*

*every person in the audience has their own personal memories of cake*

- *Too much cake makes you sick*

As usual neither the show itself nor the matrix that reflects and digests it can rest for long on a hopeful note, but the cake and dirt sequences are developmental nonetheless. The desolation must be faced; the performance builds in emotional complexity. In the matrix we see these scenes anchoring the women in emotional reality so opening them up to freer and more elaborated associations. It is as if the worst has been confronted and they have survived. Cake and its transposition into dirt, and back again, offers a full range of possible associations: from the hauntingly abject 'stuffing down trousers' to the man-child playing in dirt, performed in a scene in the show

- *The tenderness of the performer as he comes out of childhood reverie with his ceramic dogs in the mud – like his character – he lifted things, he was tender towards her and gave her a sense of touch and later once he won the crown so joyous – so lovely, conquering – I loved that moment – a lot of love actually came out of him*

Through cake and dirt, the show's grip on the women in this matrix is tightened. The scenes carry felt ambivalence and paradox: on the one hand, dirt and cake (the distinction ever more creatively confused) are repulsive, on the other hand fascinating and compelling – the stuff of play, indulgence and transgression.

The intensity of involvement with these scenes in the matrix indicates that the show is effecting a very close inter-weaving between what it presents and what the audience bring to it of their own lived experience – there have been many cakes in all of our lives – so that the scenes take on the character of the audiences' projections – imaginative enactments of sensory memory

*...it's so visceral and the sort of thing you'd see a three year old doing – bizarre older spirit doing something so childlike in a really playful, gentle way. I loved the sensual experiencing in a purely exploratory way.*

The whole cake/dirt collage is invested with a multitude of meanings and memories: of wanting too much and never having enough; of promised fulfillment that cloys and sickens; of celebrations and wishes. Dirt grounds us in our animalistic origins as creatures of the earth, while cake marks the passing of time as we grow towards humanity and foretells a creativity to come.

Cake is a gift of love from those who care for us. Thinking of cake, the matrix laughs together for the first time; something that started in pity and horror is beginning to be released; the sense of paralysed oppression begins to lift. Yet goodness is always prey to perversion

*... and it's used as a tool to get people on your side, and on your page, and invite them in...here you're being presented with it in a very lonely way*

The imagery continues to do its work: the naked old man re-born out of his cellophane wrap, in his 'birthday suit', wanders through the scenes linking them as he 'grows backwards' into a child. Towards the end he wears a big hat with candles round the brim like a birthday cake

- *I saw him as a child when he did the firework moment the disappointment when it went out, the joy on his face really like a three year old*
- *He was like that the whole way through – reverting to a childlike state as if he hadn't had anything bad happen to him yet – a happier state*

The dirt, which brings to mind ancient myths of regeneration and growth, is blended together with hopefulness in one of the final archetypal scenes of the show where a man bedecked with flowers is pulled in triumph on a bed, once experienced as a site of failure

- *The green man, produce of the Earth and celebrating it – a life ritual...*

### Soundscape

Perhaps because they were at first less inclined to associate visually, this matrix commented on the 'darkness' of the sets and the power of the soundscape. Despite the howling in the car park they saw the sound track as a whole as supporting moments of empathy and hope while also foretelling tragedy and death.

Visually the show is compelling to see, while hard to watch. By contrast there is a moment in the show where a man and a woman discuss a diagnosis of erectile dysfunction. A comment is made about the sound being 'authentic' and when a 'real' voice is heard the speaker feels less avoidant towards it, less overwhelmed

- *the awkward silence when there's a big elephant in the room that maybe should have been talked about but just isn't*

- *I felt that was broken by sound clip and the sense of an authentic voice coming through – sound of authenticity when something you're seeing ... grounds it*

- *... the bandages of an man being unwrapped by another man but you're hearing the story of a man struggling with erectile dysfunction with his wife, but you're hearing the reality of the male juxtaposed with the soldier – so many references to different archetypes*

- *[quietly]I know that story and I have an image of someone torpedoed and surviving and their life changing – very smart man, he's a very smart man*

### Inversion of mood, meaning and metaphor

As the performance moves on, it changes emotional direction, sometimes reprising earlier scenes and investing them with new significance. From each scene threads of affect and meaning interweave and mutate. This matrix in its later phases has become more confident and fluid and appears to discover a certain gratification in complex multiplicities of meaning and feeling. As the cake/dirt cluster continues to elaborate, it feels less inhibited in its transitions between images, linking what is presented in the show to other cultural references, rituals and recollections. In drawing from a wider and more varied reservoir of associative material it takes its cue from the turns and flows of the show itself, and returns to the opening image

- *Even the way he cut the cling-film – he was so careful ...*

This time it picks out the vegetables which in a new scene are meticulously and methodologically chopped – as if for a nourishing soup

- *Could have watched him chop for an hour – I don't know why it was really enjoyable.*
- *Very therapeutic – a real relief – active and pro active.*

In its reassurance, as much as through the chopping action, the matrix is transported to the orderly precision of grandmother's kitchen and the loved objects of her household

- *Very precise – it made me think of my Gran making pies. I could see her spending a long time on the fluted crust.*
- *Thought of my Gran too – her cabinet full of statues, ornaments that I always thought ugly – unusual – but she loved them and she collected loads of them.*

However in a dramatic inversion – which by now the matrix can accommodate – there is the deadliness of self-destructive violence in the disordered kitchen where relations have reached an impasse

- *in the 70's. – the young Depardieu – a film about a relationship and he feels emasculated by his wife – this is kind of on the cusp of second wave feminism and finishes with a scene where he gets roaring drunk but very morose and he takes an electric carver, right, [responsive wincing from group] and it ends with him chopping off his dick – (horrified 'OOH' of pain and shock)...and I hadn't thought of it until that chopping scene.*

The turn is a reminder of the self-imposed task of the group: to ground itself in the emotional reality of impotence, to understand its personal fallout for men and for women, to recognise its cultural significance without displacement or denial – though not entirely without flinching, and not without seeking hope in human care, love and relationship.

## THE MIXED VISUAL MATRIX



### Introduction: The 'othering' of male impotence

This matrix works with a set of signature images and metaphors to understand the delicate poise that The Barometer of My Heart maintains as an artwork. The show has stimulated a journey of discovery where potency becomes entwined with a sensitive and sensuous understanding of what it means to be human and what it is in humanity that can be considered 'strong' and 'powerful'. There is a sense that the show intimates the possibility of a 'new world' and the matrix responds to the 'architectural' qualities of this world prompted by how the audience is led through the rooms and passages of the Health Centre where the action unfolds. This starts in the cavernous underground where the scenes are stretched in time and separated by lifts and stairs, and progress is slow. As the audience ascends to the upper levels, the density and complexity of the scenes accumulate and the space and time between

them is compressed, intensifying the sense of immersion in a world where pain, once faced and acknowledged, eventually gives way to new possibilities of hope. This visual matrix is neither noticeably avoidant nor defensive, as the men's matrix often is, nor is it overly cautious as the women's is at the beginning. All the matrices find a third space within which to consider what they have seen and felt. However this one grounds itself primarily in memory and experience in contrast to the empathic identification in the case of the all women group or the profusion of cultural references among the men.

### Process, rhythm and delivery

The mixed visual matrix begins with a series of 'glimpses' at the taboo that has been presented to them during the performance of The Barometer of My Heart. These glimpses consist of images taken directly from the show working with brief images from the participants

themselves, as we can see in the following extract taken from the very beginning. The direct references to the show are in bold

- Meadow
- **White opaque screens**
- Blooded knife
- Tunneled corridor
- **Birthday cake**
- Scary attic
- **Broken**
- Rucksack
- Gunshots at Christmas
- **Tarred and feathered**

Images from the artwork on the one hand and the participants in the matrix on the other, are either emotionally interdependent or ‘polyphonic’ in their relationships, or independent from each other, in a way that is reminiscent of musical counterpoint. The opening image, which seems to emerge spontaneously from a participant’s imagination – “meadow” – appears to offer an open field of potential. The “white opaque screens” refer to screens in the performance itself, opening another line of imagery, behind which we see blurred dreamlike images. The “bloodied knife” and “tunneled corridor” are participant images, aggressively reminding us of the phallus and the theme of the artwork; while the “birthday cake” refers to a scene in the performance where an old man is presented with a birthday cake and appears to regress into childish joy at the sight; “broken” resonates with the table of shattered crystal and the fragments of china ornaments. In this way, the two lines of imagery emanating from The Barometer of My Heart work in counterpoint with those that emerge from the participants in the visual matrix producing a combined rhythmic whole that transmits a sense of sensitive balance and poise. The transfusion of affect between artwork and participants is developed in this way. Therefore, the fear, the felt heaviness of burdens (“rucksack”), and unexpected disaster (“gunshots at Christmas”), both participant images, lead to the “tarred and feathered” shame that was a scene from the performance.

In this counterpoint-like rhythm the visual matrix begins to weave life experiences of the participants together with emotions triggered by the shared experience of the artwork.

#### The overground and underground, inside and out

The opening image of a meadow sets the general scene for the matrix, where the starting point is an open field of growth where flowers bloom unexpectedly and new possibilities emerge. The matrix takes its cue from the

closing scene in the performance of the man bedecked with flowers in a state of summertime fecundity, almost as if the end of The Barometer of My Heart is the beginning of the visual matrix.

The meadow contains both the roots in the earth and flowers above ground. Like the “opaque screens” that follow there are two spaces of transforming potential: the under and over ground of the meadow and the other side of the screen. In the performance, different zones or planes of experience are dynamically related – and it is in the in-between that transformation occurs and is key to the audience’s appreciation of significance and meaning. The matrix itself plays within the ‘in-between’ – a third space that is sometimes a space of queering – where qualities can be inverted, reconstructed and transformed onto otherness and into each other.

Hence images of dirt and mud mutate. The meadow becomes a field where boys in transition to adulthood ‘prove’ their virility by “getting as muddy as possible” in an archetypal ritual of adolescence. It is this image that leads to the miners deep underground, symbols of male potency, and covered in “dirt” while a further allusion to mining is the flown canary of the show’s opening that once signaled the danger of toxic gas – just as erectile dysfunction does of heart disease. The humiliation of the miners as male archetypes is brought about by a woman of power, Margaret Thatcher. In the context of The Barometer of My Heart this speaks to a central agony of being divested of the means to ‘perform’ and with it pride in one’s identity and role.

Links are made here between political power, potency and vulnerability. The “close proximity of flesh”, brings attention to the miners’ “hair and nipples” – men’s nipples, are hardly ever remarked upon, other than in the mockery of ‘man boobs’. Here though they evoke tenderness like the patches of white skin – delicate against the dirt and belying the manliness, soon to be challenged by the “Iron Lady”.

#### Potency, care and nurture

One of the signature images of The Barometer of My Heart harks back to Mark Storor’s observation that after a consultation for erectile dysfunction many men had difficulty with a simple act of self-care – putting on those quintessential articles of softness and comfort – their socks. In the show a performer struggles perpetually to pull socks on or off with his teeth. Socks reappear in unexpected contexts in this matrix signifying protection, nurture, self-assertion, comfort, absurdity and care

- *Ken Russell Women in Love scene of men fighting and making passionate love at the same time – some reason image of them in socks*

Imaginatively endowing the protagonists in this iconic homo-erotic wrestling scene with socks is absurd. It domesticates them, deflecting the conflation of sexuality and aggression by introducing an altogether different note. The image is delivered with affection rather than mockery. Later a powerful horse is similarly ‘tamed’

- *I had a horse once and she got an abscess in her hoof – and it was desperately hard to keep a poultice on her – so I struggled, struggled to get an old sock on – only lasted five minutes but – this beautiful horse wandering around with a pink sock*

This is similarly absurd and also another way of seeing, ultimately caring (the abscess is protected). In another example, the caring male figure who links so many of the scenes in the show is identified through the socks that he wears. The symbolization of the socks reaches an intensity of development that is demonstrated in the idea that they are endowed with an almost magical power that confers upon their wearers special qualities of care

- *It was important that the man who was doing all the caring was wearing socks, as if the socks enabled him to care*

This ability to care is another way of valorizing male capacity – beyond sexual potency and the matrix makes this clear in the movement from clothing as a mark of sexuality to socks as a mark of nurture

- *Clothing and sexual attraction*
- *Socks*

The juxtaposition evokes a serious use of the absurd in a confounding of stereotypical gender ascription that runs throughout much of the show. The provocation of the absurd is to suggest that our views of what is real and reasonable can be expanded or overturned. Rather than the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ we are presented with a queer aesthetic of unlikely lateral connections with the show, and between images produced by the matrix itself. They are the product of a creative and questioning state of mind. The flamboyance of the masked wrestlers in The Barometer of My Heart leads by association to another kind of sock

- *In the fight scene – the fantastic headgear – reminded me of illustrations in Dr Seuss books...*

- *funny you should say that – there’s a Dr Seuss book called ‘fox in socks’ – so attractive and memorable but completely absurd.... The wearing of socks...*

Dr Seuss is understood as writing for children but also at the same time odd, amusing, tricksy, clever and subversive like a child’s sense of the weird. Mr. Fox, like the horse, struts his stuff in his socks with his counterpart Mr. Knox, in alliterative linguistic knots, eliding and combining in an endless celebratory sequence of transformation. Socks now are a flamboyant mark of self-assertion and style – childish innocence with ‘attitude’.

These socks have travelled some way from the original source material that marked a sense of the abject aroused in the men submitting themselves to medical scrutiny. The symbolic transformation reflects a movement within the show itself that acknowledges first the anguish, then the care and finally the possibility of something new.

#### Sensuality and organic growth

It is no coincidence that the male wrestlers/lovers in socks are immediately followed by references to the aesthetic possibilities of the above-ground linking back to the meadow in the opening image. At this later stage of the matrix, the absurdity of the macho is juxtaposed to the garden of gay filmmaker, Derek Jarman. Here, soil becomes ‘dry’ (no longer a ‘muddy’ adolescence), and there is a reference to Arcimboldo’s organic portraits. This alludes to the ‘Green Man’ myth and in its reference to Jarman, a victory of the gay aesthetic, also symbolized in The Barometer of My Heart by the man bedecked with flowers, the culmination of a sense of organic profusion marked by vegetables in the cellophane wrapper around the naked man earlier in the performance

- *Derek Jarman’s garden*
- *Plants growing in the dry soil*
- *Dutch picture of the man made of vegetables... something can grow despite being broken*

As organic metaphors accumulate, brokenness is re-evaluated – broken china animals appear in the show as a man plays in dirt like a child. From “a puppet with broken strings” we move to “the beauty of broken things”. Excrement fertilises the ground in which flowers grow, so that dirt becomes a source of organic growth and new life and the tenderness of skin on skin.

- very clean earth – it had some flowers growing in it at some point didn't it?
- Flowers are fertilized by feces
- Skin, touch of skin, skin on skin

It is a gentle touch that takes us from wrestling, tempered by socks, to the sensuality of embrace, a ‘flowering’ of an alternative male identity and a new potency evoked in the symbol of the “green man and ancient rituals”.

#### The feminine in the masculine

The exploration of male identity passes through contrasting symbolisation of the female. Between the aggression and humiliation in the Iron Lady and the sexualised servility of the geisha girl there exists another possibility for constructing a female/male identity that can be honed out of relationship.

The matrix, then, again taking its cue from the show, appears to suggest that male potency could be reanimated through what are traditionally understood to be female qualities of care and nurture, so that what might be seen as clichéd in a woman might also be seen as potential in a man

- I do keep seeing the female actor in her very female – perhaps clichéd – role of comforting, nurturing
- I see her being washed with the water – the intimacy, care and nurturing – but the other way round which was surprising

This is further developed in the matrix’s reference and interpretation of Hemingway’s The Old Man and the Sea.

#### The Old Man and the Sea

Besides D. H. Lawrence, the other key literary reference for this matrix, Ernest Hemingway, is also renowned for exploration of male sexual identity. Hemingway’s Old Man and the Sea questions what it means to be a man in complete isolation. The sea evokes the female in the man – part of his relationship to the universe

- Female – Thinking of Hemmingway – image of the old man and the sea – on his own in isolation, surrounded by something that means something to him which is just the empty sea – and my ideas of what's been broken and what's been made strong in him and where are his women?

- ... and one describes the maleness of the sea – and the other – the sea is a mysterious lunar driven force
- Imagine the sea being filled with power and the old man being weak

Finally, there is another cultural reference, that of Amenábar’s film, ‘The Sea Inside’<sup>28</sup>, with its own alternative view of potency in a man, which, in the film, is related to an understanding of self and autonomy. Frailty of sickness and death is countermanded by the autonomy and authenticity of the crippled (broken) man. In both The Barometer of My Heart and the mixed matrix it is this kind of alternative potency that is being explored.

## ARTISTIC PROCESS



#### Source Material

In the course of the conversations he engages in, the workshops he holds, and the consultations he observes, Storor listens. Sometimes we gain from him an insight into what he does

- The responsibility weighed heavy, however every time a man spoke it was easy to take courage, to ‘listen’ at every stage to what was happening. To value instinct and intuition and act accordingly within the unfolding narrative...

However, what we witness directly in the performance is not the individual narrative but embodied enactments of situations that have emerged from narratives and have been subsequently depicted in a series of scenes. Particular scenes may well have been triggered by individual stories but they are aesthetically transformed in the scenes of the show to render an emotional truth that can resonate with the experiences of the audience.

Storor lives with his subject over a protracted period of years rather than months. What takes place during this ‘gestation’ is a gathering of fragments, including, as he points out, snatches of stories, vignettes of experience, and ideas that are afloat in the public realm that will ultimately account for the societal significance of the work. The aesthetic, however, is in the linking – in the ‘betweenness’ – that brings the pieces together. This is where an artwork can expand the idea of impotence as a cultural condition and it is where it differs from a public information campaign.

What we do know is that the artists (Storor as artist and Director, together with the performing artists in the company) become the instruments through which an intuitive selection of the material takes place and the links are made. This means that there are elements of biography, disposition and personal aesthetic sensibility that leave their idiomatic traces on the final work. At the same time they have obligations to all the people who contributed through the consultations and

<sup>28</sup> 2004, The story, based on fact, of Ramon Sampedro, who fought a thirty-year campaign in favour of euthanasia and his own right to die.

conversations, and to a wider public: the work must be released into the world to live a life of its own

- *The material generated was uncompromising, true, honest and raw. Not to attempt to articulate this would have felt like a betrayal of all those who had committed themselves to the project. This challenged me as an artist to keep taking risks to attempt to be true to the power and energy of the material and the men. It was important to create something that was vital, visceral, powerful, the antithesis of the perceived notion of erectile dysfunction as a subject.* (Mark Storor: Statement on Lessons Learned 20-11-15)

### Testing out the materials and ideas

- *Due to the level of prejudice, fear and general ignorance that we encountered in some of the early meetings whilst we were creating the framework around the project it became clear that we needed to trial aspects of the work, to build a community of understanding. This was achieved by a series of soft performances designed to test some of the material, to share the process with others and begin to debate collectively how we might be able to talk about the subject in the public realm.* (Mark Storor: Statement on Lessons Learned 20-11-15)

Many of the ideas and visual motifs that were explored during the pre-production workshops, (soft performances), were worked up into scenes in the final show. There were a variety of materials at hand. Each item was laid out on the floor for inspection in its own self-contained area and each 'invited' an action from the artist, as he wove his way between them. One of the research team recorded his first impressions

- *The room has been sub-divided with squares of different sizes on the floor and we are invited to sit around the biggest one. We introduce ourselves briefly and Mark says a word or two. There are circles in the square filled with earth, ribbons, pliers, flowers, a small china dog, the hair of Mark's beard cut in front of us in the first shockingly intimate act. No longer representation but enactment. Something comes closer – can we bear to be there as he puts himself into the scene, will he drag us in with him? Can we sustain an observing position? He pours baby talc into a circle and scatters pins – Ouch*

Also enacted in these events, in the form of a psychic drama rather than a professional interaction, was a 'consultation scene' in which the patient is stretched out naked on the couch for examination whilst ambiguous digital images play on and over his body. The patient is Mark Storor himself. A trampolinist's flowing ribbons rise and fall, but these are followed by abstract 'creatures' that seem to pluck and tear at his genitals, which as he rises from the couch are framed in the terrifying exposure of unnatural green light. It is indeed hard to watch. The other researcher (a woman) writes

- *Exposure is excruciating – but why should this be shameful? I mistake the green light for a fig-leaf against the evidence of my own eyes and in complete knowledge of what the scene is about. I too have been shamed by the clinical gaze. No recall is needed – the memory is etched on my body. Avoidance seems not to be an option. Months later the double-take persists, perhaps it is a fig-leaf after all.*

After the 'examination' – for the patient "the first public performance of a very private matter"<sup>29</sup> – a return to the ordinary is all but impossible. The Doctor's cheerful and compassionate "okey cokey", indicating it is time to dress and face the world, is interpreted in a stumbling version of the dance – "It's hard to do the hokey cokey with your trousers round your ankles" – which is also hard for the audience to watch, as expressed by one of the researcher's scenic compositions

*He performs: his body, the flames or dancing forms above his prostrate body, both and sad. It's masculine. The men must feel this, and the women, I wonder? Then he does the hokey cokey with his trousers round his ankles. To please the doctor, a nice man who is trying to help, a grotesque display of desperate pleasing and a misunderstanding of the doctor's instructions, heart in your mouth, as the dance becomes wild and he's naked and howling.*

Storor will not ask the company to do other than he would do himself

*It was clear that it had to be me who performed in the first instance and that I had to be naked<sup>30</sup>*

These events are an invitation and a test of whether an audience could be enjoined to bear witness as Storor himself has borne witness. Could this artwork make impotence thinkable so that the audience – and ultimately a wider public – can imagine a different relation to it?

<sup>29</sup> Mark Storor interview 05-01-2016.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Storor, Statement on lessons learnt.

The soft performances served other purposes. A number of artists who would later become part of the company were present and so could see what might be demanded of them by committing to the project. After the first event there was also a discussion among the audience after the performance finished. The discussion appeared to be overwhelmingly preoccupied with medical aspects of erectile dysfunction, even though this was primarily an arts audience. It was as if the certainties of medical science were safer ground than the wider social implications of impotence.

### The Devising Process

#### Sticking together

A metaphor for working together was established at the workshop with the newly formed company through an exercise conducted amidst much laughter. It engendered energy and goodwill from the beginning and also established a relational frame for working together. The company were made to stand on an 'island' – a circle of newspaper, while Storor danced around it in 'choppy, shark infested and increasingly stormy seas', trimming the 'shoreline' as he circled. At the end it was only through the ingenious entwinement of the collective mind and body that the company could remain on the island. There was a felt existential truth

here that was to pervade the whole production, and a morality tale, all rolled into one with a clear implication: when things get perilous – and they will – the solution is to cling together. In a later workshop, the bonding of the performers is soldered through a tougher version of this humour, where the physicality and hard work demanded of them brings up questions of commitment and value. It emphasises strength and the body, alluding all the time to the idea of potency. There are struggles with a mattress: folding it, moving it across the space without the feet touching the floor, two people balance on a wooden board on a folded mattress. We hear the 'hokey cokey' refrain as the song is tested in this context, to see if it will catch or not. The devising explores possibilities to be engaged with, discarded, or transformed by the company.

A version of the struggle with the mattress appears in the show, which opens with a couple on the mattress entwined for safety, doused and buffeted with water. The women's matrix will remark on the intuitive pulling together of the audience itself at a point where comfort and warmth were needed.

#### Commitment and Courage

Mark Storor makes huge demands of himself and also of the company he works with. He had previously worked closely with many of the artists so that



familiarity and trust were partly established before the devising began. The devising itself is a thoroughly relational process and the first task is to produce a 'holding' environment within which the performers can discover how much of themselves they will put into the work and how far they can develop a shared world of creative illusion. Creative illusion is central to the transformative capacity of art. It involves the ability to respect the integrity of the subject matter – the experience of impotent men – while imagining how it can be presented so that it touches us all. The risk here is that artist stays too close (collapsing into documentary) or strays too far (losing touch with the particularity of the experience). For the performers each scene involved working at the edge of their own inhibitions, with defended aspects of the self that were beyond their conscious awareness. This included a willingness to accommodate friction, embrace the absurd and entertain the bizarre

*We laugh a lot during the process and there are tears and anger and ructions but actually we're very good at facing it out and understanding where we can go and what we can do.*

*It's part of not being afraid to let yourself go – everybody has to give a piece of their heart and sometimes by doing that expose a bit of their soul and that's a terrible tyrannical thing to say to someone: you can't cross this threshold unless you're prepared to give your heart and soul but actually we need people who are prepared to do that<sup>31</sup>*

'Letting go' in this instance means working with the most vulnerable parts of the self, including anxieties that are hard to own and a creative regression in the service of a vulnerability that is hard to expose. We were able to understand something of how this is done through the company's visual matrix to which we now turn.

#### Evolving a way of working

The company's visual matrix was held half way through the devising process, at a point where they had formed as a group, but much of the content of the show was yet to be defined. There were two very striking features of this matrix: in the first instance an unsettling of taken for granted ways of feeling and seeing – effectively a freeing up of perception and imagination to explore the strangeness and multiplicity of being. The visual matrix symbolized this process through a profusion of animal forms, qualities and movements. The second feature was a return to archetypes of childhood with its anxieties, desires and transgressions. Significantly, it was the imagination of latency and the school-age

child that infused this matrix, poised between the polymorphous sexuality of infancy and the sedimentations of gender identity in adolescence.

A considerable level of mutual trust was required for this company of mostly adult men to consent to such a regression, however playful, and however permissive the professional context. The first part of the visual matrix gives us a glimpse of how this was achieved through the relations established between each individual and the company as a collective.

A watery image at the beginning, "floating on water", suggests that there has been, and will be, a fluid movement of ideas, with an easy 'liquid' connectivity in terms of feel and flow. Images come fast and freely with little elaboration and they take on a 'naïf' and fantastical dream-like character signaled in the only visual art reference "the spinning and floating of the figures in Chagall's paintings". The links between images 'ripple' into each other, and are assumed rather than stated. There are few dead ends and it is unusual in this matrix for an offered image not to resonate – typically a small 'eddy' of responses forms so that within the flow, every idea claims its moment of attention and one or two key ideas are elaborated. This indicates a work group that has 'gelled' whilst tolerating the particularity and the creative freedom of its individual members.

However, this is not to say that all is plain sailing. Very close to the beginning there are impressions of an altogether more turbulent motion that herald some of the more troubling emotional content of the project: whirlpool, rotor blades, catherine wheels, the eye of the storm.

#### Mutual Attunement and Personal Life Experience

There is a togetherness about the group – a familiarity and ease in working with each other and the material. The collective mind and body seem to be reverberating with a shared sensibility. Free association comes naturally, imagery is profuse and synergistic and indeed in the discussion after the matrix someone remarks

- *it is how we work, [generating] associations and perceptions.*

At the same time, the performers draw intensively on personal life experience, and this seems to come naturally to them at this stage – there is shared tacit understanding of the value of childhood memory, also explicitly remarked upon in the discussion that takes place after matrix

- *It was making us go back in time*
- *a sense of playfulness and being childlike*
- *like being at school on an arts course*
- *misbehaving, crossing taboos*
- *we respond physically – more childlike*

Drawing on childhood experience, and on the childlike parts of the personality that persist in adult life, makes intuitive sense – the origins of creativity are in childhood play<sup>32</sup>. What is being invoked is a largely pleasurable, sometimes anxiety provoking, regression in the service of shared creativity. They have come to realise, without it needing to be said, that each individual will establish an intimate emotional connection to the work they are doing together that reaches back to early experiences of pleasure, vulnerability, transgression and humiliation. There is an emerging awareness that impotence calls into question an adult identity formed in the course of an entire life history. Something that will be key for audience engagement is being established here: the referencing of infancy and childhood that makes its way into the scenes of the show. It will be foregrounded, remarked upon and explored in different ways in all of the audience visual matrices.

#### Animals within and without

The opening image of floating on water is kinetic and the possibilities of movement will be explored through the manifold forms of animal life as the visual matrix unfolds, "seagulls swooping aggressively to steal chips off the unwary", before they "swirl up, spin and swim". Other choreographic possibilities are to be found in the 'spinning of spiders', 'swarming of starlings', 'swimming of whales' and the fabulous 'over-the-moon leaping of cows'.

Animals afford ways to explore other states of feeling and being in the world including the discomforts of otherness "like penguins sitting in a desert" and the comedic and curious marvel of 'other' sexualities in "Isabella Rossellini's green porno"<sup>33</sup>. Insects symbolize hidden away parts of the psyche. The dung beetle is associated with faeces/dirt – out of which flowers grow. We see here the company working with an idea 'planted' in Storor's early soft performances that will re-appear in the show, where there is playing in dirt and finally a profusion of flowers.

The associations to animal forms are part of a process of 'making strange', none simply represent their usual qualities – the dog has a limp lettuce rather than a hard bone. The performers need to explore and accept what

it is they are going to perform and they do this by bringing to mind the endlessly peculiar mutability of life. Animal dispositions are allowed to 'be' in all their strangeness. At the end the whale swallows everything up – taking the matrix back to its watery beginnings

- *Captain Ahab dreamt of whales*
- *The whale swallowed us whole*
- *Lost inside*

Animals do often appear in visual matrices – just as they do in dreams – in general their presence is unrelated to any overt interests or attachments for any particular form of animal life. Their function is to embody a myriad of forms of sentient but non-verbal ways of living. We project onto them qualities of mind, body and affect that overflow the boundaries of what we imagine to be 'human'. In so doing we encounter the stranger parts of the self. In this matrix the animal life is varied and prolific to an unusual degree. There are worms, donkeys, gulls, lambs, cows, pigeons, starlings, cats, moles, hedgehogs, parrots, flamingoes, bulls, dogs, chickens, penguins, seals, whales, and beetles.

#### Creative Regression

The maternal figure looms over latency with terrifying ambiguity. In the matrix she is loving, protective, industrious, but rapacious and devouring, too. She prohibits, shames and chastises but is the originary source of comfort and care, and of Oedipal desire. The visual matrix explores the facets of 'mother' through personal memories, stories (populated by animals) and explorations of the material world (food, stickiness and dirt).

In discussion with Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard, after the first stage of analysis it became clearer why symbolising the maternal should have become so vital at this 'in-between' and 'latent' stage in the development of the company

*- The 'mother' is the process – the creation of the art – and it's the fear of the process. I think in order to make great work, the mother – the female figure – is the creative process itself and that tantalizing excitement; and what they are afraid of – all of them were at the point where they were on the cusp of having to dissolve themselves, allow themselves to be devoured, to drown, (interesting that at the beginning was floating) and actually what they had to do was completely go into it. They knew if the piece was going to work they really had to do it – and in the end they did do it<sup>34</sup>*

<sup>31</sup> Mark Storor Interview 05-01-16.

<sup>32</sup> Winnicott 1971.

<sup>33</sup> Green Porno is the title of a set of short fantasy, child-like films on animal sexual behaviour created by Isabella Rossellini in 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Storor 05-01-2016.

This is a realization after the event. The fear is partly unconscious, and certainly unthought and unnamed. However it is enacted and elaborated in the visual matrix through a prominent metaphor – woven around the figure of the spider. No explicit reference was made to Louise Bourgeois' 'Maman' but her spider sculpture is iconic, embedded in the cultural unconscious, and it 'looms' over the fantasy world of the matrix

- *I was learning to make pastry at school – the teacher was sifting flour and it made snow-like cobwebs over the fridge which were revealed by the flour. She was embarrassed.*
- *Miss Haversham in Great Expectations who lived in her house of cobwebs a frail figure*
- *I love watching spiders and I don't mind them in here*
- *There are an incredible amount of spiders in my house*
- *John said that there were lots of spiders in this building*
- *I love spiders, I have a big collection at home, some quite big – thanks to Mum who's not frightened of spiders – I see them as friendly, useful*
- *I have a gadget for vacuuming up spiders and then I take them outside*
- *Makes me think of a shower of dead skin with a spidery feel*
- *Tattoo of a spider on a face*
- *This is making me feel itchy now*
- *I could look at them making webs for hours*
- *It takes days for spiders to make an effective web, caffeine for spiders*
- *People like capturing spiders*
- *I had a tarantula as a pet. I dreamt that it would escape and I ran to check that it was still there*

There are a number of things to be said about this sequence. It is introduced by association to a school cookery lesson and on the surface it retains the quality of innocent childish repartee throughout. In this it is typical of much of this visual matrix where the playful turn-taking appears touchingly naïve.

The symbolism, however, is laden with psycho-sexual conflict. The spider is an archetype of relationship to the female, the mother as monstrous femme fatale, a creative mistress of the most feminine of arts – weaving, associated with both the protection of the body and its entrapment. She is industrious in creating her home and places herself at its centre as predator on the small

and vulnerable male.<sup>35</sup> At one and the same time she is domestic and deadly, sucking the vital juices from her mate. Her webs speak of neglect and the passing of time as living things pass their moment of generativity, then desiccate and decay ("Miss Haversham").<sup>36</sup> Spiders are objects of admiration, phobic fascination, and maternal potency and they can themselves, as the extract shows, be tamed by the fearless mother.

The pet tarantula, most deadly of spiders, must be tamed and contained. The spider in the dream escapes, linking unconscious phantasy with a lived reality as the company must do (the dreamer wakes and must check if the spider is still there). The matrix here indulges in self-defence against the sexuality of the female predator through appeal to the mother

- *I love spiders, I have a big collection at home, some quite big – thanks to Mum who's not frightened of them.*

Finally the ambiguities in this extended spider imagery are gathered together in a literary/film reference that for those who are familiar with the work evokes the seduction of polymorphous sexuality – and for those who are not, still produces an enigmatically thrilling and threatening sensation: The Kiss of the Spider Woman<sup>37</sup>.

It seems that in elaborating this metaphor the company were working through an anxiety that had dominated the first phase of their work together. Storor's comment on fear of the process supports this, and so does an observation made by Anna Ledgard, who also attended this visual matrix. She was referring to the experience of the matrix itself – but the key point is that the matrix 'works' by bringing into symbolization the 'unthought known'. At this point in their development what was unthought, but latently present, was a need for the artists in the company to liberate themselves and commit to a final push towards an aesthetic outcome

*Everybody knew a massive amount to be decided in just two weeks and then we came into this space where we could play. It was a very freeing, enjoyable space – a lot of the company came up afterwards and said I really enjoyed that and went off for the weekend.<sup>38</sup>*

There is more on childhood in the visual matrix, particularly in relation to transgressions and fear of

humiliation at the hands of female authority figures. In the place of the mother, "a red-faced nun with a ruler" appears and so does the statue of the Virgin Mary, mother of God, who lies "smashed on the school tarmac". However, the most significant points are condensed into the spider metaphor. The Kiss of the Spider Woman is effectively a condensation within a condensation gathering together threads that relate to the inner life of the company and will bear on the content and form of the performance. The power and desire of the mother (as figure and process), the fear of the predatory female; the vulnerability of the male; the queering of sexuality; the dislodging of sexual potency as a pinnacle of masculine self-realization. Beyond all this there is the interwoven web of the production, industriousness, delicacy and care that characterizes the artistic process itself.

<sup>35</sup> In native America the spider woman is creator of the universe and a source of cultural wisdom while in Greek mythology, Arachne - peerless weaver of stories - dares to pit her skills against Athena depicting the sexual indiscretions of the Gods in her tapestries and exposing the rapacious potency of Zeus. For her pains she is turned into a spider, an object of revulsion but admirably industrious, ruler of her domain and ever poised to destroy the vulnerable male.

<sup>36</sup> Miss Haversham from Charles Dickens 'Great Expectations' is jilted on her wedding day and thereafter presides over the cobwebbed remains of her uneaten bridal feast in her yellowing wedding gown.

<sup>37</sup> Based on a novel by Manuel Puig 1991, a 1985 Brazilian-American drama film directed by Héctor Babenco, the film explores the developing relationship in prison between two men - a political activist and a homosexual, bringing together complex registers of sexuality and politics.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Ledgard in interview 05-01-2016.

# THE VISUAL MATRIX: a method for sensitive subjects

In 2015, we wrote about the use of the visual matrix method in the context of the evaluation of two instances of public art and the affective and aesthetic experiences of these artworks among the citizens of a small town in the south of England. In that study, we suggested that there was particular scope for the following strands of the research:

*The sensitivity of the visual matrix to social attributes needs to be further explored – for example how it differentiates gendered perceptions of a cultural phenomenon, or of the perspectives of professional and lay populations. It may be particularly valuable for understanding emergent processes for which no settled discourse exists, such as arts/science conversations, where a reciprocal influence is experienced but is not easily described.<sup>39</sup>*

In the visual matrices conducted in relation to The Barometer of My Heart we have made inroads into the study of gender within this research context, and we have asked ourselves what the affective and visual qualities of the matrix can add to the subject of erectile dysfunction, outside of its professional clinical context. This present report is concerned with work conducted at the arts/science interface mentioned in our previous paper.

## Expressions of gendered affect

The subject matter of The Barometer of My Heart made it especially interesting and relevant to bring the question of gendered affect into the research. The configuration of exclusively male and female visual matrices that could be compared and contrasted with a mixed matrix, and, to some extent, with the company matrix, made this a central question: What did we understand about affective responses to erectile dysfunction and impotence through the gendered visual matrices?

Although it is not surprising that we might notice differences in gendered responses to The Barometer of My Heart, what the method brought out was deeply felt emotions related to a male problem in ways that would have been difficult to convey in ordinary discourse. The tendency when engaging intellectually with a difficult subject is the attempt to be objective by suppressing emotion. This reflects the authority of scientific thinking with its commitment demonstrable truths, backed by measurable evidence without emotional interference. However, we have already seen how one of the inspirations for The Barometer of My Heart was that clinicians sometimes feel it necessary use figurative language with their patients<sup>40</sup>. We also know from the work of others, such as Menzies Lyth's seminal study on the nursing profession<sup>41</sup> that approaches that ignore the emotional impact of working practices on staff can lead to them feeling bereft of purpose in an environment where engagement with the humanity of the patient has been discouraged. The visual matrix provides a setting for emotional interchanges and allows for gender to become part of that expression. What we discovered was that by understanding gendered affective responses to erectile dysfunction, we gained a fuller picture of what it might mean when the taboo is broken and feelings can be owned.

We found, for example, that although some affect arising in response to The Barometer of My Heart was shared across the matrices, it was different in intensity and that perspectives changed according to a gendered context. The women's visual matrix expressed joy, love and empathy that were largely absent from the other matrices. The men's matrix expressed an incessant torrent of aggressive shame, humiliation, pain and anger, again largely absent in the other matrices. It was as if they had to work through this to get to a happier and more hopeful place towards the end. There was laughter in both the women's and men's matrices, but this laughter was expressive of very different affect: In the women's visual matrix it seemed to express simple

<sup>39</sup> Froggett et al 2015, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Discussed in detail in interview with Mark Storor, Leighton Seal and Anna Ledgard, 05-01-2016.

<sup>41</sup> Menzies Lyth 1959.

relief, faced as they were with an experience that they could never completely understand from a male perspective. In the men's visual matrix, the humour was expressed from beginning to end in the form of male banter as a way to break up the tension the imagery of the performance produced in them. The mixed visual matrix, on the other hand, appeared to be creative, thoughtful and eventually hopeful. The attempt to find the positive in the negative was more evenly present from the beginning. These very clear differences suggest that a series of mixed matrices only would not have given a full picture of the strikingly gendered affects produced by erectile dysfunction and impotence.

### **Delivery, pace and rhythm**

Just as scientific discourse discourages emotion, so it also expresses ideas in measured tones. While this is obviously part of good professional practice, something of the emotional truth of the patient's situation may be lost. The musical qualities of group conversation can provide valuable insights,<sup>42</sup> which find expression in the way we express our thoughts, our delivery, intonation, pace and rhythms of speech. Our work with the matrices convened for The Barometer of My Heart showed the value of understanding the feelings and meanings behind delivery of the imagery in ways that we had not anticipated and had not hitherto investigated. The affect and emotions identified through the visual imagination of each of the matrices were re-emphasised and accounted for the ways in which their impact was felt. We have found it useful to use musical analogies as a means of bringing out these differences.

The mixed visual matrix was developed through the gradual interweaving of individual and shared lines of thoughts and ideas. These were introduced in a simple theme-like fashion that was subsequently developed. The conclusion of one theme leads to the introduction of the next, similar perhaps to the use of counterpoint in Baroque music. The men's visual matrix on the other hand was rapid and incessant, without pause or respite. In this case, any rest from the relentless pulse of the visual matrix was produced in the multiple references to music and film culture through banter and accompanying humour. The effect was that of minimalist music or, in more raucous moments, Thrash Metal. The women's visual matrix was suffused by slow thought and reflection from which moments of ambiguous laughter eventually emerged. We could, perhaps, compare this to the slow movement of a symphony.

### **Compatibility of the visual matrix method with its object**

There is a particular compatibility between the artwork and the research method in the way The Barometer of My Heart conveyed image, affect, aesthetic, scenic and rhizomatic qualities, as opposed to narrative or representational sense making. The performance worked through imagery and affect. Its unhindered expression and connectivity to its audience meant that when members of that audience gathered in a visual matrix, the images from the performance fused themselves with imagery arising in the participants' imaginations. Although the method provides feedback on engagement with the artwork, it is also a catalyst for imaginative thinking, so that the feedback is a here-and-now experience of assimilation of the artwork, rather than a description of a past event. The artwork does not tell a story, it ignites an expression. There are examples of this in all the matrices. For example, the development of an extended metaphor in the women's visual matrix, that of cake and soil, brings the images and intimate intensity of affect from Barometer of my Heart into the experience of the moment. Nuanced experiential knowledge is transmitted rather than composed as an interpretation of meaning. There is no attempt to explain what the original images in the performance might signify, but paradoxically we end up with a greater sense of interweaving layers of meanings as infused with lived experience of the participants in the matrix. We attain a richer view than explanation might have provided.

### **The 'scenic rhizome'**

Our previous research has suggested the importance of what we have called the 'scenic rhizome', (Froggett et al 2015), that is to say the special quality of the potential or third space created by the visual matrix that makes the lived experience available for the participants. The scene is composed of a set of relations between its components and the audience and affect disseminates through it sometimes concentrating in nodes of intensity that claim attention. We have been interested in how the here-and-now experiences of the scenic rhizome can develop as a result of time and distance, so that matters of context – what is happening outside the moment and place of the matrix in terms of scale, history and circumstance – are brought into the interpretation of the data

*Visual matrix methodology combines the 'here-and-now' quality of thinking in the scenic rhizome with interpretation that unfolds in time incorporating wider contextual issues as the research panel responds to a particular research question.<sup>43</sup>*

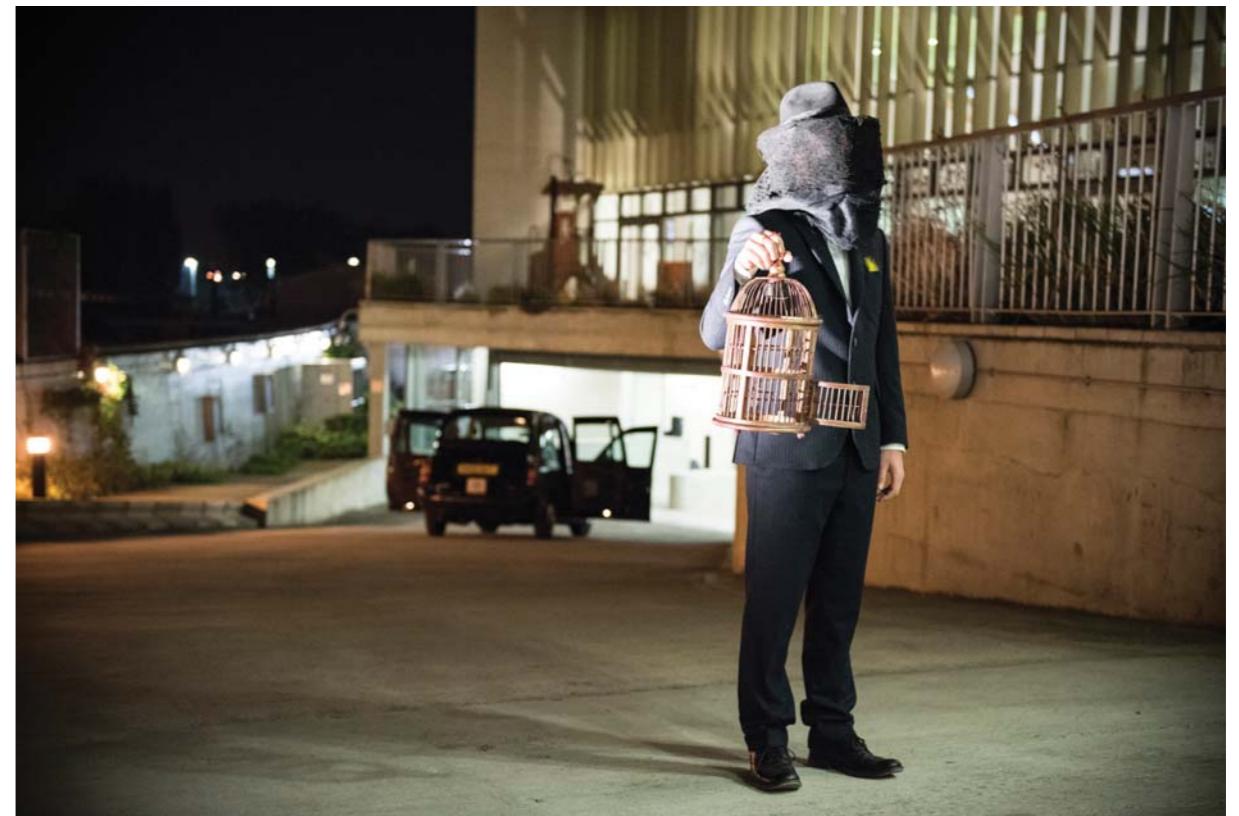
In using the visual matrix with The Barometer of My Heart, we have found it harder to disengage in time and place with the intensities of present expressions of affect in each of the matrices as they come alive again at each fresh reading. This speaks to the particularly intense and creative nature of the images from the artwork and how they merged with the creative affects of each of the matrices. Through the visual matrix method, we come to understand that female empathy is possible, masculine alternatives are desired, and that relationships and care are the keys to hope. In this study, then, we have come to understand the potential of the visual matrix method to create states of here-and-now that once ignited may continue to resonate in the creative imagination, combined with a reality that may be hard, but hopefully not too hard, to bear.

<sup>42</sup> See uses of 'communicative musicality' among groups Wotton (2012).

<sup>43</sup> Froggett et al. p. 27, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Froggett et al. p. 27, 2015.

## ART AND MEDICINE



### Art, Medicine and Metaphor

In an interview that took the form of a facilitated conversation between artist and doctor<sup>44</sup>, we began by asking how each of them had been influenced in their practice and thinking by The Barometer of My Heart collaboration. They began by reflecting on how the presence of an artist as observer in the consulting room changes the experience of doctor and patient and asking what new knowledge, if any, might arise from this situation. Dr Leighton Seal likened it to a form of reflective practice. The doctor works within the parameters of medical science but in the encounter with the patient may ‘forget to contextualize’. Herein lies the difference between scientific reductionism that quite properly focuses on a set of variables, and art which may focus on a detail – a condensation rather than a reduction in that it is emblematic of a greater whole. The difference was clarified in a discussion

between Mark Storor and Dr Seal on their respective uses of metaphor.

Initially Storor was surprised to discover that Dr Seal uses metaphor liberally in his practice as a shorthand lay language to typify syndromes, for example: ‘raging bull’, ‘faded glory’, ‘canary in the mineshaft’. The last became the opening visual metaphor for The Barometer of My Heart, but interestingly the first two spontaneously appeared in the visual matrices, showing in effect that they are cultural archetypes. An archetype is the original symbolic motif around which variations are built. The idea, now popularised, is associated with Carl Jung<sup>45</sup> who held that archetypes are pervasively embedded in the collective unconscious and so re-appear in dreams, as well as in art, including metaphors in poetry, through which we live our lives. By reaching for an archetype, an artist (and this happened in the visual matrices too) achieves instant recognition for a complex idea that has resonance

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Mark Storor, Leighton Seal and Anna Ledgard 05-01-2016.

<sup>45</sup> Jung, 1934–1954 *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, Collected Works.

beyond the immediate context, thus binding the group around the shared archetype and a common culture. The ramifications of an archetype for the artist are trans-personal, and also trans-historical. This then is a profound difference: for Dr Seal, 'Raging Bull' is a figurative expression of a category that characterizes a relation to testosterone levels and whatever is needed to restore potency. For Storor, it signifies a frustration and rage that says much about how men position themselves in relation to a cultural order, what they draw from it, and how they reproduce it. For the men's visual matrix, the same archetype was used to symbolise male strength, victory and power. Seal's use of the archetype seeks primarily to heal the person, Storor's use of it sees in the person a reflection of what needs to be healed in the culture.

Leighton Seal and Mark Storor continue in the interview to reflect upon how in the course of the project they have understood the value of bringing these perspectives together, and the authority that art and science can both gain from this. Storor became aware of gaining from medicine authorization to address a real and serious matter of concern, and to do this in the public domain. He felt privileged to be close to human situations where suffering, death and survival are at stake and to be in a position to transform what he had learnt into art. His ambition was that this art should be of use, conveying a complex and nuanced understanding of erectile dysfunction through the personal experience of his informants; and that it should be of cultural and medical significance. His fervent hope was that it should also be appreciated for what it is: an artwork that has its moment and 'lives' as art, complete within itself. Dr Seal discovered the force of an artistic vision, expression and media with which to conceive and communicate humanity within a condition, and an expanded symbolic and metaphorical language within which to refine distinctions – avoiding depreciation or titillation. It also allowed a reflection on his personal practice through the prism of the artist's vision of the consultation giving an entirely new perspective on the human interactions of doctor patient relationship. Both of them felt not only that their practice had been enriched by the discovery, but also that outcomes for the patients or audiences had been enhanced. They also appreciated the enhanced stature that both art and science gained from the collaboration, and the institutional recognition for their work that it brought.

### Privacy and Intimacy in the Clinic

In the mixed visual matrix, the problem of the consulting room is faced head on. A contrast is made between the

fantasy of sexual delight expressed in "Dionysian rituals out of control" and the cold reality of medical inspection, "Scrotum scrutinized". The medical gaze<sup>46</sup> and its objectivisation of the patient, who becomes the humiliated subject of medical power has been well recognised in the social sciences. It is questionable, however how far the existential crisis that this can induce is apprehended in day to day practice, especially where scrutiny is essential and patients in their need and dependency have no option but to comply. Art is able to make vivid and real the extent to which the doctor's incursion into what is private and intimate may seem to threaten the patient's very being. The reference in the mixed visual matrix to "white flaccid balls being shook and cradled" refers not only to the genitalia and the sexuality they represent, but by association to the man, shaken to the core and crying out for comfort and care. Storor observed how sick men in a state of abject fear got through their appointment with what can only be described as manic cheerfulness in an attempt to save face. Humiliation and resistance, if expressed in the moment in the consulting room, would risk impeding the work itself. Yet to the extent that they exist, these emotions demand recognition. Art creates a forum where they can be symbolised, acknowledged and 'fed back' to the clinic as a vivid reminder that the effects of intrusion on the individual's privacy must never be discounted.

### Empathic Understanding and the Other

The women's visual matrix demonstrated how The Barometer of My Heart is able to raise awareness for women who often struggle to understand the ramifications of impotence for men, even though they may have male partners. This was overtly expressed in the matrix

- *One image that really stuck with me in the show and ever since I've seen it is the cardboard space with the man stuffing his trousers with soil and after that scene he was still there stuffing away and stuffing away. I think it was the way he was doing it – it really felt real. He was suffering and in that dark place you go into in depression – it felt real and you think how do you help, how do you help someone get out of that place? I felt very helpless in a way – it's raised awareness for me – the whole show*

This awareness is reiterated later on, but this time it is linked to a desire to know more and a determination to support by taking action, more than just a cry of pain and expression of empathy

*...something that shows us that we are more than our physical body, and we have more to give and I think it needed that. When I heard it I wanted more stories – people's stories – wanted to hear more, how they are, how they're coping. So I left there thinking anybody that has erectile dysfunction needs help asap and how do we do it now that I'm aware*

Women rarely accompanied men to the clinics that Storor observed. What The Barometer of my Heart achieved among this female audience, by raising awareness, was a determination to become part of the process and emphasise the value of women's understanding and involvement, when it is wanted. The artwork has broken through taboos in ways that health professionals cannot, by creating a space where the aesthetic meets the emotional and where the imagination induces empathy.

### Emotion and Clinical Discourse

The depth of feeling expressed in the men's matrix goes beyond that which could be contemplated in the consulting room. In the anguish of the individual, the doctor can be presented with the shocking reality of what lies beneath outward appearance. Art offers a solution to a perceived dilemma in professional relationships where untempered emotion risks compromising the professional distance needed to think about how medical intervention may best help the patient, while never losing sight of his humanity. Dr Seal is very aware of difficulties that surround this issue: on the one hand he uses figurative language to describe and communicate, and on the other hand he recognizes the need to temper its emotional inflection to maintain clinical distance.

Aesthetic form does not leave feelings undefined, unmoored and adrift in a sea of psychological chaos – it offers containment for emotions by symbolising them and rendering them communicable. Once communicated, extremities of emotion are attenuated, rendering them less destructive. We see this in the men's matrix where rage and shame are modified through the aesthetic of the artwork. The art in this case involves a triple transformation, first by the artist, then by company, then by the audience – each of them working to retain the resonance of the emotions through the vitality of the symbolic forms they produce. These transformations temper the potential destructiveness of the emotions without denying them, and move beyond them to another place.

### Artistic and Scientific Attention

The presence of an artist in the consulting room threw into relief the distinction between ways of seeing and therefore the nature and quality of attention brought to bear on the patient's situation. Whereas medical practice backed up by scientific evidence holds out the possibility of clarity, the better to ensure safe and effective intervention, Storor's art deals in what is half-formed, uncertain, hidden from view or emergent – often taking time to bring into being ideas which are based on intuition and syncretistic perception.<sup>47</sup> Being at ease with uncertainty requires 'negative capability'<sup>48</sup>, that is to say an acknowledgement of the real pain, suffering and discomfort of men who suffer from erectile dysfunction, without seeking to find answers to this suffering that may not exist.

In the sixty-four consultations that Storor witnessed, Dr Seal was able to abstract commonalities of symptom and syndrome, allowing useful classification. Storor often focused on the particularities in the scene that were emblematic – such as a gesture, an expression – that could be artistically conveyed as expressing a set of relations between impotence, body, self and society, thus bearing on a wider social experience and condition of masculinity. The emblematic in the scene becomes evident through the free-floating attention that negative capability demands. So it is that Storor perceives a struggle with socks as conveying something of universal significance about intimate exposure and the clinical consultation.

### Art and the Clinical Setting

Negotiating with the NHS for the use of the Sir Ludwig Guttmann Centre proved to be a difficult and very protracted process, exhausting to the point where alternatives had to be actively explored. Nevertheless, artist and producer alike were convinced that a clinical setting would immeasurably enhance awareness in the audience that the artwork was the outcome of art-medicine collaboration and that it spoke to a health issue of grave importance. Furthermore the contemporary design of the Centre offered the succession of spaces that could be well adapted for the purposes of performance. Producing it in such a setting emphasised the point that art need not be peripheral to medicine but can be located within sites of clinical practice. In the course of their residency the company formed good relationships with both clinical and non-clinical staff, so that it began to seem a 'natural' part of the Centre. The drawings on internal glass

<sup>46</sup> Foucault 1963.

<sup>47</sup> Ehrenzweig 1967.  
<sup>48</sup> Keats, 1817; Bion 1970.

partitions that were applied before each performance and wiped out each night were 'invited' to stay. The caretaker appeared nightly in the performance.

How might the capacity of art be harnessed in medical practice? There is a possible clue in a comment made by a clinician at the Centre, referring to the experience of having the Company on the premises: 'What if you were to be here for a year?' Although art in primary and secondary healthcare is common and the literature is extensive<sup>49</sup> it can still often be a decorative addition and a parallel activity to enhance the environment. The Barometer of My Heart suggested that the presence of art may go to the heart of the professional relationship itself and suggested that there is there is a considerable way to go in exploring the potential of long-term artist residencies in clinical settings.

### **Art, Medicine and Third Space**

Art and medicine are two powerful disciplines each with its own terrain. In any collaboration between them the value of the knowledge produced is likely to be found in a third space that arises out of the encounter. In a project such as The Barometer of My Heart the producer has a special role in holding open and safeguarding this space. Anna Ledgard describes it as a particularly 'freeing' place to be insofar as the conventions within which disciplines are bound can be suspended. This freedom extends into the public domain and affects other people who engage with the ideas the encounter produces. This is particularly so in the case of a subject matter that attracts embarrassment and a fear of violating social taboos. Storor and Ledgard encountered difficulties for example in presenting the project in corporate environments, where its potential contribution to male health and well-being was not appreciated. Where they were able to make headway it was because a 'third space', free of the inhibition and reticence that usually surrounds the topic, was conceivable. One of the outcomes of the project for Ledgard, Storor and Seal was that they were increasingly able to hold conversations about erectile dysfunction and impotence in contexts where it would previously have been unlikely or impossible.

The third space in this context implicates not only art and medicine, but also the publics that interact with these disciplines. Because it is a space of emergence, its contents and contours are undefined. Artists are used to working with emergence and with an aesthetic third<sup>50</sup> that lends symbolic form to the emergent ideas.

They are also used to developing new sensualised 'languages' through which to convey ideas which as yet have no discursive expression, or which cannot be adequately expressed in words. An artwork like The Barometer of My Heart populates the third space creatively with forms for the feelings encountered within a scientific domain, generating new ways to apprehend the human experience within in it. The visual matrix reflects and reproduces a third space in the minds and imaginations of its participants<sup>51</sup> opening up the possibility of a different relationship to the problem of male impotence and the area of medical science that addresses it.

## **NOTE ON THE SIMPLICITY OF TRUTH – a Continuation Project at FACT, Liverpool, June 2016**

The Simplicity of Truth was an outcome of Mark Storor's interest in a support network for men through art. In Liverpool he worked on issues of male identity with Everton in the Community Football Club. For six weeks during the development process of The Barometer of My Heart he was able to work with a local military veterans group, whose experiences also informed his thinking. One of their members, Jay Bell, had appeared in person and in the digital material used in the London performances and he remained key to the work in Liverpool. The installation in FACT used some of the digital images from The Barometer of My Heart alongside other locally generated material to mount an exhibition with associated workshops.

This was neither foreseen nor included as part of our original proposal. However we hoped to do a visual matrix in Liverpool to understand how the key ideas might transfer into a different context and format. In the end this was not possible so we do not have the same depth of data on how audiences engaged with the work. As an alternative, however, we assigned an ethnographer who had not previously been associated with The Barometer of My Heart to observe for a day, during which there were open activities for any members of the public who wished to attend, including some that would appeal to young people – crayons, paints, pens, old magazines and scissors were available. His observations supported our understanding of what Mark Storor wished to achieve through the project as a whole. The following is an extract of his notes, taken on the day, that offer a vignette into the performative centrepiece of the event

*Jay and Mark were performing how they felt about masculinity. I looked again. They were both dressed in all white onesies.. They were both dressed in that way. There was something childlike about the whole image. It was moving, Jay was performing. Yes, childlike, Jay had several balloons attached to his body. He was putting together pieces of crystal glass, on a white table.*

*Meanwhile the rolling digital images of Jay and Mark, showed Jay, particularly, piercing the balloons and 'blood' splattering across his face, head and body. It was a shocking image, in contrast to the slightly strange, but childlike images of Jay reconstructing pieces of crystal glass dressed in a onesey. One needed to spend a long while, looking, thinking and absorbing them – on the one the hand, gentle, on the other, shocking and brutal.*

*Jay was very proud of them, rightly so. They caught the eye. He informed me that he had joined the army at sixteen and had experienced Iraq amongst many other things and talked about a culture of drinking within the army. ... He had developed an interest in notions of masculinity, being something else than just macho and one dimensional, behaving as men were supposed to behave. Through meeting Mark and becoming involved in this project, he felt that he was beginning to find a way to express his feelings through art.*

This is a particularly interesting example of how sustained engagement in contemporary performative and visual art, in the supportive conditions that Storor worked to establish, can meet personal emotional needs, offer opportunities to explore shifts in identity and enable development of a critical consciousness. These are complex changes and The Barometer of My Heart is a complex artwork. However, our ethnographer concluded after one day's exposure to the project that there was nevertheless a simple message and aspiration at its core: that men should be able to accept themselves and be at ease with who they are, regardless of sexual performance, orientation and potency, and that this involves a valorising of sides of the self that are not well promoted or supported in contemporary constructions of masculinity. In particular it implies men's capacity to feel tender towards their own brokenness and to care for each other.

<sup>49</sup> Staricoff 1990-2004, Stukey 2010, Clift et al.

<sup>50</sup> Froggett et al 2011, Froggett and Trustram 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Muller et al 2015.

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This has been a detailed study of the inner life of an artwork, where the artwork is conceived as an entire project stretching back over time to include the many conversations and workshops with men in different contexts, the art/medicine collaboration at its centre, the NHS setting, the work of the company in devising the performances, the performances themselves in Stratford in the autumn of 2015 and the exhibition at FACT in June 2016.

The Barometer of my Heart has prised open an issue that is seldom spoken of in public settings, and yet can be emotionally devastating and potentially deadly. It has shown that through art erectile dysfunction and impotence could nevertheless become the subject of an enquiring, informative and sensitive public conversation. The work developed a visual and performative language with which to communicate the implications for men's health and the critical importance of seeking treatment. Grounding itself in the experiences of men from many different walks of life, it has portrayed the psychosocial suffering caused by impotence, and indicated the resources that men might draw on to survive it. The Barometer of My Heart found a way to depict the ravages on intimate relationships and social roles, and on the men's ability to retain self-respect, and accept themselves for who they are. It did this in full acknowledgement of the anguish caused by impotence and without flinching from reported and observed experiences of humiliation, shame, self-contempt, failure, despair and manic denial that contributed to the artwork's conception and realisation. It has also tentatively suggested to its audiences where the grounds for hope might lie – in an understanding of masculinity that finds solidarity and community in the broken and vulnerable sides of the self, in compassionate human relationships across genders and sexualities and the capacity of men to care for themselves, for one another and the world they inhabit.

## Methodological Conclusion on the Visual Matrix

Through the unearthing of images and associated affect, the visual matrices have each played a part in creating a panorama of meaning behind a fatally threatening medical issue for men. The depth and complexity and imaginative content of the visual

matrices show the potential of art to explore ideas that are unsettling, anxiety provoking, taboo, inaccessible to conscious discourse and the public domain. It can symbolize the unthought known and so produce new knowledge. The visual matrix provides a setting where this knowledge can find verbal expression.

As a research team, we were impressed with the compatibility between the visual matrix as a research and evaluation method and The Barometer of My Heart. There was a striking resonance between the artwork's use of image, symbolisation, suggestion, nuance and affect and the features of a visual matrix that capture specifically those aspects. They manifested in multi-layered diverse and original perspectives that were built up around ideas of masculinity and that it would be difficult to encounter through other methods.

## Finding form for unspeakable feelings

By making a multi-media artwork on a subject that often defies adequate representation The Barometer of My Heart has demonstrated the possibility of developing a figurative language with which to convey not only the nuances and complexities of men's experiences, but also the ambivalence and anxiety that impotence arouses among audiences, and by extension among the public. In doing so, it has showed that it is possible to open up for discussion a world of male emotionality and sexuality which has been largely hidden from view, without reducing men's suffering to physiological 'malfunction'.

The study did not enquire into whether participants had direct personal experience of the condition, and it would not have been ethical to do so in a public setting. However, despite the fact that the audiences were very mixed in terms of gender, sexuality, age and socio-economic background, there was nothing to suggest that any group felt excluded or alienated by the sensitivity of the subject matter. This is a particular achievement of this artwork and signals a more extended potential role for art in relation to unspeakable subjects. It is a pre-condition for a wider public conversation and for the development of an effective public health communication strategy.

## Art/ Medicine Collaborations

The study corroborates ideas that Dr Seal and Mark Storor have developed about the need to reach for a new language to communicate with men in distress. While acknowledging the critical role of medical professionalism and the carefully calibrated clinical distance it demands, it also explores the implications of the fact that men's emotional universe is not left behind at the threshold of the consulting room. The question arises whether and how this universe should be recognized within healthcare and professional relationships. The Barometer of My Heart shows that art can offer an uncompromising, honest and compassionate expression of male suffering. It therefore raises the question of how ongoing relationships between art and clinical practice might be structured to ensure better outcomes for patient groups at risk of stigmatization and the negative effects of individualization.

The other implications of such collaborations, already discussed are summarized below:

- Art/medicine collaborations offer potential for developing new figurative language that can enhance communication of medical conditions between clinicians and users of health services, and in public health. This is of particular value when the subject matter attracts stigma, shame, embarrassment, inhibition and fear.
- Art and medicine both benefit from increased stature and public and institutional recognition as a result of such collaborations.
- Art may support empathic engagement with the patient's predicament among people who are not affected, and may never be affected in a similar way. This is of particular value in conditions that have relational as well as bio-medical implications across genders
- The value of art/science collaborations may lie in the third space that offers the possibility of freedom from the conventions of disciplines where authentically new ways of seeing and thinking can emerge.
- Art reminds us of the effects of medical intrusion into the most intimate areas of the body and provides a forum outside of the clinic where the difficulties this may provoke can be acknowledged and recognised.

- The third space where art and science meet also holds out the possibility of developing better ways to manage and communicate emotion in clinical settings where art's ability to contain and symbolise is brought to bear on feelings that surround the clinical encounter, and engagement with medical science provides new subject matter and focus for art.
- It has long been appreciated that art can enhance and humanise medical environments. However, there is unrealised and unexplored potential for both art and medicine in residencies that persist over time and where the artwork engages in depth with the implications of living with medical conditions and with medical practice and settings

## Gendered Perceptions of Male Impotence

The Barometer of My Heart was an inquiry into maleness itself and by virtue of its mixed audiences exposed profound differences between men and women in how masculinity is lived and conceived. The artwork found a way of questioning settled assumptions in relation to gender and sexuality so that in the visual matrices it was either through a 'queering' of gender stereotypes, or by a concerted attempt to reach across a gender gap in terms of mutual comprehension, that the most imaginative and creative symbolisations were achieved.

It showed how difficult it is for women to comprehend the effects of male impotence but also that through its symbolic forms art offers a way into the hitherto secret world of masculine intimacy and distress. This in turn affords an opportunity to consider empathically how women might play a part in support and care. In the audiences, it triggered thoughts on how women might be implicated in men's sense of shame and suggested that in the face of destructive chaos hope is to be found in the quality of relationships.

## Masculinity, Potency and Male Identity

One of the central 'messages' of The Barometer of My Heart is that there is more to male beauty, pride and strength than the standard, clichéd images to be found in conventional and social media, and that pervade Western societies. The study showed that addressing the subject of impotence through art elicits from men a pre-occupation with cultural representations and an urgent need to critique or de-bunk stereotypical images and icons of male potency. Male humour offers a means of subversion, or a defence when required. The virtue of this particular defence is that it can

accommodate a knowing irony and avoid disavowal of the problem and its projection onto others. It also offers an opportunity for a pleasurable and creative male bonding and a counterpoint to the cruel mocking humour that is sometimes directed at men suffering from erectile dysfunction.

The study of men's responses to The Barometer of my Heart also showed that opening up the subject of masculinity through a complex aesthetic experience that gave full recognition to intensities of suffering and shame, also established the conditions for a more hopeful acceptance of the idea that male identity is not defined exclusively by sexual potency. It may also lie in the quality of male relationships, their capacity to care, their ability to embrace their own vulnerability and appreciate themselves for who they are, and in the solidarity they can achieve with one another.

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