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The reflections of memory : an account of a cognitive approach to historically informed staging

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Citation

Blin, G. R. (2018, December 12). *The reflections of memory : an account of a cognitive approach to historically informed staging*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/68030>

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Author: Blin, G.R.

Title: The reflections of memory : an account of a cognitive approach to historically informed staging

Issue Date: 2018-12-12

THE REFLECTIONS OF MEMORY

**AN ACCOUNT OF A COGNITIVE APPROACH
TO HISTORICALLY INFORMED STAGING**

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op woensdag 12 december 2018
klokke 16.15 uur

door
Gilbert Rémy Blin
geboren te Guérande (Frankrijk)
in 1960

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	I
Note to the Reader.....	III
Foreword	1
Introduction	11
1 Poetic and Performing spaces in Monteverdi's operas	22
1.1 <i>Orfeo</i> in Mantua.....	27
1.1.1 Orpheus, the Humanist figure.....	30
1.1.2 <i>Orfeo</i> : a static lesson	32
1.1.3 <i>Orfeo</i> : a dynamic construction	35
1.1.4 Space in <i>Orfeo</i> 's score.....	38
1.1.5 A comparative work: <i>Le Ballet Comique de la Reine</i>	40
1.1.6 Space and scenery for <i>Le Ballet Comique de la Reine</i>	42
1.1.7 Space and scenery compared	45
1.1.8 <i>Orfeo</i> , the Modello of Striggio and Monteverdi.....	48
1.2 Monteverdi's operas in Venice	51
1.2.1 Opera in Venice	53
1.2.2 Giovanni Burnacini (1610–1655).....	57
1.3 <i>Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria</i>	62
1.3.1 The « Reggia ».....	63
1.3.2 The « Boschereccia »	67
1.3.3 The « Marittima »	69
1.4 <i>L'incoronazione di Poppea</i>	73
1.4.1 Street of Comedy or of Tragedy?.....	78
1.4.2 From « Boschereccia » to « Deliziosa »	82
1.4.3 Gods in Machines	85
1.4.4 « senza machine ».....	89
2 Allegorical program by Quinault for the Poetics of the French opera	91
2.1 The <i>Ballet</i> of <i>Psiché</i> in 1671	92
2.2 The content and symbolism of the <i>Ballet</i> of <i>Psiché</i>	97
2.3 A Forebearer in 1656: <i>Le Ballet de Psyché ou de la Puissance de l'Amour</i>	102
2.4 Visual allegory in <i>Le Ballet</i> of <i>Psiché</i>	105
2.5 Iconology in <i>Le Ballet</i> of <i>Psiché</i>	107
2.6 La Petite Académie behind <i>Le Ballet</i> of <i>Psiché</i> ?	110
2.7 The Four Poems and Quinault's « anchaînement ».....	117

3.	The Alternative French System of Marc-Antoine Charpentier	121
3.1.	Practice and context of the research	121
3.1.1	Methodology applied to Charpentier.....	123
3.2.	<i>Les Plaisirs de Versailles</i> opera portrait by Donneau de Visé for Versailles in 1683	128
3.2.1	<i>Les Plaisirs de Versailles</i> : fiction versus reality?.....	129
3.2.2	Jean Donneau de Visé as librettist	131
3.2.3	<i>La Pierre Philosophale</i>	134
3.2.4	Les Fontaines in les Appartements	136
3.2.5	<i>Les Plaisirs de Versailles</i> : reality versus fiction	141
3.3.	<i>La Couronne de Fleurs</i> a Pastorale by Jean Palaprat for Toulouse in 1685.....	143
3.3.1	<i>La Couronne de Fleurs</i> : a celebratory offering.....	144
3.3.2	The Floralia of the Ancients	146
3.3.3	Jeux floraux of the Moderns	149
3.3.4	Jean Bigot de Palaprat (1650–1721).....	150
3.3.5	Academic fever.....	152
3.3.6	Further evidence.....	153
3.4.	<i>La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers</i> an opera by Thomas Corneille for Paris in 1687.....	157
3.4.1	<i>Orpheus'</i> period message	159
3.4.2	Performing and musical information.....	160
3.4.3	Staging information	162
3.4.4	The staging trope of the Underworld.....	164
3.4.5	<i>Actéon</i> : a first attempt for tragic pastorale	166
3.4.6	The Dauphin as Charpentier's patron.....	169
4.	English « Masque/opera »	172
4.1	Practice and context of the research	172
4.1.1	Concept or design	174
4.1.2	<i>Masque/opera</i> : the meeting of sounds and images	176
4.2	<i>Venus and Adonis</i> by John Blow	180
4.2.1	Between Poems and Pictures.....	181
4.2.2	Between <i>Masque</i> and <i>opera</i>	191
4.2.3	Between king and mistress	195
4.2.4	Between life and death.....	198
4.2.5	Between Anne Finch and Anne Killigrew.....	201
4.3	<i>Acis and Galatea</i> by George Frideric Handel.....	209
4.3.1	Cannons : the place.....	210
4.3.2	Cannons: the gardens	213
4.3.3	« Ut Pictura Poesis, Ut Pictura Hortus ».....	216
4.3.4	Theatrical and non-theatrical performances of <i>Acis</i>	218
4.3.5	<i>Acis</i> , as Genius of Cannons	221
5	Opera of Mirrors in Munich in 1688: <i>Niobe, Regina di Tebe</i>.....	226
5.1	One Patron.....	228
5.2	Twins	233
5.3	Three Princes.....	238
5.4	Four Cities	242
5.5	Five Religions	245

5.6	Six Daughters and six Sons.....	248
5.7	Seven Strings.....	253
6	<i>Le Carnaval de Venise</i>	260
6.1	The Peace of Ryswick.....	261
6.2	French honors to Venice	263
6.3	Carnival in Marly, <i>Le Carnaval de Venise</i> in Paris.....	265
6.4	Regnard, poet and fantasist	268
6.5	The muses and the mummers	270
6.6	Carnival in Venice	272
6.7	Water, Gondolas and Gondoliers	274
6.8	Costumes and Characters	276
6.9	Singing in French and Italian	278
6.10	Serenade and Opera	280
6.11	French and Venetian balls.....	283
6.12	World and worldly visions	285
7	Case Studies	290
7.1	River gods theatrical costumes	291
7.1.1	The definition of an iconic figure	294
7.1.2	The baroque characterization of the figure of the river god.....	299
7.1.3	Costume designs for water on stage.....	308
7.1.4	Costume designs for river gods on stage.....	323
7.1.5	The stage costume of a male river god: Memo for the designer.....	348
7.2	<i>Psiché</i> at Drottningholms Slottsteater	350
7.2.1	Prologue	355
7.2.2	Acte I and Acte II.....	358
7.2.3	Acte III.....	362
7.2.4	Acte IV	366
7.2.5	Acte V	374
7.3	Sets project for <i>Niobe</i> 2011	381
7.3.1	Characters and costumes	381
7.3.2	Sets	383
7.3.3	Machines.....	384
7.3.4	Flying machines.....	385
	Conclusion	396
	Selected Bibliography	401
	Pre-1800 sources	402

Post-1800 sources	419
Curriculum vitae Gilbert Blin	470
Boston Early Music Festival 2007–2017 Opera productions by Gilbert Blin	471
<i>The Reflections of Memory</i> Summary	476
<i>The Reflections of Memory</i> Samenvatting	478
APPENDIX : Six texts set in music by Marc-Antoine Charpentier	483
Foreword	485
<i>LES PLAISIRS DE VERSAILLES</i> (H480)	487
<i>LA PIERRE PHILOSOPHALE</i> (H501)	498
<i>LA COURONNE DE FLEURS</i> (H486)	501
<i>ACTÉON</i> (H481)	507
<i>LA DESCENTE D'ORPHÉE AUX ENFERS</i> (H488)	514
<i>ORPHÉE DESCENDANT AUX ENFERS</i> (H471)	525

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the result of work done in touch and with the support of a significant number of scholars, patrons, and artists, who all deserve my gratitude.

First, I would like to thank my promotores and the members of the promotiecommissie. My deepest thanks go to Prof. Frans de Ruiter, who led this research with great intellectual and artistic generosity. The precision of his suggestions and the acuity of his reflections during his careful readings have turned into many discussions essential to the dynamics of my work. I also thank Prof. Ton Koopman, who was kind enough to encourage and to nourish this research from its early steps. His artistic insights in music, as well as in poetry and visual arts, and his wise advice are very inspiring to me; I appreciated his trust deeply.

I owe a great debt to Prof. Jérôme de la Gorce, whose publications have been so influential in my understanding of early operas and to Prof. Ellen Harris, whose approach has been a great source of inspiration and joy. I am grateful to Dr. Christine Fischer and Dr. Flavio Ferri-Benedetti who were the first to invite me to formulate, for the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, the general principles of my research. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Rémy-Michel Trotier for his consequential input in my work.

Throughout my research I have benefited from the kindness of many curators and librarians: I would like to warmly thank Benjamin Weiss, Director of Collections at the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston, for giving me special access to some non-exhibited works and Glenn A. Knickrehm for giving me regular access to the Constellation Center Library in Cambridge (MA). Eline Holl has been always very welcoming during my visits to the private library of Ton Koopman in Bussum. A special thank is due to Prof. Marie-Christine Skuncke for giving me access to the Gustavian Collections of the Uppsala University Library. May Dr. Inga Lewenhaupt and Magnus Blomkvist be also thanked for allowing me to explore the unrecorded treasures of the Sveriges Teatermuseum. Maestro Arnold Östman was the first to open the doors of Drottningholms Slottsteater for me and I am forever indebted to him and to Per Förström who has continuously supported my research in this inspiring place.

My gratitude goes to Bernice K. and Ted Chen for their generous funding of my work as a stage director in Boston since 2001, and to Amanda Pond, Joan Margot Smith, and Lorna E. Oleck for their financial support. My heartfelt thanks to Miles Morgan for his constant trust and his challenging curiosity in my work.

Special appreciation is due to my partners of the Boston Early Music Festival who have supported my work: first and foremost, Kathleen Fay, executive director, for having constant interest in my artistic vision and trust in my professional abilities to convey it. Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs, my artistic allies have been in many ways contributing to the development of my research. I am also indebted to Robert Mealy, who has welcomed me at the Juilliard School of Music in New York to give several lectures about *The Reflections of Memory*. Thanks go also to Maria van Kalken whose passion and wisdom are always so uplifting. Costume designer Anna Watkins and choreographer Melinda Sullivan have proven

themselves to be most dedicated colleagues and indulgent friends. Lenore Doxsee who designed the lights of all my Bostonian productions until her early death in 2017 is not forgotten: the title of this dissertation owes a lot to the discussions we had about the philosophical applications of light reflection on stage.

My many esteemed colleagues in Boston, artists and technicians, all deserved to be mentioned. I owe a special debt of gratitude to singers, too numerous to name individually here, who have been always ready to explore my hypotheses. The interest of performers in my research has been an incentive to pursue the doctorate.

I thank warmly Anna Josephine Janssen and Kathy Wittman who have been assisting with the sorting of paper and video archives, and, for various kinds of friendly assistance, Meriem Bahri, Patrick Rondeau and Matthias Zins. For their precious support and valuable advices, I deeply thank Dr. Mickael Bouffard and Dr. Camille Tanguy.

I am grateful especially to Henk Elderhorst for his critical reflection and for offering unique moral support.

Finally, I would like to thank Andrew Sigel for his reading of many chapters of the draft of this dissertation. In accordance with the academic convention, I will, of course, take full responsibility for any remaining errors, factual or editorial.

Note to the Reader

This note presents an orientation regarding the editorial procedure used in this dissertation:

- Spelling: American English.
- Italics are used to indicate titles of opera and book titles.
Italics are used to specify a genre: *Masque*, *Ballet de Cour*, etc., unless the word is used in a quotation.
- English double inverted commas are used to indicate articles titles.
- French quotations marks are used for quotes.
Quotes are always integrated in the text, even as they are 50 words or more.

Citation style: for early sources, I present diplomatic transcriptions of original documents, both printed and/or manuscripts. Wherever possible, I have transcribed documents from original or period edition rather than rely on transcription published recently. In quoting from printed and manuscript documents, I have chosen to retain the original capitalization, and punctuation as well as spelling, including reproducing typographical anomalies. The Latin adverb sic inserted between square brackets after a quoted word or passage indicates that the quoted matter has been transcribed exactly as found in the source text, complete with any erroneous or archaic spelling or other matter that might otherwise be taken as an error of transcription.

Quotes from Italian, French, German and Swedish are translated and when the context of the section actually quoted is important, the full original sentence is given in its full length in the footnotes and the part quoted in the text is underlined. Unless specified otherwise, translations are all my own.

Poetic texts from the librettos, when quoted, reflect early printed editions and have not been altered to conform to the scores. Occasionally, however, punctuation and accents have been added to clarify and facilitate the reading, and abbreviations have been expanded when clarifying the text was needed. In addition, for librettos, the beginning of each poetic line has been marked by capitalizing its initial letter.

- Notes and Figures are numbered by Chapter.
- Within the footnotes themselves, bibliographical references are always fully supplied, except when a very short interval has elapsed since the previous reference. The Select Bibliography at the end of this volume lists printed sources which have been mostly of use.
- Appendix are online at: <http://gilbertblin.eu>
Password for download: ledessein (no capital)



*Apollon, conseille à Melpomene et à Thalie, de joindre
la pratique à la Théorie, dans l'usage du Théâtre.*

Figure inset: *Apollon conseille à Melpomene et à Thalie, de joindre
la pratique à la Théorie, dans l'usage du Théâtre*

(Apollo advises Melpomene and Thalia to join practice to Theory in the usage of Theatre)
Etching of 1714 by Bernard Picart (1673–1733) for François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac. *La pratique du théâtre*,
Amsterdam: Jean Frederic Bernard, 1715.
Leiden, Leiden University Library Print Room.

Foreword

The research presented here is dedicated to my work in staging operas of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This exploration aims to show how Historically Informed staging is in relation with my approach to baroque opera aesthetics. The first objective of my dissertation is to enable a better understanding of both my creative and interpretive processes in the operatic field. The main research question I will attempt to answer in my dissertation can be phrased as follows: how can I, as a post-modern stage director, use historical research for creative purposes? The title of this dissertation, « The Reflections of Memory », is the appellation I have been giving to my current approach as an artist and constitutes a conceptual answer to this question. It found its origins in the different meanings the noun « reflection » has in English, all of them overpassed by my research.

« Reflection » is known as something, such as an image, that is reflected. The word originated from old French « reflexion » or late Latin « reflexio(n-) », from Latin « reflex- »: bent back, and from the verb « reflectere ». Therefore, reflection is « the throwing back by a body or surface of light, heat, or sound without absorbing it »¹. In this first sense this « throwing back », and my subject, is as « An amount of light, heat, or sound that is reflected by a body or surface. An image seen in a mirror or shiny surface. A thing that is a consequence of or arises from something else ». But then again, the word reflection can also express « serious thought or consideration. » and most notably something that shows, expresses, or is a sign of something: « An idea about something, especially one that is written down or expressed ». Finally, the third meaning, which comes from Mathematics « The conceptual operation of inverting a system or event with respect to a plane, each element being transferred perpendicularly through the plane to a point the same distance the other side of it », is a good description of the methodology adopted for my research, as I consider its development as a matter of space. A second image, a consideration, a transfer process: it is to all these concepts of my research that the plural of my title references. By associating it with the larger notion of Memory, I refer to the common understanding that memory is the faculty of the mind by which information is encoded, stored and retrieved. Besides this literal sense I keep in mind the rich tradition of the Art of Memory². In the spirit of the period I study, I also refer to Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of Memory and the mother of the nine Muses as my tutelary figure.

Though the second part of the title leads one, perhaps, to expect a wide-ranging discussion of some of the more general problems presented by the staging of opera, I have chosen to write a study that contributes rather less in the way of new theoretical understanding of the Historically Informed Performance phenomenon than it gives a testimony which, hopefully, makes a contribution on the factual side. This PhD dissertation should be looked at as a personal expression of a poetics and a practice for the baroque spectacle. Consequently,

¹ « Reflection » in *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3 ed.), Edited by Angus Stevenson. Oxford: Oxford University Press Print, 2010. In this paragraph all quotes are coming from this source.

² See: Yates, Frances A. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. See also the more recent: Rossi, Paolo. *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, translated with an introduction by Stephen Clucas. London & New York: Continuum, 2006.

while the evolution of opera is outlined, little attempt has been made to reexamine the received knowledge about the development of opera or to test these generalizations in the light of the practice of this artistic genre: this thesis is not a thesis in musicology. Nevertheless, I will attempt to address some of these questions in the Introduction where I identify and explain the principles of my approach and in the Conclusion where I review my current findings. My interest in staging baroque opera and theatre goes back a long time; my work did not start and will not end with this dissertation.

Ironically, the concept for this project came many years ago when a large production I was working on was cancelled during its research and design phase, due to financial constraints faced by the theatre that had commissioned it. In the time vacuum created by this cancellation of « Practice », I went back to « Theory » and more specifically to the works of the French writer and encyclopedist Louis de Cahusac (1706–1759) and planned a personal research project dedicated to his conception of the « Théâtre lyrique ». Between 1745, the year of their first proven collaboration, until his death in 1759, Cahusac wrote the libretti of more than seven operas for Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764). From 1747, Cahusac's project appears to be a comprehensive undertaking that includes a large number of spectacles and theoretical contributions spread over several years of common work. The relationship between the operas he created with Rameau and the rest of his writings, has, strangely enough, never been thoroughly investigated. In a first plan of research, I wanted to try to define this new French lyrical genre through a literary and contextual study focusing on the staging component, which seems to be the key to comprehend all of Cahusac's concepts³.

This idea seemed to be the logical consequence of my previous academic research. While a student at the Institut d'Études Théâtrales of the Sorbonne Nouvelle, I constructed my syllabus with an emphasis on theatre history and stage directing. As part of my master's degree, I wrote a « mémoire » dedicated to the staging of the operas of Rameau during the composer's lifetime⁴. The work presented itself as a synthesis of the elements necessary to Rameau's operas as the composer had known them. The objective was already, by examining librettos, scores and iconographic material, to determine their complementary relationships. Both the French opera theories of the eighteenth century and the concrete conditions of the representation of operas were taken into consideration, although there was then little hope that I would be able to implement or even test these findings in a Historically Informed Performance.

For my « Diplôme d'études approfondies »⁵ year I then chose to extend this research by broadening my thinking to theatre architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the idea of dedicating my future doctoral thesis to the Drottningholms Slottsteater and

³ The Cahusac research found its expression later in two of my publications. In my introduction to: Cahusac, Louis de and Rameau, Jean-Philippe. *Zoroastre, Livret de 1756, présenté par Gilbert Blin*. Paris: Académie Desprez, 2005, pp. 7–59. And: Blin, Gilbert. "Le Théâtre des Enchantements de Monsieur de Cahusac" in *Program 2005, Drottningholms Slottsteater*. Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 2005, pp. 94–104.

⁴ Blin, Gilbert. "Les Opéras de Rameau: pour un Théâtre des Enchantements" (mémoire de Maîtrise soutenu à l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris III. Paris: Institut d'Études Théâtrales, 1986).

⁵ The Diplôme d'études approfondies or DEA was a degree in France from 1964 to 2005. It was a postgraduate degree (diplôme de troisième cycle), aimed to prepare for advanced doctoral studies. In order to award a government-sanctioned degree (diplôme national) for a DEA, the university had to require its students to complete a thesis of at least ninety pages with a bibliography based on the students' original research, and a thesis defense.

its collections. Built in 1766, this theatre is a unique historical resource, with original, fully functional stage machinery and a large collection of original sets. It was then deserving a new critical approach and during the early stage of this research, it appeared to me that my practical experience of opera staging could enlighten the understanding of the spectacular modalities of this theatre. The project was accepted by my supervisor at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Prof. Martine de Rougemont (1940–2015), but soon had to be forsaken due to a lack of funds. To assure my own subsistence, I then abandoned the world of the university to devote myself, by pursuing intense professional practice, to my artistic career. For several years, my artistic work developed around the operatic French repertoire of the nineteenth century, but the conditions of production and elaboration of operatic projects that I encountered, in the major opera houses I was working for, left me dissatisfied on intellectual and artistic levels.

Fortunately, I had the opportunity during this period, thanks to the invitation of Arnold Östman (b. 1939), to work many times at the Drottningholms Slottsteater: first as a language coach, then as an assistant director and finally as a stage director⁶. This historical theatre⁷ was then buzzing with activities and debates around the notion of Historically Informed Performance for the repertoire of the late eighteenth century. As Östman, then Artistic Director⁸, explained in his welcoming words of 1988, the formative year I joined the Drottningholms Slottsteater as an Intern: « The reason why artistic investigation is done in the musical field is that we fiddle with the clock and try out the old way of playing. The same ambition applies to production and style of acting. This is not to be seen as a lack of creativity. Or a longing to go backward. Rather it is a necessity in an age when the history of learning begins to be associated with research into future. Not until our age have we discovered how fruitful that game is ».⁹ These experiences culminated in 1998, with the revival of my production of *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the *azione teatrale* of Ranieri de' Calazabigi (1714–1795) and Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787). The success of this production at the Drottningholms Slottsteater, despite the non-creative aspect of the revival of its staging, revitalized in my mind the need to reexamine the rich historical opera heritage of Drottningholm.

To try to unearth its principles and apply them in live performance, to test their contemporary relevance, was my purpose when I founded the Académie Desprez, *Association Française pour le Rayonnement du château de Drottningholm*. By taking the work and life of architect Louis-Jean Desprez (1743–1804) as a reference¹⁰, the Académie Desprez had the mission to assert the viability of the musical and theatrical European heritage of the baroque period, and to explore jointly, in the unique contextual perspective the Drottningholms Slottsteater

⁶ See: Blin, Gilbert. “Mettre en scène à Drottningholm” in *Lettres Actuelles*, N°1–2, Juin–Septembre 1993. Mont de Marsan: Société de Presse, d’Édition et de Communication, 1993, p. 13.

⁷ See: *A Sovereign Spectacle: Court Theaters of the Eighteenth Century*. Photographs by André Costantini. Introduction by Gilbert Blin. Cambridge (MA): ConstellationCenter, 2011.

⁸ Conductor Arnold Östman was the Artistic Director of the Drottningholms Slottsteater from 1980 to 1992. He was succeeded by singer Elisabeth Söderström (1927–2009) from 1993 to 1996, and stage director Per-Erik Öhrn (b. 1946) followed from 1997 to 2006.

⁹ Östman, Arnold. « Dear audiences » in *Program 1988, Drottningholms Slottsteater*. Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 1988, p. 11.

¹⁰ See: Blin, Gilbert and Trotier, Rémy-Michel. “The Young Desprez’s Years of Apprenticeship, seen against the abundant background of Architecture in France during the eighteenth century” in *Program 2004, Drottningholms Slottsteater*. Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 2004, pp. 141–149,

provides, its theoretical and practical facts¹¹. From 2000 to 2010, I directed an international research group composed of several artists and scholars: organizing study visits, overseeing numerous projects and supporting several productions, by study and publication. A first contact with Leiden University, where Dr. Cobi Bordewijk invited the Académie Desprez in 2001 to direct a workshop on the theatre of Voltaire (1694–1778), encouraged me to reconsider the academic world as a possible framework for the full expression of my research¹². The idea that my exploration could find a suitable frame for its theoretical expression was encouraged by the foundation, that same year, by Leiden University of a new Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts, with Prof. Frans de Ruiter as Dean, and with the declared purpose of promoting research in and through artistic practice. From 2008, when the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts was formalized as a research institute under the Faculty of Humanities, I was attracted by the idea of a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge in exploring my hypotheses. But while the theoretical knowledge could be explored in the solitude of a library, the specificities of opera, which requires for its full existence a large number of artists from a variety of disciplines, technicians and audience, make a thorough investigation difficult and multifaceted, but necessary; this is a key issue in the Historically Informed Performance movement and in the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts.

At the same time, my research found a fertile field of application when, following my productions of *Thésée* by Philippe Quinault (1635–1688) and Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687) for the Boston Early Music Festival (BEMF) in 2001 and of *Psyché* by the same composer in 2007, I was invited by this nonprofit organization to experience a long-term artistic residency. The Boston Early Music Festival, since its foundation in 1980¹³, has promoted the continuing vitality of Early Music through biennial festivals and exhibitions that attract international attendees, baroque opera productions, and an annual Boston-area concert series that later expanded to New York City. As a leading presenter, producer and promoter of the very highest quality performances, including standard repertoire and newly rediscovered works, BEMF's mission continues to be to give music lovers a renewed understanding and appreciation of the great music of the past. As BEMF's Stage Director in Residence from 2008, and then as its Opera Director since 2013, I was able to dedicate all my time, and work, in research and practice, to the staging of baroque operas. This unique experience was fruitful on two fronts.

¹¹ Here is a selection of research projects led by the Académie Desprez. See: Blin, Gilbert and Trotier, Rémy-Michel. "The Young Gallodier's Years of Apprenticeship, seen against the background of the abundant French dance life of the mid-eighteenth century" in *Program 2003, Drottningholms Slottsteater*. Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 2003, pp. 81–86. Blin, Gilbert. "Iphigénie en Tauride, Le Modèle français de Guillard et Gluck" in Guillard, Nicolas-François and Gluck, Christoph Willibald. *Iphigénie en Tauride, Livret de 1779, présenté par Gilbert Blin*. Paris: Académie Desprez, 2004, pp. 9–27. See also: Blin, Gilbert. "How do we reconstruct the original sets of the first performance of *Don Giovanni*, Prague, 1787" in *Mozart, Don Giovanni, Program – Opera Mozart, Prague 2006*. Prague: Opera Mozart, 2006, p. 12.

¹² For an account of the workshop about Voltaire's theatre with Leiden University, and other contributions by the Académie Desprez to celebrate the tricentenary of the Leidse Schouwburg, see: Blin, Gilbert and Trotier, Rémy-Michel. "The Reforms of Lekain, Abstract, in 2001 18th Century Acting Styles" in Bordewijk, Cobi; Roding, Juliette; Veldheer, Vic. *Wat geeft die Comedie toch bemoeijng! De Leidse Schouwburg, 1705–2005*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2005, pp. 16 & 17.

¹³ For the history of the foundation of the Boston Early Music Festival, see: Burgess, Geoffrey. *Well-Tempered Woodwinds: Friedrich von Huene and the Making of Early Music in a New World*. Bloomington (IN): Indiana University Press, 2015.

The first was the possibility to attach myself to a stable opera organization. The professional brief for my residency was expressed in 2008 by Kathleen Fay, BEMF's Executive Director: « to ensure long-term thinking for all our opera projects: Festival operatic centerpieces, annual Chamber Operas, national and international tours, and recordings. »¹⁴ The mission was two years later further defined by Fay during a Planning Retreat organized with the Board of Directors and Overseers, Artistic Directors and Staff: « Motivating, exacting, demanding, thorough / Teaching us to function more like an opera company, while respecting our priority status as the world's leading festival of Early Music ». ¹⁵ To establish a method of operating and to cultivate a team of technical experts were also among the tasks of my mission.

The second was the desire of the artistic directors to include a Historically Informed Practice in the staging of full-scale performances of baroque operas. Since 1995, BEMF's intent had been to unearth lesser-known masterpieces and present them « infused with the latest information on period singing, orchestral performance, scenic design, costuming, dance, and staging »¹⁶. Under the leadership of Artistic Directors Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs since 1997, BEMF had already created a brilliant trail of Historically Informed opera productions for which they had also served as musical directors. Their commitment to the importance of extending the values of Historically Informed Performance to other departments other than music was expressed when I was invited to join BEMF's team: « Most opera companies assume that historical authenticity is reserved for the music alone, while stage directors provide innovation by "bringing the opera up to date". BEMF's dedication to examining every element of Baroque opera – music, dance, costume, design, and staging – is a rare and invaluable attribute for an opera producer. But rarer still are stage directors with the breadth of knowledge and passion for the subject to make this vision a reality ». Both artistic directors were describing my research as well fitted to their organization for its ability « to see the big picture of bringing a Baroque opera to life ».¹⁷

My mission was thus twofold: to develop, in close collaboration with my colleagues, a professional structuring of BEMF's opera production system, and to bring the staging to the same level of Historically Informed Practice that the musical directors were putting at the center of their artistic work. This conjunction of purposes already made the mission rather rare, but it is its duration which makes the experience unique. Although the business of opera (planning, budgeting, casting, etc) is a big part of my daily work, the present dissertation focuses on the relation of my work with History during the last ten years, as BEMF offered me a fertile ground for experiments. There, my work and research lead toward these questions: how to stage baroque operas now? What relationships between the different performing languages¹⁸ are necessary for baroque opera to find an accomplished form on stage? How do

¹⁴ Fay, Kathleen. « Boston Early Music Festival appoints Gilbert Blin as Stage Director in Residence ». Press release dated 15 April 2008, Boston.

¹⁵ Fay, Kathleen. *PowerPoint presentation* for Boston Early Music Festival Planning Retreat. Saturday, 20 February 2010. Internal document.

¹⁶ Boston Early Music Festival Mission Statement.

¹⁷ Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs in « Boston Early Music Festival appoints Gilbert Blin as Stage Director in Residence ». Press release dated 15 April 2008, Boston.

¹⁸ By « performing languages » I mean all the expressive ways an opera production can offer: text and music, movements and acting, sets and costumes, machines, light, and relations with audiences, the staging being in my

I conceive the presence of historical elements on stage? These directions will allow to disclose as many clues of the importance of the process I am trying to account for in this dissertation.

In the 1990s a series of historical articles¹⁹ that I wrote at the invitation of the Drottningholms Slottsteater started a personal process which found its full development with the Boston Early Music Festival. For this organization, I made the decision that, for each production I was staging, I would write texts that would present my research on the piece at hand to form the main axis of the dramaturgy on which I was building my staging. These texts were not intended for a specific group, but they were shared in various states of length and completion, at different steps of the process: first with the team for the staged production (directors, performers and technicians), then with the audience and ultimately with a larger public through symposia and conferences. An intellectual and analytical approach of the artistic product could follow the creative development, but also initiate the interpretive process and become Poetics or even Aesthetics. For my research I followed, like many of my colleagues in the Historically Informed Performance field, a methodology somewhat similar to scholar Randall A. Rosenfeld's application of experimental archaeology to medieval music improvisation, exploring « the range of supportable interpretations through performing them».²⁰ My research as a whole developed in different contexts, around different structures, in the course of varied projects, materialized through various experiments and found a framework in the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts of Leiden University. This overall exploration has thus far taken place primarily within four structures:

1. A frame of historical reference for research: the Drottningholms Slottsteater, Sweden, theatre of the eighteenth century (1766), with which I worked since 1990;
2. A framework for free experimentation, independent of any commercial or institutional requirements: the Académie Desprez, a French Association that I founded in 2000 to explore the resources offered by the Drottningholms Slottsteater;
3. A framework for concrete implementation: the Boston Early Music Festival, United States, where, after being Stage Director in Residence from 2008 to 2013, I am now Opera Director and where I direct operas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on a regular basis;
4. A framework for theorizing, sharing and taking part in a more global debate: the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts at Leiden University in the Netherlands, where this doctorate was formally started in 2014 for completion in 2018.

To explore my main research question in the present dissertation, I established a corpus of productions that I staged for the Boston Early Music Festival as from 2007. This corpus

mind the combination of all. See: Kowzan, Tadeusz. *Littérature et spectacle*. The Hague: Mouton & Co and Warszawa : PWN - Éditions scientifiques de Pologne, 1975, p. 173. See also: Buyssens, Eric. *Les Langues et le discours, Essai de linguistique fonctionnelle dans le cadre de la sémiologie*. Bruxelles: Office de Publicité, 1943, p. 56.

¹⁹ See: Blin, Gilbert. "The French Gluck" in *Program 1990, Drottningholms Slottsteater*. Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 1990, pp. 93–96. Blin, Gilbert. "The Gods, The Artist and the Mortal – An attempt to interpret the Orpheus myth" in *Program 1992, Drottningholms Slottsteater*. Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 1992, pp. 105–108. Blin, Gilbert. "Philidor – between Chess and Music" in *Program 1995, Drottningholms Slottsteater*. Stockholm: Drottningholms Teatermuseum, 1995, pp. 86–89.

²⁰ Rosenfeld, Randall A. "Performance Practice, Experimental Archaeology, and the Problem of the Respectability of Results" in *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by Timothy James McGee. Medieval Institute Publications. Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 30. Kalamazoo (MI): Western Michigan University, 2003, p. 85.

does not include all the spectacles I produced for this organization²¹, nor of course all my productions, staged or designed, for other international organizations during this decade. However, the corpus, which will be detailed in the next paragraphs, is demonstrative of a broad period of the history of opera and integrates several styles. It also has the intent of addressing several problems inherent in the opera genre, such as those with librettos, sets, costumes, and machines, all elements that will be addressed, not for themselves but in their complementary relationships in the staging. Within this series of productions, the exploration is organized primarily around representative works within the domain of baroque opera, at the crossroads of geographical areas and various periods. The development of opera from its origins in north Italy around 1600 to various successive flowerings throughout Europe during the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries is the general path of the research. For this doctoral dissertation about the theory and practice of the baroque stage, the definition of the corpus had to consider an effective implementation on stage of the works studied. The research for the ten productions that I have gathered here because of their joint origin, has been subjected to the rules of living theatre and the constraints specific to each production. Nevertheless, it was necessary to focus on particular opera works, which I have been working on from the production's beginning until its completion during a performance, to be able to test the validity and vitality of the method, but then the resulting corpus is still in itself quite revelatory.

The chapters in this dissertation examine well-known operas by Monteverdi, Lully, Charpentier, Blow, Steffani, Campa, and Handel, but aim to provide fresh perspectives by their approach and by the themes they focused on, developed in relation with the concrete staging of them. Some of the ideas presented here have appeared before in various program books²², but all were reread, corrected, reworked and expanded, to reflect the sum of each experience, various experimentations in the rehearsals' studio, discussions with my colleagues and elements that were discovered a posteriori through further readings and site visits. Although each experience also sheds light on previous ones, these studies do not claim to have considered all the scholarship that has appeared during or since they were elaborated. They nonetheless constitute the chapters of a coherent work as they reflect my own experience from the vantage point of the BEMF residency and directorship. The distribution of these studies quickly structured itself; it mixes the systematic approach and the concern of the opera chronology. Here is the plan of it:

In the Introduction, I present the problems faced while attempting to reconstruct performances of the given period, in view of the fact that the relationship between those ephemeral entertainments and their surviving records is almost always impossible to fully establish. I argue that it is not only by making the inventory of these separated historical elements of a performance and their accumulation in a new one that a true Historically Informed Staging of the operas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could unfold. An artistic development can only happen in a satisfactory way for a modern audience by establishing a system of relationships between these elements which can be meaningful today. This system, which takes into consideration traceable elements that either predate the moment of first performance or provide a transcript of that performance, allows us to discover new ones when the structural relationships are understood. Because the various semantic natures of these performing elements coexist in the same space during the time of the performance, the task of structuring them is consequently largely in the hands of the stage director. The following chapters of the dissertation study various relations between various performing

²¹ For a full list, see p. 471.

²² When applicable, I will give the references to the previous publications in each corresponding chapter.

elements, and these relations can be considered as my first findings. I define my conception of the methodology for staging opera of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and, as announced before, identify it as *The Reflections of Memory*.

Chapter 1 investigates how the relation between performing space and poetic space –and by “poetic” I mean imaginary as defined by the libretto– is a cultural one which cannot be underestimated when shaping the staging of the operas of this period. It examines how Italian early operas dealt with the questions of space: the fundamental role of real space in the beginnings of Italian opera and how the Venetian pictorial conception of it has shaped opera as a specific genre are the subjects of investigation for this first part. Although still considered by many as the first true opera, *Orfeo* was not written by Alessandro Striggio (ca. 1573–1630) and Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) for the theatrical building equipped with a proscenium frame that would soon be synonymous with the opera genre. By referring to the term « modello », understood as preparatory study or model, I want to switch the attention from this approach, built around the notion of time, to a space questioning (both poetical and factual). My hypothetical description of the process of the performance sheds light on the experimental identity of the piece. By building a hypothesis about the specificities of *Orfeo* and the space and scenery of its staging in Mantua in 1607, I hope to attract the attention to the fruitful implications this Italian « modello » can have for experimental research and staged production. In the following parts I then focus on the fundamental role of scenography in Venetian opera and some of its implication for staging. By the 1630s the art of set design found in this city a seminal ground which influenced, both in terms of artists and style, all opera staging in Europe for two centuries. While presenting my findings on two of Monteverdi’s operas for Venice in the following sections I evaluate the extent to which the scenography of both *Il Ritorno d’Ulisse in Patria* and *L’incoronazione di Poppea* can be reconstructed. I also argue that although ostensibly present in the same way in both pieces, the sets are not of the same consequence and if *Ulisse* cannot truly exist without multiple sets, *Poppea* may have well been performed without any, and therefore, quite surprisingly, a production with no set at all could deserve the label of Historically Informed Performance.

Chapter 2 explores a major development: the creation of French opera during the late seventeenth century. By reemphasizing the Aristotelian emotions of pity and fear, which *Tragédie* was still supposed to provoke, and by adding next to them the sense of the « merveilleux » that the French *Ballet de Cour* was based on, French poets aimed to demonstrate that opera could affirm itself as an independent poetic form, albeit in the proximity with one or the other genres that I just mentioned. The different pieces composed by Lully around the mythological character of Psyche have been previously explored by scholars but the ending Ballet of *Psiché* has never been fully investigated. This chapter demonstrates how this finale which appears both in *Psiché*, the tragedy of 1671 and *Psyché*, the opera of 1678, contains an allegorical poetical program, and de facto a musical project, for opera « à la Française ». My aims are threefold: first to reexamine the details of the texts of this long « Divertissement » while focusing on the poetics of the *Ballet de Cour* and, second, to give a new perspective on Quinault’s role in the conception of French opera. Thirdly I wanted to provide a study of an intellectual spacing, present in two of three dimensions in various visual documents from the period, and applicable to the general design of the staging because transferable in the placement/spacing of performers on stage. A case study, presented at the end of this dissertation, relocates the « espace poétique » of the full text of the play *Psiché* in the real place of the Drottningholms Slottsteater. This *Psiché* study reconstructs the succession and spatial natures of what the Swedes called « changemang » when the play was presented there in 1766.

Chapter 3 examines what appears to me as an alternative French system, whose importance, in the shadow of the operas by Quinault and Lully, is not only musical. I investigate several works by Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704) and more specifically focus on the question of the librettos of his « petits opéras ». Besides giving all the librettos, which are only known to us by through Charpentier's scores, an editorial form (my own editions of these librettos and my own English translations are made available as an Appendix to this dissertation), I linked them with the literature and theatre history of the period. By making that connection I came across some innovative paratexts and possible hypotexts, creating fresh perspectives useful to my stage productions. Three of Charpentier's operas are discussed extensively in three distinct sections: *Les Plaisirs de Versailles*, an allegorical work, holds a special place in his opera production because of its clear closeness to Louis XIV. *La Couronne de Fleurs*, a symbolic but fleeting piece, has heretofore been misunderstood and underestimated. My findings reveal a possible attempt by Charpentier to have this music performed outside the French capital. I demonstrate that the ambitious yet incomplete *La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers* was written by Charpentier with the hope of having it performed by the Académie Royale de Musique in Paris. The piece seems to mark an attempt to go back to the pastoral origins of the French Opera, as this *Pastorale* deliberately ignores the features of the genre of the *Tragédie en musique* established by Quinault and Lully, which was then in full vogue. Heretofore, the identities of Charpentier's collaborators for these works were unknown but I propose a possible librettist for each piece, hoping that challenging the anonymity of his poets gives Charpentier's operas a fertile context for staging.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 acknowledge the concurrent developments in opera outside France and Italy, by concentrating on England and Bavaria. Through three examples I explore the question of social and cultural contexts of performances and their impacts on the creative process of opera. In Chapter 4, devoted to England: I focus on two « chamber operas » and explore private performances, courtly patronage and private patrons. First, by placing the art of painting in the center of my reflections on *Venus and Adonis* by John Blow (1649–1708) and on *Acis and Galatea* by George Frideric Handel (1685–1759), I examine the differentiation between time and space perception in poetry and painting. I argue that the complementarity of the « sister arts », in the artistic form called English masque opera, implies a staging which clearly engages in a visual movement concomitant to music, but suggests the support of specific visual references. These referents would have been present at that time in the space, and therefore in the minds, of the creators and their audience. It is we, today, who find it hard to see their relationship, but I believe that these referents can be reactivated by the performance as they are contained in the works themselves, in the librettos and in the music. Essential factors such as time are inherent in the texture itself of a performance with its instantaneous reception, just as they are for the contemplation of a picture, in its composition, or in its aesthetic arrangement. Revisiting the well-worn parallelism between poetry and painting I apply it to these two English works: with Blow's *Venus and Adonis* I reveal that the ekphratic quality of the libretto relocates the piece between poems and pictures and by doing so come up with a new hypothesis about the authorship of its anonymous libretto. For Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, I expand the concept of painting as applied to garden design, in accordance with some debates of the time, and demonstrate how the opera of Handel is an attempt to establish the mythical character of Acis as the Genius of the gardens of Cannons, the domain where it was created.

In Chapter 5 I then examine *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*, the opera composed by Agostino Steffani (1654–1728) for Munich in 1688. The combination of strong influences from Venice and France with the culture of the Bavarian court gave rise to operas that were rich with cultural references. It appeared to me that these various references were unified under the

auspices of the classical custom of allegory, a figurative mode of representation that conveys meanings other than the literal ones. Favored by the Jesuit culture, which dominated education and culture in Bavaria in the seventeenth century, this rhetorical device is deeply present in Steffani's *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*, and is the object and subject of the artistic process I try to describe in a form which takes inspiration from the allegorical mode of expression. Seven gates, according to Ovid, stood at the entrances to the city of Thebes, and this number is used here as an allegorical pathway to imagine seven keys to the construction of the production of *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*. It is an attempt to write down all the major elements which my staging of *Niobe* took into consideration. Some pictures are associated to these symbolic openings, which in turn created visual directions. They serve to curate a small personal « memory palace », a Jesuit mnemonic device based on mental visualization of images in order to comprehend the larger complexity of a piece. A performance in the 1680s in Munich was like a representational room of mirrors, where reality and fiction were intertwined through the power of allegory, both visual and verbal. This Chapter presents the fundamentals of a Historically Informed dramaturgy for the piece, which not only reflects on its components but, by its presentation, on its conceptual process.

Finally, in Chapter 6 of this dissertation, I return to France and explore the ongoing search for a defined poetics of opera and investigate the renewal that the genre knew at the very end of the seventeenth century with the blossoming of what would soon be known as French « opera-ballet ». This search for new expressions is as much linked with the regicentric power as the works of Quinault and Lully were, but although connected to issues of diplomatic discourse, self-fashioning and surveillance in the French theatre of the power of absolute monarchy, *Le Carnaval de Venise* manages to develop a symbolic form of freedom and unconventionality. Librettist Jean-François Regnard (1655–1709) and composer André Campra (1660–1744) contribute to the theatrical entertainment provided for political reasons but succeed in creating an original narrative which gives renewed places to scenography, theatre and dance. *Le Carnaval de Venise* is not only a royal product of masked diplomacy but also an original attempt to create a new genre.

The last section of this dissertation, Chapter 7, presents three cases which deal with some of the specific problems to be faced when staging a Historically Informed Performance. These three cases are approached from the point of view of one of the elements of the staging discourse: costumes, sets and machines. Case-study 1 exemplifies the type of exploration I envisage when designing a costume for a Historically Informed production. In direct relation with *Acis and Galatea*, it is centered on the river gods' theatrical costumes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but reveals a more general method of investigation that is applicable when costuming not only river gods but also other figures. Case-study 2 is dedicated to the performance of *Psiché* in the Drottningholms Slottsteater in 1766, which provides an example of the places and relations of scenery and stage machinery in a period performance space. Case-study 3 is dedicated to the staging preparation and more specifically to the implementation of flying machines in my own production of *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*.

Two electronic Appendices complete the dissertation. Appendix A is a selection of short videos which presents snippets from my productions of the operas explored in this dissertation. These clips were not made as part of the dissertation, but they nonetheless help the reader who was not able to see a performance to envisage my productions. Appendix B offers the editions of librettos of Charpentier's operas, studied in Chapter 3, together with my English translations, destined to the performers.