

PRESENTATION EASTAP Conference 2024

Ecosystems of Theatre and Performance

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## **Community intergenerational performance for challenging age prejudices**

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### **1st Part (Intro)**

The project (artistic laboratory and premiere performance) we present today is embedded in the international project “Age Against the Machine: European Solidarity Network for Older Citizens Rights”, co-financed by the European Union under the programme CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values). Our Research Centre of Art History and Artistic Research (CHAIA, University of Évora) is located in the Alentejo region, in Portugal, and is a partner in this European project within a collaborative network of six other partners: Red Cross Serbia (Serbia), Theatre Company Trupa Drž ne daj (Serbia), Teatr Brama (Poland), Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium Odin Teatret (Denmark), Compagnia Il Melrancio (Italy), and Novi Sad Foundation: European Capital of Culture (Serbia, as coordinator of the project). We count on the collaboration of the Depart. Performing Arts, the Depart. of Visual Arts and Design, Arteria Lab (transdisciplinary research), and Évora City Council (Department of Youth and Sports).

The project started in March 2024 and will last two years. We combine various participative applied theatre methodologies for the project goal of raising awareness about the existence of age prejudices and challenging discriminatory practices towards older citizens, especially older women, (such as tackling gender stereotypes, gender-based violence or the burden of care, among other topics). All partners have been developing theatre laboratories with intergenerational groups for half a year to foster a dialogue among old and young people. It resulted in a public premiere presentation this month of October in all the partners cities, open to the interaction and dialogue with our local communities. (Our premiere was last

week, the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of October). From this November to October 2025, we will hold five Festivals in each partner city, where all performances will be presented. At each Festival, an advisory council of thirty experts involved as agents in age empowerment will be invited (culture, health, social policies, etc). Dialogue and interaction with the public and a final reflection with the advisory council on the topics presented in the shows will be relevant at the Festivals.



From March until the end of July 2024, we started our activities weekly, indoors and outdoors (outdoors with performative itinerances in the rural neighbouring areas and performative and movement exercises in the public spaces of Évora historical centre). We started with groups of de 20 to 25 participants (among students and older people, between ages 22 to 80), from both genres. Due to the required long-term commitment, the group dropped to 16 participants, which were only women. Our multidisciplinary research team is made up of 14 members (... in charge of the Creative Participative Research Processes, artistic direction and dramaturgy, Light design, Sound and audio-visual design, Costumes and scenography, Community mediation, Communication, Production and research coordination).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Part (Development)

The workshop laboratory and creative processes, the gathering of ideas/topics, the sewing process (collage and montage) to build a collaborative dramaturgy step by step, the structuring and writing of the script, rehearsals and the presentation of the show stems from the teaching activity in three theatre and artistic research cycles and the research in the Theatre and Performance Studies axis, which includes the collaboration of teachers, researchers, artists, and students from the University of Évora, young professionals and people from the community (in this case, non-professional women) who have been collaborating with the Dep. of Performing Arts at the EU School of Arts.

This research is part of the research and development objectives of CHAIA - University of Évora, as a 'scientific and artistic research unit, through the implementation of a critical approach to its research areas, projected onto the transdisciplinary concept of **critical heritage**, which considers its re-signification in the present through the development of contemporary artistic practices.

We have been producing reflections on **participatory artistic actions** of a performative nature in which the design of listening, sharing and collaboration is a design at all process stages.

To discuss with you the aesthetic, ethical and dramaturgical specificities of this artistic project, based on the perspectives of **critical heritage** (Winter, 2012; Thirft, 2007) and the **processes of co-creation and participation** of/with/for the community (Nogueira, 2009; Bezelga 2012; Cruz, 2020), let's analyse how these encounters are characterised.

### Key topics:

\_Participatory art

\_Critical heritage

\_Transdisciplinary dialogues



The approaches anchored in the example we are bringing you today stem from the principles and methodologies of Theatre and Community and participatory arts, through methods that are inspired by situated listening, the experience of being and being part of a locus in which the presence of bodies are mediums of thought in action, in an intense socio-cultural experience, of re-reading and desire, in constant questioning of the world, reconnecting the experiences of trauma and care.

### KEY CONCEPTS include

- Identity/alterity
- Experience
- memory
- chorality
- poetic image
- multisensorialities
- Humour
- Affectation
- Collaborative dramaturgies

There are no interdicts. **Sensitive listening** to the paths travelled always allows us to question who we are, who we are in our encounters with each other, what is whispered and what is revealed to us.

They also occur in unhurried encounters, in sharing memories and feelings, and in the coincidences that arise.

Discovering the nest in our own experiences, in the relationships we establish with what we have learnt and want to know.

The reverberations that echo in us and ‘affect’ us present themselves as possibilities for research and creation.

**Memory** is a central element in the construction, reconstruction and invention of a common path/project, even if imagined, which is only possible because of the intersubjectivities that arise from each individual memory, offering us an infinity of possible narratives (Hallbwachs 2004; Bauman 2003).

What arose spontaneously in the context of creating a trusting, safe and respectful relationship through body action play, small group exercises and improvisation gave access to memories, experiences and personal information that made it possible to incorporate them into a fine exercise between singularities and **collective experience**.

What emerged as a potential topic for **collective identification**, through sensitive listening and notation, remained in a state of latency, which allowed us to bring to life those collective identification topics as images for scenic creation.

By valuing the singularities of each participant, and their individual poetic cultural experience, it is possible to reflect on the **processes of alterity**.

Allow me to bring up Derrida 1994 p.51

**‘There is no difference without alterity, there is no alterity without singularity, there is no singularity without here-and-now’.**

In this sense, establishing a state of **playfulness**, all collaborations are seen as valuable. Working together is free of hierarchies and rich in negotiation and horizontal discussion, and the identity of each element is sought to be coined in the work.

We follow a process of constant negotiation within the group, retaining, discarding or transforming the ideas/forms found. What is retained/reconfigured in the various stages will

later be organised and codified for the stage. The aim is a **polyphonic identity** that results from the simultaneous existence of heterogeneous elements that do not yearn for unity and harmony but rather the confluence and juxtaposition of distinct and multifaceted elements, voices, perspectives, discourses, memories, and cultures, where it was possible to find **the lyrical, the poetic, the testimonial**.

Assuming ourselves as a **collective body**, uncompromisingly accepting negotiation not based on consensus ??, we explored the limits of the roles traditionally present in the theatrical performance, taking power away from the director's demiurgic role, moving on to the vision of creators/actors, with total responsibility for the whole process, reflecting a new status of co-creation.

### **The Journey as a metaphor for life**

The Performance script was structured around the Journey as a metaphor for life. Taking as a motto the participants' curiosity, thirst for freedom and desire to know and experience, with the full awareness that life is not over yet, even though many are currently experiencing being alone for the first time (widows, divorced, with raised children). It is no coincidence that there is a growing offer of tourist packages for women traveling alone!

### **Double violence: Woman/Old woman.**

The focus is on personal and cultural enjoyment and fulfilment. In the pleasure of playing, participants discover the ability to express themselves and the collective availability to create. Dropping reservations, reducing the internalization of prejudices and the target of taboos Related to Women +60, who lives a Double violence: Woman/Old woman.

There is this tension between greater and lesser vulnerability that goes from being an object of desire to being almost invisible. Socially, the old woman's body, being perceived as asexualized, without desire, also allows her to be exposed in a condition of less vulnerability.

## **Bare Feet**

There is a poetics in which ethics and aesthetics are intertwined in the construction of a collective body, which is sought in the memories and embodied experiences of the participants, the experiences of childhood and youth, in which Bare Feet were the first and unconditional friends of Play. With them we discover and feel the paths and dangers before us. They suffer before they even reach our chest and scream. But they also shame us and we try to hide them. It is our feet that connect us to the land and the place. They build our identity and the capacity for cultural transmission.

## **The local environment and the relationship with the land**

As a particular ecosystem, the relationship with the local environment is always present. Sustainability was explored by and we brought to the stage the relationship these women have with the land, the labours of the long days, which echo the tradition of “Cante Alentejano”, as well as the vernacular knowledge and skills about health remedies, ancestral forms of care and living, as legacies for future generations from an ecological perspective.

## **The Works and the Days**

In “the works and the days” through ancestrally traditions and the connection to the Earth and the deep relationship with the cycles of Nature are vivified. There is wisdom in the gestures that come from the hard work in the fields. There is the weight, the marks and the fight against the destiny reserved for women that is expressed in the prohibitions repeated a thousand times since a girl is born:

“Show respect”, “Don’t talk back to your father, your brother, your husband”.

These are visions of bodies restrained, frozen, in a submissive black headscarf, with and lowered eyes, which insisted on lasting.



### 3<sup>rd</sup> Part (Conclusion) /Sisterhood

The reflective dimension produced through the theatrical metaphor allowed us to redefine reality using rupture, fear, pleasure and humour.

From the perspective of Care Aesthetics (Thompson, 2022) we care for ourselves and for others. We have us! Care, as an aesthetic of sisterhood, Feminist care ethics (Gilligan, 2008), is based on the intimate sharing of the “blood/life” cycle, which accompanies us all and is transmitted between the various generations, strengthening us.

It's time to leave and time to act. We have Hope!

Empowering older women and not only, based on togetherness, intergenerational solidarity, social inclusion and active participation, as a process of intimacy, collective identity and sisterhood has a sustainable effect in our local communities.

Thank you for your attention in name of all our team and creative community!



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