

## **Reflections on Teaching Performance Studies for Community-Based Theatre in Portugal**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents a set of reflections made in relation to experiences that happened in the first year of the first course for the Masters Degree in Theatrical Activities in the Institute of Education, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal. It looks at the curricular structure of this course and focuses especially on the course backbone - Performance Studies.

The text discusses the fundamental questions that guided the content framework of Performance Studies and the way that this course sought to articulate epistemological, teaching and learning concerns, while simultaneously meeting the inherent heterogeneous needs of the target audience; namely, in relation to the initial training of students, their different goals, as well as their degrees of theatrical literacy and experience.

Finally, it reflects on the constituent modules of the curricular unit that best illustrates the goals of theatrical research opened up by the deconstruction and use of the concept of *performance* in a training context.

## Introduction

Arts Education and more specifically Theatre Education are largely absent from the realm of the great educational debates, sporadically pointed out in educational reforms or cyclically called upon by the agenda of major foundations and international cultural organizations, and have been positioned as tangential to the political agenda, which as a whole has directed educational research in Portugal (DIAS, 2010).

However, in recent years, this trend has been changing. A significant number of national and international conferences such as the *Guide for Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2006), the *European and International Research Symposium* on the theme *Evaluating the Impact of Arts and Cultural Education on Children and Young People* (2007), the *National Conference of Arts Education* (2007-8), scientific studies and official reports - both national and international - like the *Report of the Task Force on the Arts* (2008) have produced relevant critical information about the situation of arts teaching and education, as well as new guidelines to be imparted.

The National plan the *Study of the Evaluation of Arts Education* (2007) highlighted the tendency towards consolidating and expanding the arts education system with its own artistic and educational provisions. This fact, revealed by the comparative analysis of national and international indicators, has come to legitimize the discussion about research in arts and opened up higher levels of training (Masters and doctoral degrees). The plan allowed - in equal ways - the different artistic fields, including theatre, to interact and respond, on the one hand, to the appearance of new "creative communities" connected with the "cultural and creative industries" (European Commission, 2010), the needs of so-called "youth culture" (PAIS, 2003) and the phenomenon of "global aging of the population" (HARPER, 2008). On the other hand, it also permitted a response to the specificities conveyed by European social, cultural and artistic policies.

In parallel, research produced in the field of Adult Education and Socio-cultural Activities has shown the importance of Theatrical Studies at the level of cultural participation and democratization. The ideas of participation and citizenship that are implicit in the practice of cultural democratization endanger theatrical language and forms with the development and autonomy of individuals in the community (Ventosa,

1990, 1996, 1999; Ander-Egg, 1991, 1992, 2006; Quintana, 1992; Veja & Ventosa, 1992; Pérez. 1996; Rueda, 1997; Rúbio, 1997; Gómez, Martins & Vieites, 2000; Van Erven 2001; Úcar, 2002, 2005, 2013; Monseny, M.; Ucar 2012; Núñez & Úcar, 2013).

Furthermore, these have been the praxeological and foundational reasons that led Ventosa (1996) to consider theatre as the operational instrument *par excellence* of Socio-cultural Activities. The author states that the practice of Socio-cultural Activities, except as a mere formal and theoretical structure, can never exist by itself. The interventionist nature and operational character of activities requires the mobilization of spaces and the assembling of specific interventional models, so that Socio-cultural Activities can really materialise. Among the possible tools and intervention models Theatre has been consensually considered to be a two-fold fundamental reference, because it provides unique time for individual or collective creation and because it is a *locus* for the meeting and sharing of experiences with others, which are historically inscribed in the heart of theatre.

Due to the confluence of these factors, the possibility of creating a Masters degree in Theatrical Studies in the Institute of Child Studies at the University of Minho presented itself as an important educational opportunity for the Institute of Education, University of Minho to host the course of Theatrical Activities. The new course was widened by its own range of institutional training and, at the same time, clung to a historical opportunity to secure loyalty in the area of official academic knowledge, which we generically call Theatre Studies.

The considerations referred to above - some of which have strong implications at the epistemological level and for the curricular design of the course, along with the institutional constraints and legal support available, interweaved and engraved specificities in the curriculum design of what was to be the first Masters degree in Theatrical Activities in this institution.

### ***Training Profile and General Objectives of the Course***

In regard to the profile of higher academic training, it was decided that this should be constituted as a process that promotes innovation, depth and an articulation of knowledge by considering these qualities applicability in the exercise of a profession. In this way, the student - the main figure in the educational process - should acquire skills necessary to adopt an attitude of reflection, autonomy, cooperation and participation, which would result directly from the flexibility of the training, the recycling and reconversion of knowledge and, thus,

stimulate creative and functional innovation and change.

In terms of general training objectives, the study cycle of the Masters degree promoted the acquisition of skills in theatrical activities that are relevant for the process of cultural intervention and Socio-cultural Activities. To this end, knowledge of theoretical perspectives and discussion about the paradigms of education, entertainment and artistic intervention were boosted. Similarly, the course sought to provide students with the basic tools that enabled them to be able to use models of theatrical action and to foster collaborative work attitudes in relation to other socio-educational agents. Such a strategy aimed at the construction, development and evaluation of educational activity and artistic intervention projects, as well as the development, management and organization of artistic and cultural events, where the family and the community could be involved. The idea, therefore, was to meet the major challenges of the present day world; namely, by the building of a more sustainable future.

#### ***Syllabus and Course Structure***

The degree program took place over four semesters and the specialization course itself plus the seminar and research work that led towards the elaboration of the Masters thesis were distributed between them.

The study plan, which is presented below, called for a set of modules that were both compulsory and optional in nature

<b>Compulsory modules</b>	<b>Optional modules</b>
Performance Studies I	Puppetry (Workshop on animated shapes)
Current Contemporary Artistic Practices	Image, Sound and Video
Psychology and Theatrical Activities	Musical Theatre
Costume Design	City, Municipality, Educational and Cultural Action
Performance Studies II	Aesthetics and Philosophy of Theatre
Theatrical Activities	Life-long Training and Learning
Research Methods	
Thesis Support Seminar	

The course plan complied with the principle of vertical and horizontal organization in terms of relevance and flexibility both at the level of content, methodologies and evaluation systems, whilst taking into account the purpose of study and its relevance to the educational profile of the course programme.

***Performance Studies: A reflective look at this course subject***

As has been seen, Performance Studies I and II have implicit continuities between them. From the theatrical laboratory research standpoint, they represent a unit of knowledge with greater importance in the curriculum of the Masters in Theatrical Studies. The conception and name of Performance Studies are the result of a systematic search and a successful encounter between a handful of epistemological and curricular concerns inherent to a Masters level program. We found it is possible to summon conceptual and praxeological tools from the world of arts that are capable of responding to these concerns.

The proposed design of these new Masters degree courses was conditioned not only by the curricular, temporal and spatial logic of the course model (in contrast to the requirements of the dynamics of theatrical research and creation) but also by the remarkable diversity of future candidates. The fundamental question that then arose was how to select and outline - from the various forms and artistic content available - those which were best suited to the contingencies of existing reality and those that would respond to the complex question: What type of theatre is best used to promote socio-cultural activities?

In fact, when it comes to theatre in the sphere of theatrical activities, it is assumed to be a theatre that avoids the *canon of tradition* and, which resists inclusion in "cultivated culture" (Chartier, 2001); a theatre that appears inseparable from the personal experience of individuals and their social reality. Thus - in this context - the "theatrical performance" *per se* is not the ultimate goal but rather a way to bring together or make common. It is theatre as a "purifying ritual in which a community is put in full possession of the energies that are theirs" (Artaud in Rancière, 2010: 13), a theatre that involves people by calling on them as theatrical creators and making their life experiences a reason and a site for making a theatrical creation. Here conceptions of a theatre that is concerned with community are created, by making a community's problems and culture a reason for the dramatic text and an educational process from the perspective of "diversity, integration and multi- and intercultural education." (Cardoso, Leonido & Lopes, 2004).

However, this flow of real life drama that is vital in intervention contexts and cultural democratization will always be absent from the training experience of the future theatrical *animateur*. Essentially, this is because training in theatrical activities - by being implemented at the university away from the living community - becomes subject to fragmentation of its time and to the constraint of institutional realities that are more and more industrialized and less humanistic. For this same reason, the summoning up of social reality, so essential to the processes of theatrical creation and training, would be a captive of the academic *ethos* and confined to levels of abstraction and the "illusion of mimesis" (Rancière, 2010) that conceal the essence and inherent conflicts of social reality. In this way the exercise of abstraction and artifice, which is generated whenever one wishes to question and create something about a social representation, would be the only gain presented to the teacher and student, when it comes to the final balance. Ultimately, these will be artificial projects in which the student is called upon to conceive and develop theatrical projects for social contexts, the limits and complexities of which are ignored or with which students never had nor will ever have some contact.

Most trainees will have - at best - little contact with certain socio-cultural contexts, an almost complete absence of a *habitus* of cultural enjoyment and a relative distancing of the *loci* of artistic production and distribution. In addition to this, there are the constraints of economic factors and the time spent in the great distance that keeps them routinely stuck in a triangle, whose vertices are almost invariably Work - Home - Training.

In this almost fictitious scenario the curricular unit responsible for the main theatrical training of the course was in danger of suffocating, since neither the "real reality" could inflate and inform the creative process nor could the trainee - immersed in this make believe - determine the social impact of his/her intervention nor achieve his/her creative potential. The act of reporting about the experience and learning achieved (inherent in the mechanisms of academic assessment and training) would also be mortgaged to the untruths of a fabled imaginary intervention about a subjective abstraction.

On the other hand, many of the written records relating to theatrical contexts and training practices of the course were geared towards dramatized texts by playwrights and techniques associated with theatrical representation – voice, body, character - developed from a perspective that is focused on professional and commercial performance. Likewise, the

personal experience that the theatre provides to each of the participating actors, which is very different from that experienced in contexts of community-based activities, is not normally subject to written reflection but contained among the secrets of the actor, because, as mentioned by Aslan (2010: xv), "he has no need to clarify for us the obscure and painful process that leads him to the depths within himself or exterior to himself." Therefore, all learning so acquired is, at best, shared orally. These methods are of little use to those involved in the Theatrical Studies course. Above all, this is because most of the activities that inject dynamism into theatrical activities at the community level feed from collective living, favour life stories, give meaning to personal memory, accidents or local problems and are not about rehearsing and presenting pre-written scripts by people outside the group or community. These community-based theatre activities are handled primarily through improvisation and only afterwards collectively transformed into theatrical performance under the guidance of either theatrical *animateurs* or professional artists (who may or may not be active in other types of professional theatre) or local amateur artists, who live among that group of people and - for lack of a better term - are often called 'peripheral,' as highlighted by van Erven (2001). In the case of Community Theatre, it reaps its fruits from those *performances* in which the residents of the community participate by engaging themselves substantially in the creative process.

This approach is only very rarely captured by national media and, as it often occurs outside of "legitimate" artistic circles, it tends, therefore, to escape the attention of cultural theorists, theatre scholars and even those involved in the activity to document this kind of work. It is a type of theatre that, in first place, favours the pleasure of artistic involvement and the *empowerment* of its participants. Its material and aesthetic forms emerge directly - if not exclusively - from the group or the community, whose interests the theatre-making process tries to express (van Erven, 2001).

Having identified the framework of contingencies that surrounded the course offerings that constituted the proposal for the Masters program, three fundamental assumptions guided the curriculum options were taken:

- The first invested in the need for candidates to get away from a traditional depiction of theatre and the making of theatre and move towards a more social representation, which allowed them to question theatre, the ways to challenge it, to see it, to feel it and, above all, to

make it an instrument of cultural democratization in diverse social contexts.

- The second, conditioned by the principles of learning and theatrical creation, proposed to be guided by the path of reality. Students, while looking ahead to the commencement of their becoming, in general, theatrical *animateurs*, would start individually from a real/actual focus, where life experience and knowledge built through a process of deconstruction of the ideas of actors about theatre and what it does, and would open up the possibility of didactic transposition for specific and varied social contexts.

- The third, obeying the principle of vertical (depth) and horizontal (breadth) articulation of any effective curriculum plan, sought to guide theatrical research through interdisciplinary forays into different fields of knowledge.

Between the perspective of theatrical deconstruction and dismantling in the field of reception the concept of Performance Studies started taking shape.

The literature produced around the concept of *performance* highlights its polydisciplinary character, operating as it does across the performing arts, and also as ritual, sport, identity, power and everyday life (Schechner, 1988/2003; 2002/2013). *Performance* is recognised for its malleability, by its interventionist character, by its calling for the modification of artistic and social relationships between its makers and its audience. The artistic possibilities revealed in the encounter with *theatre as performance* uncovered an operational and conceptual potential that seemed to be able to respond to all of the concerns raised by the construction of this curricular unit and by the ethical issues implicit in cultural democratization and Theatrical Studies.

Anchored by that concept, instead of the experience of immersing students in a repertoire of authors, we as the course instructors proposed experiences that impelled them to search for new mechanisms of creating and questioning that allowed them to build new relationships and to assign new meanings - not only historical ones - to objects, texts and images.

Loyal to the driving force of *performance* as "the interface language that circulates between disciplinary boundaries" or, as stated by Cohen (1989:116) like "dissenting peaks that cross borders," Performance Studies was designed as a place and space for experimentation.

From this starting point, students were invited to explore methods of questioning the



body as a way of interpreting the world, studying its relationship with objects and senses that come from it. We also examined the image (photograph, video) so as to reinvent it or even to lead to new perceptions by trying to go beyond common sense, the obvious way of seeing things and the given and static nature of the world, and especially of *mimesis*.

It was, therefore, important to unveil the theatricality inscribed in the very physicality of the students. In pursuit of this theatricality, the encounter with memorization of the written text was intentionally delayed; evading the fear of the word with the surprise discovery of physical theatricality. Thus, for a time, physicality and imagination usurped the privileged place that, traditionally, the rationality of writing persists in having in theatrical training.

### ***Performing the Image***

In the research that preceded the design of Performance Studies, authors were sought whose works would facilitate a conceptual and experimental closeness between theatre, text, body and image. For each exercise, especially for those moments of performance that were induced by Image/Photograph and Object/Mask, the visual and theatrical fields were cross-referenced. The work of Ribeiro (1997) interested us in the course team, as it brings together physical theatre and performance. As the author mentions,

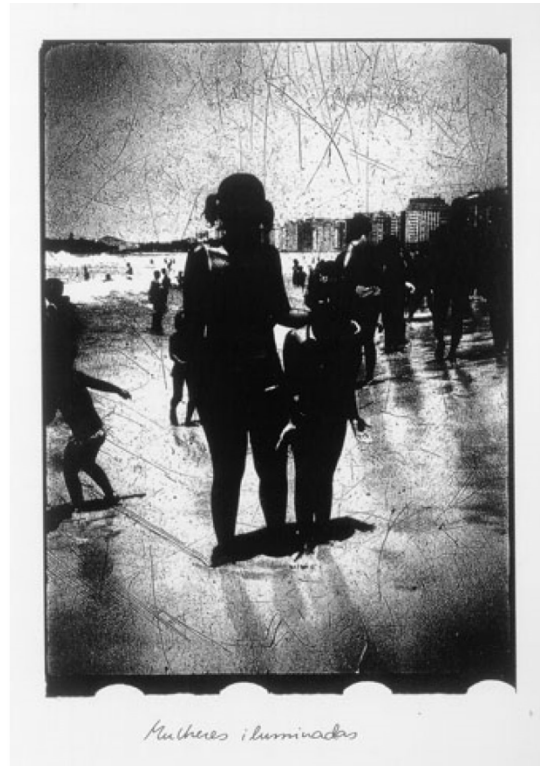
Physical theatre, such as body performance, urges us not to read the words, which tends to be the traditional approach, but to read the images. They ask us, however, that we see them surpassing their status as reliable informants of reality and that we take them as proposals that allow fiction and, to this extent, allow us to add to reality” (124).

The plan for the use of image was based on readings that allowed the students to try out different conceptions and exploratory uses of the photographic image, particularly Kossoy (1999: 52 in Silva, 2008:1) that developed the idea that "the image of any documented object or situation can be dramatized or aestheticized, according to the emphasis intended by the photographer in accordance with the final use to which it is destined” (52).

Rennó (2003) was, among various performers and researchers (Kossoy, 1999; Souza, 2001; Silva, 2008), the conceptual reference for the first performative exploration proposal conducted in the Performance Studies course: *From Photography/Portrait/Personalities Portrayed*.

Rennó (2003) brought together in a personal archive, photographs of ordinary people and old family albums, which resulted from the collection of the files of other people found in trash, bought at antique fairs or from public archives. He also resorted to using photographs from newspapers and obituaries "to create new subtitles, language and meaning of that moment or individual and what which it might later come to represent" (GONÇALVES And GONÇALVES, 2004). He rarely produced new pictures but worked on those he found making the restoration of these images his most important work.

From this artist the idea/object of photographic images, as a stimulation for the theatrical construction process, was taken for the course. From the set of available photos, which were collected by the students, they were not to select just any photograph but one with a full-body shot in black and white placed in some kind of "scenery". This chosen photograph was one that could potentially produce possible new meanings that would be different from the social realities present or that students' research could trigger. The contributions that came from visual communication were also relevant to this line of theatrical research, as they emphasized the multi-directional nature emanating from the possible "readings" of the photographic image. From this perspective, the reading of the image could be made or thought of in symbolic and iconographic terms by being substantially different from that offered by words by using - in this case - the image *per se*.



Rennó, Rosângela  
*Illuminated Women, 1988*  
Series "small ecology of the image"

In the words of Souza (2001:5), the organization of the image is given by cropping the pictorial elements and image associations that are not tied to ideological influences and are independent of the word. However, the author points out that, like verbal interpretations, image interpretations and, in this case, the photograph, always imply a relationship with culture, social history and with the training of the subjects.

By interpreting the image by eye – and not through words – one learns its material significance in different contexts. The result of this interpretation is the making of other images (other texts) produced by the viewer from the character of the inherent incompleteness, I would say, of its verbal and non-verbal language. The character of the incompleteness of the image points out its recursiveness, among other things. When one crops an element from the image by eye, it produces another image, another text and so forth in an entirely infinite way. A totally inverse movement to that which happens with verbal language: the more one divides the language, the less it means. It does not make sense - in a discursive approach - to think of the image confined in a frame, as a coherent whole.” (5)

The incomplete character to which the author refers relates to "the unspoken," what is present but not visible, with the inter-textuality, that is, with the different possible texts in relation to the past, present and future, a "reading" charged with symbolism and social and ideological meanings. The potential that this incompleteness holds has established itself as susceptible to the triggering of senses, and called the attention of the students to the relationship between the body, the photographic image, its culture and the text. The ambiguity and the possibility of the "unsaid" was implicitly guiding the pathway for our performance-based research.

The possibility to use a photo from the available set by Rennó was made available to



Rennó, Rosângela  
The woman that lost the Memory, 1988  
*Small Ecology of the image*  
35 x 27 cm / 120 x 90 cm  
Photographic Reproduction Rosângela Rennó

each student, so that they could choose the photograph that, for each of them, revealed the most idiosyncratic potential. It was through this link that the photograph/picture became visible and susceptible, as being dramatically appropriate. The "reading" of the photograph/picture chosen by each student was the first stimulus called upon for the creation of the character. The bonding that each of them had with the chosen photo/picture instigated the outlining of a character. Among the advances and retreats of this construction, the appearance of new resources (spaces, objects, memories and actions) allowed each character to grow and, as they grew, to create routes, where they could cross, interact or coexist. These routes worked, for each student, as an antechamber of a commitment to the character, woven in the relationship between space, body and text. The entanglement of the memories of various characters would shift by improvisation from individual construction to collective construction.

From this process different lines of theatrical compositions emerged that culminated in three significant performance exercises carried out by students in class.

The students, organized into three work groups, attributed different meanings to the photos, creating "new portraits". On a second phase, they retouched the "portraits", creating new progressively defined identities, dialogues, timings and outlines which led the groups into different dramatic scenes.

The bus, which was seen as a "non-place" – a concept developed by French anthropologist Marc Augé; a neutral and transitional place with no jurisdiction, a passing place where uncertain destinations and unlikely conversations between those who are "passing by" meet. This became a place of unimaginable confidences, revelations and sharing between people who didn't know each other. Throughout this "voyage", as characters entered and took their place, the subject of the conversations changed, which increased the tension and deepened the conflict caused by the revelations given by the "passengers". When a particular character – the camera man – entered the scene filming everything from the outside, the scene moved from a theatrical space into a film record, thus creating a feeling of awkwardness and non-sense.

The script of the second group was about betrayal and feminism. Students created social types of upper-middle class women whose lives met in a somewhat close physical and emotional place. Shut away in a type of Gynoeceium, at a certain point, the characters lose

their social composure and, in an unrestrained dialogue, among cries and shouts, they accuse and insult each other because of the betrayal of one of them.

The third group, with two women and one man, placed the scene at a coffee house after the Portuguese Colonial War. During this casual meeting at a public space, life accounts and stories are told and each character recalls critical moments which trigger personal memories in the others of a time they, little by little, discover they share.

### **“Cabeçudos” (Big heads)**

For a second performance event in the course the *Cabeçudos* (Big heads) - artifacts that have been identified as part of the folk festivals and tradition, especially in the north of Portugal - were called upon. *Cabeçudos* and the similar *Gigantones* inhabit, with equal ease, a large terrain that tradition has inscribed between the profane and the religious (Cruz, Lessa And Dias, 2008); above all, today they incorporate huge theatrical potential still omnipresent in most folk festivals (Feral, 1982).

Part of the aesthetic category of the grotesque, the *Cabeçudos* are theatrically anchored in the space "between," where the mask (the large mask) and the animated shapes move. The use of the traditional *Cabeçudos* in a performance creation context would enhance research directed towards masks, puppetry or other theatrical forms, such as farce and comedy, which are aesthetically informed by the pleasure of provocation and excess typical of the grotesque.

Positioned between the Puppetry course, where these giant puppet heads were created, and Performance Studies, where theatre exploration would be proposed, the *Cabeçudos* are particularly well suited for the established Masters program guidelines, as they assure the principles of curricular co-ordination and coherence created in the interdisciplinary outline required by the Masters degree. Also, their use could allow the deconstruction of stereotypes and the student to be placed again in a new research relationship that relates to his/her own physicality and the ambiguity of these forms of objects (*Cabeçudos*).

In addition, the proposal of using the *Cabeçudos* extracted dividends and gave continuity to a line of research in artistic education that is already established at the Research Centre of the Institute of Education of the University of Minho. This line, slanted towards an anthropological viewpoint, on the one hand, came to show how well these artifacts could illustrate the relationship between traditional and contemporary ways of thinking about art. The full theatrical potential of the *Cabeçudos* was tested in performance exercises built on the

borders between the visual, musical and theatrical fields (Cruz, Lessa & Dias, 2008). These are the reasons for turning to the giant heads in order to study the possibilities of the relationship between theatre and tradition, permeated by postmodernism and incorporated in the idea of "installation" (Tedesco, 2004).

The first approach to the idea of "installation" came from another curricular unit - Puppetry, where strategies of deconstruction and resignification of the object were developed. In this curricular unit, students built giant head puppets.

They initially built a backbone for the structure by gluing carton.



Then, at the characterization stage, they selected the type of “puppet” and modelled the physiognomy details of the figure they desired.



Finally, the puppet was painted and its costume created.



In the traditional version, the giant head puppet would be ready to march and contribute to the parades in community parties where it would play a social criticism role. However, at



the next stage, the teacher suggested that the giant head puppets should be taken away from the parade as a traditional collective place and placed into non-conventional spaces, thus leading to the individualization and “resignification” of the giant head puppet. The idea to deconstruct the ancient model of a procession implied the need to create non-conventional sceneries and actors.

On track and in line with the objectives of this earlier course unit, in Performance Studies the *Cabeçudos* were moved from the visual experimental space to the “empty space” of Brook (2008). Reinstalled here, the *Cabeçudos* return to their creators and are subjected to a new line of exploration that involves them in the heart of theatrical dynamics and semantics.

As stated by Goldberg (1988: 20) performance can be “prepared or spontaneous, with or without a script, improvised or rehearsed.” In this particular situation, the performance creation, inspired by the Big



Heads placed into a new and neutral space, was gradually determined in each group and gained meaning not only through the information provided and the way that this information interacted with prior experiences and learning but also through the ways this information was received and appropriated by the students. The performance texts then created revealed the capacity of the groups to produce new readings and meanings for each artifact.



In exploratory processes thus initiated, the students resorted to language and metaphors that resulted in three theatrical compositions of diverse significances:

I - For some students, the *Cabeçudo* was the reason to create a ghostly and para-religious universe that was taking shape between the play of light and the exaggeration of the body/*Cabeçudo*. This group performance transmuted the Big Head into a 'hideous God' and then into Dante-esque figures that the



intended light and its absence projected onto the bare walls. Their choice of the procession (an archetypal image inseparable from the religious background of the "*Cabeçudo*") invited those who saw it to position themselves - by joining in or rejecting – into an evoked time of inquisition and persecution;

II - For others, the *Cabeçudo* was the motive for an aesthetic construction full of contemporary conflicts, where the relationship between image, object, sound and body instilled a sense of strangeness, surprise, disgust and especially of immobility. The theme of hyper-mediated violence materialized in the installation through the excess and gratuity of the violence itself. The blatant exposure of brutality, the obsession with pleasure that would come from cutting up human beings was brutally disclosed and performed by the beheading of dolls and Big Heads. This exposure of the barbaric and warlike effects on the body presented in the performance installation raised questions that were referred to a roleplayed general assembly that debated the shattering of the right of memory and the intimacy of the body of a child, as a symbol of inhumanity;

III – To others, the Giant Head Puppet also represented a break with religion, ungodliness and lust through a male body dressed as a priest, half naked against the scenery of a brothel dominated by red and black among fruit and Baconian glasses of wine. The

lewdness, eroticism and sin were reinforced by the voluptuousness of the music, the presence of tantalizing and provocative female bodies dressed in red and black lace corsets, who, during a game of seduction, attract and were attracted by the image of the Giant Head Puppet.



### **In Conclusion**

The initial Performance Studies course - about which this article reflects - points to changes that would not have been possible if the students had not first passed through an intense exploration of a range of theatrical tools, where the body, voice, space and dramatizations were present. At the end of the first semester this exploration allowed them to advance to a level, where performance creation was beginning to shape the identity of the *animateur* who can effectively engage with communities beyond the academy.

The Performance Studies course seems to have made an important contribution to this change. The creation of flexibility and the interventionist nature of the transposed image and puppet-based performances for the course allowed the development of multiple explorations that have opened up for students the possibility of being confronted with their own beliefs and to position themselves in a game of interchanges of ideas. Within their performances, the possibility for each of them to experiment and play with the creativity of others was opened up. The observation and sharing of performance creation with others, the feedback obtained from the interchanges between them - as performers – as well as their constituting themselves as the audience for each other, turned into a significant learning experience.

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