



# WOMEN PERFORMING EUROPE

The Magdalena Project  
Across Borders

# WOMEN PERFORMING EUROPE

Is part of the Erasmus+ EU Programme of cooperation partnerships with international activities organized by four organisations: Protagon e.V.(Germany), Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium/Odin Teatret (Denmark), Teatro Nucleo (Italy), Stowarzyszenie Grupa Artystyczna Teraz Poliz (Poland).

The project aims to bring people together, through the exchange of experiences, learning activities and events, to start a discussion in international level about social inclusion, equality, integration and pioneer practices of feminist education in the cultural field.

Thank you to antagon theaterAKTion and Escuna Criativa e.V.

– October 2022



**Women Performing  
Europe - The Magdalena  
Project Across Borders**

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# INTRODUCTION

## About The Magdalena Project

THE PROJECT WOMEN PERFORMING EUROPE  
– THE MAGDALENA PROJECT ACROSS BORDERS,  
aims through creativity and culture, to create spaces of  
socio-cultural visibility for women.



The educational programme of the project was implemented in a transnational framework proposing during the years 2020 and 2022 a cycle of activities aimed to create a broader understanding of practices, policies and systematization of female adult's education across borders.

During this period we shared artistic our knowledge and experience and we learned to create and to identify new models of work that supports and help women to improve their positions at their workplace.

Following this journey of learning and overcoming the difficulties of carrying out the project in the midst of the global pandemic of COVID 19, we have gathered texts and reflections based on the experience of participants who have been on mobility in the partner organization's host countries. Therefore, the aim of this handbook is to internationally support the development of new pedagogical activities and strategies for female artists to be better prepared and trained to work in the creative market.

### ABOUT THE MAGDALENA PROJECT

The Magdalena Project is an international network of, with and for women artists in contemporary theatre, as well as the cross-disciplinary performative arts. The network, founded in 1986 in Wales by Jill Greenhalgh and colleagues from Europe, is characterised by its unique horizontal structure that gives women artists worldwide the opportunity to put down roots through the Magdalena Network. It offers artistic work opportunities, access to education and training, as well as research and teaching. It also makes the self-image of female theatre and performance artists visible. Magdalena serves as a lively discursive exchange - in terms of the selection of themes, artistic processes and finished works - between women artists worldwide.

The branches of the Magdalena Project extend far and wide: over international borders and across generations. Groups meet in real time and place as well as online to share, engender and promulgate work and ideas. Largely surviving on the goodwill of its members and sponsors, it is a testimony to what we can achieve together in spirit of community and unity.

"Intercultural artistic exchange is at the heart of the Magdalena project. By coming together, sharing and exchanging artistic works, we are able to develop further, both as artists and as migrants/people living in different countries. We are able to share our experiences and learn from each other. It happens through our artistic practice/exercise as well as through networking. The Magdalena meetings can lead to a future invitation and also opportunities for artistic collaboration."

- Helen Varley Jamieson

# FOREWORD

by Jill Greenhalgh

Founding Artistic Director – The Magdalena Project

## FOREWORD

I am more than happy to know that the project Women Performing Europe - The Magdalena Project across borders, was created through an international partnership on behalf of The Magdalena Project, International Network of Women in Contemporary Theatre. I sincerely hope that everyone involved, participants, artists, organisers, technicians and audiences have had a truly rewarding experience.



I was very happy and proud to see this project being implemented in the strange and distanced time we were living during the pandemic. These women have not given up on finding ways to connect, to be together, to defy the isolation. Even with the restrictions, they managed to be together in the same room, exchanging energy and concentration. They have succeeded in creating a safe space for sharing ideas and learning from each other through the live medium of performance. These times are asking us to think differently. To think NEW. How can we sustain liveness whilst staying within the guidelines metered out by our confused, sometimes incompetent, governments – we are all trying to stay safe.

We need to step outside of the familiar structures that we call theatre and define the heart of what it really is – live exchange. This can be done in so many ways and now is the time for re-invention. Theatre does not have to be on a stage in a theatre building with the audience in the dark silently watching those on the elevated stage with the light on them – speaking their ideas and truths. Theatre people can invent encounters of myriad shapes and forms – we just have to think outside of the box – literally. A lot of experimentation may result in a lot of failures but from the piles of manure beautiful flowers can eventually blossom.

I am sure you will be able to read and imagine all the moments these women were together in the encounters, discussions and performances which were offered during this project. They have crossed borders and created cross-cultural debates and thinking. And I hope that many left their comfort zone and risked these failures so we can find new ways in these strange, challenging and exciting times.

# COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT ACROSS BORDERS

by Bárbara Luci Carvalho

Protagon e.V. - project director

## COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT ACROSS BORDERS

**"Empowered individuals create an empowered collectivity and an empowered collectivity will consequently be made up of by individuals with a high degree of regained awareness of their social self."**

– Joice Berth<sup>1</sup>

As social and historical subjects, women<sup>2</sup> also have the right to propose new ways of being in the world, based on diversity of opinion, culture and civic education. We are at a time when it is crucial to encourage women to position themselves in the face of social conflicts, extremist nationalism, pandemics, discrimination, racism, etc.

In the frame of an international partnership, four organizations from Germany, Italy, Poland and Denmark, with diverse expertise in performing arts and education, committed to empowering women in social disadvantages.

It is worth to highlight that all the activities of the project were guided by the intersectional feminist perspective, which aims not to categorize women within a bourgeois and white logic, but to invest in the way that aspects of one's social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) might combine to create specific modes of discrimination.

We started the project activities during the 4th International Women's Theatre Festival in Frankfurt am Main in September 2020. Starting from the theme „Collective Empowerment Across Borders“ we began our journey in creating our common space: a free space for mutual empowerment, to trace geopolitical, gender-socialized and age-related boundaries within us and to go beyond these limitations - researching artistically and creatively by realizing and understanding what moves (us) in the society. In the process, we artistically approached the challenge of how the dynamics of power relations can be changed in our work environment. During the workshops, meetings, presentations and whenever we got together, the desire for borderless solidarity, emancipation and visibility of women in theatre was being strengthened and nurtured by the group we created in each country. Thus, with this book we are sharing our experiences, a common strength for making women visible in theatre. We have also created space for personal writings and reflections of participants, notes, ideas and strategies to empower women in theatre and consequently in society.

Our main goal is to strengthen feminist initiatives in the performing arts: among others, the establishment of a sustainable international project dedicated to the visibility of women in theatre and performing arts on a sustainable basis. We created through the activities a common discourse to rethink previous ideas and realities of society and culture, to change the status for

<sup>1</sup> Quote from her book "What is empowerment?"

<sup>2</sup> We understand as „women“ all people who define themselves as female. The project is an open platform for all self-definition of women. What gender or sexual identity a person attributes to themselves is just as much a part of the feminist empowerment process as the promotion of people regardless of their origin, religion or age.

theatre-makers, migrants and refugee women, and to improve women throughout and across countries within the European Union as well as worldwide. We are united through expressive arts to overcome any kind of gender based discrimination.

This project created dialogues between generations and diverse women's cultural contexts. It also promoted tools that recognize the historical female contribution in arts and is offering active participation on the process of the formation of a European cultural heritage. Physical theatre in particular plays a leading role here, as it dispenses with the use of language and is thus truly crossing borders understandable for every participating person. The thoughts across borders, how equal rights for women can be achieved in theatre and in all kinds of societies, were the common values and common approaches to solutions. How does theatre work in other countries? Intersectional theatre work is crucial for this; the focus has to be on the common interest of equality at all levels.

With this publication we hope that other projects can also grow in a transnational cooperation through theatre. Dialogue promotes the exchange of knowledge and expands one's own perception through the diversity of theatre makers. Theatre be an answer to questions that are to be asked and posed - theatre makers are here ambassadors of the discourse and build a bond with the audience, the actresses and theatre-makers. Art transports current themes as well has helped us find diverse ways for transgressing the boundaries of what is thought and lived and experienced, to explore our capacities, and how they can be expanded to create more solidarity and safe spaces for everyone.

In these two years we have expanded a long-term cooperation with international theatre makers, a wide variety of meetings and formats for exchange and networking will be made possible, and personal development and social advancement will be promoted in the dialogue between generations, among other things.

We have carried out several workshops with multilingual competences, scientific cooperation, artistic cooperation, international networking just as critical thinking and creativity complement and expand the approach of a presentation space for theatre makers and interested audiences. In the workshops, the participants deal with topics of gender roles and gender constructions as well as international context, physical abilities, self-empowerment, intersectional and queerfeminist perspectives of a diverse society.

The learning activities of the project took place within in the context of cultural events, festivals, or meetings. The project also had an impact on each partner organization, each region or country that the partners operate in and throughout the EU via the identification and analysis of the differences and similarities. This process led the project to the recognition that even in the face of local differences in the reality of each partner, it is possible to create common models, protocols, guidelines, structures, mechanisms, policies, processes, etc. relating to good practice in the training of adults.

After two years of meetings, discussions and reflections we have discovered that we were creating a broader understanding of practices, policies and systematization of feminist education across borders.

However, we're just at the beginning of creating new professional trainings that consider the competitiveness of the creative market, but at the same time present clear methodologies for promoting more gender-inclusion. In this context, the artistic work emerges as a powerful tool for development and combating segregation, sexism and discrimination against women, especially migrant women.

We are immensely happy to be able to offer the participants in mobility several tools to improve their capacity to effectively approach in professional field. We may say that at the end of this project we have won the opportunity to show and share the results and improvements of training we have made together in these two years. We have developed

trainings on a regional, national and European level and now we are open to propose to other groups and institutions new policies and new intervention strategies on social inclusion for women in the creative market.

During the project we have created a research compilation of common results that include: one Tool kit online for Women's Leadership in cultural work; one YouTube Chanel with 7 web-series with statements of invited artists from the Magdalena Project Network and this online handbook with reflections on the project activities.



(Graphics by Patricia Scheld)

It was an unforgettable and very successful experience to work in a collaborative and transnational way. Thanks to all the participants and the people involved in the associations from Italy (Teatro Nucleo), Poland (TERAZ POLIZ) and Denmark (Odin Teatret - Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium) and Germany (Protagon e.V.).

We are all part of the project **Women performing Europe - The Magdalena Project across borders**. We would like to thank everyone for the support, helping in the organization of the activities and for the collaboration in the discussions, for all ideas and new impulses to design more gender equality i in the theatre and in our lives.

# BUILDING COMPLEXITY

by Julia Varley

Odin Teatret/NTL

## BUILDING COMPLEXITY – SNAPSHOTS OF WOMEN PERFORMING EUROPE

One definition of theatre is that performers and spectators share the same space and time. During her 'mystery-class' presentation at Transit 10 Festival, in Denmark, in June 2022, Helen Varley Jamieson stated that the internet could also be a shared space and time. Listening to her, and understanding her point of view, I asked myself if a difference between theatre online, online theatre or "cyberperformance" as Helen calls it, and presential theatre could be given by the spectators' commitment and the performers' risk. Spectators invest their time, attention and money when deciding to go to a theatre or stop in the streets to look at a performance: they make an effort. Performers offer their presence here and are now dealing with whatever problem or mistake occurs in front of judging eyes and ears. It is true that the performers only risk their pride, but they are exposed. The excitement of live performance consists in experiencing the physical impulses and rhythm of bodies communicating directly. The performers' technique is the only safety net: knowing how to keep the spectators' attention. Both performers and spectators need to engage for the relationship to work.

This thought came to me after giving masterclasses with Eugenio Barba at Rome University in May 2022, when about 120 students decided to come to the University to follow the lessons, while one thousand decided to follow online. It is comprehensible that some people should make this choice because they live far away, but it seems to me that most preferred to follow from their computer at home because then they could drink coffee, be dressed informally, and do other activities at the same time, without disturbing anyone else. They could avoid the necessary compromise of committing to a relationship.

Speaking with Bianca Mastrominico and John Dean who presented their online performance Flanker Origami at Transit 10 just before Helen's talk, we tried to pinpoint what the engagement and risk consists of when a relationship is established through screens, apart from questions of failing internet connections or technical problems with video image and sound. Bianca and John have worked hard to find equivalent principles to presential theatre or dance for online performances, in search of achieving a virtual theatrical presence which is paradoxically absent.

The Erasmus Plus project, Women Performing Europe - The Magdalena Project Across Borders has been carried out during the two years that have been marked by the global corona virus pandemic and the consequent restrictions. Our task was to cross borders at the same time as travels and meetings were limited, countries closed to foreigners, and physical workshops and performances often prohibited. We had to deal with online communication alternating with presential meetings whenever possible. This experience has made me concentrate even more on the different positive effects of direct communication and on the difficulties provoked by distance.

Words used to explain aims and objectives, to describe events, to put forward motivations and points of view create an abstract reality that rarely manages to move me, unless followed by concrete actions. People meeting, shaking hands, hugging, talking, dancing, watching or making performances, eating, laughing, offering a seat, being kept awake by snoring, sharing the cleaning tasks, are real experiences that often don't need to have a meaning, but nevertheless communicate or say something. They remain in my mind as a breathing reference of creative contradictions. Words are not enough to give me inspiration, I need actions to be impressed and remember. As an actress I have spent nearly 50 years learning how to make actions and trying to pass on its essence to others. If I think back to what we have gone through together in these two years of meetings and workshops with Women Performing Europe I can only describe the experience through images. The women involved and my personal relationship with each of them are what has transformed and enriched me.

I had met Bárbara Carvalho during previous Transit Festivals in Denmark, when she came as a participant, and at a workshop in Italy and an international symposium on theatre community work organised at Odin Teatret. But I really began to know who she is and to create a connection when I saw how she taught a song for the Afro-Brazilian female orixa Oxum to Transit participants and guests, and when she appeared on stilts in the beginning of her solo work-in-progress to then fall, when I could see and feel the motor that moved her beyond appearances. Her northern Brazilian temperament was dominant even in her new German environment. Borders were already being crossed in her body, and there probably lies the root of the theme chosen for our European project. I recognise this, as I was born in the UK, grew up in Italy, then moved to Denmark to work with a theatre group spending great part of the year abroad, often in Latin America. Bárbara wanted to sing and dance, but on the journey to find her autonomy, self-esteem and authority and to be accepted within her group and in a foreign country as an afro descendant woman, she also started university research which demanded objective explanations for what before was just a subjective feeling. The task we have given ourselves as part of the Women Performing Europe project is also to find the words which could really reflect our experience of women working and living across borders, dealing with its challenges every day. These words stem from our experience, they do not exist before we act, they come afterwards when we need to communicate events to those who were not present.

As I had followed the opening meeting of the Women Performing Europe project online, I had not met Dorota Glac, Marta Jalowska and Kamila Worobiej of Polish Teraz Poliz physically before the Frauen Festival in Frankfurt in September 2020. At first they seemed young to me, as I heard them speak enthusiastically full of idealism and self-imposed rules. Then my perception changed. On the last evening of the Festival, I was sitting comfortably on one of the chairs scattered randomly around four synthesizers in the indoor space at Antagon Theater. Four women came out of the dressing room, walking calmly and decidedly to stand between the synthesizers. They were dressed in costumes that seemed like a crossover of cabaret folies bergères girls and astronauts: electric colours, feathers, jewellery, naked bellies, make up, wild stockings, high heels... They were beautiful in an absurd way and quite unrecognisable, so different to how they had presented themselves during the talks. They confirmed my opinion that feminism in what was Eastern

Europe dresses in a sensuous and provocative way. Their music performance created harmonies by placing pieces of tape to stick down different tangents. My rhythm as spectator slowly changed as I listened to the electronic tones and voices merging in harmonics that filled the space above me. My perception of time changed. I slowed down. The concert lasted a long time. The performers were concentrated and relaxed, even when spectators started to walk amongst them, changing the tapes which created the harmonies. They seemed to enjoy the privilege of performing, something I often remind the actresses I work with before they go on stage. We have chosen our craft and can meet others through our work. Our professional identity feels at home in many places in the world and finds a family across geographic and generational borders.

In Frankfurt, at the Frauen Festival in 2020, I also met Natasha Czertok of Teatro Nucleo physically for the first time. I saw Natasha's solo on the outdoor stage of Antagon Theater where I had performed Ave Maria two days earlier. At that time Natasha's solo was a work-in-progress and she was eager to receive feedback. Kashimashi became a finished work before our next project meeting. Two years later, at Transit 10 Festival in 2022, the performance impressed the international participants with its precision and energy. Natasha reminded me of her mother, Cora Herrendorf, who I had first met in the 1970s in Italy where she had come to perform Water Closet with the Argentinian group Comuna Baires, escaping the military dictatorship. Natasha's dancer leg muscles and her wide smile were so alike Cora's. Her way of being on stage, extroverted and strong, was how I remembered her mother. Natasha was accompanied by her two daughters, one about to become a teenager and the other still a baby, one silent and typically shy for her age, the other noisy and naturally demanding her mother's presence all the time. Different generations meet in my memory. The generations also expressed different theatre aesthetics, from the blue-jeans and naked torsos of the 1970s to the cardboard boxes, light changes and recorded music of 2020.

Veronica Ragusa of Teatro Nucleo seemed to always be there, sometimes on the screen ill with covid-19, other times working as a technician and babysitter, or translating and organising. I got to know her differently during the Totem Teatro Nucleo Festival in September 2021. She was one of the actors in a performance directed by Cora Herrendorf, „Il tempo del canto“. Seeing Veronica perform and hearing her sing, her inner smile came to life for me. I suddenly understood her way of being present. Her generosity was full of light, an inspiration and a reassurance for others. Veronica was one of the younger artists I really wanted to invite to Transit 10 Festival, so I could give her back something of what she had offered to others. She came with her work-in-progress Fuge in Re Minore: we need another European project to see the performance finished! The Totem Festival was dedicated to the theme of mother artists. The talks at the symposium mixed personal experiences with political motivation and artistic longings. Being a mother was not only having children, but creating spaces for other women, allowing them to grow at their own pace.

It was in Ferrara that Bárbara and I worked together practically on some scenes of her performance, which was no longer a solo with recorded music. After Transit 9 Festival, the work had developed to be accompanied by two musicians and projections.

The Women Performing Europe project gave us the opportunity to be together in the rehearsal room and challenge each other. We worked on a couple of scenes in front of observers, taking the risk of sharing the vulnerability of a process of which the outcome was not at all sure. First we needed to establish the authority of the woman on stage in relation to the male musicians. Bárbara had to sing loudly and play the drum first, and then demand the musicians to accompany her. It is interesting to see how the first steps of a performance establish the power of what comes next. Then Bárbara and I worked on the details of her actions. We needed to find the sense of what was happening on stage not through the narration or the intentions, but in the way she placed a foot on the ground, lifted an arm and pointed a finger, took an object, looked far into the distance or inside herself. Images that had nothing to do directly with the scene helped find solutions and modulations that surprised everyone watching. The body was coming alive following its own logic not dictated by theoretical intentions. At the end Bárbara wept with exhaustion; she had really crossed borders in those two hours. I asked the observers to leave the room as I hugged Bárbara for a long time, allowing her to catch her breath again. I wonder what will remain of that experience in the future, but certainly it was a turning point for our desire to continue the collaboration of all those involved in Women Performing Europe.

Later that evening, I was sitting around the fire lit for a barbecue, talking to Marta Jalowska of Teraz Poliz about my book Notebook of an Odin Actress - Stones of Water. Marta was telling me how it would have been useful for her to have read this book in her years of apprenticeship and also have known about all the issues of The Open Page, the journal edited within The Magdalena Project, which I had given to her during a preparatory meeting in Holstebro in July. One of the plans we made that evening was to translate books to Polish and to search for the financial support for the translation. We exchanged information and contacts, enlarging each other's networks. During the two years of our meetings, we have dreamt of making many plans come true, but have not followed up on all of them. The time for reflection never seems to have priority as we are engaged in one event after the other.

Karolina Micula came to fetch me at the airport in Warsaw in November 2021 when I arrived for the transnational meeting there. In the car, we spoke about her charity concerts in Wrocław, how she taught singing online, and then about the difference between theatre with a political message and political demonstrations which become performative. I was curious of the feminist movement in Poland and the protests for abortion rights. I was full of admiration for the courage women showed in going against their government's decisions and the general Polish conservative catholic way of thinking. Although not part of the group Karolina, joined Teraz Poliz for Women Performing Europe because of her interest in the activities and to feel a stronger in connection with other women. During our exchange, the word activism started to exist for me, and I got the idea that Karolina could make a presentation at Transit 10 Festival to expand on the reflection about the characteristics of political protests using strong visual imagery and the personal engagement in activism. I suggested a kind of demonstration during which she could also sing her songs and show her videos. Her explanations needed to be accompanied by examples of what she would speak about. Patricia Ariza also used the word activism at a Magdalena Festival in Ayllón in Spain during which she created a street performance involving all the town's associations and the

participants. Now that Patricia has become Culture Minister in Colombia the borders between officialdom and rebellion are being crossed again, achieving a very different reality than the one in Poland. Karolina cried after seeing Patricia's No estoy sola performance at Transit 10 Festival. They did not speak the same language, so I translated what Karolina needed to tell Patricia to thank her for the example she gave.

I hope to meet Lauren Boissonet, Magdalena Wiesgosinska and Edith van den Elzen of Antagon Theater again. Each of them has been beside Bárbara Carvalho and been present during the project with many small actions as important as a fresh boiled egg for a breakfast in the garden. It is also for them that we hope to continue a second edition of Women Performing Europe.

There is a photograph of the last day of Transit 10 Festival where I am sitting on a chair with a sunhat and dark glasses, holding a notebook and a pair of Danish clogs, covered with flowers, sweets and chocolates. I had just finished my thank you speeches to the volunteers, helpers and technicians, I was defenceless from exhaustion, and about to get ready to say good-bye to those who were leaving, when a procession of women on their knees took me hostage to tell me I should continue organising Transit Festival also in the future. Many guests and participants had written their personal messages in the notebook. At night, alone at home, I read all the notes. One of them said, "Thank you Julia for smiling at me every time I entered the room of the show as I was giving you my entry ticket."

When we make reports or reflections after an event we tend to jump over small facts in search of greater meanings. But in my work as an actress, I have learnt that details retain the most important information. The images I preserve in my memory from our two years of collaboration are coloured by hundreds of small elements which make up the variation and dynamism of human relationships and which are at the base of the need which encourages us to work together.

All events, from the simplest meeting, to lectures, workshops, performances and festivals have a dramaturgical structure. Like in music, the energy, fascination and seduction, the inspiration and innovation, result from a combination of impulses and variations, oppositions and contiguities, premises and conclusions, stories, associations, images and concrete actions and behaviour.

My contribution to Women Performing Europe has been an awareness of the dramaturgical principles which I have learnt from years of work at Odin Teatret and within The Magdalena Project network. It is the same process as creating a performance: we have a starting point and then we listen to what the work needs to embark on a journey without knowing where it will lead us but knowing how to sail following the stars and carried by the wind. The final responsibility is for the result not to be boring, which for a performance or a festival means that people should leave replenished with energy. This is our responsibility as artists, much more than telling a story or presenting a point of view: to give a sense of life, even if dealing with dramatic themes.

The starting point can be simple. Wanting to see the performances directed by my friends within The Magdalena Project was the impulse for the first Transit Festival in 1992. I also needed to find a way how to talk of the work we shared in a productive and positive way, without hurting each other. I wanted to explore how criticism could be constructive. Other times the starting point has

been a theme springing from questions I was asking myself or from situations experienced within the Magdalena Project network. Once I have the theme I think of the women and performances I would like to invite in relation to the theme. Some women should represent the Magdalena and Transit Festival tradition and know how, others should be completely new and unknown, some should work with text, others with dance, some should make performance art and improvisation, others be dedicated to theatrical complexity and characters. I need to invite women from different continents, of different ages and backgrounds, women who are open to listen and collaborate, to enjoy our diversity, women who have organised encounters in their own communities or others who are ready to take that step.

I always tell Transit Festival guests and participants to take advantage of the richness offered by every single woman present, not only following the official programme but also exchanging in the pauses and during meals. There will be time to digest and understand afterwards. Everyone discovers hidden layers of energy going from one activity to the next without stopping. Information about artists and participants, performances and meetings, the schedule and the rooms, The Magdalena Project and Transit Festival is given beforehand in the folders with a poster, leaflet and bibliography. A round of presentation at the beginning and a round of reactions at the end help the women get to know each other, also by name. Drinks are not allowed in the working rooms, and photographs and videos are taken only by those responsible. The space and time of the Festival should be extraordinary, for special experiences to occur.

With the Transit Festivals, when I take up a theme (Generations, Politics, Roots, Storytelling...) I never expect a single lecture, demonstration or performance to come with an exhaustive point of view, but that the comparative intercultural and intergenerational situation brings forth a comprehension which is different. In Transit Festivals I combine theory and practice, in search of words and ways to tell our story. It is a common voice which emerges from the experience that gives a future perspective to our work.

## Transit 10 Festival

Transit 10 Festival happened at Odin Teatret, Holstebro, Denmark, from the 3rd to 12th of June 2022. The theme chosen was THE SPLENDOR OF THE AGES – Theatre, Women, Courage. I was particularly interested in the meeting of generations and in the contribution that the different points of view and amount of experience can give to each other. After themes related to periphery, risk, beauty, I recognised courage in the work of so many women working in theatre across the globe in times of economic crisis, isolation, violence, war and pandemic. As women theatre practitioners, producers and scholars, we need courage to stand beside our ideals, to fight against discrimination, to dedicate ourselves to creating oasis of beauty and poetry with no illusion of ever achieving immediately visible results. Transit 10 Festival should be a time and space to learn from each other and get energy and reassurance in order to continue.

One of my ongoing obsessions has been to contribute to build our own history as women theatre practitioners, finding a new language, documenting our achievements, and sharing questions. One of my motivations for Transit 10

Festival was to create a space and time for this to happen.

The Magdalena Project has built an environment in which women of different generations exchange and work together. Transit 10 Festival represented a milestone in this international network, celebrating what we have done and imagining what we want and need to do next. The newly established association Transit Next Forum - Theatre and Women confronted its first task in the organisation of the Festival preparing to enlarge the fields of activity with more continuative initiatives in the future.

Transit 9 Festival Hope in Action - Theatre, Women, Will in 2019 came from a wish to regain confidence in body contact, song, music, love, spirit of adventure, movement, nature, and belief in the future. It is ironic that this theme was chosen just before the pandemic. For Transit 10 Festival, The Splendour of the Ages - Theatre, Women, Courage, in 2022, women of all ages were invited to contribute with their experience through performances, work demonstrations, workshops, masterclasses, work-in-progress, and talks. The programme wanted to surprise older and younger practitioners and scholars, and keep everyone dancing in wonder on the tip of their toes.

Transit 10 Festival was dedicated to Else Marie Laukvik, one of the founders of Odin Teatret in 1964, still active, performing and directing today, setting an example for younger practitioners.

## Programming

Being the 10th edition of the Transit Festival meant having a lot of previous experience, but this did not avoid having to confront difficulties. The pandemic first and the war in Ukraine more recently have completely changed the world situation in which we live, economically, socially and psychologically. Organising our work had to take this reality into account. But most of all the organisation of Transit 10 Festival suffered from the internal shift within Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium-Odin Teatret, with a change of director and generational leadership. All of this had a consequence of considerable economic limitations to the budget, reducing the usual number of invited guests, quantity of days, participants, paper documentation, and the payment of travels and fees. More than ever before, this edition of Transit Festival was achieved thanks to the generosity of every woman who came and of those who supported from afar.

Previous experience led to the choice of inviting artists to represent very different international origin, level of experience, generation, type of artistic aesthetics, political and social engagement, and personality. Some women were invited to give back to them the opportunities they have offered to others in their own context, like Viviana Bovino of Residui Teatro, Spain. Some women were invited because Transit 10 Festival would represent for them an important occasion for development and meeting with a large network opening future opportunities for collaborations, like Giovanna Michaliadi Sarti of Fabrica Athens, Greece. All the partners in the Performing Europe Project were invited as the backbone of Transit 10 Festival to deepen the mutual learning and exchange. Some experienced Magdalena Project women were invited to give examples of diversity, quality and resilience. Some women were invited for their pedagogical capacity, others

for their curiosity and availability to learn and participate. Some women were invited as examples of performances directed by other women, some to consolidate their artistic path, some to present their point of view on teaching, some for their political engagement. It is an unbelievable achievement to think that Patricia Ariza, one of the Transit 10 Festival guests, has since become Culture Minister in her country, Colombia.

Previous experience led to the choice of mixing international origin, level of experience, generation, type of artistic aesthetics, political and social engagement, and personality also in the organisation of the workshops and talks programmed during the Festival. It is not the voice and point of view of one woman alone that impresses and is instructive but facing all the diversity present together and seeing how they are able to communicate and exchange. Seemingly opposed practices are not stationary contraposition but inspire a dynamic transformation.

During Transit 10 Festival the fundamental learning process happened not only in physical and vocal workshops, in the concrete practice of different theatre techniques, but also listening to the talks and seeing many performances one after the other during the intense programme. An element that changes the perception is working, sleeping and eating all together in common spaces, and sharing the cleaning tasks. Everyone should feel at home at the theatre and take responsibility for the care of the space. The most difficult task in the days of preparation is compiling the cleaning and meal clearing lists, mixing ages, nationalities, artists and participants, and taking into consideration where everyone is sleeping, the spaces they use, if they are smokers, if they like late night parties or wake up early in the morning, and dates of arrival and departure.

Keeping the time strictly is a necessity for the intense programme to take place despite the sudden problems that always occur. One of my main activities during the Festival is to think ahead in order to anticipate solutions, remind everyone of their tasks and appointments while keeping up a personal contact with everyone present. This also happens by taking the tickets at the door of the performances: just a look, a smile or a word informs me of how everyone is feeling, essential knowledge for a good and creative environment. The time for meals is short, which means the food should be prepared and laid out so that people can serve themselves quickly, with explanations of what the food is. Translations are also essential. Everyone should be allowed to speak in their own language or given the time and confidence to express themselves in a foreign language. Immediate interpretation sentence by sentence is used to maintain the original voice of the speaker as much as possible, insisting on keeping the rhythm and energy more than grammatical correctness.

## Difficulties

For me as artistic director, the change of leadership within Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium-Odin Teatret in the beginning of 2021 meant that at one point I gave up organising Transit 10 Festival, at another point I decided to place it somewhere else and organise it autonomously, and finally I ended up having to use a lot of time and energy to reach an agreement to carry out Transit 10 Festival within the venue, productive structure, and human force where the Festival had always existed.

The Europe Performing Europe became a concrete obligation and support that made Transit 10 Festival possible. In particular a long telephone call with Bárbara Carvalho of Protagon, main promoter of the Europe Performing Europe project, on November 3rd 2021, gave me the courage and motivation to continue. It is interesting to note how younger generations can nourish the drive of those they think they are learning from. Nathalie Jabalé was beside me through all the ups and downs of the process of preparation. We encouraged each other in facing the difficulties that at times seemed impossible to overcome.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine provoked a movement of millions of refugees in Europe. Denmark also prepared to receive some of them. This meant that all the cheap accommodation available in Holstebro was directed to hosting refugees and Transit 10 Festival had to suddenly solve where guests and participants could stay. We certainly could not put ourselves in the position of competing with refugees fleeing war, nor could we ask for private offers of accommodation which could also be available to Ukrainians. Since the beginning of 2021, the number of bedrooms available at Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium-Odin Teatret had been notably reduced to become offices and changing rooms. Again, I wondered if I should cancel the Festival, as we could absolutely not afford more expensive hotels or guest houses. We thought of tents and caravans, and transportable toilets and showers, but that was also too expensive. Finally, the Mayor's office of Holstebro Municipality offered a solution giving us the use of three houses on the list to be demolished for new constructions in the future. We only had to pay to re-establish the use of bathrooms and for the hot water. The houses were completely empty and filthy. A lot of time and cleaning was necessary in the preparation period to make these houses hospitable enough to receive guests and paying participants.

One of the consequences of the pandemic has been a general reduction of volunteers. Through the various editions of the Festival, we have built up a collaboration with about thirty mostly retired people. In 2022 fewer could help. Old people homes, hospitals, churches and activity centres were confronting the same problem, at the same time as giving up on getting younger volunteers. We could get international volunteers, but they would be motivated by seeing performances which occur in the times when their help is needed to prepare the meals, and they would need a place to sleep. Mette Jensen, who was responsible for the coordination of the volunteers, had died in 2020. We were to discover how many practical questions involving water, fridges, food, plates, tea-towels, and much more, Mette had solved without anyone else realising.

Since 2020, the pandemic has exacerbated the use of virtual communication. Announcements, leaflets and posters which used to be done on paper, for Transit 10 Festival were no longer printed but made available on websites. Belonging to the generation of printed design, I was confronted with the need to produce shorter texts, more immediate images and a communication which only disposes of the space offered by a telephone. Marco Donati, the designer of all Transit Festival posters and leaflets, always using paintings by Dorthe Kærgaard, had also died in 2020. Rina Skeel and I spent many hours looking at texts and images on the computer and then on a mobile phone to find the solutions which maintained a quality of information adapted to the contemporary rhythm and habits of intake.

Fausto Pro, the technical director for many editions of Transit, responded happily when I told him Transit 10 Festival was going to take place at Odin Teatret. At last some good news! - he wrote to me while I was on tour. For each edition I had promised him I would reduce the number of performances, never managing. During the preparation, I give great importance to the sequel of performances on the different days, alternating continents, aesthetics, number of performers and the complexity of the technical needs. Fausto and I spend a long time placing the performances and other activities in Odin Teatret's three theatre spaces and in the courtyard. If it rains, we need to have possible alternatives to outdoor activities. If it is hot or cold, we need to think of heating or ventilation. The time for putting up and striking, the measures of the space, the acoustics, the height of the ceiling, the kind of floor, the placing of the spectators and their number, the closeness to another space, a performer's particular attachment to a room, are all elements that determine the final choice of the venue. The more intense the programme is, the more we need to count on a good and happy technical team. They should feel part of the total organisation. But for Transit 10 Festival I could not pay the fees they deserved and had to limit the number of technicians. Nevertheless I was lucky that besides Fausto Pro, Donald Kitt, Henrik Videbæk, Jakob Nielsen, Oscar Alonso Sanchez (Rusti), Paul Anthony Hales and Valerio Peroni worked hard and seemed to enjoy being amongst so many women. Also filmmaker Claudio Coloberti offered his work for free, documenting all the talks and workshops, and some performances. I had chosen the young Antonia Cezara Cioaza as assistant knowing the experience would be an incredible learning opportunity for her. I informed her of everything all the time. Janaina Matter, Tatiana Horevicht and Hermene Schneider were also beside me, offering their help in the days before and during the Festival, while Anne Savage, Barbara Manighetti, Lene Højmark, Pushparajah Sinnathamby, Søs Banke, Tage Larsen helped Nathalie and me for box office, volunteers and transport.

Guests from Taiwan and the USA were amazed by the lack of facemasks when they arrived at Transit 10 Festival. Denmark had taken away all Covid-19 restrictions in March 2022. By June 2022, behaviour had gone back to a seemingly pre-pandemic normality. We had taken some precautions, like alcohol to disinfect hands when serving food, having fewer people sleeping in the same room, and extra cleaning, but everyone was hugging each other for the happiness of meeting and working together after a long time, and the first vocal workshop had about sixty people singing in the same room. Then one day Covid-19 came undesired with a participant from Portugal. After not feeling well, she made a test and resulted positive. She held the test in her hand, weeping near the bicycle stand outside, not knowing what to do, repeating sorry a million times, as if it were her fault. We asked everyone to make a test and that day no one else resulted positive. We isolated the positive woman, moved some of the activities outdoors, insisted on keeping open doors and windows, and tried to keep other guests and participants from becoming alarmed. Two days later, two more resulted positive, and the organisation to isolate them with a bathroom, and bring them food and water, became more complicated. From that day on we asked everyone to wear facemasks while seeing performances. We moved one performance, the last meeting and feast outdoors, as luckily the weather had changed from rain and cold to sunshine. After going home, several more guests and participants resulted positive, but Nathalie and I who had spoken to everyone and hugged them all did not. Only the painter Dorthe Kærgaard had a bad

fever which lasted for ten days, while for most people it was a few days of not feeling well. The balance between allowing the Festival to follow its course, and for the activities to occur, and protect those who needed it was difficult.

At every Transit Festival there have been last minute cancellations of artists. Often it is family responsibilities that impede participation. It happened also for Transit 10 Festival when Parvathy Baul let us know that she could not come. Then Kapila Venu did not get a visa for Europe and Deborah Hunt did not get the renewal of her green card for residency in Puerto Rico. Suddenly I was missing a final performance for the Festival. I was in La Paz in Bolivia at the end of May 2022, performing at 4,750 metres altitude, when I decided to contact Keiin Yoshimura to see if she could come at such short notice. I really wanted the quality of an Asian traditional form. When she answered yes, I spent various hours communicating with Japan and Denmark from Bolivia to organise her travel. It was also from La Paz that I had to solve who would make the suppers during the Festival, as the cook had left his job at the restaurant with whom we had an agreement for the food delivery. It was just a small problem, but it felt like the straw that breaks the camel's back.

In general, I can say that Transit 10 Festival, despite the difficulties, was successful, opening to further collaborations, learning opportunities and exchange in the future. It is still early to know exactly what the outcome will be in years to come. Those who are still not born will determine its meaning one day. We will no longer be there to make comments and distinguish truth from misunderstandings, and intentions from results. We will have done the necessary actions for others to find the words to narrate the story.

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

by Karolina Micula and Kamila Worobiej

TERAZ POLIZ COLLECTIVE

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

### Part I: No Title

**Kamila Worobiej:** The reasons for writing this handbook are eminently pragmatic. We want to share the potential we have generated during almost two years of working together on the Women Performing Europe -The Magdalena Project Across Borders. From the very beginning, we wanted to share what is essential for our work - a feminist perspective or, more broadly, what I call the implementation of feminist art politics.

TERAZ POLIZ is a women\*s (women and persons who experience their life as a woman) feminist group, but in the first years of its activity, instead of the term feminist there was the notation feminine. It seems important to me to look closer at a moment of transition in defining our group and analyze how the statement feminist relates to women\*s work. The basic feminist approach that is present in our activities is the deconstruction of the hierarchical structure in which women\*s roles and attitudes are strictly organized by patriarchal concepts and rules. This hierarchy is being reproduced in every possible context - social, political, and artistic as well. The feminist perspective treats a person who identifies as a woman\* as an individual who functions not only as a muse or an object of art, but as a creator being able to do what she feels like. Artistic activity has a gender. Masculine categories are surrounded by figures of masters and geniuses, while feminine create herstories of struggle against exclusion. First in access to education, later because of misunderstanding and/or trivialization of feminine topics, mocking women\*s sensitivity and depreciating the value and validity of themes relevant to women\*. Feminist activity will always be inclusive and intersectional, it will always oppose discrimination, stereotypes, inequalities, abuses. It will be sensitive, although herstories are full of resistance and oppression. And yes, it will challenge patriarchy with its hierarchical order, and it will point to new directions and new strategies, because there is not just one unassailable model of construction. The world is not a monolith, it rather is a mandala. The term feminist refers to values. It is a way to see the world and to restore visibility. The term feminine redirects attention mainly to the fact that the members of a group are women\*.

Visibility is extremely closely related to representation - our rule of operating as a group is that the representation of the group is always a minimum of two people, and preferably - all of those who are present at a particular moment. Such a trivial issue can cause a lot of difficulties for event organizers, because most people are used to having one-person representation in accordance with the hierarchical way of managing a team, and there is always a chairman, leader, boss, etc. at the head of the group. The logistical and organizational difference, however, means that TERAZ POLI. needs three or four chairs instead of one, and the capability to share time and a microphone during public speaking.

Collective representation-building is important because it is a practical realization of the basic ability of giving visibility and voice, rather than speaking for someone else. Within the group, we also share different perspectives, and the polyphonic narrative broadens the field of view. For this reason, this chapter is not only written by the TERAZ POLI. who carried out the entire Erasmus+ project, but also an equal space for the statements of the participants of the Polish part of the workshop, which we called The Roots.

Women Performing Europe - The Magdalena Project Across Borders is an educational project, which is extremely important given that women had neither full rights or free access to education until approximately 100 years ago and in some places around the world, not so much has changed! In Poland, in 2018, we celebrated the centenary of women winning the right to vote. In practical terms, this means that our great-grandmothers (five generations back) lived with limited access to many life spaces, and their opportunities for professional fulfillment were suppressed by prevailing stereotypes and the lack of any rights. Thanks to their determination, consistency and courage, formal records were changed, but the process of disarming mental structures built on gender inequality continues even today. With gratitude to the activities of our great-grandmothers, great-great-grandmothers, grandmothers and mothers, we centered the Polish educational part of Learning, Teaching, Training Activities around ROOTS. We also decided to have the entire workshop group made up of people who identify as women or have an experience of living their lives as a woman. This step is important in the process of building resources and discovering and appreciating one's own background and identity. The valuable thing about this process is that it is created in detachment from masculine gender roles, which are still strongly determinative and superior in our culture. It is not easy to catch how powerful this prism is also for us feminists, who are constantly trying to be sensitive and aware of this dependency. Our heritage of women\* artists lives in the herstories of our female ancestors, often anchored in nothing more than our own memory. Reclaiming this heritage, restoring it to visibility, is part of building our resources and collective memory. Over two years of working together as part of Women Performing Europe - The Magdalena Project Across Borders - work that has had to face the restrictions brought on by the pandemic caused by COVID 19 - we have been able to touch upon a number of topics that are important to us, such as motherhood, reproductive rights, abortion, violence against women, multigenerational exchange, and colonialism.

„Maybe I needed to go it alone Perhaps I wanted some genuine support or just to be assured I could get it Maybe I was aware of the reality and wanted to face it Perhaps I was fucking angry and thought about the consequences only later Maybe I was ready for it Maybe it was a certain stage And maybe I had to tell my mother or maybe my daughter or a local kiosk vendor in West Berlin or the whole world or maybe no one at all but I wanted to be sure that I could.”

The above excerpt is from the script for our performance „I'll say and see what happens” which we performed during the 10th edition of the TRANSIT Festival in Denmark.

The performance was inspired by collective coming-outs on abortion such as The Manifesto of



the 343 (Manifeste des 343) and We Had An Abortion (Wir haben abgetrieben) by 374 women\* in Stern Magazine. Our explorations centered around the collectivity of experience, solidarity and power in empathy. Our goal was to look at the spectrum of different approaches without unifying them. In research for the performance we conducted an anonymous survey to collect the voices of women\* willing to share the experience of their own physicality, including the experience of abortion, so we could work with documentary characters. The performance was created at a time when abortion laws in Poland were tightened, triggering a series of protests that reverberated throughout Europe.

I'll say and see what happens.

**Conceptual Collaboration, Performers:** TERAZ POLI composed of Dorota Glac, Marta Jalowska, Kamila Worobie.  
**Conceptual and Production collaboration:** Gosia Wdowik  
**Texts and Dramaturgical Collaboration:** Martyna Wawrzyniak  
**Set Design and Costumes:** Marta Szypulska  
**Music:** Jasia Rabiej multimedia: ETERNAL Engine  
**Video:** Gosia Wdowik, Martyna Wawrzyniak, Marta Jalowska  
**Survey Development:** Alicja Długolecka  
**Photos:** Alina Gajdamowicz (TERAZ POLI.)  
**Graphics:** Dorota Glac  
**Special thanks to:** Abortion Dream Team, Aunt Czesia, Iga Dzieciuchowicz and all the people who agreed to share their experience of abortion with us.



(Photo: Alina Gajdamowicz)

**PART II: You are not alone.**

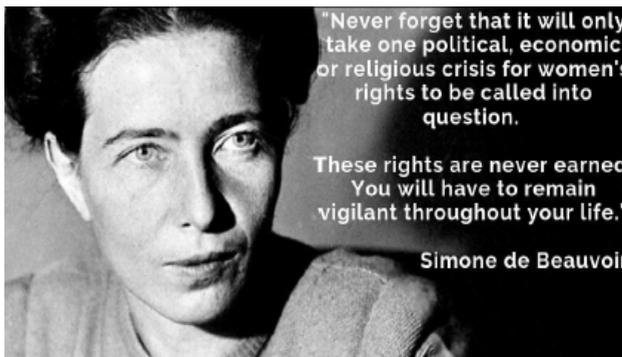
Karolina Micula: When Poland's right-wing government first tried to restrict abortion rights I delivered a performance onstage in Wroclaw in 2017 that included spreading paint in the national colors – white and red – on my breasts and face. I ended with a fist raised high.



<https://www.youtube.com/embed/-pFMAv6iUUE>

When the authorities tried again to impose a near-total ban on abortion in October 2020 I stripped to my waist again and stood on top of my car at a center of Warsaw intersection during a protest, holding a flare high and showing the middle finger.

For me the question about activism and performance is like a question: what came first, the chicken or the egg? Art is also my way of fighting. For my body. For my freedom. Art is the TERAZ POLIZ way of fighting. Art is political. Always. And has always been. This is our duty as artists, our duty as a women\* to fight for equality and equity.



Our duty as artists is to bring the stage onto the streets and the streets onto the stage.

I've prepared a performative lecture about my path in between activism and performance art for the 10th TRANSIT Festival. Julia Varley invited me to do so, because of the WPE platform. But being on TRANSIT was not only amazing experience and opportunity to meet she-creators from all around the world, to see women\* artists and art-activists every age. Being on TRANSIT was a way to understand that my art is not that far away from Columbia - seeing Patricia Ariza's performance on police violence. To understand that our struggles as a small organization are not that different from the struggles of Ya-Ling Peng in Taipei or Viviana Bowino's in Madrid.

This is a photo I took after Patricia Ariza performance NO ESTOY SOLA (You Are Not Alone) by Patricia Ariza from Teatro La Candelaria Santiago García in Colombia. The play is dedicated to the murdered female opposition leaders and activists. The play opens with the phrase: THE POLICE KILL US. At the end, the names of the murdered women and activists scroll in a catarine loop, endlessly. And on the wall is displayed the slogan: YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Today, 2 months after the 10th TRANSIT, we women\* artists, performers and theater makers celebrate Patricia Ariza becoming the Ministra of Culture, co-creating the first non-dictatorial government in Colombia.

**Part III: Organize**

Karolina Micula: It is necessary to learn from each other. It is necessary to build non-vertical ways of collaboration. It is necessary to give visibility to ourselves and different women\* artists. It is necessary to STOP hierarchical leadership towards other women\*. It is necessary to create platforms like Women Performing Europe. Personally, not only an opportunity of sharing my own artistic path is what WPE gave to me but also many different, sometimes small things that worked on very deep levels. One of them was the opportunity to lead a workshop with Lauren Boissonnet from Antagon TheaterAKTion. For our Polish part of training called The Roots we not only create a safe space for women\* to train, learn and share experience. We also manage to create experimental duos of workshop "leaders", duos of WPE artists and The Magdalena's, selected literally by a lottery. So what's called a "leadership" has been shaken in that way. All of the workshop "leaders" took part in all other workshops as participants in order to overturn the structure of the vertical learning process that we all are used to, not only in artistic education. My personal thoughts on duo with Lauren: I was trying to combine different teaching perspectives, I was trying to create exercises that will

use her and my perspective, I was trying to manage the time equally, I was trying to go deeper with my exercise through her exercise and reverse. According to the feedback round after our part. We've managed to invent something that none of us expected. It is only possible with common listening, common sensitization, and being able to dig into this vulnerable moment of I-do-not-know-what-will-happen-but-I-trust-you. Because You - dear Women, dear Person - You have all the capacity to teach me while I'm a teacher too.

Agnieszka Małowska (L\*AW - Lesbian Virtual Archive): Workshop around

Ephemeral Lesbian\* (\* - refers to the all female non-heteronormativity) Museum.

All workshops were led by people who have never worked together and didn't actually know each other. It is a risky but also inspiring idea. It teaches to work on trust, to cooperate, to look for simple concepts and solutions. In such a mode within The Roots, we designed a workshop with Magdalena Staroszczyk. Our ephemeral duo combines performative-theatrical experience, love of archivism, and research into the situation of lesbians in Poland. In our persons - custodians of the roots without metaphor - met for a few hours: an archivist with institutional experience and conviction of the necessity of preserving lesbian material culture, and an archivist with experience of activism, focused on virtual preservation of facts, works, artists.

We prepared a workshop using lesbian\* artefacts that characterize Polish les\*culture. Around them was born a common womens\*story about their own non-heteronormative experiences, also observed or unexpectedly discovered. Collectively created artistic installations were created from associations, memories, objects, personal and collective contexts. Several of them were captured photographically and on film, and these works were contributed to L\*AW - Lesbian\* Virtual Archive.

There was much emotion, as beautiful and intimate herstories were revealed. There was admiration because, as always, the creativity and stylistic diversity of the women\* moved. There were also surprises, because some people did not know the word „Lesbos“. The idea of the workshop seems to have great potential and L\*AW has plans to continue organizing it.

Karolina Micula: You have to organize it on your own. Don't wait for the system to change, cause it's 5 thousands years of patriarchy so far. Just do things. Work together. Start with something small. Organize yourself horizontally. This is really essential for all o.-stage theater groups - we don't have to reproduce the same structures as institutions. Really listen to each other and talk about everything. The distribution of responsibilities among the organizers should also be equal: each of you should do something cool and uncool. For example: organizing meals (cool) and settling invoices (uncool), or welcoming guests (cool) and arranging their transportation and accommodations (uncool). Talk about what is easy for you, and what you would have trouble with. Give each other a lot of trust. If you want to create an inspiring environment for participants - start with your own collective / organization / association. This requires time. The most precious ground that will root you as a group and help you blossom. Sisterhood is possible. Try it and be ready to have many conversations and form real relationships. And yes, it's difficult but it'll become priceless. Because no, you are not always right. Things can be done differently. Your way

of doing things is not the only way. Find another path, one that neither of you would have taken from the beginning. Talk to each other. Organizing workshops - participate in your event equally with all participants. Provide a platform where participants will be heard. What works for us is to close each workshop with a circle. A circle to listen, not to comment or advise. Give feedback only when asked to do so. Try these: „What worked for me was...“ “What didn't work for me was...“. Again - find another way, one that neither of you would have taken from the beginning.

#### Part IV: What worked for us was...

Minori Zgirska (participant of The Roots): I wasn't sure if the workshop was for me when I signed up for it, but I'm glad I gave it a chance. During these last few days I discovered a lot of things about myself and learned a lot of ways I can perform and express myself and I'm really grateful for that. After 5 days I felt as if I had known all the participants for years. I am terribly touched by the bond that formed between all of us, and I am very happy that I had the opportunity to work with probably every single person at the different workshops. I am a club performer with no theater experience, and this was a great opportunity for me to learn something souped-up and change my approach to performing on stage. I would definitely love to participate again if the opportunity arises.

The people who created these workshops managed to create an incredible space where we felt safe and comfortable allowing us to push ourselves and experiment with new things without the fear of judgement. I really liked the equal treatment and the fact that the people who came to lead the workshops also took part in other people's workshops. Every workshop was different, covering a variety of different ways of performing and self-expression, sometimes gently pushing us out of our comfort zones. I think everyone either learned something or had a new experience.

Dom Szpinda (participant of The Roots): I have never participated in anything similar before or since. I received so much space to be myself and explore my boundaries (from a nonbinary perspective it means a lot), to understand sisterhood beyond what was already known to me: we went deeper and within to take a look into our roots. We got profound understanding of human connections, and I am feeling greater appreciation to all our female ancestors now. I've also developed new breathing techniques, found lots of inspiration, met unique people who shared their weaknesses, but also strengths. It taught me new ways of expression, but also gave the belief in union and my position within. Touching moments, many of them discoveries worth every moment spent together. It's been months since, but still I am super excited about the whole thing like it was yesterday. Thinking it should be repeated by us and experienced by many. A little late and in gibberish, but fully sincere. Thank you very much for this experience.

Aga Nasierowska (participant of The Roots): I feel more rooted and empowered by other women\*, their experience, knowledge and wisdom, I do also feel more the sense of myself. I started exploring where my roots are or how I am connected with others. Thanks to the workshop I found my safe place inside me. I'm going deeper and deeper to understand myself as a part of great network-rhizome. This workshop came up in a time when I needed it the most. I'm grateful for creating the safe space where

everybody was accepted. Workshops were for me designed as a full journey starting with self and roots, leading through one's body & voice to collective body experience. Breathing and voice workshops were very valuable because women\* have a strong voice and just have to learn how to use it.

### Part V: Our voice

Agnieszka Małgowska & Monika Rak: We found ourselves at The Roots in several incarnations. Lesbian\* Virtual Archive on workshops. Women's Creative Tandem and the SISTRUM Association. Lesbian\* Cultural Space at the Symposium.

There is still a need for places and situations where women and persons who have an experience of living their lives as a woman can share artistic herstories - taking into account personal, political, worldview, generational or national contexts to tell their creative path. This shatters myths and imaginaries. It reminds us of the vigilance that must not be lost. It shows the differences and similarities of the experiences of women\* of different ages, different countries, different psychosexual identities. It brings to light the processes that have taken place over several decades, such as in the post-Grotowski's understanding of theater. It reinforces the feminist roots that allow us to persevere even in the worst of times.

We spoke about Polish lesbian culture\*, as an immanent part of the herstory that forms women's roots. It is the roots that are discussed in the poem by Monika Rak, which inspired the video performance we showed at the meeting. Its visual layer is in part collected from the Internet images of women from around the world facing patriarchal authority, most often - the police:



<https://vimeo.com/478240446>

Incarnation of the Women's Labor Collective - showing work in progress of our performance Polish Halloween (Monika Rak, Agnieszka Małgowska, Karolina Micula, Kaja Janiszewska).



(Photo: Kazimierz Ździebło)

Thanks to the open formula of Women\* Performing Europe, which brings together various forms of experience exchange, we had the opportunity to show - work in progress - an extract from a performance that was approaching its premiere. A performance created in a collective creative process for two years during the pandemic, through it largely through the Zoom platform, in the last phase exclusively in a women's group and with all the ailments of working onstage.

The show was an opportunity to share the project with an audience that understands all stages of theatrical work, that sees contexts or wants to know them, although our theatrical story was thoroughly Polish. It dealt with Polish mental demons that oppress women in the name of male-centric „holiness.” Polish Halloween was/is a descent into the roots of patriarchy. Such a performance is a kind of cooperative, incidental (sometimes a lot), support of female artists in not easy work - without funds, often without an infrastructural base in which showing even partial results of our work was possible.

The Roots became a comfortable space for dialogue within the women\*s community.

## Part VI: A letter to my younger self

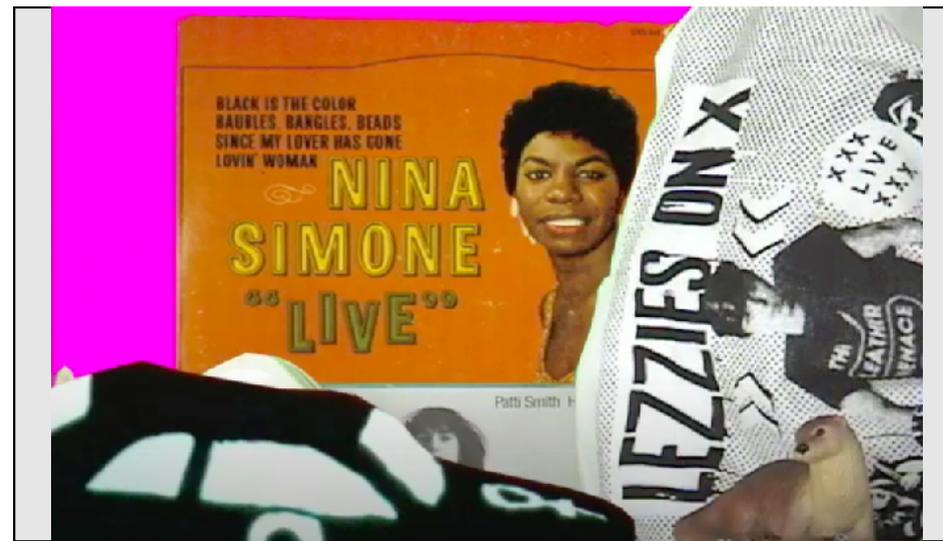
Karolina Micula: You don't have to start from the beginning. You don't have to start everything from scratch. From zero point. From the beginning. As if nothing had ever happened before. Women\* have existed and always created. Women\* are and still create. You have to search. To look outside the mainstream, patriarchal, cis-male oriented masters.

Artistic work, especially performative work that moves the body and its boundaries does not have to be a story of violence, abuse and power relations. Women\* don't have to work according to patriarchal patterns, they don't have to compete, they don't have to deny each other. No one has to drive you to the edge of psycho-physical extremity for masterpieces (phew... maestrapieces) to be created.

You have to be consistent. Don't worry about the results. You need to stop comparing yourself to men, THEY REALLY HAVE IT EASIER, in every way. You need to talk to other female artists, she-creatives, directhers, playwrights, set designers, performers, choreographers, screenwriters, producers, actors, singers, musicians, instrumentalists. And why, as I write this in my native, Polish language, the dictionary wants to correct me. It still wants me to correct women with male endings. Women\* have created, are creating and will create. Find them. Talk to them. No matter your age or ethnicity, you have common experiences, you have the same experiences. Oppression and systemic violence. Erasure. Non-existence. Oblivion. You have to build your own networks of support, mutual cooperation, without reproducing hierarchical structures. You can't build feminist relationships by building hierarchies and hard leadership. Build your own representation. Build representation with those who are even more unrepresented. With feminine people (afab), with women\* of color, with mothers, with mature women.

You have to look for feminine and queer patterns, you have to reject male masters, you have to neglect those who often based their genius on the invisible work of women, on the work of their partners, usually female creators, unknown wives of famous husbands working for their success. You have to reject the violent masters, "kill" them. Understand once and for all that individuals never reach glory on their own. You must understand the power of the collective if individuals can reject the capitalist pattern. You have to see that the collective does not kill individuality, but you have to be open to dialogue, to process, to time. You need to know that the consensual process is much longer, much more demanding, but also much more interesting. You need to see the female\* continuum. No, you don't start from scratch. We wouldn't exist if it weren't for earlier female artists, creators, theorists. If not for those who were ridiculed, those who were depreciated, those who were mocked, those who were denied education, those who were mocked. Ewa Partum, Alicja Żebrowska, Maya Deren, Lorraine O'Grady, Martha Graham, Emma Goldman, Louise Bourgeois, Małga Kubiak, Alina Szapocznikow, Clara Rockmore, Nina Simone, Izabella Gustowska, Zofia Kulik, Leonora Carrington, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Sanja Iveković, Georgia O'Keeffe, Natalia LL, Valie Export, Gertrude Stein, Yayoi Kusama, Tanja Ostojić, Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Isadora Duncan, Cindy Sherman, Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, Ella Fitzgerald, Delia Derbyshire, Barbara Kruger, Pina Bausch, Shirikiana Aina, Marina Abramović, Katherine

Dunham, Barbara Rubin, Maryanne Amacher, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, Guerilla Girls, Bettye Saar, Aretha Franklin, Frida Kahlo, Julia Varley, Geddy Aniksdal, Jilly Adams, Ya-Ling Peng, Jill Greenhalgh, Cora Chertok, Keiin Yoshimura, Patricia Ariza,... We won't stop!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9z0bUK-gQk&feature=youtu.be>

## Part VII: About muffins

Kamila Worobiej: There is a saying that if you want to see clearly what change has taken place, go back to where you have already been. As I write this, I am in Frankfurt, some 50 meters from the headquarters of the Antagon theatreAKTion. I am sitting at a large table, together with a few other women\* I met while working on the Women\* Performing Europe - The Magdalena Project Across Borders Erasmus+ activities. We are currently carrying out the latest Transnational Project Meetings. We are sitting in a spacious, light-filled room. On the front door hangs a Yoruban mask which is supposed to bring the energy of relaxation and peace. We are in the very newly acquired and refurbished workspace of Barbara Luci Carvalho, who is the project manager of all our activities. It is one of those hot July days. The first time I was here was almost two years ago, during the Frauen\* Festival as part of the first ,Learning, Teaching,



(Photo: Kamila Worobiej)

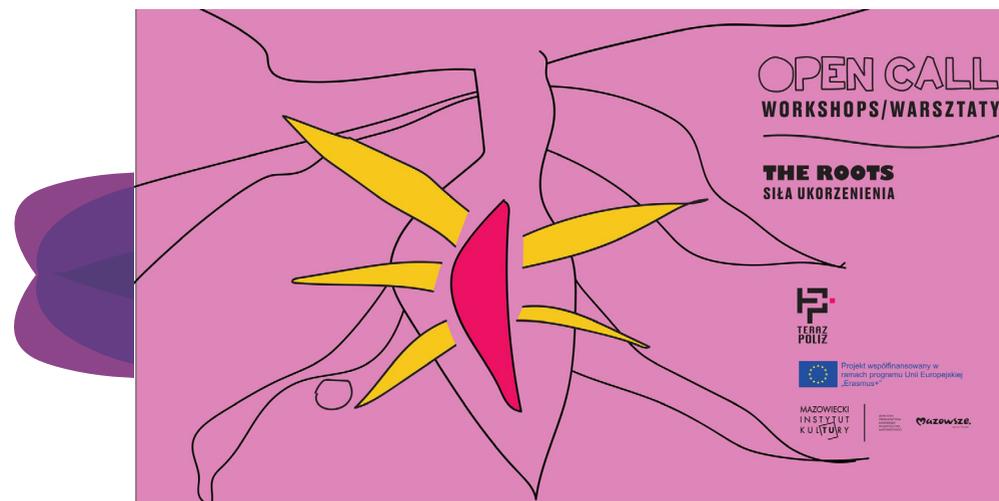
Training Activites' and that was the first time I met all the women\* who make up our project. It was September, it was raining mercilessly, everything was very intense for me, I felt overwhelmed and confused. It was like I was moving in the middle of a kaleidoscope at a dizzying pace. Or as if I were a mirror that had just broken into small pieces and was reflecting random images without being able to put anything together. On my birthday we played here (together with TERAZ POLIZ) - a concert/performance for 12 synthesizers, 4 voices, violin, ukulele, kalimba, stylophone and toy piano called 'Black Square. Sonata for keyboard and tape' (<https://www.terazpoliz.com.pl/czarnykwadrat.html>).

I remember that the morning I came in for breakfast I was surprised by a boisterous 'Happy Birthday' being sung to me. I was given a muffin. with one candle. That moved me. And it has moved me so many times so far - when, thanks to Julia Varley, I met Mr Peanut, when, thanks to Lauren Boissonnet, I thought about what color my grandmother was, when, thanks to Barbara Carvalho, for a moment I became a tree supported by the whole workshop group, when, thanks to Dorota Glac, I learnt about the massage of the four elements, when, thanks to Geddy Aniksdal, I felt completely understood when she said „I have just like you, I also have the need to be alone“, and completely amused when she made her short video (prepared for our YT channel; you can watch it here:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq0xahe-yZo>

She ended with the words „muffins muffins!“. This „muffin“ comes from my freedom to translate some Polish expressions into English. I wrote an email to Geddy requesting a video (we had never met or been in touch before) and in it I called her an „international woman“ (polish informal „babczka, babka“) which I translated literally as „international muffin“. For the video, Geddy agreed and went on to write: „I have only one question to you? What does it mean to be a muffin? Is it an honorary word for being a woman\*? In that case, thank you!“ After two years in the project, I think that the first birthday muffin was a foreshadowing of the wonderful gift I received and that is taking on a life of its own, with lots of , muffins , around me and all of them like priceless gifts that have inspired me in many ways. I appreciate how fascinating this kaleidoscope is that is created from our feminine, feminist potential and our vulnerability. Nothing shakes me to my core anymore in a dizzy way because it stands on a solid foundation of shared experiences within the WPE. It seems to me that this is how the process of reclaiming one's power takes place. This is where I am today.



# MADRINSCENA

by Natasha Czertok

Teatro Nucleo

## MADRINSCENA

Artistic residency project curated by Teatro Nucleo dedicated to women artists who are mothers

Curated by Natasha Czertok

### Premises

Let us start with an assumption: what is motherhood?

As the philosopher Michela Marzano writes:

„Care, tenderness, support, presence, recognition, containment, transmission, humility. Being a mother, really being a mother, is many things. But all these things, with procreation, have only part to do with it. Since motherhood cannot be defined only from a biological, legal, social or even simply registry point of view. On the contrary. Philosophy is mother. Literature is mother. Science is mother. Education is mother. The Church is mother. Even a woman who has no children can be a mother. Even a man (with or without children) can be a mother. Motherhood is that vocation (which one may or may not have regardless of whether or not one has children) that allows one to create bonds, support, protect, encourage, accompany, recognise, and arouse vocations. Motherhood is universal, provided we leave the narrow paths of biology or law and enter the symbolic path of creativity and transmission.“

I would add that motherhood is a founding aspect of society, something that concerns all human beings, as well as the existence and presence of children although we fully share the idea that it is not an essential element for motherhood to exist. For many women artists, becoming a mother represents a moment of profound change, also from a creative point of view. As Cora Herrendorf, co-founder of the Teatro Nucleo, writes:

„Creating life is not something that can be done rationally. Childbirth is a wonderful and terrifying moment, a rite of passage. Creating shows was and is for me exactly like creating life. Beautiful, difficult, painful, indispensable. Most of my shows have been generated in nine months, as it happens. Cells coming together and creating your rhythm, your music, your poetry. It has everything to do with love. Without love there is no art, and without love there are no children, for me at least that's how it is.“

But what does a director, a mother actress need to work on creation without sacrificing her relationship with her children? Can motherhood be an added value to creation?

At a time in history - the pandemic crisis - when life for artists has turned out to be extremely fragile, whereas for female artists (and mothers) it has always been, we have opened a space for research and sharing on these issues, offering periods of artistic residency to three female artists of different ages, also to stimulate a generational comparison by integrating different aspects of artistic production: research, performance presentation and meetings, letting them interpret in a very personal way how to interpret the theme of motherhood, the feminine, and artistic heritage.

Francesca Mari, a circus performer born in 1988, brought her study TANGLE...in the womb of a juggler, born from research carried out in Polynesia, in the Tonga islands, on the culture and tradition of Hiko, a game based on throwing objects that later became the traditional Tau'olunga dance.

„Hiko is performed exclusively by women. I was fascinated that a discipline such as juggling, which has always been predominantly male here in the West (although the trend is changing nowadays), could be seen on the other side of the world as purely feminine. By immersing myself in this tradition, I was able to reflect on the figure of women, on the differences between different cultures, on the dimension of play, and on creation, a fundamental character of being a woman and also of being an artist“.

The second guest artist of the residency project promoted by Teatro Nucleo is Manuela Rossetti, born in 1978, with Mi última cueva, a theatre, performance and live music project, freely inspired by Sophocles' Antigone, with original music by Laura Desideri, which also saw the participation of her daughter Arianna, aged 7.

„Inspired by the various interpretations that literature and art have offered of the figure of Antigone, first and foremost the readings given of the character by the writer Marguerite Yourcenar in Fires, precisely Antigone, or of choice; and the Spanish writer Maria Zambrano in The Tomb of Antigone. In both authors, reference is made to the condition of denied motherhood.“

Lastly, Caterina Scotti, a historical member of the Teatro Tascabile of Bergamo, actress and theatre pedagogue who has been working with her daughter in the company for many years, participated. She led the workshop L'arte dei trampoli (The Art of Stilts), and presented "Amor sacro, Amor profano" (Sacred Love, Profane Love), a show that proposes a journey between Bharata Natyam - one of the classical Indian dances - and Flamenco, directed by Renzo Vescovi.

During the artistic residency period and during the festival, the artists were offered the opportunity to arrive with their children. In the case of Manuela Rossetti's residency, this presence also had a creative value within the residency project, as her daughter Arianna also took part in the performance. At first, thanks to the participation of some volunteers from the Carpa association, which participates in the organisation of the festival, moments of play and music and manual skills workshops were organised, and not least, the organisation of meals for the children. Then, especially during the festival, this 'separate space' became a shared space where, in addition to the volunteers, other people took turns in caring for the children. What we were able to observe and touch with our own hands is that the creative environment not only stimulates the children's curiosity, but also encourages people to take care of them when necessary.

The theme of motherhood and childcare was one of the topics discussed as part of the symposium 'Women in Theatre in Europe' during the Totem Scene Urbane festival (September 2021). Coordinated by Maria Augusta Nicoli, social researcher and author of articles and books on participatory processes, on devices for organisational social innovation in an international and

local perspective, and deputy coordinator of the Association Rede Unida Internacional (Brazil), it was a moment of important confrontation imagined as an open construction site, in which to share the experiences, difficulties, dreams and peculiarities of „female“ work in the world of theatre was understood as a place of creation and as a place of work, as a field of artistic, political and cultural experimentation.

The symposium was also attended by: Giulia Trivero of Amleta, an intersectional feminist collective that shines the spotlight on the presence of women in the world of entertainment, on the representation of women in classical and contemporary dramaturgy and is a vigilant and constant observer to combat violence and harassment in the workplace.

Barbara Luci Carvalho – director of the „Frauen International Theater Festival“ in Frankfurt, and coordinator of the project Women Performing Europe, presented during the symposium.

Marta Jalowska – „Collective Queer Teraz Poliz“, the first theatre group formed entirely by women in Poland.

Julia Varley – historical actress from Odin Teatret /Nordisk Teater Laboratorium (Denmark), who has been involved in gender studies since the 1980s as part of „The Magdalena Project“, the Transit festival and Open Page magazine

Bruna Braidotti – actress and director of the festival „La scena delle Donne“ in Pordenone, for many years she has also been involved in gender studies

Cora Herrendorf – director, theatrical trainer, founder of „Teatro Nucleo“, curator of gender pedagogical paths both in the field of psychic discomfort and in the theatrical field (Community Women project).

Caterina Scotti – historical actress of the „Teatro Tascabile“ of Bergamo, for which she takes care of part of the pedagogical activity, dealing in particular with the use of stilts, the use of the voice and the dramaturgical and experimental elaboration of the theatrical text. For years she has been working with her daughter in the theatrical field

Francesca Mari – a circus performer born in 1988, she studied at the Flic school in Turin and works as a circus artist in numerous circuses and is part of the „Gandini Juggling“ company. She is mother of Gea, who is 5 months old

Manuela Rossetti – director, actress, playwright, art director, theatre organiser, teacher of theatre for children and adults and theatre critic. Mother of Arianna (6 years old) and Amelia (2 years old). Graduated with honours in History of Theatre and Performance at La Sapienza University of Rome.

During the festival, the performative outcomes of the residencies were presented. Due to the difficulties linked to the covid 19 pandemic, we chose for the ninth edition of Totem Scene Urbane as the „festival-laboratory“ modality. The participants were all enrolled in the week-long workshop ‚The Art of Acting‘, which included practical and theoretical moments on various themes, including the feminine. This dimension of sharing was also very important in the moments of performance. After presenting their work, the artists were able to calmly confront themselves with the audience, which was not ‚external‘ but part of a single context, and this allowed them to explore the themes brought in different ways, even outside the ‚organised‘ moments. During lunches and dinners, during breaks, during workshops, during childcare.

The moments of confrontation between the partners‘ artistic practices, with the presence of an interested and aware audience, were very important.

Teraz Poliz brought the work demonstration constructed to tell the audience about the process of creating the performance ‚Lick it now“.

Natasha Czertok the workshop ‚Stereotypes and Bodies“ through which the director delves into research on stereotypes that also led to the creation of the performance ‚Kashimashi“. Presented in studio form as ‚Private Bestiary‘ at the Frauen festival in Frankfurt, and as a finished performance at the Transit festival in Holstebro.

Caterina Scotti led the open-air stilts workshop with a large number of women participating.

Barbara Luci Carvalho led the dance workshop ‚The Afrodiasporic Body“ and together with Julia Varley did a demonstration of work entitled ‚The Actress’s dramaturgy“ in which director Varley gave her directorial and interpretation instructions for a part of the show ‚Corpus Mundi“.

Teatro Nucleo presented the play ‚Il tempo del canto“, the latest production by director and co-founder Cora Herrendorf.

Julia Varley brought her show ‚Mr. Peanuts a character who cannot die“, which conveys the profound research of the historical actress of Odin Teatret and founder of the Transit festival, around a symbolic character of the company directed by Eugenio Barba, who was also present at the festival with a masterclass that was also an important moment of reflection precisely on the themes of the feminine.

Reflecting in retrospect on the sense of this project, with Veronica Ragusa and Marco Luciano with whom I organised and conceived the festival, and in particular on the sense of the ninth edition of the Totem Scene Urbane festival and the Madrlnscena project, the importance of giving space to dialogue with the opposite sex emerges, which also becomes a reflection on inclusion and the theme of gender. Creating more moments of sharing on the significance of the feminine in the field of art and creativity, beyond labels.

I want to conclude with a reflection by Manuela Rossetti on her study on Antigone,

Motherhood is always present in Antigone’s heart, it is part of her feeling of pity, and it is independent of motherhood in the physical and concrete sense. She has heard the cries of the women in the city under assault, she has tried to dissuade Polynices from his mad rush to war against his homeland, as a mother would have done (Antigone refers to her brother as her mother’s son) . She becomes the heroine of the unheard and offended female multitude, contesting the validity of the laws made by men yesterday, today and tomorrow, which trample on the eternal ones rooted in the interiority that everyone knows how to recognise. Antigone’s entire soul is nourished by a maternal sense, of being a WomanMother, which is not an instinct gushing from the bowels, but the conscious feeling of one’s duty of love towards every human being, the acceptance of every life, the respect of what we today call human rights.



(Photo by Katharina Dubno)

# ON THE EDGE OF HISTORY

A four-handed reflection by Cora Herrendorf and her daughter Natasha Czertok

## ON THE EDGE OF HISTORY

**Cora:** „I have always seen very clearly the red thread that connects me to my mother. A thread that crosses the Ocean, the one that she crossed by ship when she left Poland with her family to escape Nazism, the same one that I crossed to return to Europe and escape the Argentine dictatorship. A sea that contains this red thread made of art, music, painting, theatre and dance.

My mother built a special kind of matriarchy with her brothers and then with us, her daughters, one destined to become a psychoanalyst and the other, me, who would be an artist, inheriting her destiny, that life that Elka, my mother, abandoned. She stopped being an actress when she married. She gave so much love, the best teachers in music, theatre, dance and there I feel I betrayed her because I did not follow the thread she had imagined for me. I did not do the theatre she imagined. But who knows, if she had lived long enough perhaps she would still have been proud of my artistic journey.

The thread that binds me to her also contains the mystery of intuition, a feminine heritage that we often struggle to listen to, and which prompted me to trace the same path for my daughter, or at least try to. Like me, my daughter began studying piano at the age of 6. Like me, she studied dance from a young age. Inheritances, transitions, intertwining threads, beyond ‚good/evil , black/white, right/wrong‘. That is how my children came about, a totally irrational, intuitive choice. Creating life is not something you can do rationally. Childbirth is a wonderful and terrifying moment, a rite of passage.

Creating shows was and is for me exactly like creating life. Beautiful, difficult, painful, indispensable. Most of my shows have been generated in nine months, as it happens. Cells coming together and creating your rhythm, your music, your poetry. It has everything to do with love. Without love there is no art, and without love there are no children, for me at least that is how it is. And all my projects were born this way too, in this constantly changing forge that is Teatro Nucleo .

I have worked for many years with women, looking for myself, a reflection.

Sometimes I have succeeded quite well.

Sometimes threads are interrupted, mine was interrupted on 27 February with a heart attack, and now it is a matter of starting again, finding that thread again. Peace, war, death, life. Hate and love. There are so many questions still unanswered.

**Natasha** : I pick up the end of the thread left by Cora and the first word that comes to mind is Inheritance. I am 42 years old and I started doing theatre when I was 16. In fact, the first time I went on stage I was 10, I was playing a piece on the piano, dressed in white in the finale of Dream of a Thing, a play that Teatro Nucleo had created to tell the story of Rosa Louxemburg. I remember sitting, barefoot and agitated for the entire duration of the show, and then approaching the piano with terror and playing that little piece that was supposed to leave the audience with an emotion of purity and poetry, and an out-of-tune performance would have ruined everything.

Then during my tumultuous teenage years I moved away from the idea of theatre, I didn't know what I wanted to do, I certainly didn't want to be there. What did it mean to pick up that thread? To realise that it was the only place where I could be, to realise that it would be difficult, that I would have my parents as teachers and as directors, that I was good, and this would create big problems with the other actors and actresses in the group, and yet it was really the only place where I could be.

One day I realised that I was the one who had to hold up that thread. It was quite a sudden change, at a certain point I was no longer Horacio and Cora's daughter, it was just me, either I was in it or I wasn't. I staggered for a few months, then I realised I couldn't give up. Without really knowing how, I started directing shows, holding workshops, writing projects and filling all the holes. In pedagogy I found the primary sense of inheritance. Teaching theatre is like digging into one's own memory, understanding a teaching and making it your own, shaping the experience, always keeping the flame that has been handed down to us burning. To teach was to continue to learn, to study. It also is today, albeit in a lesser form. It is not the same to teach in your twenties as it is to teach in your forties. It is like love. With age it changes, everything changes.

I keep pulling the thread and some distant images arrive...

#### **First image:**

July 1989, Mir Caravane, Leningrad Red Army Park.

I am nine years old, I am told there is a piano on the stage, so I go with my clipboard, take out the sheet music and start playing that grand piano which is too big for my timid scales and exercises from „Czerny“. The weather is bad and there is no one around in the camp. Out of nowhere comes Timour, a 16-year-old red-haired boy, sits next to me and teaches me two rounds of blues, the only ones I have ever learned. I remember that the folder where I kept my music books had a Scottish pattern, that Timour wore a black cap and a white shirt.

#### **Second image:**

August 1989, Mir Caravane, somewhere in Europe.

I am entrusted with Julia, a very blond 2 year old girl, daughter of Ewa, a very good Polish actress who has to go on stage and there is no other way, I will be her babysitter. Julia cries, wants mummy, says a few words I don't understand and don't know how to make myself understand. There is no TV, no computer, no children's books in that caravan. I find a tin of sultanas, I offer them to her, she smiles, maybe she had never tasted it, she is very happy, and time passes like that, between giggles and big handfuls of sultanas. The tin is white and round, Julia empties it, I will reuse it to put in coins from the various countries we will continue to cross during the long journey.

#### **Third image:**

September 1989, Mir Caravane, Berlin.

The Mir children cross the camp as they do every day, but this is a special day. It is the birthday of someone from the group Kokò, the Senegalese musicians, and they have invited the children to eat with them. We eat with our hands, everything is incredibly spicy, it does not matter if it is good or not, what matters is that we are all there around some kind of big frying pan and we can eat with our hands. Mir Caravane was a trip we made across Europe from Russia to Paris in five months with 20 theatre companies. There were many children, of all ages, and it was normal to take care of them, just as it was normal for us to take care of each other, us children. I often mention this experience when talking about motherhood in the artistic-creative sphere, because it marked me deeply, it left a great void when it ended. For many of the groups that soon took part in it, it was then a matter of rethinking everything, making important choices, big changes. It was like a long dream, the kind you hope won't end. A kind of theatre paradise, a practical realisation of all the ideals for which we fought, a perfect and idyllic social experiment, a wonderfully fragile and precarious machine that worked by magic, in total contrast to reality.

The human tide was moving in one direction, with joy, effort, collective effort, and shared problems. Everything worked with the management of the children because there were so many parents, we knew what we were talking about (or so it seemed). It was not a matter of priorities but of understanding and sharing. It is much easier to manage 20 children than to manage two. When there were only two of us, my brother and I, before and after Mir Caravane, everything was much more difficult. We had no grandparents or other relatives so it was often a matter of spending afternoons alone. I speak at length about my experience as a child because I grew up in the midst of theatre, and many of the choices I made, including that of becoming a mother, certainly have their roots there, as well as in the red thread that Cora spoke of.

What I can see today is a great difficulty in understanding what motherhood is, parenthood, above all I see a difficulty in understanding it, in making it part of the general flow, of life, of everyday life. Children belong to those who make them, it was their choice and they are the ones who have to manage it. Especially women, clearly. I see an obsessive control of the children's movements, the terror that someone will grab them and take them away is always palpable.

I see a great loneliness, of mothers and children, in all contexts, even in the theatre . I start from here in trying to imagine possible solutions, spaces in which motherhood, parenthood, and artistic creation can coexist, in a continuous stubborn attempt to dismantle the 'mystique' of motherhood as a marvellous, perfect and immutable thing. It is a daily effort, which I share with my workmates, and I realise how much things change when there are other children, other parents. Not that it is easier, quite the contrary. Simply, everything acquires a different meaning.

The presence of several generations enriches the creative environment in my eyes, although it makes it more complex to manage. But it is not a simple matter. For example, the greatest difficulty lies, in my opinion, in managing creative time: theatre work is not like office work, sometimes it takes many hours, without interruptions, to get a minimum result. If you have to interrupt the process then picking up that thread again often becomes very difficult, if not impossible. On the other hand, it can also happen that the urgency to close a job, to find a solution, make the process quicker. It is a constantly changing balance.

Motherhood is a mother word, it has no synonyms, it has daughter words instead: parenthood, reproduction, care are just some of them. It is a broad word, related to coming into the world. I wish I could continue to explore some of the possible declinations that motherhood can take today, to explore the semantic field it encompasses. Perhaps we need to find new words and with them new thoughts to narrate our relational today, to represent creation in a physical and metaphorical sense. To enrich these reflections through the exchange of direct experiences, to strengthen the roots.



(Performance: „Il tempo del canto“)

# HOW A PERFORMANCE IS BORN

by Natasha Czertok

## HOW A PERFORMANCE IS BORN

Thoughts around Kashimashi , Frauen Festival and Women Performing Europe

### Direction Notes

around two years ago a dear friend and colleague Brazilian actress, Barbara Luci Carvalho called me from Germany, where she lives and works, to talk to me about a European project in which she intended to involve me, the theme was women and theater, in continuity with an international project already existing since the 1980s, the Magdalena Project, which defines itself as a „dynamic intercultural network of theater and female performances, which intends to facilitate critical discussion, support and training“. Some points immediately started connecting in my mind. First of all, while I was talking to Barbara, I was holding Noemi, my second daughter, who was three months old, in my arms. For some time now I had been asking myself several questions about the real possibility of reconciling my work and being a mother, not of one, but of two little girls (one of whom was twelve years old) . The second point concerned the Magdalena Project, of which I had known the beginnings, having participated with my mother in the first meetings organized by the women of the group theaters who were giving life to that movement, I was a child then but old enough to understand that there was happening something important. And all the other points that began to connect during the phone call were given by the numerous reflections that arose in me as a woman in twenty years of work in theater.

I started researching, reading things I already knew but never know enough. For example, in Italy there is an impressive number of female prison directors: why? Is simple. Prison directors followed the same curriculum as a magistrate, but the career in the judiciary is entirely reserved for men. So the women go to run the prisons.

And how many women direct a theater in Italy? I don't think an estimate has ever been made, but surely you can count them on the fingers of one hand. So theatrical seasons are directed by men, which explains a lot of how female directors are viewed. In most cases there are „pink reviews“ or „dedicated spaces“ on symbolic days such as March 8th or November 25th. It doesn't do much better in independent theater companies: even here, if a woman wants to direct, she has to create her own space.

I read, I wrote, but something was missing. I felt the need to process all this information with a language that was closer to me, and decided to bring these reflections into a new theatrical research. Without knowing yet where I was going, I started from the body. I already had some elements in mind. The lion mask, the boxes, the desire to play, tease me on the stage, avoid victimhood. But I needed more voices, more elements. I wrote a letter to friends and colleagues, people of different ages, sexes, ethnic and social backgrounds and I started a choreographic research „in the field“, filtering through my study on movement the images that began to arrive in the most diverse forms: self-portraits, paintings, poems, songs. A sort of virtual laboratory through which I intended to obtain a broader spectrum on the themes at the center of the investigation. I didn't want to focus so much - or only - on the concept of „feminine“, or woman as a sexual

being, but rather investigate the stereotypes in which we recognize ourselves / which we reject / in which we feel constrained. The „putting into shape“ of the world that the human being puts in place to be effective in its tendency towards universality necessarily uses a symbolic modality, and it is to these symbols that I refer in the performance *Private Bestiary*, born from this study .

The responses to my letter have been many and varied. Hasty, deep, precise, doubtful, critical, amused, unexpected. A whirlwind of images of different shapes and nature. I felt in most of the people to whom I sent my request a strong commitment, a drive to get involved, a desire to be there. I was very touched by the contribution of a homosexual friend who sent me some images of the Stonewall protests in 1969 that led to the first Gay Pride, for example. the song by Anthony and the Johnsons „You are my sister“ is dedicated to him and accompanies one of the last scenes of the performance, in which lipstick paints a disturbing grin on my face which then becomes a clown.

Working alone is not easy. Give yourself clear goals, deadlines, understand what you are doing. You always need someone on the other side, at least in the beginning. It may seem strange, considering that I have many smart and close colleagues, but in this case the synergy was born with Marcos Rossi, a very dear Argentine friend who lives in Mexico where he runs a dance company. We got closer during the lockdown, in that strange period when we were all at the PC and participated in festivals, aperitifs, inaugurations and celebrations of all kinds. We started training together, discussing the materials that were starting to come from my work on rehearsal room.. I started shooting short videos of the pieces I was creating, organizing myself day by day, fitting the times of creation with those of the child, and making this experience a sort of “practical workshop”. Nothing was accidental: creation and motherhood, my changed body returning to dance, the new contact with Marcos ( known more than twenty years ago in the period spent at the Ballet Teatro del Espacio in Mexico City) , the visual and audio contributions and videos that arrived every day, like parts of a whole that was taking shape in a harmonious way, pieces of a self-made puzzle.

I saw clearly the image of a feminine whose substance is made of listening, of perception of Life in its entirety: following intuition, chances, small daily signals. With a good dose of self-irony, indispensable when approaching a work on stereotypes.

I started keeping a diary and writing down the images that appeared before my eyes without being called, transcribing texts from the books that came into my hands, and creating links between the contributions that came in response to my letter. The connections and images have become gestures and signs that I have begun to integrate into a choreography, and in parallel the search for music was born. I soon came across the sound environments created by Vincenzo Scorza, an attentive „sound sculptor“ who knows how to introduce very different elements into his patterns, sometimes discordant, with strange and refined results that seemed to me to fit perfectly with the actions that I was outlining and I asked him to insert some audio contributions in one of the tracks, as they had been sent to me, and after a few attempts we opted to keep only some

elements, such as segments, fragments of a speech, which created an environment rather than a set of texts, and I added some contributions in English since one of the presentation dates of the study was planned in Germany.

We closed the first draft close to the first presentation of the study which took place on September 13th 2020 (at the *Altre Visioni* festival in Coltano in the province of Pisa) with the first title “*Private Bestiary*”. Of course, having a date was essential for me to start pulling the strings, understand where I was going , and to get as much feedback as possible from my colleagues and from spectators. And when I started pulling those strings “the boxes” arrived.

There is nothing to do, at some point they always arrive, I just can't help it. In *Domino*, the street theater show I directed, “the box” is a metal cube measuring 3 meters per side, here in *Kashimashi* are cardboard boxes that I bring to the stage all stacked and that I arrange in space as the first action . Each box contains a stereotype, a creature, a strange beast that then becomes a character, but also an aspect of a woman's personality.

Why *Kashimashi*?

the Japanese language is full of sexist words . *Kashimashi* is a word that evokes the gathering of women and is synonymous with chaos and noise. A perfect title, which encapsulates the sense of violence that I try to portray through the kaleidoscope of characters that alternate in the scene, which are also aspects of the personality of a woman or of all women, who are many women in one, every day, every moment of their lives.

In *Kashimashi*, violence is always present, sometimes in the centre, sometimes behind, or hidden somewhere, like the scene in which I wear a „roaring“ tiger's head and find myself heterodirected by a recorded male voice which, like the notes of a script gives me increasingly strict instructions on how to say the lines (indicating pauses, laughter, volume, ...). As the critic Michele Pascarella pointed out, „it is not so much a play of forces between the author and the performer, nor only between the man and the woman, but, broadening, it is about the overwhelming power of language“. The monologue I perform with this mask narrates an episode of male domestic violence against a woman, and what is truly disturbing is the author's inability to realise the machismo he is imbued with. In the end, the most egregious violence is precisely this crushing, stereotypical view of women as victims.

Victim or whore, or at the limit, martyr.

Irony and self-irony are the weapons I have chosen to play against this vision.

poetic, philosophical and visual contributions: Stefania Bruno, Mara Guidi, Sara Draghi, Hassan Al Aouni, Massimiliano Piva, Elisa Bottoni, Elisa Galeati, Barbara Chinaglia, Valentina Caggio, Martina Pagliuoli, Andrea Amaducci, Marco Pasquale, Anidia Villani, Marcela Grassi, Marcella Formenti, Emanuele Piva, Alvise De Fraja, Marcos Ariel Rossi

# FUGUE IN ME MINOR

by Veronica Ragusa

## FUGUE IN ME MINOR

Behind the scenes of a feminist project

Since the very beginning of the Erasmus+ Project “Women performing Europe” I’ve been involved in a number of talks, symposiums, encounters, workshops together-with-for several women, developing their feminist practices all over Europe and the world. It’s been easy for me to understand that I wasn’t ready for this. Years of political and artistic work in several feminist environments and movements (Non Una di Meno, MalaFemme, Go\_Diva Collective, Arabian Women Association in Turin, Cagne Sciolte in Rome etc...) were completely useless: even though we were struggling for the same things (apparently) there was something in the partnership of this European project that put me out of my comfort zone, and it was the enormous differences between us, the partners.

So I started looking for a thread that could help us working together in synergy and after one year and a half, I finally found it. The ground on which we were walking together was that of the artists’ nation, a floor that could disappear every second, burning in some moments, welcoming and soft in others. It was artistically that we were facing every challenge, every topic, every meeting. It was our artistic work leading our actions, our way of speaking and supporting or commenting each other. It was an ancient love for art and workcraft that made us able to really confront, and get to unexpected results.

Coming from years in which the most important was to clearly state a need, a political wish or position, realising what I just said, brought me to a kind of revolution – and a feeling of release that I’d never felt before. So I didn’t have to show myself bigger than I am or behave like dead to survive in this societarian jungle we’re living in! I can be weak. I can be beautiful. I can be harmful.

It might sound obvious, it was obvious to me as well in a rational way. To really feel it is another matter completely. I found myself in a group of people whispering in my ear: we will support you anyway.

Is there a better definition of the word “love”?

That’s how, and why, I started working on the solo “Fugue in Me Minor”.

Running away from standard topics, and trying to give justice to what this process meant for me, I decided - together with Marco Luciano, theatre director in Teatro Nucleo, the one able to catch all the feelings and meanings I was expressing – to explore the huge theme of Love.

Particularly, I wanted to feel that sensation of support and release forever. I wished to be able to pass that feeling on to an audience, like a gift that made me as happy and grateful as the person receiving it.

We decided to start from an uncomfortable and poetic love story, that helped us in being creative and embodying our images: we drew inspiration from the poetries and the love story between Arthur Rimbaud and Jean-Paul Marie Verlaine. During the life of this project, we quite often discussed the role that men could have in our activities, whether to include them or not, and to what extent. Each of us gave different answers, but - as I said before - our common ground was so artistic that in the end the female/male difference was replaced by the matter of feminine and masculine (energies). All of us were completely ok working with gender fluid people, to show their tits in front of a traditional binary audience, to face together topics such as "intersectionality". Why? Because it was clear that we were led by the feminine principle. Every situation, every meeting, every room where we were together was full of that particular energy; that's something I'm very proud of.

Carrying this particular energy with me during the creative process has been vital.

So, we started to tell the brave and fragile love story between Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine - as a narrative pretext to the creation of the solo "Fugue in Me Minor". A controversial, scandalous, wrong, sublime story, full of selfishness and emotional greed, paved with verses never written, as bright as a child's game. The story of a love on the run, or the escape from a love. Undefined hunger, passionate thirst, boundless joy, a desperate yearning for something that could be even remotely close to their idea of freedom and poetry; two contrasting personalities locked in a tender conflict, between themselves and the world, as if they were two souls trapped in the same soap bubble, looking for a way out. There they go, running away, escaping, from one European capital to another, away in the fumes of alcohol and drugs, away in tears, away in kisses, in the woods, at the sea...Chasing each other and singing in the attempt to „be“ poetry. As in the pianist's Fugue the two hands run after each other relentlessly, so did the two poets, fleeing in a spiral inside and outside of themselves, in a vortex that seems to put under a magnifying glass the contrasting feelings, fears, smiles and miseries that dwell within each of us.

We did not intend to narrate the story of the two poets in this work, but rather to investigate some of the archetypes it offers: each person carries within him or her a poetic creature on the run, suspended between the desire to love and the need to be loved, between instinct and reason, superb failures and fleeting victories, guilt and desire, memory and hope. One or more subjects pursuing and eluding countersubjects, as in the thematic material composing the musical genre of the „Fugue“. Inspired by the structure of this musical genre, we built the dramaturgy in three movements: *esposizione*, *divertimento* and *stretto*.

From a „divertimento“ we made up the title: Fugue in Me minor, a wordplay that opened up the way for poetic intuitions, narrative and musical references that have fuelled our theatrical work, our dance, songs and movements. Escaping the outside world to find shelter within oneself didn't seem to us to be an appropriate artistic act for these times we are living, nor do we believe in the cliché of the solitary artist who admires the infinite. But we are convinced that within each of ourselves, lies the archetypes and cultural ‚vices‘ from which we must learn to flee.

After the private and delicate moment of the very creation, I was looking forward to show this small

result to the women that inspired so many reasonings and gave me such inputs and strength: this work-in-progress was presented during the 10th edition of the Transit Festival in Holstebro, where I had the precious chance to collect feedbacks from masters such as Jill Greenhalgh, Helen Varley Jamieson, Eugenio Barba, Bernhard Bub and from the project partners from Protagon e.V., Teraz Polis and Nordisk TheaterLaboratorium.

I regret not having asked for Julia Varley's and Brigitte Cirla's feedbacks: unfortunately, my strange shyness stopped me from that. I simply thought I would have been annoying. I really hope there'll be other occasions. I believe the thread we are holding is everlasting.



(Photograph: [Daniele Mantovani](#))

# PARTICIPANT'S REFLECTIONS

## Geddy Aniksdal

I wanted to write. I tried to write. I wrote. I was fascinated by the stories of Anais Nin, of Karen Blixen, of the Scandinavian Bohemians; you will write about your own life...

I had the wrong idea that my written words would shape themselves, and come out - deep, wise, sharp, witty and truly original.

They did not. They were not right for me, they were in a certain way not mine, stolen feathers, someone else's coat. Shoes too big for me.

I had this strong belief or ideal, that you wrote when you were inspired, and naturally, you were inspired. Far from it. Still, I think back to the young woman that I was, with sympathy, because she so much wanted to write like that.

The first text I wrote was when we published material about our theatre's work back in the eighties. I published excerpts from my logbook/ diary, and later I wrote for the programme for the performance. Started to have to weigh my words, make them reflect what we did, what we wanted, what we had tried.

In the nineties we women started the newsletter for the Magdalena Project, and we wrote in a semi-professional/semi-personal/professional tone, that felt reassuring.

Then we made an important shift in our writing history; we went from the newsletter to The Open Page, where we planned to collect articles, poems, letters from women in contemporary theatre, where each edition had a different theme, where women wrote in their mother tongue, or more often English.

I had a hard time accepting the long, tedious, often boring work of writing, rewriting, editing. Starting again. This was the real thing. This was serious. This was hard work, not often inspired. This was the beginning of really learning to write. How glad I am that I was part of this collective. Of serious, constructive, honest feedback and a push here and a shove there when needed. Now so many years later I am glad if I receive feedback that tells me I am on to something!

My first solo performance was based on the last poems Sylvia Plath wrote.

I saw copies of poems that poets worked on, famous poems that had many versions before they became what we now know as THE poem. This showed how much work is involved, and still, I had this inkling that if something was well enough felt, thought, seen, the precise words should appear at once.

I needed to find the tools and the patience and to have several attempts at the same text. There were so many other voices. I needed to find mine. To recognize it.

Whilst singing, dancing, moving, even speaking, it felt easier to find my writer's voice? Where was

**my own writer's voice?**

For most of my life I have kept a diary, and my friends know me as a letter writer, even today I write handwritten letters and send them by snailpost. When I started here in Grenland Friteater, my diary became a log, an archive, a journal, a repository of pictures, programmes, different kinds of paraphernalia. In the letters we wrote each other in the Magdalena Project you could see something of the same, formal letterhead, crisp yellow paper, typed letter, and, on the bottom half of the page, scribbles in pen, and in more personal words. True for our project, true for our lives.

In the early nineties when we started The Open Page, a journal for women in contemporary theatre, I was occupied with the need to make women practitioners write, perhaps for the first time, about their experiences in theatre. Every edition had a different topic, so there was always more than one angle, more than one possibility. From the beginning we wanted a mixture of first time and more experienced writers, scholars and academics.

We, in the editorial board, were like midwives, helping the first time articles to be born. By encouraging, sending back, writing or phoning or faxing when the deadline was getting too close, telling the new writers to hang on in there, the reward is seeing your own words in print, amongst many other articles from other artists.

There was also something to learn not only from your own mistakes, but also, as an editor, learning to shape, cut, reshape.

I keep Virginia Wolfe's words close to my heart; Give a woman five hundred pounds and a room of her own!

Geddy Aniksdal

Grenland Friteater

Porsgrunn , Norway May 2022

**Brigitte Cirila****"My joy is unbroken"**

There are so many different stories to describe MP and telling this adventure from the perspective of 2022, is a way of rewriting and reinterpreting this story.

Several things stand out to me strongly:

we were all from the same generation, we were all in alternative theater/music groups, we were all becoming professionals, and we all felt we were alone in the face of a silent and denied social injustice. We were crossed by all these questions concerning our place as an artist, as a woman, as a mother, in front of an unbeatable glass ceiling, we did not have the listening or the support of our partners or colleagues because no one understood what we were experiencing, intimately, and we ourselves didn't necessarily have the words.

I have often said that it was rage that had founded MP and that there originated its profound necessity. It is inaccurate, it was not just that, there was also an appetite for creation, for work, an enormous desire to work, to create, to make one's place, to find the means, to live from one's work, to present one's works. And the task for each, alone, was superhuman.

Meeting each of us was ground-breaking and gave us immeasurable energy; I remember being amazed to realize that my concerns, my discrepancies were not only mine but those of women artists in general. The times were different, it was not glamorous to defend feminist issues, even with our partners, our directors and our audiences... It was not commercially beneficial either, not in fashion, it was complicated and it projected us even further to the margins of the alternative system. It is important to realize this because the theoretical reflection, the putting into words, the writing, the putting in perspective only came at a second time, after the creation of MP.

We had to think about what we were groping for, without model, without reference, and there we discovered the discussion, the confrontation, all the differences we had, the importance of cultural antagonisms, the semantic value of a word, the symbols so different for each, we discovered how much what seemed obvious and simple to us, could be problematic for the other... and in these meanders of communication, we sought and found how to continue together, how to carry a project without agreeing on everything and even sometimes without agreeing at all. Because what carried us, what united us, was vital for us, and essential and there was no other option, no other alternative to carry our voices.

We who were speechless, without words, without recognized legitimacy, have gradually learned, first to listen to each other, then to let each other speak. We no longer wanted any words to be silenced or repressed, and we had to let out waves of logorrhea.

At that time, the «Round» appeared, a circle that gives the floor for a specific time to each without comment or interruption. It is an exercise that seems surreal today, because it is long, it takes time, it immerses most people in listening to others and in listening to the echoes made by the

words of others. It curbs emotional reactivity and allows thought to unfold. But it is also a radical way of giving everyone a voice, especially those who would not have allowed themselves to do so.

Then came the necessity of writing, and it was The Open Page, a newspaper that asked artists to move on to the written word, to leave traces, stones on the path that others could consult. The Open Page was one of the important means of exploring this work of thought, of reflection on our art, our place, our lives.

The other founding principle of MP is „do it“. We started with this, without really thinking; Jill Greenhalgh proposed a meeting of 38 women from 15 countries for 3 weeks in 1986 to also create a laboratory/show together without leading. It seemed incoherent and impossible but behind this bet, everyone went to work for 3 weeks, and it was never discussed.

One of the things I learned in MP is the commitment to create, to work, to do. I know, as an artist, that I have to set foot on the set physically and search with my body and my voice to trace the threads of the beginning of a creation. We did the same with MP, we used the creative tools we knew to grow this network, with the deep conviction that the solutions are always found in the process of construction or creation.

The themes chosen for meetings, festivals, workshops always came from our obsessions and questions. Friendship, respect, fidelity, benevolence are born of shared tasks and have grown with projects, difficulties, time.

Anyone who has ever come to a MP festival has always said the same words: 'it is different from other festivals'.

There are several principles of difference that have emerged from practice as evidence:

Having participated in several festivals (at least 2) before creating an event yourself, the guest artists come for the entire duration of the festival, workshops, and shows included and not only for the performances, the importance of transmission, workshops, discussions and always a space for work in progress, risk-taking.

One of our greatest strengths is the exponential power of contamination rather than the capacity for conviction or persuasion. The women who come in a MP meeting, choose themselves to create other meetings in their own country that is how MP 2nd, 3rd and even 4th generation were born and how other projects develop that completely escape the initial seed.

MP is at the beginning the creation of a generation of women, greedy and impatient who did not want to wait for a place and decided to create it and support each other. At the beginning, MP is the creation of a generation of women, greedy and impatient who did not want to wait for a place and decided to create it and support each other. This generation has often developed its artistic work through long learning processes and «of craftsman at work» traditions, the awareness that creative work is slow, laborious and requires years of uninterrupted practice, that the path is paved with pitfalls and failures, and that nothing is due.

We didn't have social networks, the internet, or even cell phones, so the need to be in touch was imperative. We had to meet at all costs and I remember the importance of the waiting time for these meetings, the preparation time but also the time to digest what had been said, seen, felt, exchanged.

Everything has changed and nothing has changed. Women artists still have to fight twice as hard to find their place today. There is more audience and echoes given to our words but they are often drowned in the incessant flow of emotional comments and spontaneous and ephemeral statements.

MP remains a special place, of risk-taking and yet being protected, of discovery, of listening, of meeting and of commitment. Of this generation of thirty years old, we have become the grandmothers: unwise, always rebellious, always enthusiastic, more impatient than ever because time is running out for us now.

I discover a new injustice, that of my age, this place that I conquered, rehearsal after rehearsal, I am proposed to leave it for the „young people“. More politely, I am offered to rest! I am not tired of creating, of „doing“, of meeting, of exchanging and I even believe that along the way, I have discovered some nuggets.

There is a conformism in our society which would like to confine seniors to transmission and teaching as if the source of creation could no longer exist. I believe it's the exact opposite. Of course, there is transmission, but it has always been there, alongside and nourished by the act of creation.

What can be transmitted is the "joy" of doing at all costs, "the joy" of joining forces with others, not similar but with the same urgencies, "the joy" of trusting one's desires, and of never giving up. Obstinacy seems to me to be the most necessary quality today for those who take on these still unresolved questions, woman/artist/mother/private/public/ and I will add the artist and „the splendor of ages“ (title of upcoming Transit Festival).

## SPACE, PATHS, BRIDGES – Lauren Boissonnet

It is listening to Meg Ella Brookes singing during the closing round of Transit 10, where the partners of the Women Performing Europe were invited, that the words of this text are starting to appear on the paper.

“If you want to thank me, clean the theatre before you leave. I’m not kidding.” Julia Varley just said. Everyone reacts. Tears come to my eyes as I hear the last goodbyes of the circle. I look at all those faces and I think to myself: “What a wonderful and powerful place I’m in.” How did I happen to arrive here and sit with these people. Who brought me here? The director of this festival, the leader of this project, the tour manager, myself, the people before me, a strange and yet magical hazard?” I sit here in awe and can’t really explain this mix of strength and melting sensation I am experiencing. Maria Porter just said “The best way to move forward is to clean”. Everyone reacts. Strange ideas come to my mind. I want to clean as well. People mention that space again. “Comfort zone”, “safe space”, “creating the space”, “home far from home”, “place of meeting and exchange”. “a place for my voice and theirs, my story and theirs”.

Someone in the round says she feels like a sponge. It is maybe the closest definition of how I feel: I can only take it all in, I can’t decide for anything in particular, I just want it all. I am welcoming each voice and each story as they are offered to me.

Barbara Luci Carvalho, the leader of this project and colleague of mine within the association protagon e.V., has invited me as well as all the other people of our group to take part in this adventure. I have tried to come closer to it by supporting her with what it required, that is to say a lot of paperwork, computer tasks and organisational support. The reward I got was far away from what I expected. I saw my work getting paid back with priceless artistic and human experiences, historical encounters and incredible speeches.

The question of space has been very relevant for me and in my approach to the project. I had the chance to get involved in the process thanks to my position in the theatre group of Barbara. I had never been part of such a project, it was new for me on an artistic level but also because I was directly thrown into the administration and the organisation field. I started writing down what was said in the meetings, collecting important documents and gathering content, supervising tasks and establishing schedules. Very fast I found myself travelling with Barbara to Poland, Italy and Denmark, to meet our partners and engage in the creative process. I felt extremely grateful to be part of such meetings. However the wish of wanting to be able to do more was constantly accompanying me. I wanted to engage more with them and be resourceful for the project as well. I wanted to participate deeper in a way that my contribution would make the project grow and thrive.

Today, as the project is almost behind us, I can assert you one thing... If one wants to give more, one can create space in order to do so. It may take some good connections with others, it may take more time and energy, and sometimes makes you do a lot of detours, but more than anything else it requires courage. Courage is what was most helpful to me when I had to speak up about my opinions without knowing the ground on which I was stepping; when I had to stand up in front of the project participants and lead the workshop, or when I got to represent the project in different events... Courage to take initiative when it is maybe the first time that you do so, courage to join trainings that you are not familiar with, courage to say yes to something completely unknown...

Once you take that step and enter that space, the other elements re-organise around you in order to function with you, just as it happens in a chemistry experiment. I saw myself not only growing and undertaking more responsibility, but ultimately creating the space for others to enter the process. I heard many times and from the beginning of the project Barbara talking about “being part of something bigger than us”. I knew that we were engaging on a path that many women before us had taken and prepared for us; we even met some of them during the activities such as the founders of the Magdalena project. I also knew that we would play an important role on this path too.

I believe that we can never assess with complete certainty the importance of what comes out of the seeds we sow. And nevertheless I saw how many artists answered our calls to support our project, how many people followed with deep interest the speeches and activities we gave. I saw the participants of our workshops opening up through the theatre trainings and building enough trust among themselves to share their personal stories and emotions. I have seen how many people the project has reached, touched and eventually changed. For me it was the confirmation that we had been successful in creating a bridge of knowledge and solidarity between womxn.

The bridges we are creating are visible on the map when you look at the continents/countries of origin/native languages of our partners and participants. This was indeed part of our goal, our vision of “crossing borders” to create a dialogue between different cultural backgrounds, as well as an inclusive international platform. Another form of bridges is also visible when you simply look at the pictures of the project: you can see children, parents and elderly people sitting and reflecting together. Our wish was to open a space for generations to meet and share, but also for an important legacy to be passed on. Last but not least, we also worked with the question of genders and queerness, we managed to reflect together and share educational tools and concepts such as the one of intersectionality.

# GALLERY

## GALLERY

**IFTF, Frankfurt 2020**

<https://vimeo.com/465818808>

(filmmaker Petra Schorr)



**Pandora's Box**

<https://vimeo.com/715225021>

(Edith van den Elzen)



### Totem Urbane Festival, Ferrara 2021

<https://fb.watch/ggN4aRY-sl/>  
(Filmmaker Alejandro Ventura)



### Transit festival, Denmark 2022

<https://vimeo.com/763350706>  
(Edith van den Elzen)



### The Roots, Warsaw 2022

<https://vimeo.com/763387737>  
(Edith van den Elzen)



# IMPRESSUM

## WOMEN PERFORMING EUROPE

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**Women Performing  
Europe - The Magdalena  
Project Across Borders**

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### More about Women Performing Europe

 Tool-Kit | <https://bit.ly/3Sbx9XB>

 Youtube | [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=women+performing+europe](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=women+performing+europe)

 Website | <http://women-performing-europe.com>

### About The Magdalena Project

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