Performing the paradox: collaboration as intervention in *Eis o Homem*

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After the economic crisis of 2008, Portugal, like other European countries, underwent a readjustment programme based on neo-liberal principles. This programme widened the gap between rich and poor and elevated the economic over the social, the political and the affective. This paper analyses the devised performance *Eis o Homem* (Behold Man) as both an artistic and intellectual intervention in this context of crisis. It suggests that collaboration between artists on an explicitly non-hierarchical basis functioned as a coping mechanism for both the artists involved and the audience. The material generated during rehearsals contrasted the powerful *reality* of life as lived by Portuguese citizens during this period with the *Real*, that, as Slavoj Zizek has argued, masked this reality with social discourses that emphasized that there was no alternative to the dominance of the market. It concludes that such forms of theatrical collaboration, which explicitly contemplate the right to dissensus, can lead to complex, transformative responses to social situations and to dialogically-informed performances.

Keywords: collaboration and participation; performance as intervention; eis o Homem; real and reality; economic crisis; Participative Action Research

Subject classification codes: include these here if the journal requires them

Introduction

The following account describes the performance *Eis o Homem,* [Behold Man], whose title referenced Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo: How one becomes what one is* (1908). Its creative process showed that working collaboratively helps to deal with situations of crisis and can also be a form of political intervention. It demonstrated that constructing a collective based on the value of each individual acts as an alternative to the dominant logic of hierarchy, competition and individualism. Collaborative methods also illustrated how performance allows for the materialisation of dissensus as well as

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contradictory perspectives and desires in the same aesthetic object. As such, performance can be both a form of intervention towards transformation and a fruitful context for empirical research into how to overcome the limitations imposed by a contemporary culture characterised predominantly by financial, patriarchal and colonial traditions and values.

The methodological approach adopted in this article is auto-ethnographic description (e.g., Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2010, 1) - an approach to writing and research that aims to describe and to analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*). It was written retrospectively and charts the psychological, social, economic, critical and philosophical conditions that led to the creation of the performance. Based on an analysis of the practical effects of neoliberalism in contemporary societies during the crisis of 2008, this article shows that the negative effects of the crisis were mitigated through collaborative work and artistically addressed in a theatre production. While there have been abundant discussions, for example, in critical literature, on the prevalence and significance of collaboration (e.g., Bishop 2012; Kester 2011) which have challenged the mystification that decision-making is primarily pragmatic or consensual, little has been written about how collectives deal with inherent constraints and dissent within collaborative processes. This article acknowledges the existence of moments of conflict during the creative process and shows that such moments are important in interweaving different individual perspectives and materialising different or contradictory desires in the same performance. The fact that collaboration prompted personal and social transformation in this particular case indicates the importance of further research into this still underdeveloped area of performance analysis. If the necessary monetary, human and spatial conditions are met, performance becomes a particularly fruitful domain for exploring alternative possibilities for enhancing human development and the construction of more horizontal, inclusive and free societies (Silva and Menezes 2016).

Starting points for Eis o Homem
The desire to create *Eis o Homem* emerged in 2011 in the context of the 2008 global economic crisis. Authors such as Piketty, ([2012] 2016) have claimed that a recurrent strategy adopted by many governments facing economic difficulties during this period was to put in place a set of reforms that cut drastically all forms of public

spending, especially in areas related to knowledge and human development such as art and culture, education and science. This disinvestment in the social field, however, often took place at the same time as enormous amounts of public funds were injected into the private sector, particularly banks that needed to be saved from bankruptcy due to unsound ethical and financial practices (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso 2014, 25-26; Piketty 2014, 337-38). As a result, many citizens found themselves in a situation of poverty (Piketty 2014, 343-44), increasing an already oversized population of thousands of millions of citizens all over the world who lived precariously as well as the gap between the rich and the poor (OxFam, 2017). Portugal implemented an austerity program in 2011 designed by the Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank, European Commission), which was deliberately intensified by a newly appointed right-wing government. Official unemployment rates reached 17%, forcing the (lucky) employed to accept lower salaries for a greater number of tasks and inequality reached unprecedented levels in Portugal (OECD 2013, 1-4). As the theatre company that I had been working with for seven years was dissolved due to cuts in public funding, I also found myself unemployed. For a theatre actor in Portugal, not having a contract is more often the norm than the exception and that had been the case for most of my working life. However, having enjoyed a less precarious professional situation, now framed as a 'privilege' that was being withdrawn for hundreds of thousands of other citizens, led me to an even more profound questioning of my work, my choices, my life and the world. As a result of the economic recovery programme, the idea that human beings were expendable, disposable and replaceable assets was becoming the norm and gaining progressive legitimacy (Stiegler and Neyrat 2012, 9).

The austerity program quickly materialised what Slavoj Zizek (2009, 24) has called the 'Lacanian difference between reality and the Real' – with *reality* meaning the effective social reality of the citizens implied in interactive and productive processes and the *Real* the inexorable and spectral logic of capital that determines what happens at the level of social reality. In the *Real* world of published statistics, the results of the austerity measures were praised by the media and international partners. At the social level of *reality*, however, visible to anyone who visited the 'intervened in country', the reasons for this optimism were not at all clear. Since the *Real* was in clear contradiction with the *reality* most citizens felt in their daily lives, the situation counterposed two realities that were evidently incompatible: a paradox, that had begun to undermine civil society.

Within this context, I witnessed a particularly significant episode that was a stark example of Zizek's distinction between reality and the Real and which became one of the main starting points for this project. In mid-2012, at the heart of the period of austerity, I was walking down a commercial street in Porto and suddenly noticed that there was a body lying on the sidewalk. Porto has many homeless people and people living in the city, especially during this period, tended to normalise such situations. In this case, however, the body was occupying the whole sidewalk, and pedestrians had to jump over the body to continue on their way. Following everyone else, this is what I did as well. The person on the floor, completely still, was presumably a homeless citizen of Afro-European origin, either asleep or unconscious, with minor injuries to the face and hands. I was relieved to see that he was breathing and adopted the usual procedure of calling an ambulance. While waiting, many people gathered round, commenting on the situation and offering different points of view. For some, it was useless to call the emergency number since the person was a known alcoholic. For others, it was obvious that the precariousness and fragility of his situation required specialist care.

This difference of perspectives reflected opposing positions of acceptance or resistance in relation to neoliberalism and highlighted both the dominance of individualism as the privileged form of human socialisation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002); and the logic of mutual exclusion, associated with the principle of competition (Maturana 1998). Evidently, framing the 'other' as a threat and distinguishing 'winners' from 'losers' serves the purpose of individualisation and hierarchisation which in its turn enables the transformation of citizens into passive consumers. This consequence of the dominance of neoliberalism in contemporary societies produces an evident paradox, described by philosopher Bernard Stiegler in the *Ars Industrialis Manifesto* (2010): '(…) Each of us are affected by this contradiction of being at the same time in some way a consumer, and a citizen conscious that the consumerist modality of consumption has become toxic and contradictory to the most elementary obligations of citizenship'. This was a paradox being lived out in people's daily lives. Nevertheless, after the ambulance had taken the man away, the group continued the conversation for quite a while before slowly beginning to disperse and the initial discussion within the group progressively became an exchange of ideas. Although individualism and competition are increasingly marking the contemporary world, the event opened up a collaborative space where people felt free to share their opinions and listen to other points of view, regardless of their differences. It developed into a spontaneous sharing of personal

experiences about the times in which we were living that served later as a model for the collaborative process of *Eis o Homem*. At the same time, this was an enlightening episode of collective *reality* that created a more positive atmosphere out of a tragic event.

Reflections and guiding principles

As an actor, director and teacher directly affected by the crisis and who (like many others) had recently enrolled on a PhD programme, pressing personal and social issues gradually developed into research questions. How can artist-researchers use their skills and knowledge to address the paradoxes in which people are forced to live? How can they transform them? Collaboration immediately emerged as a key concept to escape the dominance of individualism and competition. Other key concepts included participation, empowerment for change and horizontality. Methodological and theoretical approaches also played a vital role. Such was the case of the guiding principles behind methodologies like Action Research (Lewin 1946), more specifically its more radically democratic variant Participative Action Research (PAR), which was a major inspiration. It enabled performance to be cast as an artistic form of intervention-action research (aiming to transform a given reality). It also encouraged to consider different forms of collective organisation and raised the possibility that a group of different artists could work together horizontally as equals in the same performance project and avoid the type of conventional hierarchies of which the present crisis was a clear example.

Unlike dominant conventional top-down models of governance (hierarchies based on patriarchal, colonial and financial values), PAR aims to develop organized systems based around participatory, horizontal relationships that develop from the periphery to the centre and from the base to the summit (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Proposing a radical inversion of power structures, PAR seeks to engage disempowered individuals in the construction of a dynamic organised system able to fulfil their emergent needs. To do so, it seeks to create a horizontal context that provides for each individual the means, space and freedom for free expression and free participation in the construction of a collective. As such, each participant becomes the protagonist of his/her own life (narrative) and inscribes his/her own singularity into a broader social narrative. Authors such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) have called this interactive process of meaning-making between the individual and the collective 'the social construction of

reality'. As such, the enhancement of direct representation and the combination of all contributions into a dynamic whole proposed by PAR materialises in practice the highest of democratic principles.

The crisis was yet more proof that despite forward-looking and progressive discourses the *Real* broadcasts through the media, it was not the economy that was serving human beings, but rather human beings that were serving the economy. The fact that many others had also seen their lives destroyed as a result of the economic crisis prompted the engagement of other artists to form a small network. The project *Eis o Homem: a partir Ecce Homo de F. Nietzsche*, started to happen as an invitation to relational action and reflection on the contemporary human condition through performance.

Collaboration and decision making

The first artist to adhere to the project was playwright and director Marta Freitas, a friend and colleague with whom I shared my concerns and the episode of the man lying in the sidewalk, which was still vivid in my mind. Surprisingly, by the next day, she had written a text for a scene based on this same episode. In this scene, a strong-minded, successful man named 'Pedro' is forced to confess to a video surveillance camera that he has been having recurrent nightmares following a disturbing event. While hurriedly walking along a street, he had noticed a small gathering of people around something on the floor. As he came closer, he noticed it was a man who was badly injured. Despite the gathering and people's comments, no one was doing anything to help the man and that included Pedro. Then, the wife of the injured man arrived in great distress. She insulted the group for its passivity and explained that the man had been run over by a motorbike. She lay beside him in the rain and the man died in her arms as the group remained completely paralysed before eventually dispersing. One week later, Pedro started to have nightmares that lasted for months. In the nightmares, the wife of the injured man stared at Pedro contemptuously. Suddenly, the woman became his own mother, looking at him as if she did not recognise him. She lay down beside the injured man and held his head in her arms. The man stopped crying. The mother sang a lullaby and the man in his mother's arms became Pedro himself. Afterwards, the injured man would reappear, dead, covered in blood, looking at Pedro and his mother. He was smiling, happy that they were finally united. Pedro would then

understand that he was dead, for he was the man that had been run over by the motorcycle, and wake up.

In this dramatisation, it was clear that Freitas had introduced elements of her own experience (e.g. 'Pedro' is the name of the playwright's husband) to my original experience of an injured man in the street. Clearly, she also related to the episode and had things she wanted to add to it. Our personal experiences and ideas were thus starting to interweave artistically into a narrative. From this point onwards, we began collaborating regularly and started inviting other artists to contribute to the ongoing discussion and the gathering of ideas for the project. Most of these artists were multidisciplinary, such as ourselves and Adolfo Luxúria Canibal (musician, writer and performer), Jorge Quintela (Video-artist and musician), Catarina Barros (scenographer and costume designer), Ricardo Raimundo (musician and visual artist) who, along with the lighting designer Filipe Pinheiro constituted the final group involved in the creative process. Occasionally, producers, philosophers, designers and other friends also joined these meetings and discussions and contributed their experiences and thoughts. Such dialogues enriched and were enriched by such an interpersonal context. The aim was to materialise the principle of non-exclusion in *dissensus* (Maturana 1988, 39-88), i.e., to accept and give voice to the diversity and singularity of each individual in order to construct a meaningful creative whole. In order to do so, there was great care taken to create a receptive and horizontal environment that encouraged participation (as proposed by PAR). Individual memories, concerns and perspectives were freely shared on subjects such as art and life; the difference between living and making a living; constraints; contradictions; impotence; manipulation; alienation; loss of memory; and the possibility or impossibility of exerting free choice. Paradoxes around the *Real* and *reality*, hierarchy, poverty, inequality, competition and individualism emerged as particularly relevant topics that highlighted our fragile human condition in the contemporary context.

Since most participants were involved not only with this project but with other projects as well, the group soon established individual and shared tasks based on the specialist skills of each of the artists (acting, writing, video, music, scenography, costumes). Sometimes participants were responsible for more one task, or more than one person was responsible for the same task. Such was my own case (acting, directing and dramaturgy) and that of Marta Freitas (directing and dramaturgy). With the focus on embracing collaboration as an alternative to dominant competitive models, the

problems that might arise from different hierarchies of value for these different areas were also discussed. For instance, unlike performing, the tasks of writing, video, soundtrack or, to some extent, scenography, are activities that transform elements of a changeable nature into durable fixed forms (results), enabling, for example, the construction of a memory archive or *Hypomnémata* (Stiegler 2005, 357). On the other hand, due to its ephemeral nature, performance can best be described as a continuous process (rather than a result) for it requires constant realisation and changes and develops over time. Awareness of differences and similarities between processes and results in all areas (as well as their hierarchies) was taken into account explicitly and discussed by the members of the group. Following the principle of horizontality and levelling of hierarchies, it was agreed that all the different elements that composed *Eis o Homem* were to be constructed in a dialogical manner and kept open and flexible for as long as possible, in line with the changing nature of the performative process.

In retrospect, the challenge of working with horizontal, participatory methodologies was welcomed by the group, but collaboration was also a demanding process. All decisions had to be openly presented, discussed and negotiated and, in practice, it was not always easy to embrace a non-hierarchical structure. Nevertheless, after a dialectical phase of dissent between equals, this experience revealed that the results of this way of working were highly rewarding. On the one hand, as everyone was allowed to freely express their views and make suggestions in all areas, the process was slower and more unpredictable than usual. On the other hand, as the 'argument of authority' was not relevant here, a process of negotiation through experimentation became the praxis used to discover empirically the most satisfying, inclusive solutions. For instance, it was accepted that the written text (drama) would not take precedence over the performance text, inverting the convention that the theatre performance is a mere transposition of the text to the stage. A meaningful example of the difficulties of such a process is that the writing of the text would have to accompany the developments of the creative process (and not the other way around) which was a particularly demanding task for all those involved and, most especially, for the playwright. In addition, as the text was to be published, although the playwright managed to capture most of the developments of the text and included them in time for publication, the text of the last monologue does not correspond exactly to the text of the stage version because it could not be included in time. Evidently, it would make no sense to curtail the creative process because of publication deadlines. On the other hand, the playwright

would have liked the text to be published exactly as it was performed. This tension was, in the end, resolved by the recognition that the book and the theatre performance were two different products with different timings based on the same creative process.

The premise of listening to, understanding, caring for and accepting a plethora of ideas, needs and desires, especially in the face of deadlines, posed obvious difficulties that could have been mitigated by the use of more conventional methods. Nevertheless, the creative process was an intense learning experience for it led us to relativise and reconfigure the factors that create a performance. In this case, it showed that a creative process, and its outcomes can be developed collectively while respecting the diversity of individual perspectives. Even if, as in the case of the final monologue, the differences are materialised in different outcomes, they are still part of the same creative process.

Devising and constructing the play

Nearing the end of his life and seeking to represent himself truthfully to the world, Nietzsche borrowed the words with which Pilate presented Christ to the mob as an inspiration for *Ecce Homo*. Analogously, we borrowed Nietzsche's idea to frame and address the issues we wanted to raise. Although in retrospect some of the ideas of Nietzsche were seen to have inspired the performance, we never set out with the intention of illustrating or reproducing his works on stage. Instead, our interest was in creating an open space in which to encourage critical reflection on the world of *homo austeritas.*

When we actually began the rehearsals, we had a title, many ideas and guiding principles and a first scene in which a character, Pedro, is forced to confess a distressing memory to a security camera. With the dramatisation of the scene of the injured man, Freitas proposed a psychological disturbance at the heart of Pedro. He would begin as a representative of the *Real* (a typically combative, self-assured, outwardly successful man) who would then be confronted with *reality* (a world of nightmares, doubt, confusion and unease). In sequence, Freitas suggested Pedro seek help from a mysterious character called 'The Creator' (or 'The Torturer', played by the veteran indie rock star Adolfo Luxúria Canibal) to help him recover a sense of self. The idea was to create another character 'The Other Pedro' that, unlike Pedro, would be sensitive ('weak') critical and have suicidal tendencies. The Other Pedro would be the reason for

Pedro's disquiet and, with the help of The Creator/The Torturer, Pedro would overcome the weaker part of himself and his sense of unease.

This idea gave rise to the first significant moment of dissensus. In a more conventional artistic process the proposal would have been easily discarded for, on the one hand, I, as actor, director and dramaturg, was not fond of the linearity of the idea, and, on the other, we all knew we would not be able to afford a third actor. Nevertheless, with the set of guiding principles that we had devised, the proposal was considered and explored through improvisations in the rehearsal room. Between discussions, production of materials (audio, video, props, texts) and more improvisations, other possibilities started to emerge. It became clear to me that the reason for Pedro's unease was not The Other Pedro, but rather the constraints and paradoxes Pedro had to confront in order to succeed in a world organised in the interests of capital. It also became clear that I could see myself playing both of those characters: I was the person who leapt over an injured man and I was also the person who stopped to help him. I was the successful, employed theatre actor and I was also the actor who had just been fired. I was the wilful person who wanted to change the world and also the person that had to adapt to it, too weak to have a significant impact. I was the person who struggled to live and also the person who often thought life was pointless. I was Pedro and The Other Pedro. I was 'Human'. These two characters could be much more interesting if they were two aspects of the same person. As for The Creator and his propensity for torture, he became the personification of the oppressive power structures of neo-liberalism. In retrospect, he was a figure similar to that of the Dragon 'Thou Shalt' who represents the power of societal norms in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1885, 21-23) - a text that has been accompanied me since adolescence. The progress of the Human in overcoming his personal conflict through an encounter with The Creator and the outcome of this encounter became the new challenges for this devised work.

After this insight, a new, exciting concept slowly developed out of our experiments and exchange of ideas. A rich and successful Human, lost in himself and ill at ease without knowing why, seeks help from a powerful and mysterious figure. Without knowing it, in the process of successfully adapting to a paradoxical neo-liberal culture, the Human had developed conflicting personalities: Pedro (who adapted and is successful) and The Other Pedro (who resists and refuses to adapt).

 Inspired by the discussion while waiting for the ambulance to arrive for the injured man, I began to discover within myself processes of thought and feeling that

enabled me to sustain and defend the contradictory perspectives of both Pedro and The Other Pedro. Their perspectives were continuously formulated and reformulated into words, actions and situations through improvisation. On the one hand, Pedro successfully adapts to the individualistic and competitive trends of post modernity- or *Hypermodernity,* in the words of Bernard Stiegler (2011) - to the point that he loses his sense of self: *'I forgot what I exist for. I work. Because that's the only way I can be fulfilled. Because that is the only possible form of fulfilment. That was what they demanded from me and I transformed myself. I became a machine'* (in *Eis o Homem[1]*). On the other hand, The Other Pedro, refuses to adapt to these *Hypermodern* trends: '*I wanted to stop feeling the world because this world is too absurd for me. People say I am crazy because I "feel too much" ?!... "I feel there is too much injustice… I feel there is too much egotism… I feel there is too much distrust…" Well, of course I DO! And I'm amazed to see that so many people feel that all this is normal!'* (31).

This tension between Pedro and The Other Pedro within the same character, became a constant source of inspiration and encapsulated the paradoxes of contemporaneity which frequently lead to disempowerment, exclusion and illness. It is important to acknowledge that this advance was achieved by not discarding proposals before experimenting with them even if they didn't initially seem useful. Within this principle of accepting to confront with ideas that didn't seem to fit, the group managed to interweave thoughts and desires, materialising the Hegelian dialectic process of development: the opposition between the conceptual proposal (*thesis*) and the materiality of experimentation (*antithesis*), which always results in a *synthesis* that is neither thesis or antithesis but transcends the conflict between them. As this insight opened up a new path, it also started to provide a structure for the play which reflected the paradoxes of the contemporary world as well as the dialectics of our evolving creative process.

From rehearsal to stage

Devising the play continued through improvisation and the fixing of key elements. The structure of the play developed, firstly, by finding answers to the question of how the Human would acknowledge their conflict and confront The Creator and,

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[1] Freitas (2014, 42). All references to the text are from this edition.

secondly, by refining the conceptual narrative sequence of ideas, fragments and situations that were being devised by the group. These two movements were simultaneous and themselves in dialectical opposition, creating a continuously reorganised structure to accommodate new ideas and scenes.

       In our play, a successful Human, who can afford to live in the *Real* feels a sense of unease without knowing why. He seeks help from a mysterious and powerful figure called The Creator, unaware that, like the Dragon 'Thou Shalt', he represents 'enlightenment' as well as the oppression of dominant social values (e.g., financial, patriarchal, colonial). The Human is unaware of his own interior conflict and its relationship to a competitive, individualistic world. Moulded by the realm of the *Real,* the Human lives his life alienated from *reality* and, most especially, from himself.

Image 1.[2]

The path of the Human's 'enlightenment' begins when he discovers that The Creator has lured him into an encounter where he is powerless and, in this encounter, The Other Pedro, who has nothing to live for, gains increasing importance. As the Human either resists The Creator's authority (Pedro) or attempts to commit suicide (The Other Pedro) The Creator balances attitudes of pure cruelty with occasional attitudes of empathy and support.

Image 2.

The contradictory personalities of Pedro and The Other Pedro become progressively clearer to the Human and to the audience. As the Human's memories start to flow and he connects with both sides of his conflicting personality, he seeks further understanding. He goes deeper into his embodied self through electric shocks[3]. During this extreme procedure, the Human verbalises the unspoken distress, suffering and contradictions of his apparently successful life.

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[2] All photos by Susana Neves and kindly made available by Teatro Nacional São João (National Theatre of Porto, Portugal)

[3] Which is not only a form of behavioural therapy but also a form of torture and, in some countries, a way of resolving the death penalty.

Image 3.

After a near death experience, he finally rediscovers himself as a newly reunified Human while The Creator reveals himself to be an oppressor. The Human had been lured into a desert of physical and psychological torture to acknowledge the authority of The Creator's *Real*: to live in this world, one must either be part of the strong or the weak, metaphorically speaking, a 'wolf' or its 'prey'. *'So'* - The Torturer asks – *'What will you choose?'*

Having recovered his own humanity, the human decides that the way in which this question is formulated is unacceptable. As The Other Pedro has made clear throughout the play, a simple binary world of 'wolves' and their 'prey', winners or losers, posits notions of individual choice and decision-making within an exclusively neo-liberal framework.

Empowered by the process of recovering a sense of self, he refuses to comply and defies The Creator's proposal of hierarchisation and instrumentalisation in a final monologue:

 'Neither. I do not want to be the wolf or the prey. It makes no sense to exist as either. Nor can I allow you to restrict my choices in this way' (48)*.* As the speech continues, the reunified Human recognises that all human beings are irreplaceable and, as PAR reminds us, we all need each other to make the world a better place to live in: '*(…) What distinguishes us? Us, human beings, are almost indistinguishable. We pass by, inside our cars. It's raining. We are tired from a long day's work, from exploiting and being exploited, from being someone else's instrument. And we just want to get home. Our home. But, suddenly, we notice something lying on the ground. It's a man. We cannot tell whether he is dying or sleeping, but we prefer to believe that he is sleeping. And it's still raining. Would you stop? Would we stop? (…) I need you. As much as I think you need me. Shall we bring this to an end?'* (49).

During this final monologue, the lights on the audience gradually came up, framing the fiction and interpellating the audience to whom these final questions were also addressed. Yet even after this question is posed, The Creator tries to recover his authority, like Pilate to the crowd announcing *'Behold the man'*, by suddenly pointing a pistol at the Human.

Image 4.

In this struggle between the values of the Human and those of The Creator/The Torturer, it was up to the audience to decide the final outcome. The Creator addressed the audience once more: *'Does anyone have anything to say on behalf of this man?'*. If someone stood up for the man, he would thank the audience and leave the stage: he would be free. If no one did, The Torturer would shoot, followed by a blackout. The outcome was in the audience's hands. In the final performances in particular, several people defended the 'Human' and the will of the audience was always respected.

Final remarks

This account has described the performance *Eis o Homem,* from its beginnings as a set of personal intentions in the context of the most recent global economic crisis, to its materialisation by a group of creative artists. Using auto-ethnographic description, it has drawn on personal and social, empirical and theoretical elements and the way these informed the performance.

The centrality of economic interests in the organisation of human life has become so lodged in our minds and bodies that it has become silently acceptable. As a result, societies find themselves regularly in situations of crisis that authors like Bernard Stiegler (2010) encourage us to question *'We and our fellow human beings are dependent on the consumer economy even as we fight against it and suffer because of it. Nevertheless, we know that it cannot last because, as the organisation of an innovation founded on disposability, waste, carelessness and blindness, it is in contradiction with the future'*. With theoretical and methodological support, the play was constructed in response to a situation of crisis and showed that working collaboratively, although perhaps a less 'efficient' strategy, is a form of socio-political intervention in the face of the individualism and competitiveness promoted by the continuing dominance of neo-liberal economics. In the particular case of *Eis o Homem*, the creative process, informed by critical theory and participative methodologies, was in many respects more important than the play itself. The play departed from a stark example of *reality* to highlight psychological and social paradoxes that inform contemporary life and that have been discussed in critical works by authors such as Slavoj Zizek and Bernard Stiegler. Such works have written about the need to transform this system of values and their perspectives complemented the personal experiences of

the artists in the creation of the performance. The main achievement of this process had to do with the choices made regarding (and during) its creation, where, inspired by PAR, the artists explored the practical possibility of being involved in a creative process that resisted the ease (and economy) of conventional top-down forms of organisation. The risk of working within horizontal relationships, as an alternative to clear and well-established hierarchies, is that new unknown territories must be negotiated and this may increase the possibility of conflict. Refusing to engage with these different ideas and proposals would have meant refusing to acknowledge other possibilities of conceiving and transforming the world. Therefore, by accepting the conflict resulting from the need to materialise all ideas and proposals, even if it seemed they would not work, opened up a space for discovering new, unsuspected possibilities for being together. In this sense, our performative experiences enhanced the meaning of collaboration.

When needs and desires are contradictory, constant dialogue and the reconfiguration of interpersonal realities is necessary to reach the most inclusive, complex solution. We aimed to enhance horizontal collaboration, accepting and exploring each other's proposals, seeking, as far as possible, to integrate all those different possibilities. Evidently, this was a very demanding task, for it required constant trust and openness from all those involved, and was not exempt from tension, conflict and negotiation. It was particularly rewarding though as it revealed how, in the process of theatre making, it is possible to express different and sometimes contradictory desires in a collective, horizontal process. There is no reason why this should not also be possible outside the sphere of theatre. Every performance constructs an ontology, a world within the world of everyday life. The same guiding principles one adopts to organise the construction of that world will determine its ontology and this is valid both in theatre and in our everyday lives. Reality is not an immutable concept and the fact that a group of human beings allow themselves to devise the rules with which they may create a world in theatre, also challenges the limits of the ontology of the world we live in and our role as participants in its construction. There is no doubt that this experimental process of creation was intensely transformative for the members of the group, but it was also wonderful to see the ways in which the performance impacted the audience. After the performances, for instance, members of the audience engaged the artists in conversation in the theatre foyer, recalling the original incident around the injured man in the road. In these informal sessions, with great openness and generosity from participants, we received comments such as: 'We left the performance with a

sense of restlessness, wanting to start a revolution!', and we were happy that such statements resonated with all those present. A revolution would definitely be necessary to embrace collaboration and put an end to the idea that the economy must prevail above all things.

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