

Ethi-Something

By Gustavo Vicente

Abstract

This is a narrative journey through my experience as a Portuguese theatregoer since the Nineties. It encapsulates different voices, from the personal to the more academic, in an inner dialogue where the affective dimension is left free to influence the tone and rhythm of the discourse, to interrupt and challenge the logic of argumentation, and to be recognized as a powerful force of knowledge and self-transformation.

I begin by addressing the recent socio-political changes in Portugal - especially since the breakdown of the dictatorship regime in 1974 -, and its effects in the way I grew out to look at performances today.

From that perspective, I will then confront the relativist standpoint of contemporary Western performing arts, where ethics seems to be increasingly seen as *something* inscrutable within the realm of the subjective, *something* about which no one risks a common understanding, *something* of something lost. In the wake of a postmodernity that has been casting a growing shadow over the construction of foreseeable futures, and that is becoming further apart of its political relevance.

I will conclude by directing my attention to the early signs that seems to be leading the performing arts' practice to rehearse new ethical paradigms. *Towards what can point beyond ourselves* and to the possibility of a life together.

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When I finally became a frequent theatregoer, I think I would have been about eighteen years old.

It was the Nineties in Portugal, a decade of great existential questions for many who, like me, carried the heavy legacy of succession of the generation that lived through the Carnation Revolution in 1974.¹ A generation that had felt the oppression of the some fifty years fascist regime, which still carried the scars of thirteen years of colonial wars – to which the revolution put a stop – and that witnessed the final breakdown of an empire of more than half a millennium.² A generation that had taken

¹ In the 25th of April of 1974, a military coup organized by a heroic group of officers overthrew the corporatist authoritarian regime that was in place since 1926, in order to make way for the implementation of a much-desired democracy. The military action, which eventually developed without major confrontations with the police forces close to the regime, was soon coupled by the citizens, which filled the streets of Lisbon clambering for the liberation of the people. The name *Carnation Revolution* came from the symbolic gesture of the population that, when it took the streets, started to put carnations into the muzzles of the revolutionary military to celebrate the end of the dictatorship and the expected end of the war in the African colonies. It came also to symbolize the pacifist act of the revolution, in which almost no shots were fired and few people were injured.

² The Portuguese Colonial Empire was the first global empire in the world history, which began in 1415 with the conquest of Ceuta, and extended itself to Brazil and to a number of African and a few Asiatic territories since then. In 1974, Portugal was fighting to maintain its last colonial territories in Africa, waging a bloody guerrilla war with pro-independence movements particularly in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea. Soon after the Carnation Revolution, in 1975, Portugal conceded the sovereignty of the large majority of the colonies, thus putting an end to the Portuguese empire, and forcing the precipitated return of about half a million of Portuguese people that lived in the ex-colonies.

the first steps in rebuilding the country and that had put all of its hopes in the rising democracy. A generation that, by the Nineties, was already showing signs of disillusionment with the results of "their" democratic system, and starting to get impatient with the alleged lethargy of the younger people; that in the rush to find a scapegoat for the skewed course of history put the burden of responsibility on us. We were the "second-rate generation," as some of them called us. A term that rapidly spread into the popular jargon.

I prefer to see us as the orphans of the Revolution.

To this was added the urgent pressure of bringing the country to the economic, social and cultural levels of the rest of the democratic Europe, which, in the meantime, had definitely welcomed us with the accession of Portugal to the European Union a few years earlier.³ Increasingly open (and permeable) to the international influences, we had then to deal with the unrest of postmodernity, which had settled throughout the Western world at all levels of critical thinking and artistic production, and for which the Portuguese were not quite prepared, since our history had not allowed a sequential transition to this new era. An era that was strongly influenced by the social and political struggles and the remapping of the artistic boundaries occurred in the international

³ Portugal is a member of the European Union (called at the time European Economic Community) since the January, 1, 1986.

landscape, especially in the Sixties and Seventies⁴ – a time when the Portuguese were unaware of any news from abroad due to the strict censorship regime that prevailed under the dictatorship. But even after 1974, postmodernism had little resonance in Portugal, once the Carnation Revolution had brought a renewed belief in the political ideals and philosophical thought of the first half of the twentieth century, which covered up the more pragmatic reality of the (so-called) developed countries at the time. The Eighties, however, came to erode this post-revolutionary enthusiasm. The ideological crisis that followed the mercantile culture, which had started to dominate the "free world," depose many of the illusions of self-determination of the Portuguese who, at that time, were beginning to realize that they had been following a course that they could not have predicted or completely controlled. At the beginning of the Nineties, postmodernity was hence received as a jolt that shook the ground of a society still stuck between the corporatist conservatism and the revolutionary ideals of the modern era. The acclaim of subjectivity as the inescapable filter of "reality," and the wide recognition of post-structuralism and deconstruction as the driving forces of thought and knowledge production, clashed with the Portuguese docile bodies,⁵ still conditioned to believe in the grand narratives of the past. This

⁴ As were important examples the development of feminist, gay and ethnic discourses, or the emergence of new forms of artistic expression, such as Performance Art and Pop Art.

⁵ To use Michel Foucault's term about the effects of disciplinary power in society (Cf. *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison*, 1975).

laid the groundwork for a period of intense relativism that led us into “the midst of a crisis of self-recognition and of self-reinvention” – as so well described André Lepecki when he argued about the vital motivations of the Portuguese performing arts of that time.⁶ Guided by distrust in the collective and confrontation with a past that seemed to us too full of dogmatic answers, each one of us (*who would have been about eighteen years old*), scattered (*not to say lost*), was eagerly searching for a fresh view of themselves and of the world.

Perhaps it was this urge to be a spectator of my own that was pushing me towards the theatre. At the time, a generation of young artists was emerging (not only in theatre but also in dance and in visual arts) that, motivated by the desire for new aesthetic possibilities, positioned itself alternatively to the existing artistic dominance. *I will hardly forget my first encounters with the productions of O Olho*⁷

⁶ Lepecki, A. (1998:15), “Transversed body, intense body”, *Theaterschrift*, Nr. Extra, *Intensification: contemporary Portuguese performance* (Lisboa: Edição Danças na cidade e Edições Cotovia), pp.19-29.

⁷ “The Eye” (my translation), was a theatre company from Almada – a suburban city located in the opposite margin of Lisbon. Along with Lúcia Sigalho, Mónica Calle and Teatro da Garagem, among others, *O Olho* was part of a new generation of Portuguese artists/companies that sprouted in the beginning of the Nineties, and that positioned themselves alternatively to dominant theatrical practice at the time. Better known for their experimental and collaborative working processes, they were one of the first to integrate the principles and characteristics of the postdramatic theatre in Portugal. Founded in 1991, the association was extinct in 2002.

and Lúcia Sigalho⁸ (*especially these*), but also the ones with Mónica Calle,⁹ Teatro da Garagem,¹⁰ Vera Mantero,¹¹ Artistas Unidos,¹² among others. It was this generation of artists that broke with the prevailing paradigm of theatre – until then conceived exclusively from the literary language, and where realism was seen as the indisputable form of theatrical expression. It was this generation that became aware of the instability of values, of the social and political aporias of that time, of the diversity of audiences that were starting to sprout, and that claimed new ways of thinking and doing

⁸ Lúcia Sigalho started her career in 1993 and was better known by her autobiographical standpoint from which she positioned herself to engage with the audience. As noted by John O'Mahony in a 2003 article from *The Guardian*, Lúcia was «a fast-talking firebrand (...) whose anarchic brand of physical theatre seems to spring naturally from her own exuberant personality» (O'Mahony, J. "The big experiment" in *The Guardian*, 13 September 2003, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2003/sep/13/theatre1>>, accessed in 9 January 2015). She (literally) disappeared from the artistic landscape in 2009.

⁹ Mónica Calle established herself in 1992 in a bohemian neighborhood of Lisbon mostly known by the local prostitution and sex shops, from which she created a more intimate relationship with the urban space and established a theatre practice in which the body and the sensorial power of the word were (and still are) her main artistic propositions.

¹⁰ "The Garage Theatre" (their own translation) was founded in 1989 and devoted most of its work with the research into new forms of theatre writing and its connection with new scenic proposals. They were also the first to express the «perspective of a generation», as stated Carlos Pessoa (the artistic director) in a 1994's manifesto, thus laying the foundation for an alternative way of being in the theatre (Pessoa, C., "Comunicação em nove capítulos", *Vértice*, 62, 1994, pp.15-17, p.16).

¹¹ Vera Mantero is one of the pioneer choreographers from the late eighties that gave birth to what was called at the time the New Portuguese Dance movement. Vera became one of the most acclaimed Portuguese artists in the international landscape of Performing Arts, especially, as noted André Lepecki, by her «innovative uses of the body as a positive point of departure for a critique of contemporary Portuguese culture» (Lepecki, A., *Moving Without the Colonial Mirror: Modernity, Dance, and Nation in the Works of Vera Mantero and Francisco Camacho (1985-97) – abstract*, 2004, SARMA Publications, < <http://sarma.be/docs/2850>>, accessed in 9 January 2015).

¹² The "United Artists" (my translation) appeared a little later in the decade (1995) but their creative processes were fundamental in the renovation of the role of the dramaturgist and in the investment in new contemporary Portuguese playwrights.

theatre; a generation that started to incorporate new live performing formats and new technical procedures without obsessions of thematic or ideological consistency. One might say that they were the first in the realm of the Portuguese theatre to embrace and react to a postmodernity that was finally starting to insinuate itself in our cultural landscape. The Theatre Company O Olho, for example, soon distinguished itself by their extensive collaborative processes, in which they refused the idea of a single responsible director or playwright for the creative act. Their second production called *Humanauta*,¹³ to give an emblematic idea, took two years to be developed, and relied on a wide team of collaborators (about 30), from the pure sciences and engineering to humanities and arts, who helped in their thorough dramaturgical research. The performance was finally premiered in 1994 using 32 performers, most of them young performers or other early career artists. Even with very little financing and support, they were able to motivate a significant number of people, from the artistic community to the wider audience, in what became an influential alternative artistic movement. The belief in the collaborative work, the multidisciplinary perspective, the comprehensive dramaturgical methods and the appetite for the sensory were all ground breaking characteristics at the time. *I remember seeing myself being pulled by*

¹³ “Humanauta” is a made up compound word that can be translated to “Humanaut” (“human”+“-naut”, as in “astro-naut”).

*friends to go see what was happening on the other side of the Tagus river, where they were stationed.*¹⁴

Another major feature launched by the work of these young artists was the search for new relations of complicity with the audience, in which the spectators were seen as active participants, thus emphasizing the idea of a theatre based on the shared “experience” – as opposed to the former perspective that relied in the dialectical authority of the theatrical texts to “educate” the audience. Lúcia Sigalho was one of the artists that took further the questioning about the relation between performer and spectator. In *Seres Solitários*¹⁵ (1999) to use one of her most acclaimed works, the 5 monologues that constituted the performance were presented at the same time by 5 different performers in 5 different intimate urban spaces – each one of them offered to only one spectator at a time. Following her previous approaches for including the audience, this performance felt like the ultimate celebration of the uniqueness of the live theatrical experience, through the single and unrepeatable presence of each of the spectators, within a busy urban environment such as Lisbon, where solitude fills most of our everyday life. The desire to make theatre with the audience and not for the audience, as Lúcia herself used to say,¹⁶ guided her artistic career against the traditional way of acting that insisted

¹⁴ *O Olho* was based in Almada, the city located in the opposite margin of Lisbon.

¹⁵ “Lonely Beings” in English – my translation.

¹⁶ Cf. Riso, C. (2002). “Eu não sou uma televisão” in *Cem horas de conversa*, <http://www.c-e-m.org/producao/iniciativas/cemhoras/lucia_sigalho.htm>, accessed in 15 December 2011.

on limiting the participation of the spectators. *If talent was not enough, Lúcia, along with other emerging female artists, emanated a force and a fresh sense of the feminine that were still delightfully subversive at the time.*

The communication with the audience was that way recalibrated around the relationship of empathy that was established in each performance, in which the spectators were led to testify in their own bodies what was being experienced by the performers. Instead of the spectators putting themselves in the position of a “character” – in what is conventionally called an “identification” process – they were taken to embody the sensations, energy, and kinesthetic action of the performers, even if the situation was a fictitious one.¹⁷ Thus, the spectators found themselves compelled not only to relate affectively with the performances, but also, and because of that, to assume their share of responsibility with whatever was happening during those live experiences, as in any other situation of individual decision. That responsibility was not felt from a direct confrontation with a thesis, antithesis, or opinion, but rather from the direct demands of the live experience, that is, from how the spectators were led into giving a response to what was being experienced – within the logic of what Lehmann called an *aesthetic of*

¹⁷ As evidenced by the acclaimed mirror-neurons, whose recent discovery have reaffirmed (scientifically) this intrinsic connectivity between spectators and performers – previously addressed by many artistic creators and thinkers throughout the twentieth century, from John Martin to Richard Schechner and Marina Abramović, to give some canonical examples.

responsibility (or response-ability).¹⁸ Hence, the distanced contemplation that legitimated the previous paradigm of theatre gave way to the committed action of the spectators. Using the Kantian line of thought, the theoretical reason,¹⁹ which before validated the univocal interpretation of the performances, thus aspiring to an abstract truth, gave way to the practical reason,²⁰ through which the spectators, by taking the responsibility for their ongoing perception of the experience, come to constitute themselves as rational free beings. Instead of privileging the question "what is it that I believe in?" it was brought to the foreground the question "*what is it that defines me?*" There is, however, a fundamental factor that separated this from Kant's thought, which is the fact that the spectators' perception of the experience was related to a subjective construction of themselves, and not to the translation of an objective moral law, which the philosopher always defended as unconditional.²¹ In this sense, the performance-spectator relation pointed more to the existentialist thought of Sartre's being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*),²² that is, the idea that it is the human, individually, who builds his own

¹⁸ Lehmann, H.-T. (2006), *Postdramatic theatre* (London: Routledge) [1999, original German Edition].

¹⁹ Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

²⁰ Cf. *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).

²¹ This besides the fact of the theatre belonging to the sphere of aesthetics, which Kant believed to be "disinterested" and therefore outside the scope of the requirements of practical reason, that is, of ethics.

²² Sartre, J.-P. (2007), *O ser e o nada: Ensaio de Ontologia Fenomenológica*, trans. Paulo Perdigão (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes) [1943, original French Edition].

essence, and not a universal moral order. More than interfering with objective concepts, what started to become of interest in theatre was thus to interfere with the perception the spectators had of the world, thus making visible the connection (*often broken*) between our personal experience and the world that we see (*or want to see*).

It was then by the Nineties that the Portuguese theatrical practice took the first steps into what is considered by many the transformative power of the performing arts today: to direct the perception of spectators to their own affective bodies, and from this towards a better understanding of themselves and of the world they live in. It is this induced self-awareness that has been prompting the spectators to engage in an ontological process of self-definition, towards an “increase of being” – as noted Gadamer on the meaning of works of art.²³

But there was (there is) something else that grabbed me (still grabs) in an inner reflection of ethical sense. It was the reinforced experience of the *here and now* of the theatrical encounter, which guided us towards a life in the present. A life that, following the aesthetic vision of Wittgenstein,²⁴ overcomes the essential insecurity of the one who is alive to situate ourselves in the eternal, in what in us

²³ Gadamer, H.-G. (1985:55), *A atualidade do belo: a arte como jogo, símbolo e festa*, trans. Celeste Aida Galeão (Rio de Janeiro: Edição Tempo Brasileiro).

²⁴ Cf. Wittgenstein, L. (1995: §6.4311), *Tratado Lógico-Filosófico*, translation and introduction M.S. Lourenço, 2ª ed. Revista (Lisboa: Serviço de Educação, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian) [1921, original German Edition].

extends as metaphysical beings and that makes us wonder about our place in the world – independent from destiny. *I believe it was through this ineffable vibe of the present (of the presence, if we rightly want to emphasize the concept of Gumbrecht²⁵) that I realized that being a spectator of theatre is more than being a spectator of his/her own (in the Cartesian sense of the term).* It is to live him/herself up under the form of the eternal, that is, under the form of the ethical questioning. A questioning that is not merely spiritual (and therefore abstract), but embodied by the affects that accompany the spectators' experience within the performance. If the human being only finds its freedom in the process of self-discovery – to believe in Hegel's evolutionary logic²⁶ – then it was through the affective experience of the theatre that *I found (in the most immediate form) the first signs of liberation.*

From that moment on, a great deal of younger artists have emerged in the Portuguese theatre landscape and have been continuing to expand the limits of performing arts and the urge to find new perceptions of themselves and of the world. At the same time, the increasing opportunities to find common backgrounds and creative partnerships with

²⁵ To this author the term “presence” refers not only to the temporal but, and above all, to the spatial relation with what “can have an immediate impact on human bodies”. Gumbrecht, H.U. (2004: xiii), *Production of Presence: What meaning cannot convey* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press).

²⁶ Cf. *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807).

other international artists and to show their works flourished in the twenty-first century, thus putting many Portuguese artists in the map of contemporary performing arts. Artists like Miguel Moreira²⁷ and Mundo Perfeito,²⁸ to give just a couple of examples, have already a recognized career outside the Portuguese borders and have been sharing the same Western concerns and contemporary artistic trends. These trends seem to continue to point to the same open model of ethical relation with the audience, thus leaving to the emancipated spectators²⁹ the responsibility of finding their own way of perception and interpretation of the performances and, ultimately, of themselves. One might even say that, regarding the ethical dimension, nothing substantial has really changed in the last decades in performing arts. They simply became more complex and therefore posing *more and more* subjective new questions.

²⁷ Miguel Moreira is a theatre director/Live Art performer/choreographer recognized by his experimental creative processes and by his search into new forms of corporeality and body presence. Internationally he is probably better known by his co-productions with the **Les ballets C de la B, especially *The Old King***, a performance that has been touring since 2011 several places all over the world.

²⁸ "Perfect World" (my translation) is a theatre company from Lisbon that is known by their international collaborations, especially with tg STAN, with which Tiago Rodrigues (the artistic director) worked in the past and with which it shares the same basic aesthetic options.

²⁹ To use the Jacques Rancière's up to date concept. Cf. Rancière, J. (2010), *O espectador emancipado*, trans. José Miranda Justo (Lisboa: Orfeu Negro) [2008, original French Edition].

Now, after about twenty years, I am beginning to feel tired with the infinity of questions, and the lack of commitment on the answers.

Given its ability to establish an empathic bond with the audience, the theatre is probably the most effective and immediate mirror of the spirit(s) of our time. It has thus reflected, perhaps obsessively, a number of issues of cultural and social nature that have escalated under the sign of postmodernity, in particular the concern to expand borders instead of setting boundaries,³⁰ ask questions instead of seeking for answers, to value the flow of things instead of its order. Based on deconstruction as a (practically normative) method of artistic production, the contemporary theatre has been, in this way, casting a growing shadow over the possibility of developing constructive proposals.

In a 2011 creation, the well-known Forced Entertainment developed a performance called *Tomorrow's Parties*, in which two performers (a man and a woman) simply wonder about what the future might be like. In a non-stop avalanche of ideas, some of them fairly realistic, others just plain absurd, the performance depicts probably the biggest paradox of our times: how many possibilities there are still to explore in our future, and how far we are from getting closer to them. As

³⁰ The very notion of "theatre" has fragmented into various, and sometimes contradictory, perspectives.

pointed out by some critics, the performance was (in my own words) *optimistically sad*.³¹ Moreover, *Tomorrow's Parties* called attention to how long we have been living in this state of inertia – especially when the performers recovered old futuristic scenarios, which seemed as utopian at the time of the performance as they were decades before. What Forced Entertainment so brilliantly portrayed with this performance was our persistent inability to take a step forward, to risk new propositions, to commit with *something* – Including within the sphere of contemporary theatre practice, as it was symbolically implied by the fragile and temporary fairground stage from which the performers stood.

Obviously, this situation is not an exclusive prerogative of the theatre. As Brian Putnam perceptively noted,³² the Western world has not yet been able to think beyond the intellectual consequences of the modernist proposals, and as a result we became paralyzed around a latent potentiality, without expectation of achievement. We are permanently living a symptom, without being able to establish a horizon of possibilities. And as time goes by, it seems to accentuate itself in this postmodernist idiosyncrasy of looking away from anything that might compromise us ideologically. *Sometimes I feel myself orbiting around a planet that gave up Being*. The arts have been responding to this zeitgeist by turning

³¹ Cf. < <http://www.forcedentertainment.com/project/tomorrows-parties/>>, accessed in 23 December 2014.

³² Putnam, B. (2010), "The possibility of a proposition", *CineQuaNon* 6, Bilingual Arts Magazine (Lisboa: CEAUL), pp.12-18.

their attention, just as Putman stressed,³³ to everything that frames the artistic languages – for everything that concerns the perception, and very little the conviction. Under the (often misleading) belief that form and content is one and the same thing, a growing number of artists have been showing pathological signs of ethico-political escapism. Even the need for the “new,” which remains feverishly attached to the artistic motivations of our time, does not reveal more than a recurrent nihilistic temptation. By reducing the “new” to the objects that it produces, contemporary art has been evading the possibility to reverberate beyond its objectification. This impulsive repetition where the “newness” of the relationship between the object and its context is purely formal – in the narrower sense of the term – enlarges the unknowable void that separates us from the world. A void that Sartre called “nothing,”³⁴ and that can only be tackled by the conscious act of the individual, by the free act by which he/she defines him/herself to the world. But many contemporary artists seem to have been avoiding taking risks, thus eluding the responsibility to try to recreate themselves and the world we live in together. By the contrary, many of them have been manifesting an ethical detachment that perpetuates the same intellectual anguish, the same ethical aporia – it is like a circular reliving of a prelude (*a never ending story*).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Sartre, J.-P. (2007), *O ser e o nada: Ensaio de Ontologia Fenomenológica*, trans. Paulo Perdigão (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes) [1943, original French Edition].

*I continue to believe that, as Sartre proclaimed,*³⁵ the human only truly exists when he/she becomes what he/she proposed him/herself to be, and that this demand is the result of a subjective intentionality. Any adoption of a value system that is represented as being “objective” is only an attempt to transfer the personal freedom to the world of objects, thus ending up getting lost in “nothing.” The problem is that, after so much time of individualizing searches, it has installed a certain alienation of the “other,” of the universal ethics beyond the *Self*, thus distorting the very notion of ethics – what unites us rationally as human beings. In this context, the search for objectivity, though hopeless (and misleading if allegedly found), is inevitable. This search is essential to the critical understanding of the world and its history, and to prevent the existential resignation around (what could be seen as) the snob tyranny of subjectivity – however sensual it may seem. *[Yes, I miss Kant]* This is not about defending the emergence of new philosophies of life or new existential beliefs, much less is it about addressing these issues explicitly in theatre. It is about not caving in to the resignation of the disease, to risk new understandings of ourselves and reveal them to the world. As Heidegger argued, I am more of myself when I recognize the clamor of something that is an integral part of me and at the same time points

³⁵ *Ibid.*

beyond me.³⁶ Ultimately, it is about making theatre towards the others, that is, to commit ourselves in being-for-others (*être-pour-autrui*),³⁷ to use another Sartrean notion.

Do not mistake me, the transformative power of theatre (of performing arts) is still alive, and it is through its manifestations that I have been wielding these questions. It is also within performing arts that have being produced alternative artistic stances, which seem to want to push ahead their ethical concerns. In Portugal, for example, the performing artist João Fiadeiro, in partnership with the anthropologist Fernanda Eugénio, founded recently an interdisciplinary project called *AND-Lab*, which aims to address the fundamental concern of "how to live together." Here, the artistic dimension seems to be perceived as simultaneously an end and a means to what they call "an inhabited philosophy, an ethics of living together, a practice of com-position³⁸ and a way of life."³⁹ It is still early to interpret the results of these kinds of proposals, which begin to occur a little around the globe, thus bringing the process of artistic composition to a new form of questioning and ethical

³⁶ Scruton, R. (2010:339), *Breve história da filosofia moderna: de Descartes a Wittgenstein*, trans. Carlos Marques (Lisboa: Edição Guerra e Paz) [1984, Original English Edition].

³⁷ Sartre, J.-P. (2007), *O ser e o nada: Ensaio de Ontologia Fenomenológica*, trans. Paulo Perdigão (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes) [1943, original French Edition].

³⁸ "Com-position" is a term coined by João Fiadeiro and Fernanda Eugénio that resulted of the sub-division of the word "composition" ("composição" in portuguese). In the literal translation from the portuguese, "com-posição" means "with-position." It was created to express the process of "positioning-with-the-other," against the closed sense of "composition," which expresses a combination of positions.

³⁹ Cf. <http://and-lab.org/o-and_lab>, accessed in 11 September 2014.

positioning.⁴⁰ But the seeds insist on being planted, on the fringe of the trends of postmodernity. *And that, I hope, do not guide us to only another "Post-" turn.*

Maybe it was the passing of time that made me recognize with more subtlety the contemporary patterns of artistic production. Maybe it is the fact that the future has come roaring by the birth of my son. Maybe it is age. Or maybe it is simply the existential restlessness that we all inherited from the amazement of life, and that immortalized us under the vital doubt of Hamlet. Whatever the reason, whatever the phenomenological synthesis that precedes and contextualizes these words, there is still something that I believe and dream getting stronger: the ethical power of the theatre. Maybe one day, along this path, one might be given some sense to Wittgenstein's idea that aesthetics and ethics are one and the same thing.

In the direction of what it means to be human.

⁴⁰ A significant number of these proposals are sprouting from ecology-based concerns and animist standpoints, overall following the fundamental question of "how on earth do we live?" – as sharply put in the editorial of the *Performance Research* volume "On Ecology" (Bottoms, S., Franks, A. and Kramer, P., "Editorial", *Performance Research: On ecology*, vol. 17, n.4, Routledge, 2012, pp.1-4, p.1). A compelling example of this kind of proposal is the 2011 Kris Verdonck's garden installation *Exote*. But several others, like the very recent (2014) cycle of performances conceived by Vera Mantero & Guests called *More or less, but less than more*, that comprises a number of journeys through several off-screen urban gardens in Lisbon; or the ongoing work by Baz Kershaw, from Warwick University, *Earthrise Repair Shop*, are becoming to grow as proposals with an ethical responsibility towards what one might call *being-with-one-another-in-the-earth*.