



II Conference ARTHE

Caring and transmitting: challenges posed by performing arts archives

Torre do Tombo National Archives, 5th, 6th and 7th February 2025

This conference marks the end of the ARTHE - Archiving Theatre project (PTDC/ART-PER/1651/2021), which the Foundation for Science and Technology has funded for the last three years. It may also be taken as an invitation to continue working on performing arts archives and their study. The results of the research carried out by the research team that constituted ARTHE will now be presented formally. The research in case has brought together a group of companies spread across the country, whose archives helped to think about practices of caring and transmitting and opened the way to encounters, reinterpretations and updates from artistic, historical-cultural, sociological, heritage and political perspectives.

‘In contemporary societies, the most widespread mode of work is care work.’ (Groys 2022: 1).

In the process of understanding the continuous accumulation of extensions of our bodies, whose survival we seek to ensure through various artefacts (photographs, videos, emails, documents, books, artistic objects, websites, etc.), it is inevitable to question the institutionalisation of certain gestures of care. Museums, libraries, historical archives, monuments, databases are the object of care because they contain symbolic extensions of our material bodies and, therefore, of memories that communities considered culturally or historically significant. We take care of physical bodies and of the archival artefacts that extend and represent them.

Archiving documents that refer to theatre and the performing arts in general raises the broader question of what it means to preserve the aesthetic and artistic trace of theatrical practice by way of very diverse materialities and fortuitous gestures of inclusion and

exclusion involving multiple agents – gestures that are sometimes obscure or motivated by the artistic, economic and socio-political circumstances of the creation itself. In 1999, issue 30 of *Cahiers de la Comédie Française* looked at the main questions that can be asked regarding the fact of archiving theatre materials, and presented the results of a survey of various institutions in ten cities around the world, characterising their archiving practices. In her article, Noëlle Guibert defended the union between researchers and theatre professionals, between theory and practice, and drew a picture of the French reality and the resources required for the preservation and study of theatre documentation. She also issued a challenge: there was still a need to convince theatre professionals to preserve the traces of their creative work, encouraging the use of digital media and the open dissemination of documentation for future reactivations.

However, it's not just the trace of artistic creation that the archives of companies, artists, technicians and cultural institutions preserve. The administrative dimension, informal ways of connecting with the community, networks built by the circulation of ideas, causes and initiatives, and even aspects of people's lives crossed with their professional activities can be found in the materials stored, for reasons that cannot always be uncovered. Reiterating Groys' words, as they exist, archives are part of the expanded system of care provided to their survival and transmission. Caring encompasses specific actions that can include the creation of archives and the transmission of what they contain.

The aim of this conference is to discuss, on the one hand, the relationship between the caring of archives containing objects of different materialities and medialities, with specific demands on resources, people and technical knowledge (in the case of wardrobes, audiovisual recordings, photographs, props, stage materials, handwritten documents, dactyloscripts on a variety of paper supports) and the different ways in which they can be used and transmitted within the scope of artistic practice; and, on the other hand, the recent call for the study and transmission of the information contained in performing arts archives as a memory of experiencing joy at the theatre that contributes to rethinking history as a troubled epistemological space involving multiple subjects, narratives and geographies. Through the archives of the project's partner companies, it was possible to uncover the power and relevance they hold for a history of culture in the post-April Revolution period, as well as weave arguments to defend care actions that make these archives active subjects in the making of history and the present of artistic creation. It is therefore a matter of sharing thought/experience on how to care for theatre archives, i.e. how to prepare ways of preserving and transmitting them in the long term (and despite their disappearance): with what actions, forms of relationship and organisation, accomplices and means, etc.

Transmitting implies interpreting, relating, ordering, but also opening up, expanding, digging and searching for silenced voices, as well as producing more documents and different uses according to the needs of the present. The relevance of bringing the issue of caring for and transmitting this peculiar documentation back to the conversation is due to the fact that, from a practical perspective, the conditions for preserving and accessing documentation now also in a digital environment remain fragile. Above all, it is a matter that keeps raising questions about permanence and erasure, the empty place of the artistic object and its fulfilment by memory, the possibilities of making the history of the performing arts from discourses accepted to enter the history of events of such varied

typologies (spectacles, textualities, corporealities, spatialities). How do we understand these discourses and the rules that constitute them within the archive? How can we understand the discourses already uttered in relation to each other and in the face of the aporias that may arise? And how can the gesture of caring and transmitting of archivists, collectors, artists and researchers respond to these questions in their eagerness to remember/recover and understand what the practices may have been, what may have happened, what we need to uncover.

The conference **Caring and transmitting: challenges posed by performing arts archives** will host a number of papers providing reflections or case studies on the matter at issue, some of which are suggested below:

- Cultural policies and the afterlives of performing arts archives;
- Experiences of archive preservation by theatre companies;
- Archives threatened, archives cared for;
- The historiography of performing arts archives;
- Acts of transmission and post-memory;
- Digital media in the service of the performing arts;
- The affective dimension of company and artist archives;
- Uses of archives and ways of transmission;
- Archivists and artists: crossed perspectives.

We have invited three of the project's consultants to tell us about their particular knowledge and experience: Hélia Marçal, researcher in ethics and heritage and care practices in museology (University College London, IHC of Universidade NOVA de Lisboa); Luís Trindade, researcher in cultural history (IHC, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of Universidade NOVA de Lisboa / IN2PAST); and Luís Castro, performer, (co-director of KARNART-C.P.O.A.A).

Two round tables will bring together the perspective of institutional carers of archives and libraries – Silvestre Lacerda (general-manager of Torre do Tombo National Archives), Pedro Estácio (head of the Library Division of the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon), Cristina Faria (director of Documentation and Heritage of the D. Maria II National Theatre), Sofia Patrão (librarian of the National Museum of Theatre and Dance) – and the perspective of the ARTHE team, which has included representatives of the companies in the work process since the beginning of the project and will take stock of the results of the research.

There will be two visits: one to the exhibition that the Torre do Tombo National Archives is preparing for this occasion, which will be open until the end of March 2025, and another to the KARNART space and its archive and museum.

References

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- Roms, H. (2020). How Performance Art Makes History: Artists' Auto-histories of Happenings and Fluxus in the 1960s, *The Methuen Drama Companion to Performance Art*, Ferdman B., Stokic J. (ed.). London: Methuen Drama DOI: 10.5040/9781350057609.0011
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Information

Venue: Torre do Tombo National Archives

Dates: 5th, 6th and 7th February 2025

Organisation: ARTHE Project - Archiving Theatre, Centre for Theatre Studies, School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon, Torre do Tombo National Archive

Scientific Board: Maria João Brilhante, Ana Bigotte Vieira, Paula Caspão, Vera Borges, Pedro Estácio, Sofia Patrão, Daniel Tércio, Hélia Marçal, Heike Roms, Luís Castro, Silvestre Lacerda, Pedro Estácio.

Submission criteria: The abstract should contain between 300 and 500 words in Portuguese, English, French or Spanish and four keywords. They should be accompanied by a brief CV (200 words). They should be sent with the subject line:

Conferência ARTHE 2025 to arthe@letras.ulisboa.pt

Conference Schedule

5th January 2025 -Deadline for submission of paper proposals

9th January 2025 - Date for sending the results of the peer review

15th January – Disclosure of the programme

24th January 2025 - Deadline for registration

Conference registration: 30 euros



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ARTHE - Arquivar o Teatro «PTDC/ART-PER/1651/2021»



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