Old Age as Theatrical Matter:
Devising and Performing *CollAge,* a Play on the Masks and Mirrors of the Ageing Process

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This article will present the architectural configuration of *CollAge,* a theatrical show that focuses on old age and the inner lives it may generate, and which intends to highlight the irrelevant permanences and necessary ephemeralities which characterize our socio-cultural perceptions of the elderly. It addresses the following questions: What aspects of old age should be theatricalized, considering the marginal position of the elderly in our contemporary Western societies? Through which sources and techniques can old age be re-presented as relevant and truthful subject matter? What is gained and lost through the generational gap between author/actor and character and between the distance that separates actors/characters and the target audience in their respective processes of ageing? Ultimately, this paper intends to reflect upon the boundaries and potentialities of dramaturgy and performativity when the intricacies of the ageing process in its advanced phase are placed center stage.

I n *The Moving Body*, the actor and theater teacher Jacques Lecoq compares theatrical creation with the architecture of inner life (22). Even if this is also true of literary genres which are independent from the dramatic field, it is in playwriting and theatrical creation that the body acquires a three-dimensional existence. It is also with a play that the strategies and structures of the literary text adopt corporeal realities and, by doing so, they create a physical sense of both permanence and impermanence.

When old age becomes the center of a theatrical representation, the performing body around which the whole piece evolves is rendered a multi-layered "*corps poétique,*" to use Jacques Lecoq's expression. The various lev-

els of signification of this "poetic body" may not only highlight the manifestations of advanced age at a physical level, but can also "move" and "resituate" spectators within their own process of ageing, thereby leading them to examine their own internal and external "corpo-realities" in their psychological and socio-cultural dimensions.

This paper will expose the architectural configuration and construction of the play *CollAge. A Theatrical Album through the Journey of Life*, which was produced for the 6th Symposium of Cultural Gerontology celebrated at the University of Lleida (Catalonia, Spain).[1] In particular, the processes of dramaturgical creation and rehearsal of the show will be examined with a more general objective on the horizon: to observe the potentialities of dramaturgical writing and performativity when old age and its controversies are placed center-stage.

Framing the Picture

Starting with the foundations of the show, that is, the phase that preceded the process of dramaturgical creation proper, it could be said that "CollAge" with a capital "A" became the foundation stone of the play's architecture, or the first "*objet trouvé*" which would determine many of the decisions to be made around the selection of texts and conception of the piece. Not only did "coll-age" work as a pun which signalled the fusion of an artistic technique with the notion of "age" as thematic concern, but it also suggested the idea of "collection," "amalgamation," or "accumulation" of apparently independent fragments, which could be compared to the complex and somehow fictionalized remembrance of one's lifetime when the journey of life attains its last stage. As Herbert Blau maintains in an article about memory and ageing, "what is mirrored in memory is the mirror. Imagination is a function of memory whose expanse is a great divide. It is a division which seems to widen with age …" (19).

Together with the title, two questions guided the process of research before the playtext was written. First, what aspects of old age should be theatricalized? And, second, through which theatrical signs could old age be represented as truthful subject matter? Or, to summarize both of them, if the

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1. The symposium took place on 16, 17 and 18 October 2008 with the title "Extending Time, Emerging Realities, Imagining Response." Its organizing committee, the research group "Dedal-lit," commissioned a play to the theater company Nurosfera, of which the author of this article is a founding member. The première performance took place on 17 October as part of the symposium.

theater underlines the notions of permanence and impermanence through its own ephemeral nature, which "permanent" features that we associate with old age could be underlined as "transient," and therefore "irrelevant," and which seemingly "ephemeral" characteristics of ageing might be represented as "enduring," and hence almost "necessary" to remember?

The British playwright Phylis Nagy states that "[t]he decision to write a play is simply the start of a complex moral process which never ends, not even with the production or publication of our plays" (qtd. in Edgar 123). Even if *CollAge* was not to be an original play but a theatrical composition of texts, the dramaturgical process of its creation was similarly marked by the ethical implications of the burden of representation, especially because our purpose as a company was not to invent "a story," but to make the topic of "old age" itself the focus of the show. In order to make the burden of representation lighter, the views of some specialists on the topic of ageing and in the field of gerontology were taken into account. As a result, three notions became additional ordering principles in the textual composition of the dramaturgy.

One of them was Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth's concept of "the mask of ageing" (1991), through which these authors express the mismatch between an old person's external appearance and his/her inner Self. As Featherstone and Hepworth contend, the "mask of ageing" becomes further complicated by society's—predominantly negative—attitudes towards the ageing body, which affect the old person's presentation of the Self as well as his/her self-conception (267).

Closely connected to this, "ageism" as a social discourse and practice was another key notion that acted as a referent in the process of dramaturgical research. More particularly, some of the negative stereotypes upon which ageism is nurtured and which are related to the decadence of the old body, the sexuality of the elderly, and old people's senile and/or supposedly childish behaviour, became dramaturgical targets. As Tom Kirkwood affirms, the existence of social prejudice against age is as staggering as our unawareness of it (15). Far from pursuing a didactic objective with the play—especially given the high degree of specialization of a great many members of the target-audience—the play would not directly point at the *clichés* through which old people are often misrepresented or misconstructed; rather, it would suggest the contradictions inherent in stereotypical views of old age, which not only govern the lives of the elderly themselves, but also determine those of younger and, hence, "potentially old" human beings.

With this second notion in mind, the dramaturgical material would also embrace Mike Featherstone's concept of the "performing self" as a valid antidote against the rigidity of the stereotype. Yet, whereas Featherstone uses this expression to refer to a series of surgical, cosmetic and behavioral practices whereby the elderly are led to create a "new conception of the self" in modern societies marked by consumerism and the power of the image (188-89), the "performing self" represented by the characters of *CollAge* would highlight the fluidity of an old person's identity through the ephemeral flow of the theatrical performance. In other words, *CollAge* would present old people as "performing Selves" through their ambivalences as multi-faced, ever-changing dramatic figures and, therefore, through their manifold connotations as both "signifier" and "signified" of a composite dramatic discourse. The fiction of Graham Holderness, Julian Barnes, Eva Figes and Doris Lessing, the plays of Eugène Ionesco, Virgilio Piñera, Dario Fo and Franca Rame and the lines from poems by T.S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, William Carlos Williams, Miquel Martíi Pol, Carlos Marzal and Joan Margarit, eventually offered a generous gallery of male and female voices out of which a mosaic of ageing could be generated, and through which differentiated issues related to the elderly could be addressed.

Dramaturgical Collage

Having found the theoretical framework and the literary materials for the picture, the theatrical "collage" started taking shape through a series of dramaturgical decisions that intended to give the piece its textual cohesion and dramatic coherence. Some of them concerned the conception and design of essential stage signs. In this respect, the bodies of the performers and the signs which could emanate from them became the first complex signifier for the notion of the "mask of ageing," insofar as they could noticeably represent the opposition between the expected appearance of "old age" and how "old age" can be felt or perceived internally by an elderly person. In a way, this strategy also solved the problem posed by the performers' real age.

Costume and props had to be carefully devised, too, as they would underline the contradictory—and usually invisible—mechanisms whereby the "mask of ageing" operates. It was necessary to choose the type of costume that Roland Barthes defined as "healthy," that is, that which "create[s] a humanity," making the actor's "bodily nature perceptible, distinct, and if possible affecting," while at the same time generating an organic link between the performer and the background to the action (48-49). If the younger

"inner Selves" of old people were to be "unmasked" by the performers' physical appearance, costume would signify, in turn, the sense of social segregation to which the elderly are relegated in many contemporary Western societies. Pajamas or nightgowns complemented by slippers would fit the purpose perfectly: although other pieces of costume could be added on top in order to suggest different roles and situations, the permanent presence of nightgowns would remind the spectator of the minimized, even annulled, impact of the elderly in the public sphere. Furthermore, this type of garment would enhance the sense of vulnerability that often emanates from old bodies and, at the same time, it would foster a sense of intimacy—comfortable in some cases, disquieting in others—between audience and characters.

Some props that are typically associated with the elderly, such as walking sticks, handkerchiefs, glasses, wheelchairs or fans, would complement the show's inverted "masquerade of age": if Mike Hepworth considers "masquerade as a coverup through which old age nonetheless speaks" (148), the young-looking figures in *CollAge* would disclose the elements through which advanced age is characteristically detected and constructed. Yet, not only would those objects perform their ordinary functions, but they would also adopt alternative usages through which aspects of the old characters' "performing selves" could be signified: thus, thanks to the versatility of the theatrical sign walking sticks would become swords with which to fight the biological and social impositions of age; handkerchiefs would be transformed into a grotesque weapon that would help a widower preserve his private romantic spot from intruders; glasses and fans would be elegant instruments of flirting in the hands of an old scholar; and a wheelchair the object of a naughty game of senile dependence and lifelong companionship. More openly theatrical, masks would also appear at some point to invest the performers' bodies with farcical power; through the contradictory fixity of the mask, they would enable the actors' corporealities to express themselves more freely and explore the liberating territory of the grotesque as a site of (self-) mockery and resistance.

The characters' fluid identity or "performing Self" was to be further enhanced through the presence of suitcases on the stage, which were devised to constitute the basic elements of the set. Acting as both props and pieces of scenery, they were chosen to signify the contrast between the static, confined lifestyle that is frequently associated with old age—which would eventually be epitomized by two types of chair in the last scene—with the continuous sense of change that the life cycle entails in *all* its phases. "Age-

ing" as "growing old" and "ageing" as "growing old-er" would thus be fused through these objects, as would the negative and positive connotations of the two interpretations of the word "ageing" itself. The characters in *Coll-Age* would be shown travelling back and forth in time, both within their private memories and thoughts and also in a more philosophical, social, even historical sense. Within a similarly symbolic framework, the play would start with the two performers either inside or on top of two suitcases, thus presenting these props as the womb out of which "old characters," in the theatrical and metaphorical sense, would be born. As Norman N. Holland contends, "we acquire a character" and "we grow in individuality," and this sense of identity starts to be manifested from the early stages of life (52). In the play's Epilogue, when the end of the vital journey would be suggested, the sense of "accumulated identity" would still accompany the characters before the last fade out. The props which would have been collected throughout the performance would then be spread on the ground, like a collage, acting as a reminder of the social roles of which the figures would be eventually divested or, again in Norman N. Holland's words, of the "separate selves" which would have gradually "add[ed] up into a larger self" (52).

Since the representation of old age as biological destiny could not be forgotten, nor could its pressing effects upon the ageing individual, a mirror was devised to constitute the other key element of the set. In *The Coming of Age*, Simone de Beauvoir affirms that even if the elderly respond to their mirror image in accordance with the kind of attitude they have towards old age, there is always "some cause for uneasiness before [they] stand and study the reflection offered by the looking-glass" (425). Contrasted to the various pieces of costume and props on display—which would enable the characters' fluid identity to manifest itself—and opposed to the characters' vision of their "inner Selves," the mirror on stage would constantly signify the disparity between the inner world of the figures and the more alienating reality of their physical decrepitude. Thus, this object would confront the characters with their multi-layered facial stages or, in Kathleen Woodward's words, with those "deeply troubling" "palimpsests of time" (100-01) which betray the Self by "Other-ing" it. At the same time, the looking-glass would symbolically face the audience at different moments of the show, thereby hinting at the spectators' indirect participation in the same kind of masquerade and, consequently, underlining the role of the theater as "*imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis*," as Cicero or Ben Jonson had sustained (Sala-Valldaura 19). In a similar vein, the video-projection of images of old people reproduced in paintings and photographs, com-

bined with quotes by famous writers, would expand the refracting power of the stage by creating a kaleidoscopic image of old age which would be, nevertheless, still subjective in both the choice and assemblage of the fragments.

In a collage, the small pieces are as important as the prominent ones; even if they may go unnoticed to some viewers, they almost sustain the bigger picture from their delicate angles. Whereas all the stage signs mentioned so far were devised to convey psychological and social aspects of ageing while at the same time providing the text with a sense of internal coherence, the choice of a series of apparently more secondary stage signs related to the auditory channel of communication between audience and stage started to adopt a life of their own and transported culture-specific layers of meaning onto the canvas of the dramaturgy.

These had to do, in the first place, with the use of different languages in the playtext. The mixed nature of the play's target audience, mainly composed of international conference delegates but also of autochthonous spectators, motivated the choice of English and Catalan as the languages to be predominantly used on the stage and on screened subtitles. Hence, there would be entire scenes in Catalan or English with subtitles in their corresponding translation, whereas the Prologue, the third scene and the Epilogue would have dialogues in both Catalan and English. Inevitably, the sounds of each language would ultimately shape the performers' mimic expression and voices; and, eventually, their differentiated tones would add new connotations to the play's representation of old age.

Dialogues in Catalan, on the one hand, were to be delivered in the actors' original accent, which actually corresponded with the Western variety of this language.[2] The sounds and semantic specificities of this dialect were likely to be perceived as unfamiliar, even archaic, to delegates coming from other areas of Catalonia: for these would rather be accustomed to the standard variety of Catalan that is almost exclusively used in films and on TV. In a way, this dialectal detachment was to contribute to the feeling of estrangement that the dramaturgy would create in its ever-shifting presentation of the controversies of old age. At the same time, the performers' Western accent was expected to generate associations with a more rural form of speech. Even if partly stereotyped, these sociolinguistic connections

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2. Catalan is largely divided into two major regional dialects, the so-called Western dialect, which has seven sub-varieties, and the denominated Eastern dialect, with four main sub-varieties that include the standard accent or "central Catalan."

were likely to favor the traditional and allegedly simplified lifestyle that characterized some of the elderly figures in *CollAge*.

The use of English in the dramaturgy, on the other hand, carried different implications. With the help of two native speakers of this language, the performers would be trained to reproduce the standard variety of British English. Not only was work on the sounds and intonational patterns of this accent aimed at ensuring a more direct communication between stage and (the international) audience, but it also attempted the reproduction of a culturally-specific sound-scape through which a particular manifestation of advanced age could be conveyed without the blurring filters of translation. For instance, the characterization of Julian Barnes's Ms Winstanley, the elderly scholar of the play's second scene, required playful changes of pitch, stress and tone, that is, a series of phonological mannerisms through which this figure could reproduce her ironic and resilient portrait of old age. The meaningful subtleties implicit in this kind of prosodic variations would have been more difficult to achieve in a language other than English, especially if the language used in translation was to lack the contrast between short and long vowels.

The duality of languages was bound to produce different mechanisms of identification with the audience, depending on the spectators' mother tongue and/or their knowledge of the second language. Yet, the constant exchange between the familiar and the strange amongst different sections of the audience eventually ensured a permanent feeling of "engaged detachment" or "detached engagement." This composite form of reception, which ultimately led to an emotional form of reflection upon the central topic of the show, was further enhanced by the complementary use of two more languages, French and Spanish.

The adaptation of Julian Barnes's story "Knowing French" in scene 2 facilitated the introduction of French, whose presence was subsequently reinforced through the songs by George Moustaki that were played in the same scene and again in scene 4 through one of the characters. Excerpts from Eugène Ionesco's *Les Chaises* increased the cohesive power of this language and the culture it represented, to the extent of creating a semiosphere of fantasy, an almost unreal domain which Ms Winstanley enjoyed and from which she still learned throughout scene 2, and which in scene 4 Tabet and Tota regarded as almost a mirage of a very amusing, romantic past full of eccentric stories they could recall and re-create again and again. The use of Spanish in the same scene, particularly in the section that was adapted from Virgilio Piñera's *Dos Viejos Pánicos*, enabled the playful use

of a fourth language through which Tabet and Tota could adopt a new mask and, by doing so, dis-play hidden aspects of their personalities. The decision to play that fragment with an artificial Argentinean accent, as foreign to the performers as the English language, was meant to underline the characters' metatheatrical act while at the same time initiating a new sense of time-space which would be reinforced by tango music.

As if an acoustic collage was being created, the sounds of French and Argentinean words, the tangos and French songs heard in the play, and the references to an imaginary Paris through dialogue and songs, ended up generating a composite fictional space to which the old characters would intermittently escape and through which they could, nevertheless, express their passionate attachment to life. Ultimately, the acoustic atmospheres of an imaginary Paris or a fantasized Buenos Aires would epitomize the category of the "unrealizables" in which Simone de Beauvoir, following Sartre, classifies old age (420).

On the whole, the different meanings derived from this multilingual dramaturgy went beyond the all-inclusive form of reception they pursued and ended up increasing the dramaturgy's kaleidoscopic portrayal of ageing. In a way, this accumulation of meaning achieved through the different languages mirrored the "apparent" "Chaos" of dramaturgical creation itself: as Eugenio Barba maintains, the mixture of theatrical elements sometimes generates sensorial, melodic, rhythmic, associative and intellectual links that we had not totally predicted and which help us find what we were looking for —and, yet, ignored—at the beginning of the search (57).

Contributing to this sonorous map of meaningful unpredictability, a series of acoustic effects expanded the dramaturgy's network of connotations. A practical decision motivated the substitution of the projected image of a parrot by the sound of wings fluttering at the end of scene 2: this was meant to symbolize Ms Wynstanley's act of freedom in the Old Folkery, but the metonymical use of this sound created a more cohesive link with the "small chipping birds" from William Carlos Williams's poem, which were alluded to in the play's Epilogue as a metaphor of old age and whose sound was to be heard while the poem was being recited. The final effect of the wind blowing against the two performers similarly reinforced the contrast between the terrestrial nature of their aged bodies and a more volatile, ethereal sphere to which they also belonged, again as both characters and old people. All in all, a dichotomy was eventually established between visual and auditory channels of theatrical communication: even though the audience would "see" the characters moving within the limited

and isolated, almost island-like confines of the stage and their bodies, they would also "hear"—and, ultimately, perceive—the symbolic projections of their inner, freer, Selves.

Layer upon Layer: The Company's Collage

The period of rehearsals was, as to be expected, the first real test for the dramaturgy—the second and definitive one being, of course, the actual performance of the play. Even if the text had already been created with all the circumstances surrounding the production in mind, there were details of the presentational space which had to be slightly changed due to technical reasons; and, more interestingly, unexpected theatrical elements also appeared which highly enriched the playtext, such as the wheelchair that introduced the notion of immobility and dependence in Tabet and Tota's absurdist game.

But besides these additional variations, which are part of the—ever-surprising—process of bringing a playtext into life, there was one performative aspect which inevitably received special attention during the rehearsals, namely, the actors' register of performance. Borrowing from Anne Ubersfeld's words, "performance constructs a total poem" and the written play is only one element of that total poem; therefore, the difficulty lies in "the articulation that must be set up between the totality of the poem being performed," as it is perceived by the spectator, "and the poetic element of the dialogued exchange" (148). Even if the acting styles to be used in each scene were implicit in the playtext and, sometimes, clarified in the stage directions, the text could still be acted out in different ways depending on the reader's perspective. After all, the authorial territory was now being expanded from one to three co-authors, counting both director and co-performer. As dramaturgist and one of the two performers, I even re-interpreted sections of the playtext in the rehearsals, since the perspective inevitably changes when one moves from an abstract conceptualization of the text to its theatrical translation. The acting styles to be chosen, therefore, became the cornerstone on which the dramaturgical building that had been created was bound to rest.

The dramaturgy initially established a distinction between third-person and first-person scenes: that is, the prologue, scene 3 and the Epilogue enabled a more distanced acting style which led to the rupture of the fourth wall and moments of Brechtian detachment. These alienating effects were meant to let the characters explain themselves to the audience as both old

figures and products of theatrical convention. As the rehearsals proceeded, the anti-naturalistic style required by those scenes facilitated the incorporation of certain genres of performance, such as the cabaret-like ending of the Prologue and the dance of masks at the end of scene 3 using James Ball Naylor's poem as a song.

In general, the rehearsals of those scenes were focused on trying to vivify excerpts which could sound too sententious or become excessively lyrical due to the use of some poems, by rendering them a source of both entertainment and reflection. As a side effect, however, the use of the anti-Naturalistic register of performance involved exploring the third-person relationship that the aged establish with their own bodies at a deeper level, not only through the notion of the "mask of ageing" and its alienating potential, but also from a more positive, liberating perspective: that which accepts that the "I" is a sophisticated entity which gains complexity and collective character as the subject grows old. As the anti-naturalistic strategies seem to imply, the "I" of the elderly is detached and yet holds multiple connections between the individual and the world surrounding him/her; it is a collage in itself which acknowledges membership in a larger collage. Doris Lessing, who is indirectly quoted in scene 3, confirms this thought in an interview with Billy Gray about her experience of ageing. She affirms that when you grow old—

> [y]ou do become less personal […] When you're young, you think you're this amazing, unique creature but you learn that you're not and in fact understand that your experiences are common. I honestly can't think of any experience we have that isn't shared. (Gray 85)

The first-person scenes of the dramaturgy, namely, scenes 1 and 2, as well as a few brief excerpts of scene 3, demanded another register of performance. In these cases, the performers were not supposed to embody the self-reflective experience of the elderly or aspects of ageing which could be conveyed through metatheatrical actions; rather, those scenes contained confessional monologues and, consequently, the sought-after effect was to elicit a sense of identification from the audience. This inevitably required a more naturalistic style of acting on the performers' part, and a more contained direction of the performers' actions, which would have to include smaller yet very calculated gestures.

If solemnity and excessive formalism were our enemies in the anti-naturalistic sections of the text, we encountered two clear obstacles in the more realistic scenes. One of them was our own body, especially the face. No matter how much we attempted a mimetic register of performance in order

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to recreate Graham Holderness's park-defender and Julian Barnes's schol-
ar, our younger faces would always betray us in our naturalistic portrayal.
Other parts of the body became allies, helping us to partly cover our natural
facial mask: in particular, legs and spine did help in the creation of a corpo-
real mask, which was completed with the modification of the voice.
Nonetheless, the constant manipulation of our back- and leg-position and
the subsequent alteration of vocal expression revealed our second enemy:
stereotyped acting. As Oscar Wilde repeatedly contends in *De Profundis*,
"the supreme vice is shallowness" (2, 28, 31, 48-49, 88); and, considering
contemporary conditions of ageing, shallow would be a physical recreation
of the elderly which was constantly—or simply—based on a bent spine and
a croaky, trembling voice. The revolution of longevity has certainly entailed
the heterogeneity of ageing corporealities. As Raymond Tallis affirms:

> [f]rom the biological point of view, the elderly are far less homo-
> geneous than younger adults. Indeed, increased variance is the
> very hallmark of ageing—even more so nowadays when an ex-
> tended old age may reach from the fit 'young-old' sexagenarian to
> the extremely frail nonagenarian. (4)

The corporeal reality of the octogenarian, no matter how heterogeneous
that category can be in its own right, constituted the best model to imitate,
as it facilitated the contrast between our facial and corporeal masks, while
at the same time admitting the combination of fragility with a slow, yet con-
sistent form of energy. Well-aware of theatrical *clichés*, we combined the
modification of the spine and leg-position with specific actions and gestures
that could suggest certain physical problems associated with old age, even
if they are not exclusive to the elderly, such as arthritis, arthrosis or move-
ment disorders like Parkinson disease. All in all, these considerations, the
observation work they involved, and the constant search for the corporeal
mask in the rehearsal period, led us to several sculptures of the "body with-
in" out of which the characters in the naturalistic scenes were created. In a
sense, this process of characterization became a Stanislavskian study in re-
verse: we did not depart from our physical memory of certain actions and
corporeal attitudes but, instead, we trained our bodies to look for "a future
memory" and find, eventually, the old sculpture that was hiding inside our
younger marble or, again using Simone de Beauvoir's phrase, "the Other
within" that develops with old age.
     Based as it was on the Theater of the Absurd, scene 4 required a com-
posite register of performance that could incorporate elements of both anti-

naturalistic and naturalistic acting. Furthermore, the situations and dialogues of this scene, adapted from Ionesco's *The Chairs*, Dario Fo and Franca Rame's *The Problem of Old People* and Virgilio Piñera's *Two Old Frights*, seemed to evoke an extreme representation of old age, namely, one that could play with its caricature and turn it on its head by constantly toying with the audience's expectations about the two characters' mental and corporeal capacities. In this respect, the vocal and physical characterization which seemed appropriate for Tabet and Tota was somehow reminiscent of two clown-figures, as usually occurs in the Theater of the Absurd.

In line with clownesque acting, the tempo of the characters' actions and words was an important element to orchestrate when adjusting our registers of performance: it was in the different paces of the figures' speeches and actions as well as in their calculated moments of silence, that issues related to old age—such as loneliness, isolation, physical limitation and boredom—could come to the surface. By the same token, changes of pace were useful to indicate the characters' creative power, with which the tediousness of their everyday routines was constantly challenged and, ultimately, the negative effects of their advanced age could be counteracted. Despite their corporeal decay, Tabet and Tota do not cease to keep boredom and, ultimately, death at bay through their "never-ending end-games," to borrow Gabriele Schwab's expression (205). Closely related to this, the intermittent pauses of this scene also allowed the existentialist potential of the text to emerge. As Samuel Beckett demonstrates in his work, the Theater of the Absurd is the perfect dramatic territory to depict old age in its last phase and, through it, to incite reflection upon the human condition. Indeed, our experiment with the absurdist register inevitably involved recreating a very peculiar state of liminality, that is, the transition between life and death and the moments of eternity it contains, which are mirrored, in miniature, in the liminal space between speech and silence, or in the almost imperceptible gap between breath and breathlessness.

Representation and the Collage of Memory

Having covered the period of dramaturgical creation and rehearsals, and now that the performances of the show are over, there are probably as many collages as subjective revisions we can make of the whole picture. And, parallel to this, as Phylis Nagy's words indicated at the beginning of this paper, the complex moral process that theatrical creation generates still goes on. The same questions remain, all of them reminiscent of the "utopias

of the theatre" which, as Eugenio Barba defines them, have to do with looking for life in a cardboard world, making truth emerge out of a world of disguises or conquering sincerity in a world of fictions (54).

Nonetheless, if one accepts the impossibility of attaining an ideal of artistic authenticity which can be representative of a universal and, at the same time, absolutely individual experience, some conclusions can still be reached about the potentialities of the theater to represent old age in a significant manner—even if those conclusions can only emerge in this case from a very specific creative practice.

The theater is clearly the domain to question the value of what is real and to reveal in this way the layers of our identity as human beings who are constantly subjected to change. In this respect, it is not a coincidence that, as reflected in the literary corpus analyzed by Maricel Oró in a doctoral thesis on ageing and English fiction (2007), not a few novelists have based their portrayals of old age on characters that are related to the theatrical world in one way or the other.

But beyond the game of masks that the theater proposes as both a metaphor and as an artistic medium, the theatrical experience allows for an examination of the ever-changing manifestations of old age at internal and external levels through the ephemeral materiality of the actors' "moving body" and the symbols it may create in its interaction with the playtext, the presentational space, and the viewers themselves. In this respect, the theater fosters a complex space of hospitality in which performers and audience open up to the multi-layered reality of the elderly as well as to the uncanny perception of their own ageing Selves as both familiar and strange to themselves. As an act of hospitality, as Jacques Derrida puts it, this opening of borders "can only be poetic" (2). As a communal act of creation, it ultimately generates a collective representation of old age, no matter how narrow its original scope was.

All the same, and to finish, the collage-like quality inherent in both the experience of becoming old and in the theater itself inevitably stamps new questions on the experience of ageing and its forms of representation. In a way, to paraphrase Dylan Thomas, one can never "go gentle into that good night": old age, as was demonstrated through this process of creation, can always be reformulated and rediscovered before and after curtain call, thus remaining an ungraspable mystery, a veritably theatrical "unrealizable" to remember once again Simone de Beauvoir's classification of the last phase of our lives (420).

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