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Adapting, Directing and Performing New Portuguese Letters

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New Portuguese Letters**

Dissertação realizada no âmbito do Mestrado em Estudos Literários, Culturais e Interartes,
orientada pela Professora Doutora Martins de Oliveira

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

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Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

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Abstract

This Master thesis describes the creative work *The Three Marias*, a theatre play based on the Portuguese feminist book, *New Portuguese Letters*, by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa. This work is about three different creations: writing, directing, and performing. I also tried to explain the different choices I made, and the aims that I wanted to achieve. In this process I paid special attention to giving my own voice to women symbolic silence.

Key-words

Theatre, Feminism, Adaptation, *New Portuguese Letters*, Performing, Directing.

Esta tese de mestrado descreve o trabalho criativo *The Three Marias*, uma peça de teatro baseada na obra *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, de Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta e Maria Velho da Costa, um texto central para o feminismo português. Este texto descreve três diferentes trabalhos criativos: escrita, direção e representação. Procurei explicar as minhas escolhas e os meus objetivos. Neste processo dei especial atenção à possibilidade de conferir voz ao silêncio simbólico das mulheres.

Palavras-chave

Teatro, Feminismo, Adaptação, *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, *Performance*, Encenação.

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Introduction

This thesis will focus on the adaptation and staging of the Portuguese book *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, first published in 1972 by Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Isabel Barreno and Maria Velho da Costa. This study will therefore regard both practice and theory.

During the Masters course, as well as within the context of the seminar on Feminist Studies and Queer Studies, I did an adaptation of the book for the stage using the English translation by Helen R. Lane and Faith Gillespie, first published in 1975 under the title *The Three Marias: New Portuguese Letters*. In addition to directing, I also performed in the adaptation, which I titled *The Three Marias*, and presented it in Porto in 2016 and in 2017. This Master thesis is an expansion of that work.

Although the book was written in the 1970s, the themes discussed in *New Portuguese Letters* are still relevant today, and that is why I chose to adapt it. I wanted to show people of my generation that the issues presented in the book still need to be addressed today: inequality between men and women, discrimination, minorities' struggles, war, power, violence, gender stereotypes, sexual discovery, emancipation, and so on. By the time that the book was published in Portugal, these issues were not yet being discussed by people in general, and yet nowadays they are at the forefront of Portugal's political agenda. This observation was what led me to develop the presentation of these themes through the writing and performance of a text that I adapted based on the book written by the Three Marias.

I come from Georgia, a nation that has a different culture from Portugal in many respects. The women's movement in Georgia for example began in the XIX century with women's role in society increasing to participate in important political decisions.

At the beginning of the XX century this movement became stronger and one of the most important subjects of the time was the educational system. Women were fighting on behalf of every social class. The famous writer and activist Ekaterine Gabashvili played a crucial role in this movement, having opened several new schools for women of lower social levels/classes throughout Georgia. In addition, she was responsible for the publication of a new magazine entitled *The Voice of Georgian Woman*, which at that time was a significant step for the movement, as it brought it to women around the country because the movement got closer to society (Melashvili 2014).

However, with the establishment of the Soviet Union in the XX century, as Tamta Melashvili explains, movements such as this became forbidden, killing to a large degree the ideas of freedom and equality between the sexes. Feminism was now seen as subversive and contradictory to Soviet ideals, and as such the mentality of people changed. Women's place in society was further eclipsed by the shadow of men, and subjugated by the constraints of patriarchy (Melashvili 2014).

It was a long break for feminism in Georgia, a break that lasted almost a century. Nobody talked about it, and even after the collapse of the Soviet Union it was difficult for society to receive these ideas properly or without constraint. The general line of thought was that feminism was pro-European and as such unfit to be paired with Georgian nationalistic principles. However, in the XXI century small groups began to appear throughout the country with a renewed energy that was set on restoring feminist ideals that were previously ignored or suppressed. A newfound willingness to fight for and invent new ideas began to be observable and women's voices were slowly beginning to be heard. Unfortunately however, and despite great advancements for the feminist movement brought on by gender and queer studies, Georgian society still doesn't seem to be fully ready to accept feminism as a norm, and violence against women is still a problem in Georgia.

Nonetheless, it is in my opinion that the lack of presence of feminist thought in Georgian mainstream society is not due to a lack of education or shortage of information, but is instead a symptom of an enduring socio-political climate that still lingers from the Soviet era.

Coming from a different background and country I have studied different acting methodologies than those commonly taught to Portuguese students. The Georgian drama school is based on the method conceived by Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski was one of the greatest living theatre practitioners who transformed actors training from formulated cliché to an inner process and emotional reality. His legacy still lives on today in the training of actors worldwide. "The Stanislavski System" intends to portray believable, natural people on stage. In many ways, Stanislavsky is the father of Method Acting, a process in which actors immerse themselves into their characters as much as possible (Bradford 2017). "Emotional memory" is a main key for the Stanislavski method. If you don't feel, you cannot act, as the actor has to be intellectual to create characters. As the brain can control the body and mind, in Stanislavski's theatre we have actors following the "Stanislavski System" which is to portray believable, natural people

on stage, thus being both intellectual human beings as well as creators (Bradford 2017). For the performance of *The Three Marias*, I worked with people of different nationalities. The musician, professional actors, and visual artists that participated in the project were from Portugal, the Netherlands and Norway. The collaboration with these young artists of different backgrounds is something I consider valuable for my project as it provided me with multiple perspectives on art, feminism, gender, and contemporary social issues.

When we think about the interaction between text and reader, it is important to remember that this kind of interaction is individual as well as personal, and dependent on the reader's imagination. Everything is about our ability to imagine it. We may have valuable dramatic texts, when we are engaging with a text, our opinions and interpretation of it are largely informed by our respective histories that in turn inform our imaginations.

During the stage adaptation of *The Three Marias*, I came to realize the importance of that which informs the reader's imagination and how this connection can often transcend the text itself. Nothing of a text has any meaning until meaning is perceived by the reader. According to Wolfgang Iser's theory of "the implied reader" in the act of reading, the textual structure of the implied reader is composed of three basic components: the textual perspectives, their convergent place, and the vantage point of the reader (Iser 1972). Iser says that the text gets meaning only when it is read.

In this master thesis, I will discuss the textual adaptation, staging and performing processes, and as such I will talk from three different perspectives; adaptor, director, and actor. In order to work with these three dimensions, I first studied the book *New Portuguese Letters* and then I adapted the text into a script for the stage. I then incorporated myself into the performance with the intentions to make use of all human abilities, namely the brain/mind, body, voice, and feeling.

Thus, in Chapter 1, titled "*New Portuguese Letters*, themes and problems", I will discuss the material that I chose for my play, namely, the text *New Portuguese Letters*, highlighting the thematic and social messages which were so important for me as an adaptor. I will also briefly discuss the work that inspired it, *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, by Mariana Alcoforado.

In Chapter 2, which focus on the adaptation of the book, I will first analyze my directing methodology, which was informed by my background as well as my experience in Portugal and my working with Portuguese artists. Then, as a seasoned actress, I will explore the process of having attempted to marry my own acting background with the new trends in Portuguese theatre.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I will present and comment the script I have made for the play *The Three Marias*.

According to my research, *New Portuguese Letters* has never been adapted as a play, although the text has in the past been read on stage in both England and France. So, together with 8 crewmembers from Portugal, Georgia and Norway, the play was first performed at the building of Hospital Conde Ferreira, in Porto, in a joint event with the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto. Then my team and I decided to prepare a new version of the play, working intensely on it from October 2016 till January 2017. The new adaptation premiered in Grupo Musical Miragaia in Porto. Both the productions had a different frame because of the different locations and stage dimensions. As previously mentioned the first one was in a psychiatric clinic and for me, as director, this location was highly inspirational. The second one took place in a theatre and was more difficult artistically because of the atmosphere of a theatre and the presentation of the feminine figure on stage. Both of these experiences also included a wide range of artistic elements such as live projection, live music, pre-recorded audio visuals and textual interpretation. In addition to the play, students from the Faculty of Fine Arts (Faculdade de Belas Artes) filmed the rehearsals and the meetings, thereby documenting the process of taking the text to the stage. This thesis is also my way of documenting the creative process behind *The Three Marias*.

Chapter 1: *New Portuguese Letters*, themes and problems

Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively using words of despair. Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble.

Yehuda Berg

“Prisoner, Love, Orgasm, Duties, Death, Woman.” These are words many of us are scared to talk about. But why? Words, words, words. Words are just made up of letters; in manifestos, texts, books. But it’s not all about just words. Words have power and sometimes just one word can make a revolution, start a new movement. They can also break ideas or ideologies.

In this chapter, I will discuss the material that I chose for my play, namely, the text *New Portuguese Letters*, as well as the work that inspired it, *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*. The book *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* was revolutionary. It was first published in Portugal in 1972 generating much controversy at a time where the issues raised in the text were still taboo in Portuguese society. *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* is a group of 120 texts written by three Portuguese authors, three women writers, three Marias. These women wrote about a few themes that I found interesting to analyse and to work with: feminization of poverty, inequality between men and women, discrimination, minorities, war, power, violence, gender, sexual discovery, emancipation, and so on. By the time that the book was published, these issues were not being discussed by the average Portuguese citizen and yet, nowadays, all of these issues are as relevant as ever. This was the main comparison that created the starting point of developing these themes, through writing and performing a text based on the book.

The authors of *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Isabel Barreno and Maria Velho da Costa, were young writers and (at that time) friends. Following the censorship of one of Horta's volumes of poetry in 1971 (namely, *Minha Senhora de Mim*) the three women decided to collaborate on a book that would directly

challenge the censorship imposed during the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, the founder and leader of Estado Novo – the corporatist authoritarian government that ruled Portugal until 1974.

“*Enough, it is time to cry, enough. And to form a barricade with our bodies*”: this was the decision these three young women made (Barreno/Horta/Costa 1975: 330). They began to write *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* with a series of unsigned, but dated letters exchanged between the three of them. They also took their inspiration from the 17th century’s classic *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* by Mariana Alcoforado. Thus, the book consists of poems (lyrical and erotic), essays, fictional stories and letters in the voices of both women and men, forming a complex response to the Classic *Letters* while also telling new stories set at various times in Portuguese history.

The book *New Portuguese Letters* is based on the text *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and my play *The Three Marias* is based on *New Portuguese Letters*. Therefore, in this chapter, I will try to draw parallels between these two books and my play, as well as to point out the differences. This discussion could symbolically be called the “Never Ending Maria” as it entails issues that are illustrative of women’s movements of the past, present and future. I will concentrate on the similarities and the differences that were important for my adaptaion.

First of all everything started with a Portuguese nun and a true story around her. *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (*Les Lettres Portugaises*) was first published anonymously in Paris in 1669, and consisted of five passionate letters. Little was initially known about the work apart from the fact that it was addressed to the Marquis de Chamilly. As the author was female, the author's name and identity were unknown for some time. According to Andrea Calabretta, in “Letters of a Portuguese Nun: A Literary Mystery in Beja” (2010), the letters gained vast popularity and were translated into several languages, setting a precedent for sentimentalism in European culture at large. This also opened the door for the literary genres of the sentimental novel and the epistolary novel that gained popularity in the 18th century. The interest in the *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* was so strong that by the 17th century the word "portugaise" became synonymous with a "passionate love-letter" (Calabretta 2010).

In the 18th century, however, the authorship of the work was ultimately attributed to Mariana Alcoforado, a Portuguese nun. Mariana was born in Beja into a rich, agricultural family. As was customary, her father placed her in a monastery at the age of sixteen to

ensure her safety, as Beja was the stage of a long conflict with Spain that had begun with the Portuguese revolution of 1640, the same year Mariana was born.

As a Franciscan nun of the Poor Ladies, Mariana's life would be somewhat limited by her position as a woman of the cloth, but not completely isolated. As Calabretta points out, due to the relaxed environment in which Mariana lived, she was able to meet with a French officer named Noel Buton (later the Marquis de Chamilly). It is said that Mariana first saw Bouton through a window in the Convento de Nossa Senhora da Conceição, although it was perhaps her brother, a Portuguese soldier, who first introduced them (Calabretta 2010).

The relationship that developed between them was secret. Although romantic connections were not uncommon for young nuns, they were not entirely accepted by society of the time. However, if one were to visit a Portuguese convent of that era and hear tales about the intrigues and indiscretions that took place in both cloistered convents and more relaxed sisterhoods, it is not hard to imagine notes being passed through barred windows and secret meetings arranged in underground tunnels. In the end, the scandal of their love affair was at threat of becoming public, but the soldier left Mariana and fled back to France.

It is said that Mariana's heart prompted her to write a series of letters to Buton. Little did she know that her personal sentiments would soon reach a wide and public audience across Europe. Five letters were published first in France in 1669 under the title *Les Lettres Portugaises* and achieved immediate success for their honesty and passion.

Nevertheless, historians continue to discuss whether Mariana really wrote the letters attributed to her - or, in fact, the author was a Frenchman named Gabriel-Joseph de la Verne, Comte de Guilleragues. According to Calabretta, "the publisher of *Les Lettres Portugaises*, Claude Barbine, claimed that they were written by the 'Portuguese lady of society'" (Calabretta 2010). However, there are many scholars who say that this is a work of a thorough invention, depicting a fictitious "female psyche, experiencing stages of passionate love, despair, and resolve" (Calabretta 2010).

In *Letters of a Portuguese Nun (Les Lettres Portugaises)*, Mariana writes from the point of view of a simple young girl who cannot understand that she was seduced and discarded by someone she so highly valued. In the end, Mariana finally decides to give up her love for Buton and instead seek peace of mind. But in her letters she also refers to the small details of their time together in such a way that one can imagine all the progression of their romance and the hours spent hiding in her room in the monastery. In

my opinion, Mariana's discussion about her life under the church at that time, added to Barbine's phrase 'Portuguese lady of society' and the fact that love intrigues were very common among the monasteries and convents at the time, are valuable arguments to affirm that the letters were written by the Portuguese Nun. If we make a parallel with the story of *New Portuguese Letters*, we will see that the Catholic Church was never a supporter of women's emancipation and that religion has always been very powerful and people are strongly influenced by it.

On the other hand, Myriam Cyr says that Portuguese Catholicism combined with leftover Muslim customs was the ideal atmosphere for the role of women in Portugal. In Muslim culture women were sitting and eating on the floor, while men were around the table; women could not walk in the street alone, so they were always under the control (Cyr 2006). This argument strength the opinion about the Catholic Church and the Feminism movement, but the opposite of that we can find in the same author "Mariana soon discovered that life at Conceição operated under different rules than those read out loud to her. Unlike her sister Ana who was about to marry a man twice her age, here at Conceição Mariana would be mistress of her fate. Nuns would teach her how to read and write. In times of famine, she would be among the last to go hungry, and her religious status would grant her the right to speak to men as an equal" (Cyr 2006). So I think that if the Church was the way for women to speak with men as an equal and nuns were educated, Mariana Alcoforado could write these letters and have a love relationship with a French soldier. Secondly, I would like to draw a parallel between the Catholic Church and the Soviet Union, as none of them are particularly supportive of feminist movements. During the Soviet Union as I already mentioned, feminist organisations disappeared, they were forbidden, but women had access to education and work. The same happened in medieval times, with the Catholic Church. Nuns were a symbol of subjugated women (since many of them had been forced to live in a convent by their families), but they were getting education inside of the church.

In a certain sense, Mariana can be seen as a "Portuguese hero", since her transgressive figure inspired the writing of *New Portuguese Letters*, which in turn contributed to change women's role in society. In the theatre, a "Hero" often means a character who changes things or runs against something, as it is in real life. Likewise, Mariana as a "hero" is one of the strongest women portrayed in literature or in art. One such display of homage is the work *New Portuguese Letters* written by Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Isabel Barreno and Maria Velho da Costa, who chose the Portuguese Nun

as one of its main characters. They went as far as to quote directly from Alcoforado's letters, incorporating her voice in their text:

I leave my room as little as possible — this room in which you have come to see me so many times. And I look continually at your portrait, which is dearer to me than life itself. It gives me some pleasure... but it also gives me pain when I think that I may never see you again. Why... how can it be that I shall never see you again? Have you abandoned me forever? I am in despair... your poor Maria can write no more. (Barreno/Horta/Costa 1975: 421)

This excerpt from *New Portuguese Letters*, which is also used in my script, represents a pinnacle in the development of the character's climax, or a break point that all of a sudden changes the story's trajectory. Here we see a new face, a new woman, one who is not weak, and is not begging someone to come back. For her, her questions already have answers and this letter is an artistic expression of her victory, a point achieved when the character becomes stronger through pain and weakness. It is the beginning of the creation of our "Hero", in the play.

There are many thematic similarities in all of these works (*Letters of Portuguese Nun*, *New Portuguese Letters*, and my own *The Three Marias*), some of the most important being the conflict between the individual and society, and the lack of personal decisions and freedom. Women have long been bound by the constraints imposed upon them by men. We are victims of labelling and stereotypes, and it is not impossible for women of today to imagine the realities for those depicted in the two works that influenced my own. Women, just as then, continue to struggle for their rights, freedom and equality. These three Portuguese authors, because of their lives and the social movements that they contributed to, were the basis of, and the greatest inspiration of my play and its characters.

Written during the Estado Novo regime, *New Portuguese Letters* addressed then-censored issues, such as the colonial war, immigration, the ideological influence of Catholic Church dogmas and taboos, violence, and the legal and social status of women. Portuguese feminism went through its difficult times in the 1960s and 70s due to the combined influence of the fascist regime that prevailed in the country until 1974, a very conservative and dominant Catholic church, and a poor educational and scientific system, as João Manuel Oliveira states in "Hyphenations: The Other Lives of Feminist and queer Concepts" (2014: 40). Due to the existence of an attempt to revive the republican

feminism that was very active in the early 20th century, the prevailing political and social climate erased feminism as a means to struggle against fascism. It should be noted that feminists were very active in the broader struggle against fascism and in underground political parties. However, they did not openly identify as feminists, but rather fought with others who resisted the dictatorship (Oliveira 2014: 40-41).

In one especially luminous moment, Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, or, the three Marias as they came to be known, published a collectively written book. The publication and subsequent censorship and trials of these letters are what we might call the birth of 1970s Portuguese feminism, both as a theory and as a social movement in the country. The launch of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1975 occurred immediately after the justification of the three authors (Oliveira 2014: 41).

New Portuguese Letters is written by these three authors without establishing their individual contributions, and is characterized by a violation of literary genres, in particular that of the epistolary genre and poetry. Although the book took as its starting point the epistolary novel attributed to the Portuguese nun, Mariana Alcoforado, *New Portuguese Letters* also makes reference to other women (called Maria, Monica, Ana and other such combinations of the name Mariana) to challenge the imprisonment and methods of subjugation faced by women in Portuguese society at the time.

As Oliveira argues, *New Portuguese Letters* makes use of a sexually explicit language and argues for the sexuality of women as a new territory for criticism, discussing women's pleasures, orgasms and bodily sensations. In addition, the book stands out as a violation of literary genres, representing something very new both in Portugal and abroad, by deconstructing both the canon and the author as a text producer. The collective authorship of these writers is focused on themselves as principal subjects and objects of the text (Oliveira 2014: 41-2).

When the story of the trial became known in Portugal, an international movement in support of the authors began in France, the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. This movement was organized by feminist groups who were shocked by the regime's decision to take this book to court. The book refers to women's position as a notable and sexually explicit category in the patriarchal structure and to the negative aspects of dominance. Monique Wittig was one of the translators of the book in France, where it was published in 1974. French feminists nevertheless fought for the freedom of

three authors, without actually reading the book in full (since only some letters were translated at the time of the trial) (Oliveira 2014: 42).

New Portuguese Letters gained recognition amongst British and Irish reading public after its translation into English in 1975 despite the book being banned in Portugal for 18 years following its initial publication. The English version of the book gained such popularity that “ripples of support for the women were seen spreading to New York, Los Angeles and London, where a dramatic presentation of the book will be given for an audience of more than 200” (Dix 1974: II). As Ana Margarida Martins and Hilary Owen have noted, in *New Portuguese Letters to the World: International Reception* (2015), the first English performance reading excerpts of the *New Portuguese Letters* coincided with the birth of the British Women's Theater in the early 1970s. This in turn helped to turn the book into a powerful symbol of feminist solidarity. Artistic support of the movement continued (Martins/Owen 2015: 49-50).

The *New Portuguese Letters* case had in fact made an impact on the international community when it was referred to at the first feminist conference held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1973 and in the article “Women of the world united in song, laughter, work, and protest” published in *The Times* (July 2, 1973) and written by Susan Puddefoot (Martins/Owen 2015: 51-2). Having described main topics discussed at the conference by its most important participants, such as Betty Friedan, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, the journalist completes the play with the crown of glory, posting new publications at the epicenter of the conference in Cambridge Massachusetts and the Women's Movement: “but the grace notes of the women's voice remains those of the three Marias... where heard between tears and silence at 10 am on the morning of the conference's third day by women who had already spent eighteen hours “rapping” working in study groups, tasks forces, planning committees, and singing and dancing with Yoko Ono during her concert” (Martins/Owen 2015: 52).

As Martins and Owen have shown, in the case of Ireland and the UK, the media representation of feminist activity in Portugal between 1973 and 1975 does not simply reflect the fact of the Three Marias case. They also actively display the discursive truth about Portugal and its feminism, reproducing a set of well-known data: not only the central character of the book and its letters (Mariana Alcoforado), or the disparate nature of the material included in the book, but also especially the shared names, profession, social class, civic and maternal status of three co-authors (Martins/Owen 2015: 50).

Michael Binyon writes in *The Times* that “until the coup, practically the only news from Portugal was the case of the three Marias.” (Martins/Owen 2015: 51). As Martins and Owen explain, “events like the isolationist policies of the Marcelo Caetano’s fascist government, the mass illegal immigration of the Portuguese, and the Colonial War in Africa, were largely framed and filtered through successive references to the scandal created in Portugal by the publication and censorship of *New Portuguese Letters*” (Martins/Owen 2015: 51). Thus, the story of Three Marias became the catalyst for a female-centred uprising against fascist rule, colonial wars, and for the creation of a women's liberation movement in Portugal.

New Portuguese Letters was banned in Portugal, and its authors were sent to trial by the authorities. However, the book, as well as the story of their authors gave a voice to the silenced and contributed to the fight intending to change women’s place in society. In my point of view, the presence of the old *Portuguese Letters* in the *New Portuguese Letters* is symbolic of women’s voice, with society still unwilling to believe that these letters were written by a woman, a nun. By incorporating the old letters into the new ones, its three authors gave soul and new blood to the story of Mariana Alcoforado.

I think that the most important parallels between my work and these books are the feature of women with a voice and women who fight for freedom against a society that oppresses them. The three authors of *New Portuguese Letters* (Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Fatima Velho da Costa, and Maria Teresa Horta), at the time of the book’s conception, would meet periodically, to discuss their shared experiences both as women and as liberal writers. Maria Isabel Barreno and Maria Fátima Velho da Costa were both published writers, had been friends since adolescence, and they were working together as researchers in the Ministry of Economy (Lane 1975: 7). They later met Maria Teresa Horta, who was a journalist, a literary editor and also a writer. As Helen Lane notes, Horta was also an ardent feminist working on cases of specific aggressions against women by men in their lives (fathers, brothers, husbands and sons); Maria Isabel Barreno was however the most militant feminist of the three and the most socially oriented; Maria de Fátima Velho da Costa had, on the other hand, reservations about feminism as an organisation (Lane 1975: 8).

Each of them would choose material and subjects during the week and in the evenings, once a week, would meet to compile their ideas. The three Marias all had families and were well educated, however they posed a real threat to the regime that ruled the country at the time. As was the case with other intellectuals of the time whose ideas

also opposed the regime, they saw their book apprehend, they were persecuted by the State secret police (PIDE-DGS), they were accused of disturbing the moral order and they had to face a public trial. The only reason they were not arrested was because of the Revolution of April 25th which took place-before the ending of the trial. However, their efforts and their work did ultimately contribute to a new international feminist movement.

There are still many prisons nowadays - mental, social, religious, and political prisons. With my creation, I tried to express my position as a woman and as an artist, and to add one more voice to the fight and to give visibility to these pressing debates. A lot of things have changed because of people who were fighting and trying. However, we must ask: “but are we still walking around these four walls?” Plenty of things are getting better, but others are still the same. Because of that my play doesn’t have a closed end, it is open, continuing. Tomorrow’s new generation will still speak about the same issues, from other points of view, but I think that is exactly the solution, to bring a new soul, new blood and new visions to the debate. Thus, Maria(na) as the symbol of women’s oppression is a never ending character.

When I was thinking about the characters in my play, I drew inspiration from the lives of the authors of *New Portuguese Letters*. These were educated, independent women who gave everything for ideas of freedom and equality and who were not afraid, and, like the Portuguese Nun of The Old Letters, also saw themselves as prisoners of society, having been turned into victims by the state. My play however is not about victims, it is about heroes. Sometimes a person can be violently hurt and still not give up. When there is a clash between the individual and society, it can often mean that this person is trying to change something and as such has the potential to be either a “hero” or an “anti-hero” as is the case with the authors of the *New Portuguese Letters*.

The team that collaborated in the creation and production of my play, *The Three Marias*, was an international one (comprised of Georgian, Portuguese, Norwegian and Dutch artists). This gave me a lot of motivation because working with artists of very different backgrounds gave us the opportunity to see things and materials in many different ways.

Georgia still lives in a confusing moment. During the Soviet Union, just like during Estado Novo in Portugal, social revolutionary movements were forbidden. Some women could work and get an education, but there was no freedom and people couldn’t choose their life ways. While European strong feminist movements gained prominence, Georgia remained hidden behind the Iron Curtain. Only today are Georgian women taking the

steps that other countries have already taken, and as such there are many issues that still need urgent resolve. Georgia's largely patriarchal and conservative society seems to be having a difficult time with regard to women's rights and issues of equality, but little by little, as was the case with other nations and championed by women's rights groups who have been raising their voices throughout the country, things continue to progress.

Portugal is in better conditions but if we compare it to the north of Europe, it still has themes that should be discussed. Even Northern European countries, which have a more balanced gender system, feel the need to continue to talk about these problems and make them better. Sometimes we, the actors, had long discussions because of these topics and different life experiences, but we all agreed that there are "Marias" in every country and that gender discrimination is everywhere. But most important of all was to work and put together every material and skill that what we had in order to bring these themes to life and give them voice – our own voice.

Chapter 2: Adaptation. Acting, Directing, Writing

Adapters don't copy, they steal what they want and leave the rest.

Abbott

This chapter is about the adaptation of *New Portuguese Letters* into a play, and will focus on my work as writer, adaptor, director and performer. First I will reflect on adaptation for the stage in general, followed by a comparison of my work with the styles and methods of other adaptor-directors.

As a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable to other's work adaptation is a kind of expended palimpsest. It is also a way to represent, rewrite other's work and make it autonomous.

The fact that adapters take what they want and leave the rest from the work of others, sums up the endeavour of adapting one work into another, in that it is possible to use someone's creation and from it produce a new creation by applying your own vision and interpretation of it in order to tell the story in your own way. In many ways, it is like memory; we always remember strong emotional things subjectively while the rest is often forgotten.

Why, would anyone become an adapter? What motivates someone to adapt the work of another? Who knows how works will be compared with imagined versions in people's heads? Why take the risk? Why do many artists appear to have chosen to take on this dual responsibility of adapting the work of another into something new? It is not easy to answer any of these questions. Sometimes it is for the challenge, and sometimes it is to use an existing work to express new feelings in your own way. It is obvious that adapters must have their own personal reasons for deciding to do an adaptation, including which work will be adapted and what medium will be used to do it.

In my case, due to my own political, cultural, and social positioning, I felt that it was both a proper time and the correct material to express my emotions and ideas. This was a very complicated undertaking as well as a real risk to retell and present an already well-respected story.

While telling this story from three different perspectives, namely, as writer, director and actor, I somehow got lost with regard to which was the real adaptor.

Actors can bring "their individual sense and senses to the characters and give them those glances and gestures that come from their own imaginations" ((Ondaatje 1997: ix).

Hutcheon 2013: 82) Actors can be considered as an adapter and in staged works, the performers are the ones who embody and give substance to the adaptation, but does this make them conscious adapters? Novelists often comment on their surprise when seeing actors depict their characters using their own gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions, incarnating characters in ways the initial creation never envisaged (Hutcheon 2013: 82).

PERFORMER > DIRECTOR > WRITER:

According to these opinions, my work as a performer is also an adaptation of *The Three Marias*, because, I believe, actors are always adaptors, always relying on our own interpretations and creating characters inside of ourselves. In the methodology of Stanislavski taught at Georgian acting schools we are always attempting to get closer to the character we are representing; however, we are unable to run away from ourselves, as everything comes from inside of us [and our own individual experiences and perspectives]. However much actors can change or transform themselves, or however successful they may be at interpreting a character as described by someone else, their characters will always be special, unique, and different from another's because acting relies on the subjective interpretation of the character by the actor and as such, acting in itself is a work of adaptation.

In terms of the adapter director, I think it is the director who is held even more responsible for the form and impact of the whole work being adapted. On stage, the characteristic preoccupations of the director are what stand out most and are most identifiable, and as such, the director is also an adapter. I think plays always have the “smell and taste” of the person who made, or interpreted it. Sometimes we can even identify certain traits of their personalities from their works. In my case, my work as director was complex and I think an important part of my adaptation was the point when I started to express my ideas and attempt to make them visible, tangible.

WRITING

Finally, the work of the writer adapter is, in my opinion, the most complicated in the process of adaptation, as there is a feeling of dual responsibility. On the one hand, you are trying to respect the original text but on the other, you are at the same time breaking

it, perhaps throwing away very beautiful pieces of text because you don't need them or because they don't fit. To this extent, writing the adaptation presented to me a great challenge, because I had the feeling that I was stealing or breaking something that another person made. However, after I realized that if I were to be clear with my ideas and intended messages, it wouldn't compare or compete with the original because it would become something original, autonomous, and special, and still alive although presented according to my interpretation of it. Rewriting the piece in question was both a challenge and creatively stimulating as, while going through the book, I would imagine dialogues and, with my own interpretation materializing itself as words on paper, began to look forward to sharing it with others. This challenge and the rewarding feeling that can potentially accompany it is what ultimately drew me to theatre in the first place.

STEP BY STEP

In the following sections of this chapter, I will describe the process of adaptation in each of its steps, while reflecting on examples of other adaptations by well-known directors who have been inspirational to me.

First step: Location and Audience. We had the opportunity of performing this piece in a Psychiatric Hospital (Centro Hospitalar Conde Ferreira, in Porto) because there would be an art exhibition organized by the Bachelor in Multimedia from the Faculty of Fines Arts of the University of Porto.

I was surprised and a little bit worried: because of the rules of the hospital, limited time, and lack of theatrical equipment, how would we be able to work there? Going to the hospital however I realized that the place had a very strange energy, and that it was exactly what we needed at that moment for the staging of this particular piece. The Three Marias of my play as we have come to know them by now were born inside of a very similar context that ended up guiding all the work that went into this performance. The fact that we would present the work as part of an exhibition *inside* of a Psychiatric Hospital was a central aspect in the creation of the script that began to take form in our minds after reading the book *New Portuguese Letters*. Inaugurated in March of 1883, the Centro Hospitalar Conde Ferreira was the first establishment in Portugal specifically built to house psychiatric patients, and was an innovative construction at that time. Both the book

Novas Cartas Portuguesas and the Centro Hospitalar Conde Ferreira have a huge quantity of references that contributed to the central ideas of this project.

It was also a great opportunity to work in the productive intersection between theatre and fine art, having the chance to work with artists from different fields (visual and performing arts, as well as music). We combined different disciplines into one field (that of theatre,) while working towards our final objective, a stage production incorporating audio, video, and live music.

Several people were involved in the production of this piece and the staging includes a wide range of artistic elements such as live video projection, live music, pre-recorded audio-visuals, and textual interpretation. While combining all of these elements and pairing them with my own interpretation of the text, we created something new out of something already in existence.

We started to spend a lot of time in the hospital, speaking with doctors and patients, taking notes, and absorbing the ambience of this different and somehow magical atmosphere. During this time and feeling inspired by being at the hospital, I took notes regarding the characters, their behaviours, costumes, and my general observations of the hospital, and having reflected on all of this and learned from it used this material in the play, a process that was ultimately also useful for me as a performer.

While exploring the building to find just exactly where we were going to stage our performance, we found a small room with two huge windows and a very peculiar smell. It was the only room that they were using for entertainment classes on Saturdays, while the rest of the building was damaged and largely abandoned. This space was a kind of symbol of hope, a lightness to juxtapose the surrounding darkness, or a symbol of joy to contrast the encompassing melancholy. Moreover, the room was full of colourful chairs and everything seemed already set for us to stage our performance there.

Whereas the distance or the gap between the stage and the audience was not great, a short distance between audience and actors make a play more intimate. Small spaces always remind me of the “starting point”, that is, rehearsal rooms and other spaces where creative processes took place in the creation of a play, and as such, present a great chance to share these feelings of intimacy with the spectators present. For this reason, location is very important for many directors and artists.

Great Belgian director Ivo Van Hove said that space defined everything, and that the first thing you see on the stage is space, even if it is empty. The space makes a text

accessible, and it makes you understand why the characters are saying-what they are saying, and why they behave the way they behave (Van Hove/Boenisch 2014: 56).

Daniel Veronese says “the place where we make theatre is a privileged place from which we can offer to audience emotions, illusions, discoveries that they can’t find in another space that representatively is impossible to find elsewhere, not even in everyday life. I don’t want to assess the theatrical space as better, but as different, distinct. People leave their houses, they travel, buy their ticket, spend an important portion of their time, then you need to offer them something that they cannot find somewhere else. That is in general the respect I have for the audience (...), and I always make references to that unique and privileged place we occupy” (Veronese/Graham-Jones 2014: 73).

I agree and respect these opinions because I think everyone has, and everything can potentially contribute to emotional memory which in itself creates energy. For me, both as a spectator or as a performer, the first emotion is which is created from the space where the performance is staged, and I believe that the other feelings to follow are also inspired, at the very least in part, by spatial factors.

THE SPACES THEMSELVES

In my opinion, theatre is magic because it is visceral, requires the collaboration of many people of differing artistic backgrounds, is exhibited to a variety of peoples, and consists of lingering emotions, all of which contribute to a special atmosphere where spectators and performers alike can collectively feel, learn, teach, find, search, loose, wait, forget, or forgive together in a finite and defined space.

It is theatre in a classical way but on the other hand I think every space has the potential to change meanings when serving as the location of a stage production. Experimental spaces are my favourite: they are less exclusive, more accessible and closer to society, with alternative locations having become more common. I think “If people don’t go to the theatre, theatre goes to them” as it is frequent that we see artists performing not only in alternative theatre settings but also in the street, gardens, small houses or bars, because theatre is an organism that is alive, growing and changing with us and as such always attempting to stay contemporary.

AUDIENCE

Then I started to think about the audience. Spectators are always part of the play, whether as passive spectators or as elements that contribute to the atmosphere of the space the play is taking place in. Actors are giving them energy while at the same time receiving it back. While adapting the stage production of the text, and considering the space that the play was to take place in, I thought of this phenomenon and that if the characters were, as part of the story, to be, committed to a psychiatric institution while the play itself was to be shown in one, we thought to incorporate the audience into this theme and have them contribute to its ambience. In addition to the props that were on the stage, the audience's chairs were all labelled with titles, names, and mental diagnoses, making of the audience not only passive spectators but also contributing elements of the space they were watching a play *in*. This, in turn, became one of the main thematic ideas of our play: can one be part of society without being labelled?

The connection between actor and audience is very special for directors. The Italian Director, Romeo Castellucci said that the first degree of language is how the body of a spectator is exposed to an environment, and if the environment is both the play and the space in which it is taking place, then their experience *of* it can be nothing less than important for the director. Considering this, the audience from the director's perspective can be seen as more important as well as more privileged than the actors. You have to make theatre vibrate, make it resound and then put it into crisis. This vibration, this taking it outside of itself creates a space, a gap between what is contained and that which is containing it, which is a deliberate and formal space, and is the private space that the spectator inhabits. For them it is necessary (Castellucci/Ridout 2014: 99).

As performers, we are trying to make a comfort for them, actors are playing for them and giving them pleasure, but on the other hand audience is a partner for actors, it is not one way street, they are sharing. One could think of ping pong, theatre games has the same rules between actors and audience, you should catch the ball and give it back. Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen says: "When the work is on stage it becomes a kind of invitation to the audience to create a world, to bring their personal imagination into this world creating activity for those two hours"(Ong Keng Sen/Peterson 2014: 175). I agree with them in some aspects because I think it is the style of artists and their visions

and we never can say that this is an incorrect position, because, in my opinion, in art the correct way is your way, and important thing is to have your own way and style, although this might be influenced and based on something. So when R. Castellucci said that audience needs to feel alone, for me this sentence means everything, because I think everybody needs space to choose their way to think or act. We don't need someone to force us. We are the main characters in our life and all the situations or accidents around us are analysed by ourselves and everything is about our visions and decisions. And also in the theatre spectators are invited, they have space and freedom to feel, choose, imagine and create a new special world (Castellucci/ Ridout 2014: 93-105).

Second step: Text Adaptation work. There was a point in the work when I started to reflect on the text. On the one hand, I had an inspiring space and on the other I had textual material and many notes in my notebook. These were ideas about music and video, form and structure, but the forthcoming text was still at that point untouchable as we didn't quite yet have a structured story at all. However, I think that this situation was ultimately helpful, as it presented us with an obstacle which we had to overcome. Director John Collins, whose adaptations are known as “craft” adaptations, said that text, as an “obstacle”, was very helpful for him, because it was exactly there where he discovered his own style. He says that he started to read literature aloud with actors and through this realized that reading and listening are completely different processes, and that listening to a text can be stimulating for the imagination (Collins/Monks 2014: 99-212).

I think text as an “obstacle” to overcome helped me in that I didn't search solely inside of the text for material to contribute to the adaptation, I searched everywhere; in drawings, in videos, in newspapers or in my neighbourhood. It was through this that I found the sense of the play.

My starting point was the letter from the book *New Portuguese letters* “Medical-Psychiatric Report on the mental state of Mariana A.”. The first time I had read this letter was at the seminar on Feminist Studies and Queer Theory at the University of Porto, and it had had a huge impact on. It was at this point, there inside of a psychiatric hospital, when I decided that the main character of my play would be Mariana A, or, “Maria”, who would serve to be a symbol of women universally. The letter in question was a brilliant text containing a diagnostic summary from the hospital she was committed to. Mariana A, in my play portrayed as “Maria”, was diagnosed and labelled without anybody knowing anything about her. I was not only inspired by this text but it was also fitting for

the themes I wanted to address in my production. However, it still, at that point, remained a puzzle for me, one to continue to piece together.

My team and I chose to select six words representing themes that we wanted to explore and present in this play: Prisoner, Love, Orgasm, Duties, Death and Woman. We then started searching for thematically similar letters in the text *New Portuguese Letters*, which ultimately proved to be a difficult process. There were many amazing texts in the book yet we couldn't use all of them for this play.

Nevertheless, we wrote some texts in our own words into the script. I chose to do this rather than exclusively using texts from the book because when we created the characters and I started thinking from the character's perspective, I discovered that my own generation has the same troubles and pains as the characters from the book, and despite using our own words, the feelings are one and the same as those explored in the book and as such we decided to use our friends, relatives, neighbours and personal experiences as inspiration and to write about them.

We began rehearsing with different monologues and dialogues. It was a parallel process of writing the script and adapting the piece for the stage. While it was coming together, I was attempting to respect the original text yet at the same time changed, broke, and rewrote it. This textual adaptation was quite close to the textual adaptation method of director Daniel Veronese. As he says, "there is a point at which I begin to work with the text as if it were one of my own. This means that I modify what I need to without keeping the original too much in mind. I ought to mention that these versions are created because I have every intention of staging the text, but then I very quickly stop thinking about literature and decide with my mind focused on the stage. I write while I am directing because during the rehearsals I will modify texts the actors have already learnt, but I also direct the play in my head while I adapt and write." (Veronese/Graham-Jones 2014: 66). According to him, adaptation always draws the lines between "new" and "old", or "exiting" and "not-exiting yet", I tried to adapt the text into something clear and understandable for my generation, however not exclusively. The important thing for me was to be direct, clear, and honest with the audience. Actors need to have "blood running through the veins", that is, intensity and a strong energy to feel each other and have an effect on the spectators.

Ivo Van Hove states: "I can only direct a text when I believe 180 per cent that this text should be staged now because it matters for us now. That doesn't mean that my theatre is political or only about current events, I think this is never work in the theatre,

we should reflect but that's a much slower process than what happens every day in newspapers, magazine, or television shows, the current war of Syria is terrible. You can say this on the stage and we all agree but it's better to stage *Troilus and Cressida* and show this the consequences of war, and allow us to reflect. That's what theatre is for, and not to represent reality. I like to quote the line by Harold Pinter from his lecture for the Nobel-Prize that the theatre should look behind the mirror and not into the mirror." (Van Hove/Boenisch 2014: 53-54).

I completely agree with this opinion in the sense that when you are representing reality, sometimes it's difficult to hear or to listen to for the audience, whereas theatre and art in general have the capacity to express reality in different and unconventional forms perhaps stimulating people into thinking about it differently or at greater depth.

New Portuguese Letters was written almost 50 years ago and yet today, although much has changed, we still have similar sexual, political and educational problems, patriarchy still rules, violence against women is still a common thing and sex and orgasm are still regarded as taboo subjects for women to speak of. Of course society is growing more aware of many of these things, and this book could provide a great opportunity to further raise awareness regarding these issues.

According to G.Jarzyna, we have an emotional DNA that starts to manifest itself when we are reading or listening to stories written down by our ancestors, and stories are still valuable because our body genetic code never changes, we just change clothes and the set up around us (Jarzyna/Allan 2014: 35-48). Following to these opinions, this book was a great choice for my ideas and messages. I tried to reflect reality in Portugal and not only with my intercultural team with Portuguese literature, and I think DNA worked as well.

Regarding intercultural adaptation and working amongst an international team Ong Keng Sen says that he holds the view that "the intercultural process very often creates nothing, something that in a sense of nothing, when nothing is everything" (Ong Keng Sen/Peterson 2014: 168).

It was exactly our process and I will try to explain and describe the process in this line. When you are trying to mix cultures, first you have a feeling that you are putting keys in an incorrect door and nothing makes sense because nothing fits into each other, but step by step you are realizing that exactly this nonsense is the starting point of everything and you are creating your own way where nothing fits each other but it is different and special, and exactly it is something. My international team and our different

backgrounds were motivating, we exchanged our experiences and during the textual adaptation it was most helpful for me, that we were reading, discussing and putting the text in different forms, we felt in different ways with our different DNA.

And after that came the discussion about the title: *The Three Marias* is also one of the titles of the book, but why should we chose it for the play? It was simple and clear: first because of the three authors named Maria, second because we had three actresses and also the main character was called Mariana A. In Portugal Maria is a really common name and it's kind of a symbol of women. So I made this very simple decision, but I think also a very correct one. So the title came after some time and some work. Castellucci also said that the title never comes first in his work (Castellucci/Ridout 2014: 95). In my case maybe everything starts with the title, I made this decision during the process, like I said before, but the first time that I decided to make a play with a book after reading it, I was always imagining three women on the stage and also since the first day of our team we were three girls, three actress, working and searching together with another artists. So it intuitionally started from the title but the decision took place later.

Third step: Performing, directing and acting. First, when I started the process of staging *The Three Marias*, I was looking at the space and had a strong feeling that something was missing. I came to realise that it was the sound and as such I decided that the first thing the audience would experience, in addition to the physical space, would be a pre-recorded and recurring whisper saying, in a female voice, “I am walking around these four walls”. We chose to use this particular sentence because it is symbolic of loneliness, fear, rules, prison, stereotypes, and ultimately, death, all of which are thematic elements of what was to be *The Three Marias*. The result was that already at the beginning of the play the mood and the atmosphere were set to envelope the audience in the themes that they were soon to be exposed to during the production itself.

Whisper without any movement and this calm chaos is talking about everything, when your mind is on fire and you cannot react in a physical way, you feel like a prisoner, you cannot see how to move.

The décor was simple and fitting to the atmosphere provided by the psychiatric hospital. Everything was arranged to seem empty and static; on the stage an empty bed, envelopes without letters, picture frames without any photographs, an empty crossword puzzle, colors of white and grey set to cold lighting, and motionless characters seemingly without emotions.

Nothing looks alive. The whole setting is symbolic of a person without emotions and feelings, a woman who has been drained of all of her energy and feelings, empty and isolated, the room is also symbolic of her mind. Trapped between four walls, she is inside of her mind, with no way to go, just crazy thoughts and an inability to control them, confined – along with the audience – to listening to a whisper, *her* whisper, saying repeatedly “I am walking around these four walls”.

According to my script, *The Three Marias* is a play consisting of three characters inside of a room in a psychiatric hospital. These characters have distinct behaviours, manners, and ways of connecting with the others. Maria 1, the youngest Maria, is the most unsocial girl out of the three. In her medical summary it is stated that she was raped by her father, making her develop a very fragile personality. All of her experiences in life, mainly due to the intervention of men, were very traumatizing and left her with very painful memories. Maria 2 is a more mature character. She was a literary editor as well as a writer, which is a very important aspect of her background as she is also a great women’s rights activist. However strong her voice was through writing, she had nonetheless always been oppressed by society, particularly by men. Despite this, she isn’t afraid of expressing her thoughts and exploring her sexuality without boundaries. Maria 3, the oldest Maria in the group, was kept in isolation for two years yet in spite of this exhibits a certain knowledge and maintains a strong posture towards what’s happening around her during the play. As the play develops, we come to understand that these three seemingly different characters have a unique connection with each other and by some means, in the development of *The Three Marias*, the audience begins to understand, that they are just one Maria. These characters are ultimately representing just one woman at different periods of her life. The “real” Maria (Maria 3) is a patient in the Psychiatric Hospital and is living with memories of different periods of her life, and the two younger characters are hallucinations.

Then there was a point where I should make a decision about the form of the play. In a classical drama we have at least the beginning, the climax and the ending of the story, but for my play it was a non-ending story, there is no final destination. The story doesn’t have an end and everything is always starting again. It is a circle and because of that, the first and the final scenes were equal, trying to create in the audience a feeling that everything could start again. If Maria is a symbol of women, this story will continue, it is like a computer’s error, you cannot stop this, it’s damaged, broken, you should start anew, writing and creating to survive.

It was at this point that I decided to incorporate a cinematic style to the stage, cutting scenes as if we were in the editing room; the use of live-shot projections to zoom in on character emotions; the live sound environment provided by a musician on the piano simultaneously controlling and feeding off of the characters and scenes while further setting the mood for them, and the camera-man who is also working with sound, recording the faces of the Marias as they read the letters and live-projecting it on the screen behind the bed.

The Belgian director Ivo Van Hove said that he uses live videos because it has become a medium that is accessible **for the audience**. According to him, we can express things in a way through film that cannot be expressed without. For him, video is a Greek mask: it enhances things, it allows us to come nearer to an emotional dimension making it more visible. It is the same as with sounds and the microphones that serve to enhance them, the microphone giving us opportunities to connect with an audience that wouldn't be possible without it. According to Van Hove the **ancient** Greeks had masks to enhance certain elements of a character, and today we have video and microphones, and as such we should use them. As such, a parallel can be drawn between my play and his style, as live video and microphones served to create new dimensions on stage, bringing the audience closer to the emotions being presented to them (Van Hove/Boenisch 2014: 49-61).

The cinematic component of *The Three Marias*, along with the use of contemporary tools we had incorporated, brought us to the idea of being in three different theatrical dimensions: the first being when you are inside of yourself; the second when you are somewhere specific with another person or persons and you have some sort of contact with them; and the third theatrical dimension being when you are outside of yourself and your mind is somewhere else.

If we relate these three dimensions to the three layers of the play, we will conclude that: The first dimension is the ambience of the space where the play is going to be held and the intended feeling it is meant to arouse in the audience as they come inside. The second dimension, the fact that it is a) a collective experience shared between all members of the audience and b) the fact that the audience has labels on the chairs, The third dimension, the audience is absorbed into the story taking place and acted out in front of them, for them.

The use of the live video projections, the sounds and the music, and the direct contact

with the audience are symbolic of the memories shared by the characters, their relation to the setting of the performance, and the theatrical dimensions they share with the audience. This symbolic interaction, the tri-dimensional aspect of the adaptation of this piece is further propagated by the three-dimensional character that develops as the play goes on and is built by the actors and performers. These physical, social, and physiological dimensions are based on questions such as: Who am I? Where am I? And how am I? The actor has to choose how they can express and make this character, because of my school background and Stanislavski my three dimensional character is always a mix of inner, social and outsider human being and I tried to make a play following this, but also to break some stereotypes and make my own way. I want to use the work of Daniel Veronese like an example, when he is saying that actors are the beginning of everything, an actor is a powerful mechanism, who does surprising things and when actors say let's stop talking about god and Stanislavski, because we are talking about important subjects, these sentences are symbols of reality (Veronese/Graham-Jones 2014: 71). We cannot expect religion miracles on the stage because we are human beings and we should create our miracle or magic, for me as a Stanislavski school actress it is an important example. Although I consider Stanislavski as a "father or god" of acting methodology, I also believe we should listen and learn from him but live in our way, because everything comes from us, who we are now and what kind of behaviours we have.

When R. Castellucci said that he doesn't believe in freedom in the theatre or in art, because there is plenty of limits (Castellucci/Ridout 2014: 93-105), in my opinion, of course there is a limit, and it is ourselves, it is the simple nature of humans, we are creating walls and after breaking them, we are breaking stereotypes and meanwhile creating another.

Much of the adaptation of this work was due to the context in which it was presented. The fact that we were to stage it in a Hospital required a set of rules. There were also limitations regarding the type of work that was presented, the questions that this work raises, the characters that are on the scene, the way that the scene is built, the images that are offered to the viewer. The sound volume, the use of the space itself, the movement of the characters on the stage, etc. As such, this creation had to be thought of and rethought, adapted and readapted in response to all the questions that arose causing the work to be increasingly challenging.

Japanese director Uchida Michisige, director of Noh Japanese theatre says "there is only one mountain to climb but there are many ways to climb it" (Michisige/Pellecchia

2014: 86). These elements represent the various ways through which we chose to adapt my chosen text into the staging of *The Three Marias*.

If craft adaptation followers treat everything as a found object, in the case of my adaptation I tried to treat everything as a main character, a main “object” because of everything’s symbolic connection to the character, a woman at once full of memories and void of emotions. There is a very minimal and white scenography that was conceived at the beginning of rehearsals, one bed without mattress and full of empty envelopes, one screen for the video projection and some objects that are used throughout the performance ((microphones, cigarettes, lighters) (Collins/Monks 2014: 199-212).

As stated, the minimal scenography is a symbol of emptiness, of having nothing but memories or visions that are almost a reality for these characters.

In reflection of the style and form of our play, I consider Lois Weaver and her style “beg, borrow or steal.” She said that everything that she is doing is a combination of other people’s work and the influence they had on her. According to the “beg, borrow and steal” approach, she declared that she could claim ownership to any particular methodology. Because of this she is always using pop culture as material, and thinks that she can get closer to people more easily if she represents already well-known and popular things while showing them in visually different fashions (Weaver/Harvie 2014: 135-148).

Theatre is always rooted in history and I find the most interesting work starts when I am trying to express my views about traditional ways, how you can make your trace, based on other traces and represent, rewrite and rebuild things. My school is helping me to mix the classical way of acting with modern visions.

Twentieth century Georgian director Robert Sturua created a new movement in theatre, an intersection of sorts between Stanislavski and Brecht, when he directed Brecht’s “Caucasian Chalk Circle” using Stanislavski-trained actors making his staging of Brecht a kind of firework in Georgian theatre history (Kintsurashvili 2012).

Coming back to *The Three Marias*, in our final step we came to understand that this script and this performance acquired a set of formal characteristics that resembled the theatre of Brecht, his “Epic Theater”.

This theatrical tradition was developed by Brecht and was intended to make the spectators aware of the fact that they are watching a piece of theatre, rather than a depiction of reality. Brecht's aim was to make his audience critical of the characters on stage, rather than strictly empathetic with them” (Khan 2017). Brecht loathed theatre of

realism, yet his plays always had a political and social message intended for those who were viewing them.

The message of the play unfolds as storytellers, narrators, projections, placards, and actors directly address the audience. The narrators play an especially important role because the narrator is the mediator between the audience and the story. Epic and other social activist theatres aim to have the spectators make change in their own world outside of the theatre's walls.

My intention, following this tradition was to present social messages that were important to me to society through an audience, all the while having a narrator whose function was to mediate the relationship between the story we were presenting, and the attending spectators.

The narrator, although conscious of all the narrated situations, exhibits a calm and objective attitude in contrast to the themes that are being presented, and always keeps some distance. The character that assumed this role was the oldest Maria in the story (Maria 3).

We also thought about the role of music inside the performance, especially the live music with the presence of the musician on the stage, as a connecting and orientating element for the audience. This element has direct contact with the narrative figure of the story and, together, these two can control everything that is happening within the performance. Therefore, this is not just an element that supports the action as background music but, in addition, serves an active and decisive role throughout the whole performance.

As an argument of this I would like to give an example and talk about a handspring puppet theatre, because their main idea was also to combine performing and fine art and also they are using narrators very often in plays. Director Jane Taylor says: "I think [the] first person, third person thing is really interesting when you are going from a novel to [the] stage of any sort, and the first-person narrative is completely controlling: it tells you where you are looking and at what and everything else is excluded, like a camera shot. The stage cannot do that, it doesn't do that, you can always see the characters the playwright has allowed to be on stage, you can always see and you can choose to watch from different narrators' perspective, and that's a choice that *you* can make as a spectator." (Jones, Kohler, Taylor and Miller/Davies 2014: 30-31).

In attempting to combine all of these elements into the final adaptation, I tried to show people that it is not just my drama that I was intending to portray, that it is the spectators'

as well. I wasn't thinking of a revolution per se on the stage but instead about-revolution outside of the theatre, addressing real and contemporary issues that were intentionally presented in the play as its main themes. Because of these intentions Brecht's Epic theatre was a natural source of inspiration, yet in addition to this, I wanted to keep Stanislavski naturalism on the stage creating a final result that was both experimental and a unique experience for everybody involved.

Chapter 3: Annotated script and commentaries

You can change your world by changing your words...

Remember, death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Joel Osteen

This chapter will discuss my script, which is based on the book *New Portuguese Letters*. I will start presenting a few comments on the adaptation work and on the staging process and then I will present the text of my script. I will explain and describe why I chose these textual materials and how I tried to bring them onto the stage. One thing is to read the text and another is to give the words a sound. This chapter is about how the written text becomes alive on the stage, the most important thing is to bring the text in the theatre, we should make it more realistic and sometimes more contemporary.

The first chapter is an introduction to the play, six topics and themes: prisoner, love, orgasm, duties, death and woman are the main keys and goals for the play. On the stage we have three woman and one musician, but it is a story of a woman with hallucinations, there is only one Maria in the room, every other character is her imagination. She is watching herself at a younger age, and we can see her at three different times in her life, three breaking points. Because of that we have three Marias with different ages. We have everything for one person in the room. And music is a symbol of hope and protest that comes from her and it is still alive in her. On the stage we have one extra character, which is out of the frame, out of the room, so out of her mind: she is a doctor in a hospital, she is sitting in front of the shredder in the corner by cutting envelopes, in a static scene. She is a symbol of society, who helps people to feel empty and without meanings. The text is starting with a summary, which is presented by three characters but, if we are following the text, we can see that it is only one person's story. The summary is based on the biographies of the authors and on some letters from a book on Medical-Psychiatric reporting on the mental state of Mariana A (Bareno/Costa/Horta 1975: 203). The idea of the crossword comes from the book where we can find a game with words invented by the authors themselves (picture 1).

Picture 1: Maria 3 is creating the first word in the crossword



To be a prisoner is a topic where we can clearly see the character's mental conditions. It is a story about a woman who has chosen to be isolated from society for two years, a woman who always tried to escape from the rules and labels, who tried to be independent without fears. For me, the text and the scene are strong social messages to express the difference between mental and physical freedom, you could be isolated but feel free, it shows a conflict between person and society where a woman fights for her rights and escapes from a symbolic silence. It is a scene where for the first time will be shown up one of the technical elements as a real projector as a visual hallucination for the patient, a letter for the father on the screen, a visual memory, an unforgettable memory for the main character. If we compare the two texts, the first one, a monologue of the woman who is isolated in the room and the other letter where the woman is trying to come out from the shadow, trying to be independent, these two different monologues have the same sense. It is a symbol of fight and protest, the same person with same feelings in two different situations. I am showing my protest, which way I am doing this, it is my choice, it can be a manifestation or an isolation, and it can be direct words or inner meanings.

"Prisoner" is a theme where I tried to show the choices, wishes and decisions of a woman who tried to change her world and run away from the four walls, but not physically. In this scene, the character starts to fill in crosswords, the empty decoration is becoming full and alive. I chose this title because even nowadays the problems are still very actual. We are always walking between these four walls, there are no doors, no

windows, the mind is becoming more and more closed and sometimes even art does not have the power to break these walls, it is trendy to follow the society, we are trying to make rules and follow them. It is our wish to be labelled because there is no way because if you don't have any label you don't exist.

“**Love**” is another right for everybody. The text is not about feelings, it is about how we can understand this in different situations, we are choosing to be in love or we cannot control? Maybe it is also influence of society? Happiness, bad or good things are also labels. The text talks about the first physical approach with the opposite sex, the girl's feelings reminds us of a rape scene, but she started to be in love, because it is correct and it is a kind of rule. But was it her decision? On the opposite side we have the monologue of the woman who talks about love which brought her happiness, but there is still a frustration, according to these two monologues. Love can become a frustration but can violence and frustration turn to love? The word ‘love’ brings up a lot of questions, but the important part is that there are choices, different visions in every steps of her life. Our mistakes are our freedom, but one cannot ever stop moving to change things, even if it is difficult and an important part of our life. In this scene, I tried to show very clearly the different relations between characters. I question which of our faces is correct, at what point in our life do we ever stop to make mistakes? “Love” is a scene where characters are staying face to face and listening to their experiences, as in the monologue of the woman, how she experienced love during her whole life. And it's a fight of Maria with herself at different ages, a very clear expression of how much we could hate ourselves for our mistakes and weaknesses. Later we have a text from Maria 3, a text taken from the *old Portuguese Letters*, the 4th letter from the Nun where she has already decided to stop being in love with him. I chose this letter for the “real Maria” (older version) because in this letter we can feel the experience and the pain, an older version of our character is already present in this very important letter from the “Nun's letter”, after a painful and crazy love, it is time to take a decision, and she is choosing herself. Talking about the title, the word ‘love’ was chosen because of its influences in our heads, and it is in my opinion the biggest right of people, and nobody can take it away from us. And this subject is for me not a symbol of romanticism, but a symbol of wishes and decisions. This letter is projecting on the screen, projection is a symbol of modern culture, and the ways of communication between the different groups of society (picture 2).

Picture 2: Maria 2 is reading a letter, which is projected on the screen.



Orgasm and sex were forbidden as a theme and it was shameful for women to talk about them. Did something change after all, can every woman talk about it without feeling ashamed? The characters are trying to describe their good and bad experiences. The monologue about men and sexual control that I wrote myself, does not exist in the book: it is not about gender, because everyone wishes to control, it is sexual power and specially practised by men, the attitude of machismo is a clear symbol of it, but on the opposite side there are women with a lot of sexual partners and freedom. They are often associated by parts of the society with prostitution. Is that a mentality problem or just a general gender imbalance?

The second monologue is a lesson on sex, it is a game between a young girl and an experienced woman: if nobody wants to help you or give you pleasure, you should help yourself, it is a rule of life and the same applies to sexual life, nobody can be dominating your life, where you are the main character. In the third monologue we have all pleasures of sexual life, a text where a woman expresses her feelings straight ahead without fear, everybody can talk about sex that has nothing to do with gender.

My main point in choosing this title **“Orgasm”** was the prohibitions and the rules we have around us. To talk about our pleasures and sexual problems loudly is also our right. To see women as sexual dolls and toys is a stereotype, it is not about gender, it

depends on individuals and on social discourse, and every gender can be dominant or a toy (picture 3).

Picture 3: Maria1 is experiencing climax



That's why sometimes words are unnecessary. Are we inventing these words and their meanings? Sometimes duties are becoming mental sicknesses, people are obsessed by these and they cannot escape from themselves. In this text duties are one of the main and important subjects, the conflict with her father showed up already in previous scenes, but here we already opened cards and showed the audience where this conflict comes from. In patriarchal society the father is like a god in the family: "my father told me"-characters cannot finish this sentence for a long time and expectations are becoming stronger and tenser. There is a free choice. You can see the character as you want, is she just crazy or is she a girl, who was raped by the father and still believes that it was her fault because she was provocative? One thing that is really clear is that they broke her mentality, she doesn't know where reality or truth is, she is following them because since childhood she has been taught that parents are always correct, she might have broken some rules around her, but duties towards the parents are stronger than her. Now in a psychiatric clinic, she is still thinking about her duties. Because that first monologue is from the older Maria, she is starting to tell a story, she cannot control her memories anymore and after all, her imagination became stronger and powerfully starting a conflict

between characters. But whose fault is that? Which of the Marias is the guilty one? Which time of her life was the weakest and poorest? There is no answer, just questions. Two imaginary characters fight in front of Maria and there is a clear expression of anxiety in her mind, it is some sort of suicide when a person starts to break herself from inside, and it is one of the easiest way to die. Duties and violence are coming together in this text, because duties always have somehow a hidden violence inside itself. “You are a dirty whore”. Your mother called you after she headed for the front door. “You are a dirty whore”. This sentence is a starting point and a most dangerous violent movement, woman against woman, in my opinion the mother was exactly the reason why she never forgot this fact and became a mental patient. Why use duties in the title? Because criminal aptitudes, all violence, pain have their origin in childhood duties, which are invented by society.

In **“Duties”**, the rape monologue is based on a letter called “Father” (Barreno/Costa/Horta 1975: 181), and the monologue of duties is based on the letter “Words” (Barreno/Costa/Horta 1975: 306) from the book *New Portuguese Letters*.

“Death”. I wrote this suicide monologue for a single reason: I wanted to compare two kinds of death, the physical and the mental, and during the working prose I realized that the woman who tried to commit suicide was more alive and still was fighting for life: “Sometimes it’s not necessary to pass away if everyone has forgotten you. It’s enough to feel death. I was dead.” Mental and psychological death are real deaths and physical one has different meanings, fight, protest, escape, nonsense and etc. Death doesn’t mean that something finishes, to be alive and feel like dead it means that you should move on and change or finish something. In this scene I should also talk about men in her life, the father, the brother and the son, stories are mixed and invented, but anyway based on letters from the book. These three men are the most important people in her life, they brought her happiness and gave her a lot of pain too. Some sort of stereotypical line, men are important but under this stereotype we can find truth and maybe find another character who one is not a man, but a mother, the most violent figure for me in the play. According to this that there are no gender lines, because in my opinion the problem is somehow the whole society and not the conflict between genders.

Title: **“Women”**. There is a manifest in the book and also in my play, a kind of manifest, we are not searching for answers, we are questioning the audiences, we are not showing them a correct way, we are discussing with them, in a theatrical way. It is a dialogue between the main character and her imaginary characters. She is talking with

thoughts, they are asking them and she is trying to find answers but there is no way, she doesn't know what is the correct answer, but she knows that it is time to cry out: "if no one wants to listen to me, anyway I will tell". We aren't forcing the audience to listen and follow us, we are giving them free choice, it is up to you, you could choose what is correct for you, I am just offering you a dialogue.

The manifest is the most difficult part to perform, because the play is already a manifest and a manifest inside of another manifest is too much, but that form of dialogue gave us freedom to be understandable. The manifest part is based on a letter from the book. This text is a "Declaration of honor or an interrogation written by a woman named Joana" (Barreno/Horta/Costa 1975: 327) (Picture 4).

Picture 4: Manifest



"The Manifest" (Barreno/Costa/Horta 1975: 327). In this part of the play the different dimensions that the characters occupy are broken and The Three Marias become one and speak with one voice to protest and to define what it means (and what it does not mean) to be a woman. The use of three different languages (English, Portuguese and

Georgian) in this part is a way to explain that the problems that these women are talking about are not just problems of a single country but a global problem. On the final scene they decide together that “It’s time to cry” and to form a barricade with their bodies. Maria, in this moment, is awoken and is almost in the point of letting go and becoming free from the prison where she was kept. Ultimately, the whisper voices inside of her head and the visions appear once again and she is left in the room in the same way that she appeared in the beginning of the story, with the two other Marias next to her. The story is never ending. It is the circle.

Crew first and second productions

Tamar Aznarashvili – Director / Actress / Producer/ Writer(adaptation)

Rui Braga – writer/visual artist

Cláudia Sofia Monteiro Gomes – Actress / Choreographer

Eliane Wergeland – Actress / Choreographer / Producer

Ricardo Pereira – Musician / Assistant director

Alice Ferreira Pereira-Actress/Producer

Cristina Gomes-Actress

Diana Amado-Actress

Ana Margarida de Oliveira Sousa – Graphic designer / Visual Artist

Salome Pereira – Graphic designer / Visual Artist

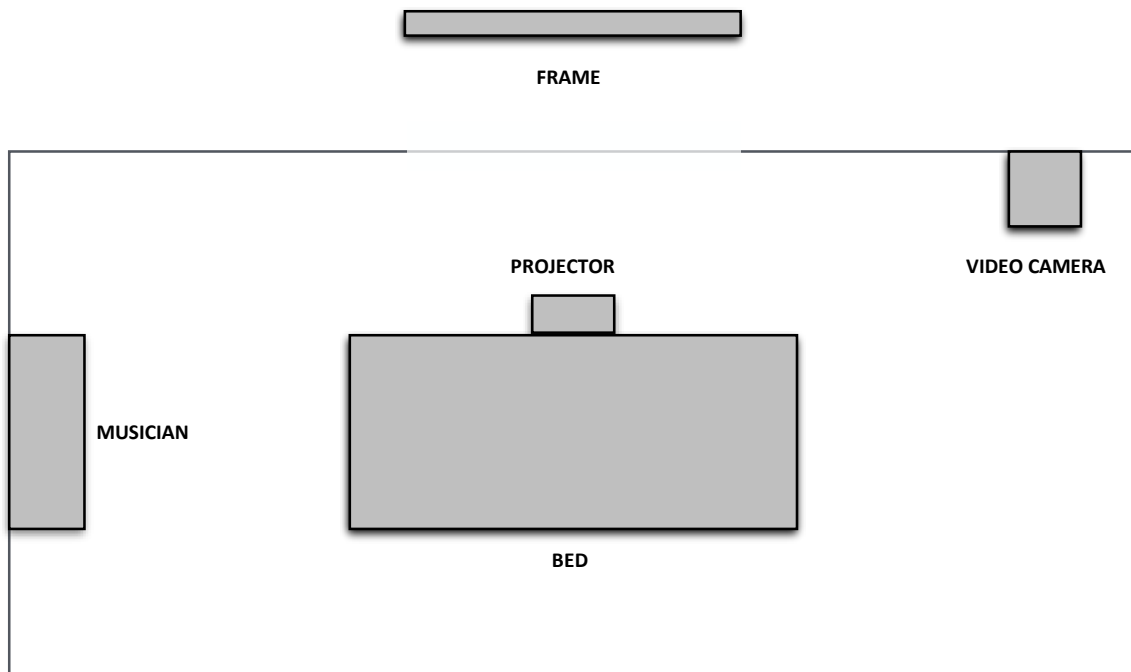
Ana Guimbra – Costume designer / Visual Artist

Sofia Rodrigues – Photographer

— THE THREE MARIAS —

(MARIA 1, MARIA 2, MARIA 3)

PRISONER — LOVE — ORGASM — DUTIES — DEATH — WOMAN



3 actresses on stage (young Maria, adult Maria and old Maria)

1 video technician and 1 musician

1 empty bed on the stage

The bed is covered with a lot of empty white envelopes: when there's a letter scene, the character should find their specific letter in this pile of envelopes

1 big empty frame on the central wall (where there will be the video live projection)

Chalk stick to write the words on the wall

The three Marias and the musician are wearing white clothes

(WAY BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE STARTS, THERE'S THE WHISPERS SOUND IN THE ROOM WITH THE CHARACTERS' VOICES: "I AM WALKING AROUND THESE FOUR WALLS, I AM WALKING AROUND THESE FOUR WALLS")

(MARIA 3 IS SITTING ON THE BED, FACING THE AUDIENCE, BUT SHE'S STARING INTO SPACE.

MARIA 1 IS FACING THE CAMERA WITH HER BACK TO THE AUDIENCE. MARIA 2 IS NEXT TO THE BED, FACING THE AUDIENCE.)

(ALL THE CHARACTERS ARE ILLUMINATED)

MARIA 1

Maria is 21 years old. Her father is a well-known military general and her mother died when she was fourteen. The patient was hospitalized by her husband with whom she married at 16 years of age. She was raped by her father and demonstrates a lack of sensibility and reaction. She has a tendency for being manipulated and she is very unsocial. Right now, the patient is controlled because of the medication.

Maria is not insane.

Maria has no sexual desire and suffers from Psychotic Disorder and Schizophrenia.

MARIA 2

(TURNING HER HEAD TO THE AUDIENCE)

Maria is 26 years old. Literary Editor and also Writer, one of her volumes of poetry had been banned as "erotic". She was also an ardent feminist, held that women were generally victimized by society but in addition she had very specific aggressors: men, not just any men, but those closest to them (the fathers, brothers, husbands and sons in her life). Divorced, she has a 10 year old son.

Child is being brought up by the father.

Maria is not insane.

She was diagnosed with Hysteria and Sexual Disorder. She tried to commit suicide.

MARIA 3

Maria is 29 years of age. She was inside of an isolation room in her house during the last two years. When the patient arrived in the Hospital, her eyes stared into space. She didn't have any reaction. Right now, her condition is stable and she is being treated with medication.

Maria is not insane.

She has a visible Social Disorder and Sociopathy.

(IN THE MIDDLE OF HER SUMMERY, MARIA 3 PUTS HERSELF INTO FETAL POSITION ON THE BED)

(THE LIGHTS GO DOWN IN MARIA 1 AND TAKO AND THERE'S ONLY ONE LIGHT OVER MARIA 3. MARIA 3 IS SCARED WHILE SHE IS LAYING DOWN.)

(THE LIGHT OVER MARIA 3 IS OVER. FADE IN AND FADE OUT OF THE LIGHTS OVER MARIA 2 AND MARIA 1 WHEN THEY SPEAK.)

(MUSIC PLAYS)

MARIA 1, MARIA 2

I am walking around these four walls. I am walking around these four walls.

— PRISONER —

(MUSIC STOPS)

(THE ENTIRE ROOM HAS LIGHT AT THIS MOMENT)

(MARIA 3 STANDS UP AND TALKS TO THE AUDIENCE)

MARIA 3

I walked up and down between those four walls with lumps of saltpeter and big dark brown stains, dragging my feet on the flagstones. I walked endlessly back and forth across

that floor and also crawled over it on my hands and knees, and my not lifting my feet was due partly to exhaustion, but even more than that to the fact that it was an unnecessary effort when I knew every last inch of that floor by heart.

(MARIA 3'S VOICE IN FADE OUT AND MARIA 2'S VOICE IN FADE IN)

In one corner was the little brazier and the battered cooking pot, possessions acquired only with the greatest difficulty. Against the other wall was the cot, with its hard, lumpy straw mattress, covered with a single blanket, full of holes, threadbare from so many washings and rewashings, now full of stains once again, with bits of dry earth and dung.

(MARIA 2'S VOICE IN FADE OUT AND MARIA 1'S VOICE IN FADE IN)

There were few other objects in that narrow space, and inside it a concern and preoccupation with everything and nothing, the slow coming and going of the daylight in the courtyard outside, a narrow space too, with a bucket of dirty water and a clump of weeds.

(MARIA 1 AND MARIA 2 SIT ON THE BED. MARIA 2 IS THROWING THE ENVELOPES TO MARIA 1 UNTIL SHE FINDS THE ONE THAT SHE WAS LOOKING FOR. SHE STANDS UP AND LETS HER BOX OF CIGARETTES FALL ON THE FLOOR. SHE GOES IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA WITH THE LETTER. MARIA 1 STARTS TO COLLECT MARIA 2'S CIGARETTES.)

MARIA 2

(IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA, WITH ENVELOPE)

Father,

You know very well that I never want to come home again. I am tired of your help and the prison you are thus trying to shut me up inside.

I'm the one who is going to raise my son and not you, and not in the same way that you brought me up, so I'm hoping to do so without any advice from you.

I beg you to leave me in peace.

Maria

(MARIA 2 COMES TO MARIA 1 WHILE SHE COLLECTS THE CIGARETTES INSIDE THE BOX. MARIA 1 GIVES MARIA 2 HER BOX OF CIGARETTES. MARIA 3 ASKS MARIA 2 THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BUT MARIA 2 DOESN'T UNDERSTAND AND THINKS THAT MARIA 1 IS ASKING THE QUESTIONS.)

MARIA 3 So where's your son?

MARIA 2 (TO MARIA 1) What?

MARIA 3 Where's your son?

(MARIA 2 SITS ON THE BED AND MARIA 1 STARTS TO COLLECT THE ENVELOPES THAT FELL DOWN FROM THE BED. MARIA 1 IS CONFUSED WHEN MARIA 2 ANSWERS.)

MARIA 2

He's with his father.

MARIA 3 Why?

MARIA 2 Because he has a crazy mother.

(MARIA 2 STARTS TO LAUGH AS SHE IS HAVING A HYSTERIA ATTACK ON THE BED. MARIA 3 IS LOOKING AT HER. MARIA 1 COMFORTS MARIA 2)

(MUSIC PLAYS: IS AQ ARIS)

(MARIA 2 CALMS DOWN AND SHE STARTS TO SING IN GEORGIAN. MARIA 1 SITS ON THE BED FEELING SCARED.)

— LOVE —

MARIA 2

We were lovers for so many months, taking our pleasure in bed together to the point of madness and sinking our teeth into sexual enjoyment to the point of wisdom; we are still

lovers even now that we have gone our separate ways, and will remain so for as long as we both care to; we are lovers because of the freedom of what we know we enjoy when we are together; we are lovers because of the happiness that each of us finds in the happiness of the other's body; we are lovers through each orgasm that we built toward with each other, reaching climax time after time in long hours when nothing else counts and everything happens... We were and are lovers who have tried everything, holding back, prolonging each experience, each movement, and each spasm almost to the point of pain... Nonetheless, he may not be as aware of this as I am...

(FREEZING MOMENT)

(MARIA 3 INTERRUPTS MARIA 2)

MARIA 3

I wrote him so many times. But I never sent him those letters...

(MARIA 3 FINDS AN ENVELOPE ON THE BED AND GOES TO THE CAMERA)

MARIA 3

(IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA, WITH ENVELOPE)

I leave my room as little as possible — this room in which you have come to see me so many times. And I look continually at your portrait, which is dearer to me than life itself. It gives me some pleasure... but it also gives me pain when I think that I may never see you again. Why... how can it be that I shall never see you again? Have you abandoned me forever? I am in despair... your poor Maria can write no more.

(DEFREEZING MOMENT)

(MARIA 1 AND MARIA 2 WAKE UP. MARIA 1 STARTS UNBUTTONING HER SHIRT.)

MARIA 2

Nonetheless, he may not be as aware of this as I am...

(MARIA 1 INTERRUPTS TAKO WHILE SHE IS UNBUTTONING HER SHIRT. MARIA 1 TRIES TO LIGHT UP A CIGARETTE.)

MARIA 1

He told me “You are beautiful”, running his hands down my body lying naked and exposed on the bed, one of my legs bent back, and the other stretched out along the sheets.

“You are beautiful”, he told me again, following the curve of my breasts with his fingers, noticing my tensed lips beneath his and the profound, acid revulsion reflected in my eyes.

“I love your hair, your concave belly, your thin hips, your arms, your thighs, your smell, your tongue.

I like it that you feel revulsion for me but still come to bed with me.”

He leaned down then, running his mouth over me as though he were trying to breathe me in, leaving on my skin a wet scar of saliva; his flaccid body voraciously attempting to take on firmness and hardness inside that of the woman who was struggling, though still motionless and rigid. But struggling nonetheless. I thought: “I’m going crazy.”

I thought: “I’m going crazy.”

(MARIA 1 BECOMES MORE AND MORE AGITATED AND MARIA 2 THROWS THE LIGHTER ON THE BED BECAUSE IT DOESN'T WORK)

— ORGASM —

MARIA 2

Stop crying! Crying is weakness, I never cry, I don’t know what it means to cry.

(MARIA 3 APPROACHES MARIA 1 WITH A LIGHTER TO HELP HER WITH THE CIGARETTE)

MARIA 1 What do you do when you feel bad, sad?

MARIA 2

I look for other men. I meet them in hotels and I play with them. I like the games. I like to play with them. I search in their bodies their vulnerability and their weakness. In this moment, men are not strong. I like the control, I like to be in control. And control makes me feel better, fulfilled.

(MARIA 2 GETS CLOSER TO MARIA 1 AND GIVES HER THE CIGARETTE AND SHE INHALES THE SMOKE. WHEN MARIA 1 TURNS HER BODY, SHE LAYS HER HEAD TO THE AUDIENCE AND EXHALES THE SMOKE. MARIA 3 IS IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA AND SHE OPENS THE FRONT PART OF HER TOP AND HER BELLY IS BEING PROJECTED ON THE SCREENING.)

MARIA 2

Step 1: Never allow yourself to become nervous or lose your head. Remain calm and collected, as though the whole thing were of no importance;

Step 2: Relax every muscle of your body as completely as possible — not forgetting the muscles of your face and hands;

Step 3: Breathe rhythmically. Inhale rapidly, taking as deep a breath as possible;

Step 4: Once your lungs are full, hold your breath for several seconds;

Step 5: Exhale slowly, emptying your lungs completely;

Step 6: Then begin the breathing exercise again. Repeat it with the absolute conviction that you will thus reach climax.

(MARIA 2 STARTS TO LAUGH BECAUSE SHE SAW MARIA 1 HAVING AN ORGASM IN FRONT OF HER AND ASKS MARIA 1)

MARIA 2

Have you ever tried this?

(MARIA 1 REALIZES WHAT'S HAPPENING AND THE FACT THAT SHE'S ALMOST NAKED, SO SHE TRIES TO COVER HERSELF BECAUSE SHE FEELS ASHAMED. MARIA 3 PUTS HER SHIRT BACK INTO PLACE)

(FREEZING MOMENT)

(MARIA 3 TAKES MARIA 2'S CIGARETTE, GIVES A PUFF ON IT AND GIVES HER BACK THE CIGARETTE. MARIA 3 LAYS ON THE BED BETWEEN MARIA 1 AND MARIA 2 AND SMOKES.)

MARIA 3

I remember it. I bare my breasts and thighs, I caress his penis. How it grows harder and larger in my hand. I pass my tongue over it, slowly, lightly, and little by little it seeks out the warmth of my orgasm as I drink in his, with its bitter acid taste. Then he moves lower down, lower and lower, and begin to enter me, big and burning-hot and still erect. But I come immediately, I add to himself by becoming myself in him.

(DEFREEZING MOMENT)

(MARIA 1 AND MARIA 2 WAKE UP AND START LAUGHING)

MARIA 2

By the way. Masturbation is a very good gymnastic exercise for everybody to do in bed.

(TO MUSICIAN)

Have you ever tried this?

(TO AUDIENCE)

Have you ever tried this?

(MARIA 2 THROWS THE AIRPLANE TO THE AUDIENCE)

(MARIA 1 LAUGHS WITH MARIA 2)

— DUTIES —

(FREEZING MOMENT)

MARIA 3

That's why sometimes words are unnecessary. And right now I'm going to invent the word...

(MARIA 3 TURNS TO THE WALL AND STANDS STILL WITH HER BACK TURNED TO THE AUDIENCE. SHE STARTS TO REPEAT WORDS AS SHE IS WRITING THE WORD "DUTIES" ON THE CROSSWORDS GAME.)

MARIA 3

My father told me... My father told me... My father told me... Duties.

(MARIA 1 HAS A STRONG PHYSICAL REACTION)

But I didn't have any duties, I was free inside my own prison. And because of this words confuse me. I never say anything. When you write, words are made up of letters, and you only hear them as words in your head.

(DEFREEZING MOMENT)

(MARIA 1 STARTS TO CATCH THE ENVELOPES OBSESSIVELY ON THE BED AND SHE WALKS AROUND IN CIRCLES. SHE BOTHERS MARIA 2.)

MARIA 1

My father says that there are many sorts of duties and everyone must do his duty.

There are two main kinds of duties: men's duties and women's duties.

Men's duties are to be strong, and to exercise authority. That is to say: to be presidents, generals, priests, soldiers, hunters, judges, and so on. And even Jesus Christ was a man and God chose to have a son and not a daughter.

Then there are the duties of women, the most important of which is to have children, protect them and take care of them when they are sick, teach them good manners at home, and give them affection. Woman can also be doctors, engineers, lawyers, and so on, but my father says that it's best not to trust them because women were meant to keep house,

which is a very nice duty. (MARIA 2 IS VERY AGGRESSIVE WITH MARIA 1. MARIA 1 FALLS DOWN ON THE FLOOR AND SHE SCREAMS.)

MARIA 2

(RIPS THE PAPERS)

Your father told you that you were perverse. You slept bare naked, your breasts free and soft, very white with large, pink nipples. You were perverse, because you had red and wet lips, your hair tawny blonde, and your skin soft. You were perverse, you had a frank laugh, and a provocative way of looking at others.

He entered your bedroom, came to your bed, and brutally covered your mouth with his hand, held you down with the weight of his body. You were laying indifferently. You felt him withdraw from inside you, dirtying the outside of your body with sperm as well. He put his clothes back on and left the bedroom without looking at you, without having said a single word, even when he was raping you. After this, in the morning, he told you: “You are going to have to leave this house. We can’t all go on living together in the same house after what’s happened. It was all your fault. You know that you were the one to blame for everything. I’m a man. I’m a man and you’re provocative, perverse. You’re perverse. A woman with no modesty, no shame. I never want to see you again, you make me sick, you disgust me, and you make me feel ashamed. You knew very well, I know that you knew very well, what you were doing to me. I’m a man, my little whore”. And what did you tell your father? What did you tell him?

MARIA 1

Of course I’m a whore. Sorry, Papa. I’m a whore.

(FREEZING MOMENT)

MARIA 3

“You are a dirty whore”. Your mother called you after she headed for the front door. “You are a dirty whore”.

(DEFREEZING MOMENT)

(MARIA 1 GOES TO THE SIDE OF THE BED. MARIA 2 CRYES)

— DEATH —

(MARIA 2 STARTS TO CRY. SHE SPEAKS WITH A SLOW AND SAD VOICE.)

MARIA 2

I tried to commit suicide, when my precious baby was taken away from me to his father, because of my reputation and the lifestyle that I had before. I couldn't keep on living without him. So I just woke up one day, I entered his little room and I looked at his little bed, his little clothes, his pictures, and I felt his smell around me, but I couldn't touch him. He wasn't there anymore. And I couldn't live like this anymore. So I sat down on his little bed and I wrote his father a letter.

(MARIA 2 GOES IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA WITH AN ENVELOPE)

My lover,

I am not yours anymore, you have trapped me and regard me as your possession, closing your eyes to the truth, and now I am a prisoner of your freedom.

Will I still have time?

Tell me: will I have time still?

Let me go away, let me forget you. Maria

And in the same moment, I wrote my baby.

My little love,

Will you be able someday to forgive me for this death?

Mommy

(MARIA 2 TURNS TO THE AUDIENCE)

I was holding the revolver firmly in my steady hand, aimed straight at my soft, tender, vulnerable target. In that moment I just died.

(FREEZING MOMENT)

MARIA 3

I know that feeling. I was dead inside my room for two years. Sometimes it's not necessary to pass away if everyone has forgotten you. It's enough to feel death. I was dead.

(DEFREEZING MOMENT)

MARIA 1 How death can be easier than love?

— WOMAN —

MARIA 2 Woman was God's second mistake.

MARIA 1

And what was the first? Men?

MARIA 3

It's funny the fact that we have history, his story. We have to write a new story, her story.

(MARIA 3 SITS ON THE BED. MARIA 1 AND MARIA 2 START TO THROW ENVELOPES ON THE AIR WHILE THEY SPEAK WITH THE MICROPHONES AND WALK AROUND THE ROOM.)

MARIA 2

Kitxvebi, kitxvebi, da gekitxebi:

Isjeba tu ara qali mrushobistvis chaqolvit Avganetsa da Saudis Arabetshi?

I ask:

A woman taken in adultery is still stoned to death today in Afghanistan and in Saudi Arabia?

MARIA 3

Digo:

Também o homem adúltero será apedrejado no Afeganistão e na Arábia Saudita?

MARIA 1

I ask:

Girls, how many Marias must still be brought back to life, or how many of us are there still living who are being put to the test, having their minds dulled, made weak, and fragile through the workings of law, the social properties, accepted beliefs and religion?

MARIA 3

Digo:

Recusemos o engodo da ajuda masculina, não precisamos dela; ou, mais precisamente, não queremos aceitar essa “oferta” de Natal com lindo invólucro a disfarçarem a bomba que, certamente, mais uma vez, nos iria rebentar nas mãos, como sempre. Se somos nós a querer, seremos apenas nós a exigir.

MARIA 2

Da gekitxebit:

Movida tu ara dro rom ertmanets gavuziarot, tundac simartle romelic vicit chveni siamovnebis shesaxeb loginshi? Vagiarot xrikebi romlebitac kacebi gvetamashebian, kacebi romlebmec vaginaluri orgazmi mitad aqcies, kacebi romlebic frigidulobis iarliys akereben kalebs romelebic amboben rom ver agweven orgazms chveulebrivi aqtis dros, da kvlav frigidulobis am maxeshi moqevit kacebs aqvt sexsi, qalebi ki samwuxarod gaxdnen mati nadavli, vapirebt tu ara dumils?

I ask:

Hasn't the time come to share with each other, for example, the truths we know about our pleasures in bed, forthrightly denouncing the trick men are playing on us, by turning vaginal orgasm into a myth, by pinning the label of “frigidity” on women who complain

that they do not reach climax through simple intercourse? Once again, by falling into this trap of frigidity men have sex, the women unfortunately become the man's prey, his inferior. Will we continue to remain silence?

MARIA 3

Digo:

E virá quem, apesar de tudo, acuse de reaccionária a luta que se irá travar no longo caminho, extenuante, que terá a mulher de percorrer sozinha com suas poucas armas. E virá quem agrida e de todos os lados surgirão gumes e farpas e nas nossas costas cairão nomes como pedras; mas putas ou lésbicas, tanto se nos faz que nos nomeiem, desde que se lute e não se perca.

MARIA 1

I ask:

If we are offered no other alternative save outright war against an entire social system that we reject in toto and are forced to destroy everything, including our own homes if necessary, will we retreat? Love is the trap, the barbed wire fence, the focal point of repression of women in a sexist world, what is love but need or fear?

MARIA 2

Da kitxva isev:

Shesadzlebelia tu ara qals isev jerodes siyvarulis? Isev endobodes kacs? Isev jerodes sakutari tavisuplebis, tu is tanxmdeba yvelapers rasac stavazoben, kompanionis da damxmaris rols, sxva sityvebit rom vtqvati, qalis valdebuleba iyos samudamo daqvemdebarebashi da qondes yopiti roli samyaroshi, "awarmoos" bavshvebi da rexsos mati sapenebi, miigos kaci romelic sargeblobs misit rogorc sawolshi aseve sazogadoebashi, kaci romelic iyenebs qals, tavisitvis naklebad sasiyamovno da uinteresos saqmis shesasruleblad.

I ask:

Can there possibly be any reason for a woman to still believe in love? To still trust a man? To still believe in her liberation if she continues to accept what has thus far been offered her: role of companion and helpmate... In other words, the eternal dependent and

domestic role in the world, coupled with the obligation to produce children and wash their diapers, and to accept the man who avails himself of her, either in bed or socially, using her to perform the worst-paid and least interesting tasks that he himself refuses to perform?

MARIA 3

Chega. É tempo de se gritar: chega.

MARIA 1

Enough?

MARIA 2

Sakmarisia, yvirilis droa, sakmarisia, droa sakutari sxeulebisgan barikadebi shevqmnat.

MARIA 3

Chega. É tempo de se gritar: chega. E formarmos um bloco com os nossos corpos.

MARIA 1

Yes, enough, it is time to cry, enough. And to form a barricade with our bodies.

VOICE-OVER

Patient number 1972: Maria A. Her father is a well-known military general and her mother died when she was fourteen. She got married at 16 years of age. She was raped by her father and demonstrates a lack of sensibility and reaction. She was a Literary Editor and also Writer, one of her volumes of poetry had been banned as “erotic”. She was also an ardent feminist, held that women were generally victimized by society but in addition she had very specific aggressors: men, not just any men, but those closest to her (the fathers, brothers, husbands and sons in her life). Divorced, she has a 13 year old son. Child is being brought up by the father. She tried to commit suicide and she was inside of an isolation room in her house during the last two years. When the patient arrived in the Hospital, her eyes stared into space. She didn’t have any reaction. Right now, her condition is stable and she is being treated with medication.

She was diagnosed with Cyclothymic disorder, which is mild form of bipolar disorder in which a person has mood swings over a period of years that go from mild depression to emotional highs. Maria is not insane.

(ALL THE CHARACTERS PUT THEMSELVES IN THE INITIAL POSITION: MARIA 3 IS SIT ON THE BED, FACING THE AUDIENCE, BUT SHE'S STARING INTO SPACE. MARIA 1 IS FACING THE CAMERA WITH HER BACK TO THE AUDIENCE. MARIA 2 IS NEXT TO THE BED, STARING AT THE WALL.)

MARIA 1, MARIA 2, MARIA 3

I am walking around these four walls. I am walking around these four walls.

Conclusion

The most passionately influenced creations are always developed by a process where the final product is just the beginning of another creation in the development of an artist. Failing is sometimes necessary and provides an opportunity to learn from our mistakes.

New Portuguese Letters is the text that motivated me to make a play as a means to express my ideas regarding femininity through art. First, I will describe the expectations and goals that went into this effort.

The first time I came across the book *New Portuguese Letters* it was in seminar of feminist studies at University of Porto led by Professor Marinela Freitas. I was a girl from a country where much of the society still believed feminists to be groups of women who hated men, providing a ‘bad’ example for the future generations. In Georgia it is rare to find feminist studies as a subject at universities. When I began to understand the real meaning of feminism it was inspiring, and I became very attached to the book.

In my country, many women are still violently killed by men and domestic abuse is still rampant. Women are discouraged from speaking without shame about their sexual lives or pleasures, and are predominantly seen as sexual objects. On the other hand, women can get an education and are found working in every industry. This situation however raises questions as to why violence against women is so predominant in society. Social conservatism, a patriarchal society, and a strong orthodox church further propel these hardships by designating all acts of defiance by women with negative labels.

Coming from this environment, I had long wished to express my feelings and ideas. As such, the main goal and idea behind my play was to show that “labels” are a big problem in the relationship between person and society, and person and state. We label, and in turn are also labeled. We as women furthermore have had difficulties in pursuing our authentic selves because our status in society has always been determined and constrained by the patriarchy. However, with my play, I didn’t want to teach something from the stage, or give too many examples. Instead, I wanted to propose a break from these constraints imposed upon us. I chose to question the audience, tried to engage them in conversation regarding these matters. I wished to work with and receive inspiration from the audience, and sought to discover answers and press these above stated issues while at the same time share my thoughts about them.

Theatre is for the people. It is alive organism with a soul and the audience is one of the most important element there. After the premiere of my play we had a conversation with the audience and shared feelings and ideas with them. It was a great experience because I found out that a lot of young people think about these same questions, these same issues. Many of them had strong opinions and they came to the theatre hoping to share their opinions with others.

The book *New Portuguese letters* had a strong international recognition, and its authors are also well known, but despite this many people of my generation do not know about the book, and has never been adapted for theatre before my play. There was however a public reading of this book in England's "First Women Theatre" in 1973.

In my adaptation, one of the most impressive parts for the audience were excerpts of the *New Portuguese letters* being live-projected on the screen being expressed by performers with real emotions while reading them.

In the first chapter I discussed the influences and the international team behind the staging of *The Three Marias*. Working with artists from different backgrounds and acting methodologies was a great opportunity and learning experience. It provided multiple lenses through which to look at the issues addressed in the play.

Many acting schools pursue differing acting methodologies. For example, the Georgian school of theatre is based on the methods of Stanislavski. During our studies, Georgian actors receive general information about acting methods and with this information have to make choices. I thought a lot about this process, as many of my colleagues in Portugal expressed that they felt lost when searching for their way as an actor and that general information was not enough. On the one hand it is positive to take a liberal approach and give students the chance to choose their own way, but on the other hand the limited time of a bachelor degree does not prove to be enough to receive ample information regarding every acting methodology of the world. If there is no solid foundation, you cannot build a strong house. In Georgian schools, actors are provided with a good foundation through learning the methods of Stanislavski as it is a very strong and emotionally-based approach.

In turn, Portugal really helped me as an artist by exposing me to other methodologies. There is however no correct, or 'right' way. I think that whereas the Stanislavski approach is well represented in theatre at large, I saw in Portugal new and interesting academic or postmodern theatre groups with very talented actors. The actors who were working with me had very interesting approaches and opinions, and very good

acting skills. My work is also a comment about my experience with professional actors as well as non-professional ones. In the first production I was working with friends who although artists were not actors. The second production however was with professional actors. If I were to compare these two experiences, I felt that working with professional actors was more comfortable, but working with volunteers was more interesting as they would sometimes be very realistic and allow their emotions to be very close to the characters they were portraying. Ultimately, working with both of these groups provided not answers to question which methodology is better than the other, but instead provided the opportunity to learn from other people's experiences. As a result, pleasure was found in the process of creation, having the opportunity to learn and share amongst an international team.

Gaining international experience is highly beneficial for collaborative works such as this one, and I strongly believe that opportunities intended to provide these experiences are extremely important. In Japan for example they have many arts residency programs for international artists. "Akioshidal International Art Village" was a real village that catered to artists for three month residency programs. It provided the opportunity for every kind of artist to make art out of the ordinary life and collaborate with different people of different artistic fields. In my opinion, residencies like this one are extremely beneficial. Artistic communities, laboratories, and hubs are very important for every country, and based on my experience, working with people from different fields (musicians, actors, architects and visual artists) is both inspirational and constructive. Through this, I have started to plan new projects and am trying to make a new artistic hub in Porto, where young people from both art and sciences can work together.

I believe that a collaboration between art and science represents unlimited opportunities. I experienced that by bringing different fields together. To work on a common project predisposes the project to have great potential. Not to mention that working with people from fields that bring in new ideas or technologies is one more step towards success and achievement of goals. Furthermore, projects that are fashioned or shared in alternative places is something that is very important for a city: Places where young professionals and students and the community at large can breathe new soul into our surroundings making the city alive. While discussing experimental theatre spaces such as the location of the staging of my play, I would like to comment on formal or standard theatre spaces and stages.

I believe that there should be more theatres available for the young artists in Portugal. In my experience it was very difficult, many theatres asking to be booked up to two years before the production date. I was however fortunate to get the theatre black box, in *Grupo Musical da Miragaia* in Porto, Portugal. It was great to have their support.

Contrarily, in Georgia most large theatres have small stages where young artists and students can put on their works and without the need to book long ahead.

With the advent and rapid growth of internet, it is difficult to make people interested to go to the theatre. I think then that theatre needs to find ways to get closer to people, and as such as theatre practitioners we should search for ways to bridge the gap between the play and the audience. Theatre has to continuously strive to stay alive and contemporary, and it should speak to us of the reality that surrounds us and engage us in questioning reality. We furthermore have to try to make richer performances, and support new movements and young collectives.

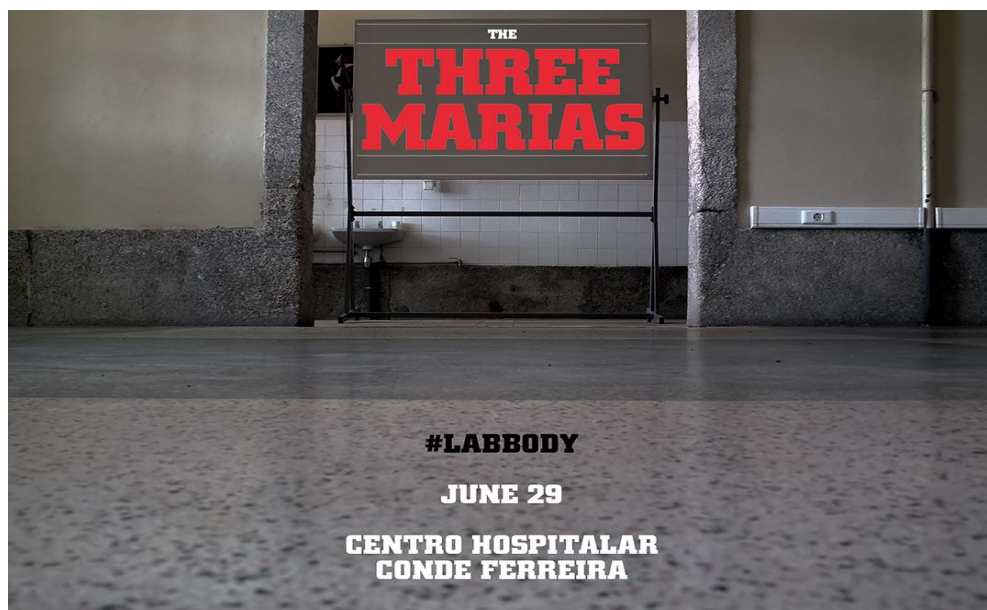
Working as a director and adaptor-writer was a new experience for me. I saw my profession from different perspectives within it, all the while acquiring new skills and drawing from all of this inspiration for future projects. My goal for now is to bring my play to Georgia because I think it is the correct time and place for a staging of *The Three Marias*. I am going to continue to work with themes regarding women's rights and gender representations on the stage and I would also like to make more adaptations. Above all, I recognize that success is in the process of creation.

Appendix

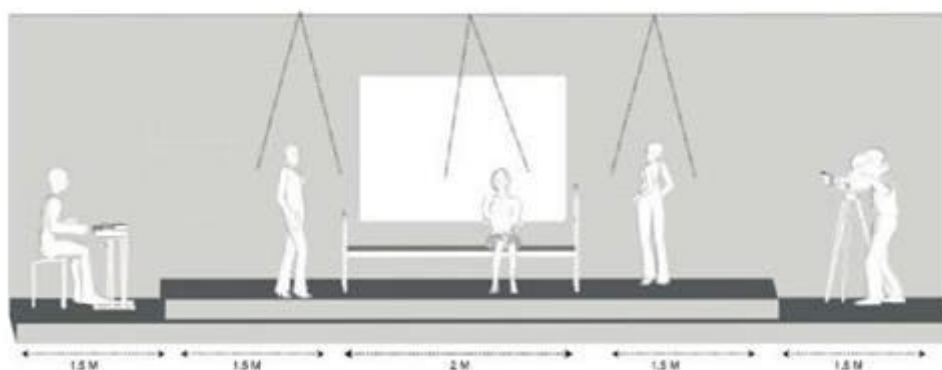
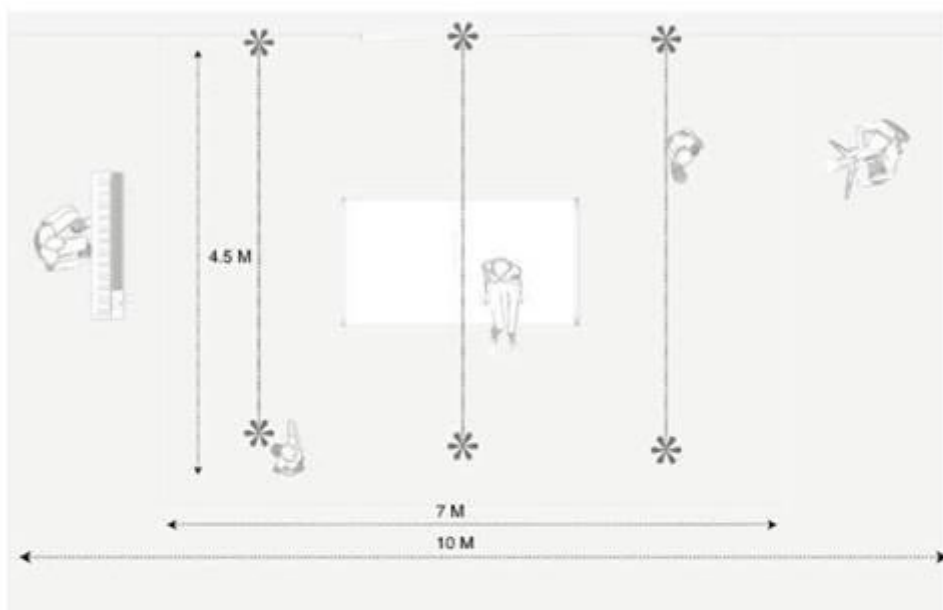
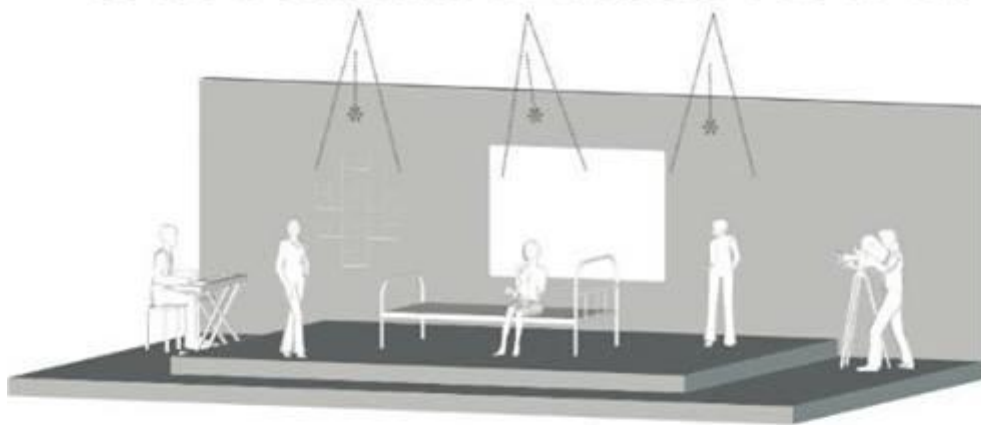
Posters From the second production.(Group musical MiraGaia, Porto. 2017)



Posters from the first production (Hospital Conde Ferreira, Porto.2016)



THREE MARIAS STAGE SET UP



ELEMENTS:

- KEYBOARD & SEAT
- WHITE WALL FOR CROSSWORD PUZZLE
- SPACE TO BEAM SCREEN
- HOSPITAL BED
- CAMERA ON TRIPOD
- BEAMER
- 3 WIRELESS MICROPHONEs
- STEREO SYSTEM PIANO/VOICE
- 3 SPOTLIGHTS
- LIVE CAMERA TO BEAMER

PROPOSAL VERSION 15NOV2016

Scene "Prisoner"

First production, Conde Ferreira. 2016



Second Production, Grupo Musical MiraGaia. 2017



“Letter for father on the screen”

Second Production, Grupo Musical MiraGaia.2017



First production, Conde Ferreira. 2016



Orgasm Scene

Second Production, Grupo Musical MiraGaia. 2017



First production, Conde Ferreira. 2016



“Manipulation” from the Orgasm Scene

Second Production, Grupo Musical MiraGaia. 2017



First production, Conde Ferreira. 2016



"Duties" Scene

Second Production, Grupo Musical MiraGaia. 2017



First production, Conde Ferreira. 2016



Scene of Manifest

Second Porduction, Grupo Musical MiraGaia.2017



First production, Conde Ferreira. 2016



Stage Decoration

First production, Conde Ferreira. 2016



Second Production, Grupo Musical MiraGaia. 2017



Rehearsal in ESMAE



Videos Connected to “*The Three Marias*”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioAWkXf_jfM

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ijd_1VGqIVQ&feature=youtu.be

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