

# Experimental recreation practices: Restaging Constança Capdeville's musical theatre work *Don't, Juan*

Helena Marinho<sup>1</sup>, Mónica Chambel<sup>1</sup>, Alfonso Benetti<sup>1</sup>, Luís Bittencourt<sup>1</sup>

The recreation or re-enactment of 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde musical theatre works involves a set of epistemological and methodological issues that can be addressed through practice-based procedures informed by archaeological, ethnographic and experimental perspectives. This article presents a discussion about the relevance of integrating these perspectives, departing from their application in a specific case study, an experimental musical theatre work by Constança Capdeville (1937–92), one of the most influential Portuguese composers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a key figure in the creation of the staged avant-garde. The work selected for recreation was *Don't, Juan* (1985), an 'anti-opera' for an ensemble of 4 musicians, choreographic instructions for two-stage performers (mime artist and dancer), light design, and pre-recorded vocal and instrumental music. Our recreation was undertaken in 2018, as a collective project by the Xperimus Ensemble, a group of artist-researchers and independent performers, and developed tools and strategies that could be applied and support similar attempts at rediscovering performances deemed unique, generating new and unique assemblages. We proposed an interdependent model based on *immersion – dispersion – consolidation*:

immersion as the interaction between archaeology and preliminary ethnography and its impact on the performers' view of the available contents; dispersion as a performative in-betweenness – chaotic yet creative – resulting from immersion and experimentation at its most basic, but also most necessary stage; and consolidation as a state of acquired knowledge that empowers and enables the performers. In this sense, the blending of archaeology with the living experience of performance might be appropriate in a reconstruction project, with methods such as performative ethnography, experimental practice and embodied knowledge through performance operating as effective tools to reshape the past into the future.

<sup>1</sup> – Department of Communication and Art & INET-md, University of Aveiro

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