

Bonds in Motion

Performing arts intergenerational family at Raval, Barcelona

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ABSTRACT

Vincles en Moviment (Bonds in Motion) is an artistic community-based research project that originated as a community-based residency in performing arts at Drassanes Civic Centre (CCD) (Raval) in October 2022. With the funding support of the Catalonia Culture Department, OSIC (CLT019/22/000216), we could gather a research interdisciplinary team of five members, experts in heritage and artistic community practices, attention to diversity through scenic arts, choreography and psychology, dance, landscape and experimental geographies, acting, dramaturgy and theatre, and audio-visuals studies. Fourteen participants, aged between 16 to 84 years old, who lived or studied in the Raval neighbourhood (Barcelona), joined the residency. Half of them were migrants from Ecuador, Peru, Colombia or Ukraine and national citizens born in other Spanish autonomous communities. During three months, we experimented with interdisciplinary artistic processes, thus contemplating visual and plastic arts, movement, dance, theatre, performance and "site-specific" indoor and outdoor interventions. All the working sessions were recorded, and on January 2023, a video documentary (40') was released in a public premiere at CCD, with a round table public discussion. We have witnessed the long-lasting impact of this artistic project on the community at Raval neighbourhood, with the transformation of the group of participants into the *Vincles* Family, active, self-organising activities after the project was finished. In January 2024, the group challenged two research team members to co-produce a community intergenerational theatre play with them. For five months, we all co-created *Temps al Temps (Time to Time)* intergenerational spectacle that premiered in May 2024.

KEYWORDS

Active ageing, Intergenerational dialogue, participative performing arts, embodied knowledge, site-specific explorations

Introduction

Vincles en Moviment (Bonds in Motion) is a participative-based research project in performing arts and humanities. Our aim was to work with interdisciplinary artistic experimentation processes, thus contemplating plastic arts, movement, dance, theatre, performance and "site-specific" (contextualized performative experiences) in the public spaces of Ciutat Vella and Montjuïc (Barcelona). From the 22nd of October 2022 until the 14th of January 2023, we could develop an artistic participative residency in performing arts at Drassanes Civic Centre (CCD) (Raval), with the funding support of the Catalonia Culture Department, OSIC (CLT019/22/000216). The researcher - working in the field of heritage studies, embodied landscape and artistic community practices - envisioned an intergenerational participative-based creative laboratory with the collaboration of four other artists-researchers. We gathered expertise in attention to diversity through scenic arts, choreography and psychology (Marta Filella); in dance, landscape and experimental geographies (Jordi Mas); in acting, dramaturgy and theatre direction (Anna Tamayo), and in photography and filmmaking (Pol Planas). Every Saturday morning for three hours over eight weeks, seven older women (ages 63 to 84) from Josep Tarradellas and Josep Trueta Old People's Centres, and seven teenagers (ages 16 to 18) from Milà I Fontanals Highschool and the Performing Arts course, and other teenagers from Raval's Youth Centre, joined our activities. We could gather an intercultural group with participants born in Catalonia and other Spanish autonomous communities, as well as from Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Ukraine. The majority of the participants, young and senior, belonged to vulnerable groups. Some had recently arrived through asylum requests, some were refugees, and others were in a situation of poverty, involuntary loneliness and isolation.

During eight sessions, we worked with the concept of "change" to generate an intergenerational reflexive dialogue about the physical changes in our bodies, the transformative changes in the places we inhabit, or the changes in beliefs, identifications and mental states. Participants could also experiment with memories of the physical transformations in the city of Barcelona, with the changes in the nature of their movements in space, or with the emotional "secure environmental spaces" that bring them comfort in times of emotional changes.

The participants played an active role in the artistic creation and research processes, as well as in the ongoing participatory evaluation processes, both throughout the residency and in the final concluding part, with the colloquium and public presentation. On January 14, 2023, in the Auditorium of the CCD, as part of the Performing Arts Residency Cycle program, we presented the premiere screening of our documentary film *Bonds in Motion* (40') with the results of our three months of community

artistic work, and a subsequent public colloquium and a round table with all the participants and artists, with an attendance of 60 people¹.

This project had a long-lasting impact on the participants with the *Vincles* group, very active, self-organising activities in Raval's neighbourhood after the research project finished. In January 2024, the group challenged the researcher and Anna Tamayo to co-produce a community intergenerational theatre play with them. For five months, and with eight members of the group (six retired women and two young adults), we co-created *Temps al Temps (Time to Time)* theatre play that premiered in May 2024, self-financed by the *Vincles* group, and with the collaboration of the CCD, which offered us their facilities, and the theatre space. In March of the same year, we already had the dramaturgic structure of the scenes, the sound and light design, the script was read and commented, and the play's transitions were discussed. Therefore, we were ready for the general rehearsals. Our big day was May 3rd, 2024, with the *Time to Time* theatre play premiere. Some months later, on September 14th 2024, we presented the documentary film premiere "Temps al Temps: Fer possible l'impossible" (Time to Time: making the impossible possible) (45')², followed by a public round table discussion with the presence of *Vincles* group, and the artistic team. This documentary film delves into the performance co-creation processes and the close-up of an intimate dramaturgical work. With this film, we wished to bring the viewer to a behind-the-scenes space of dramaturgical participative construction.

Performing arts and environmental adaptation to urban changes

Bonds in Motion (CLT019/22/000216) is a participative-based research project that reflects on the critical context of urban social isolation, especially felt in teenagers and older population in big global cities, experimenting with the making of creative "bonds" with the urban landscape in its socio-cultural, mental-emotional, bodily and environmental dimensions, and how these multiplicity of creative "bondings" dialogue with the processes of "change" that occur within the participants bodies, the urban places they inhabit, and the urban communities they live with. In 2022-23, with residents of Raval's neighbourhood, we delved into a journey to discover their affective bonds "body-place-community" that allow them to adapt to the "changes" of their close environment. We also wanted to highlight the multiplicity

¹ Documentary Research Project *Bonds in Motion (Vincles en Moviment)* (2023) (42'), Youtube@vinclesenmoviment, (<https://youtu.be/8kgIT77iguQ?si=zs2d-F1gu5RsDzzE>).

² Video documentary *Temps al Temps: making the impossible possible* (2024) (45'), Youtube@vinclesenmoviment, (<https://youtu.be/YVa4sfmuCIA?si=zqDVaCTh7oZipbzh>).

of individual interpretations and voices that speak of an emotional connection with the urban landscape. In this project, we interpreted this connection through bodily experiences, movement and site-specific performativity in the public spaces of Ciutat Vella, Barcelona.

This project implied artistic-based research in the field of performing arts, combining applied and empirical research within humanities studies, and specifically studies on the urban landscape, crossing areas of knowledge that include the observation of the phenomenological aspects of the perception of space and the integration of the artistic disciplines within the performing arts (performance, movement and "site-specific" contextual dance), making use, on occasions, of other artistic practices such as plastic and audio-visual arts. We aimed to generate a transdisciplinary and artistic community-based research work with the collaboration of invited artists and with the essential participation of an intergenerational group of residents. They all played an active role in the processes of experimentation and artistic documentation through participative artistic methodologies, allowing us to build processes of environmental adaptability and social resilience independently of their age difference.

Our methodology was inspired by "site-specific" contextual practices within theatre, performance and dance, with interventions that allowed us to establish new experimental dialogues about the embodied experience and the transformation of urban spaces. As a reference in urban studies, we must mention the drift of Baudelaire's flâneur who, in walking aimlessly, finds refuge in the anonymity of the crowd (Benjamin, 1939/2005), the psychogeographical experiences of the urban explorations of the Situationists where play and ephemeral performative interventions transform urban spaces into transitory scenarios of reflection and subjective freedom (Debord, 1955). Additionally, the happenings of the 1960s, challenged the conventions of theatrical performance, blurring the line between art and the seemingly casual, everyday actions in public spaces (Kaprow, 2003). Other references can be found in the itinerant theatre, or the performative itineraries that have blurred the role of the actor and the spectator, where the development of dramaturgical narratives and performative actions simultaneously dialogue with both of them and with the urban places (Harvie, 2009). The act of walking is an aesthetic practice because it transforms a place and its meanings through the variations of perceptions that take place in the movement (Careri, 2002). In *Bonds in Motion* we aimed to rediscover the urban landscape of our everyday life in two different ways: as actors who transform, in an ecological and phenomenological sense, the environment, giving meaning to the urban space with our actions, interpretations through play and the performative event, and as spectators who reflect on the meanings of our actions, and who restore a relationship of intimacy and emotional and artistic sensitivity with the urban landscape, through the rediscovery of our bodies within these scenic spaces (Turri, 1998). Within

our work, we also highlighted the multiplicity of interpretations and voices that speak of an environmental and emotional connection with the landscape, articulating the social, mental and environmental ecology of urban places (Guattari, 1989). We challenged ourselves to creatively shape and interpret this connection through our bodies, movement and performativity. Our actions, gestures, sensations, affective responses and bodily and performative behaviours build an intangible heritage (Thrift, 2008). The body is our tool to experience, feel, express, communicate and represent the "bonds" that unite us to the ecology of the world. The body is the threshold that connects the universe of our unconscious, of an inner, mental, emotional and subjective world, with the objective, complex and multisensory externality of the physical reality of the spaces that surround us.

Intergenerational and multicultural performing arts research

Our participants (teenagers and older retired women) experienced processes of vital "change" in a particularly palpable way. In this research, we have given them space and time to share, express, and channel these processes through the language of the arts. Even though in October 2022, the period of the Covid-19 pandemic was already distant, both groups had suffered and still were suffering situations of psychosocial and environmental involuntary isolation. Our challenge was to observe and give them tools to express themselves and create new emotional "bonds" that could help them to adapt to physical and emotional "changes" in their close environments. In this section, we will show some of the topics and exercises we elaborated on the project's first stage (2022-23).

In the session *Attentions*, we gave us time to listen to each other, observe the city and create based on that observation. It was about observing the city while observing and listening to each other, and becoming aware of the differences in everyone's observation of urban places. This outdoor session consisted of a performative itinerance or urban drift through "treasure places" chosen by the participants (Rambla del Raval, Jardins de Rubió i Lluch, and Moll de la Fusta). In this site-specific "performance", carried out in groups of three people, they observed, selected and drew what caught their attention in the urban spaces they passed through. This performance involves carrying and holding a large golden wooden frame painting while simultaneously drawing on a transparent methacrylate screen, capturing both what is in front and behind them. In this process, participants become aware of the differences in how they perceive their surroundings. As their perspectives intersect, their bodies become an integral part of the places they observe (Figure 1). In this session, walking involves "giving us time" to observe the space, listen to each other, share

stories and anecdotes about those places, and create a new collective narrative of the shared lived moment.

Session *Secure Space* was developed indoors and outdoors, ending with a performative site action in Voltes de Cirés gardens (Raval). In this session, we worked on the concept of a safe place and the associated personal memories that last despite the passage of time, which grow and are enriched in dialogue with the other (Figure 2). We started an indoor exercise through group sedimentation and dressing our bodies with the words, details and feelings of "places". Later, we established an intimate dialogue in pairs about what a "refuge space" is for each of us and which type of feeling of well-being provides us. This intimate "safe and secure space" -a different place for each of us- endures as a body memory. We return to it repeatedly, whether in our imagination or through an actual journey with our physical presence, whenever we are able to. This safe space gives us security and stability throughout personal processes of change. We went out into the street dressed as "secure spaces" and searched for a public space to hang out our clothes. In this action, we created an ephemeral "secure space" common to all of us, surrounded by all our differences and symbolic clothes.

Temps al Temps

A community intergenerational theatre play

Temps al Temps (Time to Time) is a theatre performance of the *Bonds in Motion* group. For eleven weeks (January-March 2024), we delved into artistic research and co-creation processes with an intergenerational group of eight members (18 to 86 years old) to create an original scenic piece with a public premiere at CCD, Barcelona. *Temps al Temps* experiments with the concept of "time", which holds our hopes and fears, and allows us to savour, mature and grow, feel and trust, love, and leave behind trances and a thousand doubts. The working sessions allowed us to listen to the "passing of time", to understand what it means when we "need time", or we "stop time", or "lose time", or trust in a "time" that brings everything in its proper place, or excuse ourselves behind "the lack of time" that is always running and leaving us behind. This section presents some of the topics and exercises we elaborated on *Temps al Temps* dramaturgic co-creative process (2024).

In the session *We need time*, we worked on the concept that time has a certain elasticity. It stretches to infinity when we are delicate and move slowly, for example, when we savour and carefully observe every sensation that crosses our skin and senses in a pleasure situation. However, time contracts and escapes from our hands when we are in a hurry or in a chaotic situation. In this session, images were created for the "Chocolate



Figure 1 – Session – *Atentions*, a performative walk in Ciutat Vella; Barcelona (Pol Planas, 2022).



Figure 2 – Session – *Secure Space*, creating an intimate place in Raval (Pol Planas, 2022).

Cake” scene (Figure 3). In this scene, everyone stands around a table and starts taking aprons, chalk pencils and timers out of a box. They come together to prepare a cake, but this objective requires a cooking time preparation. Only one of them knows the recipe, and the rest follow the instructions, observing how the leader draws energetic arrows and drawings on the table. Suddenly, chaos appears, with confusing situations, timers randomly ringing, and cooking processes being mixed up. Indeed, what came to be a quiet, calm experience in a friendship environment becomes a stressful experience of demanding time frames. The tension ends in random playfulness where everybody transforms the scene into an “atemporal” childhood playground of “run, I’ll catch you”. The group, with chocolate and cream on their faces and hands, go back in time when they were children (independently of age differences), and



Figure 3 – Rehearsal of the Chocolate Cake Scene at Drassanes Civic Centre (Pol Planas, 2024).



Figure 4 – *Time to Time*, Premiere in Drassanes Civic Center, May 2024 (Pol Planas, 2024).

it was possible to “lose time” and even stop it within the game.

In the session *Time Transforms Us* (*italics*), we explored the concept that “time” has the power to make the invisible visible, bury the most resistant and solid beneath the sand, or melt the ice to reveal what was frozen. Through persistence and obstinacy, constancy and patience, habit and automatism, or the act of carrying a burden over “time”, we inevitably change and become someone else. The older women agreed there was a decisive moment in their lives when they took a train to come to Barcelona. A train they had the choice to either take it or not, but it transformed the course of the rest of their lives. We asked them to bring from home those clothes they had saved from the past, and for some hidden reason, they never got rid of them. We asked them to mix them in the group and to dress them randomly. Each of these clothes

carries meaningful and deep memories, and dressing in those clothes transforms them into powerful women with superpowers. We ask them to describe that superpower and share it with the audience (Figure 4).

Conclusions

In *Bonds in Motion* (2022-23), we have created a dialogue between the participants and their close urban environment. The urban landscape has been another actor in the performative activities. Simultaneously, the participants played the role of actors and spectators in each of these spaces in the city. They have been able to transform these environments through their actions, reflected on them, given them a new meaning, and discovered the relevant role of their performative body within the landscape, transformed into a scenic space. Once the project ended, we maintained contact with the group, and the CCD offered us the opportunity to continue using its spaces for our quarterly meetings. In the project's second stage, we accepted the challenge of the group to develop a theatrical creation ending in *Time to Time* premiere spectacle (2024).

In this project, a dynamic of intimate familiarity has reminded us of the tender intergenerational relationships that can be generated. It was possible because of the open attitude of the participants, who allowed themselves to express and receive the challenges presented in the activities with open arms. This openness and willingness have also been evident in gatherings and moments of uninhibited sharing, creating an environment where, despite the age differences, there has been a climate with no judgment, fear, and shame. We have verified how art and artistic activities directed by respect and collaboration provide psychological well-being in all the participants. We have shared delicate and intimate life experiences. Art makes it easier to reflect and share them and gives them space to be expressed. In this sense, the artistic practice is a delicate means to reach sensitive topics and deep emotions, creating a sense of respectful collective compromise.

In the final evaluation, the participants also highlighted the spirit of collaboration of the whole group to generate and develop the activities in an atmosphere of fun and smiles. They explained that they encountered no age or, cultural or language obstacles (they could speak Catalan, Spanish and English naturally). They also discussed how we broke age stereotypes and the taboo of ageing. From the outside, stages of life are artificially created with supposed limits, aspirations and built-in needs. Stereotypes between young and older people also foster oppositions and relationships of supposed respect. In this artistic work, we have worked on respect from a different place. Mutual respect is where we give each other space to listen and feel heard and where we are all considered. With this artistic work, we have broken these stereotypes and these socially

imposed limits. We wanted to work from a place of authenticity and the desire to enjoy the experience where there are no age differences beyond physical differences or life experiences, but where the desire to do things and the illusions of all have been equally alive and shared.

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