

# The Lucky Children

60 minutes Performance

Conceived and directed by Omar Ghayatt



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Co-production: Schlachthaus Theater Bern & Festival D-CAF, Cairo.

SCHLACHTHAUS  
THEATER BERN

downtown  
contemporary  
arts festival  
مهرجان  
وسط البلد  
للفنون المعاصرة  
D-CAF

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## Credits

- Director, Concept: Omar Ghayatt
- Scenography / Video: Peter Aerschmann
- Costume: Ernestyna Orłowska
- Soundscape / Music: Wendelin Schmidt-Ott
- Outside Eye: Marius Schaffter
- Production Management: Boss & Röhrenbach
- Production: Studio Moroni
- Co-production: Schlachthaus Theater Bern. & Festival D-CAF, Cairo.

## Dates

- Casting: December 2022
- Creation: April - October 2023 (6 Weeks)
- Premier: October 2023 (Festival D-CAF, Kairo)
- Swiss Premier: November 2023 (Schlachthaus Theater Bern)

## Contact

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***“You only know yourself because of your memories.”***

- Andrea Gillies.

# The Motivation

Alzheimer struck my mother two years ago; I was sitting next to her on the sofa, watching her; she was physically fine and still smart. She could move, walk, watch TV, smile, and talk. Her body was still the same, but at the same time, she was no longer there. My mother, the one I used to know, didn't exist anymore. So where was she? Who is my mother? At that moment, I was shocked, not only because of her but also because of me. I was asking myself, who am I without my memory?

## History, Memories...

Throughout history - often driven by an anthropocentric worldview - philosophers tried to define the unique nature of humans and how it distinguishes us from animals. They said humans are animals with the ability to speak or think. Aristotle, in turn, defined humans as rational animals. But, among all the definitions I came across, this one spoke most to me: "Humans are animals who have a history."

History, preserved and transmitted through written texts or stories we tell, was the device that allowed us to accumulate our collective experiences, build civilizations and shape our identities. And to me, history at an individual level is memory - they function the same but on different scales. But what happens to us without memories and history? Aren't we empty bodies, then? In this project, I want to examine the relationship between us and our bodies, us and history, and by doing so, ultimately shed light on the question: who are we?

## ...and the moment we disappear.

The pandemic and my mother's situation pushed me to reflect on the elderly in our society and our responsibility towards them. It gave me the urge to put this hidden majority in the spotlight. Because as a matter of fact, people who are 65 years old and above will make up 42% of the entire population in the European Union by 2060. But despite their growing numbers, elderly people and the process of aging seem strangely invisible in our society. A gap that uncovers a complicated relationship and perhaps missing solidarity between generations. It almost seems as if we start to disappear at a certain age, even though we are still alive. The question arises: how long does one remain a valuable member in the eyes of the community? And what happens with us, our history and identity after this?

# The Performance

## Empty bodies...

"The Lucky Children" is a dream-like ride that dives into the universe of empty bodies. Bodies that no longer hold memories or histories. It invites us into a universe where different time periods overlap and the past and future cross paths. Childhood and advanced age - the stages in our lives which mark the construction and deconstruction of our own selves - will be dissolved together on stage. We will see our future in the mirror of the old bodies on stage and witness the end through the beginning.

Like a looking glass, "The Lucky Children" shall allow us to peek into the universe of the empty bodies and thereby examine our relation to history, question the reliability of our recollections, and to discover how the delicate web of memories ultimately shapes us. The performance's essence is, therefore, not a study of the aging process nor Alzheimer but of our memories, history, and their role in shaping humankind, thereby tackling questions around the fragility of our bodies and our mortality, which so often seems to contradict with the self-concept of modern humankind.



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## ...seen through a window

The first thing we see on stage is a set of a windy winter beach and five elderly performers wearing dream-like costumes that look as if Dalí designed them. The performers behave and move as if they were on a beach in summer; they act like kids and sometimes like teenagers. The show starts with them singing a typical kindergarten song. Gradually, we delve more and more into their universe, a universe that has its own dimensions, rules, and laws. An invisible universe that no one can see except if you enter

the mind of someone with no memory. In this sense, the show is like a magic window for us (the viewers) that allows us to discover an unknown universe; we can spy on the elderly performers, seeing them happy as kids in kindergarten, playing, dancing, crying, and laughing. This universe intersects with their current reality, in which their age and limited time left are dawning. And sometimes, their memories flare up, giving us a glimpse at previous lives. Like beads, they string together and draw a portrait of forgotten and long-gone memories.

At the end of the performance, the two worlds, the universe of the empty bodies and the surrounding reality, finally come together. We will see young people coming to visit the elderly who lie down on chaise longues at the beach and placing flowers next to them in silence. At the start of the scene, the young and the elderly will be invisible to each other until the dream-like universe slowly fades out, and we realize that the elderly are actually in the retirement home.

## **Visual / Olfactory**

I imagine the stage as a winter beach, contrasting with the summer activities the elderly performers are practicing. All the objects on stage will be pallid as if everything was drawn with pastel colors. To achieve the dreamy foggy universe, I will use a transparent scrim curtain at the front of the stage. The ground is covered with sand, allowing us to work performatively on the notion of vanishing. Dim video objects will be projected on the scenography, appearing and disappearing gradually like phantoms.

Developing a long-term project, I started years ago, I will use scentography as a hidden element of scenography. As a result, the entire space will smell like the sea, like the memories we discover.

The performers will wear sophisticated costumes that resemble Dali's painting, representing foggy minds and memories. They shall look as if they are melting or disappearing.

## **Auditory**

Like most of my previous works, the soundscape will be one of the essential elements. This project, it will serve as a bridge to connect the present, the past, and the internal universe of the elderly. The soundscape shall surround the viewers/listeners, manipulating their sensations and testing their hearing, especially when we play minimalistic sounds.

As most of the performance will depend on the notion of showing rather than talking, there will be few dialogues. However, a recorded conversation will be played when the performers speak, with the performers lip-syncing (not precisely) the text. This technique shall add to the overall uncertain and blurry character of the universe presented to the viewers.

The material related to the memories and experiences of the elderly performers will result from a workshop held with them in the first phase of the creation. That will allow us to achieve authentic materials coming from each performer. This aspect will be considered during the casting process.



# The Time-plan

## Casting

**When:** November/December 2022

**Who:** Director, production managers

**What:** A casting session will be held to select five performers (ideally two men and three women). They must be over 60 years old and possess good physical abilities since they will have to move energetically (sometimes like small kids) throughout the performance. Preferably they should have a personal relation to the performance subject and stories to share in this regard.

## Phase 1

After the casting process and the five performers' final selection, we will hold two workshops to generate and collect material.

### 1. Workshop

**When:** 1 week in April 2023

**Who:** Director, performers, exterior eye (Choreography)

**What:** Work on the movement and performance related to the different subjects in the performance (children, elderly, memory, history, and disappearance).

### 2. Workshop

**When:** 1 week in April 2023

**Who:** Director, text editor/dramaturge, performers, sound artist, and the exterior eye (Performance)

**What:** Work on the narrative aspect of the show; we will generate and collect materials based on the personal memories of the performers and their relations to their respective most significant historical events.

## Phase 2

**When:** 3 weeks in July / August 2023

**Who:** Everyone

**What:** Main phase of creation, where we will build the materials together and make decisions regarding narrative and visuals as well as shape the show's rhythm.

The last third of the phase must include part of the costumes since it will be essential for the performers to rehearse with it, discover its performative possibilities, and understand the obstacles and challenges of wearing it. Furthermore, the element of sand should be integrated into the performance. Finally, decisions regarding sound and music decisions will be made.

### Phase 3

**When:** 3 weeks in October / November 2023

**Who:** Everyone

**What:** The final part of creation is dedicated to developing and rehearsing the outcome from the second phase and fine-tuning the performance. All the show's elements must be ready to be matched together in harmony. Also, the final lighting plan will be created in this phase. Simultaneously, marketing, promoting, and diffusion work will be done during this period.

### Premiere

**When:** End of October 2023

**What:** 3 Shows

**Who:** Director, Performers, and technicians

**Where:** Festival D-CAF, Cairo, Egypt.

**When:** End of November 2023

**What:** 4 Shows

**Who:** Director, Performers, and technicians

**Where:** Schlachthaus Theater Bern.





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