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K.J. ERBEN – KYTICE:

COMPREHENSIVE SCENOGRAPHIC PROJECT

*EXPLORING METAPHORS IN FOLK LEGENDS THROUGH SPATIAL
AND MATERIAL INSTALLATIONS*

Nitish Jain

Thesis advisor: Prof. Jan Dušek

Examiner: Doc. MgA. Jakub Korčák

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K.J. ERBEN- KYTICE:

KOMPLEXNÍ SCÉNOGRAFICKÝ PROJEKT

STUDIE METAFOR V LIDOVÝCH BALADÁCH SKRZE PROSTOROVÉ A MATERIÁLNÍ INSTALACE

Nitish Jain

Vedoucí práce: Prof. Jan Dušek

Oponent práce: Doc. MgA. Jakub Korčák

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Declaration

I declare that I have prepared my Master's Thesis independently on the following topic:

K.J. ERBEN - KYTICE: COMPREHENSIVE SCENOGRAPHIC PROJECT

EXPLORING METAPHORS IN FOLK LEGENDS THROUGH SPATIAL AND MATERIAL INSTALLATIONS

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under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a scenographic research and artistic process. It focuses on K.J. Erben's *Kytice* as a specific case. The author develops scenarios for a production of the work as a storytelling performance in the format of 'walking theatre'. The purpose of this study is to explore the creation of metaphors through spatial and material-based installations. The idea of metaphor is central to the project because the artistic aim is to detach the poetic word from simply becoming an illustration or a "setting". The author delves into the symbolic tendencies of metaphors to exploit comparisons between (seemingly unlikely) ideas and emphasize imagery shifts to create the installations.

 The first part of the research positions the ideas, themes, plots and motifs of the ballads in *Kytice* with respect to the Czech National Revival of the 19th Century. It further extends to a comparison between *Kytice* and folklore, legends from other cultures especially India. It concludes with questioning the relevance of folklore in the present day and age.

The second part of the research analyses previous interpretations of *Kytice* – graphic illustrations by Alén Diviš and Jan Konůpek, deconstructing the aesthetic of the visual elements and their impact on the viewer. This is followed by an analysis of a stage performance based on the text.

The third part of the research cultivates a scenographic discourse. It focuses on the ideas, practices and theories from within and outside the discipline (of scenography) to define a framework for the artistic approach. Ideas pertaining to phenomenology's relevance in scenography; space and perception; material and sensorial systems; and physical engagement of the spectator are elaborated.

The artistic output is a detailed description of an immersive storytelling performance that was created in Prague based on four ballads from the collection. This is followed by the conceptual artistic ideas for the potential staging of the remaining ballads. Audience feedback from the performance is taken into account leading to the conclusion, where merits and demerits of the process are remarked upon.

ABSTRAKT

Tato diplomová práce je scénografický výzkum a umělecké zpracování, zabývající se dílem Kytice K. J. Erbena. Autor vyvíjí scénáře realizace díla jako story-tellingového představení ve formátu „walking theatre". Cílem této studie je prozkoumat tvorbu metafor v prostorových a materiálních instalacích. Pro práci je hlavní myšlenka metafory, neboť umělecký cílem je odpoutat básníkovo slovo od nutnosti stát se pouhou ilustrací či 'prostředím'. Autor pátrá po symbolech metafor, aby bylo možno porovnat (zdánlivě nesouvisející) nápady a zdůraznit posuny obrazů za účelem tvorby instalace.

První část výzkumu se zabývá myšlenkami, tématy, zápletkami a motivy balad Kytice, s ohledem na české národní obrození 19. století. Dále porovnává Kytici a folklorní pověsti jiných kultur, zejména Indie. Uzavírá pátráním po relevanci folkloru v současnosti.

Druhá část výzkumu analyzuje předchozí interpretace Kytice - ilustrace Alana Diviše a Jana Konůpka, dekonstruuje estetiku vizuálních elementů a jejich vliv na pozorovatele. Následuje analýza divadelního představení založeného na témže textu.

Třetí část výzkumu je věnovaná scénografickému diskurzu. Soustředí se na myšlenky, praktiky a teorie z vně i zevnitř disciplíny (scénografie), aby definovala rámec pro umělecký přístup. Zkoumají se zejména myšlenky, týkající se důležitosti fenomenologie ve scénografii; prostor a vnímání; materiál a smysly; fyzická účast diváka v představení.

Umělecká část je detailní popis imerzivního story-tellingového představení, vytvořeného v Praze a založeného na čtyřech baladách ze sbírky. Dále se zabývá konceptuálními uměleckými myšlenkami pro možnou scénografii zbývajících balad. V závěru, zabývajícím se klady a slabinami procesu, je do úvahy je brán i názor publika.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CONTENTS

Figure 1: Scenography for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2015)

Figure 2: Scenography for *The Cherry Orchard* (2016)
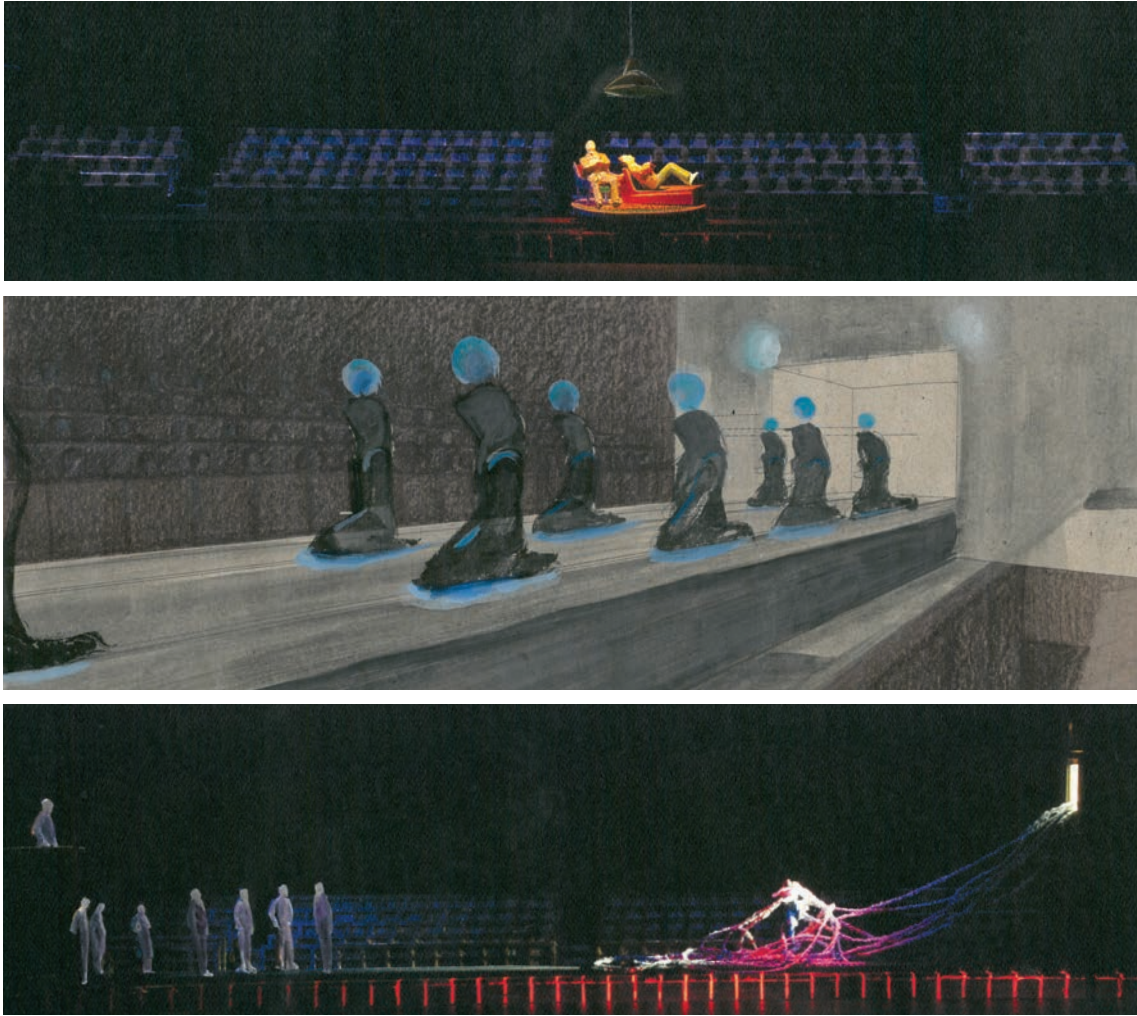
Figure 3: Scenography for Oedipus Rex (2016)
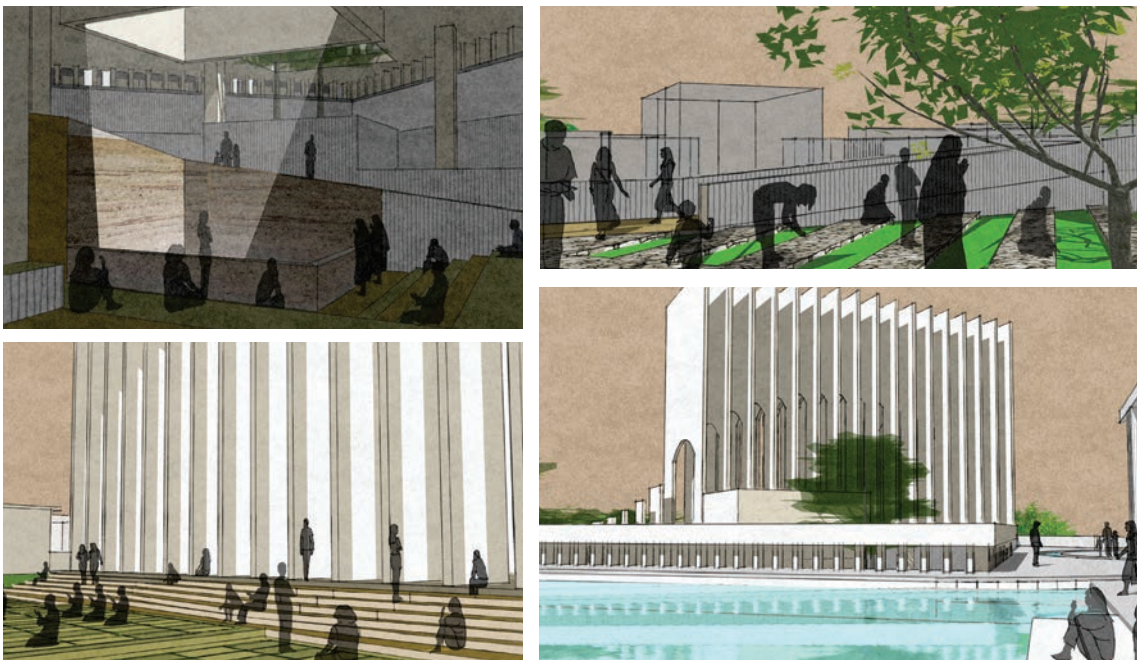
Figure 4: *Ground Zero, Ayodhya, India* (2012). The architectural experience of religious myths associated with a disputed holy site

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I

FROM ARCHITECTURE TO SCENOGRAPHY

The journey to scenography started with my architectural education in India. Concrete constructions and permanent buildings, that tend to make extrovert statements through form and mass alone, never appealed to me. Instead, I was always fascinated by ideas where nuances of space-making and spatial environments were primary considerations. Through my training, architectural praxis and, later, working as a tutor, I developed a deep-rooted appreciation for spaces that are momentary, temporary and transient. This resulted in pursuing scenography as my master's studies.

On reflection, this journey is marked with significant steps. Learning from these, I have compiled a foundation on which my current scenographic ideology is based.

This began with an observation and inquiry into the significance of the end-user of architectural spaces. I discovered two relationships of experience with space: *to distantly observe*, i.e., a spectator and *to be a part of* or *occupy* i.e., an actor. I continued an inquiry into these aspects during my Bachelor's thesis in architecture: *Ground Zero, Ayodhya, India* (2012). I created a *non-building*, i.e., architecture that existed for the sake of an (spiritual, religious) experience without stressing on the conventional role of architecture to serve a "building function". With this work, I discovered that spaces could be made to tell stories and create narratives. Abstract qualities and spatial gestures, big and small, have the capacity to influence human activity or "performance" into either of the aforementioned roles. It illuminated the idea that performative and architectural space are inextricably linked. The latter can, as Juhani Pallasmaa notes, "reconstruct the experience where we are not just spectators, but belong inseparably"[1].

I practiced as an exhibition designer at *Atelier Anonyme Design* in India. It involved designing and supervising execution of temporary, large scale, spatial installations for creating mood and ambience in the exhibition area. I learnt the critical value of visual impact and appropriating the scale of the built, to generate specific perceptual responses from the audience. These projects challenged me to oscillate between two ends of the spectrum: idealized design conception and construction rationale. Expanded knowledge of materials,

techniques and details began to stimulate and refine my artistic attitudes; I saw value in using the micro to develop the macro. These equipped me for an academic future in scenography. I was trained to design with a practical outlook to ensure constructability. At DAMU, this has sometimes been criticized as being detrimental to a 'pure artistic imagination'. However, I do not believe that is so, since it generated a curiosity for materials to the point that it became the starting point[i] of the artistic process in this project.

Prior to relocating to Prague, I was involved as a design tutor at SSAA, India. Pedagogy provided a crucial counterbalance to my professional practice for two years. The studio director, Professor Amrita Madan, and I devised exercises that emphasized on designing for perceptions. We used the opportunity to examine and explore inhabited spaces in two distinct ways – Experientially[ii] and Materially[iii]. This was the first time that I consciously engaged in creating an equilibrium with these two facets of space-making. If anything, this thesis has enriched that balance further: the artistic solutions described in the core, and the title, are based on spatial and material systems.

II

EXPLORATIONS AT DAMU

I came to DAMU to pursue the idea of dramatic space. I sought to study further the impact of visual experience and abstraction in space by expanding my knowledge of theatre, which previously was negligible. In my time in Prague, I have been exposed a multitude of inspiring theatre, literature, theory and global artistic practices. It has given ample stimulation, allowing me to position my identity and art.

My academic projects in the school provided opportunities to continue understanding space from a perceptual standpoint. I explored ways in which it could convey meaning through symbolism, emotion and atmosphere on stage. Light, colour, texture, material and sound were the tools I was encouraged to play with, leading to fascinating results. While mise en

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[i] Discussed further in Chapter 4.6: Artistic Methodology.

[ii] In the former, we leaned towards articulating spaces that are emotionally evocative. The immersive quality of the designed space was stressed upon before creating a functional building.

[iii] In the material-led studios we looked at perceiving space through textures and 'visual languages' i.e., structural and aesthetic concerns being synonymous with composite material systems.

scene through drawings and storyboards was the classroom output, the potentials of phenomenology had, subconsciously, begun to strengthen roots in my works.

The scenography for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2015) was an architectonic composition of sound and noise producing elements (Figure 1). The sense of sound inspired the creation of a visual spectacle. It resulted in a jungle-gym like playground where, depending on the actors' positions, different elements could be employed to make a pleasant or jarring symphony. The scenography for *The Cherry Orchard* (2016) tried to implement Brook's statement on Theatre of Absurd to "sense[d] the absence of truth in our everyday exchanges and the presence of truth in what seems far-fetched"[2]. I began by developing on the principle of "visualizing the sound" which was further reinforced with illustrating dramatic time- and incorporating a visual to that effect. I designed two faucets at the very edge of downstage centre that would be dripping continuously and slowly to make an irritating sound and disruptive rhythm; and a massive window suspended upstage that would slowly bleed the pigment colour out and reveal a transparent nothingness through the duration of the performance (Figure 2). Both of these elements subscribed to a contemporary message of the play interpreted as 'wasting and waning resources' such as water.

I have been fascinated with the idea of playing with the fourth wall, and ways in which the audience can be made aware of it or confront it. In *The Cherry Orchard*, the downstage position of the faucets was to ensure that all action happening behind should be perceived, by the audience, "through" and obstructed by this confrontation of wastage. In *Oedipus Rex* (2016), I discarded the auditorium-stage setup in favour of an alley stage with audience seated along the length on both sides. Based on the concept, the seating setup was created like a series of jury-boxes in courthouses: 12 people in 2 rows of 6 each with a fence as a dividing and demarcating spatial gesture. With this experiment I devised the mise en scene in a format I had not pursued but found intriguing (Figure 3). It also instigated thought on the types of choreographic relationships that should exist between actors occupying the alley stage and with the stage space itself. This led to the point where the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2017) which is discussed in this thesis, is devised as a 'walking theatre' and the fourth wall is removed altogether: the audience and storytellers share the same space and experience.

In his study of *The Immediate Theatre*, Brook makes a very succinct distinction. A painter's output is two dimensional, the sculptor's (and by extension the architect's, as a sculptor of space) is three dimensional, while the scenographer's work involves four dimensions- the

passage of time. In terms of altering creative thought and *how the designer is required to think in theatre*, this puts the idea of the mise en scene, albeit theoretically, across very clearly. I find resonance in this also because my artistic career has evolved from one dimension to the next. I have sequentially transferred my medium from painting to architecture to scenography. Though I find Brook's idea well sounded in theory, I am still reckoning with moulding the 4th dimension, that of time, in my works. In its scope, this thesis does not actively discuss the component of time; However, I hope the reflections based on this work will become the basis of my future study on the subject.

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The last 11 years of my education and practice, both as an architect and a scenographer, have led to a profound interest in the qualitative aspects of space, and ways in which the experiences related to space affect the human subconscious, emotions and bodily senses. This interest is central to my thesis.

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III

MOTIVATION FOR THIS PROJECT

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Curiosity and enthusiasm about folklores, myths and legends has persisted from my childhood to adulthood. It has inspired various artistic processes. In *Ground Zero, Ayodhya, India*, I was examining religious myths pertaining to a disputed holy site. The project shaped up as an experiential narrative of the rich anecdotes that were ingrained in the site's history. While working on *Oedipus Rex*, I began drawing parallels between Greek and Indian myths. I was captivated by the similarities and differences, and the possibilities of engaging with my culture through the lens of a Western text. I felt that this could contribute to a unique "staging" perspective, and I wanted to continue developing this language of contrasts between cultures for my final project and thesis. I began searching for local stories from Prague and the Czech culture and discovered *Kytice z pověstí národních* (A bouquet of Czech folk legends) written by K.J Erben in 1853.

The first ballad I read from this collection was *Noon Witch*, and I was shocked and horrified by the directness of the plot climax; I took the entire collection with 13 ballads as my subject. Later, while seeing an exhibition of Kantor at *Cricoteka* in Krakow, I reflected upon why *Kytice* appealed to me so much. I found the answer in Isabel Tejeda's revelation that "Death

or thinking about death has a more emotional impact than those stemming from the awareness of life"[3].

Besides, as is perhaps with all folklores across the world, there is a universality and appeal of the themes embodied in these ballads- the bond between a mother and child, love, loss, family and virtues. With multiple re-readings of the text, I also realized that women were at the centre of all but one stories: they highlight an ambivalent and paradoxical nature of women. It ensures that these stories are relevant today because it allows us to reflect on the role of women in society over the last two centuries.

Another point of intrigue was that these legends have largely been inaccessible to English readers until fairly recently. While translations of certain ballads have existed individually, the entire collection has been translated to English only twice: by Marcela Sulak in 2012 and Susan Reynolds in 2013. I favoured Sulak's translation as the vocabulary was simpler and the structure made the plots captivating. However, even though Reynolds's translation might be flowery and embellished, I have been informed by linguists that it conveys Erben's rhythm and meter better. I would encourage the reader to familiarize themselves with the ballads, in Czech or English, to understand my artistic process better. A short summary of each ballad's plot is provided at the end of this book.

I discovered that the ballads in *Kytice* were originally oral songs from the Bohemian countryside, and similar stories are found to exist in other Slavic cultures. Contemplation on exchanges of stories, shared between historically neighboring regions reminded me of *Dastangoi* (to narrate epics/ legends/ stories) an oral, storytelling tradition that travelled in the 15th Century from Persia to India (Figure 4). Both *Kytice* and *Dastangoi* were verbal traditions based in local languages, with similar trajectories of fate and time. External domination by the Austro-Hungarian and British Empires respectively in the 19th Century pushed traditional practices into oblivion; both ended up surviving as written literature while the oral forms died out.

The performance that I envisaged as the basis of this project, was to be a crossover between *Kytice* and *Dastangoi*[iv]. For the audience, it had to be an experience of listening to stories and poetry being narrated in a scenographic space. The space would provide the stimuli to engage the other senses and imagination. Living in an age where vision is our dominant sense, poetry resonates with the (other) senses because it is oral and enveloping. Pallasmaa

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[iv] Discussed further on Pages 72-74

notes that "the re-oralized word of poetry brings us back to the centre of an interior world"[4], implying that there is a direct confrontation with space through hearing poetry. The attribute that has consistently formed the backbone of my artistic works- the conscious and subconscious experience of emotions and bodily senses in a space- became the foundation of this project.

Other ideas that I have partially worked with earlier, such as phenomenology, spatial gestures, materials and tactility, and other parameters of perception could be further explored under this project's premise. As mentioned before, the performance was devised as a 'walking theatre' where the audience and storytellers would share the same space. My architectural background gave the capability to "consider the flow of people through a space, manipulating and moving audiences as part of the scenic invention"[5]. The choice to give material and space an equal footing in the process came from the knowledge that theatre is able to exploit material's metaphorical potential in relation to the possibility of transformation. Thus, it could be the source of original experiences for the viewer.

In my application to DAMU in 2015, I said, "In my endeavors at constructing active scenographic moments, I hope to gain the ability to create emotions that are shared and experienced simultaneously by the narrators and the audience". It is rewarding that my education here ends with a project that fulfills the aspirations I began with.

IV

ABOUT THIS WORK

This thesis is a scenographic research and artistic process. The purpose of this study is to explore the creation of poetic metaphors through spatial and material-based installations. This is achieved by historic and topical research, critical analysis and distillation of theory to develop a practical experiment.

Chapter 2: Background and Context positions *Kytice* and Bohemian folklore with respect to cultural and political history. *Kytice and the Czech National Revival* introduces the development of 19th century nationalism. In *Ideological Cornerstones of the Revival* I emphasize on the recurring themes on which the folklore and literature of this time were based. *Kytice in light of Máj and Babička* is a short comparison of these three significant works from the Czech literary canon. *Understanding Kytice as a Whole and in its Parts* focuses solely on the text of the collection and deconstructs the major ideas. *Comparing Kytice- Folklore across Cultures* explores comparisons between certain themes and legends from the collection and their counterparts found in other parts of the world, especially in India. This itself becomes a short study of metaphors that can emphasize a shift in imagery and borrow references from various cultures to shape the artistic work. *Relevance of Folklore Today* assesses how legends have evolved with changing socio-political agendas.

Chapter 3: Previous Interpretations of Kytice is an analytical research. In the first part, two-dimensional interpretations, i.e., some etchings and illustrations by Jan Konůpek and Alén Diviš respectively are the subject of the study. 2-D outputs such as these can be considered as 'frozen' instances in the spatio-temporal continuum of the mise en scene. They are analysed based on the intent of the artist and the impact on the viewer. The latter is done by deconstructing the aesthetic of the visual elements that affect perception. In the second part, a performance of Kytice at Švandovo Divadlo is studied. The focus is on the scenography, visual elements and dramatic structure of the performance.

Chapter 4: Cultivating a Theoretical Framework focuses on the ideas, practices and theories from within and outside the discipline (of scenography) to define a framework for the artistic approach. These include the works of scenographers Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, František Tröster, Jaroslav Malina and Tadeusz Kantor; the writings of Richard Schechner, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook; architects Juhani Pallasmaa and Jerzy Gurawski; artists and sculptors Jan Švankmajer and František Skála; philosophers Gaston Bachelard, Maurice

Merleau-Ponty; and scholars and theoreticians Arnold Aronson, Patrice Pavis and Pamela Howard.

The research work in this chapter is concerned with 4 components that inspire my scenographic practice on the idea of metaphors: i) phenomenology and its relevance in scenography; ii) attributes of space that affect us and ways perception (of the space) can be altered; iii) working with materials to aid sensation; and iv) physical engagement of the spectator. The chapter concludes with establishing my artistic methodology for the performance.

Chapter 5: Artistic Process and Output provides a detailed description of the 'walking theatre' performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS*. It premiered at Strašnické Divadlo in Prague and was based on four ballads from *Kytice*: *A Bouquet*, *Water Sprite*, *A Daughter's Curse* and *The Treasure*. A short description of the history and style of *Dastangoi*, the storytelling form that is incorporated in the performance, is given here. Conceptual artistic ideas for the future staging of the remaining ballads are explained in the last part of this chapter.

Patrice Pavis argues that a dual approach of methods is needed to grasp the functioning of a performance. a) Semiology, which describes the work's structure and analyses a systemized representation of the mise en scene; and b) Phenomenology, which " actively includes the spectator in its bodily and emotional dimensions"[6]. This allows one to find a balance between production and reception. The descriptions and explanations in *Chapter 5* are written using these methods. However, the borders between these two roles are blurred since it is quite challenging to first 'make' theatre, followed by analysing it as the semiologist and then the phenomenologist. The gaps occurring due to this are compensated by the feedback of the audience; a general description of which is provided in *Chapter 6*.

In *Chapter 7*, the study concludes with the general summations and contributions of the various research undertaken in the previous chapters. Merits and limitations of the artistic process are discussed, using the various concepts and the performance as the basis to balance practice with theory. Based on the audience feedback from *Chapter 6* some ideas of exploring the project in other formats are laid forth.

NOTES:

[1] Pallasmaa, J. (2005). *The Eyes of the Skin.*

[2] Brook, P. (2008). *The Empty Space*, pg 63.

[3] Cricoteka (n.d.). *Tadeusz Kantor. Permanent Exhibition*.

[4] Pallasmaa, J. (2005). *The Eyes of the Skin*, pg 25.

[5] Howard, P. (2002). *What is Scenography?*, pg 117.

[6] Pavis, P. (2013). *Contemporary Mise en Scene- Staging Theatre Today*, pg 61.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1: *KYTICE* AND THE CZECH NATIONAL REVIVAL.

Kytice z pověstí národních (A bouquet of Czech folk legends), by Karel Jaromír Erben is a collection of ballads, inspired by Czech and Slavic folklore. Written during the Czech National Revival of the 19th century, *Kytice*[i] is a literary distillation of the age's national character, customs and values, seen as a collage of symbolic elements ranging from scenic, supernatural and spiritual. Regarded as one of the nationalist masterpieces, the collection links Czech literature to the greater European (and especially German) Romantic movement.

A highly significant attribute of this collection is that Erben 'collected' these legends from the Bohemian countryside, where they existed as oral traditions, mostly as prose[1]. He polished them as ballads for years and the results are "fascinating verses with multi-layered meanings"[2]. Viewed in the present global socio-political climate, in the light of exclusion of racial minorities, refugees and immigrants, the literary products of the National Revival can be interpreted as solid benchmarks of identity building, and *Kytice* is highly noteworthy for bringing the fringe into the realm of mainstream literature.

The understanding of fringe in Bohemia between the early 17th and late 19th century pertains to linguistic and literary marginalization, which, as described below, became the main agendas of the National Awakening. The Bohemian Lands were part of the Holy Roman Empire since the 12th century and had de facto links to the Catholic Church. Conflicts between the Catholic Church and the Bohemian Protestants led to the latter acquiring greater freedom in 1609, during the reign of Rudolph II, and eventually triggering the Thirty Years War in 1618. The defeat of the Protestants at *Bílá Hora*[ii] outside Prague in 1620, began a period of forcible re-Catholicization and gradual Germanization[3]; demise of Bohemian sovereignty and its replacement by Habsburg absolutism[4] led to oppression. German was imposed as the language of education, and with a centralized government in Vienna, it also became the language of bureaucracy throughout the Empire.

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[i] Hereafter, I am referring to the entire collection when I am using the Czech word *Kytice*. The first ballad of the collection (which is also called *Kytice* in the Czech publications) will be referred to as *A Bouquet* to ensure a clear distinction.

[ii] [translation] Battle of the White Mountain

Centuries of Germanization of the upper classes[5] oriented the urban population to Vienna-they adopted the Germanic culture and spoke German. In the towns, organic connection to the Czech past was broken, and Czech speakers were either the lower classes in the cities or in the countryside - fields, stables and kitchens; the language 'marginalized as the rude tongue of the common folk'[6]. Czech ceased to be the language for learning or administration, with the effect that the literary heritage of the past was largely forgotten.

Since a discussion of folklore is inevitably a discussion on favouritism and obliteration of narratives, it is interesting to note the duality of the views that exist regarding this period that followed after *Bílá Hora*. Under the purview of narrative building, it is necessary to emphasize that both are important views of the past; the first stressing on the cultural and the second on the political aspect. According to the first narrative,

> …it was a period of unprecedented cultural and spiritual flowering of the Czech nation during which the cultural development of Bohemia was once more in tune with the cultural developments elsewhere in Europe after the disruption of the Reformation: the country not only accepted cultural influences from elsewhere but creatively transformed them into its own style, known as Czech Baroque.[7]

The Baroque period has contributed most to the contemporary image creation of Bohemia, as the characteristic cultural pins from the 17th and 18th centuries are visual rather than literary. It affected the entire region- towns, villages and countryside alike; its prevalence noted in music, folk costumes and distinctly, in architecture. The image created by the urban architecture is relevant till today because of its sensuality, which was designed to impress and intimidate. "The art of the Baroque is a feast that appeals to the eye, not the intellect"[8]. The second (and widely disseminated) ideology, however, has consistently maintained that the event was the "White Mountain Tragedy" or injustice, because it was followed by 300 years of darkness (Alois Jirásek's novel *Darkness*[iii] explores this narrative) and suffering under foreign domination.

After the reforms of Joseph II in 1781, which aimed at a more secular power of the Catholic Church, Protestantism was 'tolerated' in the kingdom. The reforms aimed towards higher efficiency through standardization, thus German became the sole official language and Prague University officially switched from Latin to German. These became the larger factors at play that led to the movement known as the Czech *Národní obrození*[iv] – the National

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[iii] *Darkness* [translated], original title Temno
[iv] *obrození* [translation] Renaissance or *obrodit* 'to be awakened'

Awakening, Renewal, Revival or Rebirth[9]. It necessitated the construction of an ethnic identity in conscious opposition to the Germans with whom they shared geographical, political and economic space[10] within the Habsburg, and later the Austrian Empire.

The primary aim of the Revival became the restoration of the Czech language to Bohemia and Moravia after two centuries of Germanization. The Awakeners' sought to promote Czech as an equal language to German, leading scholars to investigate the country's lost literature and history. The early years of the Revival (end of 18th and beginning of 19th century) were led by linguists and historians, such as Dobrovský, who wrote *Grammar of the Czech Language* (1809), Jungmann who wrote the five volumes of German- Czech dictionary (1835-1839), and later Palacký who wrote the *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia* (1848-1867). They focused on developing the language and culture. Literary Czech was gradually formalized and stabilized through dictionaries, grammars, translations and popularized by use in "newspapers, calendars, songbooks, theatre" [11] such as the dramatist Josef Kajetán Tyl and his Czech-language magazine *Kvety[v]*.

The 'rude' tongue of the Czech peasants symbolized the Nation. It was their sheer volume that propelled the movement, even though they were not remotely driven by problems of national identity. They spoke Czech and their migration (due to industrialization) to the German speaking cities of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia[12] formed an emerging middle class community- a growing audience for Czech literature[13]. With them came the folk customs, songs and music that were still part of their centuries' old traditional life- soon picked up by the literati. Combined with the undercurrents of Romanticism that were prevalent in Germany and France at the same time, many literary artistic contributions were made in Bohemia which began to celebrate the cultural richness of the nation.

2.2: IDEOLOGICAL CORNERSTONES OF THE REVIVAL

In the consciously evolving literature and theatre, themes from local folklore and popular mythology were promoted along with historic and rural characters to show the audience a national protagonist who would help define the character of the 'awakened' nation[14]. It is probable that these ideas could be easily disseminated in the mass consciousness, not only because they were simple, but also because the receivers were known to be sensitized to such

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[v] *Kvety* [translation] Flowers.

storytelling. Aesop's Fables and many folktales had been a popular light reading[15] since the end of the 15th century onwards.

The growth of folklore studies was defined by societal, cultural and political agendas. Folk songs, tales and legends reflected popular resistance to the tyrannical and foreign government. Peasant figures were hailed as the champions of the culture, and subjects with folkloric heroes helped authenticate and validate these beliefs. The characters and heroes were relatable, and inspired the leaders of the National Revival to revive the life and culture of their nation. Opening a major inspirational avenue was the 'discovery' of two medieval (9th and 13th century) *Manuscripts[vi]* in Bohemia (which were later proven to have been forged) containing poetic texts and epic poems that relate to historic battles and folklore, essentially stating that Bohemians had a strong and ancient literary tradition which had been subverted. These manuscripts helped the movement gain momentum and became the foundation of newer literature in the following decades. For the folklorists, they became a clear inspiration and urged them to take new pride in their traditions.[16] Poets and scholars, took on the task of bringing Czech culture at par with that of other countries, 'where the flow of civilization had not been dammed'[17].

Creating their significant works through a methodological collection of folk songs, the poetic contributions of J. Kollár and F.L. Čelakovský are noteworthy in conceptualizing the ideology of *Pan-Slavism* and drawing from the larger folkloric pool. Kollár wrote the lyrical epic *The Daughter of Slava* (1824) – inspired by Byronic pilgrimages in the footsteps of the long lost Slavs of the Elbe[18]. After the *Manuscripts*, this poem served as a model for other Slav poets and became a major influence on Czech poetry. Čelakovský focused on the folklore of the other Slav people, and published a collection of 15000 Slav proverbs. Inspired by Russian poetry he wrote *Echoes of Russian Songs* (1829), which further inspired him to write *Echoes of Czech Songs* (1839). True in spirit, form and to the subject matter of the region, these two volumes were influential in detaching Czech poetry from German influences and scout for native sources of inspiration[19]. The German concept of *'heimat'*, gave way to what is known in Czech as *'vlast'* - defined as 'the idea of the homeland', through which the state began to be collated with the nation's language and culture.

Nationalism, important in its own capacity, did not overshadow religion which still played a generally important role. From 1620 to the late 18th century, although significant literature

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[vi] The forged manuscripts of *Dvůr Králové* [translation] Queen's Court ('discovered' in 1817) and *Zelená Hora* [translation] Green Mountain ('discovered' in 1819).

was absent in the *'native'*[20] language, writing in Bohemia from this time has a distinctly Christian and religious character[21]. Catholicism and Protestantism co-existed, but the Catholic Church was much stronger. By the late 18th century majority of Bohemians, from nobility to peasants were devout Catholics[22], and its prevalence continued during the revival. The faith was passed down through generations without question, leaving indelible etchings on their folklore.

These examples of ideas that were being propagated in the national consciousness on:

a. Building of narratives to present 'simple' citizens as the guarantors of culture.

b. settings and scenes from the countryside, and literal exemplification of the homeland, and

c. the envelope of Catholicism

helps to contextualize the work of Karel Jaromír Erben, and his approach to *Kytice*.

2.3: *KYTICE* IN LIGHT OF *MÁJ* AND *BABIČKA*.

Erben, a protégé of František Palacký[vii], mapped the literary landscape through his positions as Secretary of National Museum from 1846 and Prague's first official city archivist from 1851. He wrote historical works, collected and published folk songs and fairy tales, and *Kytice* is his solitary book of verses. He republished several chronicles and historic texts, among them Štítný's *Six Little Books on General Christian Matters* and *Selected Czech Writings of Master Jan Hus*, their polarity suggesting his secular attitude to religious discourses. Influences of Pan-Slavism and his affection for the literary wealth of the countryside is seen through his collection of *National Songs in Bohemia* (1840), *Slav Reader* (1861) containing one hundred folk tales and legends narrated in their original dialects. His folk songs and nursery rhymes are a window 'into the lives of Czech country people from cradle to grave, and a masterpiece of 19th century ethnographic scholarship' [23].

Erben's *Kytice* along with Mácha's *May*[viii] (1836) and Němcová's *Grandmother*[ix] (1855) form the popular classics of the first half of the 19th century Revival. In particular, the works of Mácha are considered to have transformed the "roughness of spoken Czech into verse, giving it real poetic melody"[24]. The Czech literary convention born out of his ideology gave precedence to original and melodious poetic expression over plot. Mácha was influenced by the new Romanticism, and the poem *May* is one of the most prominent works of Czech literature. The genre of macabre, introduced by Edgar Allan Poe, became a significant influence on his works which reflect the strong Bohemian and gothic tradition of baroque morbidity[25].

Mácha inspired Erben in multiple ways: in *Kytice*, Erben focussed on the music first and the words later; "he noted down the tunes as sedulously as he did the texts sung to them"[26]. Mácha's romanticism became Erben's starting point, and indeed, common motifs are present in both their works. Exploring morbidity, Mácha is known to create tense atmospheres, which is reflected in *Kytice*. Themes in Mácha's works, such as the border between life and death, man and nature, existential dissatisfaction and angst are reflected in multiple ballads from *Kytice*. Both *May* and *Kytice* are filled with feelings of anxiety, the mystery of death and the painful conflict between dream and reality. But unlike *May* which has specifically

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[vii] the most prominent entity of the Czech National Revival, hailed as the "Father of the Nation".

[viii] May [translated], original title *Máj,* referring to the 1st of May.

[ix] Grandmother [translated], original title *Babička.*

drafted individuals, the poems in *Kytice* embrace the spirit of folk narratives by maintaining a stream of anonymous characters described solely by their relationship to other characters such as orphans, mother and child, fiancé, wife etc.

Kytice and *Grandmother* published quite close to one another draw equally from folkloric tradition; and along with *May* have successfully passed to subsequent generations the accumulated oral and verbal practices of the previous centuries.

Grandmother is the story of life and the passing of a year in the bohemian countryside. Němcová pays great attention to the details of daily life. Themes such as the importance of religion for a pious woman, traditional holidays like Good Friday, Advent, Saint Nicholas, Christmas Eve and social rites of passage such as weddings and funerals are vividly described. Similar to *Kytice*, a woman who spins diligently is considered virtuous and hard-working in *Grandmother*. Social gatherings of women sitting together and spinning during winter and advent is described in both, and these gatherings would lead to the retelling of local legends, superstitions and taboos.

Both *Kytice* and *Grandmother* display a fond reverence for the surrounding nature. Motifs of bohemian landscape such as forests, churches, hills and mills etc., form the setting for various plot lines. Casual mention of the Water Sprite creature, children picking wild flowers and making bouquets is seen in *Grandmother*, while these ideas become elaborate plots in *Kytice*. Němcová and Erben were friends[27], and the ballad of *Wedding Shirts* in *Kytice* is based on a story she had written. Erben took the prose form and turned it into poetry.

The fiction of Němcová and Erben represents and idealizes, for Bohemians, the reality they perceived themselves in danger of losing. However, both of them write with different attitudes. For Němcová these values represent a lifeline and continuity and she attempts to convey security and stability. Her text is devoid of the morbidity that defines Erben's work. He on the other hand takes risks and highlights the precarious nature of life through imminent danger.

2.4- UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE AND PARTS OF *KYTICE*

Kytice was first published in 1853 with 12 poems or ballads; the second edition was published in 1861 with the 13 poems as are known today. Titled as *A Bouquet of Czech Folk Legends*, the collection is a mix of legends, myths and folktales. Folklorists categorize legends as both sacred and secular, folktales are always secular whereas myths are always sacred. In *Kytice*, the secular legends i.e., *A Bouquet, Noon Witch, Water Sprite, Willow* and *A Daughter's Curse*; and the sacred legends i.e., *The Treasure, Wedding Shirts, Christmas Eve, The Dove* and *Zahor's Bed* are narrated as factual account of some real event that has affected its human protagonists, in a certain place and time. Folktales on the other hand, are narratives that both the author and the reader identify as fictional, imbibed with a certain degree of magic and hence, unreality which is the case with *The Golden Spinning Wheel* and *Lily* in *Kytice*. The last poem of the collection, *The Prophetess* is a myth, as it is a pre-creation story, occurring at a time and place before we know it, and sacred because it defines the culture and its foundation.

a) THE BOUQUET ITSELF

The strongest and foremost metaphor that *Kytice* and Erben present is that the collection is a bouquet of folktales plucked "from our dear own land"[28] that he has decorated with verses and will carry to sons and daughters across the country. The metaphor is extended and reflected in the way each ballad finds a particular place in the collection; most of them are paired such that their central themes mirror each other.

A Bouquet and *The Prophetess* (items 1 and 13) bind the entire work. Both of them pay homage to the mother nation. *The Treasure* and *A Daughter's Curse* (items 2 and 12), describe ethical and moral failures in mother-child relationships. *Wedding Shirts*, *Willow* and *Lily* (items 3, 10 and 11) explore themes of life beyond death, life detached from the human body and apparent humans who turn out to be supernatural. *Noon Witch* and *Water Sprite* (items 4 and 9) describe formidable yet small, part human creatures and their conflict with humankind. *The Golden Spinning Wheel* and *Zahor's Bed* (items 5 and 8) showcase the triumph of good over evil and are the only two poems that end on an optimistic note. *Christmas Eve* and *The Dove* (items 6 and 7) explore the cyclic laws of nature, life and death, happiness and sadness, and love and loss.

b) THEMES OF OPPRESSION AND REVIVAL

Tapping on the overwhelmingly emotional potential of poetry, Erben opens his collection with the following powerful verse,

"Mother died and was laid in her grave, leaving orphans without her…".

The Mother's grave is a metaphor for the defeated Nation under the Austrian empire, and the orphans being the Czech citizens. Later, the flowers that he finds growing on the grave symbolize the humble bouquet of ballads (born from the mother) that the poet is offering to the nation after the defeat of 1848. He ends the poem with verses about his hopes that this poetry will touch the heart and soul of the citizens and that their love for the nation will be rekindled. Like the anonymous (and hence universal) mother, most of the characters mentioned in the collection are unnamed and named characters are rare. They are usually described by their role, eg: a mother, a father, a servant or their gender. Thus, Erben asks his readers to see that the characters represent the nation and not any individual. In this spectrum, it is interesting to note that infants and children appearing in *The Treasure*, *Noon Witch*, *Water Sprite*, Willow, *Lily* and *A Daughter's Curse* are written as gender neutral, highlighting a sensitive authorship and certain sense of equality that is not common to Erben's time.

Sentiments of discord with the Hapsburg monarchy are reflected through the metaphors in *The Golden Spinning Wheel*. For many scholars, Dora unarguably symbolizes the Czech nation. The marriage in the narrative refers to a proposed marriage that would have steered towards a sovereignty of the Czech nation. Dora's stepmother and stepsister represent the Hapsburg monarchy, who do not love their stepchildren and attempt to steal her (the Nation's) destiny. This can be attributed to some accounts mentioning an alliance between the Hapsburgs and an Albanian king for the Bohemian crown. The wise magician and his servant represent the Czech nationalists who will take revenge and restore the rightful ruler to her destiny.

It is believed that the discovery of the forged *Manuscripts* can be considered as the beginning point of the 'artistic' aspect of the Revival and became a source of inspiration for succeeding decades. The controversy of their legitimacy ran during Erben's lifetime, yet it can be seen to have inspired *Kytice*. Reiterating religious and countryside values, there are similarities

between the poem titled *The Forsaken*[x] from the Manuscript of *Dvůr Králové* [29] and *Wedding Shirts* in *Kytice*. The former features a 'forsaken' girl who is lamenting the death of her father, mother, brother and sister; this becomes the introduction of the protagonist in *Wedding Shirts*. *The Forsaken* is described in the woods of Miletin, which is Erben's birthplace and home to a similar legend from North Bohemia.

The Austrian censors created a feeling of alienation amongst the Czech Nationalist writers, which is reflected in many of their works and letters[30]. It is perhaps for this reason that an allegorical poem like *A Bouquet* opens the collection, while the most patriotic and subversive poem, *The Prophetess* is placed at the end to draw as little attention as possible. *The Prophetess* is an embodiment of collective memory and optimism for a greater future. It is a representative of the defeated nation and builds up for a hope to triumph the oppression. This poem brings in its loop the most significant foundational myth of the nation- that of Libuše and Přemysl, legendary mother and father of the Czech nation. This legend began to embody the spirit of nationalism during the National Revival, and the narrative of this poem is "consistent with the retrospective and nostalgic tenor"[31] of the movement. Interestingly, the anonymous female narrator is also considered to be "the maternal ghost of the dead nation whose grave provides the opening scene of the collection and she looks backward and forward in time from the privileged perspective of eternity"[32].

The National Revival had a clear didactic function. Due to this, one feature of the literature produced during this time is that the Awakeners were stimulating people's imagination in an active way, as though they were in theatre. *Kytice* is a testimony to this, since Erben's has written these ballads as short dramas. It is because of this that they have been successfully adapted to music and other visual narratives[xi].

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[x] The Forsaken[translated]. Original title *Opustena*

[xi] Further discussed on Page 34

c) <u>MOTIFS OF NATURE</u>

Affection for the homeland also translates to a deep reverence for nature in *Kytice*. Not only are most of the ballads based in countryside landscapes, but they also employ nature as an active participant in the development of the plot and for its conflict with the characters. The title figure of *The Dove* narrates the murder of the husband and the ensuing guilt of the murderer. The cycle of seasons defines the trajectory of characters and plot in *Christmas Eve*, *The Treasure* and *Zahor's Bed*; in the latter two, seasons also establish the path and time towards redemption of the protagonists. *The Prophetess* pays homage and shows a great affection to the landscape of the country, ranging from fields, forests, rivers, hills etc. Encounters of the fateful night and the young girl's journey in *Wedding Shirts* are described by the turbulent landscape she flies over, ranging from highlands to lowlands, forests and meadows, sands and swamps, gorges and cliffs. Nature is also aggressive and mutilates her feet with hawthorns, razor-sharp grass blades, more as a test of character and strength while the woman in *The Dove* suffers nature's aggression as punishment. The relationship of nature with legends, dreams and human fantasy also served as an inspiration for music of Romanticism.

In the cultural knowledge of European society woods and forests have played as important role as it has occupied a large part of the landscape, providing people with food and wood. It portrays a gentle face during the day and a mysterious one at night- arousing fantasy. In stories such as *Snow White* the forest becomes a hideaway, in the case of *Red Riding Hood* and *Hansel and Gretel*, it is associated with getting lost, thrill, threat, pursuit and navigating one's own way leading to self-discovery. Witches and wizards use deep forests and deserted mills for black magic and raising their assistants, as is the case with *The Golden Spinning Wheel*. *Zahor's Bed* is a narrative of an exiled man's life and encounters in the forest. The title figure of *Lily* asks to be buried in the nature and not a graveyard, from which she emerges back to life as a precious flower. The magical cave in *The Treasure* is in sharp contrast with the setting of the outside 'real' world with beech trees, hills and creeks. The contrast of caves and forests is also seen in *The Golden Spinning Wheel* as Dora is killed in the forest but is brought back to life in a cave, similar to the mother in *The Treasure* who loses and is reunited with her child in the cave- a life reaffirming motif symbolic to the womb.

Water is considered a mysterious and dangerous element in the fantasy worlds. Various myths refer to magical creatures having the ability to command the destructive power of water, of evil monsters breaking ice in the spring and tearing dams that cause flooding. The devil in Slavic mythology is an "evil natural demon"[33] lurking in mills, abysses, rocks and lakes- many of which have devilish names such as *Čertovka*, the water channel in Prague named after the Devil. The depth of Czech rivers, creeks and lakes have been populated by water goblins or sprites, and Water Sprite describes extensively the dark kingdom of these creatures. Water banks in European folklore present nice surprises such as the golden fish that grants three wishes or swans and frogs bewitched as princesses and princes. In *Christmas Eve*, an old superstition is described where girls go down to frozen river banks on this day to predict the future. The crone in *Willow* also works with the superstitions of water for divination. But at last, water is not only destructive but has life giving power and revives the dead Dora in *The Golden Spinning Wheel*.

In *Kytice*, women are seen to fuse with nature. The opening ballad highlights that Mother is embodied in the flower *mateřídouška,* i.e., thyme. The protagonist of *Lily* and *Willow* are part humans and part nature, based on legends that humans can have a double life common with a tree. While in other cultures where human metamorphosis happens with animals such as rats and snakes – life in the human form is not threatened by the death of the host animal, the legend of the willow is unique because in this case, one cannot exist without the other and chopping the tree kills the woman.

d) <u>THE STRONGHOLD OF CHRISTIANITY</u>

Kytice is abound with motifs that combine pagan and Christian imagination about life, reflecting the eternal desire to understand the world surrounding us. The stories reflected people's fear of the unknown and the ethics of leading a devout life. The core values of religion are held in the middle poems, such as *Christmas Eve* for the role of Advent, The Dove symbolizing the purity of Christianity and *Zahor's Bed* with clear ideas of what Hell has in store for an immoral Christian and how saintly virtues are rewarded in Paradise. Ballads like Noon Witch, *Christmas Eve*, *Willow*, *Lily* and *Daughters Curse* exemplify Christian ideas of suffering while the case of suffering and learning by example is made in *The Treasure*, *Wedding Shirts*, *The Dove*, *The Prophetess* and *Zahor's Bed*.

The Treasure starts and finishes on two Good Fridays (one year apart) based on an old legend about a cave in Vyšehrad in Prague; some sources claim that the legend of *Wedding Shirts* comes from the church and graveyard of Velhartice in western Bohemia. This ballad also shows a mixing of Christian and pagan motifs that were passed down in oral cultures since the arrival of Christianity in central Europe in medieval times. Christianity does not have ghosts and zombies, and this evil power indicates pagan mythology which would harm one if they were not willing to follow the right path. As such, the good powers are in the Christian motifs – such as praying to the Holy Mother and Child, always carrying the Bible, crucifix and rosary beads, seeking forgiveness and never losing faith that end of saving the pious girl from the evil.   Thus, irrespective of where each poem is located in Bohemia, church bells and bell towers are almost always in the description. This is seen in *The Treasure*, *Wedding Shirts*, *Noon Witch* and The Prophetess. Christian motifs of death, such as graveyards and black crucifix form the landscape in *A Bouquet*, *Wedding Shirts*, *Christmas Eve* and *The Dove*.

Since the Middle Age, folk stories have reflected the Christian imaginations of a demon which comes to the earth as an envoy of evil, an opponent of heavenly powers, an insinuator and tempter. In many stories, a man sells his soul to the devil, usually to gain power, knowledge or fortune such as the legendary Faust story, and in *Kytice*, the deal made with the devil in *Zahor's Bed*. A pure soul ascends to heaven, and as a living human being one should learn to let loved ones go. However, if one doesn't want to live without their deceased beloved, they should be punished – as happens with the girl in *Wedding Shirts*. The latter was a favourite motif of authors in 19th century and Edgar Allen Poe uses this motif in *The Raven*.

Catholic views generally held women as more susceptible to sin than men and since the hunting and burning of witches in the middle ages, the Catholic views of European society maintained that evil is embodied in the woman. All Romantic literature that is based on legends and folktales adheres to that, such as the Grimm Brothers stories. In *Kytice*, all women are either victimized or embodiment of evil. Young women are punished because they are disobedient either to their mothers such as in *A Daughter's Curse* and *Water Sprite* or to the laws of God such as in *Wedding Shirts* and *The Treasure*. The girl in *Water Sprite* ends up being punished twice, first because she didn't obey her mother and later as she loses her child. The daughter is punished twice, because in the beginning she didn't listen to her mother and in the end she loses her child. The woman in *The Dove* and the stepsister in *The*

Golden Spinning Wheel are seen as vixen, while many mothers hurt their own children such as those in *Noon Witch* and *A Daughter's Curse*. Folklorists categorize these as 'warning legends', since children dying was supposed to have pedagogical value for mothers. In *Noon Witch*, the mother is punished because she does not follow the instincts of maternal love, and the witch's presence alone punishes both the child and the mother. While in older accounts of the legend, the witch is the one that snatches the child (and perhaps kills it), Erben mixes a modern point of view by allowing the reader to question whether the witch was actually there or was the mother delusional.

e) THE IDEAL OF PAN-SLAVISM

Ladislav Holy argues that much of Czech identity is built on the idea of a metaphor, that positions it as a mediator between the distinctive Eastern and Western European cultures, merging the "value systems, and creator of their eventual synthesis"[34]. As such, the legends in *Kytice* have roots in both Germanic and Slavic cultures of Europe.

The story of *The Treasure* and a cave full of treasures opening up once a year is prevalent all across Europe. Wedding Shirts exists in almost all Slavic cultures as the tale of a dead husband coming to claim his future wife. Distinctly similar legends are found in Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania and in another form in old German legends and a Scottish folk song. Similar versions of folktales on the lines of *The Golden Spinning Wheel* exist in Southern Russia, Poland and Ukraine. *Zahor's Bed* being strongly Christian and anti-Pagan has origins in early Christianity that spread to the strongly Catholic regions of Bohemia, Poland and Lusatia. It is based on a sacred legend, and rather than an oral account, it circulates from the intellectual circles of church clerics and monks. While the narrative in *Kytice* is Catholic, it has many parallels in Russian folklore since the stories also have a basis in the eastern orthodox church. It is also found in Celtic cultures and the Balkans in south east Europe. In its international dissemination, the character is known as Madej; the name Záhoř comes from Western Bohemia.

 The water sprite is a thoroughly Slavonic creature, and a parallel legend is found in a Sorbian folk song. *Noon Witch* comes from Slavic- pagan legends; however certain sources claim that Erben's interpretation is based on an actual incident: a newspaper article from 1833 about a woman named Polednová affiliated with the Norwegian child protecting organization called *Barnevernet.* The woman was characterized as strict, fighting for

children's rights but referred to as ugly, strange voiced and disabled due to a childhood illness. This incident came in the news because it ended badly. She received a letter informing her about a mother in a village who was not nice to her child. She called her child a gypsy, saying that he did not let her do the household work and if he would not be nice, she would call Mrs. Polednová. The latter acted on the tip and came with all the legal documents, but the mother did not let go off the child and suffocated him in the process.

Rituals described in *Willow* of divination from water, and divination on *Christmas Eve* respectively are practices common to all Slav people. In the course of Czech historical and literary writings, the tale of Libuše and Přemysl are ancient and have been repeatedly told, first appearing in the works of Cosmas (12th Century) and then again in *Dalimil's Chronicle* (14th Century) and later in Hajek's work (16th Century). Přemysl is an embodiment of the ploughman-prince, a recurring legendary character in most Slavic countries.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

While an extensive study of motifs in *Kytice* will reveal many more fascinating literary details, the five subheads discussed above are to familiarize the reader with the socio-cultural context of the text.

In his introduction of *History of the Czech Nation*, Palacký has used the metaphor of a bridge to identify the historic links between the Czech nation and its neighbours- the German and Slav, the European East and West. In the socio-political context, Czechs see themselves as belonging to neither east nor west, rather as a bridge in between. From my Indian perspective, this is the image with which I associates Czech Republic, and the language. Since this study focuses on metaphors, it is worth highlighting that the metaphor of a bridge expresses positive value and a central positionality- it is a structure that links two sides. This is evident in the development of languages from Sanskrit in the Indian sub-continent giving rise to the Latin and Slavic branches of the Indo-European pool of languages. I am personally intrigued by the sound of Sanskrit word *dwar*, which in Czech becomes *dveře* and in English becomes *door*.

On that note, the next section explores the migration of folklore. I am delving into some instances of universality of themes – the similarities and nuanced difference in the rendition of folklore beyond the Slavic pool.

2.5- COMPARING *KYTICE*- FOLKLORE ACROSS CULTURES.

It is commonly known and widely accepted that origins of European fairy tales can be traced back to the ancient cultures of Egypt, Greece and India. In the 18th century, William Jones, a linguist, travelled to India and investigated similarities between Sanskrit and European languages. This phenomenon known as the Oriental Renaissance further substantiated that all European mythology (including old Czech and pagan ones) were variants of stories in Sanskrit and the folktales of European cultures were derived from the fables of *Panchatantra.* Erben himself believed that old Czech mythology has its roots in Indian ones, a theory which was elaborated upon by Max Muller, a German scholar at Oxford University.

Vladimir Propp argues that the morphology of Indo-European folktales is based on principles of recombination of already known ideas and plots in collective consciousness. He deconstructs folktales on the basis of 'functions', of which he says there are only 31, and only 7 principal characters in the realm of folktales, and all folk structures use a combination of these functions and characters. According to Freud and Jung, the repetition of motifs and typical characters in fairy tales across nations can be traced to the formation of basic patterns of human activity.

I have tried to reflect on this cross over and evolution, drawing parallels, comparing similarities and differences between the legends of *Kytice* and some stories that I have encountered from India (mostly), Iceland, Greece and Japan.

The place that thyme as a herb holds in the Czech cultural milieu is comparable to *Tulsi* or Holy Basil, which is deeply revered in Hindu cultures as Mother, often being the centre of each house's courtyard and worshiped every morning. Greed is the central theme of *The Treasure*, and caves full of gold appear in stories across all cultures. Old Buddhist tales from *Panchatantra* often have merchants becoming greedy for materialistic treasures which leads to the loss of the paramount invaluable: family. The story of *King Midas* from Greek tales also explores the same theme. A folktale from Kashmir region in northern-most India remarks on a golden tree that makes four greedy companions kill each other.

Similar to the supernatural beings in *Wedding Shirts*, *Baital Pachisi* is a collection of 25 Sanskrit stories from the 11th century that mention creatures called *Baital*- ghost like creatures from Hindu mythology that inhabit dead bodies and can bring them to life on command, and *Pishacha* that are flesh eating demons. The collection highlights the juggle of power between the human *Vikram* and the non-human *Baital.* In southern India, *Yakshis*

in Malayalam folklore are beautiful women (similar to sirens) who lure male travellers and then drink their blood. They are found on tall palm trees and when they walk their feet apparently do not touch the ground. Legend has it that the body of the *Yakshi* carries a distinctive fragrance of a particular flower similar to Plumeria.

Grýla, a Christmas witch from Icelandic folklore is an ogress who lives in mountain caves and is the matriarch of a family of strange creatures. She snatches up misbehaving children and turns them into delicious stew. Tales of this giantess began as oral accounts in the historic sagas, and earliest written references are found in 13th century texts. Folklorists say that she serves as a warning legend especially for children who cry for meat during Lent- she carves out the stomachs of such children. The *Namahage* in Japanese folklore are demon-like beings that go door to door, admonishing children and teaching them lessons. Such warning legends are common in India too, however, the character used to scare children is a 'wild man' and not a woman. The physicality of *Grýla* is sharply contrasting to the *Noon Witch* who is quite frail and small. Another variant in the physicality of witches comes from India, where it is largely believed that a woman can be identified as a witch by checking her feet, as a witch's feet are rotated backwards.

A water ghost usually takes the form of a woman: ancient *Sirens* or *Lorelei* of the Rhine tempted sailors to ruin them using a beautiful singing and Slavic water nymphs are similar. Mermaids have their male counterparts such as a water horse, dog or lizard in the Anglo-American world, a water dragon in china, and a rhinoceros in Africa. Abduction to a world underwater becomes the case with *Water Sprite*; and in Hindu mythology, the demon *Hiranyaksha* kidnaps the earth (personified as a goddess) and hides her in the prehistoric ocean. In this story however, *Lord Vishnu* takes the form a mighty boar and descends into the depth of the ocean, slaying the demon and rescuing the goddess.

In the retelling of Czech fairy tales, the water goblin evolves from a demon into a little green haired man, dressed in a penguin suit, who smoked his pipe and used his colour ribbons and mirrors to tempt girls and pull them down into his water land and marry them. *Lord Krishna* from Hindu mythology is depicted as a blue skinned (a substitute colour for dark skin complexion) boy. One of the anecdotes describe him stealing the colourful garments of young maids while they are bathing in the river, hiding them upon a tree at the river bank where he sits and watches them and attracts their attention by playing the flute. Given the core patriarchal values of Hinduism, his actions are considered playful and not sinister.

Due to its fairy-tale motifs, *The Golden Spinning Wheel* is perhaps the easiest to trace as it surfaces across cultures. The tale of *Ochikubo* from Japanese folklore is similar to the story of Cinderella, where a girl suffers humiliation at the hands of her stepmother; and the stepmother is later punished when the girl comes to a position of power. Similarly, in Hindu mythology *Shukracharya* is the teacher to the *Asuras* (a kind of demigods) and is known to possess the secret of *Mritasanjivani* – restoring the wounded dead to life. In the story, the *Asuras* repeatedly attempt to ambush and kill a student of *Shukracharya* and devise various ways to mutilate his body so that he cannot be found; but the teacher, due to his powerful knowledge, is able to revive the young man each time this happens.

The story of *Willow* explores the dual life of the wife inside a willow tree. Whereas in Hinduism astrological compatibility is believed to be very important, and if a girl is born *Maanglik* (Mars-bearing) she is considered to be cursed and can cause an early death to her husband. According to an old Hindu custom, the only way to break the curse for such girls is to marry them to a *Peepal* or banana tree first. The tree is then destroyed, and the curse is broken. While in the story *Lily* by Erben, a young girl who dies blossoms to life as a lily flower, and becomes human when she is cared for, the story of *Ahalya* from Hindu mythology is based on a curse turning a woman to stone for having cheated on her husband and coming back to life after her deliverance by the deity *Rama*.

Stories in Hindu and Buddhist mythology are filled with moralistic stories describing the futility of predicting the future since it cannot be altered. *Macbeth* and *Banquo's* encounter with the witches in Shakespeare's play explores the paranoia that results from negative predictions.

The Hindu religion does not regard purgatory in heaven and hell as permanent, rather the soul can return to the present world (reborn as a higher or lower being respectively) after virtues or crimes of the previous life have been accounted for in either domain. While *Zahor's Bed* describes the agonies of hell, I find it interesting to compare these with the idea and descriptions of *Naraka* (the Sanskrit word for Hell). Early texts like *Rigveda* do not provide details and call it a dark bottomless pit. Later texts like *Bhagwat Purnana* describe 28 stages in hell, classifying the severity of the sin with the corresponding hell. This idea is quite different from Erben's story, since it appears that Zahor (and by extension, Christian people) are not aware of what waits in Hell. Looking at them in terms of their spatiality, some of the most vividly imagined stages of *Naraka* are: darkness, blind darkness (loss of

consciousness and sight), cooked in a pot, forest of sword leaves, a hog's mouth, a well with its mouth hidden, becoming worm food, torment with pincers, confined in a hole, living in an ocean of pus, being forced to drink a river of saliva or semen and many others. Stories of repentance for sins are common; gods and saints can wield power through curses. Once uttered, the curse itself cannot be revoked, however its intensity can be nullified.

The orchard with the tree bearing golden fruit narrated in *Zahor's Bed* could be a reference to the *Garden of Hesperides* from Greek mythology. This is supposed to be Hera's orchard in the west where grows a single apple tree producing golden apples that grant immortality when eaten. Interestingly, the golden apples mentioned in most of these European texts could have been a reference to oranges, a fruit unknown to the Mediterranean and Europe before the middle ages.

Oxen and cattle are a revered figure in the mythological story of Přemysl the ploughman, and they serve similar functions in Hindu mythology. Jainism (a religion in northern India) values ploughmen since a legend states that the simple man followed his cow to a mound where she would drop all her milk, and dug the place to find an ancient idol of the *Lord Mahavir*. Like the magical cattle in *The Prophetess*, *Kamdhenu* in Hinduism is the "cow of the plenty" giving the master whatever he desires and considered to be the mother of all cows. *Nandi* is a bull-deity and guards the entrance to Lord Shiva's abode on the mountains. *The Prophetess* narrates various mythical elements of destiny that sank underwater, such as the golden cradle and the bell, and will only resurface when the timing is right to fulfil their destiny. Such motifs of 'destined beings' rather than objects are prevalent in Hindu and Greek mythology: In Hinduism, *Kalki* is supposed to be last incarnation of *Lord Vishnu* and will manifest when the time or *yuga* is appropriate. In Greek folklore, Constantine XI Palaiologos, the last reigning Byzantine emperor of his dynasty, became a legendary figure. He is known as the "marble emperor" (rescued by an angel and turned into marble) who will rise and recover the Empire and Constantinople from the Ottomans.

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As will be made evident in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, this categorization and cross- referencing of ideas and motifs is necessary in order to see details beyond the seemingly obvious. Obvious associations, in my opinion, are relevant only if the scenographer's occupation is considered illustrative. In that (often observed) capacity, the

evident motifs are used to visually "latch-on" in order to solely position the performance in space and time.

In this case, the objective of the scenographer is to enrich the visual, in order to substantiate the narration[xii], with abstract metaphors. One needs to acknowledge the literary metaphors that the poet implements in order to acutely grasp the text. For instance, a just adaptation of *Kytice* has to disassociate with the joyous, meditative and spiritual connotations of water, but understand the element as dark and foreboding.

Moreover, understanding details beyond the seemingly obvious is also necessary in this case. I do not inherit any collective emotional (and national) pride in Erben's work; I respond to the universality of their themes. I intend on using this historic, cultural and cross analysis to fuel the imagination and discover how metaphors can be manifested.

[xii] Referring to the format as a storytelling performance. Detailed explanation on Page 64.

2.6- RELEVANCE OF FOLKTALES TODAY

Old legends like those in *Kytice* are relevant even today because they appeal to human nature at two levels. The first is to make sense of existence in this life, to provide motivation and as such, they pose the basic and universal questions of life addressing the core values and morals on which human society is based, such as the love and bond between a mother and child, the meaning of family. At the second level, they quench the eternal curiosity about existence beyond this life- an alternate, an escape and imagination of the border between real life and fantasies. Švankmajer notes that "poetry comes into being as a defence mechanism against reality: it has common roots with the magic where the defence mechanism has been transformed into the will to control it"[35].

Storytelling is a simulation of reality, and legends are simulation devices for reality, comparable to the role played by virtual reality and augmented reality in the present age. People might be religious, antagonistic or atheists but old legends affect us in a very emotional and powerful way. As much as the stories, the 'storytelling' of these legends is also important, since the narrator affects the audience by the manner in which the story is told, through his emotions and seducing the audience by his movements.

Fundamentally, legends are seen as political acts that are pessimistic and negative in their world view. They are violent because they are a projection and an extension to man's inherent need to conquer. The structure of *Kytice* is similar, where the legends are trying to dissuade people from certain actions for fear of tragic consequences or death such as *Noon Witch* and *Water Sprite*. It reflects the dangerous nature of the world which is perhaps ingrained in some kind of a social dynamism, a social warning mechanism. We are intrinsically tuned to receive more warnings than be optimistic about good news.

As we live in an age of information chaos, some scholars say that we have more legends now than in the middle ages. Internet contributes massively to this effect as it has become very hard to distinguish between facts and fake news. In this post-factual period fake news, hoaxes and alternative truths are common. Social media makes it easy for legends to enter public discourse and influence public opinion. This democratic press has resulted in the collapse of a stable 'overview' system which allows competing narratives to thrive. Until 150 years ago, majority of the society was religious, and the word of religion was set in stone which obliterated competing narratives.

On the other hand, competing narratives allow us to be critical as a society. Access to information also allows to broaden horizons. The Christian themes in *Kytice* repeatedly show women in a negative light but as a reader in this century, it allows us to question this and shift the discourse, further substantiating the need to make 19th century legends relevant today. Modern science gives answers and possible interpretations, for instance in *Willow*. The sleeping lady could be a victim of lucid dreaming, a phenomenon where the person feels that they are awake but the body does not respond to the signals sent by the brain. It seems that some external power ties the body down, and no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to get up or shout for help. Being critical allows us to see beyond the obvious, for instance in *The Dove* where we do not know how the first husband treated his wife ad what cause did she have to poison him. More than obedience and sin, the case of *A Daughter's Curse* is a commentary on individual responsibilities.

Modern contemporary study of legends and rumours, exploiting their sociological and psychological nature started during the 2nd world war to counter the Nazi and Japanese propaganda. In 1941, the United Kingdom created the Ministry of Information (which was later disbanded) to propagate legends that helped with the British War Effort[xiii].For instance, the most well-known is the legend about a secret weapon allegedly held by the British Army that could set the sea on fire. It could thus stop any possible invasion of the British Isles by the Nazi Germany.

In the present time, legends influence people's opinions and even public policies to a certain extent. Legends are politically motivated and disseminated as the truth, by politicians and leaders like Trump, Putin, Zeman, Modi all over the world in the name of nationalism. In many ways, the political construct of the society is not different from what it was in the 18th and 19th century – people believed and continue to believe stories that often have xenophobic undertones. However, during Erben's time the nationalist discourse was helmed by cultural leaders like artists and writers and not politicians.

Peter Brook notes that the when knowledge is passed orally[xiv], meaning is communicated. And meaning never belongs to the past as it can be checked in an individual's own present experiences.   Most contemporary legends (popularly known as urban myths) focus on

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[xiii] They were disseminated mostly by the press in neutral countries during WWII such as Spain, Portugal or Sweden
[xiv] He refers to the oral transfer of knowledge from father to son in the Japanese Noh tradition.

cognitive dissonance, playing on the knowledge of existence (or lack thereof) of subjects that have competing views- ranging from ghosts to typical xenophobia and racism.

Contemporary legends are more in tune with current views- so, characters like water sprites and fairies are replaced by real people with evil intent, such as serial killers and murderers, or new age creatures that are considered part human with eccentric tendencies. Two such contemporary legends from New Delhi in India have surfaced in the last two decades. One of them is the *Monkey Man*, a shadowy and hairy figure appearing at night and scratching people's faces with sharp claws. The other is a recent story of a *'hair-chopper'*, a heavy and dark figure who is chopping off hair locks of young and old women in the city. The victims felt headaches and went unconscious when the incident took place in their respective homes, which were locked, at night. These, and many other such modern legends continue to dwell on our greatest fear- that of the unknown and inexplicable.

NOTES:

[1] Janeček, P. (2018). *Interview- Folk tales in Bohemia.*

[2] Bažant, J., Bažantová, N. and Starn, F. (2011). *The Czech Reader*, pg 157.

[3] Holy, L. (1996). *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post - Communist Transformation of Society*, pg 39.

[4] Day, B. (forthcoming) *Subversive Stages: Reflections on Czech Theatre*.

[5] Sayer, D. (1998). *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*, pg 118.

[6] Ibid, pg 50.

[7] Holy, L. (1996). *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post - Communist Transformation of Society*, pg 125.

[8] Sayer, D. (1998). *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*, pg 50.

[9] Day, B. (forthcoming) *Subversive Stages: Reflections on Czech Theatre*.

[10] Holy, L. (1996). *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post - Communist Transformation of Society*, pg 5.

[11] Sayer, D. (1998). *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*, pg 70.

[12] Bažant, J., Bažantová, N. and Starn, F. (2011). *The Czech Reader*, pg 114.

[13] Schmiedtová, V. (2001) *Czech Literature*.

[14] Wilmer, S.E. (2008) *National Theatres In A Changing Europe*.

[15] Dvořáček, J. (1963). *The Museum of Czech Literature*, pg 17.

[16] Hartwig, K. (1999). *The Incidental History of Folklore in Bohemia*, pg 67.

[17] Dvořáček, J. (1963). *The Museum of Czech Literature*, pg 21.

[18] Ibid, pg 24.

[19] Ibid, pg 24.

[20] Lützow, C. (1906). *A History of Bohemian Literature*, pg 355.

[21] Ibid, pg 8.

[22] Sayer, D. (1998). *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*, pg 50.

[23] Ibid, pg 74.

[24] Sayer, D. (1998). *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*, pg 118.

[25] Bažant, J., Bažantová, N. and Starn, F. (2011). *The Czech Reader*, pg 137.

[26] Reynolds, S. (2016). *Kytice: česko-anglické vydání*, pg XV.

[27] Vaughan, D. (2013). *Karel Jaromír Erben: A Not Quite So Grim Fairytale | Radio Prague*.

[28] Erben, K. and Sulak, M. (2012). *A Bouquet.*

[29] Wratislaw, A.H. (1851). *Manuscript of Dvur Kralove - Lyrical songs.*

[30] Lützow, C. (1906). *A History of Bohemian Literature*, pg 369.

[31] Thomas, A. (2010) *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and the City*, pg 37.

[32] Ibid, pg 37.

[33] Národní Muzeum (2017). *Hudba a pohádka - Music and Fairy Tale.*

[34] Holy, L. (1996). *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post - Communist Transformation of Society*.

[35] Švankmajer, J. (2004). *Jan Švankmajer, Transmutace smyslu/ Transmutation of the Senses,* pg 108.

CHAPTER 3: PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF *KYTICE*

3.1: OVERVIEW

In order to make critical choices about the nature of my artistic expression with regards to the source text, it was imperative to see previous audio-visual interpretations of *Kytice*. The objective was to understand the principles used in each of them to convey the essence of the poetry, or lack thereof. My vision for this project[i] was to depart from a conventional performance (stage and audience) system and explore spatial and material systems once the fourth wall was removed. Along with, I envisioned a storytelling performance rather than a dramatic staging and these factors required me to look beyond direct theatrical interpretations of the text and expand my outlook to other mediums also.

I came across various examples of *Kytice*'s adaptation such as the symphonic poems for orchestra[ii] (1896) by Antonín Dvořák; a popular (and ongoing) musical performance by Jiří Suchý at Divadlo Semafor[iii] (1972); a performance at Švandovo Divadlo (2017); the feature film *Kytice* by F.A. Brabec (2000); a comic book published in 2006; and lastly the works of various Czech illustrators on the subjects of *Kytice*[1]. Some of these have had direct bearings on my work and out of these I have discussed three cases below –the etchings of Jan Konůpek and the illustrations of Alén Diviš the performance at Švandovo Divadlo. The other works have helped form a critical opinion of the direction I did not want to go towards, notably the film by Brabec and illustrations by Jan Zrzavý.

The last two mentioned above convey a highly romanticized interpretation of the poetry. They lack the brutality that I believe is essential for these ballads. Zrzavý's illustrations are soft and sentimentalist. They are full of pictorial descriptions and representations and lack any charged atmospheres. It portrays magic as an element of dream and detached from the ordinary. Similarly, with Brabec's film, the basic theme of death is fanciful and the horrors are depicted in a comical manner. The fictional worlds created are devoid of morbidity, and

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[i] Discussed in Chapter 4.6: Artistic Methodology

[ii] Dvořák wrote symphonic poems for orchestra (1896) on *Noon Witch*, *The Golden Spinning Wheel*, *The Dove* and *Water Sprite* and a ballad for soprano on *Wedding Shirts* (1884)

[iii] Semafor is a popular style theatre which began as a generation theatre of the 1960's in Prague and continues till today. It is significant in the nation's history because it was associated with Prague Spring- the 1968 reform movement in Czechoslovakia.

they do not instil a sense of threat, foreboding or the matter-of-fact pain and vulnerability that death brings to the living. It is seen as the director's idealization of the Czech countryside from a bygone time. The visuals are very definitive and absolute, and leave no room for imagination or allow different perspectives to emerge.

As such, both of these interpretations are not conducive for abstract imagination, there are no metaphors that can be discussed, and rather, highlight the problems of naturalistic representations. This leads to the barrier between the viewer and artwork to be reinstated – their fiction does not allow one to be immersed in the environments created, one is unable to empathize with the subjects and the situations, the poetry is not emotionally effective.

3.2: PURPOSE OF STUDYING ILLUSTRATIONS

If we consider two-dimensional visual representations, such as paintings, illustrations, photographs etc. to be 'frozen' instances in the spatio-temporal continuum of the mise en scene, then a study of these representations would bring forth a discussion of what Craig considered to be the essence of the mise en scene: the overall visual impact of the careful co-ordination and balance between light, movement, objects and spatial relationships. From Kantor's perspective, the essence would further deepen to an analysis of the basic two dimensional (point, line and shapes) and three dimensional (form) components of visual expression. These translate into concepts of spatial relationships, tension and movement which themselves are elements of drama.

The analysis in this section is concerned with -

a) The intent of the artist:
    Patrice Pavis considers mise en scene as a system of meaning controlled by the artist(s), which by extension to illustrations would imply the composition of all the elements coming together, to understand the meaning that the artist wants to communicate through deliberate choices of aesthetics. In the following cases, it will pertain to how the visual quality interprets the dramatic action of the respective legend.

b) The effect produced on the recipient i.e., us as the viewer:
    This broadens into a phenomenological understanding of the artwork, of how we perceive things. Based on Vostrý and Vojtěchovsky's argument that the experience
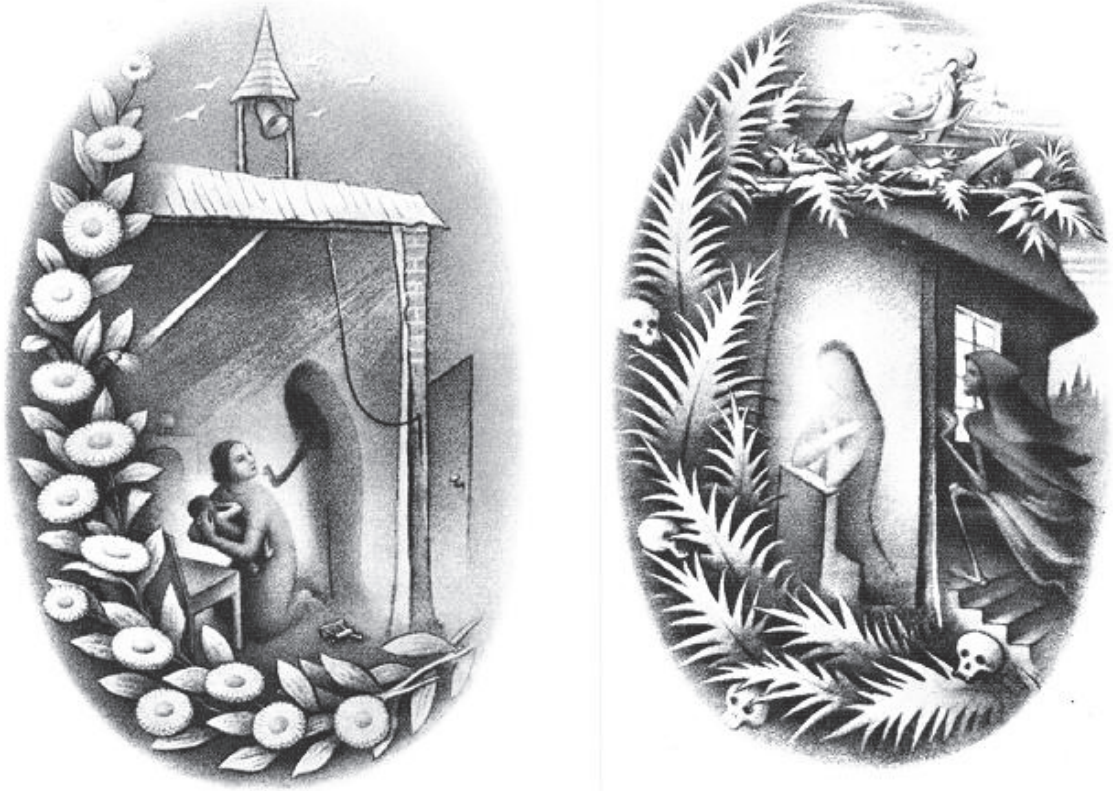
Figure 5: Illustrations on *Kytice* by Jan Zrzavý (1976)- *Noon Witch* (L) and *Wedding Shirts* (R).

Figure 6: A still from the ballad *Water Sprite* in the film *Kytice* by F.A. Brabec (2000)

Figure 7: *Noon Witch* by Jan Konůpek (1920).

Figure 8: *Water Sprite* by Jan Konůpek (1920).

Figure 9: *The Treasure* by Jan Konůpek (1920).



Figure 10: *Zahor's Bed* by Jan Konůpek (1920).

Figure 11: *Wedding Shirts* by Jan Konůpek (1920).

Figure 12: *The Dove* by Jan Konůpek (1920).

of theatre is similar to viewing an image, this analysis will help to examine perception by understanding the "…contradictory relationships between the detail and the whole, between the concrete action of the figures and the abstract field lines applied to the scenic space, between the narrative and the image…"[2]

a) ETCHINGS OF JAN KONŮPEK

Here, I am analysing six etchings of *Kytice* by Jan Konůpek that were created in 1925. These are for the ballads: *Noon Witch* (figure 7), *Water Sprite* (figure 8), *The Treasure* (Figure 9), *Zahor's Bed* (Figure 10)*, Wedding Shirts* (Figure 11) and *The Dove* (Figure 12).

All the images embody the essence of the mood of the poetry without illustrating the descriptions of Erben. Verbatim details of settings are omitted, and there are no distinguishable elements of bohemian landscape- the natural settings (such as the background of *The Treasure*) are very generic. The mood created is of gloom and despair that is present in Erben's narratives, with a sense of thrill, threat and anticipation. Zahor is waiting, the mother is an unidentifiable mass on first glance, the water sprite appears to be pushing the girl (which is not how Erben has described it) giving a new perspective to be imagined. Titular characters of the noon witch and dove are not shown in the images allowing the viewer and reader to question their presence. The presence and absence of the *Noon Witch* has been discussed previously[iv] and here it further opens the question whether the cooing of an actual dove drove the lady to commit suicide or was it just her guilt-ridden hallucinations? This also brings to notice the 'real' nature of these images, and the fact that they lack any 'magic'- the people could be ordinary people and anyone can find themselves in these situations.

All the images (due to the technique) employ the chiaroscuro effect of light to create the distressing atmospheres. They are high contrast images and hence demand attention by the viewer. The contrast also makes it disturbing and jarring for the eye, and the overpowering black adds to the sinister quality. Due to the contrast, we perceive a lot of content in the image quickly. In the image for *Noon Witch*, *Wedding Shirts*, *The Dove* and *The Treasure*, the shadows (black parts) tend to be at the edges of the pictorial frame and bleed[v] out,

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[iv] Refer to page 23

[v] Implying that the color or shape that touches the edge of the picture frame can be assumed to extend further into imaginary space.

bringing the eye to focus on the highlights[vi] in the middle of the image. The high contrast forces us to apprehend shapes and not focus on details. This is not the case with *Zahor's Bed* and *Water Sprite* – here, the highlights are more visible than the shadows which allows the eye to wander in the frame and perceive details. In *The Treasure* and *Zahor's Bed*, the subject is in contrast while the surrounding is in highlights gives a sense of liberation. The light in *Noon Witch* is extraordinarily dramatic as the shadow of the woman is directed towards the viewer and reaches out to us. The shadow is the highest contrast in the surrounding highlights and combined with the way the woman is positioned, portrays a deep heaviness.

There is an excessive use of diagonal lines in the composition of *Water Sprite*, *Wedding Shirts*, and *The Treasure* which gives a sense of speed and urgency to these images. The compositions for *Zahor's Bed*, *Noon Witch* and *The Dove* are made of vertical, horizontal and curvilinear lines and shapes which gives it a more restful, frozen quality. The artist's aesthetic is also to use curvilinear strokes in the background and foreground repeatedly, which creates small patterns and rhythm, around the subject – it is the artist's way to reassure the eye into the frame and focus on the subjects. The overlapping lines in the images gives a three dimensional character to the flat images.

The artist has placed the viewer at a higher angle than the subject in *Noon Witch*, *Water Sprite* and Treasure which makes us associate them with vulnerability and fragility. In *Zahor's Bed* and *Wedding Shirts*, the viewing angle is lower than the subject and the subjects command authority and appear intimidating. This is further enhanced by the verticality of the subjects themselves. The viewing angle is kept at eye level in *The Dove* where the artist wants to confront us with death at an equal level. The horizontality of the subject makes the image more restful. The line of gaze – looking up in *Wedding Shirts* and looking down in *Water Sprite* guide the viewer to perceive the relationships between the characters in the manner that Erben has portrayed them.

The girl in *Water Sprite* bleeds out from the lower part of the frame which gives the picture a sense of gravity and heaviness towards the bottom. This directly suggests her drowning, and what happens when she goes below the water is a mystery. We are not able to see her body; this mysterious disappearance allowed me to understand the ballad in terms of isolation[vii]. In distinction, the man in *Wedding Shirts* is bleeding from the top of the frame

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[vi] Ordinarily refers to the part of the image where the strongest concentration of white colour or lightest colour in the image is visible.

[vii] Discussed in Chapter 5.2: Specifics of Scenographic Environments – Water Sprite.

due to which we don't sense gravity in this image and can imagine them flying. The subjects are contained in the picture frame in *The Treasure*, *Zahor's Bed* and *Noon Witch*. This containment gives a feeling of lightness to the subjects. In the case of *The Dove*, clear shape of the subject is not distinguishable at the first glance as it is dominated by the strong pattern of grass blades on either side. On closer observation, we see that the woman breaks the pattern and that's why we notice it.

Zahor's Bed, *The Treasure*, *The Dove* and *Water Sprite* are set within a landscape creating a distance and barrier between the viewer and the image. Representation of a landscape leaves little room for imagination, and does not allow fantasy to take over. *Noon Witch* and *Wedding Shirts* are set in abstract space- the former has a discernible rectangle and triangle in the largely amorphous composition, and the latter is a composition of various triangles which invite the viewer into the image space to explore and be inquisitive. The multiple triangles in *Wedding Shirts* make it a very dynamic image and the shape itself is the strongest visual interpretation of the number three- which is a recurring motif in this ballad.

b) ILLUSTRATIONS OF ALÉN DIVIŠ

Here, I am analysing illustrations of *Kytice* by Alén Diviš that were created between 1947-1949. These are for the ballads: *Noon Witch* (Figure 13 and Figure 14), *Wedding Shirts* (Figure 15 and Figure 16), *Water Sprite* (Figure 17 and Figure 18), and *Willow* (figure 19 and Figure 20).

In Diviš's work, similar to Konůpek's, verbatim details of settings by Erben are omitted and the artist brings his free interpretations of the dramatic situations. In this case, the viewer has a direct and concrete association with the brutality and magic of Erben's poetry. The brutality is a result of the style of drawings, which has a 'scratchy' nature and thus a tactile quality; one can almost feel the scratches of a pencil or blade on the skin. This tactility is remarkable because it affects the viewer[viii] even though the drawings have no three dimensionalities whatsoever; they are simple, two dimensional representations and perceived as flat. The 2D nature allows these drawings to be magical and imaginative, as against the 'reality' conveyed by Konůpek's work. The drawing style is a result of the time that Diviš spent in the prison in France and the scratching have a distinctive quality that is reminiscent of lines etched by

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[viii] The idea of internally tactile perception as explained by Vostrý is discussed in detail on page 57.

Figure 13: *Noon Witch* [I] by Alén Diviš.   **Figure 14**: *Noon Witch* [II] by Alén Diviš.
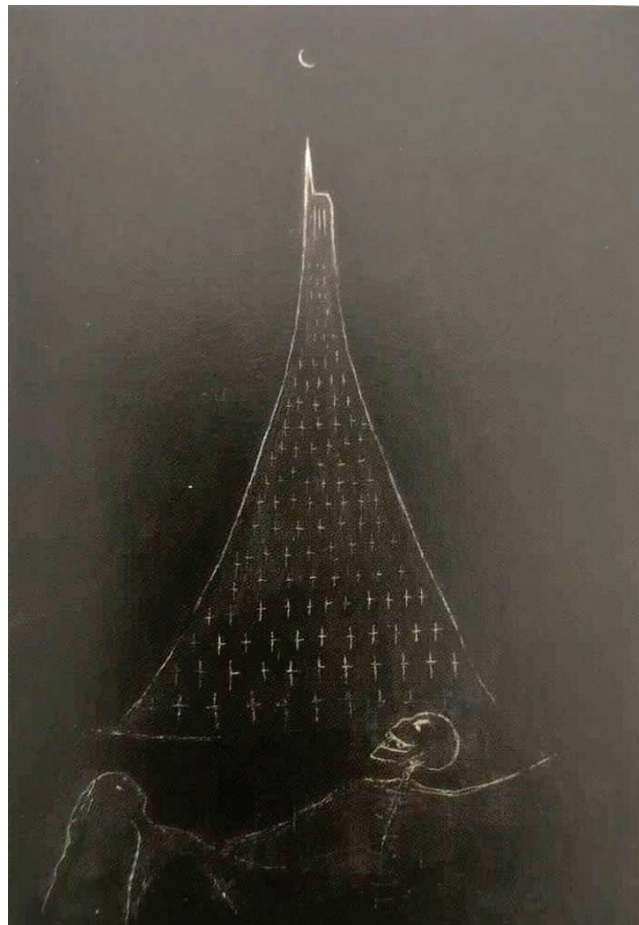
Figure 15: *Wedding Shirts* [I] by Alén Diviš (1948-49).
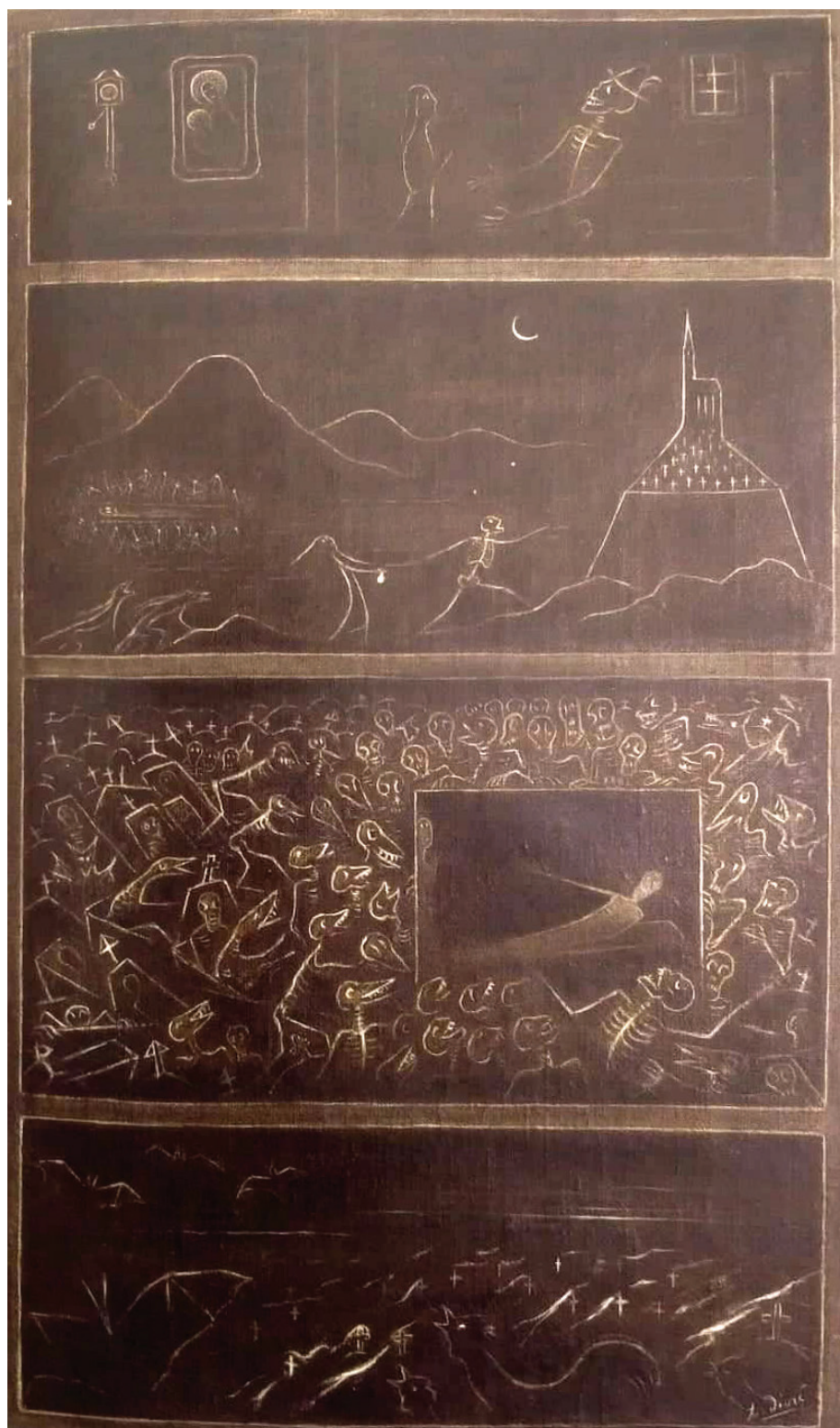
Figure 16: *Wedding Shirts* [II] by Alén Diviš (1947-48)
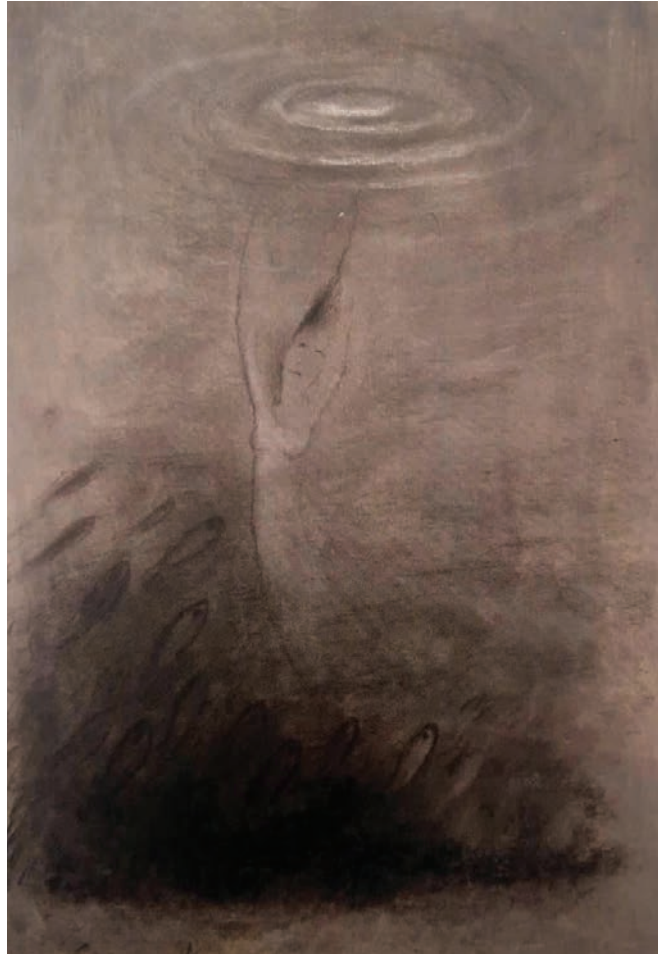
Figure 17: *Water Sprite* [I] by Alén Diviš (1948-49)
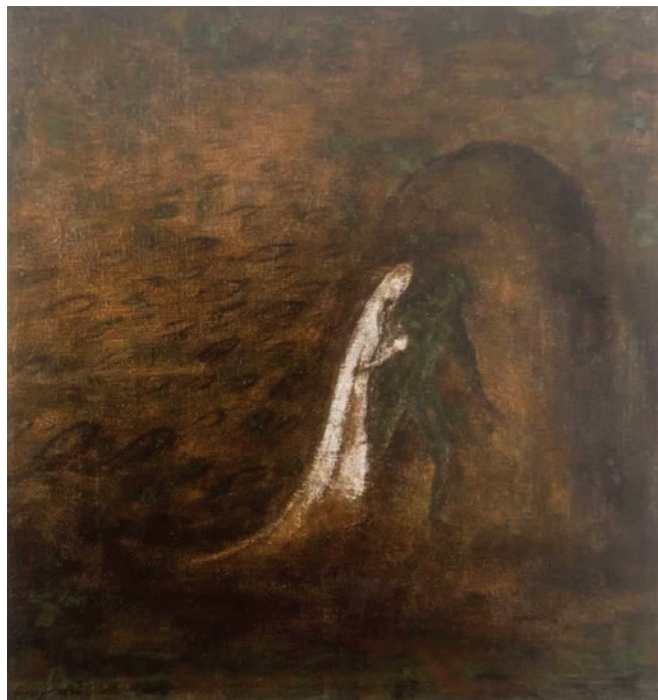
Figure 18: *Water Sprite* [II] by Alén Diviš (1948-49)

Figure 19: *Willow* [I] by Alén Diviš (1948-49)
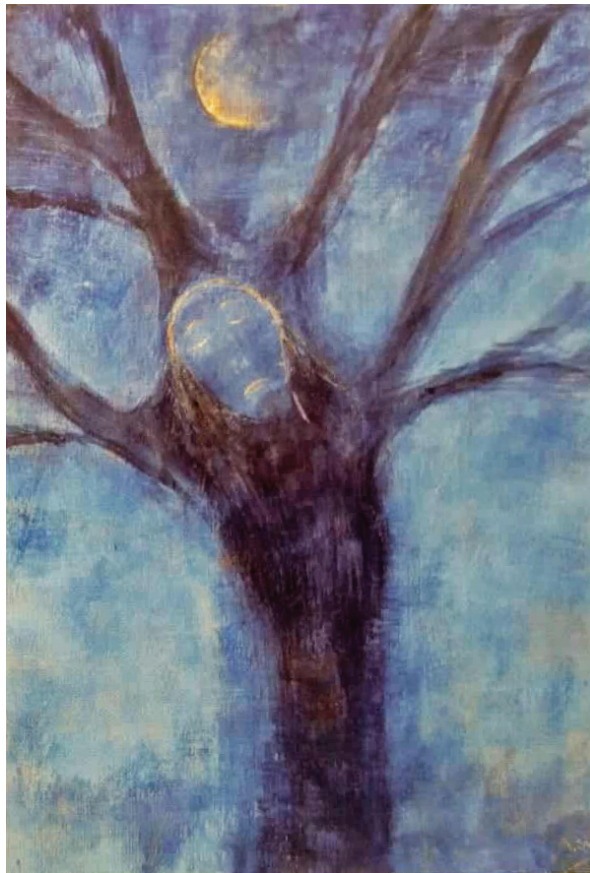
Figure 20: *Willow* [II] by Alén Diviš (1948-49)

prisoners on stone walls. The drawing for *Wedding Shirts* is based on his encounter of a prison morgue in Morocco where he saw dead bodies lying everywhere and he could directly relate his experience to the situation in this ballad.

The women protagonists in the images for *Water Sprite*, *Willow* and *Wedding Shirts* have a radiance and an aura around them, they are the highlights in the images, while male figures are vague, darker and in contrast. This can be understood as the artist's intention to draw the viewer's attention to the subject's plight and be sympathetic. He sees them as fragile and vulnerable. The *Noon Witch* on the other hand is shown as a dark figure, without any shadows around her in the blazing highlight area of sunlight.

There is a sense of confrontation and equality with *Noon Witch* since the viewing angle is at eye level. The witch is vertical, upright, but small in scale compared to the picture plane. This gives a sense of authority to the figure, but the impact is not to intimidate. Figure 13 shows her in a desolate, hot landscape where she commands a certain power but is not frightening. Her frightening nature is illustrated in the next image, where we are confronted with her red, luminous face and have direct eye contact with her. She stands framed by the doorway at the threshold and it highlights an essential relationship with the house- we do not see her enter and she is able to intimidate from outside (Figure 14). She has no clear feet and she seems light, almost floating without the pull of gravity. Yet, her thin cane connects her to the ground. In Konůpek's depiction too (Figure 7), the open door is centrally located in the image.

The illustrations of *Wedding Shirts* are quite dramatic. Figure 15 puts most of the emphasis on the setting and the background. The triangular shape seems to pierce the sky and its sharp point is a crescendo. There is nothing visible in the surrounding darkness. Upon closer observation it is understood as a hill covered with graves and a church at the top of the hill. The verticality and positioning of the church is suggestive to the might of religion that is the theme of the ballad. The infinite graves on the hill bring the viewer to confront the enormity of fear here. This is also emphasized by the relationship of the two figures at the bottom of the image. The ghost-man is bigger, his profile is distinct while the girl is miniscule, has an amorphous shape and cowering in the face of death. Her reluctance to continue following him anymore is visible by the opposing diagonals in which their arms are positioned. This reluctance, along with a more expansive understanding of the scene and surrounding is shown in the second plate of Figure 16 which is designed like a storyboard. When both these images are seen next to each other it helps to appreciate the dramatic vision of this sequence

– the artist first wants the viewer to focus on the characters and the ensuing conflict, and later throws more light on the surrounding events, as if these were occurring on a stage or film.

In this expanded view in Figure 16 the horrors are better defined. The other skeleton like figures appear to be rejoicing and reflected in the water below. There are dogs that howl and creep upon the girl while her fiancé pulls her forward. The titular object of the ballad- a sack of wedding shirts is the strongest highlight in the image clutched in the girl's hands and becomes the center of the image where the viewer rests his eyes. The image is filled with diagonals and curves, making it very dynamic and action intensive. The intensity of the situations, suggested by the multiple diagonals and overlapping lines increases with each successive plate in the storyboard. Here, one can note that the first plate is quite static and restful. The highlight there is the halo around the Holy image, and the setting is quite literal when compared to Erben's description of the opening scene.

The third plate here is most appreciated for the abstract representation of the situation. The morgue is simply depicted by a rectangle, which is empty as against the surrounding areas that are densely populated, bringing the viewer to concentrate attention in the rectangle. Semblance of identifiable shapes is lesser in this canvas, as human skeletons merge with animal faces and gestures. These creatures are bleeding into the picture frame on all sides making it appear infinite and overwhelming to the girl trapped inside the box. Interestingly, there is no sense of viewing angle here, and the plate could be read as if the viewer were above looking down or as if the view is frontal at eye level. The fourth plate shows the epilogue of the ballad. The strongest highlights are the flowing lines – representing pieces of torn wedding shirts on the graves, the zombies have disappeared. The left side of the plate has bats flying away while roosters are beginning to appear from the bottom and right side. The visuals of this storyboard also carry a sense of sound, and across the four plates the viewer can imagine the voices and sounds that are created in the image.

In the images for *Water Sprite*, we see the murky world below the water and I was inspired to carry forward the atmosphere depicted in both these images into my work. The schools of fish surrounding the characters in both the images, though illustrious, give the images a sense of swift movement and dynamism and they would be perceived as static without them. The viewing angle in Figure 17 is low and highlights her entrapment. The way her arms are positioned are similar to the woman depicted in the illustration for *Willow* (discussed below), and indicate a plea for help as well as an action of having given up hope. In Figure 18 the

girl is the strongest highlight, depicted as a bride, while her captor is a vague shadow. He is leading her into an abstract, cave like space suggesting the uncertainty of the events to follow.

In the images for *Willow*, Figure 19 has a restful quality because the lower half of the image is horizontal and the subjects are contained in the picture plane. It shows the mother and child asleep, while the upper half has the father as a silhouetted profile. The image of a mother and child sleeping in this manner reminds me of an exhibition I have seen where an authentic set of Egyptian mummies (mother and child) were on display. This image has the same quality of time being frozen and I think it is a powerful visual that suggests the space and time relationship of the lady with her surroundings, which can be explored in a performative medium as well. The gaze line of the father and the way he is inclined suggest a very affectionate and doting relationship with his family and one cannot relate it to the sinister happenings in the ballad. On the other hand, the largely dark and shadowy background, against which the mother and child are placed as highlights, suggests an ominous quality to this picture. Figure 20 depicts the woman trapped inside the tree. The subject is vertically placed and the viewer is at eye level which confronts them to her pain. The diagonal branches are thicker near the trunk and they fade outwards creating a sense of misery within the dynamism of the diagonals. The branches appear to be her hands calling out for help, similar to the woman in *Water Sprite* (Figure 17). When observed keenly, it appears that the woman is crucified to the tree and suggestive of the intertwined fate of the woman and the tree. The crucifix is an interesting motif to be used in a non-religious text like *Willow* and lends misery of the image. This is further enhanced by the combination of blue and black which lends it a rather melancholic atmosphere.

c) <u>BEARINGS ON MY WORK</u>

Both Diviš and Konůpek treat the subject matters in distinctly different ways as can be seen by comparing the common subjects of *Noon Witch*, *Water Sprite* and *Wedding Shirts* from both the artists. In *Noon Witch*, Konůpek intrigues the viewer with the present-or-absent phenomenon of the witch while Diviš articulates the witch, present bare in broad daylight and stripped of any fantastical quality. They serve as inspirations because Konůpek demonstrates dramatic composition and Diviš demonstrates a dramatic (reduction of) subject's scale. Both of them emphasize the spatiality of the door and threshold in this ballad:

it has influenced my process[ix]. In *Water Sprite* they play with the dramatic setting in opposing ways. Konůpek positions the viewer to shows the girl disappearing from above, while Diviš's perspective shows her from below the water. This alternation of viewpoints contributes to the perception and experience. It is inspiring as an idea and is reflected in my scenographic concept for this ballad[x]. Both Diviš and Konůpek play with the symbolic dynamism of triangles in their composition for *Wedding Shirts*. In both cases, it gives the artwork tension, anticipation along with urgency. Konůpek catches the protagonists in a singular instance of their flight, while in Diviš's case they are a small part of a larger whole. He pays emphasis to the supernatural surroundings that constitute the mood of the poetry. This aspect of Diviš's work on this subject is influential because it helps to expand on the imagination of the viewer. He "reveals", slowly and progressively, the enormity of fear in *Wedding Shirts* like a dramatic development.

The analysis of these illustrations contributes to understanding dramatic action by studying the balance between the various visual aesthetics discussed above. Horizontal, vertical, diagonal and gaze lines are immediately suggestive of various movements, tension and spatial relationships. Light plays an important role in establishing the mood for the viewer, along with highlights and contrast that immediately attract or divert the attention of the viewer to an area on the canvas. Particularly notable towards that is Konůpek's chiaroscuro that creates the distressing atmospheres and the viewer can sense a gloom. Viewing angles and the relative position of the subject helps to orient the viewer's feelings for the subject-ranging from the subject being considered vulnerable or intimidating. Both of them insightfutlly use an eye level viewing relationship between the subject and viewer to establish a confrontational attitude. Diviš is also notable because even though his work is flat and 2D, it inspires to explore the sense of tactility which is a 3D gesture. He treats the environment of *Water Sprite* with a murky and hazy quality that encouraged me to a pursue materials that can embody these effects[xi].

In this way, one appreciates both artists' interpretations of *Kytice* as inspiring elements of drama.

[ix] Discussed in Chapter 5.3: Conceptual Scenographic Environments – *Noon Witch*.

[x] Discussed in Chapter 5.2: Specifics of Scenographic Environments – *Water Sprite*.

[xi] Discussed in Chapter 5.2: Specifics of Scenographic Environments – *Water Sprite*.

3.3: *KYTICE* AT ŠVANDOVO DIVADLO.
DIRECTED BY: MARTINA KRÁTKÁ. PREMIERED ON 20TH JUNE, 2017

Presented by the acting studio of Švandovo Divadlo, the performance was based on 8 of Erben's ballads. The duration of the performance was 70 min, and it was performed by 13 actors.

The ballads were performed as stylized dramatization combined with most of the actual verses from the poems (Czech language) which were recited partly as dialogues and partly as songs. 2 or 3 actors became the protagonists of each story (rotating within the group) while the rest of the actors became a collective body as a chorus, antagonists or *Foley* artists in various situations in the performance. I don't intend to discuss the quality of the acting, and this is not a review of the performance; but a critique of the directorial concept, visual elements and scenography, dramatic structure and the execution.

The composition of the stage space and costumes can be classified into the following categories.

a) Large 'space-making' objects, authentic (in terms of material) and aged, probably sourced from the Czech countryside or villages. These included a heavy wooden chest in the upstage centre, and around the corners a few tin water buckets, a tin water tub etc.

b) Smaller authentic 'prop' objects, included a hollow picture frame, a small bible, rosary, crucifix, a spinning wheel, and a plastic doll baby.

c) Authentic farm tools such as a large, gruesome and fear inducing scythe, hammers and knives. In the context of the performance, they were associated with crime and weaponry and not with manual labour.

d) Masks, which were designed and created objects, included a mask for Death, a generic face mask for a boy and a girl, abstract masks including a horse head and a pair of royal crowns, made of tubes of hay.

e) Basic costumes of white shirts and blouses and black trousers or skirts, white lace scarves, and a wedding dress.

The witch mask and scythe together became a motif of Death (always atop the wooden chest and strategically the elevated part of the stage), the plastic doll an obvious motif of infant and motherhood. Both of these dramaturgically connect the ballads into the performance.

The performance starts with Death coming out from within the wooden chest, picking up the scythe and killing two anonymous, masked lovers. This serves as a prologue, and the other actors enter with a funeral song. The wooden chest becomes *The Treasure* and the mother picks out 'valuable' rocks from it. Leaving the plastic doll inside the chest, she fills her skirt up with the rocks; when she unfolds her skirt later, ordinary stones drop out onto the stage. The other actors collectively embody the mouth of the cave and deny her access to the child, followed by rebukes, hisses and taunts for being a bad mother. After her year of repentance, the chorus returns her baby to her. The mother and child are positioned behind the hollow frame to create the holy Christian image.

This framed image becomes the point of transition from *The Treasure* and creating the opening setting for *Wedding Shirts*, where the girl is praying to the image. The chorus creates the mood of a wind and storm outside. The frame becomes lopsided- indicating the return of her lover. He helps her wear the wedding dress and the chorus lifts her up- creating the image of the girl flying with the help of her lover, her large dress swaying in the wind- orchestrated by the chorus. The small objects like the crucifix, bible and rosary are thrown away and appear to be flying in slow motion as they are passed on from one chorus member to another. Arrival at the graveyard is indicated by the chorus acting as ravens and then transforming into tombstones. The wooden chest is seen as the morgue where the girl hides until dawn- which is again indicated by the chorus becoming roosters. Two women feed the cackling roosters and the moment of feeding becomes the point of transition from *Wedding Shirts* to *Noon Witch*- feeding the roosters turns into feeding a deviant, fretting child.

Death is seen atop the chest with a spinning wheel running between her fingers, and the actors use other metallic objects on stage to create menacing, jarring sounds to indicate the impending doom of *Noon Witch*. Death disappears leaving the wheel on stage, signalling the transition to *The Golden Spinning Wheel.* The horse mask is used to show the prince riding, reaches the hut where Dora is sitting and spinning. Dora's stepmother and stepsister, armed with knives and hammers, lead her into the forest and attack her. Dora's mangled and dismembered body is portrayed simply and effectively, with the actor lying facing the audience, her eyes closed and her arms and lower limbs folded and tucked behind her. With each barter between the strange man and Dora's stepsister, Dora's body is restored and she is rendered whole again. The chorus sings the song of the evil thread; a new bride is dressed in the wedding gown and the culprits are thrown

to a pack of wolves, the pack transforms to a group of girls sitting by the spinning wheel which is the opening setting of *Christmas Eve*.

Death appears upstage again, moving her scythe menacingly. Hana and Maria go to the lake armed with axes and see their futures- Hana becomes a bride and Maria is attacked by Death. She falls, and is lifted by the chorus- they become her coffin bearers leading to her funeral. This funeral procession becomes the transition point to the next- *The Dove*, where a girl cries over the body of her dead husband. Death is still present above and the wedding gown is passed onto the protagonist here. While she lies with her new husband, the chorus becomes her guilty conscience, tormenting her and then turning *Foley* as the cooing of a dove, compelling her to commit suicide in the water. Her floating body is represented by her being propelled up by the chorus that moves the wedding gown to appear lost in waves.

The water scene forms the point of transition into *Water Sprite*. The wedding gown, doll baby and lace scarves form the components of the story. Water in the tin tub at the back is used to create the soundscape. The murder of the baby in the end is represented by Death snatching the baby from the water sprite and hacking it off with her scythe. The death of the baby forms the point of transition to *A Daughter's Curse*. Death is now seen armed with the baby in one hand and a noose in the other and the protagonist hangs herself.

The visual from the beginning is repeated, with two (fallen) masked lovers rising up from the stage and being reunited. The chorus puts Death back into the chest and hammers it shut. However, the chest unlatches and the hand of Death crawls out, signalling the end. The performance was received positively- it generated an enthusiastic response from the audience.

The performance becomes relevant to this project because it helps evaluate certain artistic choices that are made here with respect to how I imagine to interpret them. for instance, staging the motif of 'being lifted from the ground' in *Wedding Shirts*, which I am interpreting in a different manner[xii].

In terms of scenography, while an 'object' based approach is not my aesthetic, the performance can be appreciated in terms of the composition. It is necessary to point out

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[xii] Discussed in Chapter 5.3: Conceptual Scenographic Environments – *Wedding Shirts*.

that the plastic baby doll is a misfit in the composition because it does not adhere to the rules of its environment of authentic objects, masks and costumes. The scenography carries a low level of narrative weight[xiii] since the objects and costumes position the performance in a conventional depiction of Bohemian countryside.

The performance serves as an example of a good dramaturgy, especially with the objects (that are essentially the scenographic elements). The transitions are the most interesting thing in the performance, and were a source of inspiration- presenting 'linear' connections between Erben's poems. These connections show ways in which the text can be interpreted for a performance using the space and setting, if one takes note of how the previous poem ends and the next one begins.

NOTES:

[1] Vyhlídal, M. (2014). *Ilustrovaná vydání Erbenovy Kytice v letech 1890 - 2012*.

[2] Vostrý, J. and Vojtěchovský, M. (2011). *Image and Narrative- On scenicity in the plastic and dramatic arts*, pg 42.

[xiii] With reference to Stephen di Benedetto's analysis on the conventional purpose of the visual, discussed on page 52.

Figure 21: *Kytice* at Švandovo Divadlo (2017).
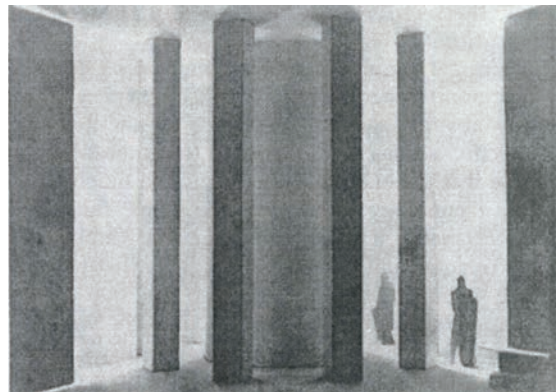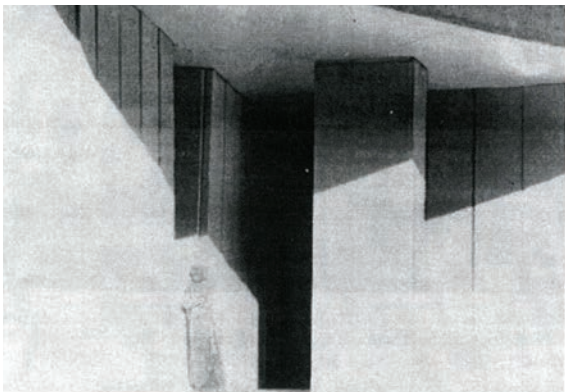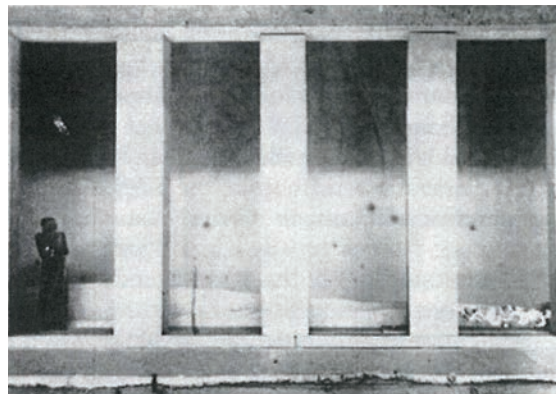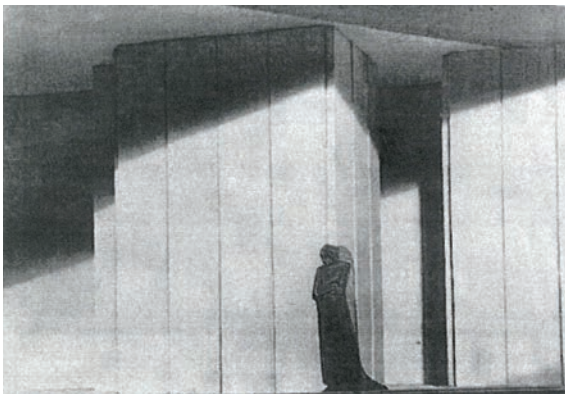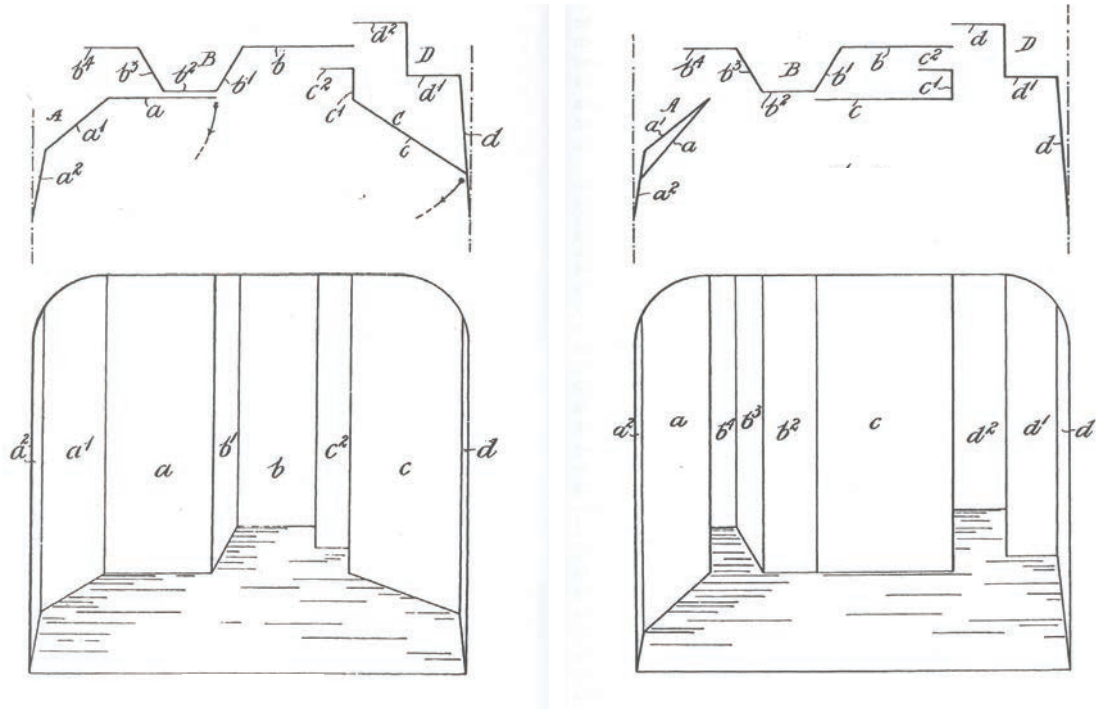
Figure 22: Top- Craig's screens illustrating the changes needed to transform an interior (L) to an exterior (R) (1910). Below- Spatial relationships achieved by shifting the screens in Hamlet, Act 4, various scenes.

CHAPTER 4: CULTIVATING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1: OVERVIEW

It is repeatedly said that "scenography is both an art and a way of thinking"[1]. A way of thinking implies that certain method(s) must exist and this chapter is a synthesis of the thought processes that have influenced me.

Arnold Aronson states that "The stage can be understood only if it relates to the spatial and imagistic codes of its society. And ours is a multitasking society, a culture of the instantaneous, the temporary, the fragmented, the polyvalent, the intangible and ephemeral, the distant and the near. A stage that depicts solidity, linearity and continuity- in other words coherence- is not merely a false depiction of the current world, it may be unreadable to a contemporary audience"[2]. Jaroslav Malina shares the same sentiment that "variety is needed on stage even at the cost of heterogeneity. The rhizomatous structure of today's stage design defies linear models"[3].

This implies that in the theorizing of scenography, just like on the stage, while linear and sequential models have worked in the past; the "polyvalent" and "rhizomatous" arrangement of contemporary society warrants that we need a new influx of inspirations to propel the discourse forward. I have observed that (within the discipline of scenography), a vast majority of the theoretical discourse puts emphasis on deconstructing the "formal" aspects of the mise en scene. They elaborate on the intent of the scenographer/ artist in each work, limiting it to "Interpretation of text is often the sole principle of the stage designer's message"[4]. They usually fail to take into account:

a. While focusing on symbolic form and shapes, not enough attention is given to the materiality of the space that plays a huge role in making the space evocative.

b. The manner in which the created work was perceived by, and impacted the spectator.

c. The reader (that is me) did not witness the production. By looking at photographs and drawings, the reader is observing a two-dimensional visualization (dominated

by scenic form, light and composition) of a three-dimensional instance in the mise en scene.

I am therefore drawing upon a rich pool of ideas, practices and theories from within and outside the discipline to create a framework. These include the works of scenographers Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, František Tröster, Jaroslav Malina and Tadeusz Kantor; the writings of Richard Schechner, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook; architects Juhani Pallasmaa and Jerzy Gurawski; artists and sculptors Jan Švankmajer and František Skála; philosophers Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty; and scholars and theoreticians Arnold Aronson, Patrice Pavis and Pamela Howard.

The ensuing research work in this chapter is concerned with 4 components that inspire my scenographic practice on the idea of metaphors: i) phenomenology and its relevance in scenography; ii) attributes of space that affect us and ways perception (of the space) can be altered; iii) working with materials to aid sensoriality; and iv) physical engagement of the spectator.

The chapter concludes with establishing my artistic methodology for this project.

4.2: PHENOMENOLOGY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO A SCENOGRAPHIC DISCOURSE.

The study of phenomenology is concerned with conscious human experiences, such as perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, embodied action[5] etc. Phenomenology of space deals with the first person experience of space – *we* are in a space and hence experiencing it. It is characterized by bodily sensations, i.e., how the senses experienced the space through sight, sound, smell and touch.

Phenomenology is suited to understanding (and hence creating) performances since it is defined by the effect "the experience" produces on the recipient i.e., the spectator. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a 20th century phenomenological philosopher, applied the scope of phenomenology to arts such as painting to determine the emotional and cognitive responses the viewer has, and what physical sensations are transmitted from actor to spectator.

Patrice Pavis compares the philosophy of phenomenology to the mise en scene, which is the abstract part of the performance. As spectators, we do not see mise en scene, but we are aware that it has organized the entire production. Similarly, phenomenology establishes the

meaning of the phenomena and how we (can) become consciously aware of that phenomenon. The appeal of art to us, Juhani Pallasmaa notes, happens within the two ends of the spectrum: a) the intellect informing the capacity to conceptualize and b) addressing the senses. As such, phenomenology within theatre will seek to determine the experiences[i] (emotional and cognitive) of the spectator.

From the viewpoint of catering to the spectator, the emotional and cognitive constituents of the experience are what scenographic and spatial practices strive towards. Jaroslav Vostrý notes that scenic art is "based on a fusion of the corporeal with the mental and of the sensorial with the spiritual"[6]. Thus, as spectators, we attempt to understand what we see on stage with respect to the development of a narrative; at the same time what we see affects our sensations and emotions. At the helm of putting this idea in practice was Edward Gordon Craig who, more than a 100 years ago, revolutionized the scenographic incentive, asking "how to engineer and produce disorienting spatial phenomena? And how to embody them?"[7]. A phenomenological basis can thus help the artist to be consciously aware of what she is generating versus what is being transmitted to the spectator.

The cognitive aspect of this discussion leads to the idea of images and metaphors. In his study, *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard notes that the phenomenology of imagination captures images at their point of origin, and implies that image comes before thought. Beth Lazroe's study focuses on how the viewer perceives (photographic) and receives images – another phenomenological discourse. She maintains that the image is primitive, traced back to our infancy when we learn to comprehend meaning through visuals before we can articulate thought or speech.

Bachelard writes that poetic image emerges into our consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul and being of man. He qualifies that an image is a product of absolute imagination, exists only because of imagination. A literary metaphor, he believes, is a fabricated image "without deep, true, genuine roots. It is an ephemeral expression"[8]. He qualifies metaphor as a false image. However, in the course of theatrical work this does not imply negatively- we build illusions through false images.

The idea of the metaphor is strongly ingrained in this project because the artistic aim is to detach the poetic word from an illustration- as a visual or as an experience. A

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[i] Phenomenology would also study the physical sensations that are transmitted from actor to spectator, and will include the spectator in his bodily and emotional dimensions. For example, if an actor shivers does it transmit, in a kinaesthetic way, to the spectator? However, this is beyond the scope of my study.

metaphor by nature is representative or symbolic of something else. In non-literary terms it directly implies non-illustration. It provides clarity and identifies hidden similarities between two (seemingly unlikely) ideas.

The purpose of this study, to explore metaphors through space and materials, is to facilitate imagination using interesting and unique comparisons to craft descriptions, imagery and emphasize shifts. A visual metaphor itself becomes poetic since it does not specifically compare; it states that one thing *is* another thing.

Bachelard claims that a metaphor has no phenomenological value. While he says this regarding literary metaphors, I believe that it does not apply to "physically manifested" metaphors in the realm of performance. Here, the idea is to create metaphorical experiences, that the spectator can "live", hence a phenomenological value by virtue.

"To imagine going down into the water or wandering in the desert is to change space, and to change space is to change being"[9]. The task at hand becomes to manifest the imagination and make the vocabulary of metaphors important. Through that we can create a metaphorical experience that can suggest a possible feeling of going down in water (Figure 47) or wandering in the desert. In a way this comes back to the path that Adolphe Appia laid out, 120 years ago, as a pioneer of looking at the poetic expression rather than its illustration: "we no longer try to give the illusion of a forest but the illusion of a man in the atmosphere of a forest"[10].

4.3: WORKING WITH SPACE AS A MEDIUM / HOW ATTRIBUTES OF SPACE AFFECT US.

Traditionally in most theatrical works, the visual, i.e., the setting carries a low level of narrative weight. Stephen di Benedetto makes a very interesting and succinct observation, that the purpose of the visual is to set a) time, b) place c) mood; adhering to the "generally accepted depictions of real"[11]. The time, place and mood are often conveyed by the visual elements through conventional means and unadventurous depictions of cultural contexts. The role of the visual in the narrative is reduced to depicting what we perceive as familiar through reliable likelihood.

However, if one rejects the idea of depicting the familiar, especially the *notion of place*, then working with space as a medium presents immense opportunities for exploring mood and time. Pamela Howard states that space can be translated or adapted. We can create suggestive space, link space with dramatic time, think of space in action. It can be moulded to be a whole or broken. We think about what we need to create the right space, and how it can be constructed with form and colour to enhance the actor and text. We can search for its metaphor and meaning to define dramatic space.

Besides, bodily actions also contribute to defining space, since every movement of the body is an action in space and therefore linked, as Jaroslav Vostrý argues, to the spatial intelligence[ii]. An actor jumping across, stretching his arm to reach towards the ceiling, squatting etc. are actions that help define the space all of these actions would help define space for the spectator. Lazroe states that 'the line', one of the fundamental constituents of space, is always imaginarily created by the gaze. Alison Oddey further adds that the direction where the performer looks becomes a spatial act as "it directs the spectator's attention within the space and is one of the performer's most powerful stratagems in activating the whole space"[12].

[ii] Specific application of the movement-space intelligence (faculty) is the foundation of what in scenology is known as scenicity.

a) SOME PRINCIPLES OF ARCHITETURE IN PERCEPTUAL AND DRAMATIC SPACE.

Modern scenographic strategies are derived from the writings and works of the pioneers of stage space: Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, who laid them down more than 100 years ago. At that time and prevalent until the 19th century, built environments in scenic practices were concerned only with providing a frame or backdrop for defined bodily orientations. Appia and Craig undertook to not provide a background, but to determine the setting that was dictated by the written text.

Craig advocated the purpose of scenic design to appeal to the emotion of the spectator. Concerned with the medium of space, this created a unique opportunity for the scenographer- to anticipate, establish and impose a spectrum of emotions for the audience (who are static) as well as the actors (who are in motion) in the space. According to him, the scenographer can achieve this using suggestive visuals, i.e., visuals that are non-representational; communicating a deliberate mood and atmosphere that is evocative – the strongest tool at our disposal for this being colour- both of light and physical objects; and symbolist aesthetic, i.e., conveying meaning through a universal language of symbolic associations. His production of *Hamlet* (1911-12) at Moscow Art Theatre became a milestone to understand this shift towards a simplistic symbolism of space. Using a series of flat, non-representational and mobile 2-D screens he transformed the stage space to symbolize an interior or exterior space and explored other relationships that were possible on stage by continually shifting the screens (Figure 22).

Appia appropriated the stage's three-dimensionality as against its perception as a pictorial, two-dimensional entity. He insisted on the stage as a malleable environment "into which the drama was projected through light, mass and movement"[13]. According to Appia, there are four integral elements needed to create a stage setting: three dimensional elements, formative lighting, symbolic colouring and sculptured space.

Appia emphasized on the integrity of architectonic elements to scenic design. He discussed the importance of the stage floor as the primary link between the actor and the setting, noting that the "expressiveness of performance suffered from the absence of different playing levels and from the failure to use the performance area imaginatively"[14]. Rather than obscuring the floor (which was the prevalent practice) he highlighted it with steps, slopes, levels and platforms. In terms of visual perception this established, unambiguously for the spectator,

the solid mass and volume of the surface supporting the actor. For the latter, the contoured floor allowed the body to occupy and require the space rhythmically (Figure 23). Further, he stressed that the architectonic elements should be closely coordinated with the emotive qualities of the text and music and the stage action of the performed piece (the rhythmic movement of actors on the elements).

Future decades saw modernist practices develop and extend the tenants laid down by Craig and Appia to widen the discourse on the medium of space. One such inspiring figure is František Tröster who stressed on architecturally constructed dramatic space. He approached scenography by employing architectonic elements to emphasize on the immaterial aspects such as movement, time, rhythm besides light and colour. For instance, in *The Government Inspector* (1936) visual rhythm and time is established by the repetition of "doors" as an architectural element or architecture is used to create atmospheres of alienation and overburdening in *The King of Diamonds* (1948).

Tröster's another important contribution to this discourse was his work with the idea of scale and monumental shape. This is best highlighted in his scenography for *Julius Caesar* (1936) where he create a "monumentalisation of dramatic reality"[15]. A study of the images for this production displays the relevance of scale as an immensely powerful tool to convey visual metaphors. He created a giant plinth, monumental horse's hooves and a large bust that made the actor disappear or insignificant "under the weight of the meaning"[16]. This play of the metaphorical scale, i.e., the size of the stage object with respect to the actor allows scenography to became an indivisible part of dramatic action leading to a striking effect (Figure 23). Pamela Howard notes that "manipulation of scale within the architectural space provokes a confrontation between spectator and the non-verbal image that directly challenges our perception of where we are and what we understand by the image"[17]. A monumental scale does not become a part of my work directly, but this idea allows me to critically question the scale of architectonic elements and the ensuing dramatic meaning

While Craig's modernist approach demanded the space to be unified and homogenous, post-modernism advocates that variety is needed on stage even though it might lead to heterogeneity. Using the analogy of "a text" Jaroslav Malina argues that the stage space should incorporate principles of variability. It should allow for the gaps to be understood as being more important than the integral parts of its very structure. When I apply this analysis to the architectonic attributes of space these "gaps" can be understood as an

acknowledgement and perhaps an equal emphasis of the negative spaces such as the edges, corners and behinds. In terms of creating metaphors, this could indicate to using the non-illusionary parts of the stage space to develop contradictions.

Indeed, the work of Tadeusz Kantor[iii] is heavily inspired by an investigation of inferior, suspicious spaces such as cloak rooms, waiting rooms and hallways (Figure24). He tapped into the subverted mystique of these places and carries them forward, as visual metaphors in his productions, such as Cricot 2 Theatre's *Lovelies and Dowdies* (1973). In an essay on scenographic avant-garde practices[iv], Natalie Rewa states that we need to approach the conception of space by allowing potentialities of negative space to be aesthetically significant. She concludes that this allows the spectator to enter into a dialogue with what they are seeing.

Bachelard's study *The Poetics of Space* (1958) deals with the phenomenology of imagination. He uses the components of a house, from its cellar to attic, the nooks, corners, fireplace, chests etc. to meticulously explain how each of these motifs has a different meaning etched upon our psyche. This is a philosopher's study, yet it concerns the discipline of scenography because the most primitive metaphors of shelter, curiosity, order, chaos, secrecy and intimacy are understood. For instance, he explains: a door knob and a key are both used to open and close doors, yet in our subconscious, we associate a key with the act of locking while a doorknob with the act of opening.

In scenographic practices, one such enlightening example is the work of Kantor. In his production of *Wielopole/ Wielopole* (1980), he uses doors to challenge perception. The metaphorical role of a door is usually understood as a precious symbol of memory and guarding the entrance to the past. More importantly, Kantor uses them in a way to make the audience interested and curious in what is happening behind the door rather than what is happening in front of it (Figure 25). One cannot see what's behind, only sense a presence. Appia used steps and stairs for what they did for stage action along with the emotional qualities. He noted that a misuse of the staircase leads to non-expressive results such as: one

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[iii] While Kantor is often studied for his unique rendition of brutality, dehumanizing the living and humanizing mannequins thus blurring the lines between the living and dead, and his expressive staging with 'poor' objects- the 'lowest rank of reality', I am shifting my study of him to understand his perception of space, architectural metaphors and the unique way in which he uses mannequins as materials- discussed further on page 59-60.

[iv] The author cites examples of Canadian scenographers Michael Levine and Ken MacDonald.
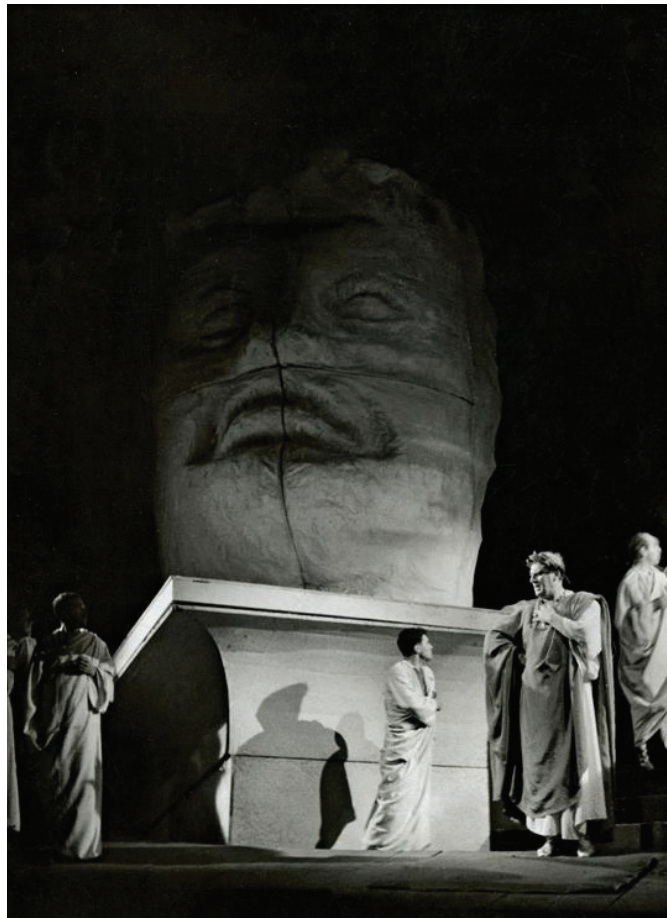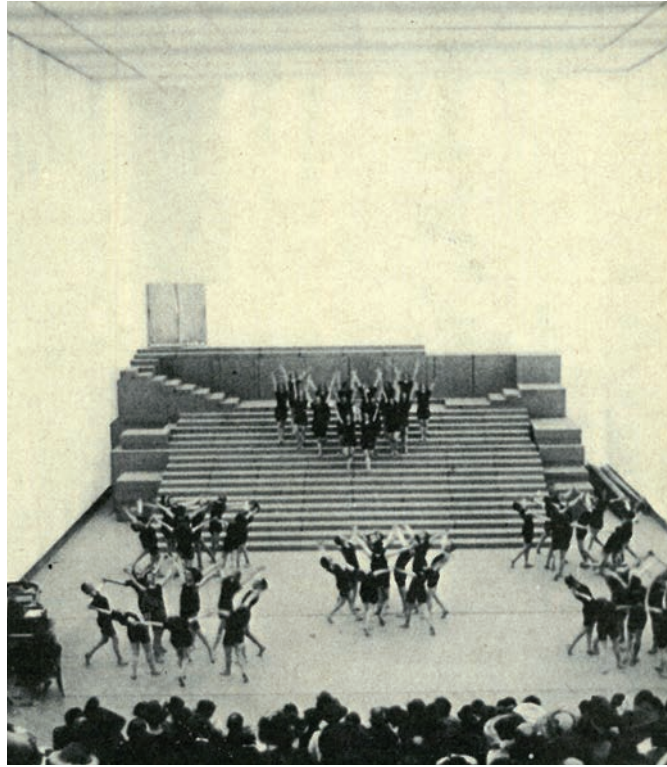
Figure 23: Principles of architecture used in shaping perception. Top: Appia's steps establish the solid mass and volume of the surface supporting the actor. Performance in Jaques Dalcroze Institute, Hellerau (1912). Bottom: Scenography for Tröster's *Julius Caesar,* directed by Jiří Frejka at National Theatre, Prague (1936).
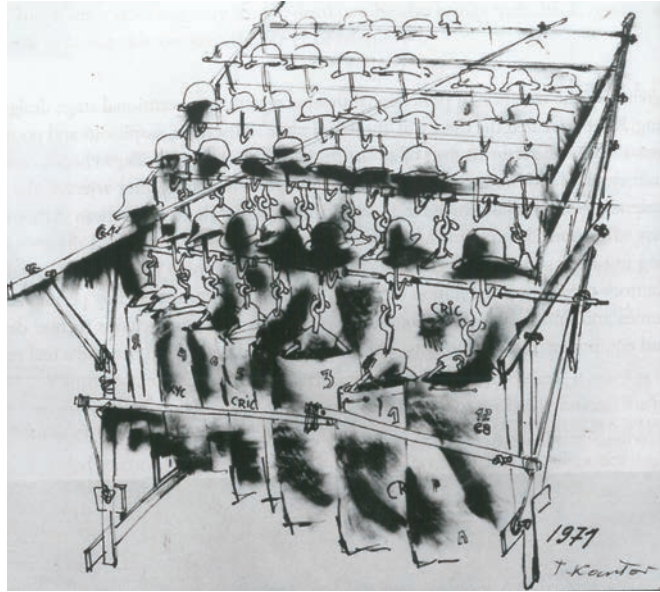
Figure 24: Kantor's investigation of inferior, neglected spaces such as this drawing titled *Cloakroom* (1971) for the production of *Lovelies and Dowdies*, Cricot 2 Theatre, 1973.

Figure 25: Kantor's use of doors to make the audience curious about what is behind rather than in front. An exhibit (above) and a scene (below) of *Wielopole/ Wielopole* (1980).

Figure 26: Space titled "*Privat*" at the exhibition *Jízdárna (Riding School)* (2017) by František Skála.

Figure 27: Sensoriality in Skala's play with materials at the exhibition *Jízdárna (Riding School)* (2017).

Figure 29: Skála - *Yellow Tower* (2005)

Figure 28: Skála's use of plastic material for its properties (above: *Inquisition* 2012) and detail versus whole (below: *House-Church* 2011).

cannot stage a Roman orgy on a staircase since it is "a place poorly adapted for sensual pleasure!"[18].

b) ALTERING PERCEPTION BY:

i) THE ROLE OF LIGHT AND SOUND

As an audience, sound and light become the scenographic mediums that animate and guide us through the space. The "visual and auditory senses are manipulated to focus on objects, real or constructed, that carry a metaphorical significance in the space beyond their reality"[19].

Bachelard states that silence suggests a sense of unlimited space. Sound imparts "colour to space, but absence of sound leaves it quite pure…"[20]. He notes that through silence, we perceive vastness, depth and infinity in space.

Light is one of the most fluid elements of scenography as it incorporates a sense of time. Light can be understood as the component that allows the eye to wander or follow; it lets the eye move within the stage space. Whether scenography is stationary or mobile, space is "nonetheless perceptually modulated via the impact of light upon its surfaces"[21]. Due to its potential to incorporate time, light can be used to communicate movement and create real corridors of space. It therefore becomes the strongest tool of exploiting the spatio-temporal continuum and thus indispensable to the mise en scene.

Appia proficiently explained that light is the soul of mise en scene, and he articulated that the stage space required two types of lighting. Firstly, a diffused light to provide general illumination, without suggestive nuance and devoid of feeling. Secondly, a "formative" lighting which ought to be intense and diverse. It needs to be understood like a sculptor that can build up or subtract, give mass or dematerialize objects or actors and allow the scenic space to expand or contract.

ii) CHALLENGING PERSPECTIVE AS A STATIC

So far in the history of theatre scholarship, the spectator has mostly been assumed as a static entity. Her relationship to the created space is defined predominantly by the visual: she *sees*

the stage, that the scenographer has visualized as a two-point perspective. Natalie Rewa argues that when we depart from pictorial representation of place and play with the focal distance and spatial arrangement of objects on stage, we can manipulate perception.

For instance, Tröster changed the spectator's viewing perspective in *Julius Caesar* (1936). He created a dynamic, low angle viewing i.e., the floor of the stage on which the monumental objects rested was raised and inclined such that the spectator was undermined and had to look up, which assaulted her senses.

In an exhibition at the Cricoteka, Krakow, I saw *The Classroom* that Kantor created for *The Dead Class* (1985). He manipulated the metaphor of windows: one could only peep through them and thus created a new viewing relationship of the spectator and scenography. He created this as a closed work in the conceptual and metaphysical sense: by the act of closing and hiding it, it could be viewed in a way that is against the decorum of a museum. Replete as a classroom with the deadly faced mannequins, at its heart was the action of peeping into other people's lives- quietly, stealthily and somehow dishonestly.

Another exhibition that has been influential in examining different viewing relationships between the artwork and the spectator was the exhibition *Jízdárna (Riding School)* (2017) by František Skála. He arranged the artworks into several distinctive pavilions in a "museum within museum" language creating individually unique spaces such as *Pavilion*, *Museum*, *Gallery*, *Privat* etc. This allowed for a play of various types and levels of dialogue between the spectator and object, creating a new perception of the space in its entirety and an extensive experience for visitors.

Of particular interest was the section "Privat" (Figure 26) which allows a glimpse into the private life of an unknown, fantasy creature. The artist explains this viewing relationship as similar to visiting someone at their house and not finding them there: one begins to understand or form an impression of what the inhabitant is like by the appearance of the place. In the exhibition, the visitor has to be respectful in this section and cannot make noise because the space indicates that the creature might be asleep. One is prying into someone's bedroom; the spectator's space is limited. Combined with the materials that constituted this segment, this piece was influential in examining viewing relationships and questioning how the meaning of a material changes when we are forced to view it differently.

iii)   APPARENT VISUAL TEXTURE

Phenomenology, as discussed earlier, relates to the cognitive and sensory-emotional components of human experience. As per Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology of perception was rooted in the concept that all vision takes place somewhere inside the tactile space. If this statement is assessed under the purview of theatre practices, where scenography tends to be "principally visual", it would imply that all that we see on the stage is taking place "inside the tactile space", and despite the texture being haptic-inaccessible, we perceive it nevertheless. This is further corroborated by Vostrý, whose study deals extensively with an "internally tactile perception"[v] in theatre. To see this from a scenographic perspective would mean that we (the spectator) subconsciously or unconsciously associate a feeling of touch with any surface we see on stage. While real texture is tactile, visual texture is always apparent.

In the previous chapter, the "scratchy" and apparent tactile quality of Alen Diviš's illustrations was commented upon[vi]. Vostrý argues that the spectator's perception must go beyond the merely visual, but the visual must stimulate an overall experience. Within this framework, the internally tactile perception plays a fundamental role. Hence it can be extended that the practice of the scenographer should take into account the visual competency of the material they present on stage and employ the material's attributes to stimulate the (dormant) senses beyond the visual. Pallasmaa clarifies it further stating that the sense of touch is the unconscious of the vision. The unconscious tactile sensation determines whether the forthcoming experience is pleasant or not. For instance, we feel repulsed by anything we classify as "icky" even before (or never) touching it, and if we were to embody this repulsion on stage, we might get nearer to stimulating an overall experience. This illustrates the deep interconnections between our emotional and sensorial capacities in the experience of a phenomena.

This is incorporated in many works, albeit differently. When theatre is regarded as an illusion, it warrants that scenography should create magic, enchant and transform. At a meditative level, the purpose of scenic effects is, as Howard says, "to ravish the eye and soothe the spirit"[22]. Traditionally, the most common way that the apparent visual tactility affects the audience is by the scenographer setting a mood or tone. Craig puts forward a case

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[v] He links it to the actor's movement and the spectator's kinaesthetic. However, that aspect is beyond the scope of my study

[vi] Refer to page 38.

for understanding the scenic space: he asks the reader (and scenographer) to see how the play look, first of all to the mind's eye. The question leads back to the root idea that imagination, vision and perception is rooted in tactile space. Through Craig's exercise, the internally tactile perception can be understood as an important tool and advantage to the scenographer.

Craig explains, in context with *Macbeth* (1908) that principles of simplicity, unity and proportion can bring out the emotional essence of the play. He asks the reader to assess the colours that the playwright has indicated, and not refer to the colours of nature. In this case, he analyses that Shakespeare has noted two colours "one for the rock, the man; and one for the mist, the spirit"[23]. He explains that the scenographer should use only these two colours throughout the process of designing the scenes and costumes, but not forget that each colour[vii] contains several variations. Stephen di Benedetto comments on Robert Wilson's scenography that when all stage objects – actor (through costume and hair), furniture, backdrop, scenography are cohesive and homogenous, they produce the visual texture.

Playwrights, such as Chekhov alludes to the atmospheres he imagines in his dramas[viii]. For instance, stage notes for Act I of *The Cherry Orchard* states the following:

> A room which is still called the nursery. One of the doors leads into ANYA'S room. It is close on sunrise. It is May. The cherry-trees are in bloom but it is chilly in the garden. There is an early frost. The windows of the room are shut [24].

More than the physical manifestation of the space, the directions are diurnal and seasonal associations- near to sunrise, summer, chill and frost. The windows are shut and hence the cherry trees can't be seen. There is an idea of a relationship between the indoor and the outdoor and in fact, it is the invisible outdoor condition that establishes the indoor environment, giving clues for the kind of light, colour and texture that can be associated with such a description. The "nursery" emotively it simply refers to a setting where the characters felt happy when they were younger, and have fond memories of this space.

These exercise help in determining the mood or visual tactility of the space, which precedes the creation of tangible space. The idea itself can be considered as other perspectives to

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[vii] Colours transmit perceived tactility, as has been established by many studies including Švankmajer's surrealist experiments.

[viii] Chekhov's drama has traditionally been associated with realistic and cluttered settings, encasing productions in a detailed, representative physical world which is ornately detailed with the architectural style and furniture pieces of 20th century Russia.

enlighten the scenographer on Bachelard's monumental conclusion: the ultimate task of the phenomenology of imagination is "to capture images at their *inception*"[25].

4.4: SOME IDEAS ON WORKING WITH MATERIALITY:

The language of materials – their inherent meaning, sensoriality and the expressivity, are of great emphasis to this project. Bachelard notes that "everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate"[26], and I believe this can be extended to a play of materials in creating theatre. While visual tactility has been discussed in the previous section, this part focuses on the perception of material through direct contact, mainly by their tactile qualities.

Before getting into the dynamics of materials, I would like to discuss shortly the phenomenon of Kantor's imagination where he worked with humans and mannequins, treating both sets of bodies like materials. He animates mannequins on stage to get a life of their own. He blurs the line between the living and dead on stage and creates powerful contradictions by combining the animate and the inanimate.

At Kantor's exhibition, I saw and touched the props and stage objects of his various productions with Cricot 2 Theatre. These provocative objects make a lasting impression, both visual and tactile. The mannequins are powerful theatre objects, and display the greatest extent of contrast in theatre. The sense of death is inherent in a mannequin but it also makes it possible to transcend death. Isabel Tejeda notes that life can only be expressed by the lack thereof, by emptiness, by a dummy. In his ideology, reflected immensely in *The Dead Class*, the life and signs of the mannequins rather than the text constituted the substance of the performance (Figure 30). For a spectator (of his theatre and his exhibition) the inanimate objects in inanimate situations evokes vivid anxiety and emotions. The mannequin is mysterious as it can come to life suddenly, such as when it is carelessly thrown on the floor. It is unpredictable how it's expression will transform with any action is made upon it. It emits an energy that makes us confront memories directly.

Scenographic pedagogy at DAMU is derived from Tröster's action scenography, which also put emphasis on the authenticity and truth of materials- both natural and artificial[27]. One such resonating work is of Jaroslav Malina, who worked extensively with drapery and textile as a stage material and it became the essence of his stage language. Across his years of work, the properties of fabric indicate different metaphors. With fabric he discovered the landscape

of dreams as a counter-balance to everyday reality[28], or used it to make a statement about the absence of limits[29]. He uses colours and textures on the drapery to communicate grotesque, brutality on one hand and softness, intimacy on the other. He mastered a superimposition of contrasting beauty and ugliness, presenting a "purity of style in conflict with impurity of detail"[30]. He further used it to play with acoustics – transcending the material's sensorial attributes. In order to create contradictions, he worked with the contrast of natural and artificial such as combining draperies with real trees, dry leaves, sand etc. His metaphorical solutions leave room for imagination, a property I wish to explore through materiality.

Jan Švankmajer's writings on tactility opened, for me, a new dialogue with the authenticity of material in artistic practices. The writings allow the reader to imagine ways in which material can be used to provoke. He is inspiring because he departs from formal, aesthetic and decorative ornamentation and focuses on materials expressing impressions. He believes that they play out a drama that should be revealed through them.

The body of his work focuses on tactile perception and tactile memory. He discards traditional concepts of beauty and states that tactile art allows to reach one of the origins of creativity as a way of expressing "what we are"[31]. The surrealist collective of Švankmajer and his fellow artists have elaborated on ways of understanding, developing, classifying and distinctively describing the tactile senses (Figure 31). On architecture's relationship with tactility in *The Eyes of the Skin*, Juhani Pallasmaa regards touch as an integrating sense that fuses various sense impressions into a coherent one. Similar to Švankmajer, an important part of the design process for Pallasmaa is to be concerned with how 'the designed thing feels to the hand, concretely or imaginatively[32]'. These ideas, along with Švankmajer's tactile collages have served as extensive inspirations in this project. Based on Brook's distinction that the scenographer's work involves the 4th dimension i.e., time[ix], I believe that tactility is a direct component of that dimension: since 'touch' becomes an action in time.

František Skála's creations are based on "formal analogy or material polysemy"[33] . He displays a boldness in combining different kinds of materials, and developing on their formal properties ranging from wood, plastics, naturally found elements, objects etc. He experiments with contemporary materials and tests unusual ways of presenting his work, such as a high-stationed sculpture flying with a sheet of thin plastic foil, together made to

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[ix] Refer to page 4.

rotate using the ballast of a large industrial fan (Figure 27). This leads a humorous, playful quality and child-like curiosity to his collections which have been termed as curiosity cabinets of a satirical nature. Most notable towards this is the animal with the unicorn horn, which has been replicated in various scales and positioned in many obvious and negative spaces of the exhibition area.

His work with plastics is particularly inspiring because it allows an appreciation of grotesque narratives. The objects such as *Dome* (2008) and similar type objects made out of translucent polycarbonate convey a meaning of luminance and light through an ordinary material. The physical joinery of one surface to the other creates an interesting contrast of detail and whole, where the detail is in focus and the whole is obscure (Figure 28). The object *House-Church* (2011) combines the above mentioned properties and also conveys a frozen sense of time. The object *Yellow Tower* (2005) (Figure 29) displayed the combination of various materials of a particular type to form an artistic whole, which served as a direct inspiration for the pedestals in my scenography for *A Bouquet*[x].

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[x] Discussed in Chapter 5.2: Specifics of Scenographic Environments – *A Bouquet*.

Figure 30: Above- an exhibit (1975) and, Below- a scene from Kantor's *The Dead Class* (1985).

Figure 31: Švankmajer's tactile objects. Above -tactile props from the film
Conspirators of Pleasure (1996) and Below- *New Eroticism* (1990).
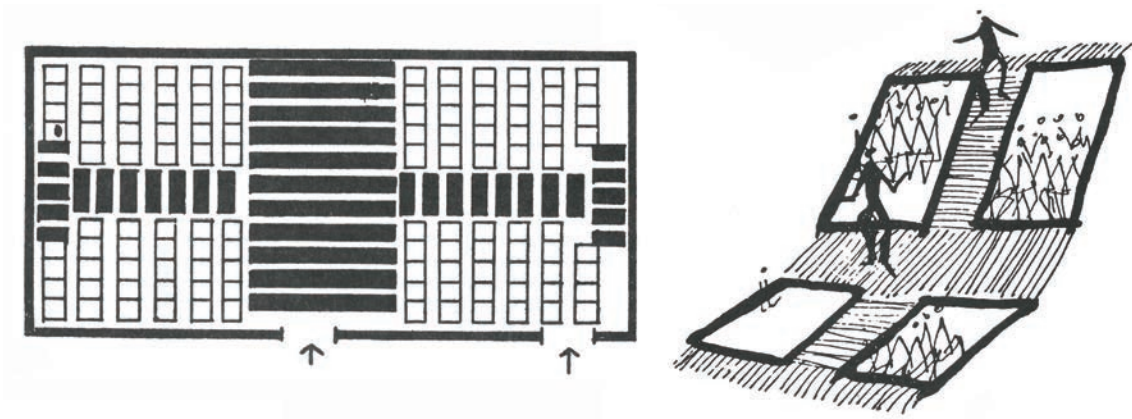
Figure 32: Usage of space in *Shakuntala* by Theatre Laboratory. White areas denote spectators and black areas donate actor's playing spaces.
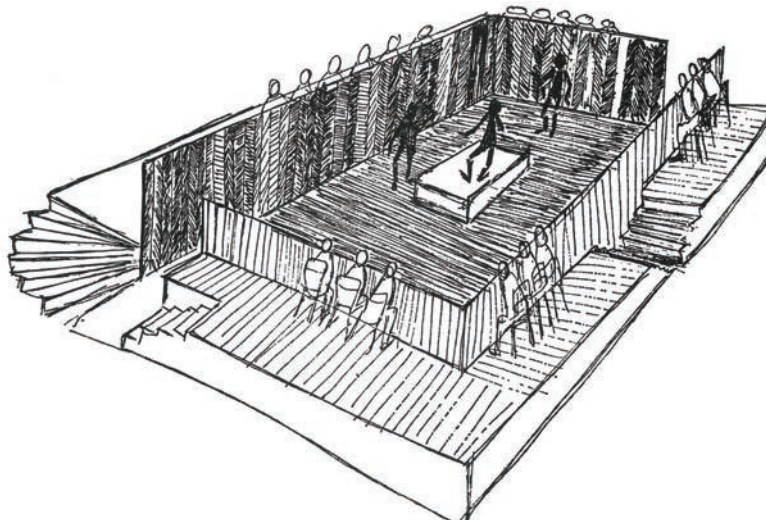
Figure 33: The spectators are positioned to look down and view the scenic action as if it were a forbidden act, such as an arena in *The Constant Prince* by Theatre Laboratory.
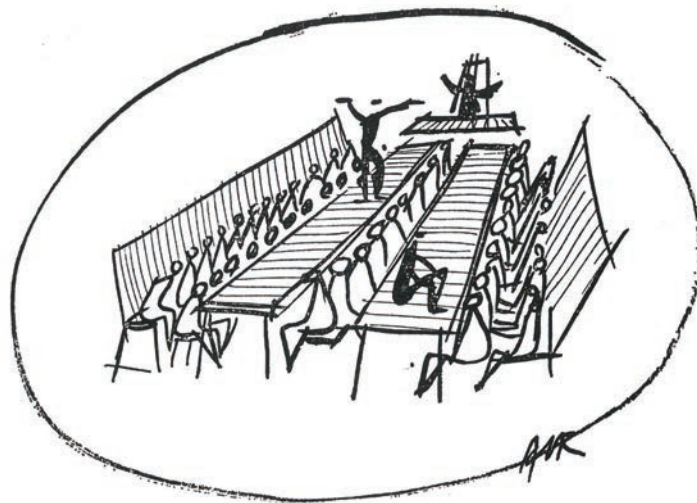
Figure 34: Spectators sit around on large dining tables in *Dr. Faustus* by Theatre Laboratory.
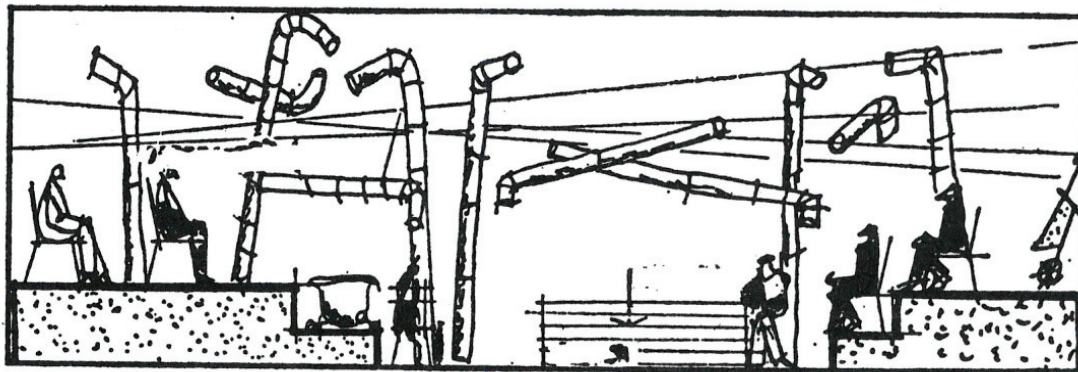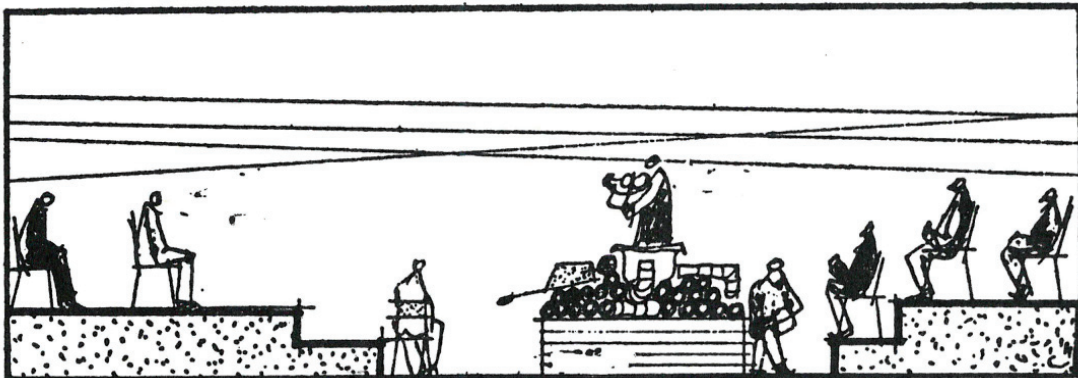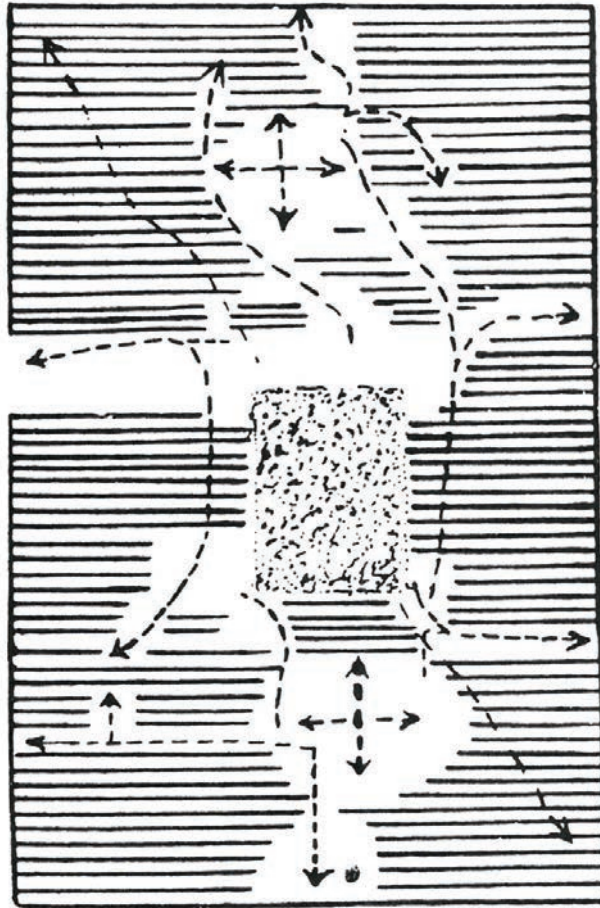
Figure 35: Arrows and white spaces donate the actor's movement areas and the black lines are the audience area (Top). The room at the beginning (Middle) and at the end (Bottom) of the performance *Akropolis* by Theatre Laboratory.

4.5: PHYSICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE SPECTATOR

Current practices in contemporary art and theatre are concerned with the spatial positioning of audience, author and artwork to pave the way for the creation of contemplative space. In certain ways, I find the processes of Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski and his architect Jerzy Gurawski insightful in understanding various actor spectator relationships.

Kantor's work with *Happening Theatre* was concerned with the audience being an active participant in the performance. In his *Impossible Theatre* he strived to create an experience, for the spectator, where it would be challenging to cope with the increment of many elements appearing simultaneously, and making it deliberately impossible to decipher the meaning of the whole performance. This specific way allows the spectator to be totally consumed through his audio-visual capacities. I envisage a method where the latter could be combined with Švankmajer's tactile experiments to bring the spectator to invest his olfactory and tactile capacities as well, and the performance discussed later is a small attempt towards that.

In Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre, I find the work of the architect Jerzy Gurawski very enlightening. While Grotowski is best known for his poor theatre, differentiated from the "rich" theatre by the absence of light, costume, text and scenography and developed by the sole presence of the actor and spectator, he revers the latter relationship with respect to space. Their collaborative work is significant in this discussion, because for each production in this company, a new space was designed to foster the relationship of actor and spectator, which moved away from a stage-auditorium plant. Grotowski says that for him the stage-auditorium dichotomy is eliminated so that the unique relationship in each type of performance can be fostered by the physical arrangement of the space. Thus, he ties space to the dramatic action in an allusive way without the presence of any scenographic metaphors.

The Laboratory Theatre proved that infinite variations of these relationships are possible. The actor could play among the audience, directly contacting them and giving them a passive role in the drama, such as in *Kalidas's Shakuntala* (Figure 32) The actors built structures among the spectators in *Wspianski's Akropolis* subjecting them to sense pressure, congestion and limitation of space. The spectators were separated from the actor by a high fence over which only their heads protrude in *The Constant Prince* (Figure 33). Here, an arena-like relationship was created, with the spectators "watching down" on the actors like animals in a ring. In *Faustus* (Figure 34), the entire hall of a convent was made as a baroque dining

room with huge tables. In *Akropolis* (Figure 35) the actors played with props of 'rust and metal' such as stovepipes of various lengths, nails, wheel barrow, bathtub, hammers etc. piled in the middle of the room. In the course of the performance, they built an absurd civilization-a metaphor to gas chambers. There was no direct contact between the spectator and actor even though they shared the same physical space. The actors represented the dead people, and the audience, the living. Their proximity created the impression that dead are born from a dream of the living.

Richard Schechner expresses that when the spectator and actor share the same space, it makes the experience dangerous as well as communal. It allows the spectator to move closer to something that calls them and move away from something that they find repulsive. Everyone shares in the event and it makes everyone responsible for the event, and he refers to the practice as the "architectural version of sunlight"[34].

4.6: SECTION CONCLUSION - ARTISTIC METHODOLOGY

With a phenomenological approach, the task of imagination while reading *Kytice* for the first time, became to capture the images (formed) at their inception. For me, this was the morbid appeal and brutality of the ballads. As a reader, I was impressed by the ideas of 'death in plain sight' in folktales that reoccurs throughout the collection, since death, brutality and gloom are motifs that are not usually found in Indian folklore[xi] – which are lessons on judgement about right and wrong. *Kytice* on the other hand, calls for judgement very rarely (eg: *The Treasure*) but rather allows the reader to have an opinion and perspective.

The works discussed in Sections: 'Challenging Perspective as a Static' and 'Physical Engagement of the Spectator' made a strong impression to challenge the assumption of the spectator as a static. This was coupled with the fact that more than an acting-oriented performance, I envisioned presenting *Kytice* as a storytelling performance where these terrifying tales could be narrated and be heard. Narration and storytelling from my cultural perspective conjures in the imagination the idea of how in India (and perhaps globally too), oral storytelling evokes ancient rituals of congregation, such as huddling up around a fire or sitting under the shade of an old tree. The imaginative power of these images is such that via

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[xi] A comparative of Indian folklore with Kytice has been discussed in Chapter 2.5.

the inspiration of phenomenology in this project, it led to articulating the question, *how can the experience of the space contribute to the act of listening to stories?*

The image of a storyteller and listeners under a tree or around a fire also demand a certain proximity and intimacy between the storyteller and the audience, which led to the idea that the performance can be conceived as an experiential walk in a given space. It later evolved to the idea of a promenade or immersive performance. Since oral storytelling, by virtue, engages the auditory, I wanted to formulate the space to focus on the other sensory dimensions, primarily the visual and the tactile.

I have not explored themes of death or emotional anguish in my works before- and *Kytice* offered an interesting challenge to pursue that exploration. The illustrations of Alén Diviš and Jan Konůpek provided a resonance and reference on this idea by their virtue as "instantaneous, sensorially perceived form…"[35]. The morbidity of the text flows into their illustrative styles. However, since my medium of expression is space- it required me to understand the feeling(s) that were embodied and channel those to create the sensorial experiences that I desired. The works of Jan Zrzavý were critical to understanding the direction I did *not* want to take, in terms of a style that would be soothing the way fairytales are supposed to be.

Another thing to be noted, while talking of a performance of Kytice is the sense of time in the text - the situations take place in the present. This facet is unique because folktales are ordinarily not written in the present (or historic-present) tense[xii], the usual cliché being "once upon a time…". The sense of "now" combined with the idea of death is how Erben provokes[xiii] and it makes these ballads so shocking for the reader. Erben writes the ballads as dramas. Thus the text already has the ephemeral quality of theatre that "what one sees is happening for the first, last and only time as far as the audience is concerned"[36]. With this particular trait, Erben can almost be compared with Shakespeare due to the similarities of directness and immediacy with the reader.

[xii] The historic-present tense is usually observed in dramas in the English language, whereas in the Czech language this tense is often used for prose and poetry as well.

[xiii] This can be linked directly to the ideas discussed previously in Chapter 2.4.: Themes of Oppression and Revival. At the time of Kytice's publication in Bohemia, most written works especially poetry were in the German language. Erben, by using this confrontational style in writing and the structure of tenses naturally found in Czech language is also provoking the (then) reader to wake up, rise and stop with the Germanization.

These ideas resulted in make "death in plain sight" as the focus of the idea. I was drawn to exploring that in terms of materiality, and what it would take to devise provocative and experiential scenographic strategies through material sensoriality[xiv]. This led me to plastics – the most commonplace material of this millennium which metaphorically speaks volumes about the notion of death in plain sight. This is attributed to the fact that globally in the last decade, a rising consciousness is relating plastic consumption and its presence in our lifestyles with mankind's abuse of the planet; our consumerism is leading towards an impending, uncertain future.

This consciousness makes plastic highly interesting in a discourse on metaphors when one thinks of the poetic value that is associated with plastic as a set of materials- the answer being none. I wished to offset the eloquent poetic word with the sensoriality of a material that is regarded as highly unpoetic. While talking of new age materials (like plastic), Pallasmaa says that they "tend to present their unyielding surfaces to the eye without conveying their material essence or age"[37]. The material is created to reflect an ageless perfection; they do not incorporate the dimension of time or processes of aging. This property of the material- to be lacking in time, combined with Erben's dramatic tense of present also appropriated the play of contrast, which is the root of Kantor's work and inspiration for me; and thereby coming closer to Bachelard's philosophy: to allow contrasts to accumulate for the imagination to thrive.

The enveloping scenographic concept became a quest to search for poetry in plastics, befitting the idea that the poetry in consideration pertained to death and gloom in human life. I would like to clarify that when I am speaking of their poetic values, I am not talking about utilitarian objects manufactured out of plastic, such as containers and garbage bags; but in fact of the constituent material that has shaped and molded that object. As such, I am not looking at the impact that, for instance, a hundred plastic jars will create, but the material attributes of that particular grade of plastic- its translucency, opacity and what are the possibilities of using that material in targeted ways if one were to procure a significant quantity of the base material in its raw, unutilized form. This clarity came about through witnessing Skála's sculptures with plastic and the knowledge of Švankmajer's experiments. The latter's work breaks from usual stereotypes of tactile and non-tactile sensory

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[xiv] While Kantor's work offered a lot of inspiration on the subject, exploring marionettes was not viable as it would lead to an illustrative output.

experiences, "to divorce them from utilitarianism and to stimulate the imagination"[38]. As the reader will come across further[xv], my artistic process gives importance to the raw material (and how it allows itself to be manipulated), and not to existing objects found in that material.

Motifs and themes in Kytice are based on the specific sequencing and arrangement of the ballads by Erben[xvi]. With the common motifs in these groupings, it became a reasonable choice to extend this system to the material oriented scenography. Hence, I established a parameter that as a starting point of the thought process, the central theme (of each group) would be visually corroborated by the same or similar plastic material to develop the metaphors.

Central to the project and performance was the process of learning and creating abstract solutions, spatially and materially for the experience of listening to the stories. I am concerned with the creation of metaphors, where the poetic word has to be detached from becoming illustrative. *The purpose of this study, to explore metaphors through space and materials, is to facilitate imagination using interesting and unique comparisons to craft descriptions, imagery and emphasize shifts*. The artistic imagination was deliberately kept away from objects and props mentioned in the text. Given the brutal and sinister nature of the poetry, the objective of this parameter was also to not fall in the trap of creating spaces like haunted houses that would shock the audience for the sake of shocking, or because the text is shocking. Rather, the task was to convey the inner feelings of the poetry and all scenographic choices and actions to be 'outside' the poetic word but in touch with the feeling of it. This allows an honest creation of space and not "place"- which would be illustrative. Space on the other hand, becomes interactive with the imagination of the spectator. The spectator can engage "in an experiential ordering of the elements and choreography, beyond mere identification"[39].

This parameter and the ensuing method delved directly into a meandering, non-linear approach that was conducive to the abstract output that was being sought. Combining the quest for abstractedness in space and a metaphorical approach to playing and experimenting with materials, I believed that it would allow for creating something disturbing for the audience, and to shock them by the sensorial feeling of the metaphors – the visuality and the

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[xv] In Chapter 5.2 and 5.3

[xvi] Discussed in Chapter 2.4, refer to page 17

tactility. The role of scenography thus evolves from no longer being a two-dimensional landscape captured in a frame; rather the scenography itself "performs"[xvii].

Generally, my method becomes to take the following approach for each ballad (or group): It starts with deconstruction of the atmosphere-feeling or idea[xviii] that is rooted in the poem. I try to see how that singular idea can be expressed spatially or through material. I assess the tactile and the apparent visual tactility of the material, and the kind of relationship it should have with the spectator to be provocative. When need be, the space and material should work together to be evocative, enticing or alienating[xix].

Addressing the two ends of the phenomenological spectrum- the cognitive: there is a conceptual meaning to the (created) metaphors and the emotional: the spectator is made aware of, and acknowledges the bodily senses. Together, this allows a free development of the spectator's imagination, based on the hearing of the narration and their observation of the space.

[xvii] An instance of scenography itself performing is discussed in Chapter 5.2: Specifics of Scenographic Environments – *Water Sprite*.

[xviii] It has to be clarified that these pertain to sensorial atmospheres such as "the feeling of isolation" and not human feelings such as "the love between a mother and child" which would be impossible to communicate through space and material.

[xix] Brecht introduced the idea of *alienation*. Brook describes the philosophy as alienation has to cut, interrupt or make us (the spectator) look again. If alienated, the spectator is required to work for herself, to accept what she sees if it is convincing to her as an adult, not have a romanticized child-like notion of things. Brook elaborates on ways the directing and acting can alienate the audience- by a range of rhetoric such as antithesis, parody, imitation, criticism etc. I extend this idea to space and materials: the spectator should be able to realize it is alien.

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Figure 36: Poster for the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).

I - cafe
II - main hall
III - stage
IV - cellar
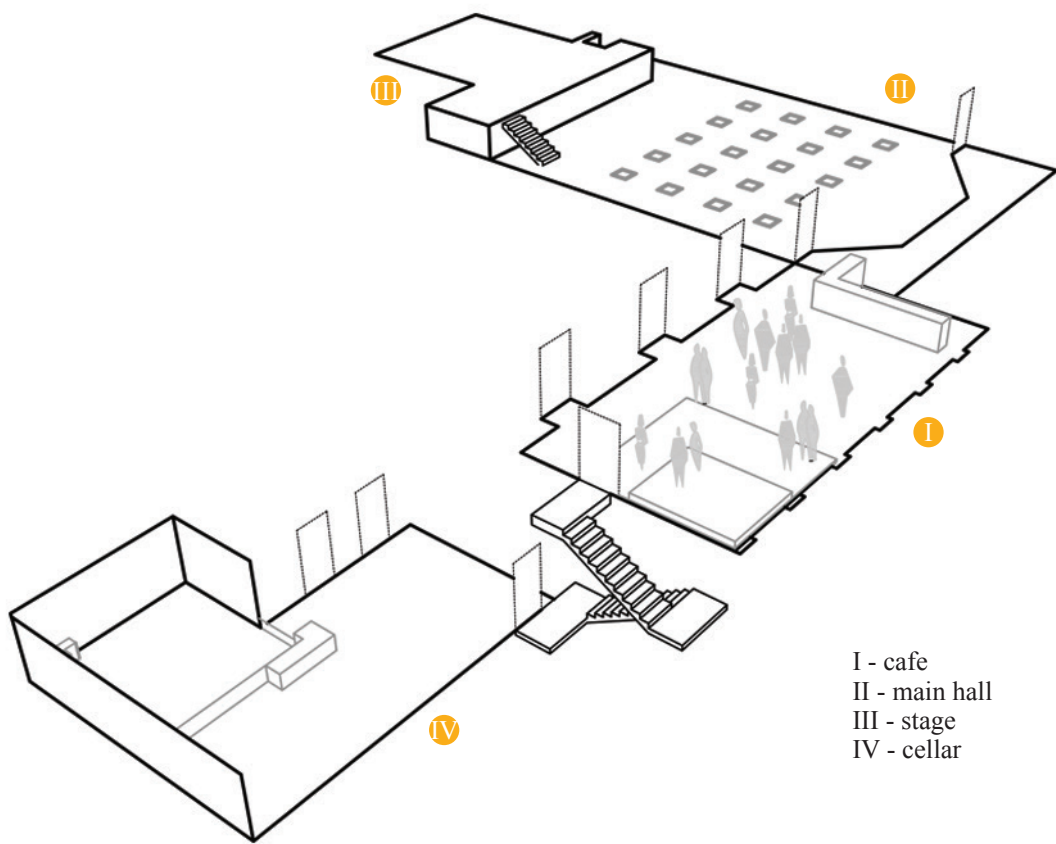
Figure 37: Spaces in Strašnické Divadlo used for the 'walking theatre' performance.

CHAPTER 5: ARTISTIC PROCESS AND OUTPUT

5.1: OVERVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS.*

I wished to design the project as an experiential walk in a given space, with a focus on creating environments for each story such that the experience of the space would enrich the act of storytelling. Factors such as the intimacy between storyteller and listener, tactility and interaction with physical material etc. swiftly allowed the project to take shape as an immersive storytelling performance. The project was pitched to the Norwegian Arts Council and received financial support as a pre-project grant. The grant allowed to create a work-in-progress show in Prague, which was presented to an audience in April 2018. The performance was titled *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS.*

With the grant support, certain parameters became fixed for the performance. We had requested the support with a considerable emphasis on the budget for scenography and venue renting, which made it possible to test the artistic ideas that were central to the performance. We chose Strašnické Divadlo, a theatre in the Prague 10 neighbourhood to create the show. This venue was attractive due to the fact that within the building there were four distinct, usable spaces which gave ample opportunities to imagine various scenarios about the walking theatre and create the experientiality for each story.

If this performance was to be done in any other large, open-plan space, for instance industrial halls or factory floor spaces, it would require strategies to create pockets or sub-spaces for each environment. However, in a space like Strašnické Divadlo this issue was preaddressed by the nature of the building – here, the space was divided into distinct units for various functions (Figure 37). The four spaces were 1) the bar and café 2) the main hall, which is a flexible black-box like space and usually used for audience seating 3) an elevated stage area situated on one end of the main hall and 4) a cellar below the café usually used for rehearsals and a weekly theatre school for children.

In terms of the artistic process it is important to point out that this performance (and future ones) are understood as site-adaptive and not site-specific. Marvin Carlson argues, a production is site-specific only when the space is determined before the creation of the performance and when it is "conceived specifically for the space in which it is produced"[1] –

a condition that was not prioritized in the development of this project. This means that the scenographic environment for each story was conceived prior to the selection of the venue; rather the criteria for shortlisting the venue(s) was whether the respective space was viable for setting up the scenography, based on:

- Movement trajectory of the audience within each environment and from one space to another.

- Ideal relationship (in each environment) envisaged between the scenographic elements, the audience and the narrators.

- How the audience would perceive each space– where will the focus be, and what kind of actions did we assume them to take.

- What were the practical challenges of setting up each particular scenographic situation and the space's adaptability in resolving that?

In the successive chapters, I will address these questions while discussing the specifics of each environment-story-metaphor that were created in the spaces of Strašnické Divadlo.

The first consideration for selecting the particular stories we wished to develop for this performance was based on the themes and motifs of the ballads. The mirroring of themes and the subsequent pairs was the starting point of the material led scenographic process. Of these, we selected the ones that explored mother-child relationships as a working framework for the performance and provide the dramaturgical framework. Out of the 13 ballads these were the pair of *The Treasure* and *A Daughter's Curse*, *Noon Witch* and *Water Sprite*; *A Bouquet*, *Willow* and *The Golden Spinning Wheel* also explore this theme individually but not through their pair set.

The budget allocated to scenography became the other determining factor in the selection and elimination process. We shortlisted *A Bouquet*, *The Treasure*, *A Daughter's Curse*, *Water Sprite* and *Noon Witch* as five stories that could be created in the four spaces of Strašnické Divadlo; upon further evolution it was realized that the desired scenography for *Noon Witch* was not possible in the available finances, and thus four stories in the four spaces were finalized for this show.

Intimacy between the spectators and storytellers was another consideration from the inception of this project. In this kind of immersive theatre, we understood the narrator to take the role of a guide, leading the spectators into various abstract installations, where the material and/ or space would be metaphorical to a core feeling that would start making sense

at an emotive level while the story was being narrated. To foster this relationship, the number of audience was limited to 20 people in each performance, where we would present a work-in-progress show and understand the limitations of the ideas. Audience participation and co-operation was integral to the work showcased. As such, it was important to be able to anticipate and predict to a certain degree what the audience would be inclined to do and react in this guided walking theatre approach; based on which we needed to outline strategies to skilfully manoeuvre them during the course of the show. It was therefore decided to keep the audience age at 15 years and above, since we wanted to first test the ideas on an adult audience and focus on their engagement. Besides, inviting a younger audience would require an altogether different modelling of the show on many levels such as the role of tactility, attentiveness and participation etc., the scope of which can form the basis of another experiment I would be willing to try in the future.

A fascinating aspect of working with *Kytice* was the potential to explore cross-cultural motifs, similarities in cultures and interpretations of legends and folk tales. While some of these have been discussed (in Chapter 2.5) I have also tried to incorporate some through a visual understanding in creating the metaphors for some stories. In the following chapters, it will be specifically discussed with the artistic evolution of each particular ballad from the collection. In *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARWAY LANDS*, we attempted to explore this cultural hybridization in another manner- by using an oral storytelling tradition from India called *Dastangoi* to narrate the verses and stories of *Kytice*.

Dastangoi[i] is an oral tradition that travelled in the 15th Century from Persia to India. Historically, *dastangos* (storytellers) would be employed in the royal courts, and would travel in the kings' retinue. Or they would be nomads, stopping for the night at the *sarai* (inns or travelers' lodges) and entertain the guests with legends, usually of love, warfare and heroes from Islamic culture. As the stories were orally collected by travelers, they spread along with the Islamic civilizations, ranging from Bosnia, Georgia, Morocco to Indonesia.

The element of *Dastangoi* was befitting this project because firstly, both *Kytice* and *Dastangoi* are oral traditions based in local languages and secondly, they both have similar trajectories of fate and time. While the late 19th century National Revival came about to appropriate local languages against the dominance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; at the same time in India, the Revolt (National Uprising/ Mutiny) of 1857 led to a total domination

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[i] translation: dastan is a Persian word for stories and dastangoi means to narrate epics/ legends/ stories

of the country by the British Empire. Many local cultures were propagated as 'vulgar' and obscene, pushing traditional practices into oblivion. *Kytice* – a collection of oral folk tales and *Dastangoi* – a storytelling tradition have respectively survived this period as written literature while the oral forms died out.

In India, *Dastangoi* developed (between 15th and 18th century) in the Urdu language, which itself is a hybrid of Hindi and Persian. As a performing art it disappeared with the advent of the British rule, but based on certain written *dastans*[2] that were discovered towards the end of the 20th century, a revival of this tradition began with artists in New Delhi backed by American scholars. Much of this revived Indian style of *Dastangoi* (distinctly different from the Arabic style and the Persian style) is based on conjecture about how the performances would have developed in the Mughal courts in its formative years of patronage in India. It is a minimalistic storytelling form which uses only voice and gesticulation, with techniques of improvising and spontaneity. The number of performers is usually two, as it helps with alternating the rhythm and the energy. They are dressed in plain white *kurtas* and white pants; the stage is barely furnished- with just a mattress on the floor, covered in a white sheet on which the storytellers sit. Traditionally, the storytellers only sit, they never stand or walk around the stage (Figure 38). Two bolster cushions, again white, demarcate the edge of the performing area and also serve as hand rests or leaning objects for the performers. The whiteness of the stage and the costume is suggestive of the fact that it considers 'suggestive visuals' as distracting for the spectator. It is simply a story telling –listening performance and the *dastango* is supposed to create magic and images using only his words and hands; and use that to transport the audience.

If one engages with the phenomenology of the whiteness further deeply, it also renders the performance 'timeless' and the spatio-temporal continuum is frozen. It is frozen in the sense that firstly, there is no visual to indicate or represent any particular space or time- it is all established with the words of the storyteller (if they choose to establish it). As with legends, the narration usually begins with phrases like "once upon a time…". The white metaphorically acts as a blank canvas, that the imaginative spectator can fill and color as she desires. Secondly, the absence of distracting form and color provides a visual focus for the spectator to follow only the face and hands of the performer. It can be argued that the costume is culturally discernable, which is true, but that goes only so far as to establish a social or cultural context for the performer, and does not overshadow the narration.

While the traditional performance system has its merits, it falls in the conventional audience performer relationships in theatre. The central question for this project argues about the experience of space in listening to stories, and for that it was important to take *Dastangoi* out of its context, remove the fourth wall and challenge the storytelling form with rich, vibrant spatial experiences.

For this performance, we had two female storytellers, dressed in white as *dastangos*. In this case, the costume served a cultural hybridization. It rendered the storytellers 'exotic' yet neutral. The trajectory of the walking theatre experience in Strašnické Divadlo was as follows:

The show started in the café where a *Dastangoi* stage was set up – a white mattress on the floor and two white bolster cushions. After the 20 audience had been seated, the storytellers entered the room and introduced themselves and the performance, which became a prologue to the walking theatre (Figure 39).

After this, they escorted the audience from the café to the big hall, which was where *A Bouquet* was performed. Next they were led up to the stage which was the setting of *Water Sprite*. Then, they were taken back to the café, which had now been transformed from the prologue setting to the scenario for *A Daughter's Curse*. Lastly, they were escorted from the café down the staircase to the cellar which became the setting for *The Treasure*.

The performance ended in the cellar. In each space, plastic elements were explored in various ways to convey the inner feeling of the poetry through the scenographic environments.

<div align="center">*</div>

Chapter 5.2. elaborates on the scenography for these 4 ballads staged at Strašnické Divadlo; Chapter 5.3. elaborates on the conceptual ideas for the environments of the remaining ballads in the collection.

Figure 38: A *Dastangoi* performance in India.

Figure 39: Prologue in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018) set as a *Dastangoi* stage

Figure 40: Early conceptual sketch for *A Bouquet* (2017).

Figure 41:Scenographic environment for *A Bouquet* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).

5.2: SPECIFICS OF THE SCENOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENTS FOR BALLADS STAGED IN THE PERFORMANCE.

A BOUQUET

a) Evolution of the scenographic concept

The central idea for *A Bouquet* that I wanted to develop was to connect the space with burial- not only through death but also the sense of coming in touch with the depth of the earth. I wanted the audience to listen to this story in a space that was mystical, with a meditative or spiritual quality, a space where the sense of time fades away. While the textual setting is of a graveyard, the first idea was to create a crypt like space with roots of trees hanging from above. This would serve to change the relationship we assume with graveyards- that of standing on top of the earth, but bring the audience in contact with the earth from beneath and within.

Upon further deliberation, this idea seemed that the space could run into the risk of becoming monotonous. So it evolved into creating a metaphorical museum of layers of the earth, contained in plastic showcases or cuboids which would be layered on top of each other (Figure 40) to create vertical pedestals. The experience of this space would suggest a reading of the depth of the earth laid out as evidence in front of the spectator, with a frozen or preserved sense of time.   The plastic cuboids would be constructed out of a clear polycarbonate; its transparency would have an effect of the space and objects feeling ethereal and lightweight as the vertical pedestals would seem to be floating and not appear heavy.

For Erben, this ballad also serves as an introduction to the collection of Kytice,

> I plucked you from an ancient cairn-
> to whom should I carry you

and he uses the metaphor of a bouquet,

> tied with a decorative bow

to represent him collecting these stories and presenting it to his country.

To extend this thought in the space, the polycarbonate showcases could also have snippets of materials or elements from the various spaces where the other ballads will be narrated.

The idea of paying homage to the passing away of a loved one is the starting point of the oral narrative. I wanted to explore that through motifs from Indian rituals of death and

cremation from my own culture: Clay pots are used to collect ashes after cremation, the mouth of the pot is covered with a red (for its sacred significance) cotton fabric; later the ashes and the pots are immersed in holy rivers. They act as funeral urns, albeit temporarily. Water is an element that is linked, among other things, with soil (earth) and purging and I wanted to use the urns and water as elements in the scenography.

I imagined the space to be filled with many of these, tall and short, polycarbonate pedestals, having samples of earth and other scenographic materials. At the top, each of them would be capped with a clay pot, or a shallow water bowl made of the same clear polycarbonate. As a contrast, the clay would highlight the artificiality of the plastic, while the fluidity and movement of water would amplify the rigidity and brittleness of the polycarbonate. The layers of soil trapped in the polycarbonate sheets would suggest a clinical, investigative space and a fossilization of the life-giving-earth.

b) The scenographic space in the performance

These ideas evolved further while developing the performance. The pots in connection with the polycarbonate pedestals remained at the core, however the materiality of the plastic was reworked; taking on different meanings.

Each pedestal now comprised of the following system: at the base were layers of thick, white Styrofoam sheet. On top of this was a simple stool with four thin, metallic legs, white in colour. Centred between the legs of the stool was an empty clay pot, its mouth closed with a red cotton fabric. The top surface and texture of each stool was different. The original surface was covered in various artificial and plastic materials such as plastic grass, fake fur, sandpapers, Velcro etc. On top of the stool surface was an abstract replica of a Buddhist *stupa* made out of translucent polycarbonate. The *stupa* divided the horizontal circular surface of the stool in 4 quadrants – and in each of these were kept the following materials: soil, hay, sunflower seeds and seashells.

In the main hall at Strašnické Divadlo, we created 20 such pedestals (Figure 41) arranged in a strong geometric grid, with wide aisles being formed between each row in either direction. The aisle widths further enhanced the museum-like feeling, defining a specific relationship between the scenography and the observer. The space for each pedestal was marked by a silver tape boundary on the floor, indicating a threshold that the audience was not encouraged

to cross and demarcating a viewing distance. While the system of elements stacked on all pedestals remained the same – variety and rhythm was created in the space through the number of layers of Styrofoam in each unit. The pots were also of varying sizes. The stools were of a constant size, but the textures on the surface of each were different and the *stupa* kept on top were similar in morphology and size but in different shapes. This variety was needed in the space to propel the audience to be inquisitive and explorative. While on the first glance everything looked the same, after a few minutes of walking around in the space, they would begin to acknowledge the small differences that made each pedestal an individual identity, yet belonging to the same family.

In an abstract way, the layering of Styrofoam sheets was meant to signify the layers of soil. This was indicated by the opportunities that Styrofoam as a material presented by its transformations through sculpting and the associations these sculpted objected evoked. The material sculpts differently with abrasive tools, fingers or under heat. When sculpted by bare hands it is rendered rough and seems to have been 'gnawed' out. The character it takes suggests the traces left behind by archaeological findings, cavities and diggings. The gnawing by the hands is registered in the spectator's subconscious through the "internally tactile perception"[ii]. Through this subconscious perception, the Styrofoam embodies measures and details which have undergone human stress, as against the standard machine-cut blocks that are "repulsively flat, sharp-edged, immaterial and unreal" [3] .

When sculpted with sandpapers, it can be smoothened for organic curves or sharp edges, which can suggest cave or labyrinth like structures[iii]. Its reaction to a hot wire suggests textures similar to stone quarrying – especially marble quarries which can also be credited to the white colour of the Styrofoam. In this case, the abundance of white Styrofoam in the space also helped to create the clinical, sterile feeling of a 'museumized' space.

The *stupas* were incorporated in the scenography to explore motifs of death and burial, but, from an eastern perspective. In Buddhism, *stupas* are hemispherical mounds of earth and they contain body relics such as hair, finger nails etc. of Gautam Buddha and his successors; the structures are revered as sacred monuments. In the performance, they are taken out of this context and cultural association, with the awareness that they would not have the same

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[ii] Elaborated in *Chapter 4.3.B. Apparent Visual Texture.*

[iii] These labyrinth and cave structures were also a part of the scenography for *The Treasure*, refer to page 87

value and meaning for a western audience like it would be for people who are familiar with these cultures. As a result, what is presented is a bare, notional image of a sacred object, represented in translucent polycarbonate. The material imparts meaning as it reacts with light to give an ethereal quality that adds to the mystique of these objects.

The pots stood as metaphors for death; while their material, clay, directly belongs to the earth. Their mouths were covered with the red cloth which made them look like mysterious objects full of secrets. Their meaning was only understood once the narrators began to tell the story. The system in which the entire pedestal was created challenged the everyday perception of the stool as a utilitarian object. Here, viewed in a way that the four legs were at eye level and what is usually considered a base become an enclosing roof (with a *stupa*) to the clay pot- they acquired a shrine-like quality. One could understand them as monuments or objects of certain reverence; the feeling enhanced by the colours of the pedestal system which was predominantly white with ghost white *stupas*, a hint of earthy clay and red. The 4 elements kept on the 'fake' surfaces of the stools were – soil as the medium of growth; hay as sustenance for animals; seeds as sustenance for humans; and sea shells as relics of life at the interface of land and water.

Together, the materials combine to make the pedestals evocative and the space is read in many ways by the audience- entrenched with meanings of life, death, spirituality, curiosity (Figure 42). After this ballad was narrated, each spectator was asked to remove a *stupa* and put it on the floor. Then, they were encouraged to collectively remove the soil, hay and seeds from the pedestal in a ritualistic manner, and keep the seashells in their palms. This interaction with the 4 elements, especially with soil which has to be 'brushed off' rather than be picked up, brings the hands in contact with the textures applied on top of the stool surfaces. Each spectator has a different tactile experience in these moments depending on which texture they touch- prickly but soft (plastic) grass, rough sandpaper or smooth satin etc., evoking different feelings and attitudes. Besides tactility, the storytellers encouraged the spectators to explore the sense of smell – the *petrichor* like fragrance of a clay pot dipped in water and taste a pinch of dry thyme. Pallasmaa states that "the nose makes the eyes remember"[4], and Bachelard notes that memory and imagination are associated. I believe that by adding the smell here, we created a memory trigger for the audience. When they come in contact with this fragrance next time in their lives, they will perhaps be reminded of their presence in, and memory of this environment.

The mise en scene came about in the following manner: when the audience enter the room, the space is not brightly lit and it seems expansive. As all the 20 spectators collect inside, they understand that the 20 pedestals and 20 people implies that the space is consciously designed for this confluence. The light and soundscape (birds chirping, soft humming and a sense of walking in nature) were suggestive of a soft mood, permitting the audience a relaxed and unhurried exploration of the space. The space would also expand and contract depending on how the people moved about inside: whether they were at the pedestals near the periphery or the ones in the centre. The audience created the mise en scene as a collective since it was formed by how fellow spectators used the space and time.

To transition from this space to the next, the performance here finished with the ritualistic removal of the 4 elements (Figure 43) and the audience were asked to pick up a stool each in one hand (while in their other palm they held the seashells) and follow the storytellers to the elevated stage. Walking with the seashells layered this experience with another spiritual meaning, as shells are symbolic of old Christian pilgrimage. The significance of the seashells at the interface of land and water would be understood by the audience in the next space, that of *Water Sprite*.

Figure 42: Details of a typical pedestals in the scenography for *A Bouquet* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).

Figure 43: Audience interacting with the scenography guided by the storytellers in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).

Figure 44: Material inspiration and concept for *Water Sprite* (2017).
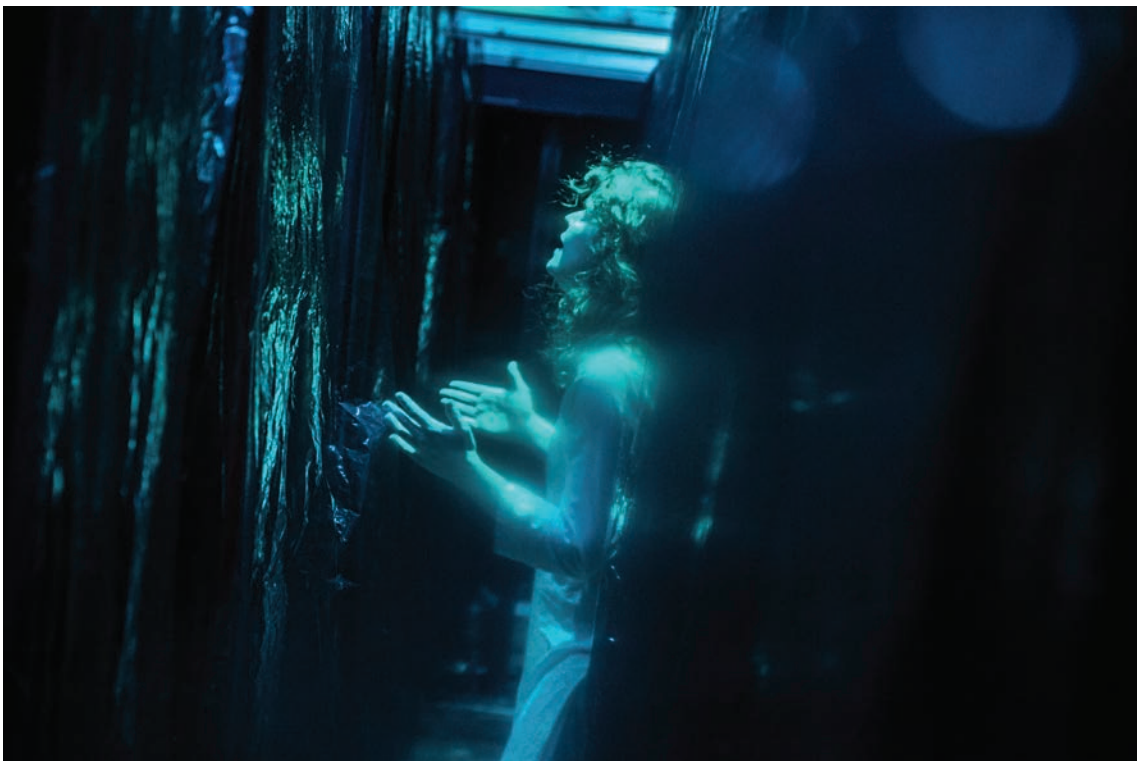
Figure 45: The storyteller in the scenographic environment for *Water Sprite* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).
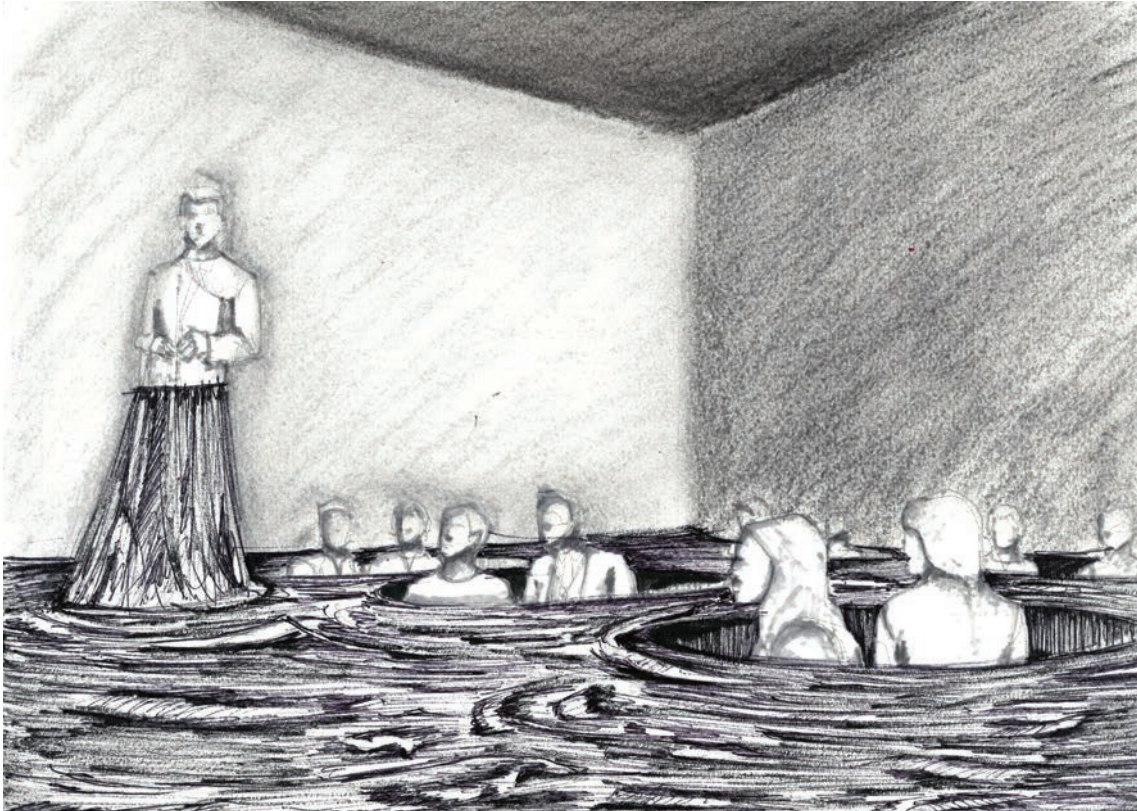
Figure 46: Early conceptual sketch for *Water Sprite* showing the relationship of spectators and storyteller with the scenography (2017).

Figure 47: The audience seated in the scenographic environment for *Water Sprite* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).

Figure 48: Layers of plastic foil creating the isolation chambers during the narration of *Water Sprite* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018). Above- the storyteller outside and, Below- the spectator inside the chambers

WATER SPRITE

For creating an experience for the ballad *Water Sprite*, I was most interested in creating immersive conditions for the audience based on the three key settings of this story. The first setting is of the dry land; there are two situations here- first, of the *Water Sprite* sitting on a tree above the lake and second, of the girl and her mother having a conversation about the latter's fears and superstitions with the lake. The second setting is below the water- where the girl lives isolated and trapped with the sprite and pleads with him to let her go and visit her mother, which he eventually agrees on with certain cruel conditions. The third setting is of the girl being half on land and half in water, not physically but emotionally, since she is with her mother but her soul is with her child under water. The ballad ends cruelly; the sprite snaps away the girl's only ties with the *watery world* and leaves her with the deepest traumatic scar.

Both mothers are only concerned with not losing their child, and would go to the extent of causing any emotional wreck to stop that from happening. This distress, personally, is the epitome of human anguish that is at the heart of this ballad.

> Even if you fear for your baby,
> so much greater is my fear.

It questions the shortcomings of human love and possessiveness, and the reader is unable to answer if the girl's mother was right or wrong in her actions. As a reader and as a listener, the climax warrants the need for a few seconds of contemplative thought to understand, register and react to the action and the unspoken consequences. It was understood that the experience of the space should be able to provide this contemplation.

I wanted the audience to experience these three key settings by bringing out the contrast between being in a collective and being isolated. The core idea was to use plastic foil (thin sheets) to create an environment where the isolation of the girl under water could be experienced by the audience. The act of the girl transitioning from land to being submerged under water would only form an instance (which might feel wondrous or magical) in the spatio-temporal continuum of this mise en scene. The distinction of land, water and half-land half-water would be explored by breaking the unity of the audience as a collective, a pattern that they are used to. Instead, each individual would be cut-off from other people and will experience a part of this storytelling in partial isolation.

The evolution of the concept and space started by looking at the kinds of, and ways in which, materials can stand as a metaphor for water. I was not interested in exploring a magical and incredulous ocean-like poetry with the material, but a murky, sinister and dark nature of the water. Certain kinds of fabrics and surfaces when folded look like ripples or waves in water. Plastic foil itself doesn't make lasting waves or ripples (if it is just crushed and mutilated by hands) I experimented by taking a cheap, thin garbage bag and filling it with glue and water. When the sides of the bag were pressed together and let to dry, it became wrinkled and stuck in places with air bubbles trapped in other spots. When this surface was laid out flat, it had the transparency, reflectiveness and overall quality of the water metaphor sought (Figure 44). Further, when light was allowed to pass through, it came in a filtered, uneven quality, much like light underwater. This passage of light clarified that for the material to work for this metaphor, more than 1 layer of plastic foil would be required in the scenography. I could imagine that the material along with filtering light could be used to create isolating spaces for the spectator; and when they would begin hearing the narration about the bottom of the lake, the material would create the murky yet fantasy like quality for the imagination.

With the material, the three key settings would be manifested in space as following: the first relationship of the audience and the material would be that the plastic foil would be around them on the floor giving an impression of dark waters. The second would be that the plastic foil envelops and engulfs them on all sides, thereby isolating them visually. Here, they could hear the story being narrated but they could not see the narrator making a collage of voices in space. The third setting would be achieved by lowering the plastic foil to a height that the heads of all spectators are above the surface and their bodies below it- creating a scenario with floating heads (Figure 46). The foil surface would be held by the narrator who would be rising above the audience. His elevation above the audience would suggest, like the water sprite, his position of maximum power. The most challenging practical requirement of this ballad was to have a system that would allow this surface to go up and down as desired.

In the performance, we explored the material in a slightly different way. Based on the usable floor size of the stage at Strašnické Divadlo, we constructed a wooden frame, whose grid was designed in a way that squares measuring 80 cm x 80 cm demarcated spaces where the 20 audience could be positioned individually. We used plastic foil in three colors to make 4 layered curtains on each member of the wooden frame. The layers were grey, green, red and grey to create the murky colour (Figure 45). Blue foil was intentionally disregarded because

of a blue transparent material's symbolic relationship with clean water. When the horizontal frame was elevated above head height, the curtains created numerous cloisters (for each spectator) and labyrinth like passages all around them. When lowered to the floor, the frame took up most of the area of the stage, which made the space, and the frame construction look vast. The foil curtains at the edges of the frame were fanned out horizontally to enhance this vastness while the curtains attached to all the middle members of the frame where tucked under. It created a palette of colour patches- green, red and grey; and their folded state under the frame gave the impression of something seeping from below and growing larger. Staging this ballad was most suited to a theatre stage because it required stage technology to allow the frame to move up and down and the simplest solution for this was to connect it to the flybars.

The audience walked up to the stage with their stools from the scenography of *A Bouquet*. The static nature of the frame in its base position as described in the paragraph above gave the space a playful quality, the red and green foil resembling candy wrappers. The narrators escorted each spectator to a square in the frame where they put their stool and sat. In the first setting, the narrators walked between the audience and then moved to explore the limits of the stage space, such as the dark corners and a technical ladder. These movements allowed the audience to be engaged with the volume of the space, expose the technical fantasy of the stage and giving them 360∘ views of it to familiarize them with the space. This was important for the next setting, because while narrating the lines

> Down she goes, just like a pearl
> and water closes over the girl.

the narrators started to operate the manual machinery of the flybars to lift up the frame.

The frame rises up very slowly, with the narrators chanting the above mentioned verse (Figure 47). The experience of this is heightened by the ominous and jarring creaking sounds that the flybar machinery makes. At this point, the audience can understand that what earlier seemed like playful, innocent colours take on a more sinister meaning and they are going down like the girl in the story.

The curtains start forming the isolating cloisters and the audience hears the next part as isolated spectators. The sea shells that they have been holding since *A Bouquet* make their significance felt as the audience holds this tactile and natural object trapped inside this artificial surrounding. A sense of danger and thrill is experienced with the sound and the

movements of the narrators that cannot be seen (Figure 48). The narrators move about in the passages between the curtains, they caress the foil, graze their fingers on it, sometimes touching the body of the spectator over the foil curtains. This play with the sound and tactility of the material, the rustling of the layers of plastic creates an unnerving sense of the whereabouts of the narrators. As Bachelard states, our imagination allows us to feel that the two kinds of space- the intimate and the exterior (in this case, the cloisters and everything outside of it) "keep encouraging each other, as it were, in their growth"[5]. Thus, the isolation in an intimate space changes our perception of the scale of the exterior space. The tactile quality of the plastic foil also becomes 'shocking' as the thin foil layers in contact with each other and the friction of the air create static electricity which the audience can feel in small instances when their skin or hair touches the foil.

The lighting is designed in a blue, green scheme, creating a cold atmosphere. To make it look unnerving, the top light grid is connected to a string that can be manipulated from the stage, so that the lights sway above the frame, and moving shadows and patterns are created within each isolating cloister. The gaps and slits between the layers and between two layers placed next to each other expose the greens and reds sandwiched between the greys on both sides. With the light, this rendered the narrators eerie and blurred. And since they were wearing white, they became pictorial highlights amongst the dark setting in these moving images. The horrors for the climax of the story were created with lighting bars fixed to the stage floor and flashes of strong light coming at eye level.

In a space and installation like this, there is no particular visual focus as the experience is to do with listening in an isolated space. An intent listener could imagine the girl and her baby are nearby. Like the girl, the audience is trapped in the underwater world of the water sprite, and hence are characters themselves.

At the end of this story, they step out of the curtained cloisters and follow the narrators. They walk down the stage and across the main hall. The experience of passing through this space has a different quality than the one in which they entered this room at the beginning of the performance. They perceive it in its new condition- the soil, hay and seeds scattered across the floor as if they are the remnants of a ceremony or ritual that took place. With the stools removed, and the *stupas* on the floor, the clay pots – motifs of death are visible more strongly. It resonates with the morbid climax of *Water Sprite*, evoking the power of death.

The audience exit this space and wait in the foyer to be allowed inside the café where they will experience the next story, *A Daughter's Curse*.

A DAUGHTER'S CURSE.

The pain of being guilty of failing one's own child forms the essence of the ballad *A Daughter's Curse*. Intuitively, I have always had images of animals (not a dove, which in the text stands for purity) while reading this poem. Through Bachelard's phenomenology I examined that these imageries can be attributed to the fact that "… all aggression whether it comes from man or from the world, is of animal origin"[6], and unredeemable aggression is paramount in *A Daughter's Curse*. It became an interesting facet to be explored as the starting point of the scenographic process. The other themes that I wanted to communicate visually were the brutal loss of innocence and a sense of pain ripping one apart. In material terms, the best way to express this feeling of being torn was the plasticity, jarring sound and the contrasting texture of Velcro.

The idea of representing innocence took the course of creating large scale childhood motifs, such as scaled up stuffed toys. This developed into a giant stuffed giraffe, made in two halves and stuck together with Velcro, which would be ripped apart to its two halves during the performance. The giraffe, unlike most animals, has unsymmetrical body structure which would make the ripping apart a more gruesome, lopsided affair – adding to the brutality of the narrative. However, this idea was discarded for its lack of creating a sound metaphor and its practicality.

With the themes of loss of innocence and a keen interest to explore Velcro, the concept was reworked for the performance. A contemporary, non–romantic view of the ballad also highlights another core meaning- that of not taking responsibility for one's own actions and blaming others. We now looked at the mother in this relationship as Mother Earth, the guardian who has greatly indulged her daughter (human citizens). She sees her child destroying everything- her future generations, her relationship with her surroundings and above all, her own self, without taking any responsibility for her actions. As the present time indicates, this has led to bigger global consequences. Mother Earth is burdened with failure because she is at fault for wishing to please her own children; who wash their hands off the responsibility and curse the mother.

This led to the animal in consideration as the panda, a species that is critically endangered and on the verge of extinction due to our actions as a race. Since it dealt with the act of collective responsibility, we decided to have all the audience 'participate' by wearing panda masks, made out of paper. After having experienced *Water Sprite* in isolation, we bring the audience back to the sense of a collective but this time they lose their individuality and are truly anonymous. The idea of the panda mask was further substantiated by ways of exploring Velcro- the trademark black eyes, when ripped apart, changes the panda to a polar bear and another endangered species was revealed.

To amplify the jarring sound of Velcro, a bigger action was required. For this, we decided to add some panda traits to the costume of one of the narrators. We created a jacket, made in black furry textile, which would cover the hands and shoulders of the narrator, making the black and white patches of a panda's body. The black fur, attached by Velcro, would be ripped off (similar to how the giraffe had been imagined earlier) revealing a white 'nothingness' below and again rob the panda of its physical characteristics.

To add a sense of innocence to the space in this environment, we collaged the panda masks with drawings of various mother-child relationships that were made by primary school children in India (Figure 49). It brought a cross cultural contrast as well as a universality of the theme. Drawings by children are the strongest visual indicators of sense of security or insecurity, happiness and protection. The way children draw and erase, leave etchings and marks on the paper also brought a brutality in the softness of the surface and material – visible on the collaged masks. This process was inspired by Švankmajer's idea of torn and damaged "mental landscapes"[7]; here the drawings were pasted on the orthogonal facets of the masks "in order to extract from them and externalize their internal torment.

In the performance, the audience is escorted individually into the café. At the entrance, they are made to wear a panda mask. The black Velcro eyes were fitted with film negatives, which render a sepia vision. This created a deliberate suppression of sharp, focused vision which Pallasmaa notes is "a remarkable factor in the experience of enveloping spatiality and tactility"[8] . The floor of the café was covered with dried leaf plates, as a sensory extension to the panda's natural habitat filled with bamboo leaves. The audience walks on these leaves, which make crunching sounds (Figure 50). Their vision is not clear so it takes time for the audience to navigate themselves in this space. As more people fill into the room, one starts observing the masks on other people, reading the consistent theme of the collaged drawings'

pattern. At this point, an observant spectator can begin to consider the symbols that are being presented and deconstruct the metaphors, setting up a mood for the narration.

Once all spectators are inside, the bright and warm light is changed to a cold, ultraviolet blue that makes the white panda heads and the narrator's costume shine and glow. It created darkness and shadows in the rest of the space and combined with the effect of negatives covering the eyes (Figure 51). It was significant because, as Pallasmaa notes they "dim the sharpness of vision, make depth and distance ambiguous, and invite unconscious peripheral vision and tactile fantasy"[9].

One of the narrator is in the jacket described above while the other rips apart the black fur and like the daughter in the story, the Panda loses a part of herself. As if out of vindication, she goes up to each spectator and rips apart the black Velcro eyes, turning the heads into polar bears. Since the masked audience formed one large collective, the playing space expanded and contracted with their movement – creating variations for how the narrator would go to the spectator to remove the eyes. In all the 3 performances, they inevitably created a circular formation around the narrators-who became the focus loci. The sound of walking on dried leaves, coupled with the constant 'rip' of Velcro created a tense environment that was in tune with the build-up of the text that was being narrated.

At the end of this piece, the audience were asked to take off the masks and they followed the narrators to an exit leading to the cellar for the last ballad of the performance, *The Treasure*.

Figure 49: A typical panda head for the spectators in the performance (2018).

Figure 50: A scene from *A Daughter's Curse* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).

Figure 51: Scenes from *A Daughter's Curse* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018). The space is lit in ultraviolet light. Above- the spectators with panda masks and below- the storytellers.

Figure 52: Early conceptual sketch for The Treasure showing the soap foam engulfing the storyteller (2017).

Figure 53: Scenes from *The Treasure* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018).

THE TREASURE

To create the environment for the narration of *The Treasure*, the starting point was to work with a material that can mirror the central quality of the treasure spoken about in the ballad without being illustrative. The essence and 'point of no return' in the narrative led to exploring, in material terms, something that can disappear just as easily as it appears. Deliberation on such materials concluded with the idea to use soap foam, an artificial liquid to create a parallel metaphor between a cave full of treasure and a space filled with foam that could grow (Figure 52).

Since *The Treasure* forms a pair with *A Daughter's Curse* in Erben's composition, we also wanted to use Velcro here, but in a different manner. In this case, the year of repentance of the woman who abandons her child would be described by designing a walking action using one surface of Velcro as a carpet, while the other would become the sole of the narrator's shoes. As imagined, this would create a heavy walk, and lifting each foot would be a burden, the dramatic situation would be triggered by the properties of the material and complimented by the jarring sound of detaching the two Velcro surfaces with each footstep. However, we did not use this idea in the performance, because the space designated for this ballad in Strašnické Divadlo was not suitable to create this walking path.

The entrapment of the child and the mother's quest to find him for an entire year was another dramatic sequence that could be explored in exciting ways with materials. The essence of this idea was to create objects or artefacts that functioned on the principle of caves and labyrinths. Some sound making and audible material had to be trapped in a core that was invisible and impossible to reach. On the outside, it needed to be tactile, with visible cavities that could be touched and probed.

In the performance, the scenographic dramaturgy and continuity of materials was maintained by creating these objects out of Styrofoam that was already a constituent element of the environment of *A Bouquet*. They were layered in the pedestals[iv] of *A Bouquet* and then appeared in the spatial setting of *The Treasure*. We fashioned them as miniature Styrofoam labyrinths having the appearance of static architectonic models from the outside. When one began to play with them and move them around in the hands, one can hear the muffled sounds of invisible, yet identifiable sounds of materials trapped in some inner cavities and tunnels.

[iv] Refer to page 77

Bachelard notes that "the power of attraction of smallness lies in the fact that large things can issue from small ones"[10]. Developing on this principle of imagination, the scale of the object would ensure that the spectators sensed the child trapped within.

The narration of *The Treasure* in the performance started when the audience exit the café after the panda scenario of *A Daughter's Curse*. They collected on the staircase leading to the cellar and followed the narrator who described the journey of the woman- her rushing to church and encounter with the sudden appearance of a cave. They descend with the narrator to the cellar and each step builds anticipation for what they as a collective and the character will find inside. When they enter, the description of the magical cave is complimented with the visual of a greenish glow that fills the threshold of this space, created by transparent plastic curtains. As they go further inside, they encounter a tank filled with foam.

The tank was created out of translucent plastic foil and polycarbonate boards, closed by the cellar walls on three sides and the low ceiling above, and lit from within. Light penetrated with various luminosities through the voluminous foam that was filled in the tank. This gave an interesting visual to the vivid description of the treasures inside the cave. The surreal beauty of the foam combined with the heavy and distinctly unnatural smell of soap (due to lack of ventilation in the cellar) created a contrasting experience for the audience. Here was a material that was sensorial through its sight and smell, and if one desired to go close to the tank they could also feel its slippery and airy tactility. Foam provided various possibilities of play and metaphors by the abstract volumes that it creates. It can be both fragile and sturdy, lightweight and heavy. It can be manipulated by blowing air or its malleability and dexterity can be explored between fingers.

Inside the cellar, we created two distinct spaces- one of the foam tank and the other of a shadow curtain, with each space occupied by one narrator. The audience have a passive relationship with the space and they do not actively participate in the creation of the scene. Rather, they can sit and stand before the tank and shadow curtain and follow the scenes (Figure 54). The cellar is small and the space for the audience is intimate, which allows them to huddle around. The intimacy is a very different relationship than what has been experienced in the other three environments previously. The story was told such that the narration happened from behind the curtain and the dramatic action happened inside the tank. The audience see a woman in shadows reading a story from a book, a motif that highlights the fantasy of the storytelling and the story itself. They see the magic of the cave by following

the other narrator inside the tank. She assumes a 'silent actor' role and becomes the character of the mother in the plot.

The mother's incredulous encounter with the treasure is demonstrated with a playful relationship with the foam (Figure 53). It can fly, it can be collected in the costume, it can be offered as handfuls to the spectators who can reach their hands out to the tank and feel the tactility of the treasure. The loss of her child, and his plea for help

> "Here deep underground am I,"
> whispers a voice carried by wind,
> "you can't see me with your eye,
> no ear will ever comprehend!

is heard and demonstrated by the Styrofoam labyrinths: one with the mother, one behind the shadow with the narrator (Figure 54) and several others that are passed around the audience imploring them to reach inside the objects and extract the metaphorical child out.

This ballad ends with both the narrators getting engulfed and drowning in the foam, signalling the end of the performance. The woman's wonder and encounter with the treasure- playing with foam, then, her loss of child and hearing its voice

> "Ha ha, Mama! ha, ha, Mama!"

by playing with the Styrofoam pieces and the sounds it makes – the performance ends with both narrators getting engulfed and drowning in the foam.
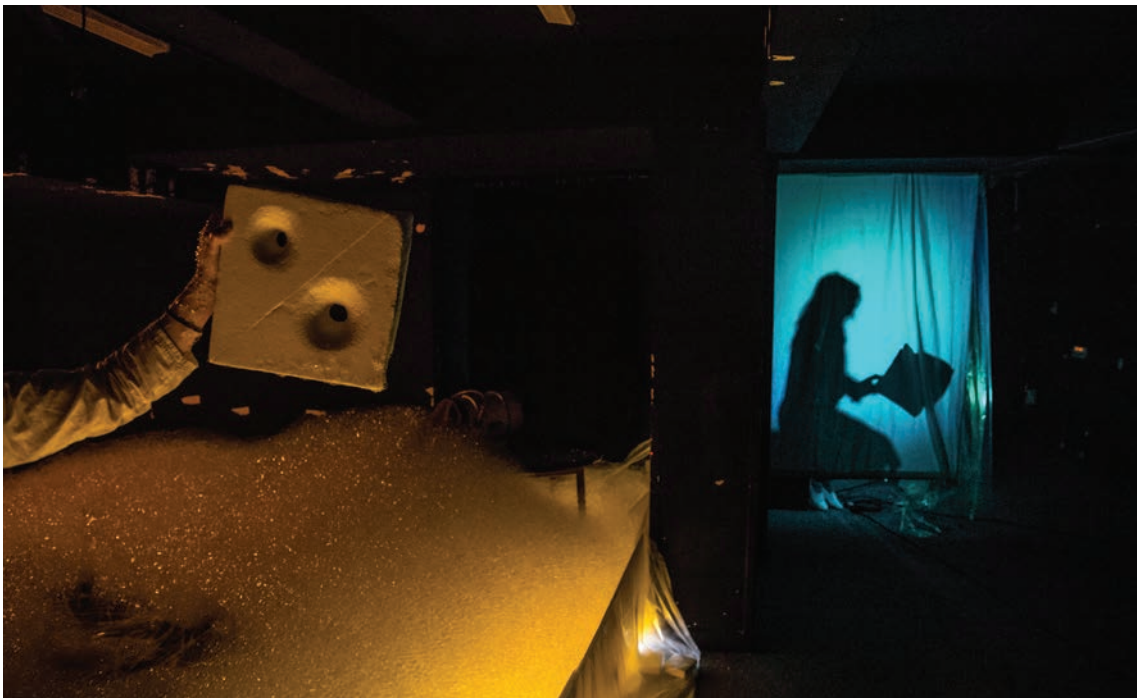
Figure 54: Scenes from *The Treasure* in the performance *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* (2018). Above- the audience seated around the tank while each storyteller occupies the two spaces – the tank and shadow curtain respectively, and Below- the Styrofoam labyrinths in use by the storytellers.
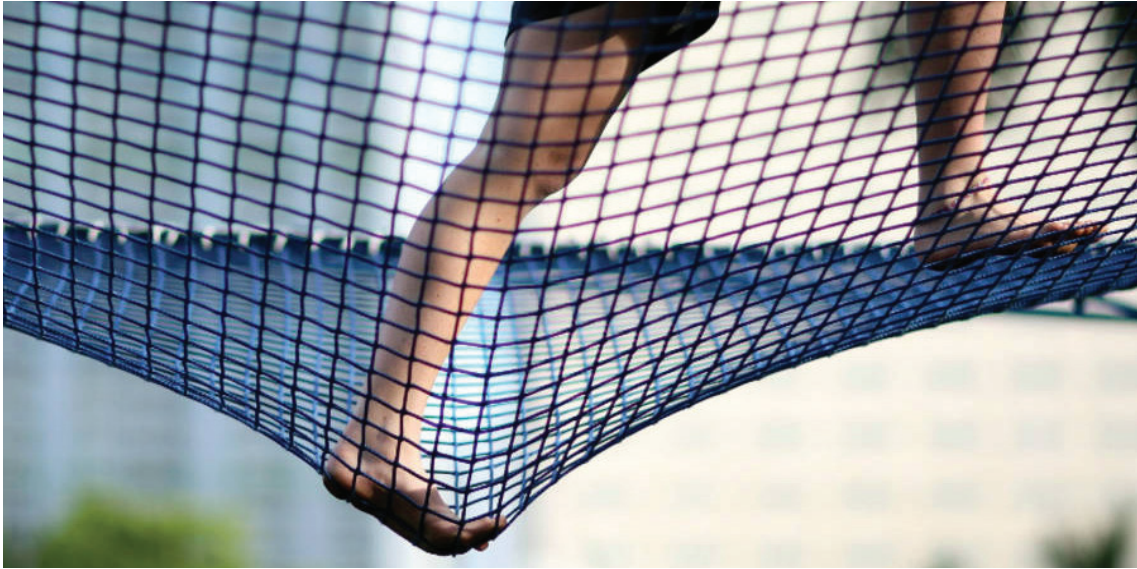
Figure 55: Material reference for the swings in *Wedding Shirts.*
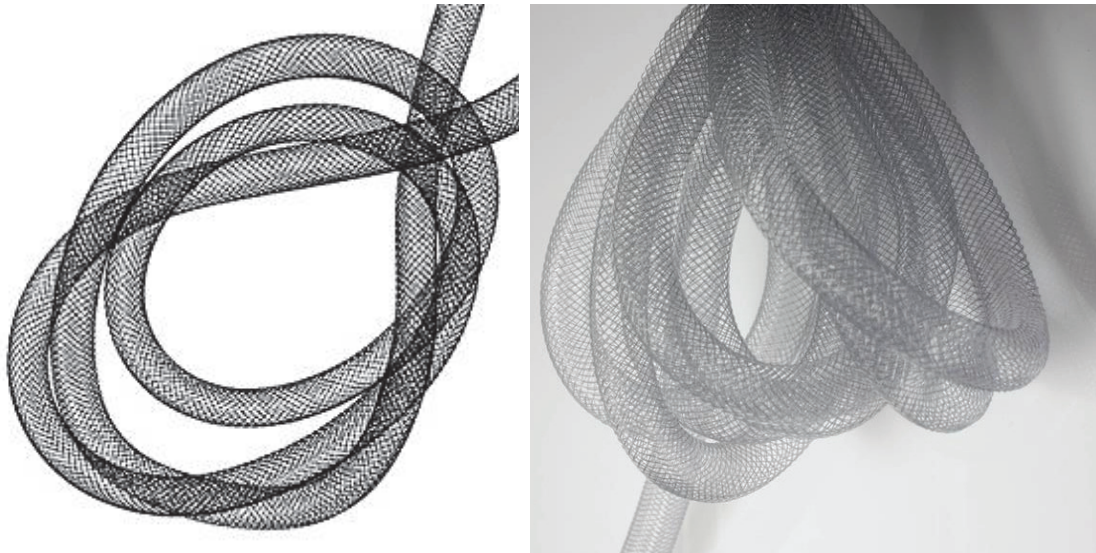
Figure 56: Material reference- nylon tubes/ pipes for the scenography for *Willow* and *Lily.*

Figure 57: Material inspiration- porcelain tubes for Lily

5.3: CONCEPTUAL SCENOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE REMAINING BALLADS

WEDDING SHIRTS

A substantial part of the narrative, and for me the most powerful dramatic action, in *Wedding Shirts* is the vivid description of the girl's journey- her flying across the landscape on that night. I wanted the audience to be a part of this intensive experience of being airborne while listening to this narrative. Also, this is one of the only narratives that confirms with a thriller genre. It starts out as a happy reunion and as it unfolds, the reader begins to feel gradually that something is not right and it is headed towards something darker. To associate it with an image of happiness in the beginning, combined with the basic parameter for an airborne experience, i.e., to not have the feet touch the ground, led to the idea of creating swings for seating the audience.

Bachelard claims that the origin of the image of flying is associated with birds. The shelter space of birds are nests, and in the human subconscious the image of the nest is the antithesis of the house. Nests are nowhere as strong as a house with foundations, therefore immediately associated with the sense of not being in contact with the ground. In this scenography, each audience is seated in a nest like cocoon swing that wraps them up and their feet dangle a few inches above the ground. This allows the spectator to be "curled up" (the foremost adjective that is subconsciously associated with the image of nests) and listen to a story about flying and fears.

I imagine using a tensile nylon net to make the swing structures (Figure 55). The choice of a textile material in this shape is associative to bundles of clothes (such as laundry wrapped in sheets) and in this case, it can be associated to the bundle of wedding shirts that is the central motif of the ballad. The net material of the nylon textile will allow a certain porosity in the space and it takes its proper cocoon shape once the spectator is in it – thus making the spectator a part of the scenographic space. The material has a slightly rough texture that will be in direct contact with the skin and material tactility will become an inherent part of the experience. The narrators would sit on a different kind of swing. This would be a construction where a horizontal wooden board is suspended on the edges by metallic chains, and the horizontal, sturdy surface is similar to a flat bench as shown in the illustration.

Initially the space will be dim and warmly lit. entering into a space and the experience of being on swings would evoke a joyous, child-like mood (Figure 58). The narrators would sit

on the bench swing and start the storytelling. They would walk amongst the audience, nudging the swings slightly so they will sway. In the plot, her journey is marked by three important pauses when her fiancé asks her at different instances to throw away the Bible, the rosary beads and the crucifix. In the created installation, each time he rids her of these elements the audience will experience objects such as pages from an old book, wooden beads etc. falling from the ceiling and scattering in the space. the rhythm of the narration and the push on each swing would get speedier and aggressive as they get nearer to the end of the girl's journey.

Her arrival at the graveyard would be signalled by changes in lighting. There will be tube lights fixed at the top of each swing (Figure 59). As she realises the horror of where she has been lured to, the tube lights will start flickering creating a totally eerie atmosphere. The tube lights are fixed to the swings in a way that will create a motif and silhouette of the crucifix- making an associative image suggestive to a graveyard. At this point, it is no longer fun to be on the swings and it has transformed into something more sinister- as if the cocoons are actually burial pods, like those created by *Capsula Mundi*.

When the girl hides away in the morgue, one of the narrators will sit under the bench swing, as if trapped. The other narrator will be above, knocking on the bench. The dead man in the morgue that functions as a puppet will be conveyed by a marionette made of rotten fruits and vegetables that the narrator will manipulate from the top of the bench. At this point, the dramatic action will be focused on the area under the bench swing which will become the stage until the end of the story. When the audience exit this space, shredded pieces of the nylon net will be lying on the floor outside.

Figure 58: Conceptual sketch for *Wedding Shirts* showing the space with the swings, audience and storytellers at the beginning of the performance (2017).

Figure 59: Conceptual sketch for *Wedding Shirts* showing the space at the climax- the tube lights at the top of the swings flicker to create crucifixes like in a graveyard (2017).
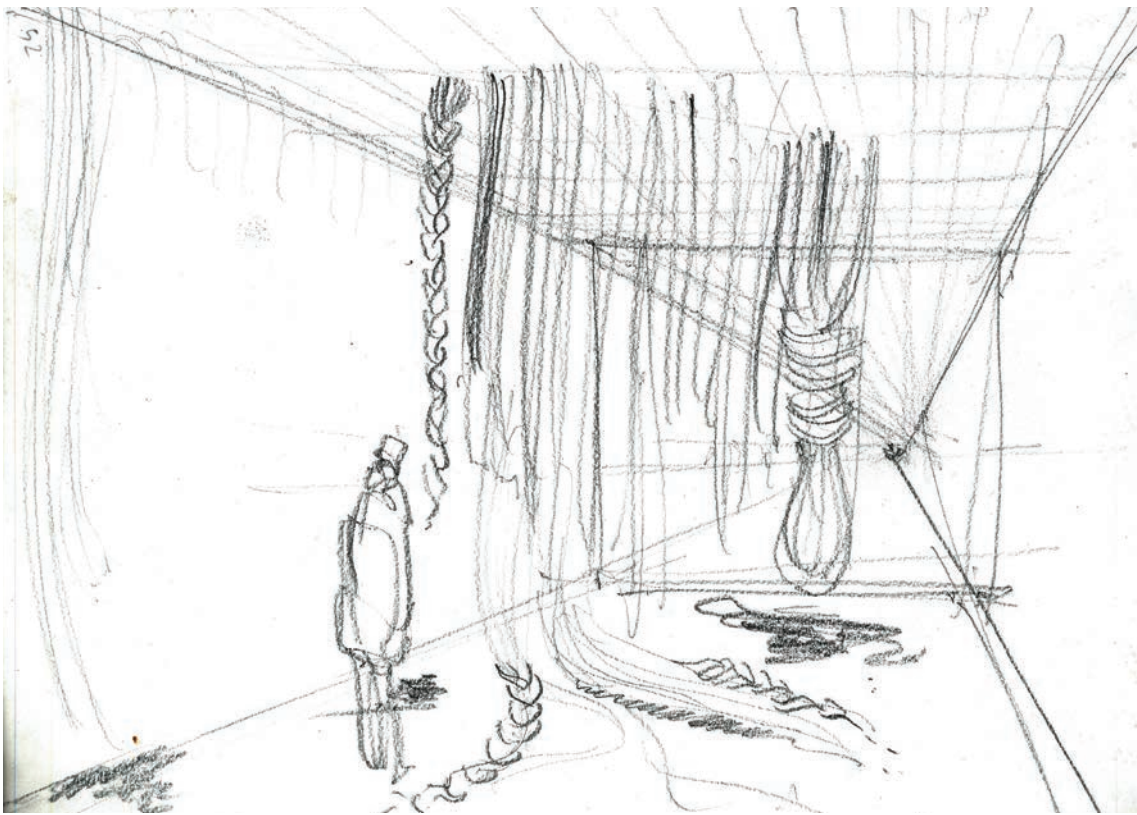
Figure 60: Conceptual sketch for *Willow* showing sculptures made of nylon tubes suspended in the space (2017).

WILLOW

The material that I want to create the space with for *Willow* are hollow tube-like ropes made of nylon (Figure 56). It appears to be delicate however on touching one can feel the texture is coarse. Because of its nylon material and tubular structure, its edges sparkle and shimmer when light falls directly. It has some tensile strength. It functions like a rope, so it can be knotted. The knots created have a surreal effect because one can see three-dimensional layers.

The space for this narrative will be filled with these ropes, suspended from the ceiling and I imagine that they will have the effect similar to what one would feel under the canopy of a giant willow or banyan tree. In this case however, the hanging objects will appear ethereal due to the porosity of the tubes. When the spectators walk around between these tubes, it will make the space layered, transparent and emphasize depth, highlighting the plasticity and fantasy of the material. Using their tensile strength and knotting capacity, several tubes will be combined in abstract ways- like a large hair braid falling from the ceiling, nooses for strangulation, sculptural ways in which knots look like the joints in human body such as knuckles, knees, ankles, divisions of fingers etc. These representational tube sculptures will be spread in the space along with tubes that are simply hanging and knotted that create other interpretive images and objects. Through these, the space will suggest a mix of botanical and anatomical associations.

The narrators will walk around in the space with the audience, describing the ballad. The space will be softly lit near the floor such that the ceiling is in darkness. When the man in the story learns about his wife's dual life in the willow tree, the space will be fully illuminated. The audience will then be able to see the ceiling where the fixed ends of the ropes will be sculpted to represent human figures. What seemed like a botanical forest in the beginning will be understood holistically as the limbs and hair of the giant bodies that appear to be trapped and attempting to break free (Figure 60). A contrast of scales will be created by the seemingly giant sculptures compared with the actual humans inside the space.

When the man chops off the willow tree and kills his wife as a result, these sculptures attached to the ceiling will be unhooked. This will cause them to no longer be stretched and in tension, and they will fall to the floor. The fall will not be sudden and heavy, but due to the lightweight material it will appear (in the moment) to be soft and lucid. When they land

on the floor, these sculptures will either become formless or as flaccid and shapeless grotesques bodies.

LILY

In the ballad *Lily*, I wanted to explore fragility, which is an important theme, in the space and materials, and keep the material in a similar language as that of *Wedding Shirts* and *Willow*. Porcelain, as a technique and object, is associated with delicacy and fragility. If the craft is well done, it is rare (and expensive) while if it is an imitation, it might appear either beautiful or fake. I wish to use these metaphors of porcelain to convey the two different ways in which the lily is perceived in the ballad- the man finds it beautiful, precious and unique, while his mother thinks it is evil.

The environment created for *Lily* will be bare and empty, except for a long, raft like object kept in the middle of the room. It will be made of cylindrical hollow tubes, either in ceramic or plastic, and decorated with the blue motifs of porcelain (Figure 57). I wish to conduct tests with both these materials to see how the phenomenology of perception changes with each. If made as plastic tubes, it can be covered with a print that resembles the porcelain pattern and has the right glaze and shine, but it has to be seen how its authenticity or spuriousness will fit with the dramaturgy of the performance.

The audience will enter into a dark room with this object lying across the floor. The white and blue (due to the porcelain colours) raft will be reflective and hence the light can be very soft and dim at the beginning of the performance (Figure 61). It will encourage the audience to come closer, bend down and apprehend the shape and purpose of this object. Inside the hollow cylinders, there will be the hollow ropes made of nylon net described in the scenography for *Willow*. In this case, these ropes will be painted with ultraviolet or glow-in-the-dark paint. In the narrative, when the lily comes to life, the narrators will pull the ropes out of the porcelain cylinders into the dark space and stretch them across the room- making dynamic patterns of lines and lights (Figure 62). This will be in sync with the 'night lady', i.e., the lily who comes to life and walks in the garden.

At the climax, when the mother destroys the dark and safe chamber that her son had created for his lily-wife, the room will be fully lit. The magical beauty of the glow-in-the-dark paint will be replaced by the ordinary, greenish property of how the paint appears in light, breaking the fiction and exposing the fake, plastic and non-magical attributes of the material to the audience.
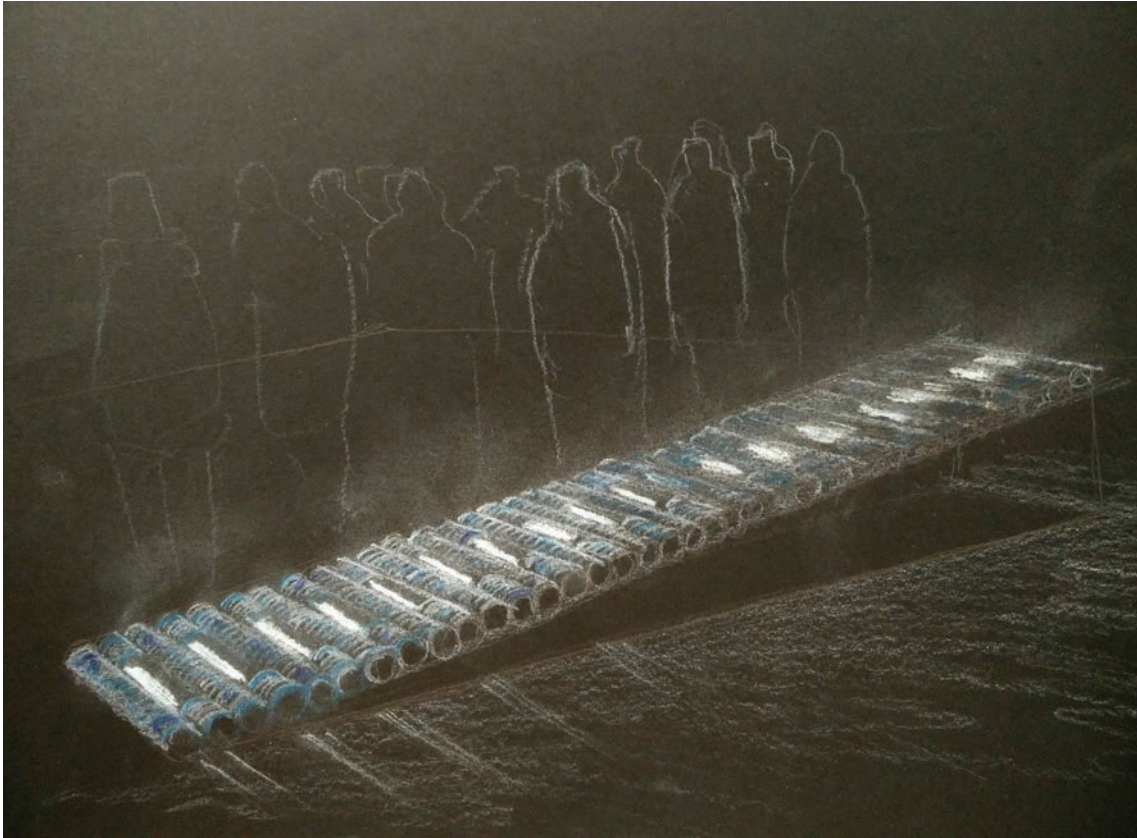
Figure 61: Conceptual sketch for *Lily* showing the beginning of the performance (2017).
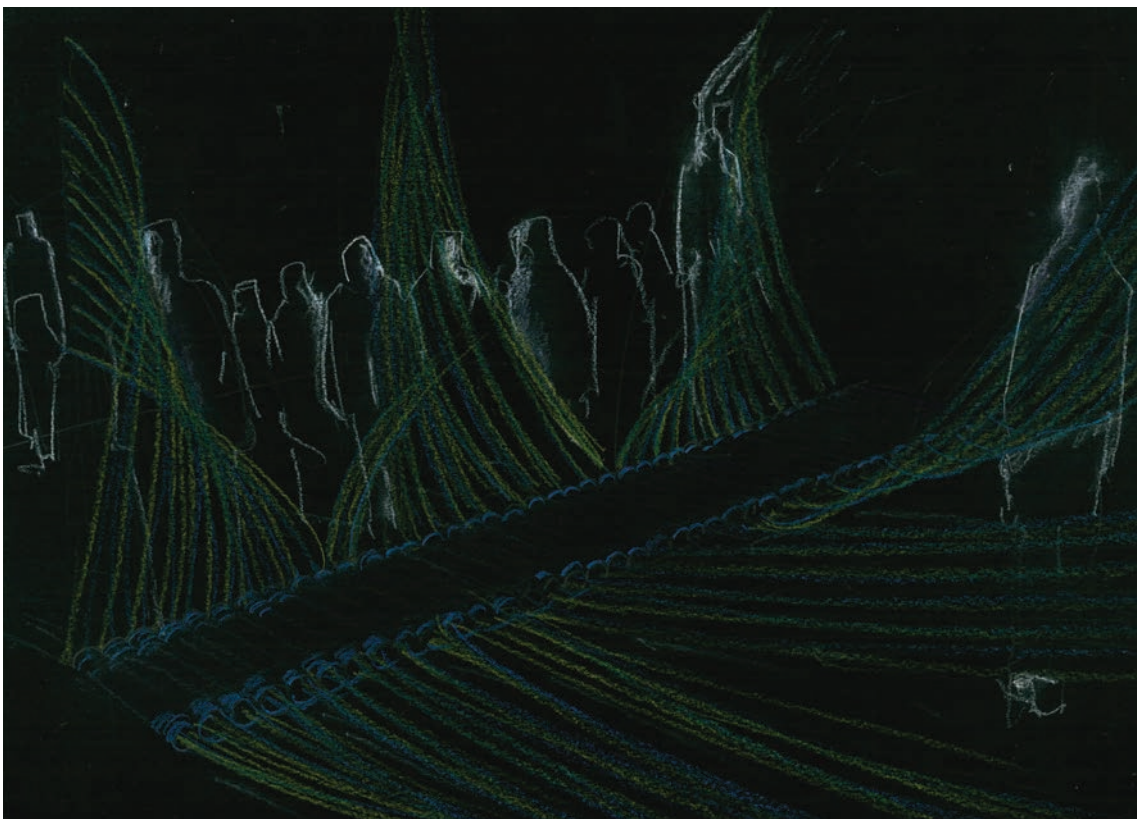
Figure 62: Conceptual sketch for *Lily* showing the climax of the performance (2017).

Figure 63:An Indian legend which maintains that witches have their feet backwards

Figure 64: Indian ritual of *Vat Savitri* where married women tie red and white threads around tree trunks.
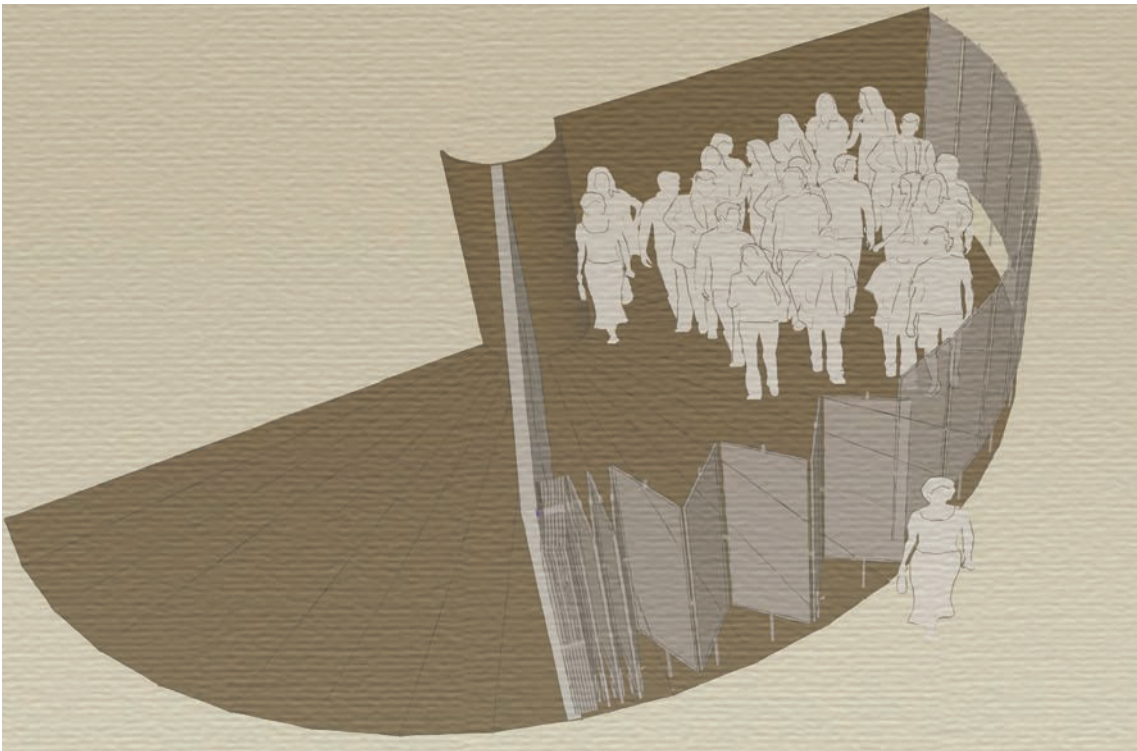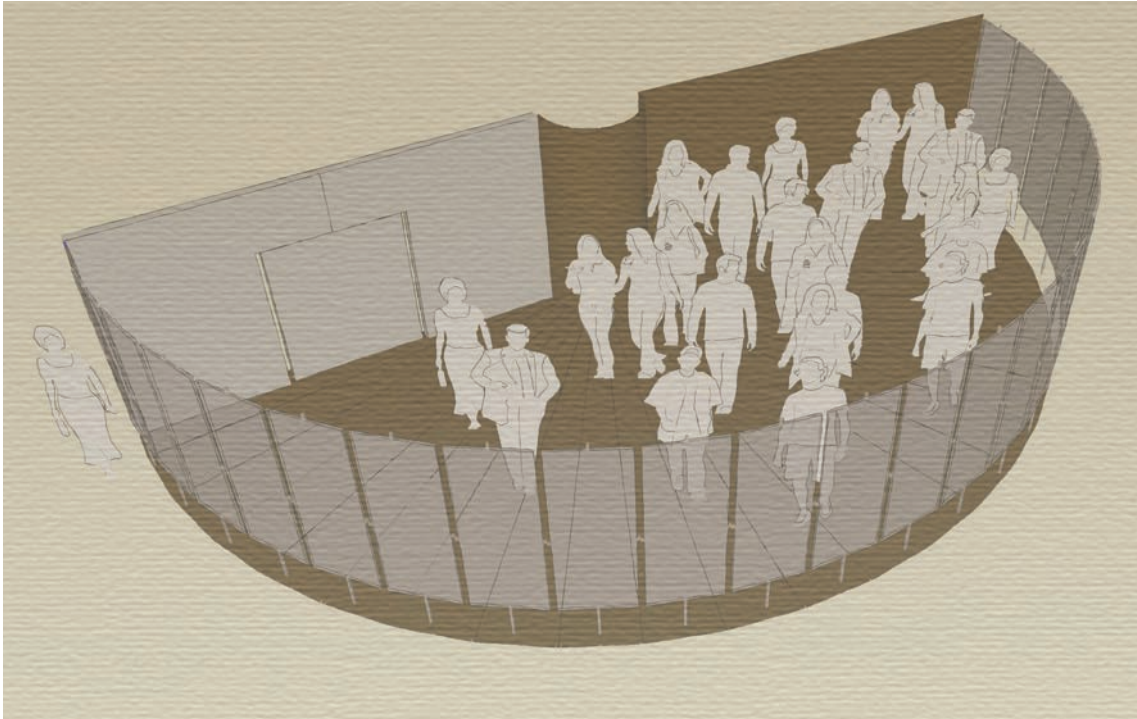
Figure 65 :Conceptual sketches for the space of *Noon Witch* showing the accordion-like space (2018).

Figure 66 : Conceptual sketches for the space of *The Golden Spinning Wheel* showing the use of threads during the performance (2017).

NOON WITCH

Central to the *Noon Witch* ballad is the feeling of suffocation. I want to create an experience where the audience understands this feeling by being compressed in and by a space. The other strong element is to work with the questionable presence of the noon-witch: *was a witch actually there or was the mother delusional?* To leave this question unanswered for the audience, it was important that they do not see a representative witch, but a shadow or peculiarity in the space. Here, I wanted to incorporate an Indian legend that states the way to recognize a witch from an ordinary woman is to look at their feet, as witches have their feet backwards (Figure 63). Without any verbal context of this legend for the audience and no associative images for witches, a motif of visible, reversed feet and footsteps could be used to enhance the presence/ absence of a strange person in the space.

The mirror ballad in Erben's composition is *Water Sprite*, and for that experience we created vertical curtains of plastic foil to form isolation chambers for each spectator. Using the principle of flat vertical walls to create a collective enclosure for all spectators, the space for *Noon Witch* will be designed as a semi-circular room (Figure 65)- with polycarbonate panels along the arc of the semi-circle and opaque walls on the two radius lengths. It will work on the system of an accordion. One of the opaque walls will be fixed in position, while the other can move along the arc by being fixed on a rail channel system. When the opaque wall is pushed and moved manually, the accordion panels will start collapsing and stacking next to one another.

The polycarbonate panels of the accordion will be translucent and allow a prismatic deformation of visible shapes due to the property of the material. The material will help create the shadowy appearance of the witch as described above. The panels will be fixed on a top rail. There will be a considerable gap between the bottom of the panels and the floor as illustrated, which would allow the audience to clearly see the feet of any person behind the panel but the rest of their body will appear as a deformed, pixelated silhouette through the polycarbonate.

The door in the narrative of *Noon Witch* is an important metaphor for the unknown and the fact that even though it is supposed to secure and protect, it does not. The sense of danger lurking behind the door was deemed worth exploring, especially after understanding how Kantor makes use of them[v]. In this work, the audience will enter this space through a door

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[v] Refer to page 54

in the movable wall. One of the narrators is inside the space with them, while the other one will stay outside to push the accordion panels into action. The narrator outside will wear an extension to their costume which will have shoes fixed in the reverse direction. The narrator inside will tell the story. The narrator outside will begin to slowly push the wall when the noon-witch appears. The semi-circular room will be brightly and plainly lit to suggest fear in the ordinary and non-magical quality of this ballad. The audience will be able to see (through the panels) the hazy outline of the person outside moving the wall and see that their feet are facing opposite to the direction of motion. As the noon witch comes closer, the accordion will keep getting compressed and smaller – making the audience huddle closer, thereby creating a suffocating environment. This will be in sync with the narration of the mother holding tightly on to her child and suffocating it.

The arrival of the father will be indicated by opening a concealed door on the fixed opaque wall, filling the room with more light. The audience exits the accordion through this door.

This scenography is aimed at creating an intensive claustrophobic environment (for a brief moment) to suggest just how simple it is to get suffocated. The other aim is to not bring the mother and the witch in direct contact, and have both of their actions visible directly. The reversed feet of the witch will give the experience a hint of fantasy and denounce the cliché representation of witches.

THE GOLDEN SPINNING WHEEL

What lies hidden under the narrative of *The Golden Spinning Wheel* is the rhythm that is formed as a result of ritualistic repetition of verses and ideas. The wise man sends his assistant three times for different barters between components of the golden spinning wheel and mutilated body parts of Dora. He performs ritualistic magic to make her whole and bring her to life. The golden wheel unfolds the crimes of the stepmother and stepdaughter over three verses with

> "Whirrr - evil is the thread you spin!
> You came here to beguile the king:…
> whirr – that evil thread!"

I wish to create a ritualistic ceremony during the narration of this ballad. Various religious ritual in India require Hindu women to tie a red or white thread around the trunk of sacred trees (Figure 64). I find this action inspiring and connected with the dramatic feeling of this ballad because of the colours, the meaning of wishing and praying and for the way it almost brings movement and life to inanimate trees. It incorporates the use of thread as a material with metaphors of binding life and values, assuring safety, strength and the material being loaded with magic. In the ballad, the spun thread declares the truth of the situation and becomes an important motif. Using it in this ceremonial way in the performance will be an abstract evocation of bringing Dora to life and declaring the truth. A space will be created where the audience can watch and participate in the ritualistic ceremony. There will be benches to sit facing an altar, with an aisle in the middle. The configuration of the space in this manner will suggest an association to a church or other holy places. To make it abstract and to work with the motif of 'three' in this ballad, the altar will be a triangular pedestal with a big tree trunk on it. The edge of the benches of each row will have a long metallic needle pointing upwards. The shine and lustre of metal will be apprehended in contrast to the dark and silent wood of the benches and altar, and their shape and gleam will suggest a sinister and uneasy quality. Stacked on each of these needles will be spools of red and white thread.

During the recitation of the ballad, the narrators will play with the thread, audience and altar in various ways. They will wrap the thread around the trunk with each action that joins Dora's body (Figure 66). Towards the climax when the wheel starts talking, the needles can be motorized (to rotate like the machinery of a rotisserie) and make layers of electronic and mechanical whirring sounds.

CHRISTMAS EVE and *THE DOVE*

For *Christmas Eve*, I wanted to exploit the value of mirrors and reflections in superstitions as they are almost inevitably associated with death in most cultures. In fact, the belief described in *Christmas Eve* of Hana and Maria breaking ice and looking in the lake to determine their future is one of the earliest form of the "broken mirror signifies death or bad luck" superstition. In archaic cultures people used water as a mirror to look into it to see their fates. If the image was distorted, the viewer would die. The beliefs changed, as the mirror changed form. Mirror as a material is metaphorical because they are believed to possess a power beyond the natural, a reflection of the truth, and so "became a repository which is handy for many mystical and supernatural ideas"[11].

The scenography I envisage for this environment was inspired by Kantor's philosophy in his concept of Zero Theatre. He believed in working with objects in such a way that they are stripped of their usefulness and lose their status acquired in daily life. In the same way, I want to create copies of the "complex object" described below.

Rear-view mirrors such as those on motorcycles and scooters are associated with the action of looking behind one's shoulder to navigate danger. Usually, they have cautionary warnings written at the bottom: "objects in the mirror are closer than they appear" to indicate that the reflective surface is not planar but slightly curved. When the rear view mirror is detached from its functionality of road safety and brought into a performative environment, the warning can be interpreted as rather ominous.

In *The Dove*, the most important theme is the wife's treachery. Material research led me to the understanding that the metaphor of mirror could be expanded to link treachery. This is possible by implementing reflective film or mirror foil. Depending on the direction of light, it acts either as clear glass or as a mirror. A metaphor of treachery is found because the material reveals and hides secrets, and its intentions are relative: it can interchange the viewer and subject casually and with ease.

Another powerful image that is described in the narrative of *The Dove* is the description of her dead body visible in parts amidst the waves –

> here we catch a glimpse of leg,
> and a white arms waves

For this, I was inspired by principle of "fish in moving liquid keychain". Based on this principle, the objects (fish, ducks) in the liquid could be replaced by bones (to represent

rotting limbs) or pieces of broken mirror[vi] (Figure 67). When the circular disk is rotated, the enclosed object always stays afloat over the liquid. If this object is pivoted on two sides and rotated, the buoyancy of the object and the liquid can work as metaphors of truth: the floating pieces always rising against gravity and revealing themselves.

Using the three principles and materials described above, I wish to create objects as shown (Figure 67). The circular disk shapes will appear as rear view mirrors from the outside (using mirror foil) on both sides, with the warning statement etched at the bottom. The circular shape is preferred over others because it represents totality and timelessness, infinite nature of energy and inclusivity of the universe. In case of *Christmas Eve* and *The Dove*, the passage and cyclic nature of time are the basis of the plot lines, summed up in the moral of "what goes around comes around". The disk will have a significant width and inside will be LED lights. When the outside space is dark and the lights inside the object are turned on, the mirror foil will become transparent and show the liquid and object floating inside. Each disk will be clamped and supported on the horizontal sides so they can spin vertically.

I wish to create a space where there is a dynamism in the walking action by introducing steps, platforms and stairs. Walking paths for the audience will be marked by railings on either side (Figure 68). The railings will have the rear view mirrors fixed at specific intervals, so that when a person walks in this area, they are constantly observing the reflections of the other spectators in various mirrors. The repetition of the cautionary warnings on all the mirrors begins to feel uncomfortable - almost as if the mirror is asking each person to beware the other spectators. The mirrors can be angled, some of them can be shattered to increase the sense of unease in the space. Light will be diffused through a gauze from one end of the room or in other manners such that the people in the space are apprehended as silhouettes, so that it seems that one is walking amongst shadows. The narrative of *Christmas Eve* will be performed in this situation and given the plot structure, it can seamlessly integrate with the narrative of *The Dove*.

At the point when the audience understands that the protagonist's husband did not die of natural causes but was murdered, the circular disks will reveal their hidden secrets. The lights inside the disks will turn on, while the outside diffused light will be put out. The disks will become tanks showing different pieces of bones and broken mirror floating in each. The

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[vi] The Romans believed that to avoid the curse of bad luck for seven years that comes with breaking a mirror, one must either bury the broken pieces in the moonlight or throw them into running water.
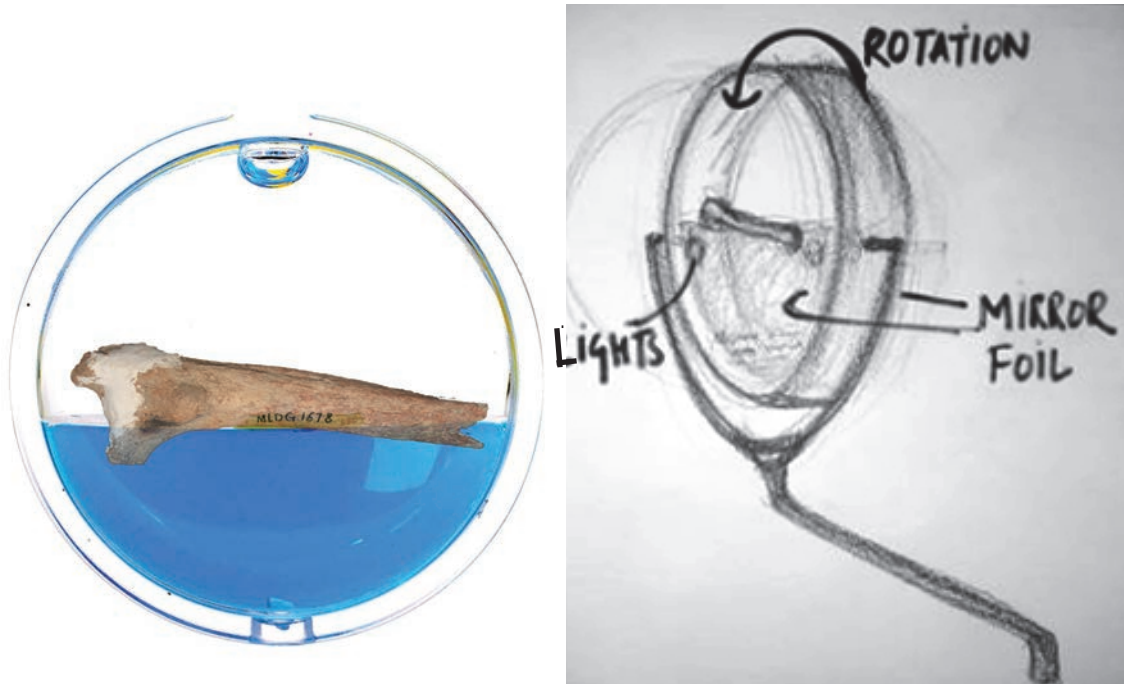
Figure 67: (L) Using the principle of "fish in moving liquid keychain" – circular objects with a viscous water gel and pieces of bones, mirrors etc. (R)- Composite object with mirror foil on both sides and lights inside.
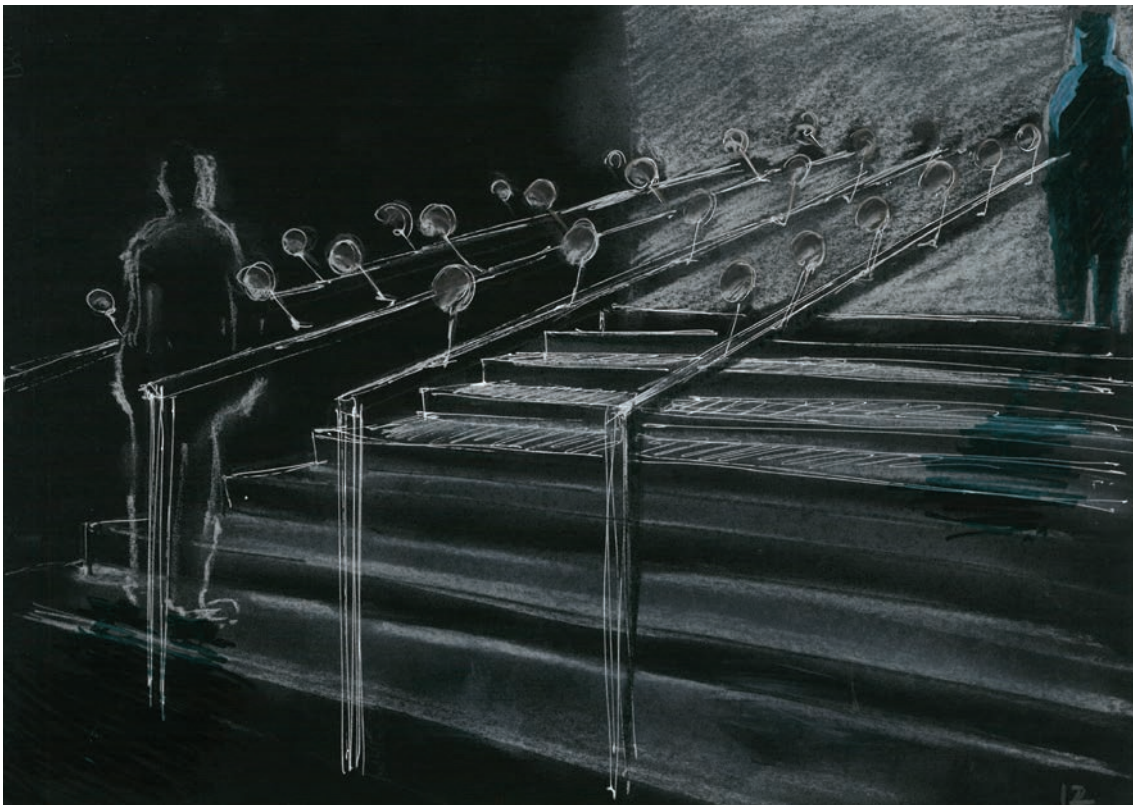
Figure 68: Conceptual sketch for the space of *Christmas Eve* and *The Dove* (2017).

Figure 69: Interior of the *Bruder Klaus Chapel* (2007) by Peter Zumthor showing the hollow blackened cavity and charred walls.

narrators can play with them, spin them around and direct the spectators to focus on various details.

ZAHOR'S BED

The structure and fictional time of *Zahor's Bed* is unique in several ways. The first part of the ballad is the journey of the piligrim to the focus, i.e., the entrance to Hell and introducing Zahor who stands guarding it. This is followed by Zahor's wait for the pilgrim to return from Hell and the latter describing all that he sees there. This leads to Zahor's penitence and the departure of the pilgrim. He returns 90 years later to find Zahor still in penance and a golden fruit bearing tree at the entrance, which is now remoulded as the entrance to Heaven. The pilgrim and Zahor die side by side and ascend to Heaven.

I wish to create the journey using the scenographic environments of the other ballads, and guide the audience to a threshold or doorway which can be understood as the entrance. Using the idea of 28 hells of Hindu mythology[vii]. I wish to create a series of 28 small chambers, one leading to another.

The characteristic of interiority and materials that I wish to create in these chambers is inspired by the architect Peter Zumthor's *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel* in Germany. The spatiality created by Zumthor are resultant of an ingenious construction method. He began with a framework of tree trunks shaped as a tent. Layers of concrete were poured and rammed on the framework. When the concrete had set, the trunks were set on fire from the top, leaving behind a hollowed blackened cavity and charred walls (Figure 69).

Using principles of burnt framework and burning of materials such as strips of polycarbonate board (same as the one discussed in Noon Witch), burnt strips of cork board and similar textures, I wish to create the interior walls and floors of these chambers. They will be replete with notions and descriptions of what one is expected to find in the different hells of Hindu mythology corresponding to the sin committed. I plan that the spectators will be able to enter these chambers one at a time and come back to describe their experience of Hell. Once the spectators have shared their views, the narrators will proceed to describe what the pilgrim saw in Hell.

[vii] Refer to page 28

To give elongated time for the idea of Zahor's penance to set in the audience' minds, the narrative of *Zahor's Bed* will be broken in two parts. The dramaturgy will be such that other stories are told in between the two parts. The return of the pilgrim will be told much later, at the entrance to the 28 chambers.

NOTES:

[1] Carlson, M. (2012). Non-Traditional Theatre Space. In: *The Disappearing Stage*, pg 27.

[2] Farooqui, M. (no date), *Dastangoi: The Lost Art Form of Urdu Storytelling*.

[3] Pallasmaa, J. (2005). *The Eyes of the Skin*, pg 31.

[4] Ibid, pg 55.

[5] Bachelard, G. (2014). *The Poetics of Space*, pg 218.

[6] Ibid, pg 65.

[7] Švankmajer, J., Dryje, F., Schmitt, B., Purš, I. and Zelenka, P. (2012). *Jan Švankmajer: Dimensions of Dialogue-- Between Film and Fine Art*, pg 107

[8] Pallasmaa, J. (2005). *The Eyes of the Skin*, pg 47.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Bachelard, G. (2014). *The Poetics of Space*, pg 128.

[11] Mirrorhistory.com. (2018). *Mirror Superstitions - Superstitions Related to Mirrors.*

CHAPTER 6: GENERAL FEEDBACK FROM THE AUDIENCE.

We presented the show *STORIES [FROM], [TO] & [BY] FARAWAY LANDS* for 3 days and for 20 audience member in each show. They ranged from a) professionals and students of theatre – a mix of those who prefer either traditional or experimental performance systems as well as those who are used to immersive and experimental theatre; b) people from art, performance and film backgrounds and c) a small number of people who are not frequent theatre-goers. It was a mix of Czech and expat people. We also set an age limit of 15 and above for this performance, because we wanted to understand the reactions of adults in these kind of spaces before we challenged ourselves with a younger audience that can tend to be impatient. We received mixed reviews from the audience, based on different parameters.

The atmospheres and ambiences created, and the way different spaces marked different expressions, were highly appreciated. Mostly everyone enjoyed the experience of walking through the entire building and being in spaces that most theatres don't allow access to- such as the stage and the cellar. They enjoyed the smells, sounds and tactile elements – that were subtle but very integral to the concept of the show.

The contrast of reality, fantasy and the in-between had a strong impact on the spectators. At all moments, they felt that they were inside powerfully created worlds, and every space was a scenographic surprise. At the beginning of the performance with *the Dastangoi* stage in the cafe, the ambience that was designed made people feel welcome and they associated the space with warmth and coziness.

In the space for *A Bouquet*, the references to death in eastern cultures, such as the stupas and the pots sparked a lot of curiosity in the visitors. Because of their translucency, the stupas were understood as beacons of light and something spiritual, even though their exact meaning was not communicated. The moment when the pots were understood to represent urns was a powerful moment for many people. This space was liked for the mood through lighting and sound. The way in which people filled in the space and the organic choreography of associating twenty pedestals for twenty audience members was another aspect that was a highlight.

In the scenography for *Water Sprite*, some people could really associate with the feeling of being trapped, showing that the metaphor was communicated successfully through the

material. A lot of people felt that an intense dramatic visual was created when the frame was being lifted and only floating heads of the fellow spectators were visible. Regarding the isolation, the responses were varied: some people enjoyed the seclusion with the soft lighting and rustling of the plastic foil while others felt that it became boring after a while since following the story without seeing the actors did not invite attentiveness. However, the experience of this space was heightened immensely for many people because of the tactility of the seashells clutched in their hands- which allowed them to contemplate on the paradox of the hand held elements' authenticity with the conflict of the plastic sheets engulfing them.

The waiting period before entering the café for *A Daughter's Curse* and the performative way in which the narrator crowned the panda mask was considered ceremonial and ritualistic. However, we did not consider the waiting that people would have to endure once masked and inside, and this was a setback as this non-dramatic time caused the fiction to collapse. The masks were also unstable on some heads and did not allow for streamlined vision from both eyes which also caused distraction for some spectators that we did not foresee. Those who enjoyed the experience, perceived the ripping out of the black eyes as an intense moment and felt afraid, which, for us was in tune with what we wanted to convey.

In *The Treasure*, the foam successfully communicated an abstract and interpretative landscape. People enjoyed seeing the narrator exploring and being completely absorbed in the foam which created the feeling of a vast space even though the cellar was too small to hold so many people. The metaphor of foam for gold was appreciated.

Some people enjoyed manipulating the scenography as they were asked to, and the effects that were produced. Generally, spectators from a film background found the performance exhilarating because they are not very used to experiences that are so tactile, physical and live. Other people felt that the materials were too synthetic, and despite the strong visuals, were unable to connect the materials of the space with the metaphysical nature of Erben's *Kytice*.

Spectators who do not enjoy immersive theatre felt that they were losing energy and attention in the act of being manipulated and organized, i.e., the fiction was constantly disruptive and they found it difficult to go inside the stories and the worlds. This critical commentary is helpful for understanding dramatic time. People who enjoy being spectators only appreciated the work, and said that they would prefer to see these elements as an audience in a theatre. An example cited was that they would enjoy watching 20 pandas in a room more than being

one of them, or they would enjoy the experience of seeing the plastic foil submerge people on stage, rather than be contained inside it themselves.

For those people whose first language is not English and are not from Czech Republic (so not aware of the stories of *Kytice*) – they found it difficult to keep up with the stories being told, because of the accent and the stylized delivery of the text. However, Czech people found it easier to follow the story being told because most of them are aware of Erben's, and perhaps did not have to grip on to every word that was being said. The role of the narrators was also unclear to some people and there were various opinions on the acting. Some found the voice and actions of one narrator to be intimate and natural for the created environments, but the other narrator to be overreaching and exaggerated. Some people associated them as fairies in white, who were telling fairy tales. It was said that there was no dramatic tension between the two performers. The delivery of the text was criticized and it was suggested that if the rhyme and verse were used, as Erben had written, it would inspire the actors to develop their work. This highlighted the necessity of working with voice and text for future performances on this subject.

People from the theatre discipline had valuable opinions and critical feedback. Most of it pertained to the dramaturgy. Overall, the storytelling was considered weak and it did not integrate the narrators' actions with the scenographic content. The instructions, such as removing the elements from the pedestals in *A Bouquet*, were felt to be forced and people desired strategies that would incline them towards specific actions. In the same spirit, people felt that the experience could be made more immersive and more risks could have been taken with the audience. There should have been more freedom for the audience to decide what they wanted to do and interact with the space and objects as they wished. Some people felt that instructions and guidelines from the actors hindered the playfulness and interaction of the audience as a collective while others were of the opinion that the guidelines helped them be oriented otherwise they would have been lost about what to do.

Based on the above and other feedback received has allowed me to think critically and determine the future course of a project like this. Some positive suggestions to help the project grow include:

a) creating this as an installation which could have a performative aspect but it does not stop the spectator from exploring at their own pace, and relate it to an experience connected with the text.

b) Create a format of performance with dual possibilities of experience- where some spectators can have an immersive experience while others can have a traditional experience of watching a show.

c) Creating the performance as some kind of rituals where the audience are invited and welcomed to participate, but the actors lead the ritual akin to priests.

d) playing more with the tactility so that the audience can feel and touch the stories as well as heat them.

e) Improving the connection between the actor, action, object and verse.

f) Manipulate the way one hears the story- the source of the voice could be hidden, and voices could be altered.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.

This thesis demonstrates an individual artistic approach. Space and materials are understood as two components that contribute to the creation of a live and physical experience in a performance. These two components are explored for their metaphorical capabilities in order to manifest the poetic word, not as an illustration but, as abstract symbols that provide clarity and identify hidden similarities between two (seemingly unlikely) ideas.

The study puts considerable emphasis on different kinds of research in order to engage with unique comparisons, new forms of expression and emphasize shifts in ways of thinking about scenography.

Chapter 2 contributes to an examination of Czech cultural history through the lens of folktales, highlighting important ideas that are entrenched in Erben's *Kytice*. It further expands into a retrospective analysis of folktales across cultures. I believe this impacts theatre directly because it offers the potential to engage with cultures, traditions and folklores. The performance described was an attempt to test that potential, thus balancing theory with practice.

2-D artworks often provide invaluable inspiration for deepening the knowledge, and creation, of mise en scene. The visual analysis in Chapter 3 helps to discover certain ideas that might not surface through reading the text alone. The analysis of the illustrations relies on the method established by Beth Lazroe for visual communication. It systemizes a deconstruction of aesthetic elements and principles in a composition and how they impact the viewer. In my study, the impact is understood as a tangent of 'perception' which is of crucial importance in making experiences.

Since I have not engaged in substantial practical work in theatre, articulating through theory helps to develop a logical clarity of thought. Concepts of phenomenology, perception of space, material tactility and positioning of the spectator are some ideas that influence my scenographic process. Chapter 4 is a derivation and synthesis of important ideas put forward by pioneers in each domain. It is in no way an exhaustive research, but barely a start. Metaphorically, it puts 'one foot in the door' to initiate a bigger dialogue in developing a personal professional and (in the future) a collective academic practice. Importantly, the

ideas discussed in this chapter help to establish the corporeal nature of space intertwined with material tactility.

Chapter 5 describes my artistic process and outputs. I show ways in which it has been possible to put theory into practice and create metaphors based in *Kytice* by using space and materials consciously in a performance. The dramatic meaning of plastic as a material is elaborated in different cases, along with the role of light, spatial gestures, scale of objects, apparent-visual and real tactility. It is done in different scenarios where the audience are not static but walking and the performance genre is storytelling. The spectators thus confronting the space differently by listening to stories and poetry. It proves the hypothesis that visual and experiential metaphors (just like literary ones) themselves become poetic, since they state that one thing *is* another thing. I consider the performance itself as the testing ground for trial and error; its impact and reception is discussed in Chapter 6. It opens up further possibilities and formats of exploring the potential in these ideas.

An aspect that was highlighted in the audience feedback is the criticality of dramatic time, which Brook has also termed as the 4th dimension that differentiates the scenographer's work from a painter and sculptor. In laying out the theory and describing the performance, this thesis does not actively discuss the component of time in order to contain the scope of study. This is done with the full knowledge that a discussion on mise en scene is incomplete if time is not addressed in relation to space[i]. I hope that in a future study, my reflections from this work will help in correlating the idea of time in a performance with phenomenology and tactility.

Another limitation of my process has been that while I stressed on the plots, structure and philosophical meaning of the poetry, I did not have access to understanding one component of the poetry: the rhythm and meter of Erben's verses. In the course of writing this thesis, I have learnt that the rhyme employed by Erben is what makes the poetry unique and regarded highly by the Czech people. Bachelard also states that to assess poetry and get to the root of its phenomenology, one must pay attention to the vocal importance of the words and observe where the poet lays emphasis. I am determined to resolve this shortcoming by listening to the poetry narrated in Czech and observing the effect on the subconscious creative process. This is still, after all, a work-in-progress.

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[i] In a previous research work titled *Visual narrative and interiority: Interior thinking rooted in the scenographic method* (2018) co-authored with Professor Amrita Madan, I have delved into the mise en scene with respect to the spatio-temporal continuum. It addresses the idea of time in an experience.

Certain feedback from the audience also focused on exploring the idea of rituals through this format of participatory theatre, where the spectators are asked to manipulate scenography. While Craig and Grotowski have spoken about rituals in theatre in different ways, I am impacted by how Kantor explains it. He believes that in a theater performance viewers are expected to only pay attention and be passive receivers; whereas a ritual is sacrament – it requires participation and faith. He explains that repetition and reappearance help to create rituals, and I plan to try this idea out in my practice of creating experiences.

To think of a future presentation of this work as an installation opens up many ideas. For instance, the stories from Kytice can become a starting point for thinking about the space and the metaphors to be created. After this, one can also look at the created output objectively, to see what the space tells about itself. This can then be added to the (narrated or visible to read) text to expand the story being told.

Other than that, I was introduced to Švankmajer's writings at a not-very-early stage in the artistic process. However, they have impacted me greatly and now I see multiple possibilities of working with *Kytice* through sensorial interpretations and approaches. This thesis, to use a tactile metaphor is barely the first scratch with my pen-knife on a new scratch card.

<p align="center">*</p>

In this way, the study navigates through research and artistic imagination to develop on the attributes of space and materials. It reinstates that if scenography is considered through a phenomenological lens, our job is similar to that of the poet. That, as Bachelard notes, is to create images which "…have not been experienced, and which life does not prepare but which the poet creates; of living what has not been lived…"[1].

NOTES:

[1] Bachelard, G. (2014). *The Poetics of Space*, pg 14.

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LIST AND SOURCES OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Scenography for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2015). Source: Author.

Figure 2: Scenography for *The Cherry Orchard* (2016). Source: Author.

Figure 3: Scenography for *Oedipus Rex* (2016). Source: Author.

Figure 4: *Ground Zero, Ayodhya, India* (2012), The architectural experience of religious myths associated with a disputed holy site. Source: Author

Figure 5: Illustrations on *Kytice* by Jan Zrzavý (1976)- *Noon Witch* (L) and *Wedding Shirts* (R). Source: Stratil, J. (2014). *National Artist Jan Zrzavý - Illustration from Bouquet, Albatros, Prague, 1976*. [image] Available at: https://stratil.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=425589 [Accessed 15 Aug. 2018].

Figure 6: A still from the ballad *Water Sprite* in the film *Kytice* by F.A. Brabec (2000). Source: Brabec, F. (2000). [image] Available at: https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1013898051-kytice/ [Accessed 15 Aug. 2018].

Figure 7: *Noon Witch* by Jan Konůpek (1920). Source: Larvová, H. (1998). *Jan Konůpek (1883-1950) Poutník k nekonečnu/ A Pilgrim to Infinity*. Praha: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, pp.98-99.

Figure 8: *Water Sprite* by Jan Konůpek (1920). Source: Larvová, H. (1998). *Jan Konůpek (1883-1950) Poutník k nekonečnu/ A Pilgrim to Infinity*. Praha: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, pp.98-99.

Figure 9: *The Treasure* by Jan Konůpek (1920). Source: Larvová, H. (1998). *Jan Konůpek (1883-1950) Poutník k nekonečnu/ A Pilgrim to Infinity*. Praha: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, pp.98-99.

Figure 10: *Zahor's Bed* by Jan Konůpek (1920). Source: Larvová, H. (1998). *Jan Konůpek (1883-1950) Poutník k nekonečnu/ A Pilgrim to Infinity*. Praha: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, pp.98-99.

Figure 11: *Wedding Shirts* by Jan Konůpek (1920). Source: Larvová, H. (1998). *Jan Konůpek (1883-1950) Poutník k nekonečnu/ A Pilgrim to Infinity*. Praha: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, pp.98-99.

Figure 12: *The Dove* by Jan Konůpek (1920). Source: Larvová, H. (1998). *Jan Konůpek (1883-1950) Poutník k nekonečnu/ A Pilgrim to Infinity*. Praha: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, pp.98-99.

Figure 13: *Noon Witch* [I] by Alén Diviš. Source: Zemina, J. (2016). *Alén Diviš*. 1st ed. Praha: Arbor Vitae, pp.193-194.

Figure 14: *Noon Witch* [II] by Alén Diviš. Source: Zemina, J. (2016). *Alén Diviš*. 1st ed. Praha: Arbor Vitae, pp.193-194.

Figure 15: *Wedding Shirts* [I] by Alén Diviš (1948-49). Source: Zemina, J. (2016). *Alén Diviš*. 1st ed. Praha: Arbor Vitae, pp.181.

Figure 16: *Wedding Shirts* [II] by Alén Diviš (1947-48). Source: Zemina, J. (2016). *Alén Diviš*. 1st ed. Praha: Arbor Vitae.

Figure 17: *Water Sprite* [I] by Alén Diviš (1948-49). Source: Zemina, J. (2016). *Alén Diviš*. 1st ed. Praha: Arbor Vitae.

Figure 18: *Water Sprite* [II] by Alén Diviš (1948-49). Source: Zemina, J. (2016). *Alén Diviš*. 1st ed. Praha: Arbor Vitae.

ANNEX I

SUMMARIZED PLOTS OF THE BALLADS

A Bouquet:

Orphans bury their deceased mother. They keep returning to the grave and the mother, taking pity on them, emerges in the form of a Thyme plant on the gravesite. The flower smells of their mother's breath, and the orphans collect them in a bouquet. They plan to display the bouquet to families they will meet, hoping that it will allow everyone to reminisce their own mothers.

The Treasure:

A poor woman finds the entrance to a magical cave on her way to church on Good Friday. It is filed with treasures. Putting her infant on the cave floor, she collects a lot of gold and takes it home. Later she finds that the gold at home is missing, and the cave entrance has disappeared- her child trapped within. She is anguished, burdened and repents her sin. On the Good Friday, next year the entrance reappears and she goes inside. She finds her child alive, the treasures don't appeal to her anymore and she flees.

Wedding Shirts:

At night, a girl mourns the death of her family and missing fiancé. He appears just then and asks her to accompany him for their marriage right away. He leads, jumping and flying across the landscape. Shrewdly, he deprives her of her Christian tokens – rosary, crucifix and Bible. He brings her to his castle- a graveyard. The girl outwits his plan and locks herself in a shed, which is a morgue with a dead man on the table. Her zombie fiancé commands the dead being to rise and unlock. The girl pleads and prays and is eventually saved at sunrise.

Noon Witch:

A mother tries to coax and discipline her agitated child while preparing lunch. In her distress, she summons the noon witch to come and take her child away. The door opens and the witch reaches out for the child. The mother clutches to the child and suffocates it in the process.

The Golden Spinning Wheel:

A king wants to marry Dora, a girl he stumbled upon in the woods. The wedding is arranged, and Dora's stepmother and sister kill her enroute the wedding. The king is fooled into marrying the stepsister. A wizard finds Dora's mutilated body. He sends his servant to barter components of a golden spinning wheel in exchange for Dora's missing body parts. The king returns and asks his wife to spin thread on the golden wheel. The enchanted wheel recounts the two women's crimes. Dora is reunited with the king and the women are eaten by wolves in the forest.

Christmas Eve:

Hana and Maria go to a frozen lake on Christmas Eve to break the ice and see their futures. Hana sees her wedding to Vaclav and Maria sees her own coffin and funeral. In the following year, both prophesies come true.

The Dove:

A sad widow, accompanies her dead husband's coffin to the graveyard. She is comforted by a man who proposes a next marriage. She remarries but has a deep secret: she had poisoned her first husband to marry her current one. A dove sits in an oak located at the former's grave; and his cooing burdens her with guilt and drives her insane. She commits suicide by jumping in the water.

Zahor's Bed.

A pilgrim walks a great distance to find the entrance to Hell, guarded by Zahor. He allows the former to pass, on the condition that the pilgrim will return to retell the horrors he witnesses in hell. Zahor waits and the pilgrim returns after a very long time. Upon hearing the tortures of the Devil, Zahor is remorseful and goes into penitence. The pilgrim returns 90 years later to find Zahor still in penance and a golden fruit bearing tree at the entrance, which now leads to Heaven. The pilgrim and Zahor die side by side and ascend to Heaven.

Water Sprite:

A girl goes to the lake against her mother's wishes. She is abducted by a Water Sprite and taken below the water. She bears his child, whom she loves but remains unhappy. She pleads with her husband to visit her mother; he relents on the condition that she has returns by nightfall and leave the child with him as guarantee. Once home, the girl's mother refuses to let her depart. The sprite demands that she returns, but she is helpless against her mother's fear and determination. Upon being disobeyed, the sprite kills the child- leaving the corpse at the doorstep.

Willow:

A husband asks his wife about her ailment when she sleeps each night- she becomes lifeless and does not wake up even when her child cries. She implores that it is her destiny and all is well since she wakes up every morning regardless. The husband counsels a witch who 'sees' that his wife's soul goes into a willow tree at night. The jealous husband cuts down the tree and as it falls, his wife too dies at home. He repents his actions and his wife's soul tells him to use the wood to love and protect her child.

Lily:

A girl, upon her wishes, is buried in the forest after death. She transforms into a lily which enchants a bypassing lord. He takes it home and tends to it. One night, the lily transforms into a lady -sad about her transient nightly life. He assures her shelter from daylight and marries her; she bears a child. The lord is summoned for a war; he leaves his mother in charge of his wife's protection. The mother disobeys and destroys the shelter. He returns to find his wife and child are dead due to his mother; he curses her to damnation.

A Daughter's Curse:

A daughter confesses to her mother that she has killed her child. The mother asks her how she is going to atone; the girl replies that she will atone by committing suicide. The mother asks what is she going to leave for the boy who enjoyed her company. The girl replies that her suicide is a blessing for him because he lied to her. The mother asks what is the girl going to leave for her mother: the daughter answers that she will leave a curse on her (mother) for always letting her (daughter) have her way.