

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE

THEATRE FACULTY

PERFORMING ARTS

DIRECTING FOR DEVISED AND OBJECT THEATRE

MASTER'S THESIS

**Mutation of the Human Body in Performative Art -
Body as Main Aspect while Creating a Performance**

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Date of Defence: June 2019

Allocated Academic Title: M.A.

Prague, 2019

AKADEMIE MÚZICKÝCH UMĚNÍ V PRAZE

DIVADELNÍ FAKULTA

DRAMATICKÁ UMĚNÍ

DIRECTING FOR DEVISED AND OBJECT THEATRE

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

**Mutace lidského těla v performativním umění -
Tělo jako hlavní aspekt při tvorbě performance**

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Datum obhajoby: June 2019

Přidělovaný akademický titul: M.A.

Praha, 2019

Declaration

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

**Mutation of the Human Body in Performative Art -
Body as Main Aspect while Creating a Performance**

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

Prague, date:

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Signature of the candidate

Warning

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Abstract

Thinking through body about creating performance – master thesis paper based on two years of Master Studies on Directing on Devised and Object Theatre on Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, containing terms of body as a topic, material and performative tool. Analysis of plays done by author between 2016–2018 :

“99–9” (premiere January, Prague, 2017)

“HernameisSandy” (Premiere May, Prague, 2017) ,

“Crying zone” (Premiere January, Prague, 2018)

“Fragile handle with care” (Premiere June, Prague, 2018)

“photo.synthesis ” (Premiere July, Warsaw, 2018)

Questioning where future will bring author’s way of thinking about body. Author’s artistic therapy through the notion of her body, their body, our body on stage.

Konspekt

Myšlení tělem o vytváření performance – diplomová práce založená na dvou letech magisterského oboru Režie alternativního a loutkového divadla na Akademii múzických umění v Praze, která má tělo jako téma, materiál a performativní nástroj.

Analýza her autorky mezi roky 2016-2018 –

„99–9“ (Premiéra v lednu, Praha, 2017)

„HernameisSandy“ (Premiéra v květnu, Praha, 2017)

„Crying zone“ (Premiéra v lednu, Praha, 2018)

„Fragile handle with care“ (Premiéra v červnu, Praha, 2018)

„photo.synthesis“ (Premiéra v červenci, Varšava, 2018)

Tázání se, kam budoucnost přivede způsob myšlení autorky o těle. Umělecká terapie autorky prostřednictvím jejího těla, jejich těla, našeho těla na jevišti.

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INTRODUCTION

My art is not abstract, it lives and breathes.

Mark Rothko

The body evokes an array of contrasting emotional responses – it can stimulate and fascinate or, on the contrary, irritate and repulse. It can also be used as a metaphor to describe the essence of someone’s being – as a 3-year-old my siblings would refer to me as “fatty”, which was meant to represent not only the appearance of my first body, but also, later, my entire personality. My mum whose body is round, soft and feminine is my biggest inspiration. My preoccupation with the body continued up until my studies and became the focal point of my Bachelor’s degree at the Faculty of Stage Design of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. For the purpose of my graduation performance based on S. I. Witkacy's play *The Mother*, I created a real-size puppet of a woman representing the title character. I started working on this project during my Erasmus exchange programme at the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan, where the insufficient knowledge of the Italian language forced me to resort to more visual and physical ways of communicating. I worked on researching through material and prints for the costume of a mother. That was really interesting process for me, working on the sense of blood to be visualized on the clothing. I wanted to show through chosen prints toxic relationship that mother and

her son Leon have in this play. It took me a month of experimenting by colouring fabric samples in my bath tube based on laboratory's images of tainted and toxic blood to achieve the exact effect I had been looking for. I used it later in my graduation performance at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, which was the first time my research on the body was visualized and made public.

Also, the exploration of how costumes and the human body (in this case – the body of a mother) can tell a story, as well as express a character's emotions and tensions got me accepted to an MA programme in Directing in Devised and Object Theatre at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU). I was intrigued by the possibility of using the skills that I had already gained at the Fine Arts Academy, during Theoretical Art Studies, as well as while working in the fashion industry and I became intent on delving deeper into the subject of total theatre.

In this thesis I will describe my way of discovering the notion of body in performative environment. Starting from fashion where I got my first job as stylist assistant, where my focus on the body was completely different than understanding and giving artistic layers to the body itself. It was more about dressing body, and adjusting to the system. In my paper I would like to describe my work from the time of 2016-2018, where I was studying on MA programme in Prague, and how it had impact of my way of thinking about notion of body now.

1. BODY IN MY WORK, DESCRIPTION OF PROJECTS

In the following chapter, I would like to discuss the projects that I created while studying Directing Devised and Object Theatre in Prague focusing on the details of the process of working at the performances presented to the audiences in the past three years.

99 - 9

The first performance that all the students from my year put on together was as part of Braňo Mazúch's directing class. The show was created on a staircase and it instantly revealed which direction each one of us would follow in the future. I chose the body, its limits and temperature. For the whole 60 minutes of the performance, I was rolling up and down the 99 stairs dressed in eight layers of costume, which I was gradually taking off as I kept rolling until I was left with only one thin body suit, which gave me bruises.

Why did I choose such a way of presenting my first public group work? I was certain that the process of exercising and preparing for this performance was vital. I worked on the rhythm of the happening – I was switching between moving faster and freezing for brief periods of time. I also carefully planned the way I used the space – the staircase was crowded by the audience, so I always chose the most impossible road to get through in order to stay close to people and make them feel intruding into

their personal space. I enjoyed the moment when the audience realised that all the tight layers I was wearing made me sweaty, exhausted and forced me to work through my claustrophobia.

Initially, during the rehearsals, I felt cold, uncomfortable and rather scared that I might have chosen a too difficult task for myself. However, the more effects I saw of my movement and the more I cooperated with the other performers, the more I realized that it was well worth it and that it was all a part of the process. The process I would call training my body to make this special task that I created for myself. I felt that I am becoming my own personal trainer that even if I am not with energy any more, I know that I still need to work on my movements on stage. It reminded me of my childhood memories connected to playing the cello every day in order for better technique.

During the premiere, I was strong enough to wait more than it was established on cold, uncomfortable and tight part of stair. Last minute I added my opera singing from Turandot G. Puccini titled 'Nessun dorma'. Why I did that I think it is coming from the notion that when you lay it is really difficult to sing, and I felt at that particular moment very cold, uncomfortable so I decided to even feel more uncomfortable with the whole body. Whole body means also organs from inside. It felt very accurate at that moment even I never thought about this before.

At the end of the performance, my body felt exhausted and bruised, I had a muscular pain and my body temperature was taken to the extreme during the weeks of preparations for the performance when I would stay up late to practice my

movement on the stairs even after rehearsals, without all the layers that I normally had on my body to protect me from the cold and incommodious stairs.

After this first project, I knew that this was just the beginning of my research into the body and of my journey at this MA programme. Our task was to create something together and even though it was undoubtedly difficult, we managed to achieve some results. Discussing and developing our ideas as a group required a great deal of patience, but also speed and flexibility during conversations, as well as being able to deal with many topics at the same time. I truly appreciated these moments when we, all the students in our programme, still new and inexperienced, were trying to create a performance without knowing exactly what we were doing. On the other hand, it was precisely this lack of knowledge that got us further than expected. In fact, participating in this project taught us how to talk with our future collaborators. Also, it made me realise that I was not going to be a performer at school anymore and that I would love to be able to see our results from the perspective of the viewer.

HERNAMEISSANDY

Throughout the second semester, I had the opportunity to work on my own project based on a topic of my choice and in cooperation with whomever I desired. I knew from the very beginning that I was going to work with my friend Nataša Mikulová, who was studying by that time (2017) Acting on Alternative and Puppet Theatre Department, whose artistic expression suits mine and who has a beautiful, inspirational body. She has this body that you can not define either if it is something sexual about it or maternal, and that was exactly what I was looking in this piece that I was about to start working on it.

I needed to find the topic that best reflected my interests in that specific moment. At the time, I was fascinated with the phenomenon of the Japanese “cuddle bars”. A cuddle bar is a place where people come looking not as much for physical pleasure as for some basic human experiences, such as the feeling of warmth of another body or of being stroked by another person. For each of these services, the prices vary according to the time you spend in a cuddle bar. My fascination with the cuddle bars stemmed from my own fear that one day I might be in a position where I need to go to a cuddle bar myself just to be hugged and cuddled by someone nameless or faceless, just to feel another human being. This haunting fear kept waking me from sleep, making me even more determined to explore the topic,

regardless of the results. I felt that there was an enormous performative potential there, but I could not pinpoint where it lied or how to tackle it. Therefore, for the first month Nataša and I only worked over the Internet, via social media. I was convinced of including a puppet in this performance. Looking back, I believe that the idea of a puppet was inspired by my previous individual project that I had done just before coming to Prague as part of my Bachelor's degree. In this graduation performance I used a puppet to present my way of thinking about the relation between the son and the mother from the play by S. I. Witkiewicz. As I felt quite confident about the topic of a mother and comfortable with using a puppet, I came up with the idea a sex doll. Nataša's Rubens-like figure reminded me a little of my mother's body, which represents homeliness and safety to me as much as to other people. And how do I know it? Because Nataša is very warm and affectionate towards others, she touches and hugs a lot, which can make you feel like you are in safe space. That was a crucial realization for me, which laid the groundwork for my entire work.

I started to do research into how come cuddle bars succeed at making people feel comfortable even if everyone knows that it is a financially-motivated endeavour. I also tried to combine it with a psychological session. I knew that it was going to be my starting point for this work. I wanted to make people feel comfortable and safe with the performer, that when the show will grow, people would have a desire to own the performer only for themselves. This was part of the initial feedback that I got from my fellow students after open rehearsals – some said that they really wanted to have Nataša – the performer – only for themselves and that they were jealous of other people and of her interactions with other members of the audience.

Our creative process with Nataša went through many stages. At first, she posted photos and videos on social media showing me how she was working with the puppet. With my comments and directions, we were searching for the kind of emotion we were hoping to achieve in this performance. I was planning on using all of those videos during the show. Also, that was the first time I learned that if you are sure about some artistic choices from the very beginning, it means that they are likely to fail faster than you think and that they will not be included in your final work. It was quite a disappointing discovery for me but with results of other movements like live, interactive actions, I got satisfied about the changes.

After one month of rehearsing over social media, we finally met in a room where we started talking about being close to someone and about the nature of the process of getting to know each other, as well as about trance. This was the beginning of my warm-up exercises which I have been using until now and without which I cannot imagine starting my rehearsals. The point of the warm-up is to get into a state of trance – to leave behind all the energy that you bring into work, to feel that you are here and now with specific people working on this particular project. It is a really simple picture – loud, a very particular type of music, the eyes are closed and the body is moving. There are three stages – first comes the shock caused by the music, then the discovery that you have complete freedom of movement and the last is this strange and uncomfortable sensation of the lack of sense of sight .

Then, we can follow the flow of the music, work with it, dance or scream – it is a peak moment where we dance like mad having nothing to lose. This leads to the final stage of the trance session which is acceptance. When acceptance arrives, you can

either do nothing or embrace the madness of your constantly moving body, it is entirely up to you in which direction your body will take you. After this at least 15-minute-long session, you should be able to feel present in the here and now so that you can start working on a project with new energy. Recently, I have developed a jumping trance session, which only can be done by people who have no problems with hips or knees, because for 10/15/20 minutes you jump constantly, which leaves you tired but liberated. Your muscles become relaxed and you can work on it and put new layers of energy on it. This exercise is inspired by TRE's technique (Trauma Releasing Exercises) of stress-relief, which also helps to get rid of other emotions that are irrelevant at a particular moment. I believe it is crucial for a performing body to get rid of the layer of everyday reality, to focus on the work at hand and to be ready for new experiences brought by every project. The results of such an approach are incredible. After such a session, you can truly share the same energy with the other bodies and you start speaking the same language and enter into a dialogue. You can work together precisely because of the shared experience of debilitating the body. This, however, is an extreme version of my trance.

Coming back to process of creating a performance with Nataša, I entitled it *HernameisSandy*, which was inspired by the name of the sex doll that we bought for our show. Also, we put the words together as a reference to a hashtag which we often used when talking about the project. In fact, the title determined the role of the doll in the performance. It was supposed to represent the desire to have something impossible, but also something that is completely dependent on the owner who creates the doll's narration. As it referred to adult life, I decided to use not just any doll, but precisely a sex doll.

When we were working with Nataša and the doll on the sound and the videos, somehow those two figures got confused. I was still a beginner and could not handle everything. But I really appreciate the direction that we took during the creative process and that we were entirely in this together.

One of Nataša's task was to kill the doll and another was to be with the doll among people, so we took the doll for a walk in the park, we went on the bus and the tram. I recorded it with a camera to observe what was happening and how people reacted to what Nataša was doing. It was quite interesting to see how she was slowly losing her childish attitude towards the doll, shifting from this talking sweet to normal, adult monologuing.

After we first showed the performance to Sodja Lotker – the leader of our programme, we agreed with hers feedback which led to us entirely to rethinking our work. Feedback was about leaving all the layers that we are getting confused about contains all the media. We changed the space and we limited the tools with which we worked. We got rid of the distracting videos, of the drama and the heaviness surrounding the show. We made it more to people among people, which means to be among audience with the performer and with the subject that we are talking about. One of the introduced changes was the division of the space into two layers of participation – a direct and a passive one. The former was created on stage in the form of a circle of chairs resembling a group therapy meeting, the latter was achieved through a typical arrangement of audience seats. In other words, there was one performer, twelve people sitting in a circle involved in the interactive performance and

the rest of the audience that was observing everything without not having a direct connection with the performer.

When it comes to how the topic of the body was explored in this performance, Nataša's body became a costume's object that changed throughout the whole performance. When you entered the space Nataša invited you to sit on stage in a circle of chairs, which meant, in fact, that the first spectators who came to the performance were also performing in the show and were watched by other audience members. Once the show started, for the first five minutes Natasa sat silently in the circle among the other audience members just observing them and the prolonged silence made people not only insecure, but also curious where this performance was going. I decided to ask them about their date of birth, which seemed to me a very personal question that could allow people get to know each other. At the same time, calling people by a number rather than by their names was more anonymous and formal. Thus, at the beginning Nataša asked the people sitting in the circle to write down their dates of birth and then collected them in order to gather material for her lottery. The person whose date of birth she chose at random during the lottery was then entertained by Nataša just like a client of a Cuddle Bar. The duration of all of her actions was meticulously timed with a stopwatch: 30 seconds for a smile, 30 seconds to touch someone, one minute to look into someone's eyes, one minute to smell someone. The question arising in this context is: who was really the client and who was providing a service – Nataša as performer or the audience who started to be involved in the artistic process and was watched by other audience members in the room? The emotional reactions achieved by this first part ranged from creating a sense of comfort to creating discomfort by putting the audience in the position of

performers.

In the second part of the performance ,Nataša, whose costume made her look bigger emphasizing her corpulence, started getting rid of the balloons that were inside of her. What was important for me was the way in which she was doing it – for work purposes, we called it "soft killing", which meant that she was killing something that had already been there when the audience arrived, and then with soft moves that made smoothly a change to big ones the water-filled balloons hidden under her costume making her look like a bizarre creature started leaking.

According to psychologists, if we start off by asking for something big to which we expect refusal, the person is more likely to agree to whatever we ask of them next just because the initial thing we asked for was so enormous and impossible that everything else seems more doable. I applied this notion to my idea about the perception of Nataša's body by other people. I wanted to make her look bigger with balloons and the Sandy's doll so that when she removes them, the audience feels like she is smaller than she actually is. Thanks to this trick, she was indeed smaller at this moment of the performance. She also kept asking if the people around were okay, which got scary at some point as it demonstrated how the system in which we live expects us to be okay no matter what. Also, in the second part of the performance we focused on trying to mix the actions between the audience in the circle: we wanted to get them to exchange seats, to look at themselves, to smile at each other, to get them know each other more while Natasa was observing them.

The final part involved the sex doll (Sandy), which was supposed to be

Natasa's alter ego in the sense that the actions performed on the doll, such as "killing" or "squeezing" it, revealed Natasa's emotions. The performer talked to the doll, was giving air to a doll to be alive. She also sang Funny Valentine to the doll with milk in her mouth that was spilling all over her black tight dress. Finally, after giving birth to the doll and losing the balloons, she left the cleaning of the whole space of milk and water to the audience and to me as the director.

Throughout the whole performance I was asking Natasa if she was okay, if she needed anything, if she wanted a cigarette etc. The whole process of getting to the final version of this performance was really intimate, private and very interesting both to me and to the performer. We had many open rehearsals with real bodies because we could not see what was and what was not working otherwise. It gave us more comfort to be that close to people and for Nataša to be more aware of speaking in English and to be completely comfortable with it. Also, it was quite interesting for her to try different actions with different people – with schoolmates, with professors or complete stranger - to push her own boundaries and to be more open for the final performance. Also, as it was my very first attempt to work with a professional actress, the experience helped me understand how the ideas in my head have an entire different meaning for others and taught me how to communicate them more effectively.

Finally, I received feedback as an individual creator of the performance, not as a member of creative team, I was the only one responsible for the entire project. This moment was really critical in my life and helped me progress to another level as an artist. It took something away from me, but it filled me with confidence that I can

work with others, that the things in my head can be interesting for others and that I do have something to say. I remember that I started to feel myself more than before.

I was very much afraid of what the reactions of the audience would be, but they were so diverse that I was really surprised and happy to have achieved it. I wanted to make the audience feel something either towards each other or towards the performer. Some of them were reacting through each other – looking at each other, commenting with face expression, laughing; some people left, could not stand the stress that something would happen to them on stage, whereas others were completely fine with the experience. I was not expecting any specific reactions from the audience other than them feeling a connection with the performer, in which I seem to have succeeded.

When I think about the body in this project, I used the way in which my performer's body could be transmitted as comforting and warm, evoking that of a mother. Also I initially over-sized a body of a performer to change a feeling that she is much more bigger than in reality to deceive a viewer with their safe assurance. I used the body as a tool to manipulate people into feeling comfortable with Nataša and thus consent to having to interact with her. The performance spoke about setting, pushing and extending boundaries within each person, but also about coping with the awareness of being observed and becoming a part of the performance, which allows you to behave different to normal. I was truly satisfied with the effect I achieved by having two separate audiences during the show, and how being in one audience can be differently delivered, experienced. One audience is more direct and controlled, because, as its member, you need to bear in mind that you are not only watching the

show, but being watched at the same time. All of stages of creating the performance made me realize how important it is to have open rehearsals to see how people react, as without this opportunity you cannot prepare for the spectators' reactions.

Moreover, I admit to being extremely lucky to work with Natasa, who is a brilliant performer and a wonderful person, who listens, understands and tries her best to get involved in the creative process. The aim of the performance was to capture the moment of intimacy between people who do not normally get it. To break the silence about intimacy, people's lack of another human being. To break the ice with which we are covered. But also to calm down and to be more humane towards another human.

CRYING ZONE

I created the next performance during my second year of the Master's Programme.

It all started with an idea that came to my head when I was doing my summer internship at a Theatre Festival in Santarcangelo. One night, Israel Lopez, a fellow student from my programme, approached me and asked for eye drops because he had something in his eye. As I did not have any, I suggested that he forced himself to cry. So he started performing in front of me at a party– he started crying. It was such a powerful image that everyone in the group stopped talking and kept watching him. It was such a beautiful and exciting moment in my life that I could not sleep for the entire night. I knew already this feeling, that the seed was left in my stomach to become a beautiful flower. That is how I knew I wanted to explore crying as a performative act, so in the following days I created “crying zone” at the festival. A zone in which you can cry without any questions asked while being observed by others. I also started looking into cultural phenomena connected with crying and yet again found inspiration in Japan where all of my fears and doubts are structure: I discovered that the Japanese use “crying therapy”, during which people force themselves to cry through various means, especially by watching animals being in pain rather than seeing human beings killed or tortured. At that point I started to be scared that humans cannot guarantee emotions in another human such as crying or just empathy any more.

I remember being completely convinced of the way I wanted my performance to look like: I wanted to do it outside, in the main points in the city so that passers-by can watch performers cry in transparent cubes. However, I later started working with dramaturg Lukáš Jiříčka who offered me other directions to try out. Thus, I started experimenting with the concept that I had already had defined in my head which was performative installation with performers just sitting and crying. I knew that I want this action - crying to appear but without context, without space to present it and also without knowing exactly who would be involved in that project. But once I started to experiment with my idea, and trying to follow thoughts and notes that were given by my tutor I failed. I was first interested and curious to try new ways of presenting work that were suggested by Jiříčka, but I didn't have enough instinct to see how this performance would be developed, because I wasn't that familiar with performance manipulated by artist with stage design, music and laptop as main tool. Also, I must admit that I did not rehearse it in a way that it should be. If I would put more try outs into this way of showing, then I would understand more how to guide audience member to be pushed in the action that I wanted to have. It turned out to be a mistake, as when I first presented my it was manipulated installation without performers. I failed, because it was not me, I wanted to try new things that were not mine. I remember that while preparing this first showing I was too emotionally focused on my private life and art took second place. Therefore, instead of focusing on the emotional state in which I found myself at that particular moment, I escaped into something that I was not familiar with and into a way of working that was completely not mine. I worked without performers, while I wanted to work with a manipulative installation that would explore solitude and redundant emotions, which

is what the audience should take from my work. Also, I mixed too many artistic tools – the voice of a Gregorian choir, transparent plastic wall with reasons of crying that I got from my Facebook friends, virtual materials about the most touching and agitating moments from movies, TV series or artistic content. I knew that it was not even the starting point of my work.

Due to the negative feedback I received, I was completely lost and confused, but at that moment I realized that it was best to take some rest and after an unexpected break up with a boyfriend, I was full with emotions that I needed to get out of my system. This is when I realized that I had to create something that was only be mine.

I cried a lot for days and really needed others to help me cry with me. I needed a space in which I could stay without having to answer questions, a space of understanding rather than judgement. I started working on a project that included five performers, a chair, an aquarium and tissues. It was a great deal simpler compared with my first attempt. I was glad that it changed the direction from stage design/virtual technology exhibition into simple and here and now action. This performance was the most personal and the most mine out of everything I did during the three years of studies.

I worked with a performer who was focused on object theatre and I combined him with an authentic action of crying on stage. I also wanted to see how far we could go with the notion of crying, when the skin would start hurting and when we would feel exhausted, so I created a six-hour-long performance, in which the audience

members could come or leave whenever they wanted. In that time, four performers changed every 30 minutes to cry.

Being focused on crying without fail left little preparation time. The performers had to cut down on sugar and caffeine and they were not allowed to sleep more than four-five hours for two days. This was required to get the body ready to release the discomfort and tension through tears.

The whole action was simple: when one of the four performers was crying on stage, the other performer, who always remained on stage, was sitting on the floor playing with tissues covered with the performers' tears. That was the only connection between the person crying in a chair and the performer making a sculpture. I wanted to combine two types of theatre in one – an authentic performance based on one simple action and a pantomime-like, rhythmical but not dramatic construction of a sculpture representing a body. The performance was slow-paced, raw and silent, which required a lot of patience from both the audience and the performers.

I was invited to present this show at Aussicht Festival in Hamburg in August 2018, where I decided to change the ending of the performance. I also changed and developed the aforementioned trance session warm-up in which I switched dancing into jumping. During my first rehearsals the exercise that I proposed to the actors was designed to explore the madness of dancing in the dark, rather than the emotions evoked by the experience of attending at a hard techno party. I needed to modify the exercise due to a lack of rehearsal space, so I asked my performers to try jumping in the hope it would achieve the same result.

I tried the reversion of our transe's meaning – where the core is to put all of energy into reality of rehearsal and moment of 'here and now' in the space with collaborators, but to focus on coming back to our own individual reality after the performance. At the end of the performance, we, as performers, were jumping together for ten minutes. We were standing in one line, looking into the audience's eyes like we did before while crying, but this time with a different emotion and a different approach. We were tired but focused and wanted to return to reality after the enormous effort of the hours spent on stage. It was exhausting but being in this together made it quite motivating so no one could give up. Once the performance ended, we quickly got back to reality, which was a nice relief that we found our way back to where we had been before entering into the "Crying Zone".

I consider this performance the most important in my artistic career so far. It was a major turn for me shifting from elaborate stage design and video technologies to complete minimalism which led to so moving results. The format of the performance was meant to be easy to stage and accessible to the audience. It was simple and powerful. It was conceptual, constructive, simple and synthetical with form. The rehearsing process was also adapted to the possibilities of the human body. I wanted the actors to remain fresh and always ready to perform, so we did numerous exercises involving playing with breath, with another person's body, with space awareness, with calming the body down to focus on one action. I felt like a leader of a catharsis workshop. After each rehearsal we discussed the reasons for crying that day. It was always my favourite part, because I gave me a better understanding of the people with whom I was working and of how different people

can be. There were some moments that we laughed while crying or that we were blocked and could not cry. I noticed, however, that the more we practiced and performed, the more we cried, as if getting of grips with the core of the performance.

How we worked on finding reasons to cry? Every day was different. But we had a really long warm up, where I was trying to reach the state of mind that our body is completely soft, flexible and without any tension. I used trance sessions that I described in a process of creating “HernameisSandy” that helped us to vanish all of the emotions of our bodies to create new ones easily. After warm up we were doing maximum three sessions of 15 minutes of crying one by one in front of everyone. We never talked about what is killing us inside now, what is our problem. I always asked all of them to have this possibility to talk through crying than talking. And even to me, I needed more time to understand what I really mean by that. It is a moment of changing your narrative from verbal into physical with a focus on crying.

Why did I create this performance? Because I wanted to see how the human body can deal with the exertion of crying while being observed. I wanted to become exhausted from crying, from showing emotions and from being emotionally naked on stage. I did not strive to make people feel sad or compassionate, I just wanted them to stay in the moment, to share a moment with a crying person, to look into each other’s eyes, to see different ways of crying, to think about how crying can cleans us of toxins and internal blockades.

At times, the audience could not take it and left, but other people found it really meditative to stay in silence filled only by the sound of crying and observing another

performer's the performative action with the tissues. I wanted audience to stimulate their imagination, to address their sensibility and also to connect the two worlds of theatre that I wanted to show on stage – pantomime and performative action. Pantomime was created by the action performed by Yannick Stasiak, who was playing with tissues that had been previously used by other performers on stage. He played with the lightness, the fragility, as well as the heaviness of the material. He adjusted his body to the forms of tissues, and created many images of body sculptures. Performative element was the action of crying by four different women performing on stage. It was simple and predictable, but required patience from the audience to get into those vibrations and maintain eye contact with the performers. Also playing with the durability of a body and eyes as the main element of this action, was very interesting and painful and fatiguing.

I was pleased with the people's reactions after every showing. Sometimes people joined us on stage, sometimes they sat there for three hours not wanting to leave the space, and sometimes they would leave just after one minute because they did not like the format of the performance. Every time I was given feedback, I was happy that it worked, that everyone took something from it for themselves and that we were getting stronger and more confident as team knowing that our performance met with understanding and that it responded to a certain need of the society.

A note from the programm:

“Come. Observe. React. Or do nothing. It is a space which is not about asking questions. Nothing is wrong, nothing is good. It is not about how you feel. It is a space to cry without a reason. To cry and not to be afraid that someone will come

and bother you. A six-hour-long performance to experiment with tears and notion of crying. But remember that crying is contagious.”

FRAGILE HANDLE WITH CARE

The final project which I did during my Master's Degree was a show entitled „Fragile handle with care“, which took me the most time to rehearse plan and produce, but it taught me the most from both a theoretical and a practical point of view.

The project was based on plastic bags. I was looking for a material that easily changes context, a material into which I can put a human body and can give it a different meaning. Also, it was general and universal enough to create different forms and transmission and the sound it produced could be either soft or sharp depending on what kind of movement the body would make. Another argument in favour of using plastic was that it is available in different shapes and sizes, which offers a lot of possibilities. They are metaphor of life, of living creatures, of consumption, as well as of my childhood and of my profession as a costume designer. They are everywhere, they are mostly single-use, they are transparent, sometimes they do not seem to be able to carry too much weight. And, most of all, they are fragile. As a child, I used to pack everything, one shoe to one bag, the other shoe to another bag. I was always ready to leave, always packed, everything in plastic bags. Also, in Eastern Europe plastic bags were a symbol of the nineties and a symbol of the West, in other words – of better living, of wealth.

I wanted people to be able to experience their fragility first hand – they could touch, smell, hug or blow the bags. I wanted them to become a part of the

installation.

The initial idea was to work with one dancer who would dance with a transparent bag as an object. I was thinking of collecting all of the bags that I had been accumulating during all those years of working as a costume designer and also of getting them from other costume designers. I wanted to liberate my colleagues from all the plastic that covered them. I realized, however, that I did not want to be involved in ecological or social problems, instead, I wanted to concentrate on the artistic way of working with this installation. Therefore, I decided that in this project I would also need to focus on how to use the plastic after each performance, although it was never the first or most important element of this work.

After months and months of researching and trying different strategies, I started to realize that I wanted to talk about many other aspects regarding this installation and that I would like to work with more than one performer. So I started choosing my team and rehearsing individually with each of them. I must admit that I really like working with the freshness and the novelty of the material. That is why I decided to organise my rehearsals to not last longer than two or three hours a day so as to keep us hungry for the performance. I was deeply happy that, after some time, it started bearing fruits: when I gathered all of the performers to rehearse together, it was easy to put it all together, as everyone knew what was happening and could easily adjust themselves to fit into this installation that was created every time we were trying out.

As to how the script and the format of the performance originated, it began with me putting down all of the topics that I wanted to discuss in this performance. I

also asked my performers, after the first and the second rehearsal, for the keywords that inspired what they were doing, which was really helpful to put it all together. Choosing my cast was a long process, but I needed to make sure that we had a mutual understanding and share the same way of feeling, had a similar type of sensitivity and looked at the world through quite the same lenses. I believe that the cast contributes greatly to the performance, so it was really important for me to have good energy and a good dialogue between each other. Also, actors inspire me a lot, they help me decide which way to go, what I can develop more so that they can give more of themselves. By giving them freedom, I can have more of them on stage and achieve more.

I split the performance into four parts, divided my topics between the people involved in the project and we worked on each of the topics separately. Instead of ordering the topics so that to tell a traditional story, I wanted to have them all the same time with the viewers' attention moving from one to another. In order to prevent the spectators from missing out on important elements of all the parts, I decided to resort to repetition. I shall now discuss separately what each part of the performance was about.

In one of the parts, a performer was trying to get rid of the foil. It was a metaphorical journey of a lone human through life – from birth to mature existence in the world. I worked with Yannick Stasiak, one of my performers, on being able to tell the story of a human's life through the material itself, to successfully convey different emotions and different states of the body. It was really interesting how we both got inspired by watching childbirth and sought to translate it into the language of art. We

were focused on how the foil reacted to different – slow or fast - movements, how it could become a costume and how the performer could express his emotions through that foil costume. Admittedly, this part was focused the most on the material itself and how it worked with the body in the attempt create something meaningful and beautiful.

Another part of the performance showed two performers trying to communicate by touch through the foil as if it was a wall that separated them. In the third part a performer was eating a fish – taking it out of the foil and filling the stage with an unpleasant smell. The last part presented two performers who were undressing packing up their belongings into foil and then wrapping themselves, almost naked, in plastic like fish packed in a supermarket. Finally, there was also one other performer making sure that everything was working according to plan like a security guard.

In this performance, I used repetition, mechanization, robotism, unification, multiplication, homogeneity and time frame. I found it difficult to handle all of the tools that I needed to use in this project, but I think I managed, even though I know how I am going to improve it when adapting it for an art gallery that invited me to remake it there. Thanks to the received feedback, I know what needs to be developed or removed.

Most of all, I would use the space differently now, I listened to the advice of my professor Sodja Lotker to choose a classical black-box stage for the premiere to contrast it with this post-post-dramatic installation involving a moving image. I was curious how it would work in a space where people expected to be entertained. It

didn't work how I was thinking it would, but I tried, and I saw my performance from completely different point of view, which gave me theatre space. Ideally, I would love this performance to last for at least three hours so that people could observe the change that would be visible after packing and unpacking. Foil is a symbol of consumption and of the contemporary world with its artificiality. But at the premiere I had only one hour, so I had to condense everything to do it within the time frame. I am quite happy with the result, but I prefer more lengthy performances where time teaches patience and also creates a trance-like situation, which ends in acceptance. In this performance I wanted to use different ways of exposing bodies on stage. I wanted to show one man show with object, that would be more classical than other parts that I used in this work. There were also two bodies communicating with each other through the foil. The rule was concrete – two bodies can touch, hit or pet each other but only by being in the material. I wanted to have completely esthetically correct touching relationship on stage. Also the material was a buffer, but mostly it was supposed to be the canvas that got painted through this body communication on stage. The other bodies that were presented in this piece, were two bodies that were similar with sizes. They create each others cocoons out of the foil. I wanted through this movement, create kind of a factory of human beings, that produces same bodies with same dimensions. There were also two performers that were dressed up in uniform and the only thing that they were doing was peeling a smoked fish out of the foil. The presence of their bodies was really important to contrast it with the absence of two fishes that were picked. Those performers were supposed to be similar, because also in this part I wanted to focus on the horrifying to me subject of vanishing individuals. They were supposed to have no feelings, no emotions and were supposed to be the same with sizes. Also with last representative from this

performance – guarder I would call them, they were supposed to with their presence bring some disquiet. That we also experience while getting to an exhibition, watching something beautiful, thinking and analysing this piece of art, and then suddenly we realize that there is a guide staring at us, or just sitting on a chair. But it is the thought that we know that this person is sitting there and we are not the only one in the space that actually would be easier to be alone. This feeling I wanted to achieve with putting two guards, that would just stand, pick up trash, help with distributing fish around the audience.

Bodies were the most important tool that I used in this work to create the atmosphere, feeling, image. If I would use only material, it wouldn't be that interesting, because it would just be another exhibition presented in the theatre, rather than performative exhibition.

PHOTO. SYNTHESIS

In the summer after my final project, I was invited to work in a specific, natural space, namely the Warsaw Botanic Garden. I had little time to create a whole performance, so I chose to organize a performative walk with two performers who brought us back to the utopian world of nature. The performance, entitled photo.synthesis, included two performers were working with the space of the garden, at the same time working on their relationship for two hours. I focused on their bodies, on how they behaved and how free they could be in this space. The whole walk started with them spread in the garden, dressed as lab workers and wearing tyvek white jumpsuits, completely isolated from the environment and ended with them being practically naked together in the natural space exploring the beauty and sensuality of the botanic garden together with audience.

After this short but intense project I realized that I was getting closer to nature. Before, I never would have predicted that I could enjoy the contact with nature and be inspired by the sight of a human body among the greenery. I wanted to create a performative walk where through the transition of seeing a body of performers, also point of view on nature has been modified into less distanced. At the beginning, the performers were wrapped in “tyvek” costumes normally used to in laboratories. By placing two people in such clothing in the midst of pure nature I tried to evoke in the

audience the sense of clash between artificiality and nature in order to intrigue them and encourage them to join the performance.

After some time, our guides left their uniforms on the gravel road so as to be liberated their bodies entirely and connect with the surrounding nature. The gesture of losing the costume was very clear and established a relationship with audience. People suddenly got more quiet and came closer so at that point I could see that the performers captured the audience's attention.

The next turning point of the performance happened near a pond where the performers were blending in with nature. They started changing the colour of their skin by rubbing green and yellow paint into their faces, shoulders, backs, necks and legs. I wanted to create a simple metaphor of the performers being part of the natural environment by playing with the costumes in order to achieve the "chameleon effect", Without clothes they could be themselves as human beings, barely visible through the bushes and trees. Also, the time of the performance was idyllic – it happened in the second half of July, when nature is in full blossom. It involved all the senses – smell, touch, sight (watching the performers' transformation), hearing (chirping birds and the quietness of the space).

After the performance, many people asked me if it could continue for hours or be repeated a few times a week, because it was so relaxing and surreal that they would be happy to watch it more than once. It was the best review we could hope for. The performance was supposed to be simple in terms of artistic tools, but more complex in its message, as it explored the connection between human beings and

nature. It was telling the story of a humanity only backwards, from the present until past. The final scene was recreating the utopia of Adam and Eve with no one or nothing else but the two of them. The performative walk ended with the performers finally facing each other and looking into each other's eyes. After seven minutes, the performers left the circle created by audience gathered around them and walked away together without holding hands. In that moment the performers showed everyone that were done and wanted to be alone.

I mixed the performers with visual arts and performative actions. In the first part, the performers were playing with plants as professional laboratory workers observing them closely and touching them through their gloves. They were looking at water plants so as to make the audience curious why we decided to highlight this particular plant. Later, one of the performers was dancing and moving his body to resemble the shape of plant that was growing next to him, fulfilling the image of a tree or plant, acting as a part of the installation in nature. I wanted to achieve such an eclectic effect so that every audience member could find something for themselves. Mostly, however, I chose this way of working because I was interested in combination of those elements - Polish performers, nature and lack of time. Showing something for very first time in your hometown it was challenging than showing anything more intimate during my studies in Prague. I know why. My hometown is full of memories, filters that I'm overwhelmed with, that I never experienced it in Prague. But eventually, this short and small version of this performance was accepted with some concerns.

If I could develop this project, I would get more performers involved, including

children, but as to the tools, however, I would stick to everything that the botanic garden, or any other natural environment, had to offer.

I felt more grounded after this short project, as it brought me closer to what I enjoy doing and in what I am interested. It was my first individual project that I did outside of my studies and I wanted to mention about it because I feel the connection and the continuation of the road that I started during studies. This work also is about bodies in the space, but here those two bodies try to adjust to nature's environment. With time lapse in this work, performers are getting naked to finally started to be natural, discovered and innocent. Also I wanted to try new way of performance which is performative walk, where performers are walking around botanical garden, and the audience can observe the images that performers are offering in the space and also can touch or come closer to performers.

2. MAIN TOPICS, FORMAT OF MY WORK

Time can make body more exhausted, relaxed, or more exposed. It is natural tool that does not need special equipment or space. It is, and it can be used everywhere with everyone.

Time is one of the elements that I want to have control over while doing a performance. Time is something that you give to the audience as an artist, but also something that you receive from the audience. But for me personally, time is something vital and transcendent. It is priceless, it belongs to each person individually and it can be manipulated. In art manipulation goes with attention. I find that time helps you to capture the audience's attention providing you know how to use time to your advantage. That is why I became interested in durational performances. This way of presenting my work is quite challenging for me.

Also, nowadays, keeping someone's attention for more than one minute is already a success. Living in the world of virtual parallel realities, we have become fastidious about how we spend our time. We are more conscious and have so much to do that having to give someone attention or dealing with their presence requires a lot of effort. But coming back to the notion of durational performance, I would like to say that it is my way of pausing and focusing people's attention on what I would like to say to them. I find that it is a truly difficult experience for people – it works on some, but for others it is too much to handle.

In durational performances you can experience a change visible on the performer and also in the audience. The energy will change, the rhythm will be either very fast or very slow, the attention will also have its own rhythm of increasing and decreasing. In durational performances the creator puts an enormous amount of trust in both the performers and the audience. Why? Because as a creator you can only provide some structure, but while the performance is actually happening you cannot just stop, so you need to have a lot of trust in the people that you work with and also be aware that time is your ally, not your enemy.

The notion of time is subjective. Recently, I was at british and french singer and songwriter Lou Doillon' s concert during which she was also interviewed. She shared her view on time, which was very nice and simple – she said that one minute of swimming is different from one minute of storm on the ocean. The way we use that time depends on us – whether we want to slow it down or speed up it, is us who give time its speed.

Durational performance is like a meditation. In order to be here and now, it is like a journey from the past to the future and back to the present. To experience a durational performance is like checking if you are alive: catching your breath, focusing your gaze, leaving your problems outside stay in a particular space in the presence of art.

I grew to like durational performances because they have the biggest effect on me. I come from a generation addicted to cell phone, Instagram, Facebook, Uber

and fast-paced life. I used to be bored after a short time and it is quite difficult to catch my attention. But a durational performance allows you, as an audience member and a performer, to experience your higher self. What I mean is that art generally gives you the space to become something more, but in the case of a durational performance it is a longer and deeper process. However, it requires patience, calmness and focus.

While working on *HernameisSandy*, we used a stopwatch because in “cuddle bars”, which we tried to transform into a performative action, time is an item appearing on the price list. At the beginning it was really hard to keep eye contact with someone for three minutes, to hug someone for one minute or to stay in silence for seven minutes. But with some practice, the performer and I developed an entirely different attitude towards the actions happening during the performance. It was interesting, however, to witness during the performance how audience was not familiar with this time system. At the start, when the audience was already sat in a circle surrounding the performer, I asked for seven minutes of silence. Why this amount of time? Because after five minutes people are either annoyed and relaxed, but after seven they start to be either accepting of the time frame or intrigued by it.

Time was very important in this performance. The people who created the circle and thus performed alongside the actress did not know our counting system. Initially, Natasa's actions in the show were following a strict time schedule, but at some point I gave her the freedom to manage the time herself and decide when to do the things she was supposed to. As a result, I gave up control over time and became a witness to the show, entirely dependent on the actress's management of time. I truly

appreciate being able to stop thinking, at some point, about how long the actions were lasting and worrying whether they took too long or too short. I became dependent on the performer's time frame. During rehearsals we actually tried to work on a notion of a time. After many practises we got to the point that we knew in which actions time is prolonged and in which - shortened. That is why I could count on performer's sense of timing.

However, this was not a durational performance yet. My first durational performance was the Crying zone. From the beginning, I knew that it would need time to play out, even though I did the complete opposite during the first showing. But after making changes, I got to the point where I wanted to do an experiment on human body, an experiment on tears and the notion of crying, for which I needed time. I remember the first rehearsal took place at my home and it involved a group of people sat in a circle trying to cry together. We were both embarrassed and excited, but after having succeeded in crying for the first time, we started feeling comfortable about doing this in front of each other. Later, during rehearsals, we were prolonging the action of crying so as to become more and more familiar with it. This went on until the premiere, which was our first attempt to cry in front of an audience for 30 minutes, take a 90-minute break and then resume crying. We repeated it three times. The process left us exhausted but happy. Even though we did not cry as much as we had wanted to, it was very difficult to experience this intimate action running in a loop in front of an audience. I was also performing myself so I have some insight into what it felt like from an actor's perspective. It felt like undergoing silent psychotherapy. It seemed like I was understood, even though I was only communicating through eye contact and body language. At the premiere, during the final round, one of my

schoolmates approached me while I was crying on stage, took a tissue wet with my tears and thanked me. I was extremely touched by that gesture. After the show, he told me that he had never spent almost thirty minutes looking into someone's eyes, so it was a beautiful and very emotional experience for him. He was wondering why I was crying, as it felt like I was mourning his life, his failure and his unfulfilled dreams. After receiving such a review of the show, I was motivated to dig deeper into the subjects of crying, tears, emotional nudity and the body. Although I was exhausted and truly needed to relax, I was satisfied and knew that what I did in this show meant something to someone, so it was worth the effort. It also made me realize that the final show of my MA program would need to use a time frame as well in order to help both its creators and the audience members to feel the energy of the performance.

Fragile handle with care is another example of a durational performance that I created. At the very beginning, I wanted it to be a twelve-hour-long performative art installation presented in a public space. Such a long time would help me understand natural light and use it in a specific way. But when I started working on this project, I realized that I would rather do it in a closed, not a public space and cut it to three hours. I chose to do the project in a gallery or a warehouse, a vast postindustrial space that would also add to the meaning. When I found Pragovka, I thought that it would be the perfect space for for this durational performance, as its size would allow people come and go whenever they felt like it, but I could still use natural light there. I already knew from previous experience, that even though at beginning of a project I am overwhelmed with ideas, in the end it is always true that less is more. I started to realize that an enormous space would definitely work in my advantage in terms of timing, but it would not serve the performance. I did not want to

create something that was contrary to me. Therefore, I followed Sodja Lotker's advice and decided to show my work for one hour on stage, to make an experiment with this form. It was repetitive but within a one-hour time frame. I knew that it was an experiment, but I wanted to see if my way of working could be presented on stage. And, looking back, I can say that it did work on some levels, but on others it did not. Nevertheless, I do not regret it. Having watched this performance after four months in a gallery called Litost, it seemed much more fragile, beautiful and logical (however inappropriate I find the word 'logical' in the context of art) – it made sense as a whole. The space worked well in conveying the meaning and I added videos and a screen with live action. In the gallery, I played with time to create confusion among the audience so that they either leave the exhibition or stay. I also think that if I could develop it further, I would strive to prolong the actions but create breaks for the performers and to leave the things that they had been doing “on stage”.

I believe that it is thanks to durational performances that I found my style of communicating with people. Before, I had opposed durational performances, perceiving them as a waste of time. But now, having matured and gained more experience with them, I am firmly convinced that this is my way of working for the time being. Time is deceptively easy to work with, but it does need meaning and a special structure. At the moment, I cannot imagine not making shows which are not durational, but at the same time I started also to think that maybe I'm moving into more of exhibition form of self - expression.

Installations are the second issue that I would like to get more familiar in this text.

It all stems from my education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where at the end of every semester we had to create an exhibition, getting me used to thinking about how to create a space that would say more about our work or how to create a structure based on images, drawings, sculptures. During those studies, I felt trapped in form and having to follow certain rules of how to present your work was not satisfying. It was not enough for me and I found it too easy to present something that you had been working on for six months of your life. I am sure now that this was one of the reasons why I wanted to study something else than stage design – so as not to be limited by some structure that did not suit me and could not encapsulate my artistic expression. I would not like to be misunderstood – it is not a matter of an inflated ego, but rather of the artistic formats that I always wanted to gather together. I wanted to have more space for being creative, to be able to work as a performer, a director, a lighting designer – to design the whole creation, but also to be an active part of it. This feeling pushed me to apply for Directing Devised and Object Theatre, which was one of the best decisions in my life.

Even though I wanted to move away from art as a former graduate of a Fine Arts School, it keeps coming back to me, which shows in my performances which are also a certain kind of an exhibition, especially in the final performance which I put on during my MA programme entitled *Fragile handle with care*. As it was already mentioned, I wanted this to be a durational performance using the human body in a public space, but during the creation process, it grew from a one-actor performance to a few actions happening at the same time on a theatrical stage with artificial lighting instead of natural one. But the main idea was to create a performative exhibition. What does this mean to me? It means that I am showing the act of

creating an exhibition, the moment that we, as observers, normally miss, because we are always invited at the very end of the process to see the final product which is the exhibition itself. I had always wanted to show others how we work, the whole raw material which is behind project – the process and the research, which are more creative stages than the premiere itself.

When I presented this show on a theatrical stage, the space carried a different meaning in the context of the general theme of the work which was the homogeneity, artificiality and mechanization of the world conveyed through the use of foil. The theatre created a post-post-dramatic dimension evoked by loops, repetition, lack of words, actions, predictability, boredom, raw sounds. But what I truly wanted to achieve was an experience a performative exhibition. Therefore, it was crucial in which space I was going to show it. I would not say that I failed by showing it on a theatrical stage, because, even though it did not work the way I intended, in some regards, it worked well. The next time we presented the performance, we did it in Litost gallery, which provided exactly the language, the energy, the vibe, the space and the light that was supposed to improve the final effect. I learned how important it is to try out different spaces to find the special space that suits the performance and makes it better. When I think about showing my final piece at DAMU in DISK Theatre, I wish that all of the audience members who had left, especially the professors, could see this performance again in a gallery space.

Another performance which had elements of the exhibition form was photo.synthesis. It was a performative walk with elements of an exhibition that was happening there and then. The bodies were creating the atmosphere, sculptures.

The bodies in this performance become objects, part of nature. In other words, I would say that this performative walk was also a performative live exhibition with bodies turning into shapes, everything becoming an element of space. During this performance, I knew that I and the space and the only thing that I could transform it into would be with the help of the bodies. I felt like there was no guide to lead the group and talk about what we see, but rather the performers were showing where to go and where to stay for a while to reflect, to observe or take a photo. I really liked this work because I felt that I needed to complete the process that I had already initiated with *Fragile Handle with Care*, this time taking it outdoors.

When I think about the ideas that I have in mind now, they started to change direction from the idea that I had when I started this Master's programme. I am really curious about what is yet to come, but at the moment I am working on designing a museum where performative actions would be the main tool of experiencing exhibitions. If I had been told when I started studying in Prague that my concern with form and structure of performances would change so much, I would have never believed it. In fact, another thing that I have learned during those studies it is that you never can be sure about future.

When I took up these studies, I wanted to develop my costume designer and puppeteer skills to create better characters on stage and perhaps work on operas. But right now I am more interested in performative installations and exhibitions. My approach to costume design changed as well – I am much more open-minded about clothing, I focus more on the body as a tool rather than clothing, fabrics, textures. I start with the body and only then do I think about costumes. I try to work out what a

specific body needs to be more present on stage.

This leads me to the final issue that I wanted to discuss in this chapter, that is, the shift of my interest from costumes to bodies. Logically, it would seem that the order should be reversed, that I would start with the body and then look at costumes, but it was different for me.

I started working in the fashion industry right after graduating from high school and environment is preoccupied with clothes more than bodies. As every model look the same, somehow it works. When I started in 2009, the purpose of a model's body was just to present clothes, not add value to them. Normally, this was the rule, although it has recently started to change. Women are becoming more conscious of their bodies, nowadays the image of model body is not fully accurate/desirable as it used to be. Now, it is all about being natural and authentic, there is a different way of talking about the body, taking care of it and listening to it is promoted more than before.

Later, when I began my studies in Fine Arts, where I got fascinated with human body during drawing and painting lessons so much that I even asked for extra classes just to be able to paint and see and observe more. I had my favourite model that reminded me of my mother's body – curvy and soft, like a shelter. I create a whole cycle of painting devoted to my model's body. I was always inspired by Alina Schapocznikov and her sculptures which were human remains. For her, it was inspired by breast cancer, but in my works I was simply trying to practice playing with human body. My paintings never presented a human body in its entirety, it was

always parts of the body, multiplied, mismatched. When I left to Milan on my Erasmus exchange programme, I wanted to spend the whole semester researching the body type similar to my mother's. When I think about it, it was an imaginary image of my mother that was inspired by my mother. When I worked on the issue of a mother's body for the play entitled *The Mother* by S.I. Witkiewicz I knew that I wanted to make the mother character the focal point. I spent the entire semester thinking about the mother in the context of the play, so after returning to Warsaw I prepared my Bachelor's degree project with a very strong body of a mother. In the final version, I had three puppets which were inspired by my mother, by grey mass and by people's masks. This work made me realize that I feel confident the topic of the human body as a material to work with, as something to be obsessed with. Although at that point I thought that this interest in the human body was a part of the whole process of creation, especially for a costume designer. My Master's studies however opened my eyes to the fact that the body, the costume is a way of thinking about a performance and it can be the only theme of a performance.

To my first individual project, I invited Natasa, who has the same body as the model for paintings and also the character of the mother from my final BA project. From the very beginning, I wanted to create a costume for her that would magnify her in order to play with her body image.

3. PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT IN RELATION TO FORMAT AND BODY

Bodies are being displayed, transformed, gendered, controlled and scrutinized to find a meaning in practices like live art, dance or theatre. How has the meaning of a body on stage changed through the centuries, how do we see a body now and how artists are using body as material on stage to make sense of it?

I will start with the definition of a body: *The entire material or physical structure of an organism, especially of a human or animal, also a corpse, a human, a person, a group of individuals regarded as an entity, a corporation, a dead organism*¹. In order to make the body work properly, there is a need to organize every part of it, to combine it.

Bodies are the effect of a dialect between nature and culture. They are material reality. Something different can be found everywhere in the body, with the body and within it.

French phenomenology philosopher Maurice Merleau – Ponty² puts the body in the center of his perception of work. He claims that the world comes to each of us with other perceptive recognition, which puts the emphasis on the fact that our mind is located in our body and our body forms our way of thinking about the world rather

¹ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/body>

² *Phenomenology of perception*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, chapter Freedom

than us being objects in it.

Our self is located in the body, which is also located in the space and time. In order to understand our relations in the world we should locate our body corporeally and historically in space. I quote:

*The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and to be continually committed to them.*³

What I understand by this is that the body determines much more than we think it does. Each body belongs to the space as it is, and also how the body behaves and looks is based on how the environment regulates and also time effects.

Body becomes the centre of attention in theatre, according to Lehmann⁴, not with the meaning of body itself but in its physicality and gesticulation. Also, illness, disability and deformation are becoming more present in theatre more so than they ever used to be. By contrast, its creators aspire to catch the audience's attention, which operates on quick, shocking visual effects, which gives fascination more than beauty in dramatic theatre that we are used to see.

A French philosopher, Georges Bataille, focused on an interior experience, where the body wants to get out, cross boundaries. The body opens up for the chaos from “the outside”. It is a dynamic, sudden experience, where it loses control. The “outside” is getting into the body, dissolving its identity, leaving no trace

³ Maurice Merleau Ponty , Basic writings, ch.1. The body as object and mechanistic physiology, p.89-91

⁴ Hans - Thies Lehmann, Postdramatic Theatre, 2006, chapter Panorama, p. 95-99

simultaneously making it feel ecstatic about the whole process. Bataille situated the “fullness” of the body and outside on the boundary of eroticism and death. Between empty and full.

Talking about body on stage and its relation to the audience it is crucial to mention Lacan’s idea of mirror on stage.⁵ He proposes an idea in which a child, while looking at its reflection in the mirror, identifies with its body that results in finding out what mental idea of itself it has. And through the time passing, it will perpetually strive to achieve this ideal image which it identifies with childhood. Transferring this subject to the stage, it concerns a relation and imagination of audience when seeing an object (body) on stage.

Seeing body through the image of another body is shedding a new perspective on seeing one’s own body. It indicates the little gap which contains seeing and what is seen. The body that is being seen develops a desire of being seen. Placing a body on stage is equivalent to placing a concrete product with providing specific cultural and psychological background to it as opposed to placing body just to be seen by the audience.

Referring to Drew Leder’s⁶ observation which is saying that as long as a body functions well, we are not paying any attention to it. With the emergence of some anomaly in the body, it seems to start manifesting, trying to express something.

⁵ Visuality in the Theatre, the locus of looking, Maaïke Bleeker, chapter Disorders that Consciousness can produce, p.125-133

⁶ Ph.D. and M.D, is assistant professor of philosophy at Loyola College in Maryland

At that moment, the body stands in opposition to itself. That thinking leads us to a new concept introduced by Leder, defining the term dys-appearance to degrade way where the body appears to open consciousness. The prefix 'dys' can be understood in many ways - through any illness or a drastic change of its condition, which presents the body itself and its inside as two different objects trying to fit with one another despite having two incomparably different meanings.

In my work I was also focused on maternal body, that was particularly visible in my first individual project titled "Hernameissandy" for which I found the performer based on an illusory vision of her being bigger, which reminds of being pregnant.

Being on the subject of the maternal body I have come across to different approaches towards it by two feminist philosophers. Julia Kristeva⁷ adopts an idea presented by Plato: chora (nourishing maternal space), that she believes shares a lot of spatial meaning with the uterus through the metaphorical meaning of a relation of mother and child. Kristeva insists that maternal passion as she calls the state of pregnancy is ambivalent - linked both with madness and nobility. She speaks about pregnancy as a narcissistic process where the woman has an unknown pre-object inside of her which distracts her from the world. She states that the modern society is the first civilization not to have a meaning of motherhood and its complexity. According to her, motherhood is a state of detachment.

On the other hand we have Bracha Ettinger⁸ who compares the idea of pregnancy

⁷ Polylogue, Julia Kristeva, 2004, chapter The Subject in Process

⁸ Bracha :L. Ettinger, 'The matrixial gaze', 1995

with an aesthetic process. To put it into words, she came up with her own terminology. It's called Metramorphosis. It is the process of change in borderlines and thresholds between being and absence, memory and oblivion, I and non-I, a process of transgression and fading away. The metramorphic consciousness has no centre, cannot hold a fixed gaze – or, if it has a centre, it constantly slides to the borderline, to the margin. Its gaze escapes the margins and returns to the margins. Through this process the limits, borderlines, and thresholds conceived are continually transgressed or dissolved, thus allowing the creation of new ones.⁹ Her notion of the “Matrix” focusing on the prenatal state combines Lacan’s “Phallus” and Freud’s psychoanalytical theories.

The two theoretical points of view of Kristeva and Ettinger may seem similar. They are both based on personal experiences, and both are passing through the same psychoanalytical modelling of subjectivity. What is the difference then? Kristeva is looking at the process of pregnancy as a process of transformation of a woman’s nature into a narcissistic and inward state of mind that is bound to end with an expulsion. And the expulsion will lead to the separation and detachment from the child itself.

Ettinger’s theory focuses more on the potentiality for imagining subjectivity where there is waiting and an unknown moment of upcoming collaboration, which is not a stereotypical one, but rather collaboration where there is an allowance for a post-natal bigger drama of subjectivity.

⁹ Bracha L. Ettinger, ‘*Matrix and Metramorphosis*’, *Differences* (Special Issue: Trouble in the Archives, ed. by Griselda Pollock), 4 (1992), p. 176-208.

4. SUMMARY

*We can never understand a picture unless we grasp the ways in which it shows what
we cannot be seen*

Toni Mitchell (1986, p. 39)

A Body can adopt many roles to be seen as an art piece. Starting my work as an artist I'd never thought the body would become my main interest. I thought that it was just an imminent part of the project I was working on.

More than one year ago when I needed to come up with the idea of the title for this Master Thesis I was strictly interested in the notion of mutations of the body, body maternal space - in other words all the parts that body doesn't have instead of seeing what is there. I remember sitting on one of those classes on year second, where we mainly talked with our teacher Sodja Lotker about how we are going to write our thesis, what subjects are we going to apply, and why we are interested in particular subject, and when I said that I want to write about mutations, she said that I need to come to the moment where I will vanish my filter of naming bodies mutated. And for a long time I couldn't understand her approach. But coming to the original title of my work, I would like to explain myself for the subtitle - Body As Main Aspect While Creating a Performance. While creating this paper I realized that I erased this filter that names bodies somehow. I got to the point that I needed to write this paper

in terms of switching my perception of seeing a body in real life and on stage. It helped me to understand that the filter that I had before was my blocking wall from the things that really matters, from meaning that I wanted to achieve in creating each performance. I can not say that I am entirely healed from naming and defining each body and pigeonholing. But finally I am not commenting on bodies where it is not needed. It is a waste of time, energy and it is not changing anything in the process of making. I am happy with the conclusion that more than one year ago through all of my work I changed the vision on seeing the body in the society, life and art. That I start working with the body as material but without unnecessary naming before. I start to name a body in each of my work, and this what brought me to another level of creating a performance.

I would like to quote my Master Programme exam paper: “A description of envision Masters Study Project and intentions in the course of study”:

I see my Master Study Project as a journey through the human nature. To me, we all are fragile creature with our own fears and toxic influences which are poisoning us. In my Master Study Project, I would like to treat the theatre as a place where we come to clean our mind and soul. I would like to learn more about ways to interconnect the actors and the visual side of a theatrical play. [...] I would like to focus on dancing, on the stage movement of the actors' body, on expressing their hidden emotions. I want the audience to identify with the actors and get into a kind of trance where anyone can dance, yell anything they have always wanted to express to their parents: the angers, the bitterness, but also the love. In the performances, I would like the actors to refrain from using their voices, but to focus on the expression of their bodies. This way, it would multiply the impression that words cannot express all we want to say.

I would like to sum up my body of work of my Master Programme in Prague, as a time that has changed my way of thinking about body as something objectified, that has more power than words. I wonder if the subject of the body will always fascinate me and if I will always involve it in my work. But as of now, it seems like it's not going anywhere. And the hunger for expanding my knowledge on it seems to be never ending. My way of thinking about the body in arts has changed over time, from a stricte fashion way - of it being an object presenting garment, through it being a concrete image of a mother, up to the body that lives in Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World", the body that we are all afraid of: the homogenism, the lack of individuality and boredom.

Whenever I take up a new project, the body is the first thing that sparks my interest. Only then I start to put together images, lights, the visual's areola.

It seems like the only safe and comprehensible way for me to work with art and express myself is through bodies of other people communicating with the audience. I'm still not sure where the fascination comes from: is it the human factor joining the humans on the stage and the human spectators who all happen to have bodies in common or is it the complete opposite - I am drawn to every type of body from a need of experience the nuances and imperfections that come with it that I would never have been able to do otherwise?

That I will probably never be sure of. But isn't the uncertainty the best part?

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Attachements



¹⁰ Private photographs from the premiere of 99-9

**Customer and girl
stare at
each other
(1 min.) - 1,000 yen/ 15 euros**

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¹¹ <https://japantoday.com/category/features/lifestyle/japans-first-cuddle-cafe-lets-you-sleep-with-a-stranger-for-y6000-an-hour>

¹² Shot from the movie 'One flew over the cuckoo's nest', dir. M. Forman, 1975





¹³ Private photographs from rehearsals of the project HernameisSandy





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¹⁴ Photographs from the archives of Process Klauzury winter 2018, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU)





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¹⁵ Photographs from the archives of Process Klauzury summer 2018, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU), Premiere DISK Theatre, N. Sevcikova



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¹⁶ Photographs from Gallery Litost, Prague, October 2018, S. Lopato





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¹⁷ Photographs from the premiere, 27.07.2018, Warsaw Botanical Garden, M.Materna