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(de)forming places

Space - Perception - Experience

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Supervisor: Sodja Zupanc Lotker

Opponent: Lukáš Jiříčka

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Declaration

I declare that I have prepared my Master's Thesis independently on the following topic: Space, Perception, Experience. Under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Prague, date:

Signature of the candidate

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Abstract

In this thesis the author reflects on the process of creation of (de)forming places; a research project around space, perception and experience that concludes with three performative installations in specific buildings: (de)formation #1: Colloredo-Mansfeld palace, (de)formation #2: the National Library in Prague and (de)formation #3: The New Stage of the National Theater of Prague, Building B. Each installation was devised in a site specific format and served as a snapshot of the research process. The installations were framed as performative, as they allowed the space to perform. Space here, is defined as a mutable entity that changes with any interaction with the people that inhabit it. The project considers the possibility of transformations of the experience of a place by the encounter between the different perceptions of one same place. (De)forming places researches the use of sensory manipulation, as a staging element, using mechanisms of sound, smell and light, that modulates the perceptual set of the audience and therefore the experience of the atmosphere of the place. In this sense the installation is performing with the audience, not only as it is constantly transforming, but also by causing transformation in the audience's perception; the place performs, not because it changes, but because its change affects the audience. In (de)forming places project, the author states that a shift of perception is a movement in space, while questioning our positioning as spectators. We live in an environment where everything is changing, yet if everything is moving, what does it mean to be here?

Abstrakt

V této práci se autor zamýšlí nad procesem tvorby (de)formování míst výzkumným projektem zaměřeným na prostor, vnímání a zkušenosti, které zakončí se třemi performativními objekty ve specifických budovách: (de)formace #1: Colloredo-Mansfeld Palác, (de)formace #2: Národní knihovna v Praze a (de)formace #3: Nové jeviště Národního divadla v Praze, budova B. Každý objekt byl navržen ve formátu specifickém pro danou lokalitu a sloužil jako snímek výzkumného procesu. Objekty byly orámovány jako performativní, protože umožnily provedení prostoru. Prostor zde je definován jako proměnlivá entita, která se mění s jakoukoli interakcí s lidmi, kteří ji obývají. Projekt zvažuje možnost transformace zkušenosti s místem, a to setkáním mezi různými vnímáními jednoho místa. (De)formování prostorů zkoumá využití smyslové manipulace, jako inscenačního elementu, s využitím mechanismů zvuku, čichu a světla, které modulují vnímající soubor diváků a tím i zkušenosti s atmosférou místa. V tomto smyslu objekt funguje s diváky, nejen tím, jak se neustále mění, ale také způsobuje transformaci ve vnímání publika; místo, ne proto, že se mění, ale proto, že jeho změna ovlivňuje publikum. S projektem (de)formování míst autor uvádí, že posun vnímání je pohybem ve vesmíru, přičemž zpochybňuje naše postavení jako diváků. Žijeme v prostředí, kde se všechno mění, ale pokud se všechno pohybuje, co to znamená být tady?

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Introduction

(De)forming places is a series of performative installations, devised from December 2017 to June 2018, in collaboration with different artists¹. The installations used sound, smell and light design intending to destabilize the perceptual system of the audience and propose a shift in the experience of a place. Each installation was designed on-site, taking into account how we (de)code spatial information, and considering each place as a set of potential locations, trajectories and relations. Named numerically each (De)formation was staged in a specific building; (de)formation #1: Colloredo-Mansfeld palace, (de)formation #2: the national library in Prague and (de)formation #3: The New Stage from the National Theater of Prague Building B.

The installations are developed based on what I call 'sensory massages'. With them the aim is to stimulate the senses of the audience with a composition on the threshold of perception, and provoke a different state of attention towards a place that at first seems to be unaltered. We search for details like the changing shadows on the walls, the slight reflections on the ceramic floor, or the almost silent sound of the room and we modulate them. (De)forming places reflects on the concept of change, claiming that a shift on perception is a way to create a deformation of a place.

¹ (De)formation #1: Sebastian Drack and Svetlana Spirina. (De)formation #3: Eva Rosemarijn, Thereza Schrezenmeir and Zuzana Šklíbová. (De)formation #4: Eva Rosemarijn.

The material core of (de)forming places installations is based on a set of mechanisms used to interface the atmosphere of the place and modify it. There are colored light bulbs, mirrors, sound transducers, scent diffusers, blurry filters for the windows, a selection of texts spread around the place, and an introductory instruction text to frame the experience. The performance has no specific duration. Each person has the possibility of experiencing the place at their own rhythm and may find their personal relationship to it while deciding on their position as a spectator.

(De)forming places also refers to a personal research process of questioning space in performing arts. Its a project that tries to put together several ideas that were floating around my artistic practice for more than two years. Ideas that started by wandering the possibility of performative space as an active element that is able to perform and shape creative processes, that later developed to the questioning of space as a concept and its role in our experience. Departing from these questions, the project was set to help me navigate the potential of the concept of space while at the same time carving my personal aesthetics in theater making. Named numerically, each (de)formation constitutes a new attempt to understand space and how to approach it artistically.

The process started by thinking of space as a network of interrelations, to later research the relation between perception, space and experience, questioning how the positioning of us as individuals affects the event of space. In collaboration with each of the artists, we devised several rehearsing methodologies in order to decode how the experience of space is constructed. In long and meditative sessions of

perception, we tried to “become the space”. We locked ourselves for hours in darkened rooms to feel how the light was moving, we remained silent to listen the sound of the building, we reconfigured our daily circuits of attention and allowed the simple things to become meaningful. At the end of these sessions we discussed in front of big paper sheets trying to map how the place was affecting us and how this was affecting space. We were sitting in a room and this simple act had (de)formed the space that we were experiencing it.

Experience became a key concept for the development of the project, it allowed us to approach space-thinking through our senses and opened a frame in which (de)forming places research could develop as an ongoing collective questioning. At the same time it demanded us to consider the role of audience, and the politics of participation on the creation of a performative installation. We opened the rehearsal space and included the audience’s point of view as a constituent element for the developing of the system. We met and played with different technologies, and invited the audience for “sensory massages”, offering a space for meditation, and later talking to them to receive feedback about their experiences. We asked questions to understand how atmospheric information is coded, and how it relates to memory and imagination. We constructed the installation space by sharing the experiences of the creative team and of the audience.

In this essay I will reflect on the process of the (de)forming places project, and all of the steps and questions that the questioning of space opened. In the first chapter, I will briefly introduce the first three (de)formations, which constitute the main body of

the project and serve as snapshots of the development of the research. I will conclude by introducing 'roommodulator.movobj'² the material body of (de)forming places project.

In the second part, in the form of a timeline, I will ground the questioning that was driven by my practice as a scenographer which served as a background for (de)forming places installations. In this I will recall basic concepts that later became crucial for understanding space. Concepts like virtuality, participation, atmosphere, movement, space and place, and reflect on how they relate to my scenography experience. I will reconstruct how my conception of performance art has changed throughout this research and will trace the shift from designing a place to devising space.

The third chapter will reflect on (de)formation 1, 2, and 3. I will reveal the process of their creation to reflect in depth on how the project was shaped. I will trace the dramaturgical solutions that appeared when reflecting the concepts of perception, attention and experience, and also how designing space using a programming environment (MAX/MSP) as the main tool helped me to think of space in terms of systems. With (de)formation, I will reflect on how I understand space in performance arts and in life in general.

² Roommodulator.movobj is the set of mechanisms that was being created along the research. Is a set of hardware and software used to modify the place atmospherically.

Space

Thinking of space involves thinking about people and codes, in interrelations and possible encounters, in places and in placing. Thinking on space involves considering the ways in which we create relations and on how this relation shapes our experience of the places that we inhabit. It also means considering places not as geographical locations but as spatio-temporal constructs, and it means considering the possibility of many places unfolding in the same location.

Space is personal, cultural, social and fictional. Its multiple and invisible and is formed in the intersection of many spaces, the ones from our memory, the ones from our imagination, the ones that without knowing are being formed and deformed by the encounter of different perceptions.

Space is not a site. Space is a negotiation of the here and now that requires our presence and demands an active construction and reconstruction of our realities.

Perception

Researching perception is a quest for difference, it considers the possibility of perceiving the same thing in a different way by two different people. It is reflecting on the fact that the way that we feel space depends also on our cultural, aesthetic and political background. It also considers that theater does not occur on the stage or on what has been staged, but happens in between what is perceived and what is experienced by the audience.

When I refer to perception I also refer to an attempt to de-hierarchize the senses in performance, considering the visual, the sonic and the olfactory as equal layers in the aesthetic event. Questioning perception in my work means searching for the possibility of sensory scenography and staging using light sound and scent as the main dramaturgical elements and composing atmospheres and multisensory-scapes.

Framing the project with a question on perception does not necessarily mean an attempt of philosophical or scientific questioning on human perception, but a reflection on how it influences our aesthetic experience. It also means an exploration of the dramaturgical potential of staging in the thresholds of perception, and the possibility of altered states of perception as creative states. It means considering the process of perceiving as performative, and to give an active roll to the perceiver on the creation of performance art.

Experience

What is an experience? What does it mean to have an experience? Or to have experienced something? What does it mean to experience? What will happen if what should be experienced happens so fast that we couldn't perceive it? Did we experience it? Or if the sound is too low, or the tone is above our hearing range, can we experience it?

To research on experience means to open the scope of the possibility of experiencing in performance. It means to question the role of attention in the way that we code information, and reflect on how much of what we experience happens through states of un-attention and daydreaming. It also means to give an important role to our memories and trajectories, and to be aware that how we experience also depends on our experience.

To research experience means also to question participation. It is considering that an experience cannot be composed, given, or staged for the passive consumption of an audience member. An experience is something personal, that might happen to each of us after our own process of perception.

(de)formation # 1: Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Devised by: Israel López, Svetlana Spirina and Sebastian Drack

Performed in December 2017 as part of “Illusive State” exhibition in Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace in Prague.

(de)formation # 1 was a performance devised for the ballroom of Colloredo-Mansfeld palace, in which the audience was invited to find new possibilities of observing a place. We used the symmetry that the baroque ballroom proposed, to explore on the potential of equilibrium and the failure to fully accomplish it while questioning the performativity of locating our sight. Using mirrors and a set of simple sound waves we searched for ways to magnify the space optically and acoustically. The performance developed as an ongoing situation where the audience was free to walk around the space and find different views of the room though the mirrors located and relocated by a performer. In this sense, the installation performed as a space that was visually changing and demanding a decision from the audience to be experienced. The performance was devised in collaboration with the sound artist Sebastian Drack and the photographer Svetlana Spirina, as part of “Illusive State”, a collective exhibition in collaboration with students of the masters degree programs of Directing for Devised and Object Theater in DAMU and Fine Arts in Prague College.

Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace³ is a historical building located in the center of Prague that in spite of being a Prague City Gallery venue, its interior had not been fully

³ Colloredo Mansfeld Palace is late renaissance building, which decoration gives count of baroque and rococo periods. Due to several ownerships during the 17th and 18th centuries the palace shows elements from different historical periods. The name of the palace comes from the last ownership the Colloredo-Mansfeld dynasty.

<https://www.prague.eu/en/object/places/842/prague-city-gallery-colloredo-mansfeld-palace-galerie-hla-vniho-mesta-prahy-colloredo-mansfeldsky-palac>

renovated yet. The place offered the possibility to experience details in the material with which the building was originally built, showing traces of its past which gave the place a strong visual quality. One of its most impressive rooms is the ballroom located on the second floor. The ballroom is an open space of about seventy five square meters. The room is mostly decorated in wood, with golden details on pillars and a wooden floor that cracks as you walk on it. On each side of the room are two huge mirrors that due to their size are composed in three parts breaking the image reflected on them. On top of each mirror there are three sculptures that continue the composition of the most impressive element of the room, a fresco painting covering the entire ceiling. Under the painting, a golden chandelier sets the center of the room, while four balconies located in each corner finish setting up the feeling of symmetry of the place.



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⁴ Colloredo Mansfeld Palace ballroom. Photography by Sebastian Drack.

Even though the place was composed to be symmetrical, the place soon revealed compositional tricks that marked the failure of this attempt. We started experimenting around this paradox searching for how to create new symmetry, and questioning what is the effect of repetition on space. We used mirrors to create new reflections and explored the possibilities of the natural reverb in the space to create a composition that reflects on the concept of balance and repetition while leaving the place unaltered.

The atmosphere was composed to create different views of the place, focusing on the “highlights” that we find on it: the painting on the dome, the center lamp, the mirrors on the side and the strong reverb. The ballroom was illuminated using PC lights which were pointing to the dome and programmed to spin slowly, highlighting some parts of the dome’s painting and hiding others in darkness. The sound was made using analog oscillators which triggered pulses onto the walls with the intention to bounce them and guide the audience’s attention to the reverb. With the use of different sized mirrors, one performer walked around the place finding various positions to reflect the painting on the dome, the pillars and the windows, trying to find images that replicate the symmetry proposed by the place. For example she would place a mirror in one location to recompose one pillar by reflecting the pillar in front of it. She walked around shifting the mirrors and offering possible locations for the audience to view. After a while she would offer small mirrors to some of the audience members, allowing them to find their own point of view of the place.



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The performance started with a brief introduction in which the audience was asked to walk around the place freely and search for possible views. When the audience entered the room, the action had already started. The performance development was based on how to distribute the mirrors and how to provoke the audience to explore. The space was shaped through the mirrors and being deformed by slow movements of them. The performer would find a possible view through the mirror, place it down, and then continue to the next one. In this sense the views of the ballroom were always changing and renewing, but also moving, as the view through the mirror moved the space inside it. After the audience got used to how the performance worked, the performer would offer small mirrors to them and slowly tilt the mirrors, causing a subtle sense of disorientation. At a certain point the sound pulses started looping and the performer left the place leaving the audience with the proposed images on the longer mirrors and the possibility of finding new ones with the small mirrors.

⁵ Set of mirrors used for (de)formation # 1. Photography by Sebastian Drack.

(de)formation # 2: National Library of Prague

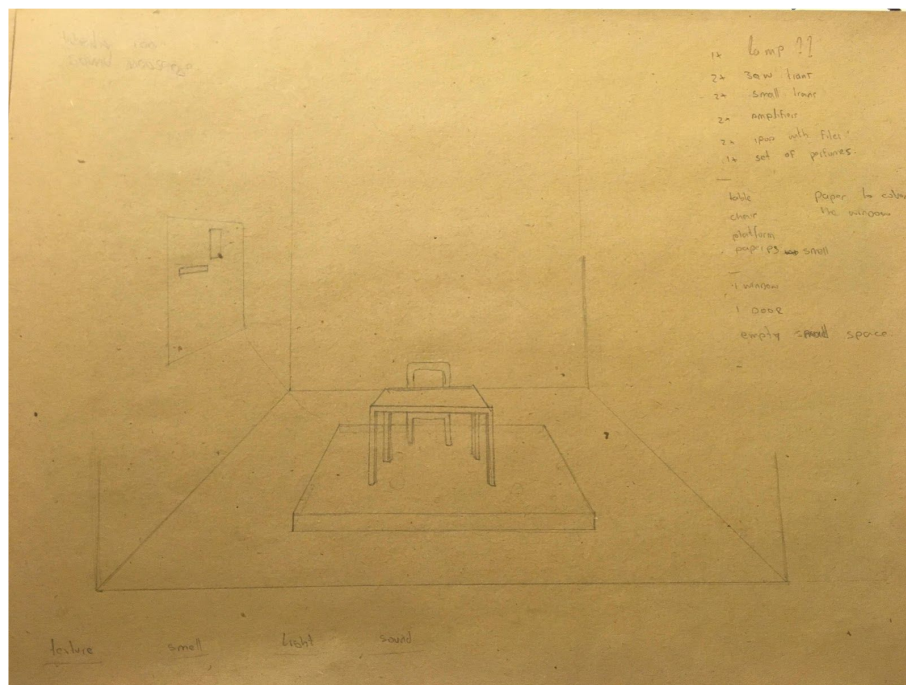
Devised by: Israel López

Performed in February 2018 in the National Library in Prague.

(de)formation # 2 is an installation separated into three parts which combined explores the possibility of modulating the perception of one place by sensory stimulation given in another. In this installation the audience was stimulated by a sound and a scent composition in a neutral room, a rehearsal space in DAMU, and then asked to walk to the general reading room of the national library of prague where another sound composition was being played in the thresholds of the audible. The installation had no specific duration, the audience had the freedom to decide when to take the next step and move from one place to the other. The only rules were to keep silent, to turn off phones and to be aware of the surroundings in which something small was always happening.

The installation started with an introduction in which the audience is explained step by step how the installation works and where the there phases of the installation are located. They were then given a hand drawn map and instructed in detail how to get to the General Reading Room in the National Library of Prague including some visual hints to find while on the path to the library. They were also given a daily ticket for the reading room to be used to enter the place. After that, the audience was invited to enter the first room, staged in one of the rehearsal studios in DAMU. From this point on, they were left alone to find their own connection to the installation.

The first room was designed to serve as a perception modulator; a perceptual massage chamber. In the room there was a platform with a pair of stereo sound transducers, a mechanism that transfers sound into objects in the form of vibrations. On top of the platform there was a table with another transducer under it. The table was covered with the remnants of a destroyed book sprayed with the scent of smoked wood. The windows of the room were covered so that just a small fragment of the exterior was visible. One last transducer was hidden behind the window.



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The composition of sound and smell was designed to be imperceptible at first but slowly changed during the stay of the audience. At first, just the smok scent was clearly perceptible, which invited the audience to get close to its source. Soundwise the room was apparently silent, the transducers were producing a sine wave calibrated to fade into the natural sound of the room; an apparent silence composed

⁶ Final sketch for the “perspective massage chamber” the first room of (de)formation #2. Drawed by Israel López.

by the flickering of fluorescent light bulbs, a heater, and the exterior sound that managed to permeate into the room. Slowly the other three oscillators started modulating the sound, transforming not only the sounds coming from the transducers but also the perception of the ones already existing in the room. The platform was equipped with two sub-bass transducers that produced a slight vibration on the floor which then slowly grew, creating a sense of unbalance with an increasing panning effect. The whole composition was relaxing and by driving attention to these small changes, the audience's perception was then tuned to perceive the sound of the silence. Slowly the audience tuned into the details, while also receiving a strong scent that was unbalancing their perceptual set.



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After exiting the room, the audience then walked in silence to the library, for this they had to exit the DAMU building and walk through one of the busiest streets of the city.

⁷ Bria's hands in the Perspective Massage Chamber. Photography by Israel López

After a moment of silence and privacy the audience was confronted to the noise of tourists and a crowded feeling while trying to remember the instructions given to them earlier. There were four location cues on the map:

- Karlova street
- An arched door next to a hot-dog store
- A girl sitting on top of a wall⁸
- An apple tree

Following these cues, the audience found the entrance to the library. There they found the general reading room, in which they have to find the table numbered 137, located next to the window, where they would then experience the last phase of the installation.

The last phase of the installation was a sound composition staged in the threshold of audibility. The installation worked by using a transducer attached to back of the front cover of an old book. The book was placed on a table in the general reading room located in a spot that has a good view of the whole place. The National Library in Prague has, as most of Prague's historical buildings, a beautiful baroque style architecture. One singularity of this building is that it is not accessible as a tourist attraction; the place was filled by students and researchers working in intense concentration during the installation hours. The place was busy most of the time, marking a threshold between the almost sacred silence of a library and the noise

⁸ This hint referred to a statue of a girl, but was stated as "a girl".

produced by human occupation. The library as space also existed in a paradox between privacy and silence and a busy public space.



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After leaving the library the performance was over, but the audience was asked to return the ticket to be reused by the next audience member. This also served as a mechanism for story sharing through which I could receive feedback on how the installation was working and on the different experiences of this place.

⁹ The General Reading Room in the National Library of Prague. Photography by Israel López.

(de)formation # 3: Building B at the New Stage of the National Theater of Prague.

Devised by: Israel López, Theresa Schrezenmeier, Eva Rosemarijn and Zuzana Šklíbová.

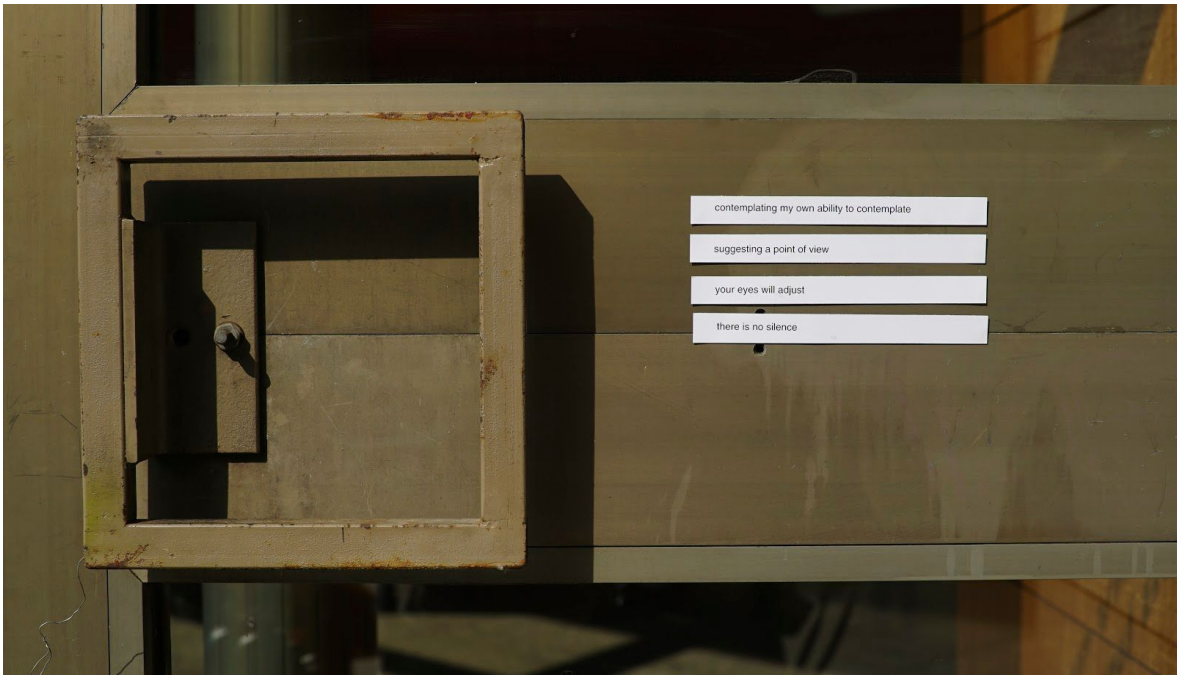
Performed in February 2018 in the National Library in Prague.

Deformation # 3 is an installation staged on two floors, in six rooms, and in the corridors and staircase of building B of the New Stage of the National Theater in Prague, devised in collaboration with Theresa Schrezenmeier, Eva Rosemarijn and Zuzana Šklíbová, students of Directing for Devised and Object Theater in DAMU. The installation was designed as a series of sensory massages, spread around the building. These massage stations were located in different places, ranging from widely open with the possibility to share with other people, to small and intimate spaces. (De)formation # 3 was designed to host four audience members at a time, each of whom had the freedom to walk and explore the different places that we proposed and also to find new places. The audience had the possibility to decide when and where to sit, and also if to share the space with other people or not, the only rule was to remain silent and respect the experience of the others.

The dramaturgy of the place was not primarily guided by a chronological organization but instead took into account how the space was distributed and imaged the possible relations between each fragment of the installation. As a last layer there was a series of philosophical/poetical texts spread around the building, with the aim to reframe the perception of the audience by inserting a symbolic element as contrast to the sensorial composition.

The performance started in the Vaclav Havel square which is located in between buildings A and B from the New Stage and the historical building of the National Theater in Prague. All together, they form Prague's National Theater (Národní Divadlo). The piazzetta (as the square is commonly referred to) connects these buildings and at the same time serves as a public transition space between one of the most busy streets of the city, Národní street, and a transient to Smetanovo nábřeží, where in spring (when deformation # 3 was staged), hundreds of people pass by the square daily.

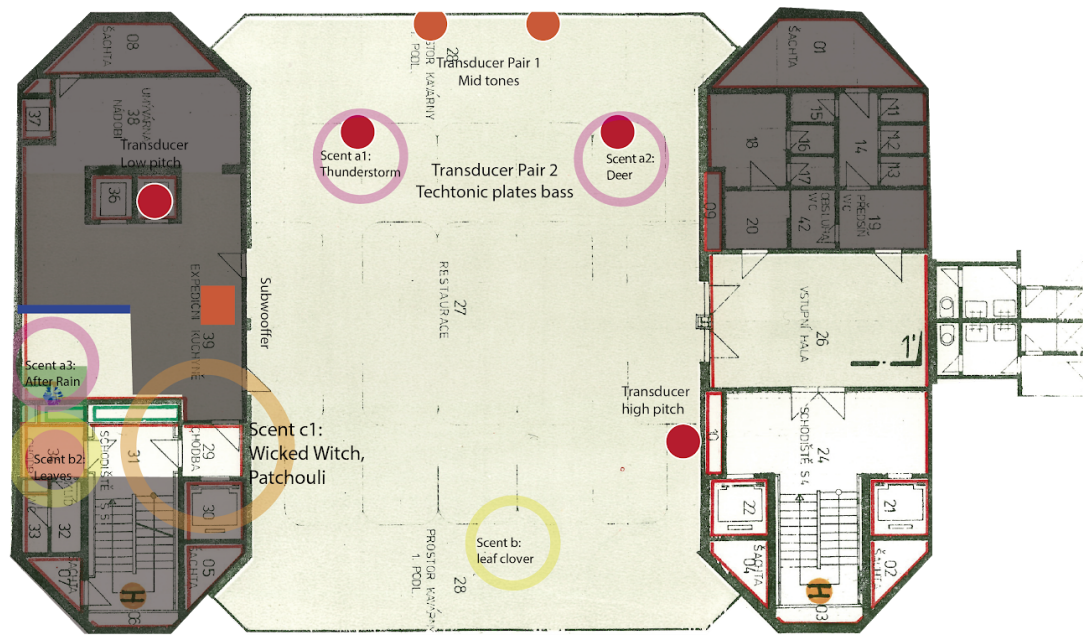
The performance started with the audience members making an appointment on an online platform, in which they were given the time and place of the event. They then went to Vaclav Havel square, where several tables were placed, and at each of the tables one member of our team was waiting for each of the audience members to join. Once there, they were given one on one instructions on how the installation worked. The instructions allowed freedom to walk in the space, and also to frame the perception and to search details in sound, light and scent. After they received the audience members were guided to the front door, where the first of four phrases was located as a second framing of the experience of the building.



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After entering the building they were free to explore freely and at their own rhythm. The following description of the installations will follow a “chronological” order, but it is important to acknowledge that not all the audience members followed this path or experienced everything in the installation. The place was designed in a modular way considering that no specific order is required for the installation to work, and taking into account that every audience member will have a different composition. All of the mechanisms were looping independently without any synchronization with the others, causing an always changing composition.

¹⁰ The entrance door to (de)formation #3 installation. Photography by Israel López.



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The first floor is a big empty hall with tall windows on both sides. On one side Vaclav Havel square is located and on the other, there is a garden. Just after the entrance door there was one chair facing the empty space. On the opposite side of the room there was another one facing the garden. The first chair had a direct view of the other and had the possibility to experience the slight sound of an oscillator.

The second chair was located facing the garden with its back, facing the empty space. On its left, diagonally, a mirror cut identically as one of the ceramic tiles of the floor, is reflecting the outside and recomposing one of the pillars of the window with its reflection. Diagonally right on a different pillar was another mirror, located in a way that you could see the first chair reflected in it. On the ceiling there was a scent-diffuser box, with the scent of “leaves”. on the floor next to the second chair a text was placed with the words: “cinamon, cardamom, lemon”

¹¹ Final draft for (de)formation #3 installation. Drawed by Israel López.

On the right side of the room there is contiguous room, blocked by a huge piece of plastic from which you can see blurred square structures. This room produces a sub-bass sound that can be felt in the form of vibration on the floor but also from the structures stored in this room.



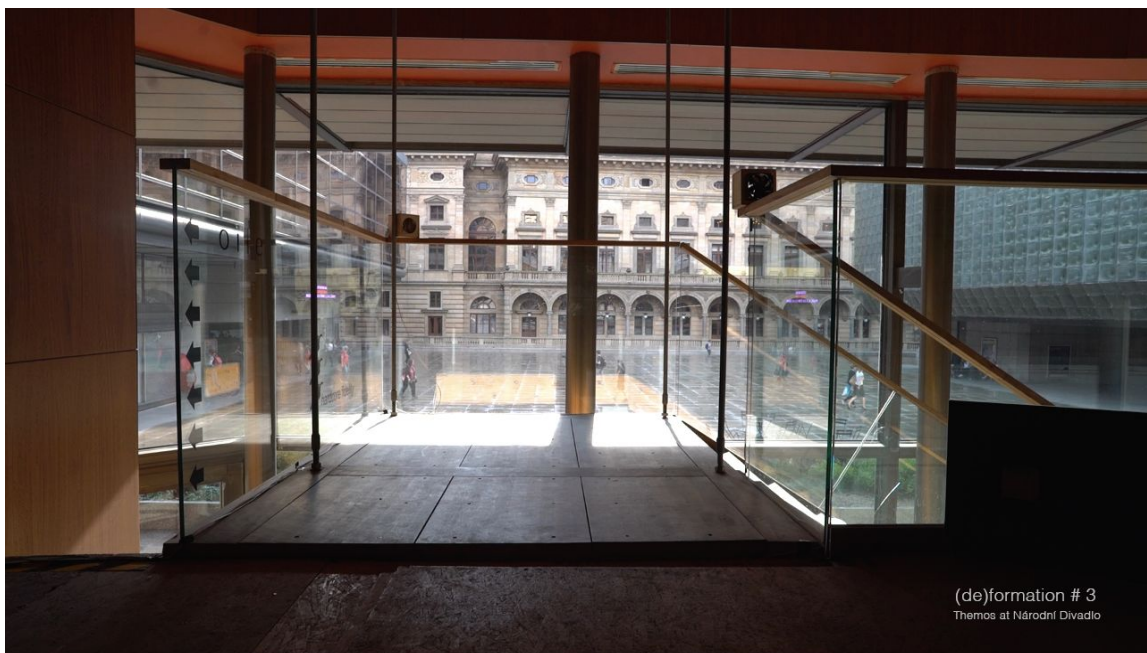
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Next to the first chair there is a staircase that leads to the second floor. On the third stair from the top there is a pillow. The staircase baluster is made of glass that creates a double reflection effect when reflecting the windows and also the square behind them. Located behind the glass there is a mirror that mirrors a fragment of the piazzetta creating a triple reflection effect. Under the staircase there is a bass sound transducer which makes the surface of the staircase vibrate.

¹² (de)formation #3 installation, chair one, floor 1. Photography by Rishi Sen.

On the threshold of the second floor there are two scent diffusers spreading a scent of rain and wet leaves. They are directed to reach the audience as soon as they come out of the staircase. The second floor has a strong look of abandonment and misuse, some wooden tiles of the wall are missing, there are holes on the ceiling, and the architectural furniture is naked. There is an elevated corridor in the middle, separating the space into three.

On the side facing piazzetta there is a long bench with another pillow in the middle. This space was designed to have a quadraphonic vibration composition. Equipped with two sub-bass transducers under the wooden bench and two mid-tone transducers on the window in front, this spot was designed to offer a sound massage while contemplating the passing of people through vaclav havel square and producing the scent of a thunderstorm.



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¹³ (de)formation #3 installation, staircase exit, floor 2. Photography by Rishi Sen.

On the other side of the corridor there is nothing, but by this time all the oscillators located throughout the building might create some auditory effect, as it was possible to hear in this space and the noises coming from the garden.

One of the extremes of the elevated corridor leads to a red room. Inside a chair is located facing an automatic glass door that serves as a border to the staircase that connects with the offices of the national theater. The room is dark and the walls are covered by a texturized red color. Because of the light situation and the reflection of the glass, the person inside the room can see outside, but cannot be seen from the outside. On the sides of the sliding door there is a stereo pair of mid-tone transducers transducing an FM modulated oscillator. On the threshold between this space and the corridor there is a scent diffuser with the scent of metal, corrosion and ozone.

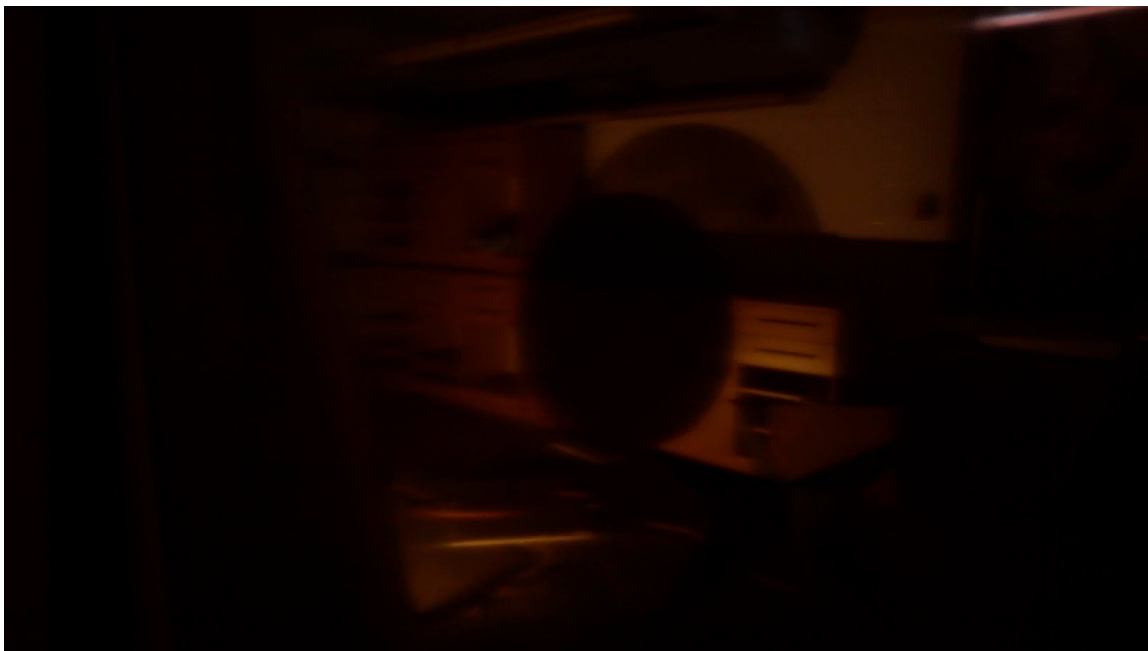
The other extreme of the corridor connects to a small and dark alley. On the threshold of this alley is located the most extreme scent of our smellscape "The Wicked Witch¹⁴". The alley conducts into two small rooms. The first one has a bed and several glasses on a stand. The thought behind the room was that the audience will lay down and receive a sound massage, produced by a sub-bass transducer located under the bed. Behind the glass is a small 1W LED which creates a refracted light composition on the wall. The room also had a diffuser with a scent of leaves, that created a sense of relaxation after experiencing the Wicked Witch.

¹⁴ Developed by Andreas Wilhelm originally for HAAL 06 installation by TAAT collective. Staged in January 2018 in the frame of the Keine Disziplin festival in Zurich-Switzerland. Special thanks to HALL06 team to authorize to use some scent samples in the research process of (de)forming places.

In the other room there was a colored light bulb going up and down slowly. In front of this room, was another room blocked with a blurred plexiglass screen that created a dreamlike image of a destroyed space in which a big circle can be seen.



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¹⁵ (de)formation #3 installation, private room, floor 2. Photography by Rishi Sen.

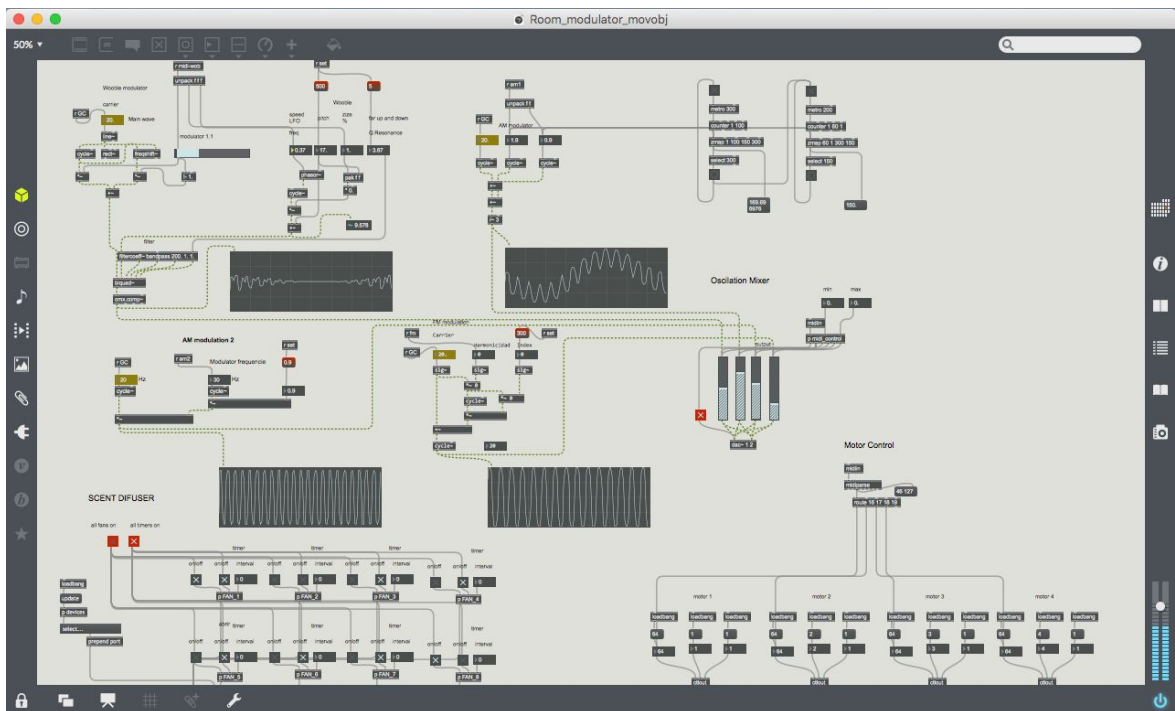
¹⁶ (de)formation #3 installation, blurred room, floor 2. Photography by Rishi Sen.

In between these spaces were transition zones, like corridors, thresholds, and all of these were a constituting part of the installation even when we had not staged them. Throughout the place there were four people walking in silence, listening, smelling, remembering and sharing the space. Even time deviated after some time of being immersed on the space that slowly started to uncover itself. The mechanisms that we installed were just serving as an interface for the space to reveal itself towards the perception of the audience. We didn't design a place, we just opened an already existing space and framed so its detail would appear. We displaced to provoke imagination, we transduced simple sounds into the architecture, we spread scents, we dimmed the light and we gave time for the space to appear.

The installation worked to give space and time to the audience in order to contemplate and visit the place in a relaxed and untimed manner. Most of the audience members spent a long time inside the place walking and spending time in different spaces. The minimal sound and scent composition guided their attention to details inducing a state of daydreaming. The situation allowed for prolonged slots of nothingness to be created, and with this the space for personal relationships to what was there were produced. It was interesting to see the responses and reactions of the audience when they left the space, a special mixture of relaxation and being "spaced-out". It seemed that the installation worked to induce a space for personal being and reflection, a time to be there and also to enjoy the event of being here and now.

Room_modulator.movobj

Room_modulator is the physical body of the (de)forming places project, it is the set of mechanisms and computing algorithms that run each installation and served us as an interface to access the atmosphere of each place. It consists throughout all the objects used along the installations: mirrors, sound transducers, scents, colored light bulbs and space texts linked together by the use of a computer software. This particular computer software was developed in max/msp and allows for the control of the events happening in the installation. Considering all the elements as one compound object that help us “move” the room, this interface receives the .movobj appendix referring to a movement object to hint on the importance of the movement that it produced, rather than on the algorithms with which it is made.



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¹⁷ Screenshot from roommodulator.movj software. A patch designed in max/msp, able to control motor and ventilator drivers and to synthesize the sound based on 4 digital oscillators.

Room_modulator elements can be divided in two categories, the physical elements that are located on the place, and the software that runs them. In the room there are sound transducers, a speaker-like mechanism that translates electric pulses into vibration, and in the control room there are four digital sinusoidal oscillators being modulated by simple algorithms based on AM and FM modulation. The program also counts with a code that controls the frequency on which each of the scent transducers will turn on and off by controlling an arduino based relay that will physically turn on and off the ventilators that spread the scents in the room. In regards to the light, the program controls some of the light bulbs by using a DMX dimmer.



The program allows the control of the physical elements, but the design of the code intends to leave a big gap on the modulation between each other. In this way we are just able to control some of the parameters and then the modulation of them happens in an almost random way, based on a logic of asynchronous loops. For example, we can compose and record independent soundtracks for each of the transducers on the space, but when the moment of playing back each soundtrack occurs, it will loop without synchronization with the others. In this way when one transducer is next to another, there will be a modulation between them that will be always different, and as such, the loops will never encounter in the same place. The same logic applies to the scent diffusers, in which each diffuser is controlled by a timed relay, but the set of relay is not programmed together. With this we intend to create always changing combinations depending on the time and the position in which the spectator will detect them.

Room modulator is the element that guided the (de)forming places research on a production level. The search for this object was guided by experimentation and mistake, by finding and testing mechanisms, coding, prototyping and inviting audiences to test them. In this way the development of the object guided aesthetic and production solutions while in dialog with the theoretical research. The design of room_modulator was developed by how to (de)form a place while questioning theoretically what does it mean to be here.

¹⁸ Roommodulator.movobj hardware: scents, transducers, amplifiers, glass paint, ventilators, motors and motor driver.

We live in a situation where everything is moving. From the tectonic plates under us, our home, the buildings, their walls, our neighbors, everything exists in constant change and movement. Places, even the apparently still ones, are moving and this movement might not just involve the fact that time is passing, but also that space is changing. Space understood in the form of relations and considering the possibilities of perceiving a place; the event of existing within a site and the system that moulds its experience.

We are in a room, in a building, in a street, yet if everything is moving what does it mean to be here?

.Squares

It seems that humans reconfigure their natural environment
by making it rectangular.

Kenya Hara¹⁹



When thinking about space I usually start by creating a segment, i.e. drawing a square in an attempt to frame what is inside the and separate it from the vast possibility of becomings that an empty page offers. This action somehow responded as much to, a necessity of framing in order to produce meaning, as to a fear of the state of pure potential of an empty page. By drawing the square I was not just framing a place within the paper but hierarchically organizing meaning, thinking on stage by separating what is meant “to be seen” and what will “be seen” .



¹⁹ Hara, K. *White*. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2010. p 25.

In the book, “La escena presente” the Argentinian scenographer Gaston Breyer, defines the essence of the *event of stage* as a demand for mounting*²⁰. He defines this mounting as the material and heuristic platform in which the encounter between an actor and a spectator will happen. The creation of this platform happens as a cut in the flux of reality that opens the possibility for an image to appear and the extraordinary to happen. Translated to my square dot A is now an extraordinary dot when compared by the ordinary dot B which resides outside of the square. But what will happen if dot B enters the square? or if dot A can't be seen by dot B due to the physical quality of the square? What will happen if neither dot A nor dot B is an actor and the square is no longer necessary for theater to happen? Or if instead of just seeing dot A and dot B we reframe our perception to consider the possibility of the other dots that are located in the corners of the square, which to be said, have the exact size and color than dot A and dot B?



In the last few years of my theater practice, my conception of scenography has been transforming from thinking of the stage as a platform to questioning the role and character of space in performing arts. This questioning opened, in first instance, the possibility of seeing theater as a practice outside of the theatre building, to later, open a wider scope of theatre forms that can offer a better scope to think of space in its physical, perceptual, political and emotional levels. Seemingly the possibility for

²⁰ Breyer, G. *La Escena. Presente*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Infinito, 2005. pp 18 - 21.

* Term translated from original in Spanish “Demanda de Soporte”.

theatre as an act of creating and thinking space. This, in return, provoked a questioning around the scenographic act as an act of designing a place for an event, to reconsider it as a process of thought towards the system created in the happening of an event. To be said taking a creative approach towards scenography as dramaturgy and considering system-thinking as a possibility for scenographic design.

Considering scenography practice as dramaturgy for space also required a revision on some of the theater concepts as image, actor and spectator. To open the possibility of an image to become multi-dimensional, multi-sensorial and only fulfilled after the encounter with each particular perception of it. To blur the limits between audience and actor and give them the possibility of becoming creators of their own experience. To think of theater space as a horizontal exchange system in which the piece can be generated by the interaction with and between the audience. The intention with this is to imagine theater as a tool for creation of spaces that propose democracy and demand openness and understanding of differences.

Space –
whether a suspended pause,
a blank area,
an empty room
or a limitless cosmos
– performs.²¹

When thinking in scenography I'm essentially thinking in terms of places. But when thinking of places, the first thing that comes to mind is not necessarily a construction, or a site, but somehow my relation to them. I remember the house of my grandmother, when I was small, the living room had a five piece set of Louis XV style couches surrounding a long wooden table that had a bull statue on its top. That living room disposition remained the same throughout time with only slight changes to the elements of daily use that were allocated on the table, like candies, candles, pictures, books, etc. Those changes, even if they were small, were also the manifestation of changes in the system of the house, for instance the ashtray will disappear when my grandpa was forbidden to smoke, or the pictures would show different characters that were joining or leaving the family. In 2015, after five years of partial abandonment of the house due to the death of my grandmother, my theater collective rented the house to produce an immersive theater piece. When we entered the house, the living room was intact, but somehow my relation to it was different; it was not only I as the grandson, but also I as the scenographer of the play that was experiencing the place.

²¹ Hannah, D. Event-Space: Performance Space and Spatial Performativity. *Performance Perspectives: a Critical Introduction* (Edited by J. Pitches and S. Popat), 2011. <https://doi.org/Palgrave> Press. p. 6.

The place, even though it was the same, was now located in a different spatio-temporal situation.

Later the play was developed in a collaborative process of adapting the existing house to become the place for the performance. To do so, we used all the objects that we found in it to create the atmosphere of “a castle”, while its architecture served us as ground to create trajectories for the audience and the actors. To adapt the house we confronted two places, the one of the play to the real house that was also as an archive, giving us information on the life of an Ecuadorian middle class family in the 70s. This negotiation between the real house and the theater house was shaping not just the play, but also our relationship to that place and between us as a collective.

By that time it was clear for me that blurring the borders between stage space and real space not only enrich the creative processes in an aesthetical level but also in human and political dimensions. Working with an existing architecture, and having to allocate an aesthetic process in a domestic space, forced us to find strategies for dividing the work and the spaces while maintaining certain congruence to create one dramaturgy along the house. By thinking systems of division, sharing and coexistence we were creating not just the performance space but we were netting personal interrelations with the place and between us that later became more important than the play itself. Somehow the house served as the place for a new form of home as a space to exist, a home that at the same time was also the atelier for the creation of the performance, the place of the theater play and the place of the

previous home of my family, traversed by all the political imaginaries and social tensions that this house preserved²². The house hosted multiple places within the same place. This didn't seem complicated to live in or to experience but certainly raised a question on the nature of theater space. Where are the thresholds of performance space and "real" space? Which of the spaces is the one that will be experienced by the audience? ²³

In 2015 a colleague scenographer, and I attended Prague Quadrennial to talk about the process of staging "Esas Putas Asesinas²⁴". With these questions in mind we came into an immense ecology of situations being framed under the scope of theater space. PQ²⁵ created a complex topography of possible spaces, hosting different forms of theater that went from stagings in traditional black boxes and galleries, to forms that challenged the concept of place by for example blurring it, spreading it into a large area, or multiplying it to exist in parallel temporalities. These (dis)locations provoked a level of scenographical thinking that demanded the inclusion of the situation as an event of space. The place was not treated as a passive host for the event but considered as the producer of dramatic situations. Scenography was reframed as a dramaturgical system that shaped encounters between creators, situations and audience, reframing the relations between the viewers and the performance. This dramaturgical/scenographic systems allowed performance space to appear as independent aesthetic experience through which relationships were created.

²² The house had an extensive archive of the political life of my grandfather which traced an important decade of ideological changes in the country due to the petroleum boom and the insertion of underdevelopment in ecuadorian society in the decades of the 60s and 70s.

²³ For instance when my family assisted to the show.

²⁴ Literal translation to English: Those Killer Whores.

²⁵ Prague Quadrennial.

One example of this was the Makers Section, curated by Rebekka A. Ingimundardóttir, in which scenographers were invited “to design a theatrical food and dining experience in front of an audience”, and with this “to explore not only the design of food itself, but also the way it is prepared, presented, shared and played out”²⁶. For this section a fully equipped kitchen with several ingredients at disposition of the theater makers was staged in a gallery in the center of Prague. This kitchen further more than offering a place for cooking and eating opened a multiplicity of spaces to be shared. Firstly, a shared space in a physical form in which the audience and the creators were next to each other in close distance and without defined hierarchical statuses. Secondly, the sharing of the creative space, a space that traditionally is reserved for the intimacy of a group of selected people. Thirdly, a space for sharing food, a simple and wonderful situation in social life. The kitchen opened in a gallery a real sharing space that not only allowed the audience to become close to the performance but to take the responsibility of being part in the production of the dramatic situation.

The concept of dramatic situation in theater helps to understand the contemporary scenographic practice. The situation in contemporary theater has shifted from a linear structure of narrative events to a ecology of possibilities, “favouring instead improvised actions, aimed at a specific experience of presence and ideally the equal co-presence of actors and spectators”²⁷. To say, theater is open for a situation to happen and by this situation happening, theater is defined.

²⁶ <http://2015.pq.cz.s3.amazonaws.com/www/en/program/makers.html>

²⁷ Lehmann, H-T. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006. P. 123.

Coming back to the Makers Kitchen, the scenography proposed a second layer of openings by spreading the location of the artistic work: On a material level, as a complex composition of taste, smell, colors, and the all the possible relations of the senses that takes part in the creation of a dish. On a performative level, as the action of creating, serving and eating a dish. And very importantly with a spatial layer, by offering a realm of possibilities and imaginations for both creators and audience. The kitchen as scenography, was not the design of a kitchen to be seen, but as a system thought to produce relationships and possible situations.

This kitchen serves as an example of the possibilities of scenography in contemporary theater in which the pre-given narratives or fixed situations have been replaced by unstable structures in which the situation can unfold from the place. Structures that produce perceptions of the environment as “a state of becoming rather than being”²⁸. The scenography practice shifts from creating the points of view of a place to create the place and its system. “Scenography is not only visualization and spatialization of something imagined, but a combination of “reading and writing space”²⁹. A simple place like a kitchen unfolded a series of dramaturgies, the one of the recipe to be followed, the one of the placing of elements to create a table, the one of the timing in which each of the plates will be disposed to the audience to eat. The makers section proposed a place that remained simple and familiar to all, to prove the complexity of spaces and the multiplicity of places within one place.

²⁸ Hannah, D. Event-Space: Performance Space and Spatial Performativity. *Performance Perspectives: a Critical Introduction* (Edited by J. Pitches and S. Popat), 2011. <https://doi.org/Palgrave Press p.7>

²⁹ Zupanc Lotker, S. Sharedspace: Music Weather Politics Or Where Is The Theatre Now?. *Sharedspace: Music Weather Politics* (Edited by Branislava Kuburović and Sodja Zupanc Lotker). Prague: Prague Quadrennial, 2015, p. 167.

These systems-of-becoming in a shared space at the same time negotiated the condition of reality. The performance appears “as interplay, tensions and collisions between what we perceive as real (architectural and social space, community audience) and what we perceive as imagined (text, sound lights movement)”³⁰. In these type of scenographies the performative space and the real space no longer require differentiation as the situation happens simultaneously in both. This kitchen proposed an environment that allowed the place to perform as theater.

Thinking on how the kitchen gave place for a theatrical situation to happen and also considering how it opens a space of domestic performances in every house, produces a question of what makes it different and special arises. Considering that in both situations the spatial feeling is different, and considering that in each of the stagings there were different forms of the place and its becomings, the question becomes, what is that that we call space? Space might not be the kitchen, nor the people, nor the city and at the same time it is all of them. It serves as a background that set the potential for the situations to unfold and at the same time the unfolding of the situation as itself. Also looking back to several contexts in which the word space is used, arises the question of its nature. Space can exist as cities, buildings, as data translated to media, it contains places and people, it also contains the outer space for aliens and the multidimensional universes proven in theory. Space is neither subject nor object. So how can it be effectively grasped³¹.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

³¹ Horemans, B. *How To Do Things With Space*, Postgraduate Thesis, ZHdK: Zürich, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://breghoremans.com/how-to-do-things-with-space-cas-thesis-zhdk-zurich/>. p. 7.

Considering also that the question of space has always existed in philosophy and that in modern society there are many viewpoints around it, I will take one idea and approach it as a kind of mantra, not intending to solve the question but to help me reflect on space without fixing it as a concept. In the book *For Space* Doreen Massey proposes three points of view to understand space³²:

1. That we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions.
2. That we understand space as the sphere of possibility of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist.
3. That we understand space as always under construction.

Also, there is this key in my computer, called space³³.

Thereza Schrezenmeir

³² Massey, D. *For Space*. London: SAGE, 2005. ISBN 978-1-4129-0361-5. p. 9.

³³ Schrezenmeir, T. 42 degree. It is warm. *MA. DOT.2016*. Prague: DAMU, 2018. p. 89.

..Strings

In 2016 I applied for a masters study program in Directing for Devised and Object theater in DAMU with the aim to develop my questioning around scenography and performative space. By this time it was clear for me that my role as an artist in theater was in the scenography field, however I wanted to challenge my practice and find a personal relation to space. At the same time I was interested in the intersections between space-scenography-dramaturgy and wanted to develop a way, in which scenographic thinking becomes the main role of the theater process. In my study proposal I wrote that I want to “humanize” a site and make it able to tell a story for its own, and from there establish relationships with other scenic devises to create an interactive, performative space that also maintains its nature. By the time it was clear that there is something about space that is not site-dependent. Somehow there was a sense of the importance of its relational nature.



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³⁴ One of the image options to create a one minute video as part of the application process for the MA program in Directing for Devised and Object Theatre.

Inn the next step of the application we were asked to choose a picture and make a short video that explores the way of which watching would depicted it. Based on the image above I developed Equilibrio³⁵, a performance in which four people worked together to balance a glass cup. I proposed the performance as a reflection on how the gaze of a delicate action was setting up the atmosphere of the picture. Some important things of the production of this gaze were, the possibility of failure, the mechanization of an action, and the need for collective attention. With this in mind I developed a simple system of pulleys that was connected to a wooden square plate with a string attached in each of its corners. Each of the pulleys were installed on a tree surrounding a water fountain. The system required to be operated by four people, who without talking, had to find a dialog it in order to levitate a cup that was placed on top of the plate. Once the system was installed I invited three friends to participate and explained to them how the mechanism worked and without rehearsal we attempted to balance the cup in silence. The system was never tested before and the location of the pulleys were almost random.

My main aim was to use the scenographic machinery as the center for production of a dramatic situation. With the insertion of an element that through failure will break, I wanted to produce a need to keep attention on the cup as much as in the others in order to maintain a stable cup. One important requirement in this exercise was to separate the performative role from acting, the action in order to succeed, required a mechanic presence, therefore there was no space for self expression. Finally it was required to transform the dramaturgical text to a manual of operation that set steps

³⁵ <https://vimeo.com/164381320>

and conditions for the operation of this machine, taking into account that the dramatic situation will not happen based on that manual but in between our interaction with the machine.



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The physical machine, a basic plate with pulleys, served to expose a mechanism of interactions, reflected on rhythm and the silent dialog between people. At the same time the interaction was conditioned by a series of elements, on one side was my imagination of a beautiful image and a choreographic performativity and on the other was the complications of doing it over a working fountain, which created tension and the fear of getting wet, the dis-trust based on the possibility of failure (especially by my mechanically-aware friend, due to the fact that I placed the pulleys without measuring distances and elevations), the presence of cameras, the pressure of working in a public space, and for the cherry on the cake the fact that just before

³⁶ Still from the performance *Equilibrio*. Quito-Ecuador 2016.

starting, it started to rain making us wait and have time to discuss all the possible failures. All of this took part in a simple act of lifting a cup, and created a drama that was beyond the operation of the machine.

Finally, once we were there, ready to lift the cup there was a moment of magic, all of us understood that the only way to make this was to trust, keep silent, slow down our rhythm and collaborate. The machine made us aware of each others movement, and we had to keep our attention on the cup at the same time to see how it would balance and also on the other participants to be able to synchronize our movements. The piece demanded full presence and awareness of the others, somehow the machine shaping the movement of the bodies that were animating the cup. The theatrical apparatus, both materially and conceptually, was setup to enable the flow of animation to be interchangeable affording an agency to the objects being used as much as to the performers using them³⁷. To make a simple act complicated, created a space of collaboration and mutual understanding, this created a special atmosphere that gave meaning to a banal action. Somehow this machine was capable of transforming the ordinary to extraordinary, like the box without a box. At the same time the complication produced minimal dramas that were crafting the relationship between us and that which made us capable to perceive a simple event as an aesthetic experience.

Looking back to the role of the site in the production of the performance, the fountain as a place was not essential to conceive our space. Even if the place was an

³⁷Allen, R. *The Object Animates: Displacement And Humility*. Performance Research: On Scenography, Volume 18 no.3 (Edited By Sodja Lotker And Richard Cough). Oxon: Routledge, 2013, p. 120.

important element for the atmosphere of the situation, the main element that was shaping the space between us was a machine, and the system to overcome the complications that it provoked. This somehow suggested the possible separation between a place and space, but also of scenography and location.

...Box

Experience is our virtual reality.

It is our continual variation.

Our becoming.

Our event: the lightning whose thunder we are³⁸.

Questioning space opened a series of questions that somehow destabilized my perception of scenography. From one side, there was a whole new field of possibilities and by the other there was a special relation to the theater space in its more conventional form, the black box. Coming from a set design background and working later in a contemporary theater environment, most of my practice was held in unconventional spaces; the black box was an almost unknown place and produced an immense interest in me. From one side there were a technical desire to compose from darkness and emptiness, making a proper light and sound system, and the perspective given by a stage that is delimited and separated from the auditorium. Parallel to this formal desire to compose in a black box there was also a curiosity of how theater works as a place, and how the theatrical experience is created.

At the time it was clear for me that traditional dramatic structure was not interesting at all, but there were theater forms that I found powerful and intriguing. Especially ones in which the action on stage remained simple, and there was not acting involved, but a more honest and basic sense of presence. Forms of theater that allowed theater to

³⁸Massumi, B. *Sensing the Virtual Building the Insensible*. *Hypersurface Architecture*, Vol 68, May-June 1998. p. 17.

be perceived, “as a “ thing in itself,” not as a representation or a medium”³⁹. These stagings could create dialogue from their emptiness and leave space for the audience to be active in the creation of the aesthetical experience even when acknowledging the separation of stage and auditorium. This emptiness presented an interesting possibility of creation in the artificial space, to create through absence and allow the place to be felt. German director Heiner Goebbels reflection on “theatre of absence” establishes that “Theater might be able offer an artistic experience that does not necessarily have to lie in a *direct* encounter (with the actor), but in an experience *through alterity*. Alterity to be understood, not as a direct relation to anything, but as an indirect and triangular relationship whereby theatrical identification is replaced by a rather insecure confrontation with a mediated third...” Somehow the emptiness leaves a gap, though where the experience can be coded based on each specific perception of the same event.

One example of this was “I’m not here said the void” created by Julian Hetzel and performed at the Ponec theater during the 4 + 4 Days In Motion festival in Prague in which two people where on stage performing simple actions like extending a plastic folie through the floor, sitting on a couch, slowly destructing it, and then disappearing under the plastic allowing some balloons to take the stage like ghosts in their presence. These images were creating a dark atmosphere of confusion, death and loss, not by a direct representation, but by allowing the empty space and the silent slots of nothingness to be felt and by that establishing the relation between one

³⁹ Goebbels, H. *Aesthetics of Absence: Questioning Basic Assumptions in Performing Arts*. Cornell Lecture on Contemporary Aesthetics. Cornell University, 2010, p. 5.

image and the other. Somehow there was something beyond the seen that defined the space and set a common ground for a shared experience.

In the text “Broken Symmetries” Peggy Phelan reflects on the power located in the unseen with a memory of a family roadtrip in which the absence of her dead sister set up the atmosphere in the car. The sister was the only one that was not there and yet she defined the relationship of everyone. In the silences she was present as a trace of her missing state. With this example Phelan concludes that in the absent image there is space not only for imagination but also for reality, that even if it can't be visualised it is still able to define an atmosphere. The atmosphere here appears as a state of the space in the car that can be felt and comprehended. But what then is an atmosphere?

The german philosopher Gernot Bohme defines an atmosphere as “ a floating in-between, something between things and the perceiving subjects”⁴⁰. Somehow it is a state produced by the elements by their presence, that will inflict on the quality of an experience. Here, even though an element is not directly involved in the production of the experience it sets the ground for its unfolding. In the case of the absent sister or absent bodies, the absence as a thing is also an element that plays into the construction of each atmosphere, as it is present in its virtual state. What I mean by virtual is that in the state of absence a potential is set for its presence to be felt. “Like the fantasy of erotic desire which frames love, the distortions of forgetting

⁴⁰ Böhme, G. *The art of the stage set as a paradigm for an aesthetics of atmospheres*. Ambiances [Online], 2013 Retrieved from: <http://ambiances.revues.org/315> ISSN: 2266-839X. p. 3.

that infects memories, and the blind spots thought the visual field, a believable image is a negotiation with an unverifiable real”⁴¹.

To define the virtual is even more complicated, but it is important as it opens the possibility of understanding an image as an event of becoming rather than being. The philosopher Brian Massumi defines the virtual as the potential for transformation. “The virtual is the mode of reality implicated in the emergency of new potentials. Its reality is the reality of change”⁴². In this sense, every thing is defined after an abstraction of its virtual state into that that thing. The virtual cannot be detached from reality as every reality is an abstraction of its virtual state. The experience of this reality is the event of its becoming. The virtual is abstractly lived as the experience runs through itself, from one limit of its unfolding to the other⁴³. Virtual state can not be seen, it can only be noticed as traces or footprints of its transformation. Like the silence that is felt when it is broken and the absence that is felt on the quality of the silence. The virtual runs in transition from one image to another, and is later stored in order to condition the emergence of a new one. Somehow we live in a realm of active possibilities and continual transformations from which experience unfolds.

With this labyrinth in my mind and together with the the authorial acting students Lea Blasko and Ivana Atanasova and the sound artist Sebastian Drack, we started the rehearsals of *Traces*, a performance that aimed to research the potential of the black box as a place. In the performance, two women walked in a darkened stage while

⁴¹ Phelan, P. *Broken Symmetries: Memory, Sight, Love. Unmarked: The Politics Of Performance.* Oxon: Routledge, 1993. p. 1.

⁴² Massumi, B. *Sensing the Virtual Building the Insensible.* *Hypersurface Architecture*, Vol 68, May–June 1998. pp 16–24.

⁴³ Massumi, B. *Semblance and event.* Cambridge: MIT press, 2013, P. 17.

describing a house. The house described, was a mixture of homes from their past. The idea was to create an overlap of memories and create an atmosphere of confusion and oblivion.

The research began by talking about memory and by finding spatial relations with our past spaces in order to be able to draw a “frankenstein” space, a mixture of our homes. After this our main challenge was to translate these memories into the black box, to be aware of the impossibility of representation and to use this failure to find the possible transformations of an empty space. For this we worked in an open structure in which the actresses would describe their spaces with the use of body sequences, while the sound artist recreated his with a soundscape, from my side I would translate my childhood house into a series of trajectories following the architectural disposition of that house.

From the moment in which we started the translation to the scenic space we fronted problems; the task was set to describe and translate rather than research the creation of an atmosphere. From the beginning the bodies were descriptive and expressive through representation. These actions in the empty space looked like pantomime or like an underdeveloped physical choreography. At the same time the design of the trajectories relied on the creation of walls and thinking of the material division as the only possibility which at the same time contributed to the descriptive path that the process was taking and created a dependency of a physical construction to define a place. Somehow, in practice I was going against what I was thinking and researching theoretically.

The element that most resonated with the quality of the performance that I first imagined was the soundscape developed by Sebastian. By telling through the use of sound, his place remained abstract and resonated with us from an emotional yet neutral way. This in part was caused by the fact that he continuously denied to describe with words the space that he was depicting, but also by the fact that all the sound was completely digitally produced. There was no real sound processed in the creation of the soundscape until the last phase in which I insisted to include spoken text by the actresses to dissolve the characterization into a multiplicity of voices that faded into the sound space.

While the process was developing it was clear that the performance was being driven in the wrong direction. There were two bodies with some weird qualities of movement existing in a middle state between acting and not doing anything. There was a descriptive text of several rooms that still pretended to reconstruct a mental image. And a well crafted sound design. In order to continue I decided to give privilege to the atmospheric layer and give more space for the soundscape to develop as the main element and work with the light to deepen the feeling of emptiness on the stage. After this the work began to erase the forms of the dancer's bodies and to use them as pure elements of composition in the darkness.

For this we worked with the choreographer Petra Hauerova⁴⁴, who helped to find a neutrality in the bodies that was able to transmit a sense of presence, without acting or playing just walking and being aware of this action. In order to intensify the sound

⁴⁴ <http://www.czechdance.info/database/choreographers/independent-choreographers/petra-hauerova/>

atmosphere we upgraded the soundscape to become a four audio channel composition. As a final layer I developed a light design that was intended to hide and produce darkness. The light was set to produce two different colors of white, that were slowly spinning, getting mixed and fading in and out. The lights were distributed as a grid dividing the space into faded quadrants of light, always keeping the stage dark enough to demand that the audience concentrate in order to see⁴⁵. Both the sound and the light were spinning, creating a perceptual trick of movement.

In the end what we presented was two bodies walking on the stage creating mostly linear trajectories, a soundscape that was slowly spinning and a light design that was covering everything in the gloom. With this, the performers became some kind of scenic object and the text lost rationality and was perceived in a less narrative form. The atmosphere was mostly set by the scenic technologies and opened the possibility for a sensorial experience, a simple composition of light sound and bodies in an uncanny state, merging and disappearing into the dark stage.

The body in traces was the most difficult element to abstract. Its presence on stage immediately demanded figuration and it was really difficult to overcome the image. At the same time the possibility of using the other senses in the center of attention was opening the space for abstraction. This plus the fragility of working with bodies that are offered to the public gaze, arraised a personal necessity for overcoming the body on stage as the only element entitled to perform, and questioned the conception of places as passive elements to be perceived. Parallel to this there was an interest to

⁴⁵ The maximum light intensity was 15% in a fluctuation between 7% and 15%, creating a perceptual effect of disappearance.

de-hierarchize the visual as the center of the theatrical experience and search for new forms of creating atmospheres. How do atmospheres perform and how do we perform within atmospheres?

....(de)coding space

All space is dislocated

Massey⁴⁶

Thinking in the possibility of a theater without bodies, I encountered with a text written by the digital culture and philosophy researcher Stamatia Portanova, “moving without the body” in which, through the study of motion capture technologies, she extendedly analyses the possibilities of understanding movement without the necessity of a physical body. Portanova states a possibility for movement to exist as an independent object that can later be applied to different media and make it move. To explain this she refers on how the data collection works in movement tracking devices. There, the body is dissected into a discrete amount of points where the motion tracking devices will be placed, usually joints and articulations. Later these points are translated into dots in the digital space, where the movement of them will be recorded as numerical-data. The movement is translated to the digital space as position relations of the points and its variation in time⁴⁷. The software then runs an algorithm that translate this relations in mathematical functions that allows to map and locate the dots in the digital space as how they were performed in the physical space. The movement recorded then, exist in the form of a numerical function⁴⁸. This

⁴⁶ Massey, D. *For Space*. London: SAGE, 2005. p27

⁴⁷ To deepen reflection on the algorithmic nature of movement, is interesting to note that speed is the mathematical derivative of distance over time, therefore just by creating a function of location then speed and acceleration can be tracked.

⁴⁸ Portanova, S. *Moving Without A Body: Digital Philosophy And Choreographic Thoughts*, Cambridge: MIT press, 2013, p.160.

allows later to translate the movement of the dancer into whatever, for instance a drawing, a series of lines, a 3d object, Mickey Mouse, etc. Until here nothing new, but the interesting part comes when she looks back to the more traditional choreography notation, to understand that in principle is the same: a discrete number of relations between parts of the body that compose movement. And even more when she proposes that movement might be not the data, not the relation of the dots, but the virtual state of the changing relation between them, which can be felt and gives special quality to the movement from which it can be experienced like dance.

One interesting concept here was the one of the moving-object as a set of relations between elements and the way that they change. Thinking this in relation to space, and considering that space, like movement, also has a relational nature, it might be that space also does not depend on a physical medium. As movement was detached from the body, space needed to be separated from the territory. Even though body and space can exist as an independent entity, their abstract nature makes them difficult to be understood, somehow they remain virtual to our experience until there are interfaced by some medium. We cannot experience movement without a medium to which it is applied (the lines, Mickey Mouse, the body, a table, an earthquake). So what can be medium that interfaces the experience of space?

The British geographer and social scientist Doreen Massey defines a place as “an integration of space and time; as spatio temporal events⁴⁹” The place becomes an articulation of space, through where we can experience its becoming. At the same time it is not something fixed as it emerges from all the vast possibilities of spatial

⁴⁹ Massey, D. *For Space*. London: SAGE, 2005. p. 130.

“stories” that had traversed it over time. From localities of our house and neighbourhood, to global events, passing through social media and cyber space, our relational network is noted in a multilayer of spaces. The place as space is dislocated, it does not constitute a territory, is the event of becoming what we perceive as that place, and it is a process of negotiation of all the possible places to be in the same location.

For example let's take a place, a bar, let's say Kyklop bar located in Korunovační street in Prague. The same location serves to host different Kyklops, is obvious that the place at 17h won't be the same as at 20h when it opens. But in a more subtle way, the same place, in the same time, is different to each of the people that inhabit it; all of them carry their personal and spatial relations that will shape this bar. For example, I might've been there after a long day of rehearsing, meaning that I came from shifting my spatial relationships from the one in the theater space, to firstly the one in the tram, where I had to take certain decisions as a citizen of Prague, secondly shifting momentarily to the interaction mode required in the mini-market in order to buy cigarettes, to finally the one for this bar: a place that with the time had become my second living room. My perception of that bar might differ strongly from the one of the guy sitting next to me, but while the beers advances and we cohabit in kyklop we will nit a new spatiality; a new place to be experienced. The bar served as a meeting point where our spatio-temporal backgrounds collide to shape our experience of that place through where our spatial relations can be felt.

Places are not static, rather they change and perform in the interaction with our perception of them. Places become in a negotiation between of the possible places to be. The philosopher Michel Foucault, in his text, 'Heterotopias and Other Spaces', states that a place "is not homogeneous and empty, but, on the contrary, is a space that is full of qualities, a space that perhaps is also visited by ghosts; The space of our first perception, that of our dreams, that of our passions⁵⁰". The place that we experience is the event of becoming of that place. Each place is also a node for encounter of differences, of all the possible personal codings of space-time relations, with all of the codings of the others that coexist in the same place.

In his PhD dissertation around public space and new-media art the the Spanish intermedia artist Diego Diaz defines an interface as the point, area, or surface in which two entities of different nature converge; By extension, is called an interface to any media that allows the interconnection of two different processes with a single common purpose⁵¹. Places are not only the interface for space as a system to be perceived but they are also interfacing their own becoming. The interface functions as a knot of relations, which is never simply binary, but always 'leaks' across various intersectional boundaries, entangled within a web of material, socio-political and semiotic relations⁵².

⁵⁰ Foucault, M. *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*. ("Des Espace Autres," March 1967 Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec). From: *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* October, 1984, p. 2.

⁵¹ Díaz, D. *De la Plaza al Chat: Análisis de las Transformaciones del Espacio Público desde la Práctica Artística Aeomedial*, Ph.D. dissertation, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2007, p. 50.

⁵² Bohal, V. & Breitling, D. *Algorithms: an Introduction*. *Algorithms*. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia Books, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.diffractionscollective.org/algorithms-an-introduction/>

A place is also a system, and as such, it gives an insight for its possible design. To design a place might be to think in the system that provokes its becoming, an algorithm to interface space-time relations towards the active construction of a place as an aesthetic experience. The design of this algorithm then has to allow the possibility of abstraction of the place into another form of itself. An algorithm that not necessarily involves data processing through a machine, but that considers that all the possible spaces are variables that will take part in the becoming of a place when confronted with each specific interaction with it. Algorithm as a discrete image of the world, as a mode of imagination that can be attributed to all material, organic, and human entities⁵³, and can link the perception processes of creators and audience towards the conception of a place.

At the same time, the possibility of dislocated space opens the ground for a deeper political thinking on society and its relational systems. It offers points of view towards perception that are not human-psychological centered, but are a matter of a complex topology of spatial relations. It allows the inclusion of the other as an active creator of our personal experiences and sets a ground for explore shared experiences. With this it opens a field for reflection on complex social structures, like cities, buildings, streets, rooms, in where the place performs as it mediates interactions taking an active role in the event of space.

Places become and transform and as they change we change with them, in a continuous movement from place to another. Without the necessity of changing a

⁵³Portanova, S. *Moving Without A Body: Digital Philosophy And Choreographic Thoughts*, Cambridge: MIT press, 2013, p. 17.

location we move between different places and experience their becoming. We live in a situation where everything is moving. From the tectonic plates under us, our home, the buildings, their walls, our neighbors, everything exists in constant change and movement. Places, even the apparently still ones, are changing and this change might not just involve the fact that time is passing, but also that space is moving. Then if everything is moving what does it mean to be here?

(De)forming Places

(De)forming places started as a research on how to make a place move so we can reflect on its becoming. For this movement was first of all considered as change, then if a place is always a negotiation between differences, its nature is changeability, therefore a place essentially is always moving. But this movement does not necessarily involve displacement or visible change, a shift in our perception of it. The way in which we perceive a place changes the experience of it, not just for us but also for the people that coexist in it.

To explore this the project was set as a series of site-specific situations, in order to allow the place to expose itself in the form of architecture, history and location without any manipulation or direct addressing to these layers. To challenge the perception of it, its atmospheric layer would be manipulated by composing in the thresholds of perception, using sound, light and scent design as the main media.

Later in the process perception became a key point in the research, it allowed formal exploration in composition and gave a frame for creative manipulation. For this was important to consider that perception is a process “it starts from an integration of indiscernible sensations and ends up with the capacity to discern an image”⁵⁴. Acknowledging that perceptual processes differ from one person to another, opened the possibility of distorting it to magnify its difference. For this was important to consider also that an spectator is never perceiving a “world of already present

⁵⁴ Portanova, S. *Moving Without A Body: Digital Philosophy And Choreographic Thoughts*, Cambridge: MIT press, 2013, p. 29.

objects-images: they both form and trans-form themselves along their mutual participation in the perceptual process”⁵⁵. Therefore manipulating the perceptual system of the audience will deform the place that they are perceiving.

The concept of image also needed to be expanded from a visual image to encompass a more complex understanding on the environment sensed. In the book “Visuality in the Theatre” the Dutch performance theorist Maaïke Bleeker mentions Plato’s myth of the caveman as the first representation of spectators in the history of western culture⁵⁶. This image basically creates the canon for understanding western perception, not only because it depicts the duality of subject/object, but also because it defines visuality as the main parameter in which the acknowledgment of the world is based. The caveman can only know when they see the shadows. They see them fixed in their positions, they see them with their eyes and are not capable to use any other senses. As western culture developed in visual-centered cognition forms, is understandable that the visual image has so much power of figuration. To de-hierarchize the visual in this project was an attempt towards abstraction.

In order to decentralize perception it was needed to compose making use of as much senses as possible. This created a possibility to compose towards the creation of atmospheres rather than images; atmospheres that were existing as a combination of the one pre-existing in the site plus a subtle addition to be staged by us. This at the same time gave us the chance to frame perception as an action, through which audience gains states of active creation that not necessarily needs a concrete forms

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 31.

⁵⁶ Bleeker, M. *Visuality in theater*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

of interaction. As perceivers they become actors in the event of place. The place in the sense that it changes, physically, but also through each specific perception of the audience becomes another performer. The installation takes form in the interaction between place and audience and in the negotiation of the here and now. At the same time, staging in the borders of perception demanded modes of concentration that provoked states of presence and personal reflection on time-space relations.

(de)formation # 1: Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

(De)formation # 1 was the first step on the research process. By this time I was researching theoretically what does it mean a place, how is it different from space, and what is the role of location in this events. Location here was considered as a geographical or cartesian coordinate, but as a decision of assuming a point of view. It is different to experience a room while sitting next the window that next to the door, for example, and the decision from where to experience it affects place for all the people in it. Let's say you choose the window, then when another person enters the room the place has been already (de)formed.

I turned this research into a practical way with a simple task, mostly to be aware of how I take decisions towards my location in places. This is a task everybody is confronted daily. When we go to the theater we choose our sits, when we enter a cafe we search for the best table, when we set our bedrooms we establish places to be sitting, resting, smoking, etc. The act of location, a simple and daily task has enormous implications in the event of perception and will establish how our experiences will unfold. Selecting a place sets a special configuration of our senses, and defines points of view of the place inhabited. But also it has relational implications that will inflict on other people's experiences. The simple act of location unfolds a series of interactions and space formations. It allows the possibility of communication, sets grounds for self being, and establishes power situations.

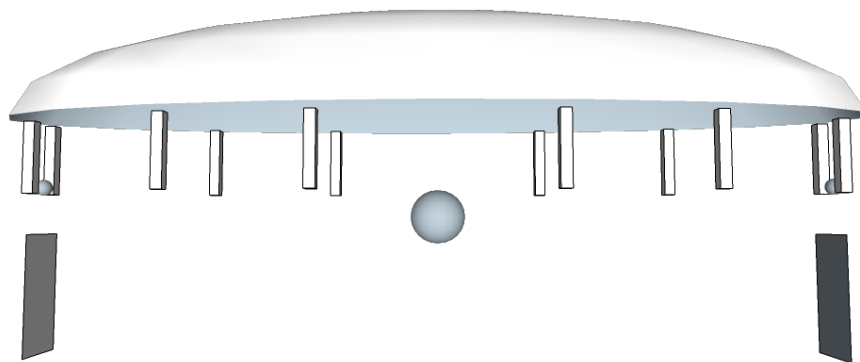
While in the research process I was contacted by the teacher and curator Michal Kindernay that by the time was organising a site specific exhibition in Colloredo-Mansfeld palace with the students of the Media Arts Masters of Prague College. After a first visit to the place I realized that this was a perfect opportunity to try a first (de)formation.

The palace had a strong visual presence due to its baroque decoration, that unlike many of the historical building in the center of Prague, was not renovated; the place showed traces of its past and offered a strong visual setting as a departure point. For the experiment we proposed a performance to be held in the ballroom, the main room of the palace, a beautiful piece baroque decoration. In the center of the room there is a big golden chandelier, that is reflected on two big mirrors located on the sides of the room under a dome-shaped ceiling decorated with a fresco painting.

For (de)formation #1 I established a new collaboration with the sound artist Sebastian Drak⁵⁷, to help me think an installation that proposes an active reflection on placement. The first idea was to create a digital interface for tracking position. For this we wanted to use ultrasonic distance sensors and create a grid that allows us to track the location of people and objects in the physical space to later process this data and control a sound and light composition. The idea was inspired in my previous project Equilibrium, as the strings balancing the cup we wanted to create an invisible network to equilibrate-disequilibrate the room with sound and light. The aim was to create game of balance with the audience movement.

⁵⁷ <https://soundcloud.com/sebastiandrack> Retrieved on 24-04-2019.

The first thing to be done was to abstract the room into shapes to understand how the composition of the objects creates the sense of equilibrium. The idea was to detach all visual elements and focus on the shapes. Here, each of the round shapes represent a concrete object, in this case the center chandelier and two statues, the rectangles represent the mirrors, and the parallelepipeds represent the columns.



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Each of the sound speakers was intend to be located on the corners of the room, as for the light, each fixture will be diffused and directed towards the columns. We will locate two arduino-based high definition ultrasonic sensors to create a two-dimensional position grid on the room. The idea was creating a sound and light composition that reacts to position data collected by the sensors and create a game of balance.

⁵⁸ Colloredo Mansfeld Palace Ballroom spatial reduction.

One of the first challenges that appeared was how to code location. Even if we can track information about distance, the information tracked will give account of a two dimensional dot in a cartesian plane. But the coordinates will exist in linear relation to the sensor, meaning that two same values of distances can be achieved in different positions on the room. The coding of the algorithm that translates this linear distance information into a precise location was the first technical challenge, that later exposed a strong conceptual failure of the experiment. Does location, as an action of deciding a point of view, depends merely on a selection of specific cartesian coordinates? As consequence, can we track our location based on our position in a cartesian grid? As the development of the system continued and the technical solutions where getting more and more complicated to achieve, I was getting convinced that the approach to location must not depend on a physical/trackable element. The act of location can be addressed in a more simple and trascendental way.

As part of the development of the system we booked a fully equipped test room in the institute of intermedia (IIM) for a rehearsal. We setted up a four channel sound system and two lights to create a basic prototype of the balancing machine. After hours of coding and failing with the system, the answer was clear: the sensors are out. The coordinates where not reflecting at all an event of positioning, we were just receiving distance data based on a static points of reference. Maybe with more time we could arrive to a sharper tracking system, but even then we will have setted up super logic-based form of sensing position, or even worst we could've created a cool toy for audience to play with sensors.

After dropping the sensors I still had the idea of exploring in the sense of balance of the ballroom, but to approach it in a more conceptual way. If the place is composed by symmetry, maybe the repetition can be a way to segment it. Exploring in IIM I found a set of mirrors. The white space gave the idea that if I reflect one side on the other window the reflection might disappear, then I might be able to display one wall into the other. Just like the painted balcony in the palace ballroom, I could fake symmetry, and later break it.

After playing around for a while I figured out that looking at the space through the mirror created a huge distortion of a place. Somehow looking through the mirror for prolonged times was creating a distortion on reality. Then moving the mirror was virtually moving the place. To help me deepen this research I invited the photographer Svetlana Spirina⁵⁹ that the moment held a research around the relation between inanimate objects and people towards performance art. The interesting part of her research was how she considered the object as a active element of performance, therefore she could contribute also in the research on how to make a place active in the creation of experience. We met couple of times in one of the photography studios in UMPRUM⁶⁰ and played with mirrors, reflecting on how as in photography framing the space through a mirror is selecting a point of view and imagining how can a mirror perform as a place.

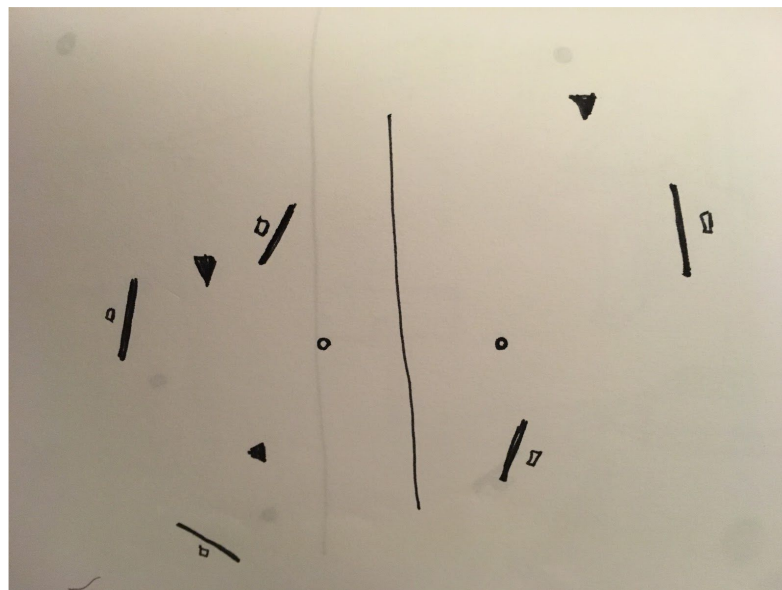
In a second viewing of Colloredo-Mansfeld ballroom it was clear that the space was giving enough visually to not do nothing else. After giving us time to contemplate the

⁵⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/svetl.spirina/>

⁶⁰ Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague.

architecture, all kind of extra staging seemed too much. We agreed on focusing the attention on the ceiling fresco, and distort the space by locating mirrors in the floor and then changing the position of them. In this way the audience will move from one point of view to another. By placing several mirrors we were offering different points of view that the audience could choose. Svetlana will select specific positions to place the mirrors, finding symmetries on the place. After a while, once the audience got used to the presence of the mirrors, she will start moving them. At first changing them from one static position to another, then moving the reflection and finally giving the mirror to the audience for them to play and find new points of view.

The place in this way was altered not by a direct manipulation of it but by offering new possible readings of the elements already present. The placing of the mirrors also stopped to be decided by placement in terms of coordinated but in terms of simetries. After a first rehearsal the space reduction looked much more as a system:



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⁶¹ Spatial reduction 2. In the image the lines represent positions in which the reflection of the place in the mirror, creates a repetition that hides the mechanism in certain level. Like reflecting one column in another that looks the same.

To set the atmosphere of slowness and contemplation needed, we used computer programmed light. This setted the light levels down and also showed and hided segments of the ceiling. Also important for the atmosphere was a soundscape that was bounced into the walls to produce an extra reverb into the room. This combined with the cracking of the old floor gave an extra layer of attention to the movement around the room.

Looking back to the performance this sound layer added a dramatic tone to the action. Also the fact that the sound was performed live, was creating reading of a place being performed as an instrument rather than a place that is performing with the audience. The presence of Svetlana worked differently as her role was to move the mirrors until the audience can do it by their own and then disappearing, in this sense she was performing to evidence the system and guide the audience, giving later space for the audience to interact freely.

With the action of seeing both the place and the audience acquired performative roles. The audience as an active seeker for new points of view, and the place as creator of visual and sound relations. Here the place worked, not just as changeable image, but as the image changed also the relations between the spectators did. As each mirror moved, the audience was required to also move and find a new location. This constantly transforming situation, opened space for the audience to create their own aesthetic relations. (De)formation #1 served as a first experiment on how guiding perception can work towards the formation of places through personal choices

towards individual experiences, and how this decision affects the event for all the members involved in it.

(de)formation # 2: National Library of Prague

For (de)formation # 2 I was reflecting on the hidden elements that form the atmosphere of a place, elements that might exist on the thresholds of perception. The idea came after a night of partying in Belgrade, I woke up totally hangover and went for a walk alone. The streets had something different, this sounds obvious, but due to my inability to think too much I was experiencing the city just in a sensual way. With this in mind I started researching on how altered states of mind can be used in an aesthetical way. Of course the first things that came to mind was how to use drug micro dosage as a form of stage design, but in a more subtle I was trying to figure out how to redirect the normal circuits of attention towards details that at first remain unnoticed.

Researching this I arrived to the concept of un-sound that as defined by the music producer and theoric of sound Steve Goodman⁶² in his book *Sonic Warfare* “refers to the apparently paradoxical field of inaudible audio, infrasonic and ultrasonic⁶³”. The sonic includes the sound waves that exist in the borders of human audible perception. As humans, we can hear in the range of 20hz to 20khz, everything outside of this range scapes to our sound perception and enters in the realms of the subsonic - if its under 20hz-, or ultrasonic, -if its higher to 20khz-. Even though this wavelengths can not be heard they can be felt and they have strong influence on our body. This sonic compositions exist extensively in our daily lives, are common in the party scene in the form of subwoofers, are used in commercial store design to alter

⁶² Steve Goodman aka Kode9.

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/5Z3GyWBvJZgJ35TS0cmXII?si=Jzm1clywS4qEnG-geQINNA>

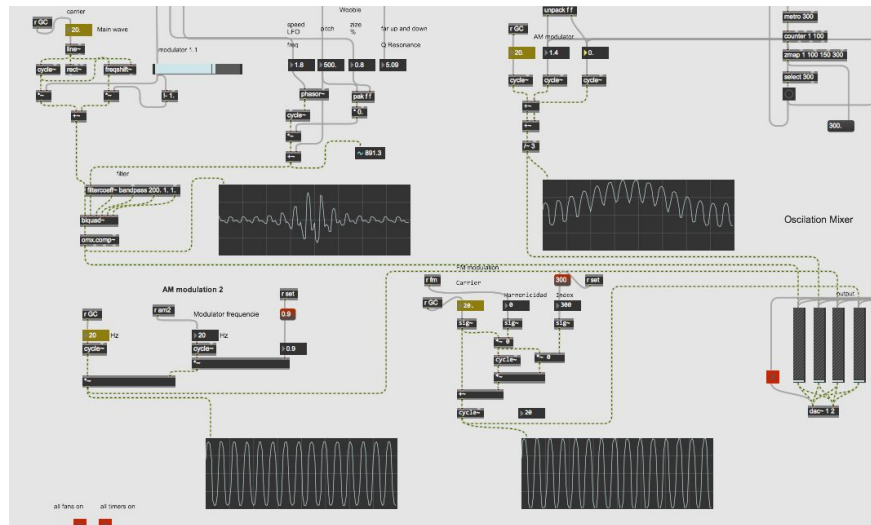
⁶³ Goodman, S. *Sonic Warfare*. Cambridge: MIT press, 2010, p. 184.

moods of consumers, and in even more unethical way are used as weapons to provoke fear and uncertainty in modern warfare⁶⁴. Acknowledging the presence of the sonic, arised a question on experience, if we don't hear it, do we experience it?

The concept of silence became important in this phase, as it might be the logical opposite to sound. But still silence is full of sounds. In fact: What is silence? -Turn of the computer and any sound device for a moment and close your eyes to listen; there is a complex ecology of sounds in the silence. In fact our sound perception is always an action of selective attention, they usually refer to this as "Cocktail party effect⁶⁵", and it refers to our ability of reconfiguring our attention in order to be able to process a selected range of sounds in a room. In this way we can listen to a conversation in a party, even if the atmospheric sound is louder than the voice that speaks to us. To research into this I started to pay attention to silence in different rooms. This at some point led me to an almost insane state of attention. There were days that I couldn't sleep at all as, after some hours of silence in my room, I could notice how the oscillations of every electronic device in my room started to modulate each other creating a huge bed of noise.

⁶⁴ Read: Goodman's introduction to the book in which he describes a sonic bomb in gaza stripe. Goodman 2010, p. XIII.

⁶⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cocktail_party_effect



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Researching on this I found a sound device that allows to reach deep frequencies and translate them into vibrations. This subbass sound transducers were designed for gamers, to reach an extra layer of reality when playing a game. The system consists of a transducer, which is an electronic device that translates electrical pulses into vibrations, and an amplifier which amplifies electrical pulses to later be sent to the transducer. This allowed me to reproduce vibrations as low as 20hz, meaning reaching one of the thresholds of audible perception. Using max/msp⁶⁷, a node-based programming environment that allows digital sound synthesis, I designed a patch that using four sinus oscillators could create different variations of low-frequency sounds. After developing the system I started trying it in rooms, locating the transducers in the windows, tables, or doors. Then I was locking myself inside the room and listening to the silence of it in order to find its natural oscillations. After this I tried to tune the digital oscillators with the ones in the room so the oscillation remains under-heard. Once the

⁶⁶ Room_modulator, in the image there are 4 oscillators running at the same time and modulating between each other. The sound was later reproduced through speakers to add oscillations to the existing in my room during the research process.

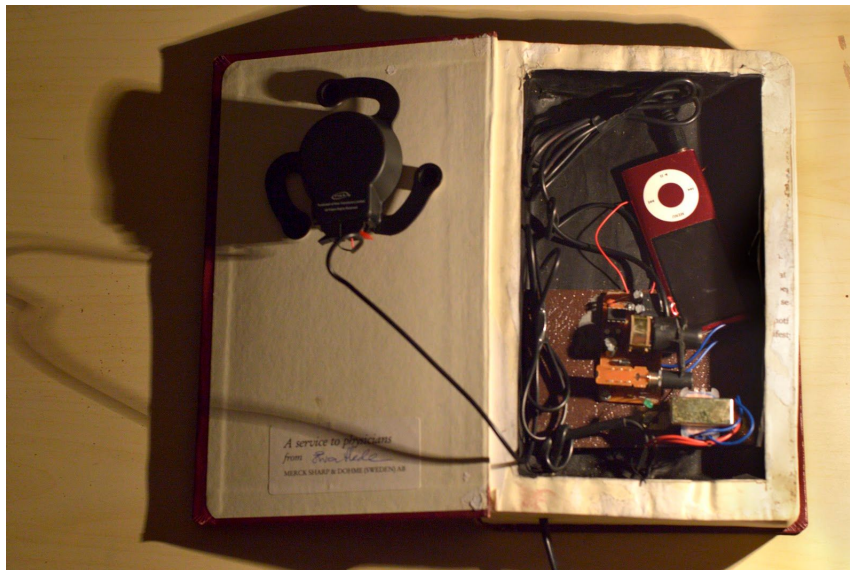
⁶⁷ Max/MSP/Jitter is a programming environment developed by cycling74 company. The program is widely used to create sound synthesis, graphics, and media art in general as it allows communication between several protocols and physical devices. <https://cycling74.com/>

silence in the room was tuned with the digital oscillator, I was slowly modifying it. This physically change the sound of the room, not just because one of the sounds was getting distorted, but all the frequencies in the room were getting also synthesized. This produced a subtle distortion on the perception on the room, as it was not fully possible to locate the sound source that was changing and new sounds will appear in the synthesis process.

In one of my rehearsals I found the general reading room of the National Library of Prague. Once I entered the room I knew that this was the place for (de)formation # 2. The place was defined based in a paradox, the silence. After being there after couple of minutes I figured out that this might be one of the noisiest places that I have been in the past weeks. In comparison to a cafe for example, in which all the voices merges together into noise that after a while becomes a new silence, the library was doing the opposite. The demand of silence suppressed all noises, therefore anything that goes a little bit loud, becomes noticeable. The library became a loud environment of coughs, keyboard taps, people walking, phones being silenced, etc. A perfect place for a subtle modulation.

After defining that this is the perfect place for this experiment, the first thing that popped out is that in order for it to work it has to be active, this in addition that we will never get authorization to (de)form a place where active research processes were held, demanded us to stage without being noticed. (De)formation # 2 was going to be a guerrilla installation.

For this I hid a transducer in a book entitled “A Practical Approach to Infectious Diseases”. Then programmed a sequence of changing oscillations to be played in a loop in an ipod. Finally sneaked the book to the reading room, to where I invited the audience one by one to experience the modulation of the sound of the room.



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After some time of trying out of the mechanism, it was clear that the modulation of perception given by the book was too mild. So I decided to interface the experience with another room in which the experience can be staged stronger. The idea was to previously (de)form the perceptual set in a controlled environment to later guide the attention to the composition in the library. The audience will enter a “sound message chamber” to receive a perceptual massage, and get an its perception tuned towards small changes in sound. After this they were asked to walk to the library in silence being aware of their surrounding, where a second composition will be played from the vibrating book.

⁶⁸ Sound transducing mechanism hidden in a book.

In one of the rooms of DAMU I set up a four channel system of transducers. One was located on the window, one under a table and two under a platform where the table was located. The composition was set as described before, tuning the oscillators to the silence and then modulating them. On top of the table there were the rests of the cut book, to give a hint of some past action. As a last layer I added a smoked scent that was donated to me by the Hall 06 project from TAAT collective⁶⁹.

The smell layer came at last as a formal addition suggested by my mentor Sodja Lotker. The scent is a sense that, even if it's noticeable and present in our perceptual process, it remains abstract. This allows the scent to create experiences that figure differently in each person. The interesting thing was that when overloaded, it also saturated the perceptual set of the audience and produced, in combination with the sound, an extreme sense of disorientation.

After the phase of sound massage the audience had to follow a map given to them at the beginning in order to reach the library. The sound chamber was composed in a way that slowed down the rhythm of the audience and focus them towards details, therefore to accomplish a location task was challenging. What I did was to give spatial hints in order for the audience to not lose attention towards details, the map was drawn in front of them in a one on one meeting, and marked with important elements that will appear towards their visual perception. At last I framed the last library as optional, and opened the option to get lost and enjoy the city walk.

⁶⁹ <http://taat-projects.com/hall06/>

In the library I placed the book in a table that was guarded always by one friend in order to ensure that the person will find the location of the book. In the table my colleague Thereza Schrezenmeir, who was the first to guard the book, placed some other books to accompany the vibrating one, creating a random narrativity with the titles and the texts inside them.

What happened after was diverse but gave count of strong experiences. Some of the people didn't find the library and returned after some time of a silent walk having experienced the soundscape of the city. Others got overwhelmed by the amount of stimuli that they could perceive in the spaces. The "massage chamber" amplified their sensitivity and created connections to past experiences and/or sensorial relations that allowed the simple to become meaningful. Somehow the alteration of the senses created a space for deep reflections and self time. For this the most important feedback element was my notebook, that by mistake, I forgot in the library. People thought it was there staged as another element of the composition and started to write and draw in them. This are some of the audience's reflections of (de)formation

#2: Appendix A.

(de)formation # 3: The New Stage of the National Theater in Prague –

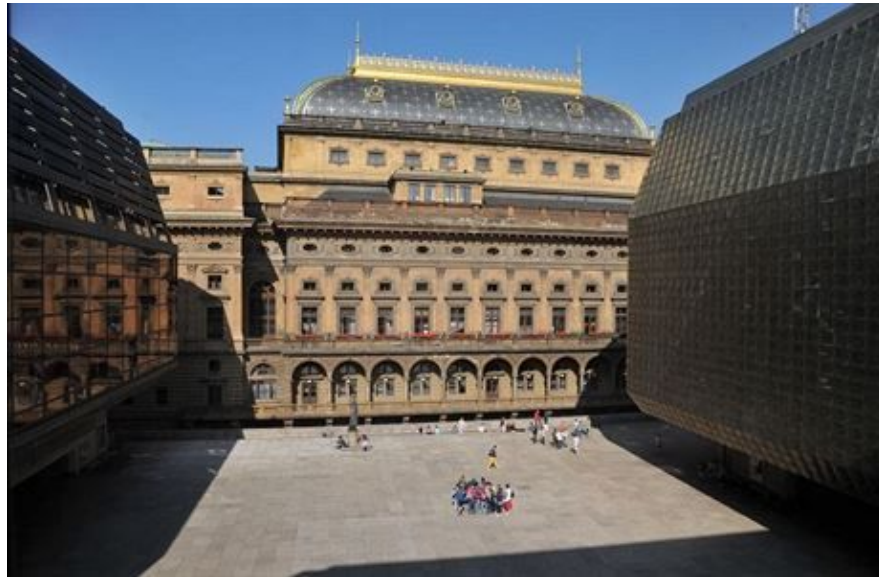
Building B

(De)formation # 3 was the conclusion of the research process on how sensorial stimulation and atmospheric composition can be used as a form of scenography. The installation was thought since the beginning as a multi-room installation, to explore how the architecture of a place helps to create trajectories through where we can neat a spatial dramaturgy. By working in a multi-room format I wanted to deepen the exploration on how a room can interface the experience of the others, how the *coming-from* affects the experience of the *being here*. Working in many rooms allowed me to think in complex network of relations between sensations that can lead to the construction of a personal transcendental experience of one place.

To stage this I choose to work around the National Theater complex, with special focus on the “Piazzetta⁷⁰”. The piazzetta served as connection point between all the buildings that compose the National Theater, and at the same time as a public space where people transits daily. The initial idea was to create several points of view of this place and explore how the experience of it changes, not just when changing the point of view but also when perceiving it having already having experienced it. For this I found some interesting points of view for the square: 1. NONA café located in the second floor of Nová Scéna main building. 2. One of the balconies of the historical building. 3. One of the offices 4. Nová Scéna’s building B 5. The piazzetta itself. By perceiving the place from different angles and after having experienced it

⁷⁰ The original name of the square is Vaclav Havel Square, but is commonly referred as Piazzetta by the locals.

from different atmospheric situations, the site will unfold a series of narratives that will (de)form the place.

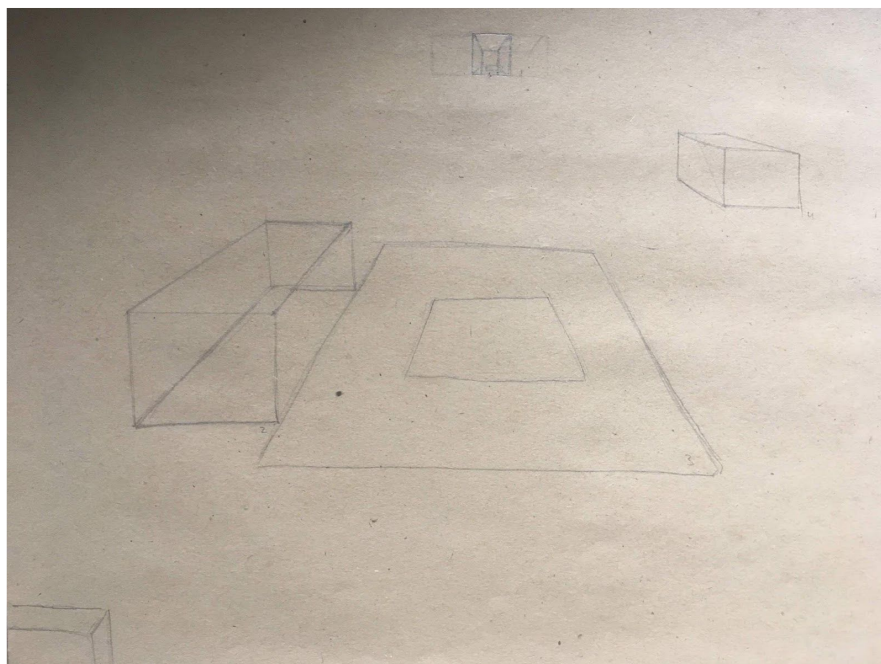


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The installation was also thought to include more than one person at the time to explore how encounter also shapes the way we perceive a place. Having many people walking around this maze will create encounters and recognition of the other being part of the same situation, then seeing that person in another place might create a sense of connection or reflection on the place. Like when you meet someone in the street, or know that somebody is now in a place that you know. For me this experience of the other was important to research as people are one of the main elements that create atmospheres in a place.

⁷¹ The National Theatre of Prague. On the back: the historical building. On the right: the New Stage. On the left: the administrative building. On the center: the Václav Havel square also referred as Piazzetta. FOTO: MAGISTRÁT HL.M. PRAHY, Retrieved from: https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/piazzetta-narodniho-divadla-se-prejmenuje-na-namesti-vaclava-havla.A160927_162051_In_domov_jko

The installation was devised based on the sensory massage chamber used in (de)formation # 2. The idea was to create several chambers and spread them along the different buildings surrounding piazzetta. Each of them designed to stimulate different senses, and being composed in the borders of perception. The people will walk from one sensory chamber to the other alone, and meet or pass by the others audience members in the trajectories. Also the space was thought to give viewpoint of other spaces from where the audience could acknowledge the presence of the other. With this the idea was to create a network of perceptions, of time, space and presence while the senses are being slowly distorted. This is how the spatial reduction of the installation looked like:

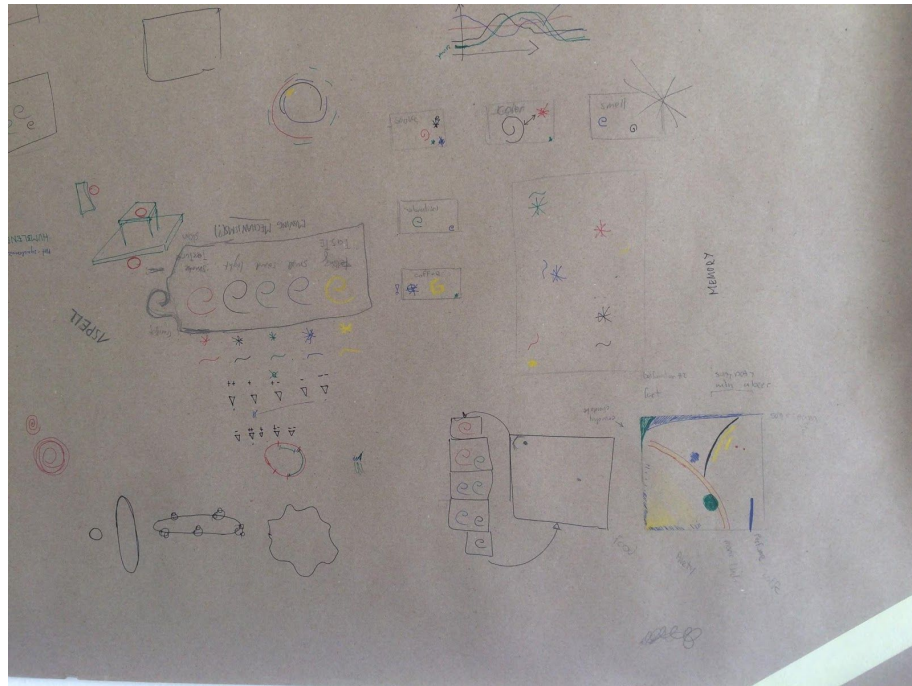


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⁷² Spatial reduction of the National Theater. The draft shows possible viewpoints of the Piazzetta, being perceived from different places. In the back a window of one of the administrative offices, on the right a balcony on the historical building, on the left Nová Scéna's building B, on the bottom left corner cafe NONA

Parallel to this spatial research, together with Theresa Schrezenmeir and Zuzana Šklivoba we started testing how our senses worked. For this and with the help of the project mentor the dramaturg Sodja Lotker, we developed a task: how to become the space. The research consisted on locking ourselves in rehearsal rooms and remain silent to listen to the sounds of them, to dim the light slowly and watch how the the color of the remaining light changed to our perception, to watch several textures and analyse them attentively to find little details on the materials of the rooms, to find new viewpoints of a place and to reflect how it feels to see our colleagues from a different angle. This long sessions of perception, were relaxing and profound, and create space to feel the atmospheres and how they changed. The study of perception didn't need to go forward to a neural or cognitive analysis on how our perceptual system works. It was enough to feel the changes and share our experiences.

After each session sit down in front of big papers and shared our experiences and findings, trying to decode perception through our experiences. After this we drew connections searching for possible sensorial dramaturgies. In a really open and horizontal way we were coding experience through experience, trying to reduce the rational processes to the minimum. In one of the sessions we drew a map of perception that served as the dramaturgical structure for the development of the project. Each of the colors represented one of our senses, the different shapes showed different forms in which they could be stimulated.

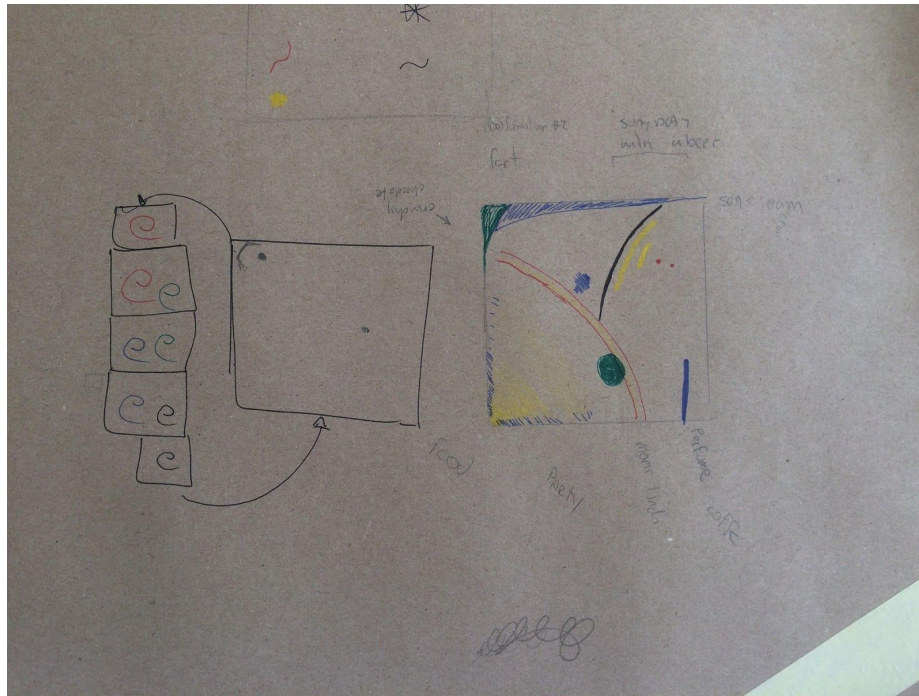


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Until here we were treating each of the senses as separated and trying to decode what one kind stimulation is doing to our perception. But after this meeting we understood that the experience comes as an holistic process of perception in which all the senses takes part in. Here intuitively we composed a square with colors and then we made a “sensorial reading”⁷⁴. The experience started to flow based on our past experiences and own analogies. For example what happens when you combine bass sounds, the smell of a sewer and a smoke machine: a fart; or the scent of sun cream, bright light and high pitched sound: sunday brunch in a park. The interesting fact is that all of this was completely abstract, but we were recreating concrete stories based on what we were perceiving plus our personal desires and memories, therefore every experience will vary even if what is perceived is the same.

⁷³ Dramaturgy board. Drawn during rehearsal by Israel López and Theresa Schrezenmeir.

⁷⁴ I called like this because we were not reading the colors, or the lines, but by acknowledging them as representations of our experiences of the perceptual sessions, we were reading experience.



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With this in mind we designed, a “sensory spa” that contained three sensory rooms. The aim was to try out of how the several rooms situation will look like and how we can interface the experience in the rooms with perceptual stimulation. The first room had a light bulb, painted with a degrade that gave a white light changing from 3200k and 5000k while slowly moving up and down and two subbase transducers to make a platform vibrate. The second room had high pitch sound transducers on the windows and a smellscape to be perceived in cups of water. The smellscape contained six scents. The third room was empty and just had some snacks to sit and wait.

The experiment was a failure. Each of the rooms was designed to create a experience that was isolated and didn't connect to each other. Somehow we had created a museum of senses but not a trigger for self reflection. At the same time the

⁷⁵ Dramaturgy board detail. Experiencescape. Drawn during rehearsal by Israel López and Theresa Schrezenmeir.

parameter on “in-the-border-of-perception” was absolutely not there, each installation was “loud” and the mechanisms were very present. The main problem was that each installation was taken as an individual piece and we were thinking in the connections in a time based sequence. The dramaturgy of the installations was not contemplating the relations that can be made between each sense and the place where is located.

After this we receive confirmation that the performance can be held in the national theater complex, but we were only allowed to use the two floors of building B. Therefore the installation will run essentially in one place. For this we had to reconfigure the project in order to create different places within one space. This somehow solved the problem of disconnection because the fact of not having walls faded the borders between one installation and another and created a single atmosphere. At the same time the location had several architectural divisions. There were two floors to stage, one storage room, one small bedroom-like space, one kitchen-like space. All the building was destroyed and showed traces of abandonment, specially the second floor. This created a paradoxical condition of the place, that was located in front of the almost sacred historical building of the national theater.

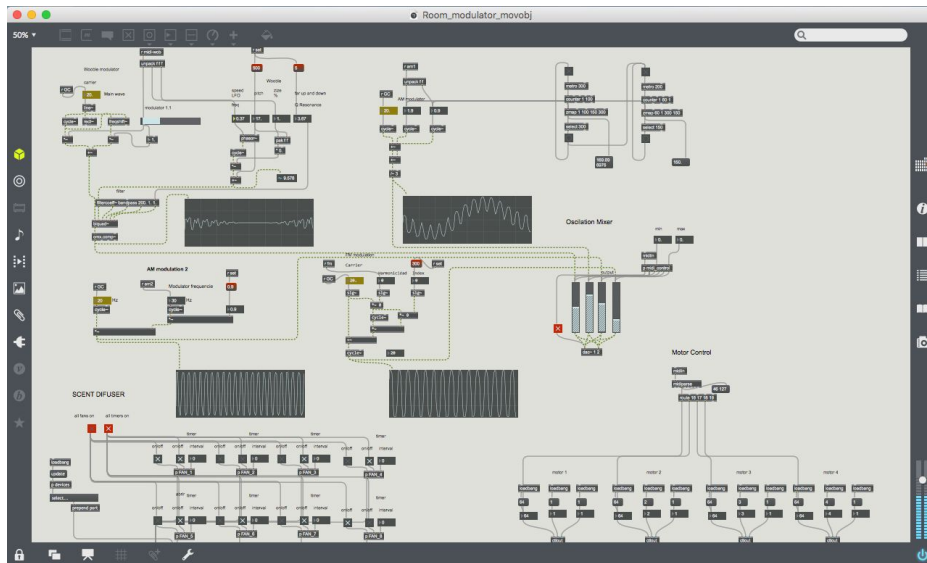
To help me deconstruct my project, I had a working session with the dutch theater maker Gert-Jan Stam from TAAT collective⁷⁶. In a eight hour working session we discussed deeply on how the senses work, on how architecture proposes trajectories, on how all the elements present in a place are active part of the construction of an experience and also on how every single action staged will frame the perception of

⁷⁶ <http://taat-projects.com/> Retrieved on 08-05-2019

the audience, especially when the room is empty. With this in mind we went through several compositional possibilities, imagining how the attention will be guided from the moment in which the audience is waiting until they leave the installation. This meeting made me aware on the importance of every single element in the space, but most important it triggered the understanding of dramaturgy in a spatial form. The dramaturgy stopped to be taken as a development in time, and became a topology of possible spaces.

This demanded to think in a system that does not depend on time, but it generates and regenerates always creating new atmospheres and therefore new spatialities. wanted to create an object that can be applied to the place and allows space to change, until then we had a set of separate mechanism, and the control of them did not allow us to reach connections of the atmospheres. To solve this I designed `room_modulator.movobj`. Named inspired in the moving objects described in Portanovas book “moving without the body”, this object⁷⁷ or `mov_object` was thought to help us to control all of the elements that until the time we had explored to create the sensory messages, and compose with them as a whole. The image below shows `room_modulator` software, a MAX/MSP patch that allows control of up to eight sound channels, eight scent diffusers, four motors and DMX lighting fixtures.

⁷⁷ Here, object is referred also as in computational sciences, as a variable, or a function through which more complex functions and algorithms can be created.



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The other part of room_modulator was the physical elements to be used. This consisted on sound transducers, scents of different types, scent diffusers to spread the smell in the atmosphere, a motor set to make light bulbs spin or go down and up, and glass paint to color light bulbs.

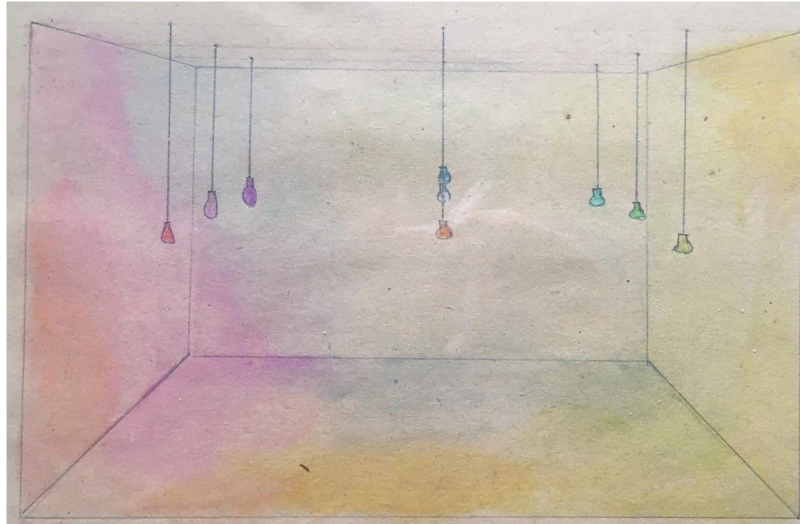


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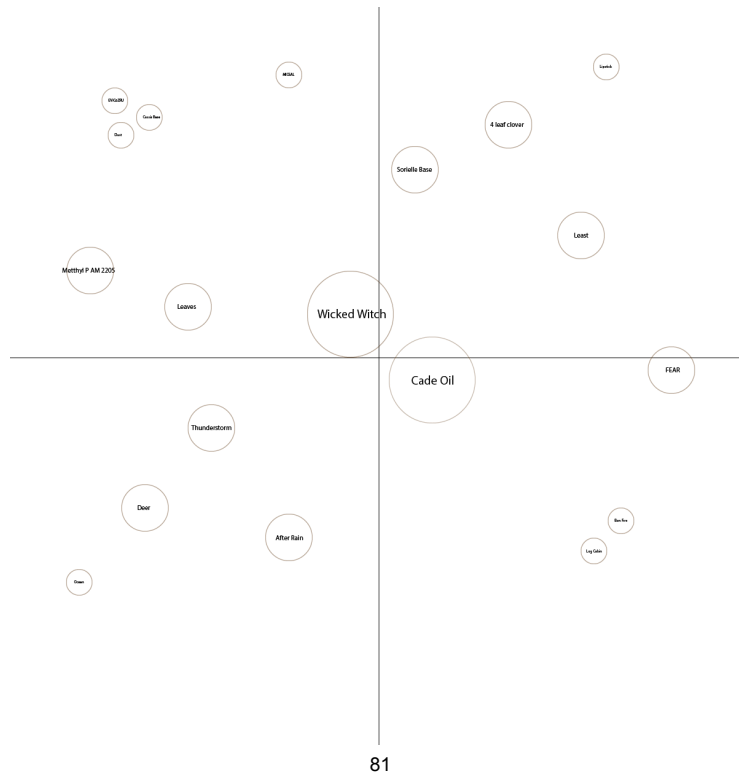
⁷⁸ Roommodulator.movobj software. Screen Capture.

⁷⁹ Roommodulator.movobj hardware. Photography by Israel López.

To prepare the installation the first thing that we did was to map the possible relations between the elements in this system. For this we developed maps on how the different elements relate to each other based on our experience of them. In the following pictures you can see the color-scape and the smell-scape.



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⁸⁰ Color distribution draft.

⁸¹ Smellscape. Drawn during rehearsal by Israel López and Zuzana Šklíbová.

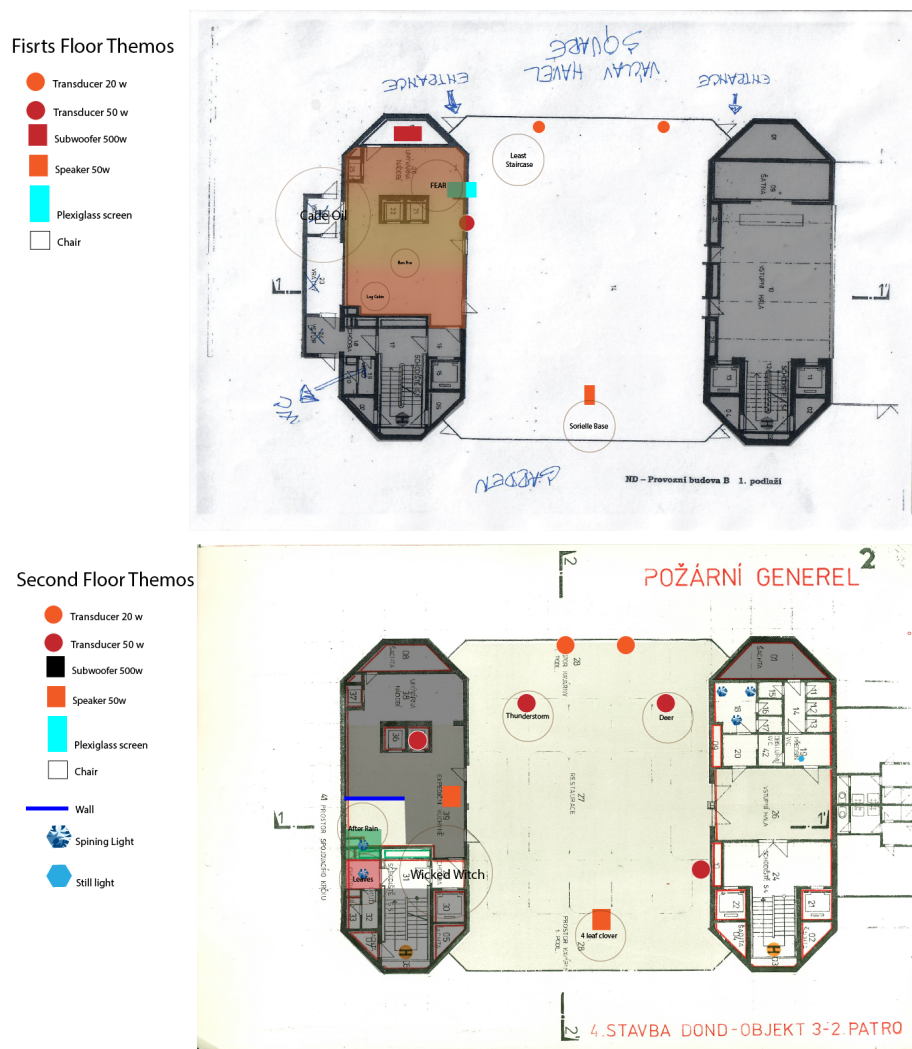
The color-scape was developed by reflecting on how the light can get mixed without being noticed imagining how smooth transitions between one color and another can be achieved. The smellscape was developed by defining differences and similarities on the effects that each scent was producing in us. The smellscape is divided in four quadrants just because the table in which we were working had them, this already framed our organization sense and served us as a base for composition. The stronger smells are closer to the center and the mildest to the sides. The idea of creating this scapes was getting to know our material and start to create abstract relations to it.

As part of this research we were trying how to install the system in specific places, creating new versions of massage chambers. For this we did two installations in rehearsal rooms in DAMU and left them run for full days inviting people to go inside and later talking to them to try to understand how the system was influencing their experiences. This process served us to find the potentials of room_modulator, and to train our sensitivity in order to be able to knit a network of sensorial relationships in-place.

When we arrived to the Building B the process unfolded based on our training. The first thing to be done was to become the space. For this we walked in silence and found special spots where we could have some kind of sensory experience. After a first round of exploration we talked and share the places but we didn't share the experiences of them. Then in a second round we tried to fade into this spots to

uncover all the hidden elements. We were searching for little sounds, changing shadows, reflections, change of colors, textures, but also for places that invited us to slow down and stay.

Once we had decoded the sensory space, we made a process of adaptation of room_modulator to the place. This happened in an intuitive way, without too much questioning, allowing the evident to be a guide for the placement of the elements.



In the process of installation the location of the elements took the final shape based mostly on technical troubles and solutions. While placing them we figured out that is not important the exact location of them, but how they are used to create a meaningful composition. After locating all the mechanisms we created small compositions in the places that we selected. At last, using room_modulator software, I mixed a final general atmosphere, created by timing the scent diffusers, dimming the lights in relation to the places that come before and after the one experienced, and by leveling the sounds of all the transducers. As a final touch, with the help of my colleague Eva Rosemarijn⁸³ we added a layer of texts extracted for the EXPERIENCE book, in order to reframe perception and to create and to dislocate the reason.

After every session of work we sitted down and reflected on what is what we are producing: this are some of the notes that we generated:

Hangout

Devising the being here

Mind state from the inside

Giving time

Being with themselves

⁸³ Student of the Masters Program on Directing for Devised and Object Theater.

Stop

Beauty is in details

Memory

Stay

Chilled station

To see

To deform

Drug, like being drugged

We runned the installation for two days during DAMU's Process Festival. During the running times a maximum of five people entered the space, they were allowed to go in one by one after a slot was getting free. Once inside they had the freedom to stay as much as they need. The installation runned continuously during 8 hours. Before entering the person was given one of one instructions on how the installation worked. They were asked to keep silence, to turn off the phones and to respect the experience of the other. With this our aim was to set boundaries and give freedom of

exploration while making clear that even if what we searched is to create a personal experience, this was created in a shared space.

The people will walk in and at first don't know what to do, then slowly they will discover specific places to sit, and wonder. In general the experience was created after spending some time inside the installation. It was common to see people going to one place to another, until they went through everything. Later they will do a second circuit or repeat some places. In general each person will stay an approximate of 40 minutes inside but there were people that stayed longer, with a maximum of 75 minutes. After leaving the installation it was clear that something in them had changed. They walked out with a look that reflected distortion, or had some difficulty to talk, most of them were just able to give a sign of thank you and walked away in a really slow pace. It is difficult to express in third person how this could be notified, specially after taking part of the whole process of setting and tuning the installation, but in order to create a picture of the audience experiences, here there are some reflections of the audience:

Mga. Jiří Adámek, Ph.D.

Directing teacher at the faculty of alternative and object theater in DAMU

During the klauzury festival, I am usually supposed to see twenty or thirty students works. There is no time to eat, to relax, to think of the shows and of course, there are many reasons to be a bit frustrated with many of the shows.

The last year, one of the presented works was Lopez's installation out of the school building which has made the organisation of the festival days even more complicated. nevertheless, I have run from school to the Themos building and (as quickly as possible) enter the installation to see it in a couple of minutes.

The first part on the first floor was very simple - a permanent deep sound coming from hidden speakers, and some objects. But... to have a feeling of it, I should slow down. And it made me well. I was fascinated by observation of people in a garden restaurant behind the glass wall of the building. The everyday movements and small actions of the people there went well with the simplicity of the installation inside. So, step by step, I was more and more concentrated. And after seeing everything attentively, I have finished sitting on a bench at the second floor, looking at the small square and watching people walking through the space: their bodies, attitudes, speeds, moods. It was a great show, I was fascinated.

So, the whole installation was somehow a preparation to SEE really the world outside.

At the end, I have spent there almost one hour.

Mgr. Brano Mazuch

Acting teacher at the faculty of alternative and puppet theater in DAMU

1/ Huge empty space around me gets rid me of my body. My consciousness, my senses are spread out in the space.

2/ Static of the space, heaviness of the space is disturbed in different ways. But I am calm, relaxed more and more.

3/ Proportions of the space allow me to focus very precisely on each disturbing element.

4/ The world outside the space I am in is not real, it is performance very precisely and accurately corresponding to the disturbances of the space (sound, vibration, air).

Jan Koutný

Audience member, he came in after finding the installation by casualty

It was a particularly beautiful day that day. Right after breakfast I headed directly to the mysterious building of National Theatre where (de)formation took place. I've spent maybe an hour or two inside. I can't be sure as time basically disappeared inside. Instead, all my other senses (I count time perception as a sense.) were totally filled up with stimuli. Quite a transcendental experience. Loved it.

Mga Robert Smolik^{*84}

Scenography teacher at the faculty of alternative and puppet theater in DAMU

Impotence, looking to the people in the cafe, the wall, the kids playing and somehow reflecting about impotence as artist?

Karolina Plicková*

Theater studies teacher at the faculty of alternative and puppet theater in DAMU

I was afraid of what is happening.

Are they performers

Is something going to happen

Sitting and watching the guy walking washing the piazzetta.

Mga. Kristýna Täubelová, Ph.D.

Teacher at the faculty of alternative and puppet theater in DAMU

I wanted to stay 10 minutes

I sitted on the pillow and give it a chance because at first I didn't feel like

I started to hear the details

It slowed me down.

⁸⁴ The symbol * means that are notes taken from the discussion in Process festival, meaning that is a fragment gathered by me in a note while the discussion was being held.

More thoughts collected by talking to the audience after they left the installation, I don't know exactly to whom they belong but they were generated straight after they left the place.

There was some message that somebody left

People live like with antennas, they are not aware of the other. Even when you walk by someone they will move the air around us, but we have developed like an elephant skin we cannot feel details.

I feel like an alien

Time runs different inside

Finding secrets, searching for details

You need to have a non-capitalist mode of behavior to uncover the installation.

Yet if everything is moving, what does it mean to be here?

Places exist in constant change and transformation, from the tectonic plates beneath us, to the walls that limit our private spaces, the streets of our cities and the people that cohabit in them with us, everything exists in constant change and movement. This always changing state, means also that they demand to reconsider our positioning within them. Each place demands a state of being from which it will unfold towards the experience of it. In the interaction between our positioning and its influence on the becoming of the place, each place performs. Places, even in their apparently stillness, perform.

To be in a place is an action, it involves constant decisions of locating and tuning our perception of our environment, but it also involves taking part on the construction of that environment. To be in a place means being part of it and modulating it with our interactions with the other elements. Every subtle interaction affects the becoming of a place for ourselves and for the others. Being in a place opens a series of possible spatio-temporal relations from which we knit our own experiences and the ones of the others.

To be here, a simple question, then means whole universe of possibilities from where we create the sense of here. Is a process of perception that is not passive but involves a creation of that place that we are experiencing. Is also an acknowledgement of multiplicity and the possibilities of differences within the same

place. To be here is an action, the action of being but also the influence of the Here as a constituent part of that being.

To think the here in an aesthetical for me is to think on performativity, is to challenge the perception towards an understanding that what is happening is not just a matter of an external becoming, but a creation process that involves our participation. To darken the stage to make it appear and disappear, to stage with sound waves that merge with the rooms silence, to search for details that will normally be lost and to focus the attention to it, all of this are attempts to challenge the conception of perceiving as an static action, and to push the act of perceiving to be difficult to perform. To propose perception as a conscious decision that shapes the places that we inhabit.

Last page number

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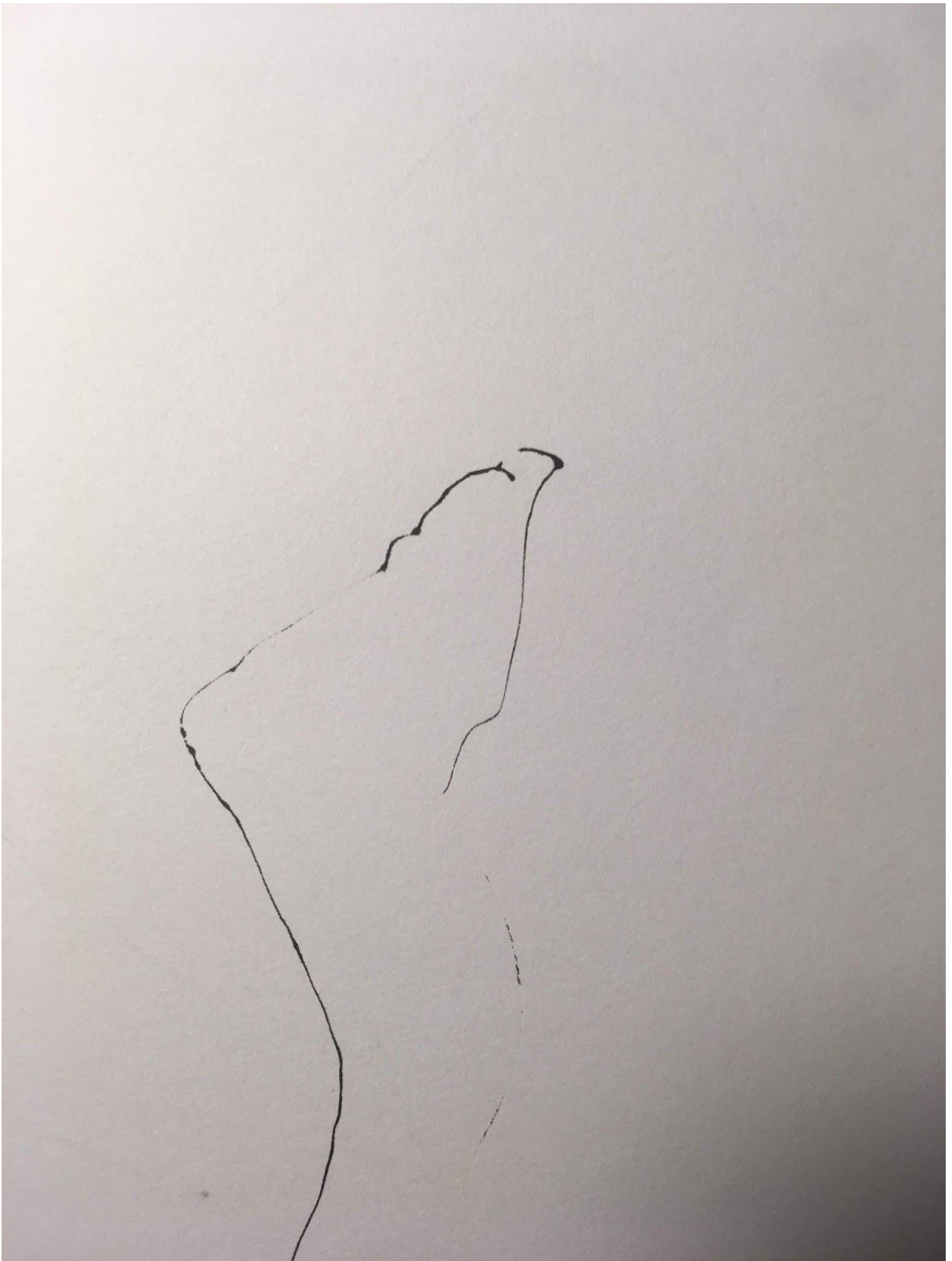
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Appendix A: Reactions to (de)formation #2 expressed in a notebook forgotten on the place.



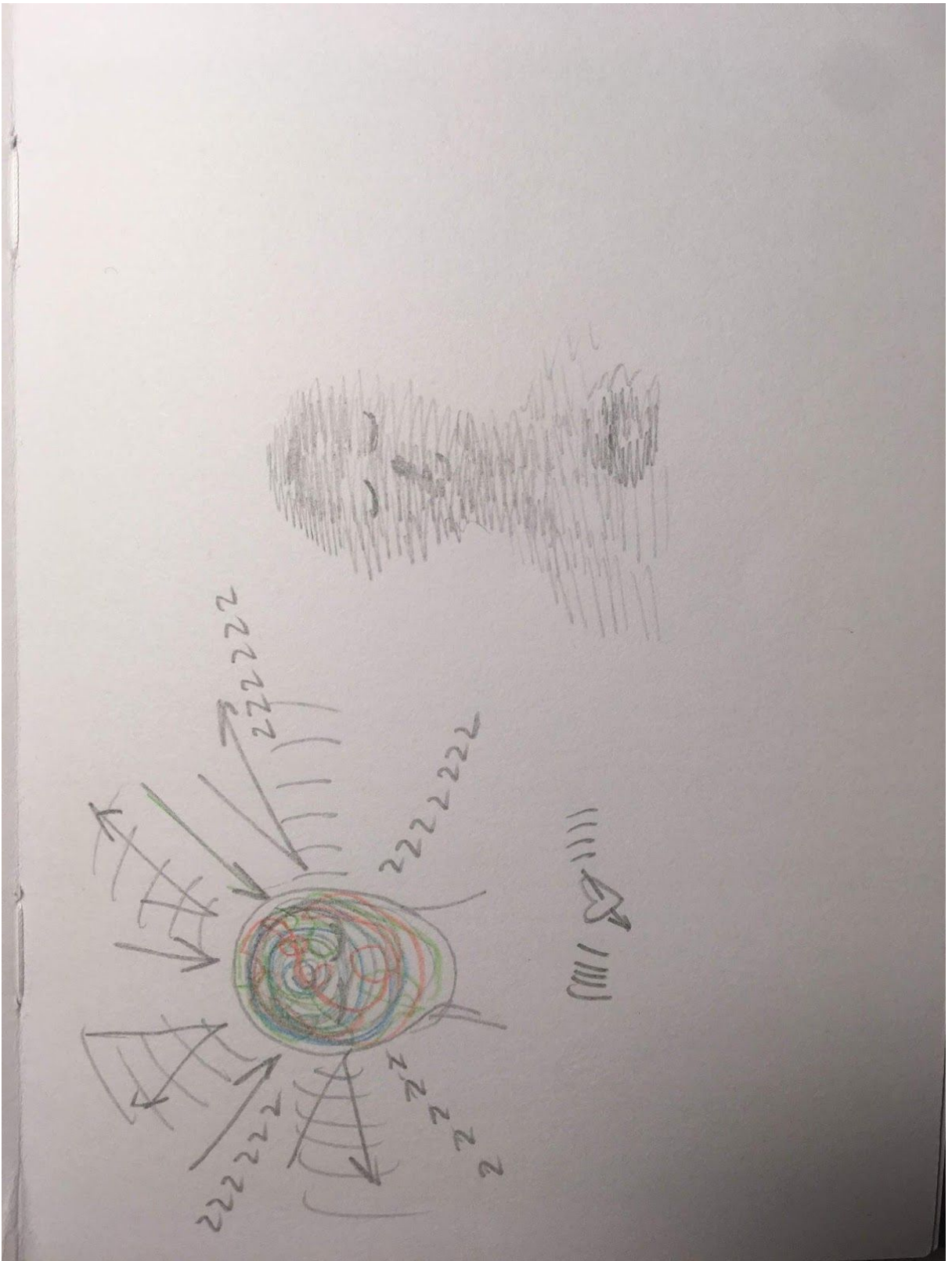
85

⁸⁵ Collected from the notebook left on the installation. Author Unknown



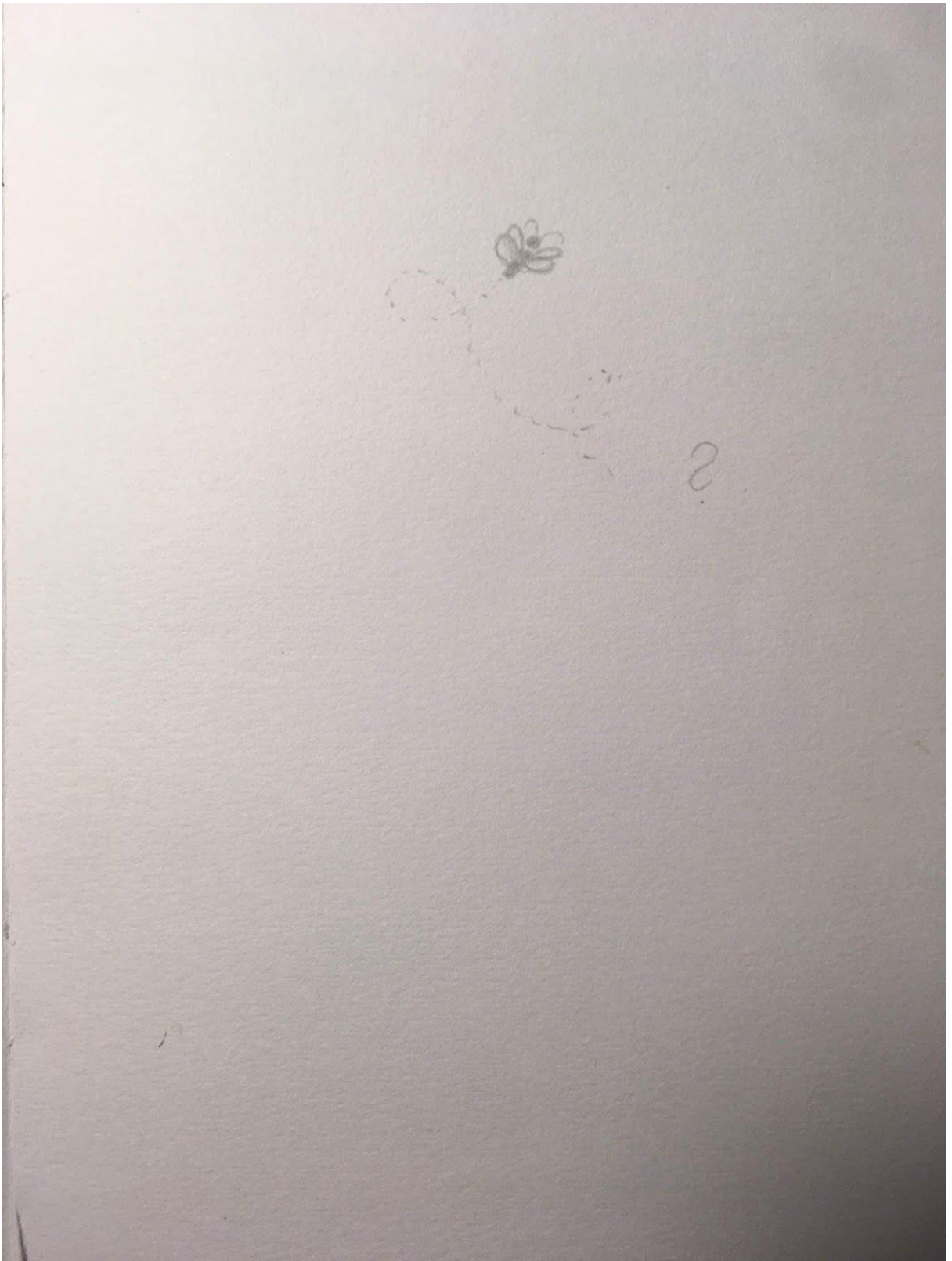
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⁸⁶ Collected from the notebook left on the installation. Author Unknown



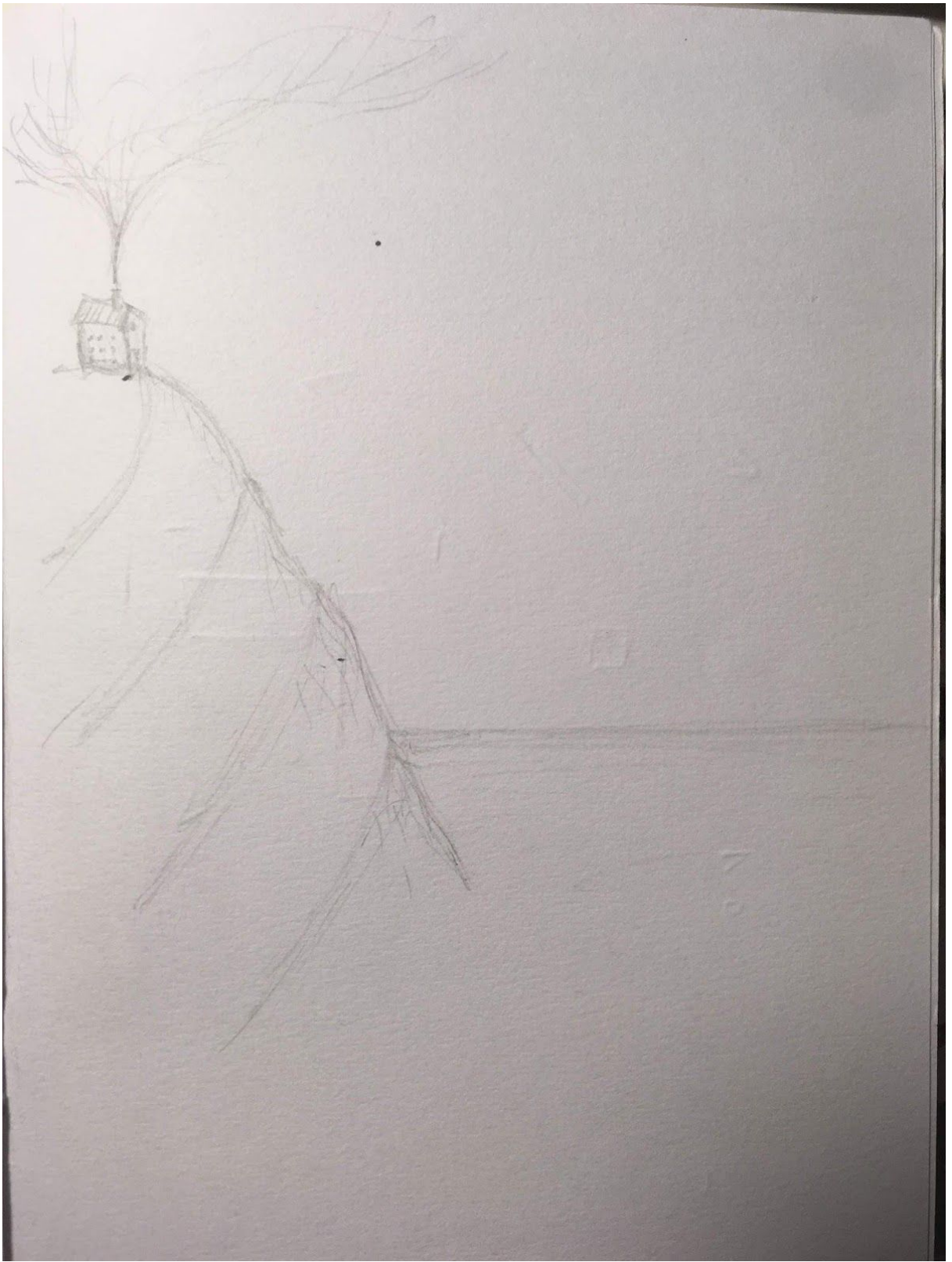
87

⁸⁷ Collected from the notebook left on the installation. Author Unknown



88

⁸⁸ Collected from the notebook left on the installation. Author Unknown

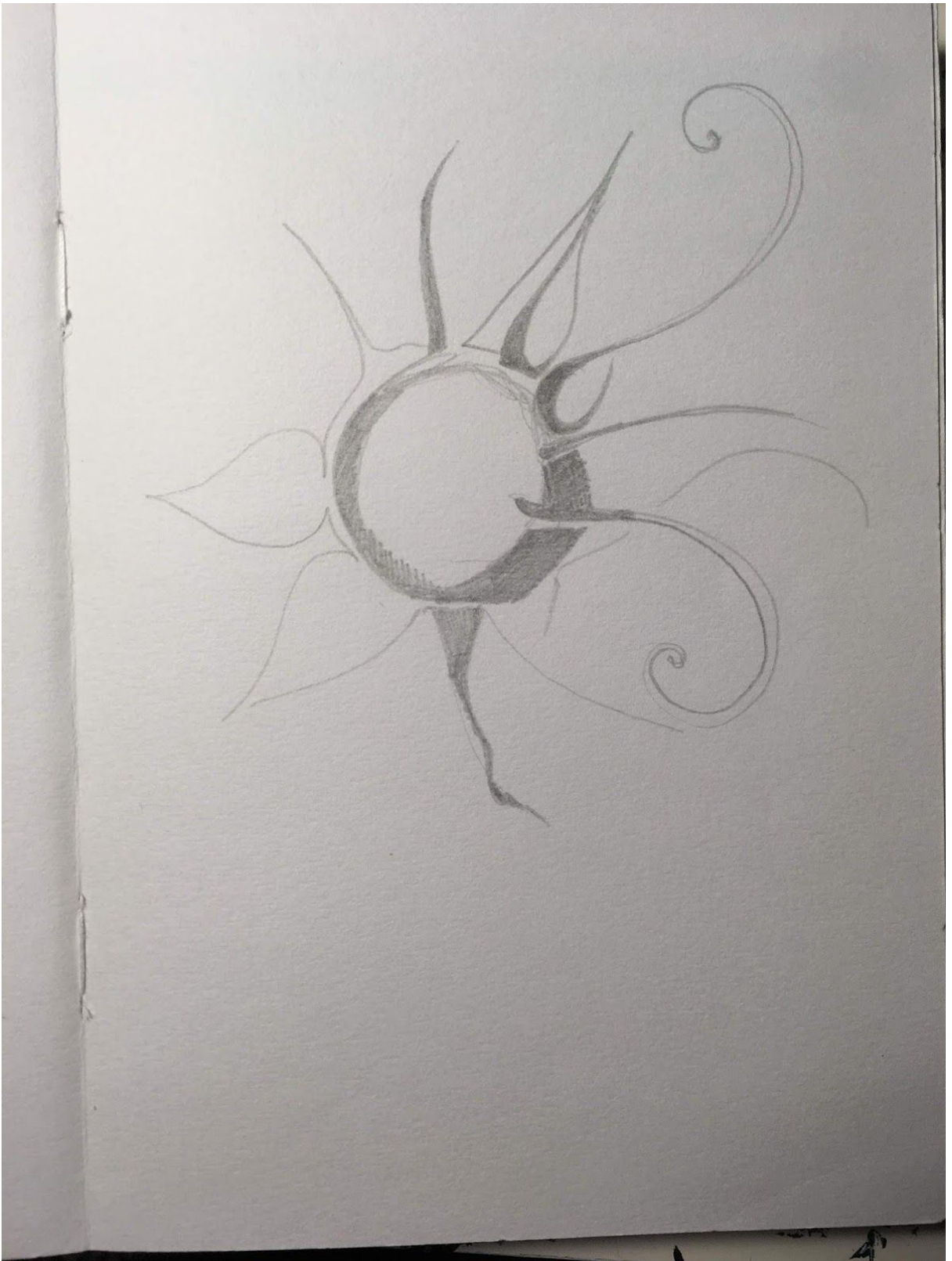


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⁸⁹ Collected from the notebook left on the installation. Author Unknown

endurance test

- just to leave smth here in the end.

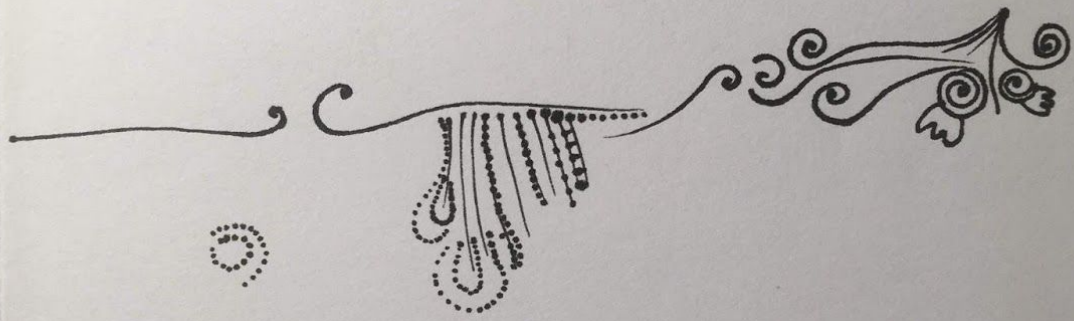
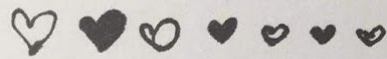


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⁹¹ Collected from the notebook left on the installation. Author Unknown

IF something happens just unplugs.
unplugs.

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PAPER TO WRITE ON.



contemplation state ...

to watch the DAY pass.

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⁹³ Collected from the notebook left on the installation. Author Unknown

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