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**RE-EVALUATING THE VISUAL IN THEATRE
ARTISTIC RESEARCH**

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DISSERTATION THESIS

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Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci na téma

**Re-evaluating the Visual in Theatre
Artistic Research**

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Praha, dne

.....
podpis

Upozornění

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Anotace

Ve své disertační práci *Re-evaluating the Visual in Theatre* zkoumám vybrané režijní postupy současné divadelní tvorby, které přehodnocují vztah mezi perspektivou, vizualitou a tělesností účastníků představení. Metodologicky toto téma zpracovávám za pomoci postupů uměleckého výzkumu, jež umožňují efektivní kombinaci teoretické analýzy dané problematiky s vlastní tvorbou a její reflexí. Ve čtyřech částech své studie se kromě teoretické a historické kontextualizace tématu věnuji analýze dvou vlastních inscenací - *Žádný člověk* a *Molyneuxova otázka* – a tří inscenací jiných režisérů – *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* Romea Castellucciho, *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* Alexandry Pirici a *Crowd* Gisèle Vienne.

Práce začíná zamyšlením nad významem starořeckého pojmu *θέατρον* (divadlo), který doslova znamená "místo pro dívání". Pojem divadlo tedy v sobě již od počátku ustavuje vztah mezi individuální tělesností každého diváka, prostorem a perspektivou pro sledování představení a konkrétní zkušeností diváckého zážitku.

Ve druhé části práce vycházím z eseje Waltera Benjamina z roku 1935 *Umělecké dílo ve věku své technické reprodukovatelnosti* a zkoumám vztah mezi fyzickým odstupem, perspektivou a tělem diváka v divadle. Zaměřuji se dále na pojmy „perspektiva“, „ikona“ a „ikonoklasmus“ a popisuji, jak inscenování ikonoklasmů a změn perspektivy ovlivňuje percepci obrazu v divadle a umožňuje divákům aktivně reflektovat to, co vidí. Dále zkoumám fenomén obdivování ruiny v umění a jeho vztah k estetice fragmentu, nedokončenosti a palimpsestu, vedoucí až k post-dramatickým tendencím využívaných v avantgardním divadle 20. století.

Ve třetí kapitole této studie zkoumám vybrané inscenace Romea Castellucciho, Alexandry Pirici a Gisèle Vienne, které zpochybňují divadelní portál jako základní rámec pro sledování představení, čímž významně přehodnocují standardní principy vizuálna v divadle. Ve svých analýzách se zaměřuji se na to, jak dané inscenace konfrontují své diváky s novými způsoby dívání se na známé obrazy a jak definují samotné dívání se jako plně subjektivní akt.

Ve čtvrté části studie se věnuji dvěma vlastním inscenovaným představením: opeře *Žádný člověk*, která měla premiéru v březnu 2017 v Národním divadle v Praze a inscenaci *Molyneuxova otázka*, která měla premiéru v listopadu 2018 v berlínské galerii EIGEN + ART Lab a v prosinci 2018 v pražském divadle Studiu Hrdinů. S odkazem na pojem tělesné mysli kognitivních lingvistů George Lakoffa a Mark Johnsona popisují

vznik inscenací, jejichž záměrem bylo umožnit divákům projít racionálním i fyzickým procesem reflexe, a zároveň jim nabídnout konfrontaci se zpomalenou vizualitou, jež umožňuje objevovat nové vrstvy známých obrazů.

Klíčová slova

Perspektiva, vizualita v divadle, ikona, ikonoklasmus, aura, post-dramatické divadlo, avantgarda, tělesnost, vtělené poznání, zpomalení, Romeo Castellucci, Alexandra Pirici, Gisèle Vienne.

Summary

The doctoral thesis *Re-evaluating the Visual in Theatre* examines different directorial attempts at re-evaluating the relationship between perspective, visibility, and bodies in theatre today. Methodologically my research is based on artistic research procedures, which allow an effective combination of theoretical analysis with my artistic practice and its reflection. The study is divided into four parts: in addition to the theoretical and historical contextualization of the topic, I analyse two of my productions - *No Man* and *Molyneux's Problem* - and three productions by other directors - *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* by Romeo Castellucci, *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* by Alexandra Pirici and *Crowd* by Gisèle Vienne.

The study begins with a reflection on the meaning of the ancient Greek term *θέατρον* (theatre), literally translating as "a place for viewing". From the very beginning, the concept of theatre established a relationship between the individual corporeality of each spectator, space, perspective, and the specific experience of the spectator.

Relying on Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, I examine the relationship of distance, perspective, and bodies in theatre in the second chapter of this study. I investigate the terms "perspective", "icon" and "iconoclasm" to analyse how stagings of iconoclasms and staged changes of perspective make the visual in theatre less self-evident and more visible, allowing spectators to reflect actively what they see. I further examine the historical concept of the artistic admiration of the ruin in the arts and its relationship to the concept of the fragment, the aesthetics of the unfinished and the palimpsest in theatre, leading up to post-dramatic tendencies occurring in avant-garde theatre of the 20th century.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I analyse three examples of stagings that re-evaluate the visual in theatre by questioning the theatre portal as the basic frame for viewing: Romeo Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* and Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd*. I further analyse how these three shows confront their spectators with new ways of looking at known images and situations and how they mark the act of viewing to imply an inherently subjective perspective.

In the fourth chapter, I describe and analyse two of my staged works: the opera *No Man* that premiered in March 2017 at the Prague National Theatre and the show *Molyneux's Problem* that premiered in November 2018 at the Berlin gallery EIGEN+ART Lab and

in December 2018 at the Prague theatre Studio Hrdinů. Relying on cognitive linguists George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's concept of embodied cognition, I describe my attempts at creating shows that allow for a rational as well as physical process of reflection on the side of the spectator, whilst offering them a confrontation with decelerated, slowed down visuality creating a space that enables spectators to discover new layers of well-known images.

Key words

Perspective, visuality in theatre, icon, iconoclasm, Walter Benjamin, aura, postdramatic theatre, corporeality, avantgarde, embodied cognition, deceleration, Romeo Castellucci, Alexandra Pirici, Gisèle Vienne.

Re-evaluating the Visual in Theatre

Artistic Research

I. Introduction

I.1 Point of Departure.....	2
I.2 Theatre. A Place for Viewing.....	4
I.3 Bodies in Theatre.....	6

II. Re-evaluating the Visual

II.1 Perspective.....	13
II.2 Icons.....	15
II.3 Iconoclasm.....	17
II.4 The Aesthetics of the Ruin.....	19
II.5 Iconoclasm and Ruination on Stage.....	20

III. Three Examples of Directorial Approaches Re-evaluating the Visual

III.1 Romeo Castellucci.....	24
III.2 Alexandra Pirici.....	34
III.3 Gisèle Vienne.....	44

IV. Artistic Practice. Staged Works: Berlin - Vienna - Prague, 2016-2019

IV.1 2016 - 2019: <i>No Man</i>	53
IV.2 2017 - 2019: <i>Molyneux's Problem</i>	73

V. Conclusion.....

102

Bibliography.....	106
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Appendix

Text of the Play <i>Molyneux's Problem</i>	112
Excerpt of the Libretto of <i>No Man</i>	126

Re-evaluating the Visual in Theatre

Artistic Research

I. Introduction

I.1 Point of Departure

Rehearsing *Molyneux's Problem* at the Studio Hrdinů in Prague in the Winter of 2018. Our set is a round, upholstered darkroom with a 15-meter diameter; the first part of the show is meant to happen inside this space in absolute darkness. Actors Pavlína Štorková, Jakub Gottwald and I spend hours each day rehearsing movements in the dark, we try to find ways to approach each other without falling over, to establish the best strategy to work with voices and sound and to test out how our bodies react to being left in the darkness without any visual stimuli.

Later, during try-outs of the show, some audience members become tired after about 25 minutes. Their bodies react to the soft floor, the darkness and the feeling of merging with their spatial surroundings with sleepiness. I decide that the first part of the show mustn't last longer than thirty minutes and to confront the experience of being lost in the dark and having no visual point of orientation in the first part of the show with a second part that is distinctly perspectively anchored. Our darkroom set is equipped with a mechanism that allows it to open like an eye and offer the audience a central perspective on the vast concrete space of the Studio Hrdinů theatre. To my surprise, this switch from being in the dark, i.e., from not having any visual focal point, to having a clear position to view the show from isn't a simple task: most audience members need some time to get accustomed to the new perspective. When the darkroom opens, many spectators are disoriented, and it takes them minutes to be able to concentrate on the action happening in the frame of the central perspective that is created in front of them. This experience relates to several issues concerning my work as a director and playwright in the last few years: the physicality of audience members and the question of perspective. They are also at the core of this study, in which I attempt to analyse attempts at re-evaluating the visual in theatre today.

I work as a director and playwright in theatre and opera. My research for this study was conducted as an artistic research, based on my artistic re-evaluation of the visual in the practice of developing staged works as well as on a theoretical analysis of stagings by three other directors. Along with two staged works - the opera *No Man* that premiered in March 2017 at the Prague National Theatre and the show *Molyneux's Problem* that premiered in November 2018 at the Berlin gallery EIGEN+ART Lab and in December 2018 at the Prague theatre Studio Hrdinů¹ - this text constitutes my thesis.

In this study, I examine examples of directorial approaches, which subvert ubiquitous perspectives that are so omnipresent they become invisible as constructs and instead try to make their directorial approaches towards perspective visible. These examples are Romeo Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, and Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd*. I am interested in

¹ Both *No Man* and *Molyneux's Problem* are pieces of theatre and as such collective achievements. In this study I am going to reflect on my experiences as the playwright and director of both shows, which would not have been possible without the actors, singers, dramaturgs, composers, and designers working with me. The credits for both shows read:

1. Jiří Kadeřábek – *No Man*

Composer: Jiří Kadeřábek

Director: Katharina Schmitt

Dramaturg: Lukáš Jiříčka

Libretists: Katharina Schmitt & Lukáš Jiříčka

Conductor: Jiří Kadeřábek

Set & Costume Designer: Patricia Talacko

With: Eliška Gattringerová, Sylva Čmugrová, Jan Mikušek, Jakub Tolaš, Josef Škarka, Jiří Štrébl

2. Katharina Schmitt - *Molyneux's Problem*

Writer and director: Katharina Schmitt

Composer: Michal Rataj

Set: Pavel Svoboda

Dramaturg: Jakub Režný

Photographer: Peter Fabo

With: Pavlína Štorková, Jakub Gottwald.

the disintegration of the divide between auditorium and stage and the implications of this disintegration for the audience-members' perspective. The deconstruction of the central perspective leads as inevitably to new perspectives as the staged destruction of images breeds new images, relying on the dialectic of destruction and creation of images as a directorial means.

Methodologically, my research is based on transdisciplinary approaches formulated in the field of artistic research, one of the methodological inspirations for this study being Cecilia Parsberg's artistic research on begging conducted at the Malmö Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts at Lund University in Sweden². My artistic work is visual, time-based, spatial, and physical; these aspects inform my writing. The two staged works were developed during the time that I worked on the text of the thesis. These works were created in Czech and in German and they were shown and broadcast by institutions in the Czech Republic and in Germany. I decided to write this thesis neither in German, nor in Czech, but in English, to allow for a bigger accessibility of the presented material and results. Text and practical work inform each other and were created to be regarded as a whole.

I.2 Theatre. A Place for Viewing

The word theatre is derived from the Ancient Greek term θέατρον, which translates as *a place for viewing*. In theatre, the physical perspective of each audience member as well as the spatial characteristics of each performance are different, and thus the question *What is viewed?* is closely related to the question *Which place do we view from?*³. Theatre happens unrepeatably in

² Parsberg, Cecilia. *How Do You Become a Successful Beggar in Sweden?*, Dissertation Thesis. Malmö: Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, Lund University, 2016.

³ "In the 17th century, most Western European languages used the term theatrum or theatre to refer to a multitude of diverse activities - irrespective of an increasingly metaphorical use of such terms. The term theatre signified any raised space, where something worth being seen and observed was set up or happening - be it a fountain or an execution, a comedy or an operation, an exposition of rare naturalia or a funeral procession. Moreover, the term was used in the titles of many philosophical, theological, geographical and medical treatises. An abundance of publications which took the term theatre or theatrum as part of the title flooded the European

the present, between bodies of performers, bodies of audience members, space, and time, it is a visual as well as a time-based medium. The relationship between creation and destruction in theatre is dialectical at its core, which applies in many cases not only to the time-based character of the art form itself, but also to visuality and perspective.

Analysing perspective in theatre is complex, it is a fragile connection between body, space, and time. The central perspective in the second part of *Molyneux's Problem* seemed evident to me as a director, but it took the audience time to perceive it. Once the central perspective is deconstructed in a staging, it isn't easy to re-establish. Every gaze outside and beyond the central perspective breeds a new perspective. Each change of perspective is a change of the visual field⁴ of the spectator and he has to move his body to attain such a change. Stagings that ask their spectators to move and change their physical position towards the depicted remind the spectators of the fact that their perspective is subjective and that what they are witnessing in the framework of the show is a construction, an artistic decision, something to be actively perceived, analysed, even co-created through the act of viewing.

book market: *Theatrum Morum* (Prague, 1608), *Theatrum Veterum Rhetorum, Oratorum, Declamatorum quos Sophistes Nominabant Graeces* (Paris 1620), *Theatrum Europaeum* (Frankfurt 1634-1738), *Theatrum S. Casimiri quo ipsius prosopiae, vita, miracula pompa in eiusd. apotheos Vilnae Lith.* (Antwerp, 1604), *Theatrum Pacis, oder Friedensschauplatz aller fñhrnehmsten Fiedens-Instrumenten und Tractaten* (Nuremberg, 1663-1685), *Theatrum Chemicum* (Argentorati, 1613-1662), *Theatrum Florae* (Paris, 1622), *Theatrum Insectorum* (London, 1634), *Theatrum Machinarum* (Nurmberg 1661), *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Antwerp, 1570), to mention just a few. In Germany, it was not until the end of the 18th century that the term was restricted to a particular institution, its buildings and its products." Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p.12.

⁴ The visual field is the total area in which objects can be seen in the peripheral vision whilst focusing on a central point.

I.3 Bodies in Theatre

In this thesis, I examine the relationship between perspective, visibility, and bodies in theatre today. The role of visibility in everyday life has fundamentally shifted since the beginning of this century. Today, thanks to second wave⁵ internet applications such as the image sharing platform Instagram, launched in 2010, a state of non-stop creation and consumption of images and self-image in social media has been reached. As of June 2018, Instagram counted one billion users worldwide with 500 million active daily users and around 95 million images and videos posted daily⁶, exposing its users to a hitherto unimaginable variety of images, whilst at the same time turning them into performers, photographers, models, filmmakers and curators in the framework of the massive visual archive of the platform. The seemingly two-dimensional world of virtual images deeply affects the three-dimensional world of bodies, as Claire Bishop argues:

The non-stop creation and consumption of self-image in social media means that today we are all photographers, models, curators, filmmakers, poets, and DJs. Such amateur performances arguably turn our entire lives into theatre.⁷

The beginning of the third millennium was marked by an increasing cultural importance of digital and social media. It simultaneously started with two violent iconoclastic acts: the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the Taliban in March 2001 and the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001. Both facts are related to the broader question of what

⁵ The wave model is commonly used to describe the development of the internet from desktop (1st wave) to a mobile network (2nd wave) on to the internet of things (3rd wave).

⁶ Newberry, Christina. "37 Instagram Stats That Matter to Marketers in 2020" [online]. *Hootsuite.com*. October 19th, 2019. Accessed on November 5th, 2019.

<https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-statistics/>

⁷ Bishop, Claire. "ARE YOU ALIVE OR NOT?" [online]. Paper presented at the conference 'Looking at ART through the lens of THEATRE' at the Dutch Art Institute in Amsterdam. March 18th, 2015. *dutchartinstitute.eu*. Accessed on July 16th, 2019.

<https://dutchartinstitute.eu/page/6750/are-you-alive-or-not---looking-at-art-through-the-lens-of-theatre---act-2--march/>

passes for visual culture, of how the image can be - violently or playfully - reimagined. This question was broadly discussed in the early aughts, for example in the framework of the exhibition *ICONOCLASH. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, curated by Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour (among others) at the ZKM in Karlsruhe in 2002.

The above-described recent development of visual culture also has implications for me as a theatre maker. I question the value of the image, the necessity of every visual element of my work in a time of never-ending imagery, spectacle, and visual distraction manoeuvres. What implications do contemporary means of image production imply as a task for artists working with the image? What exactly makes an image an artistic image today and how can artistic images be created in the framework of contemporary theatre? Walter Benjamin analysed a similar conundrum related to changes in media consumption in his 1935 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in which he examined the reception of artworks in its relationship to the development of photography and film, mass reproduction and a resulting altered depiction of reality leading to a changed collective perception. Through these processes, Benjamin argues, the aura of the artwork is weakened:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes

are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements.⁸

Benjamin comments that although the possibilities of mass reproduction of artworks offer a potential of social emancipation for artists and audiences alike, they also carry with them a danger of political appropriation, as shown by the rise of fascism and fascist use of mass media in the 1930s. Benjamin was interested mainly in photography and film, new artforms which brought the artistic image closer to the viewer than had been possible to date. Aura, for Benjamin, is based on distance:

And if changes in the medium of contemporary perception can be comprehended as decay of the aura, it is possible to show its social causes. The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones. We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.⁹

In the second half of the 20th century, Walter Benjamin's essay became a key reference for the newly established field of media studies, referred to by media theorists and thinkers like Marshall McLuhan, Paul Virilio and Friedrich Kittler. Today, 85 years after its first publication, the text is still a relevant tool for analysing the work of art in the 'information age'. Present-day screens used to experience social and virtual media allow for an even more extreme closeness towards the depicted object than anything Benjamin could have imagined, making it possible to zoom into every pore, every pixel of the image. At the same time, the screen is the edge of the image on social media, a threshold that can never be questioned or physically overstepped. Benjamin well described how

⁸ Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". In: *Illuminations*. Translated into English by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 217-251.

⁹ Ibid.

physical proximity changes the perception of an artwork and I can rely on his analysis of the functioning of perspective for my study. Still, I have to take into account one aspect that is specific to theatre when it comes to perspective and that is the physicality of the bodies present. It seems self-evident that distance is necessary to see and to build perspective. In theatre perspective is furthermore linked to the physicality of the spectator and the physical action of the actors. Meanwhile, every specific physical perspective allows one to only view and to depict snippets of the world and in a time of fetishization of images every image is a fragile entity, as easily created as it is destroyed. Philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman comments:

Kant once asked, 'What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?' Since Warburg and his concept of orientation, since Eisenstein and his dialectical montage, since Georges Bataille and his cheerful science of documents, since Walter Benjamin and his dispositive of the *Arcades Project*, one can pose the question differently and ask: *What does it mean to orient oneself in the picture?* Or rather, what does it mean to orient oneself in the labyrinthine archive of constantly mixed, connected, compiled, and destroyed images and texts? A burning question, today more than ever. Never before has the image – and with it the archive that arises as soon as the image multiplies and as soon as we want to capture and understand its diversity - dominated our aesthetic everyday life, our political and historical universe to such an extent.¹⁰

¹⁰ Georges Didi-Huberman in: Didi-Huberman, Georges and Ebeling, Knut. *Das Archiv brennt*. Berlin: Kadmos, 2007, p.10, translated into English by K.S.: „Kant fragte einst: 'Was heisst es, sich im Denken zu orientieren?'. Seit Warburg und seinem Begriff der Orientierung, seit Eisenstein und seiner dialektischen Montage, seit Georges Bataille und seiner fröhlichen Wissenschaft der Dokumente, seit Walter Benjamin und seinem Dispositiv des *Passagenwerks* kann man die Frage anders wenden: Was heisst es, sich im Bild zu orientieren? Oder vielmehr: Was heisst es, sich im labyrinthischen Archiv der ständig vermischten, verbundenen, zusammengestellten und zusammen zerstörten Bilder und Texte zu orientieren? Eine brennende Frage, heute mehr denn je. Noch nie beherrschte das Bild - und das Archiv, das

Theatre is only partially a visual medium, it is also based in time, space, and performance, though much of what Georges Didi-Huberman writes about the image applies to theatre as well. I am interested in how to think the theatrical image, how to re-evaluate space and its inherent social components in theatre today. Attempts at such re-evaluations in theatre started already in the 1960s and have led in the last decades to directorial approaches which either try to deconstruct or reinterpret the visual in theatre, focusing on minimalistic and iconoclastic concepts or to strategies that try to immerse the audience in the visual itself and thus erase the distinction between image and viewer, between auditorium and stage. Both approaches usually negate the geometry of the central perspective, that is at the core of classical theatre architecture, acting and directing, where images are constructed as entities that seemingly exist only in 2-D; flat, in front of the eyes of the audience in a dark auditorium.¹¹

Questioning the theatre portal as the basic frame for viewing has strong implications for what is shown and what is left out, as well as for the audience-members' physical and ethical positioning towards the depicted.¹²

entsteht, sobald man diese Vielfalt auffangen und auffassen will - niemals noch beherrschte es so stark unser ästhetisches, alltägliches, politisches und historisches Universum."

¹¹ „Let us imagine that an affinity of status and history has linked mathematics and acoustics since the ancient Greeks. Let us also imagine that for two or three millennia this effectively Pythagorean space has been somewhat repressed (Pythagoras is indeed the eponymous hero of Secrecy). Finally, let us imagine that from the time of these same Greeks another relationship has been established over against the first and has got the better of it, continually taking the lead in the history of the arts - the relationship between geometry and theatre. The theatre is precisely that practice which calculates the place of things as they are observed: if I set the spectacle here, the spectator will see this; if I put it elsewhere, he will not, and I can avail myself of this masking effect and play on the illusion it provides. The stage is the line which stands across the path of the optic pencil, tracing at once the point at which it is brought to a stop and, as it were, the threshold of its ramification. Thus is founded - against music (against the text) - representation." Barthes, Roland. "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein". *Screen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, 15 (2), p. 33–40.

¹² Judith Butler analyses the question of the framing of images and how every frame implies something left out in her book on war photography: "... to call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already

When in theatre the central perspective is re-evaluated, the relationship of the spectators towards their own position in the physical space of the staged piece evolves. The spectator has to reflect his individual perspective in spaces that confront him with non-traditional perspectives or that try to blur the lines between him and the staged image. I am interested in how a re-evaluation of the visual and the perspective of looking at things in theatre might imply a training for a more empathetic and responsible gaze, a gaze that reflects seeing as an act with an inherently subjective perspective and as an act that implies a capacity of (re)action of the bodies present.

II. Re-evaluating the Visual

I begin developing *Molyneux's Problem* in 2016 during a residency at the Museumsquartier in Vienna. Simultaneously, I start working on a Ph.D. research at the Academy of Arts in Prague with an artistic research project about perspective in theatre, linked also to my work as the librettist and director of the opera *No Man* at the Prague National Theatre. At the time, neither the research question for my Ph.D., nor my concept for *No Man*, nor my intent for *Molyneux's Problem* is fully formed. I know that I am interested in blindness and blind people's relationship to the image for *Molyneux's Problem* and I know that I want to examine perspective and iconoclastic approaches in theatre in my research and during the rehearsals of *No Man*. I also know that these impulses might be linked, but I am not sure where they are going to lead me.

When I arrive in Vienna, I email the *Blinden- und Sehbehindertenverband Wien*, the Viennese Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I explain that I am a writer and theatre director interested in conducting interviews with their blind born members about the form of their dreams, as I am convinced that blind born people know something about the image that I, as a seeing person, cannot know. If the language of the unconscious in dreams expresses

outside. (...) The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, apprehend. Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality." In: Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*. London: Verso, 2009, p. 9.

itself through metaphors and images¹³, then how do people that were never exposed to any kind of visuality form images and narratives in their dreams?

The Viennese Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired have a messaging board on their website to which my request is placed. Within two hours after putting the request on the messaging board, seven blind or visually impaired people email me. They all want to meet up and tell me about their dreams. My weeks in Vienna are filled with these interviews, which I record on a small WAV-recording device. In the evenings, I transcribe the interviews and read theoretical texts by Claudia and Romeo Castellucci about iconoclasm in theatre, attempts at re-evaluating the visual by staging the destruction of the image.

The idea of re-evaluating visuality is also at the core of *No Man*, a piece of music theatre I am at the time preparing with composer Jiří Kadeřábek and dramaturg Lukáš Jiříčka for the Prague National Theatre. *No Man* is based on the story of the most famous Czech iconoclasm of the 20th century: the destruction of Otakar Švec's Stalin statue on the Prague Letná Plateau. It is in Vienna, that I begin to understand how the question of iconoclasm as a theatrical strategy is connected to my interest in blindness: both topics are linked to questions of spatial perspective and visuality, both allow for a re-evaluation of visuality. Perspective, when made visible - for example in shows that ask their spectators to physically move and thus provoke changes of the visual field - allows spectators to look at what is being presented to them in a new way. Iconoclasms and the stagings of iconoclasm function similarly as they allow for the construction of new meaning from the debris of the destroyed object and its context. Both stagings of iconoclasms and staged changes of perspective are directorial means to make the visual in theatre less self-evident and more visible.

¹³ Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated into English by A. A. Brill. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913.

In this chapter am going to have a closer look at the terms *perspective* and *icon* and see, how and where they can intertwine in the framework of contemporary directorial approaches. Furthermore, I am going to examine the historical origin of the concept of the icon, as well as the concept of iconoclasm, which I am first investigating as a social occurrence and secondly as a theatrical strategy that marks the depiction of the destruction of an image as a creative act. Following Sergej Eisenstein's reflections on theatre directing¹⁴, I consider the "image" in the context of theatre to be a staged metaphor, a composition of perceptions with the potential to move the viewer. In chapter III, I am analysing three examples of directorial approaches that re-evaluate perspective and visuality in theatre today: Romeo Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, Romanian artist Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* and French choreographer Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd*. Chapter IV documents my own artistic practice and the development of the staged works *No Man* and *Molyneux's problem*.

II.1 Perspective

Art historian John Berger describes the central perspective in his book *Ways of Seeing* as a unique European convention:

The convention of perspective, which is unique to European art and which was first established in the early Renaissance, centres everything on the eye of the beholder. It is like a beam from a lighthouse - only instead of travelling outwards, appearances travel in. The conventions called those appearances *reality*. Perspective makes the single eye the centre of the visible world. Everything converges on to the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God. According to the convention of perspective

¹⁴ Vostrý, Jaroslav. "Ejzenštejnovy lekce divadelní režie". In: *Režie je umění*, Prague: AMU, 2001, p. 181-188.

there is no visual reciprocity. There is no need for God to situate himself in relation to others: he is already the situation.¹⁵

In the European theatre tradition, the use of perspective scenery, representing a three-dimensional space on a flat surface, was a reaction to the development of perspective in painting developed during the Italian Renaissance. It thoroughly changed the way in which theatre was perceived by the spectator:

The transfer of the central perspective from painting into theatre seems to have been a one-way transaction. It completely changed the conditions underlying visual perception in theatre, without causing any remarkable reaction in the fine arts. The medieval and Elizabethan stage allowed the spectators to circle around, to move to and fro, to follow the action from at least three different sides, from different angles and perspectives, without running the risk of suffering an obstructed or distorted view. However, the introduction of the Italian stage with a central perspective, at the beginning of the 17th century, resulted in a radical reduction of the spectator's possible movements and positions and, consequently, the viewpoints and perspectives open to the spectator. The central perspective provided by the painted flats required the spectator to take up the fixed position of an external observer, who alone is guaranteed a complete overview.¹⁶

My training as a director at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts was strongly based on the concept of the central perspective. I continue to rely on that training. At the same time, I realise in Vienna that my interest in creating shows and researching directorial approaches that re-evaluate the relationship between

¹⁵ Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin, 1972, p.16.

¹⁶ Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p. 3.

spectator and what we call the stage is linked to my experience as a theatre maker and as a spectator, as well as to my own demands towards the art form that I work in. I want to explore possibilities of questioning the premises regarding perspective and the construction of staged metaphors that formed my training and that I continue to rely on.

In the following months, I work on the concepts for *No Man* and *Molyneux's Problem*, I read theoretical texts about perspective and visibility in theatre and I see three shows that influence my thinking about the topic: Romanian artist Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, French choreographer Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd* and Romeo Castellucci's iconoclastic *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, a show that later becomes an influence on the concept of *No Man*, a piece that also stages the destruction of an icon.

II.2. Icons

Icon (εἰκών-eikōn) means image in ancient Greek; the term *iconoclasm* is etymologically composed of two words – *icon* (εἰκών)/image and *klasma* (κλάσμα), which translates as *to break something*. Until the 5th century, the word *icon* was used in the Orthodox tradition as a general designation of all possible types of images, from displays of the dead to the portraits of saints. From the 6th century onward, the term *graphis* was established for secular portraits; the term *icon* has since been reserved exclusively for religious paintings.¹⁷ It describes the theological concept of an entity, which connects two spheres. The icon is, on the one hand, a real physical object, on the other hand, its content expresses a spiritual core. As Robin Cormack puts it in his book *Painting the Soul*:

In the eyes and mind of the Orthodox and eastern Christian believer, an icon is not simply a physical image; it is, in our words, an interactive medium between this world and the other.

¹⁷ Antonova, Clemena. *Space, Time and Presence in the Icon. Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010.

[...] The development of icons, their increasing popularity must have been due to an acceptance of the value of the particular powers of the visual; icons were accepted as a mode through which one reached closer to an explanation of God, than any verbal definition ever could.¹⁸

Orthodox icons have a different function than the images of saints in the Catholic Church. In the Orthodox tradition, icons are not only depictions, but key objects during the performance of liturgy and rituals.



Andrej Rublev: *Icon of Christ the Redeemer*, ca. 1410

¹⁸ Cormack, Robin. *Painting the Soul, Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds*. London: Reaktion Books, 1997, p.31.

Thanks to the icon, secular space becomes a place of encounter with what surpasses us, with the spiritual side of our lives. The icon allows such encounters thanks to its gaze, which opens a two-way relationship: the icon is an entity that is looked at and that is responding to the believer's gaze at the same time. Through the gaze of the icon the invisible speaks and it is its gaze, that has the power to change the believer's behaviour, as he is recognized by it. Understanding the icon as a dialogical entity is key to understanding its meaning in the Orthodox Church.¹⁹

The 20th century marks a major shift in the usage of the term *icon*, which started to be applied also outside the religious context as a description for objects with strong social significance: suddenly an icon could be a depiction of Christ as well as a depiction of a film star or a commodity.²⁰ This shift allows me to understand the icon today as any kind of object charged with symbolic meaning, which is not only looked at, but which looks back at its observer and which as a representative of an absent power can influence the behaviour of those who observe it through its gaze.

Throughout this study, the term *icon* will thus be used to describe images from the religious sphere or images that carry political and cultural symbolic meaning; an icon can thus be a religious depiction, a pop-cultural idol or the statue of a political leader.

III.3 Iconoclasm

Iconic objects define or threaten the identity of a society by representing the concepts of the institutions that have created them. Because of this, they are always endangered. From the destruction of statues of political leaders such

¹⁹ "There exists the icon of the Holy Trinity by St. Andrej Rublev; therefore, God exists. The icon is revelation and embodiment in the sensual and through the sensual of true reality, of that which is absolutely precious and eternal." Pavel Florensky, philosopher of the icon, quoted in: Semenowicz, Doroa. *The Theatre of Romeo Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p.33.

²⁰ Andy Warhol was probably the artist most famously invested in an exploration of the 20th century pop-cultural iconic.

as Otakar Švec's Stalin statue in Prague to the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, iconoclasms - the targeted destruction of symbolic images and objects - are associated with political, economic and religious change. The spectrum of objects that attract iconoclasms is vast: statues, paintings, exhibition areas, and landscapes, as well as all sorts of objects charged with symbolic meaning that have the potential to influence human behaviour.²¹ Iconoclasm is the reverse side of the cult of images: violence against the icons that have committed violence towards its observers, as art historian Hans Belting argues:

Iconoclasm is image cult in reverse, that is violence against images from which one has experienced violence. The images proved themselves in the symbolic actions that were performed on them and failed when they were refused. Through that they became heroes, martyrs or enemies as placeholders of their backers, who could not be attacked directly.²²

Symbolically charged objects can be destroyed by knives or hammers, they can be decapitated, set on fire or buried. All of these acts are reactions to the icon; attempts to erase its gaze and turn it into a ruin.

²¹ „Iconoclasm is rarely a single act which totally obliterates the object. In the history of iconoclasm, icons have been painted over, defaced with slogans, hung upside-down, had horns attached, thrown in pigsties, beheaded, dragged around in the streets, buried and displayed as examples of idolatry or superstition. Icons have even been damaged through repeated, devout touching. All of these behaviours are reactions to the icon, whether worshipful or hostile or curatorial or carnivalesque. In many cases, the history of an icon includes repeated and overlapping moments of contestation, appropriation, damage, restoration and amnesia.“ Boldrick, Stacy; Brubaker, Leslie; Clay, Richard. *Striking images, Iconoclasms Past and Present*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, p.3.

²² „Ikonoklasmus ist Bildkult unter umgekehrten Vorzeichen oder Gewalt gegen Bilder, von denen man Gewalt erfahren hat. Die Bilder bewährten sich in den symbolischen Handlungen, die man an ihnen vollzog, und versagten, wenn man sich ihnen verweigerte. So wurden sie zu Helden, Märtyrern oder Feinden, wohlgernekt anstelle ihrer Hintermänner, die man nicht direkt angreifen konnte.“ Belting, Hans. *Das echte Bild*. München: Beck, 2005, p.177.

II.4 The Aesthetics of the Ruin

The destruction of the icon turns it into a wreck, without necessarily destroying its symbolic contents or its aesthetic qualities which can remain untouched by the iconoclasm. Ruins are not automatically considered dysfunctional artefacts; their aesthetic quality can even be directly linked to their destruction. The tradition of ruins as a source for artistic inspiration, as well as the recognition of the utopian potential of destroyed places and artefacts dates back to the 18th century. Denis Diderot, in his *Salon* of 1767, famously stated: "A palace must be destroyed in order to become a subject of interest."²³. For Diderot, the ruin of a palace is more interesting than an undestroyed building as it inspires reflections on the devastating effects of time. Another example of theoretically conceived admiration for ruins from the same period is William Gilpin's essay *On Picturesque Beauty* from 1792, in which Gilpin, a British art historian, describes a painter who has the choice between painting a beautiful Palladian palace or painting its ruins. According to Gilpin, the ruin is a much better motif than the original palace: the uniformity and elegance of a beautiful building cease to be attractive once they are painted; they become merely a formal motif. The ruin, on the other hand, turns into something new in the painting: a basis for transformation and a new image:

A piece of Palladian architecture may be elegant in the last degree. The proportion of its parts - the propriety of its ornaments and the symmetry of the whole, may be highly pleasing. But if we introduce it in a picture, it immediately becomes a formal object, and ceases to please. Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty, we must use the mallet instead of

²³ „J'ose vous l'avouer, il y a plus de grandeur réelle dans un arbre brisé, une étable, un viellard, une chaumière, que dans un palais. Le palais me rappelle des tyrans, des dissolus, des fainéants, des esclaves; la chaumière, des hommes simples, justes, occupés et libres. Il y a plus de poésie, plus d'accidents, je ne dis pas dans une chaumière, mais dans un seul arbre qui a souffert des années et des saisons que dans toute la façade d'un palais. Il faut ruiner un palais pour en faire un objet d'intérêt." Diderot, Denis. *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*. Paris: Garnier frères, 1876, tomb 14, p.317.

the chisel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a smooth building we must turn it into a rough ruin. No painter, who had the choice of the two objects, would hesitate a moment.²⁴

Apart from a nostalgic fascination with ruins and natural disintegration, Gilpin describes the ruin as an entity with a potential for change. Ruins and debris always offer the possibility of reconstruction both aesthetically and symbolically. The destroyed icon, the damaged artefact may turn into something new, it may live on as a ruin, a museum exhibit, as a material for new icons or as a representative of the former icon in spaces marked as museum *sights*.

II.5 Iconoclasm and Ruination on Stage

From the 18th century onwards, the aestheticization and admiration of ruins and destroyed artefacts developed as an artistic strategy all over Europe from the romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, on which lonely figures gaze on destroyed buildings from the past to T.S. Elliott's *Waste Land*²⁵. Alongside the fragment, this strategy gradually turned into a key mode for the artistic avant-garde, including theatre. Theatre avant-gardists applied the concept of the fragment, the aesthetics of the unfinished and the palimpsest unto theatre, producing fragmentary concepts and stagings of the destruction of images and symbols as part of their artistic language. August Strindberg's play *Miss Julie* from 1888 famously features a long stage direction describing a kitchen with „three-quarters of a large arched entrance“, a „part of a stove“ and „the corner of an oven“²⁶, turning the aesthetics of the unfinished theatre space into a basic requirement for the staging of his play. In the early 20th century, Bertolt Brecht

²⁴ Gilpin, William. *Three essays: On Picturesque Beauty, on Picturesque Travel and on Sketching Landscape*. London: Richmond Blamire, 1792, p.7-8.

²⁵ Dillon, Brian, 2012. "Ruin or lust: our love affair with decaying buildings" [online].

TheGuardian.com. February 12th, 2012. Accessed on October 14th, 2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/feb/17/ruins-love-affair-decayed-buildings>

²⁶ As described in: Vostrý, Jaroslav. *Režie je umění*. Prague: AMU, 2001, p. 201.

developed his theory of epic theatre based on the idea of the destruction of theatrical illusion. Gradually, dramatic language and the structure of dramatic narrative themselves became elements that were fragmented or destroyed. From the end of the 1960s onwards, strong post-dramatic tendencies occurred in avant-garde theatre (later summarised and described by German Theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehman, who, among others, named directors Einar Schlee, Robert Wilson, René Pollesch, choreographers Pina Bausch and Meg Stuart or Società Raffaello Sanzio as examples of postdramatic theatre artists²⁷), in formal approaches that focused no longer on dramatic literary structures, but on performative aesthetics. In his essay *The Road Not Taken*, architect Arata Isozaki goes as far as to claim that the whole modern art movement of the 20th century is based in iconoclasm:

In the twentieth century, targets at last came to include things on a conceptual level: the ornaments that made architecture art-like and the institutions that sustained art. Ornament was rejected as a crime (Adolf Loos); painting, which had been about portrayal, was reduced to abstraction (Kasimir Malevich); a ready-made toilet was exhibited as a sacred object (Marcel Duchamp); and the house was called a machine for living in (Le Corbusier). The targets of these artistic acts of destruction were old works of art that had themselves become icons and the social system that supported them. To put it another way, the modern art movement of the twentieth century can be said to have begun as iconoclasm.²⁸

²⁷ Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated into English by Karen Jürs-Munby. London: Routledge, 2006.

²⁸ Isozaki, Arata. "The Road Not Taken". *GA Document 77 Special Issue: Arata Isozaki*. Tokyo: ADA Edita, 2004, 77.

I began to study directing in the beginning of the 21st century: my courses started in October 2001, seven months after the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the Taliban and a few weeks after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th. While I was getting ready to learn about constructing staged images, the 21st century had begun with two brutal incidents of iconoclastic vandalism - a fact that had a much bigger impact on my thinking about theatre and aesthetics in general than I was able to reflect in the Autumn of 2001.

The construction of staged images and metaphors as well as the situations that emerge from them are historically considered to be the essence of the art of theatre directing. During my studies of at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU) between 2001 and 2006, one of the textbooks for teaching directing, Jaroslav Vostrý's *Režie je umění*, explained basic terms and concepts of directing like movement, expression, space, motivation and image based on lectures by Russian director Sergei Eisenstein held at the Moscow Film school in 1933-1934. In the book, the term „mise-en-scène“ is defined as:

Eisenstein calls this kind of topical arrangement mise-en-scène. For this director and theorist, the mise-en-scène is inextricably linked to what he calls mise-en-jeu, which can literally be translated as putting-into-play. We can understand the mise-en-scène as a thematic play of stage elements, based on the mutual positioning of the acting persons in space and expressing the (dramatic) situation.²⁹

This definition is based on the idea of direction as a construction of visible

²⁹ „Takové tematizované aranžma nazývá Ejzenštejn mizanscénou, která je pro tohoto režiséra a teoretika ale neodlučitelně spojena s tím, co nazývá mise-en-jeu a co lze doslova přeložit jako rozehrání(...). Můžeme mizanscénou rozumět tematizované rozehrání jevištních prvků, jehož základem je vzájemné postavení jednajících osob v prostoru, vyjadřující příslušnou (dramatickou) situaci.“ in Vostrý, Jaroslav. *Režie je umění*, Prague: AMU, 2001, p. 95.

action and positioning of actors in space, based on a dramatic situation expressed in a dramatic text. For me, it was one of the most useful definitions I learned during my studies of directing and it is something I come back to until today in rehearsals.

At the same time, during my days in Vienna, I keep returning to the idea of a staged image of destruction and I wonder as much about the relationship of destruction and creation in theatre as I do about the visibility of perspective.

Besides staged changes of perspective, iconoclastic strategies - attempts at staging not the construction, but the destruction of images - are one of the possibilities of re-evaluating visuality in theatre. Staged iconoclasms depict the destruction, abuse or disintegration of images and objects, which hold symbolic content. In the framework of the visual language of a show, every iconoclastic strategy inevitably breeds new images from the ones that are destroyed, in the same way that every gaze outside of the central perspective breeds a new perspective. *What are examples of stagings that incorporate this dialectic as their core in attempts to re-evaluate the visual in theatre today?*, I wonder and I keep returning to the works of Romeo Castellucci, Alexandra Pirici and Gisèle Vienne in my thoughts.

III. Three Examples of Directorial Approaches Re-evaluating the Visual

III.1 Romeo Castellucci

The most well-known theatrical iconoclast of the past decades is Italian director Romeo Castellucci. Trained as a visual artist - Castellucci holds a degree in painting as well as in set design - and strongly influenced by the visual tradition of the Italian Renaissance, Castellucci founded the theatre group Societas Raffaello Sanzio (named after Renaissance painter Raphael) with Claudia Castellucci and Chiara Guidi in 1981. Since then, Societas Raffaello Sanzio has produced numerous shows which have travelled to over 50 countries, on which Castellucci worked as an author, director and a designer of sets, lighting, sound and costumes. Since 2006, Castellucci has also been working individually. He has been awarded with the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement (La Biennale Teatro di Venezia, 2013), a Honoris Causa (Università di Bologna, 2014) and was named Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters by the Ministry of Culture of the French Republic (2002) among others.

Even though in the past years his work was strongly recognized, Castellucci's shows are met with controversial reactions by press and public. An interview with Jonathan Marshall at the occasion of Castellucci's production *Genesis: From the Museum of Sleep* at the Melbourne Festival in 2014 shows Castellucci as an artist constantly trying to create new perspectives and images in theatre in an attempt to make theatre itself unrecognisable and turn it into a confrontation with something unknown:

Romeo Castellucci: 'Theatre is not something that must be 'recognised':

'I-go-to-the-theatre-to-recognise-the-Shakespeare-studies-that-I-have-completed'. It is not [or should not] be like that. Theatre is rather a journey through the unknown, towards the unknown. What myself and those of a similar mind have tried to do over the years has been to hold high the scandal of the stage and to keep it constantly vibrating. Even the word 'theatre' itself

has to be continually re-invented, because it is a word that has completely lost its radical meaning. The stage is in fact a place of alienation, and nothing must be done to anaesthetise this alienation. The 'problem' of the author, of the text, of the tradition of narrative theatre has always been, in actuality, an attempt to solve this 'problem' by filling in the scandal which theatrical creation represents with various discourses, by forcing the actor—and therefore the actor's body—to become nothing more than a repeater of these elements, diminishing the energy of the stage itself.³⁰

In Vienna in the Autumn of 2016, I keep returning to Castellucci's notion of the stage a place of alienation, during my work on the staging concept for *No Man*. I would like to stage an iconoclasm and show the building of an icon, its destruction as well as the disorientation after its destruction in the framework of a show. One of Castellucci's shows that influences my thinking about iconoclasm in theatre is *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*³¹ from 2010.

³⁰ Marshall, Jonathan. "The Angel of Art is Lucifer, interview with Romeo Castellucci" [online]. *Realtime.org*. 1.12.2002. Accessed on July 19th, 2019. <https://www.realtime.org.au/the-castellucci-interview-the-angel-of-art-is-lucifer/>

³¹ Castellucci, Romeo / Societas Raffaello Sanzio. *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, Conceiving and staging: Romeo Castellucci, Original music: Scott Gibbons, Cast: Gianni Plazzi, Sergio Scarlatella together with Dario Boldrini, Vito Matera and Silvano Voltolina Executive Producer: Societas Raffaello Sanzio in Coproduction with: Theater der Welt 2010, deSingel international arts campus, Antwerp Théâtre National de Bretagne, The National Theatre Oslo, Barbican London, SPILL Festival of Performance, Chekhov International Theatre Festival Moscow, Holland Festival, Athens Festival, GREC 2011, Festival de Barcelona, Festival d'Avignon, International Theatre Festival DIALOG Wroclav/Poland, BITEF, Spielzeit'europa, Berliner Festspiele, Théâtre de la Ville–Paris, Romaeuropa Festival, Festival SPIELART München, Le-Maillon, Théâtre de Strasbourg, TAP Théâtre Auditorium de Poitiers- Scène Nationale.

On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God – The Iconic and The Decaying Human

On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God is one of Romeo Castellucci's most controversial stagings. Conceived in 2010 as a co-production of 19 theatres and festivals all over the world, the show was first met with controversy after a presentation at the Avignon Festival in July of 2011, spurred by Lefebvrians (followers of the right-wing archbishop excommunicated by John Paul II). The following shows in Paris and in Milan were met with protest by fundamentalist Catholics, who occupied the stage to prevent the performance and who had to be taken away by the police.³²

³² „Bizarre polemics surrounded the Milanese premiere of director-designer Romeo Castellucci's latest piece, *Sul concetto di volto nel figlio di Dio* (*On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*), at the Teatro Franco Parenti in January 2012. At the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris the preceding November, zealots had accused the author/director of blasphemy and “Christianphobia”; they protested and marched so vociferously that the “Comité de soutien à la liberté de représentation du spectacle de Romeo Castellucci” (Committee Supporting the Freedom to Perform Romeo Castellucci's Show) was created, a manifesto was published in *Le Monde*, and famous actors, such as Michel Piccoli and Juliette Binoche, directors, such as Patrice Chéreau and Jean-Michel Ribes, and theatre directors, such as BAM's Joseph Melillo and La Scala's Stéphane Lissner, among many others, signed it to protect the artist's right to freedom of expression. An appeal similar to the French one was redacted by three excellent Italian theatre critics and signed by the most important and influential men and women of Italian arts and letters. Motor oil, eggs, tear gas, and stink bombs were intercepted by the Parisian police checking on demonstrators outside the theatre, while agitators inside interrupted the show. According to *Le Figaro*, a handful of Islamic fundamentalists also joined the 1,500 demonstrators to “defend the honour of the Prophet Issa [Jesus].” In Milan the media circus was accompanied by a message from the Milanese Curia, chastising the theatre's director for not pre-censoring a possibly inflammatory production while asking the faithful to refrain from accompanying their prayers with violence. Bullets sent to the author and anti-Semitic threats to the theatre's director, Andrée Ruth Shammah, notwithstanding, the show took place in Milan as well, with an impressive display of police and security measures to hold a sorry crowd of rebels without a cause. In fact, none of the demonstrators, bloggers, and detractors saw the show, including the archbishop of Bologna, who this February became the latest to join this choir of a priori judges.” Pastorino, Gloria. “The Face of Christ, Looking at Us”. *Theater*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, 42 (3), p.1-2.

The basic situation of the staging is simple: set in a bright modern living room, the audience follows a son taking care of his sick, confused father, who cannot control his body anymore. The incontinent father sits on a bed and watches TV, then he starts crying and soils himself. His son calms him and cleans up his mess, disposes of nappies and cleanses him. Once, the son is finished with the task, the father defecates on stage again and the son has to start all over. The monotone sequence between father and son is full of helplessness and humiliation. It is watched silently by a massive portrait of the face of Jesus, the "Salvator mundi" by fifteenth-century painter Antonello da Messina. The gaze of the world's saviour faces the audience and its reactions, whilst also following the action on stage. The gaze offers many possible interpretations, it is maybe impassive towards the suffering of the old man, maybe merciful. Later, father and son leave the stage and a group of children enters. They start throwing objects at the portrait of Jesus, attempting to destroy it. These objects first seem like stones but turn out to be ink filled grenades. During the last part of the show, the face of Christ dissolves under their ink bombardment and a phrase appears on the painting: „You are (not) my shepherd “, the „not“ being merely visible.

Perspective, Bodies and Time in *On the Concept of The Face, Regarding the Son of God*

In the visual arts, the motif of the individual figure of Jesus, who looks directly at the viewer and thus enables a personal identification appeared in the late Middle Ages, very often in the framework of depictions of the Ecce Homo scene from the Bible: Ecce homo ("behold the man") are the Latin words used by Pontius Pilate in the Vulgate translation of the Gospel of John, when he presents a scourged Christ to a hostile crowd shortly before his Crucifixion.

In Western art since the Middle Ages, similar motifs gradually have become more and more important. Especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Ecce Homo motif was extensively used to depict the suffering and the degradation of man by violence and war. Until today, this motif is among the most popular and influential - even in a seemingly secularised context, the image of Jesus evokes respect and recognition.



On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God

When asked about his reasons for using Antonello da Messina's "Salvator mundi" as a backdrop for his set for *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, Romeo Castellucci answered:

This is the beginning. I want to meet Jesus in His very long absence. Jesus' face isn't there. I can see paintings and statues. I know more than a thousand painters from the past who spent half their lives trying to reproduce the ineffable, almost invisible grimace of sorrow which appeared on his lips. And what about now? Now, he is not there. What is really making its way in me is the will. It's about putting together the will and Jesus' face: I

want to be in front of Jesus' face, just there, where what mainly strikes me is the first part of the sentence: 'I will'.³³

Castellucci uses an iconic two-dimensional painting in the framework of his own three-dimensional art. *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* is a show centred around the relationship between the body and the image. The bodies of his performers act in a staging about the human condition, decay, aging, humanity, and loss of dignity and in doing so question the tie between the depicted icon and reality. What meaning can a work of art have confronted to a suffering body? What relief can belief, as represented through the "Salvator mundi", offer to a dying old man? Is the icon involved in what it sees? Or does it represent the gaze of a power indifferent to suffering?



On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God

³³ Castellucci, Romeo. "On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God - program notes." [online]. *Chekhovfest.ru*. May 20th, 2012. Accessed on August 8th, 2019. <https://chekhovfest.ru/en/festival/projects/performances/j-project-on-the-concept-of-the-face-regarding-the-son-of-god/>

When describing the relationship with the audience in his work, Romeo Castellucci regularly returns to the notion of the gaze of the spectator on the actor, whose role as a pathetic figure is to suffer. Claudia and Romeo Castellucci explained this concept in an interview with Nicolas Ridout from 2007:

Claudia: The relation with the audience is always thought about, but never with a final intention. In other words, the relationship with the audience has always been part of the theatre, for the reason that this relationship is the theatre. There is, however, no design upon the audience, nor is an audience envisioned. When the work is being created, the audience doesn't exist. Whoever creates is already, herself, astounded by what she creates, which is why there is no pedagogic intention, or intent to provoke. The relationship is always already there.

Romeo: Perhaps it comes out of the character of our actual political condition, that of the permanent spectator. All of us are permanent spectators. This is a new condition for the human community.

(...)

Claudia: The relation with the audience, or the spectators, is fundamental for our theatre. However, it's a slippery argument because it could be taken in exactly that finalistic sense. It is, though, rather a structural, ontological argument. As Romeo said, this relationship emerges in different ways, in different directions. For example, the actor who looks at the spectator reveals to the spectator his own gesture, a form of mirroring that also creates a profound equivocation and puts in doubt the spectator's proper role. Once again, this doubt is not functional, but ontological, with respect to our being actors or spectators of this life. The crossbow that shoots darts into the stage can be understood in terms of something Romeo said some years ago about the actor as a masochistic figure with respect to the

theatre. The actor is purposely put in place to receive, like arrows, the gazes of the spectators. In this sense, perhaps unconsciously, Romeo has taken something from this image, because he has often spoken of the gaze of the spectator transfixing the actor, whose condition is to suffer and endure. The actor is a pathetic figure.³⁴

The above-described relationship between gaze and performer applies in the case of *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* to the audience, as well as to the “Salvator mundi” painting. The audience looks at the painting looking back at the audience as well as looking at the characters of the father and the son on the stage. Father and son look at the audience. The audience looks at them. Time passes.

The longer the old man in *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* suffers, the longer he endures a loss of dignity, the more the role of the spectator and the ethical implications of watching become apparent - the aspect of time passing is a key component of this effect as the slow tempo of the staged action allows the audience to reflect closely on the experience unfolding in front of them. Would it be possible to assist the old man? Can the audience intervene? Can God help? *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*, Jesus’ saying on the cross during his crucifixion, comes to mind and the sentence relates as well to Antonello da Messina’s painting of Christ as to the characters of Castellucci’s show: the old man facing suffering, humiliation and a loss of identity and his son, facing the loss of his father and confronted to merely the physical shell of what his father used to be, function as three variations on abandonment.

³⁴ Kelleher, Joe; Ridout, Nicolas; Castellucci, Claudia; Guidi, Chiara; Castellucci, Romeo. *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. London: Routledge, 2007, p. 210-211.

Regarding the spatial arrangement, the central perspective is never directly questioned in this staging: Christ's gaze facing the audience creates a clear spatial division into auditorium and stage, which is respected by the movements of the performers during the whole show. The icon itself though changes significantly through time though: attacked by a group of children, it dissolves in front of the eyes of the audience and thus the power of the icon's gaze fades, giving way to a new possible spatial hierarchy, also reinforced by the message that appears on the ruined image, *you are (not) my shepherd*. If Christ is no longer a shepherd for humanity, the icon representing his gaze no longer holds the power to restrict the characters' and the audience's movements.



Children throwing objects at the face of Christ in *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*

Apart from the on lectures at the Moscow Film School, quoted in the DAMU directing textbook, Sergei Eisenstein is famous for his theory of cinematic montage, an approach to film making that relies heavily on editing. „Montage is conflict“, Eisenstein stated, describing how new ideas emerge from the collision of seemingly conflicting montage sequences, following a dialectical logic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The logic of montage could be also applied to the development of the central visual motifs in *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*.



On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God

The depicted iconoclasm of the „Salvator mundi“ in the staging leads to a new image and a new possible spatial hierarchy, based on and emerging from the destruction of the icon. Christ looking the spectator in the eyes turns into a dissolved presence, overwritten by time, offering the spectators a reflection of the icon, their own relationship to the divine, the question of what makes a father

and their own responsibility towards the world when acting without a (divine) father figure.

For all the above-described reasons, Castellucci's show is on my mind a great deal during the Autumn of 2016 and during all preparatory work for *No Man*. Another show that influences my thinking about perspective and visuality in theatre is Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, which I first see at the Hebbel am Ufer Theatre in Berlin in October 2017.

III.2 Alexandra Pirici

Alexandra Pirici is a Romanian artist born in 1982, who works across different media, though mainly in performance. Initially trained as a classical dancer and choreographer, Pirici starts directing her own performative actions around 2010. She develops her pieces usually with a group of performers and in reaction to public spaces, monuments, iconic gestures, and artworks.

In 2013, Pirici joins with choreographer Manuel Pelmuş to represent Romania at the Venice Biennale, „using dancers to stage an 'immaterial retrospective' of the international show through recreations of artworks, moments, and scandals from the Biennale's history“³⁵. Pirici's work has been shown at the Skulpturen Projekte Münster 2017, the Venice Biennale, Manifesta 10, Berlin Biennale 9 and Tate Modern London. In an interview with Elena Stanciu given on the occasion of Pirici's *Monument to Work* project in Gothenburg, Sweden, in May 2015, she describes her practice as one that is focused on the medium of the body in entanglement with other media and technologies:

Elena Stanciu: Please tell me about the Monument to Work project. What led you to consider working bodies as your subject matter?

³⁵ Perlson, Hili. "The Conjurer: How Romanian Dancer Alexandra Pirici Became Performance Art's Newest Rising Star" [online]. *Artnet.com*. August 31st, 2017. Accessed on August 16th, 2019. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/performance-artist-alexandra-pirici-political-narratives-1055345/>

Alexandra Pirici: I have a background in choreography and dance, so I mostly make performative works; the body has always been my medium of choice, in relation with other mediums or as part of different technological entanglements. The process started with the invitation of the Public Art Agency in Sweden and curator Lisa Rosendhal to look at the ongoing transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society and its effects on the human subject. Starting with the labouring body on the factory floor and the conveyor belt, I wanted to hint at how this labour is transformed today, when we speak of immaterial production, and how it could transform in the future. The intention was to commemorate the working body, to make an immaterial archive of these movements, but also, to distort them, to transform the hard and repetitive movements of the Taylorist factory into a slower-paced, meditative, pleasurable flow, with different dynamics; a group that spreads to include others and comes back to itself, and which can function as a self-regulating organism.³⁶

Delicate Instruments of Engagement – Re-enactments of the Iconic

The idea of an immaterial archive of movements which Pirici describes in the interview, is something she returns to in *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*³⁷, a show I see for the first time at the Hebbel am Ufer Theatre in Berlin in October 2017 and then again in November 2018 at the Czech National Gallery/Veletržní palác in Prague in a slightly adapted version (the

³⁶ Stanciu, Elena. "Working Bodies – An Interview with Alexandra Pirici" [online].

petrieinventory.com. May 2015. Accessed on October 15th, 2019.

<https://www.petrieinventory.com/working-bodies-an-interview-with-alexandra-pirici/>

³⁷ Pirici, Alexandra. *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, directed by Alexandra Pirici, Light design: Andrei Dinu, with: Paul Dunca, Paula Gherghe, Farid Fairuz, Maria Mora, Cristian Nanculescu, Produced by Impulse Theater Festival and the FFT Düsseldorf in coproduction with Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, National Centre of Dance Bucharest, HAU Hebbel am Ufer and Tanzquartier Wien.

Czech title of the performance being *Křehké nástroje účasti*³⁸). I also travel to New York in March 2018 to see her show *Co-natural* at the New Museum. I'm impressed with Pirici's capacity to create shows built around the historical and social context of the locations she works in as well as on cultural consciousness and its embodiments. She uses iconic images from the sphere of politics, arts, and Pop culture as her material and lets her performers quote and re-enact these images. In an interview with Alison Hugill for Berlin ArtLink from September 2017, Pirici describes the inception of her piece *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*:

Alexandra Pirici: The work is an ongoing action with 5 performers that remediate through their bodies a subjective selection of images, situations, political speeches, memes, important events within pop culture and politics (also commenting on the merging of pop culture and politics). It's structured as several narratives that the audience can choose from, with intersecting, similar elements but arranged into different configurations so as to afford slightly different readings. It was made at the invitation of Florian Malzacher for 'Impulse Theatre Festival' and initially commissioned to be shown in Düsseldorf at the Kunsthalle/Kunstverein, so in a visual arts space. It had, originally, an element of site-specificity and a sort of mixed *raison d'être* (sic), as part of a theatre festival but shown in a white cube, while we actually talked about it not being bound to the white cube. And it was also made in relation to the framework of the festival, which focused on political decision-making and political gestures. It also draws on and is a continuation of a previous work, *Delicate Instruments Handled*

³⁸ Taneční Aktuality, 2018. "Alexandra Pirici uvede ve Veletržním paláci performance Křehké nástroje účasti" [online]. *Tanecniaktuality.cz*. November 13th, 2018. Accessed on August 16th, 2019. <https://www.tanecniaktuality.cz/tanec/alexandra-pirici-uvode-ve-veletrznim-palaci-performance-krehke-nastroje-ucasti/>

with Care, but there are quite big formal and structural differences and also new materials to work with. The element of site-specificity – the city of Düsseldorf – turned into a link to Beuys' idea of the world as Gesamtkunstwerk and today's society of total spectacle /total work of art as a dark manifestation of his dream of social sculpture. And one event that seemed to be the perfect example of a certain endpoint in that was the image of the terrorist, and his victim, the Russian Ambassador Andrei Karlov, after performing an assassination in the gallery space. So by transferring these spectacular images from "daily life" into the gallery space and now a theatrical environment (the HAU 1 stage), I guess I hope for a better understanding and feeling of how reality is manufactured, by also giving time to unpack these images and play with them as abstract objects, to think and maybe also reveal where and what is the political gesture today in relation to the past.³⁹

In *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, Pirici and a group of five performers create an ongoing performative action, based on a selection of reconstructed images, situations, and Internet memes⁴⁰. Set on the empty stage of the HAU1

³⁹ Hugil, Alison. "Delicate Instruments of Engagement: An Interview with Alexandra Pirici" [online]. *BerlinArtLink.com*. September 22nd, 2017. Accessed on November 5th, 2019. <https://www.berlinartlink.com/2017/09/22/play-delicate-instruments-of-engagement-an-interview-with-alexandra-pirici/>

⁴⁰ Pirici's program notes state: "*Delicate Instruments of Engagement* is a collection of artworks, internet memes, political speeches, actions or images that the performers remediate but with emphasis on different narratives and meanings that emerge from these associations and representations. They are performed in different sequences, according to different dramaturgies, while the audience can, from time to time, chose from 4 different beginnings. The beginnings are associated with different sequences/ dramaturgies but sometimes the actions overlap and they can acquire different meanings depending on the sequence in which they are situated 1: a Coca-Cola commercial takes on a different meaning if performed after a first free television broadcast during the Romanian Revolution of 1989 or Mikhail Fokine's 'Dying Swan' choreography for Anna Pavlova after the image of the Ceausescu couple execution during the fall of the Soviet Bloc. The work is more 'active' and more abstract at the same time."

space, the audience can sit or stand wherever they like, there is no division between performance space and audience space and no set design. The performers are dressed in the same style as the Berlin audience and it is initially impossible to know, who among the people present is a performer and who a spectator. The show runs for several hours and spectators arrive and leave freely during the available time slot. During the running time of the show, the performers show an ongoing set of iconic scenes, images, and situations – some silently, some text related: the broadcast of Ceaușescu's execution; Bill Clinton's apology to the nation for his relationship with Monica Lewinsky or the assassination of Russian Ambassador Andrey Karlov by a Turkish gunman in an exhibition space in Ankara⁴¹.

⁴¹ The complete list of available scenes Pirici used in *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* : The 'confused Travolta' meme; Anna Akhmatova's poem 'A Land Not Mine'; footage of the Ceausescu couple's execution during the Romanian Revolution of 1989; David Cameron, Helle Thorning-Schmid and Barack Obama taking a selfie at Nelson Mandela's funeral; an excerpt from Grace Jones's 'Slave to the Rhythm'; Bolivian president Evo Morales shining shoes after winning the election in 2007; the covering of the Guernica tapestry at the UN during Colin Powell's speech advocating for American intervention in Iraq; the Assassination of Russian Ambassador Andrey Karlov by a Turkish Gunman in an Exhibition Space in Ankara; Rembrandt van Rijn's 'The Abduction of Europa' painting; the last speech of Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973, before his death during the American backed coup against the first democratically elected socialist government in Chile; a STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) photograph; Russian protesters arrested for holding up invisible banners; a first free television broadcast during the Romanian revolution of 1989; a poetry reading with Marsha 'Pay it no mind' Johnson; Joseph Beuys's 'Plight' installation; Joseph Beuys's Japanese whiskey commercial made to co-fund his '7000 Oaks' project for documenta; Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists in what became the 'human rights' salute during their medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City; 'The Right to Be Forgotten' – data protection law; George Michael's 'Freedom '90' song; Bill Clinton's apology to the nation for his relationship with Monica Lewinsky; a scene from the movie 'Birdcage'; a 3D rendering of the killing of Osama bin Laden; Erdem Gündüz's 'Standing Man' protest action; Céline Dion's song 'My Heart Will Go On'; the fake sign language translator from Nelson Mandela's funeral; emoticons; Melania Trump and Michelle Obama performing similar speeches at the Republican and Democratic conventions in 2008 and 2016; the 'Dying Swan' choreography; a stabbing at Art Basel mistaken for performance art; an image of Hillary Clinton waving to supporters taking selfies with her; a monument in memory of Mohamed Bouazizi depicting his fruit cart, erected by local artists in

These scenes start and end without explanation or introduction, at some points the audience is asked to choose different beginnings for a variety of narratives that then develop in front of their eyes, but they are never told, which iconic scene they are going to witness next. I stay for about two hours at the HAU to watch the show. In the case of most scenes, I quickly recognize, what is being performed; I am often surprised by how quickly.

The Assassination of Russian Ambassador Andrey Karlov by a Turkish Gunman in an Exhibition Space in Ankara, for example, a crime that happened in December 2016, is performed without words and without the emotionality of the original scene: Pirici's performers silently move into the mise-en-scène of the famous photography by Turkish photographer Burhan Ozbilici, which was awarded the 60th annual World Press Photo of the Year award in 2017. Immediately the quoted image appears in front of my eyes. The same is true for the scenes entitled *Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists in what became the 'human rights' salute during their medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City*, the *'Dying Swan' choreography* and *George Michael's 'Freedom '90' song*.

The fact that Pirici mixes scenes from different public domains is a statement about the nature of the contemporary iconic. In the 21st century it does not matter whether an image is mundane, taken from the context of politics, entertainment or conceptual arts – every image, every social situation contains the potential to become loaded with meaning, part of the cultural consciousness and can thus be turned into a meme⁴², a quotation, the starting point for a performative action. The iconic has lost its connection to the divine and become democratic.

Sidi Bouzid – Tunisia; the 'Google' search engine; Natalia Goncharova's painting 'The Cyclist'; the monolith scene from Stanley Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey' movie; the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem; a man against a tank during the Tiananmen square protests in Beijing, 1989, a Coca-Cola commercial.

⁴² The term "meme" describes an element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means. Memes are a common internet phenomenon, often spread through social media platforms.



Four performers re-enacting *The Assassination of Russian Ambassador Andrey Karlov by a Turkish Gunman* in an Exhibition Space in Ankara



The original photograph of the shooting by Burhan Ozbilici from 2016

Meanwhile, Pirici is also interested in how contemporary technologies allow for an image to quickly gain access to our visual consciousness and become ubiquitous. In *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, there is a long and humorous scene in which her performers perform taking a selfie and another one in which they perform the most popular emoticons⁴³ used in text messages on smartphones. These images are icons of our every day and inhabit our archive of visual references in the same way videos of pop songs or gestures from films, traumatic images from the political sphere as the picture of the assassination of Andrey Karlov are part of that archive.

⁴³ An emoticon, short for "emotion icon", is a pictorial representation of a facial expression, emotion or attitude, usually through a group of keyboard characters (such as :-)), that is used especially in computerized communications, such as e-mail or text messages.

Perspective, Bodies and Time in *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*

Many scenes from the immaterial archive of movements created in the show are known to the audience from screens or newspaper images, that is to say in 2-D. Pirici allows her audience to walk around freely in the spaces, where the re-enactments take place, while they are being re-enacted by the living bodies of her performers. She thus enables the spectators to view these scenes, which they remember as motionless iconic images as live movements, which happen so close in front of their eyes and bodies, that they themselves can become an active part of them.



Taking a selfie in *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin⁴⁴

At the same time, the fact that the show functions as an ongoing performative action in which the spectator can stay for hours and scenes are constantly being repeated functions as a means of deconstruction of these very scenes. Having

⁴⁴ All captions © Dorothea Tuch.

witnessed the same scenes for the third or fourth time in the loop of the show at Hebbel am Ufer, I watch them differently. The time I am allowed to spend with re-enactments of otherwise fleeing images allows me to analyse the production of meaning and question what makes one image more meaningful than another. Pirici creates a space that allows for a dialectic pleasure of presence: the spectator is on the one hand physically closer to iconic images staged as scenes than ever before, whilst on the other hand able to witness their deconstruction and question their functioning in and through time.



*The Assassination of Russian Ambassador Andrey Karlov by a Turkish Gunman in an Exhibition Space in Ankara in Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* at the National Gallery in Prague in 2018⁴⁵*

⁴⁵ Caption from the Czech version of *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* © Jindřich Chalupecký Society.

I begin to understand the title *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* as a statement about the fragile relationship between image, body, and action. It is the setting into motion and into 3-D, the possibility of connecting the spectator's body in space and time with a living performative presence that allows for engagement and movement (as in: moving on, moving elsewhere). The physical participation of the spectators, their bodily relationship towards the represented iconic images allows for a clear mental engagement, also in the sense of a questioning of the seen.

III.4 Gisèle Vienne

The third show that is on my mind during my work on my artistic research project is *Crowd*⁴⁶ by Gisèle Vienne. Vienne is a French-Austrian artist and director born in 1976, whose background is in choreography. After graduating in Philosophy, she studied at the puppeteering school École Supérieure Nationale des Arts de la Marionnette and founded Compagnie Gisèle Vienne in 1999, creating shows between visual arts, dance, and theatre ever since. She works regularly with the writer Dennis Cooper, the musicians Peter Rehberg and Stephen O'Malley, the light designer Patrick Riou and the actor Jonathan Capdevielle. Since the company was founded in 1999, 14 shows have been created. Vienne's body of work spans over different artistic disciplines, some of

⁴⁶ Compagnie Gisèle Vienne. *Crowd*, Choreography and Scenography: Gisèle Vienne, Assisted by: Anja Röttgerkamp, Nuria Guiu Sagarra, Lights: Patrick Riou, Dramaturgy: Gisèle Vienne, Dennis Cooper, Music selections from: Underground Resistance, KTL, Vapour Space, DJ Rolando, Drexciya, The Martian, Choice, Jeff Mills, Peter Rehberg, Manuel Götttsching, Sun Electric, Global Communication, Edits, playlist selection : Peter Rehberg, Sound diffusion supervisor: Stephen O'Malley, Performers: Philip Berlin, Marine Chesnais, Kerstin Daley-Baradel, Sylvain Decloitre, Sophie Demeyer, Vincent Dupuy, Massimo Fusco, Nuria Guiu Sagarra, Rémi Hollant, Oskar Landström, Theo Livesey, Louise Perming, Katia Petrowick, Jonathan Schatz, Tyra Wig, Costumes: Gisèle Vienne in collaboration with Camille Queval Sound Engineer: Adrien Michel, Technical Manager: Richard Pierre, Stage Manager: Antoine Hordé, Light Manager: Arnaud Lavis Production by: DACM. Co-production by: Nanterre-Amandiers CDN, Le Maillon, Théâtre de Strasbourg – Scène européenne, Wiener Festwochen (Vienna), Le Manège Scène nationale de Reims, Théâtre National de Bretagne, Rennes, CDN Orléans/Loiret/Centre, BIT Teatergarasjen (Bergen), La Filature Scène nationale de Mulhouse.

her shows could be defined as dance theatre, others are installations or focus on puppets. They are all rather dark in mood and explore fantasies, emotions, and sinister sides of the human psyche, violence, and sensuality.

***Crowd* – The Iconic and the Banal**

Crowd was created in 2017 by Gisèle Vienne and her regular collaborators composer Peter Rehberg and writer Dennis Cooper with a group of 15 young dancers. The piece is inspired by Berlin's club scene of the 1990s and depicts a rave party as a collective ritual. The music of the show is a playlist of famous techno tracks from the 1990s, which run from the very beginning until the very end of *Crowd*.



Gisèle Vienne - *Crowd*⁴⁷

⁴⁷ All captions of *Crowd* © Estelle Hanania.

In an interview with the blog of the Singapore Festival of Arts from February 2019⁴⁸, Gisèle Vienne describes retouched movements and editing techniques in films as one of her inspirations:

***Crowd* is described as a 'deep dive into the dark side within us'. What happens in *Crowd*?**

Gisèle Vienne: *Crowd* depicts a rave party where young people encounter strong emotional experiences. There are several layers in the piece, but one major layer is the narratives.

We have 15 young people on stage who create this gallery of personal portraits. It's an emotional rollercoaster, which talks about love, desire, violence and loneliness, and many contradictory emotions. It also deals with the question of how these emotions are shared and 'communicated' in a social setting.

Crowd also questions the need for contemporary rituals or the need to reinvent rituals in contemporary culture. Specifically, in alternative youth culture, this appears as Rave Culture and Techno parties.

What was the biggest challenge you faced in creating *Crowd*?

Gisèle Vienne: *Crowd* is about how time is perceived or distorted through our emotions. One of the beautiful challenges in this piece was executing the 'retouched' movements – slow, cut out loops that are inspired by special effects or movie editing techniques – which was a great technical challenge. But it is not

⁴⁸ Singapore International Festival of Arts' Blog, 2019. "Interview with Gisèle Vienne" [online]. *Sifa.sg*. February 24th, 2019. Accessed on November 13th, 2019. <https://www.sifa.sg/festival-insider/blog/interview-with-gisele/>

about 'imitating' these retouched movements, it is about finding a way to perform them in a very sensitive, very organic and personal way.

I see the show in 2017 at the Volksbühne in Berlin, the city in which Gisèle Vienne lived as a teenager in the 1990s and also the city whose techno scene inspired *Crowd*. The Volksbühne was built in 1913 by architect Oskar Kaufmann, it is one of the biggest theatres in Berlin with an auditorium designed for 800 spectators and a clear division between stage and auditorium. The perspective of an audience member watching *Crowd* seated in a theatre building from the beginning of the 20th century is very different from the perspective one has as the active participant in a rave. Vienne worked very precisely with sound and lighting to create a rave on the stage and the world she depicts in *Crowd* is one that is almost never represented in the framework of theatre institutions. This unusual spatial arrangement for a rave - a genre popular for its immersive qualities -, which relies on the division of auditorium and stage, allows Vienne to stage the show as a series of images in motion, as tableaux vivants, an impression, that is reinforced still by the slow movements of the dancers. The classical division of the theatre space in the Volksbühne paradoxically enables the spectators to enjoy a view anchored in a central perspective as an unusual, as a new perspective: rarely before has it been possible to witness a rave party from this position.

The beat starts, Vienne's dancers enter a set made of mud, reminiscent of Pina Bausch's famous *Sacre du Printemps* staging from 1975 (a show in which Bausch was similarly interested in the cathartic potential of violence as Vienne is in *Crowd*). The dancers move in slow motion throughout the whole show in a choreography that is extremely precise; bodies controlled by a choreography depicting ecstasy. Vienne's creation exists in a dialectical space between control and the loss of control. In an interview with the Guardian about *Crowd*, she stated:

I would say liberal capitalist western societies don't have so much space anymore for ecstatic experience, which other

societies in the world do, and always have. (...) Darkness and violence are not necessarily negative. It can be very invigorating, joyful and pleasurable expressing primal energies in a context that is respectful of each other and doesn't disturb the balance of the community.⁴⁹

Perspective, Bodies and Time in *Crowd*

The tracks Peter Rehberg chose as the soundtrack for the show are well known techno tracks from artists like Jeff Mills or Underground Resistance. They make me want to move, the spatial and social setting of the Volksbühne makes me sit still and watch. This trick allows Vienne to render visible micro-situations between the characters on stage, which follow the decelerated dramaturgy of a rave: groups and couples form and fall apart again, characters get into conflicts, fight, make up, dance, fall asleep, dance. Thanks to the physical distance, the movements in slow motion, and the central perspective of the Volksbühne stage, I am able to see images that I would not have been able to see in a more immersive setting.

In techno clubs, as well as in theatres, one is not supposed to take pictures; everything that happens between the people present happens in the here and now, very often in the dark. The famous Berlin techno club Berghain, for example, has a strict no photography policy and asks its visitors to put stickers over their mobile phone cameras to prevent them from taking pictures inside the club. In contrast, in Vienne's show the lights are always on and thus the expressions of emotions of her characters stay constantly visible in the tableau vivant of her choreography. On stage, the 15 performers witness the development of a moment of collective euphoria, a catharsis that is accompanied by beauty, but also by violence. Both club culture and theatre can offer a gate to a transgressive social experience. In *Crowd*, this experience is

⁴⁹ Winship, Lindsey. "Western society has little space for ecstasy': back to Berlin's 90s club scene" [online], *TheGuardian.com*. September 30th, 2019. Accessed on January 7th, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/sep/30/performance-artist-gisele-vienne-western-society-leaves-no-space-for-ecstasy-interview/>

happening on a stage and being watched by the audience from the distance of the theatre auditorium, whilst both stage and auditorium are filled with light. Thus, apart from investigating the necessity of rituals, *Crowd* is a statement about images and how they can be perceived today. In some moments, the dancers' bodies repeat movements over and over again, bringing to mind visual material from video clips, internet memes, or GIFs, in others, their bodies seem sacred or at least: in touch with something sacred. Because of the fact that the dancers move in slow motion, every image in every scene develops very slowly making some of the staged images in *Crowd* reminiscent of renaissance paintings and Christian iconography. The slowness of movement of the dancers is linked to a perpetual development of images, it is the very quality that allows the spectators to witness seemingly banal scenes from a techno party as something touching.

Vienne's dancers are covered in mud and at the same time they evoke sacred imagery. They stay in my mind for days after in the same way the techno tracks keep playing in my head. The coexistence of the sacred and the banal in *Crowd* is a contemporary perspective on what is the cathartic dimension in our lives: a connection with our intimacy, that is linked to the very high and the very low simultaneously, marking them as two sides of the same existential coin.



Gisèle Vienne - *Crowd*



Gisèle Vienne - *Crowd*



Gisèle Vienne - *Crowd*



Gisèle Vienne - *Crowd*

IV. Artistic Practice. Staged Works: Berlin - Vienna - Prague, 2016-2019

Having returned from my residency at the Museumsquartier in Vienna in Autumn 2016, I re-read the transcribed interviews with the blind and visually impaired people I spoke to and try to come up with a form for my text for the project that is to become *Molyneux's Problem*. For a long time, I am unsure which point of view to write from. Whenever I try to write a scene from the perspective of a blind character, I cannot bring myself to phrase more than a few sentences - everything sounds wrong. Although I spent several weeks in Vienna interviewing blind people, I do not feel that I possess enough knowledge and authority in regard to the topic of blindness to be able to write from a blind character's point of view. I am stuck.

After a few weeks, I decide to read theoretical literature on the topic and to develop the piece starting from the spatial concept. One of the texts that I come across is Dennis Diderot's *Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who can see*⁵⁰ from 1749, an essay about blindness from the time of Enlightenment, in which Diderot analyses Molyneux's Problem, a popular philosophical question of the period: *Can a blind man, who has been made able to see with the help of an operation, distinguish a sphere from a cube simply by looking at it - without touching it?* The question was first asked by philosopher William Molyneux in a letter to John Locke in 1688. A publication by the English anatomist and surgeon William Cheselden, who had successfully performed eye surgery on a 13-year-old boy, had inspired a public debate on the functioning of perception, in which Molyneux and Locke engaged.

Diderot's analysis of this debate, as well as the letters between Locke and Molyneux become an inspiration for the form of my piece. Perception is something I want to explore and the focus of Molyneux's Problem on the basic forms of geometry - sphere and cube - seems like a relatable and concrete

⁵⁰ Diderot, Dennis. "Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who can see". Translated into English by Margaret Jourdain. In: Diderot, Denis. *Early Philosophical Works*. Chicago and London: The Open Court, 1916. p. 68-141.

starting point for the exploration of an abstract question. I am also influenced by the stylized, formal tone of Locke's and Molyneux's letters. I decide to write the text as a dialogue between two characters, one seeing and one blind, in the style of a formalised philosophical debate, to base this dialogue on the perception of the seeing (male) character and to mark it as a memory. This dramaturgical construction manifests itself in the grammatical structure of the dialogue, which is written in what German grammar refers to as *Konjunktiv 1*, a subjunctive mood used to express indirect (reported) speech. The dialogue I write is thus always marked as the subjective perspective of a seeing character and as a memory, which relativizes the reliability of what is said. This formal approach suddenly enables me to write about blindness - once I find a perspective that is clearly marked as a subjective point of view of a seeing person on blindness, a perspective that contains a distance towards the described, it is suddenly possible.

In this chapter, I am documenting the creation of two staged works that were developed during my artistic research Ph.D. project: the opera *No Man* that premiered in March 2017 at the Prague National Theatre and *Molyneux's Problem* a show that first premiered as a performance piece in November 2018 at the Berlin gallery EIGEN+ART Lab and then as a staging in December 2018 at the Prague theatre Studio Hrdinů. Both staged works are attempts at re-evaluating the visual in theatre and based on practical as well as theoretical research I conducted in the framework of my artistic research Ph.D. project. The theoretical reflections from the first part of the thesis and practical work described here inform each other and were created to be regarded as a whole.

IV.1 2016 - 2019: *No Man*

Together with composer Jiří Kadeřábek and dramaturg Lukáš Jiříčka, I am approached in the Autumn of 2015 by the dramaturgy of the opera department of the Prague National Theatre with the offer to co-write and direct a new piece of music theatre as a commission for the New Stage. We are excited by the offer and quickly decide on a few basic principles for our show: we want to create a show in which musical, directorial and spatial concept are developed together and intertwine, a show that somehow relates to the history of the city

of Prague and that is based on a dialectical three-part musical and spatial structure, offering a different perspective on music theatre than the stagings usually created at the National Theatre. The central perspective of the protagonist in the plot of an opera is as much a common convention as the central perspective in the history of painting. We aim to subvert this convention of the central perspective, to turn it around.

During research for a possible topic for the piece, I come across the study *The Stalin Case*⁵¹ by historian Hana Píchová. The book follows the construction and subsequent demolition of the gigantic Prague Stalin monument, built by sculptor Otakar Švec, the most famous example of an iconoclasm in the public sphere linked to socio-political change in the history of the Czech Republic. Píchová's study contains a considerable number of period photographs depicting a series of topics that seem interesting for our artistic team: the effort to create a monumental work of art; belief in ideology; the fate of artists under dictatorship, the city of Prague during Stalinism.

Inspired by the Švec's biography, the story and the scale of the statue, I suggest to my colleagues to develop a piece based on the story of the Stalin monument. I am interested in the idea of creating a show that incorporates the depiction of an iconoclasm - the destruction of an entity that holds power over people against their will - as well as the possibility of experimenting with the ruination of imagery in the framework of the directorial concept. We decide that even the three-part libretto of the show should be based on the idea of building something that is then destroyed: the first part is to be written by me, the second part, depicting the destruction of the monument, will be without words and that the third part will be based largely on quotes and variations of material from the first part assembled by dramaturg Lukáš Jiříčka. The perspective of the show is going to be in constant movement: from Švec's perspective in the first part to a historical perspective in the second to a projection of the future in the third.

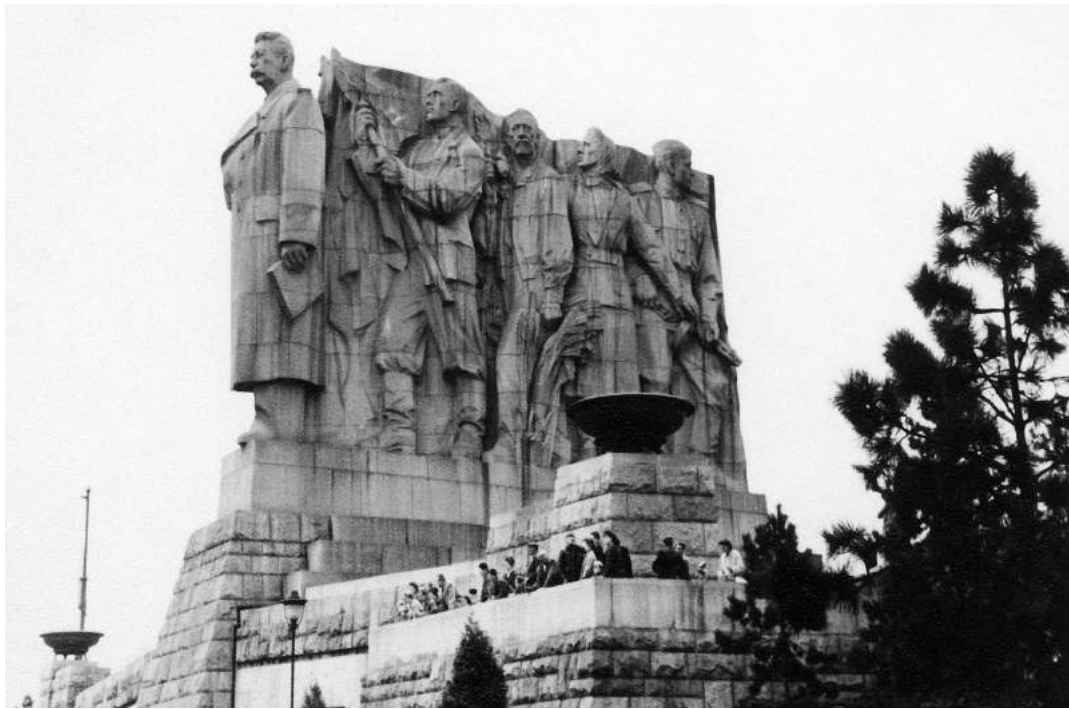
⁵¹ Píchová, Hana. *Případ Stalin*. Prague: Arbor Vitae, 2014.



The Building of an icon: sculptor Otakar Švec in 1950 in front of the model of his Stalin monument, gazing into the future



The building of the Prague Stalin monument in the early 1950s



The finished Stalin monument on the Letná Plateau in Prague in 1955



The Prague Stalin monument after its destruction in 1962



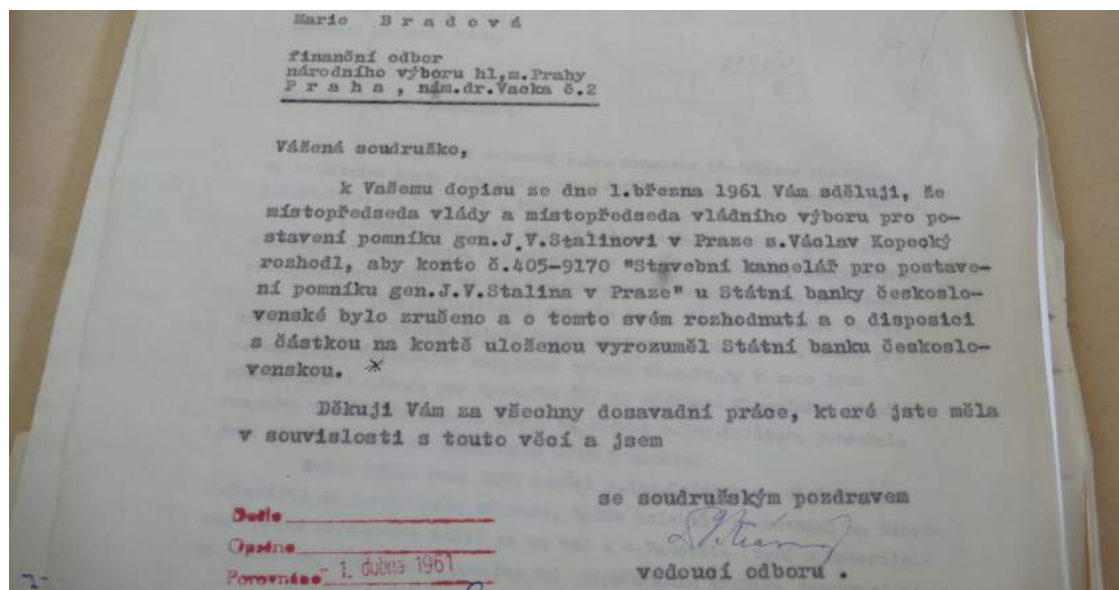
Debris of the Prague Stalin monument after its destruction in 1962⁵²

Icons and iconoclasm in *No Man*

The research conducted for *No Man* was conducted in archives. During the development phase for the piece, I spend weeks researching historical material connected to the Prague Stalin monument at the Czech National Archive in Prague 4 and at the National Film Archive. The Czech National Archive contains hundreds of text documents related to the history of the statue and the life of Otakar Švec: descriptions of official and unofficial party meetings, the open call asking artists to submit their designs for a Stalin monument, transcripts of the jury meetings, letters of citizens reacting to the finished statue, as well as correspondence between party officials and Švec. The material I find during my research becomes an inspiration for the libretto and the concept of the piece. In the National Film Archive I discover several filmed short news bulletins depicting the work on the statue, as well as the official unveiling and a longer report of 14 minutes called "Pomník lásky a přátelství", directed by Oldřich Kříž. I decide to use some of the filmed material discovered in the framework of my research for the staging, as well as one scene from the Russian film "Падение Берлина/The Fall of Berlin", directed in 1949 by Mikheil Chiaureli. Based on the material I

⁵² All pictures of the Prague Stalin monument taken from: Píčov, Hana. *Přpad Stalin*, Prague: Arbor Vitae, 2014.

found in the Czech National Archive, I know that this film, in which Stalin was played by the actor Mikheil Gelovani, was shown to the artists that were asked to submit designs for a Stalin statue. I am fascinated by the fact that the material the artists were asked to react to, was a feature film, in which Stalin did not appear in person, but was interpreted by an actor instead. This scene, as well as a moment from the film at the centre of it ends up being depicted both in the libretto and the staging of *No Man*.



A letter documenting the finances of the process of building the Prague Stalin monument found at the Czech National Archive.



Stalin, played by Mikheil Gelovani, arriving in Berlin in the film *The Fall of Berlin*

During these weeks of research, I regularly share my findings with my colleagues. We develop libretto, directorial concept and composition simultaneously base them on a three-part dramaturgical and musical structure. Visually and musically, we want the first part of *No Man* to be closest to the traditional opera form, depicting the story of Otakar Švec and his relationship to the monument in a style that contains all elements of a realistic opera staging (arias, tragic conflict, pseudo-historical costumes). The singers are going to sing live, whereas the instrumental musical material is going to be reproduced through a multichannel sound installation: an attempt to musically represent the absent presence of Stalin in the space. This sound installation is going to surround the audience, seated on the stage of Nová Scéna/New Stage and looking into the auditorium. In the centre of the auditorium is a huge, covered object, that is later unveiled: a huge Stalin head, so big that it is impossible to escape the statue's gaze. Every action in the first part of *No Man* takes place in the uncanny presence of this central object.



Recording the composition for the sound installation in first part of *No Man* with the orchestra of the Prague National Theatre in December 2016

Visually, the statue is part of every possible frame of looking at the stage - in the same way as God, in John Berger's definition of perspective quoted in the

second chapter of this study, doesn't have to situate himself in relation to others, Stalin in our staging doesn't, as he is already the situation. During the first part of *No Man*, our piece follows sculptor Otakar Švec, who wins the competition to build a Stalin monument against his will and the melodramatic changes occurring in his life as the monument grows and ruins his existence: people stop talking to Švec, the construction of the statue takes much longer than expected, Stalin dies, his wife commits suicide and Švec himself kills himself shortly before the statue is unveiled. Already during the preparation of the celebration of the new monument, the first signs that the statue is going to have be demolished become visible and in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev holds his famous speech about the end of the cult of personality at the 20th Party Congress. The first part of *No Man* depicts the inception of, the building of and the decision to destroy the icon of Stalin: it ends with the demolition of the Stalin monument.



Building the icon. Rehearsal of *No Man* in Spring 2017

The second part of *No Man* marks a step away from the realistic depiction of

Otakar Švec's life. In the same way people under Stalinism vanished from historical documents, pictures and books, the socialist authorities wanted Švec's Stalin statue to disappear from the city of Prague without anyone noticing during a secret, supposedly silent, nightly detonation. This silent detonation, the process of an invisible iconoclasm is the starting point for second part of *No Man*. We decide to create a sound installation without any text, during which the Stalin statue falls apart, in a very stylised, decelerated staged image. For this part of the show Jiří Kadeřábek creates a composition inspired by sounds of explosions and the following silence. In the staging, every character from the first part of the show disappears in the waves of the explosion of the icon and time itself. They slowly get up in the fog the detonation created, leave the auditorium of Nová Scéna/the New Stage and exit through a door at the back of the auditorium. A group of stagehands enters and slowly takes the Stalin head apart. The perspective of the show changes in this second part: the Stalin head, the marker of the central perspective and a classical narrative structure focused on one main hero is destroyed and the characters are suddenly able to access different spaces. The question whether a new central point, a new centre is going to be created by them remains to be answered.

The third part of *No Man* is centred around the question of how to deal with the gap left by the ideologies of the 20th century in society today. It describes a different time space than the one we live in now: a less civilised future than our present day, a future that is a regression. This third part is the only part of the show that uses live instrumental music – after the explosion of the statue, a chamber orchestra enters the stage and starts playing amongst the debris of the statue. The singers return to the stage as uncivilised creatures, who are without any connection to the ruins of the ideologies from the past. They sing music which quotes fragments from the first part of *No Man*, fragments of old ideological texts that are without any apparent context and thus create a new context. In the last image of the show, the singers build a new statue from what the debris that is left of the Stalin monument without knowing what material they are using. Their perspective on the debris of the icon is innocent, they are attracted to it without knowing why and fill it with new meaning.

Generative Destruction

The three-part structure of *No Man* makes it possible to show the construction of an icon, its demolition, and the emergence of something new from the wreckage of the original icon, thus displaying the icon as an entity that cannot be destroyed without generating new projections, in the form of a ruin or of debris that takes on a new meaning in a new context. This new context shows itself also through a new perspective for the audience, a new spatial hierarchy in the third part of the show. The statue, the central visual focal point of the first part, is now destroyed and only present as debris. Suddenly musicians enter the stage from behind the audience, they walk over the stage and take a seat in the initially empty orchestra pit. The division between visual space and aural space is thus lifted. During the third part of *No Man*, the audience hears live instruments for the first time and is confronted to a whole new spatial logic and a new perspective on the icon.

Workshop at Performance Philosophy Conference in Prague in June 2017

Shortly after the premiere of *No Man* in March 2017, I take part in a short practical artistic research connecting reflections concerning staged iconoclasm that came up during rehearsals of *No Man* with an opportunity to confront them with the opinions and experiences of other artists and researchers: I hold a talk at the *Prague Performance Philosophy Conference*. The conference addresses the question *How Does Performance Philosophy Act?* and asks its participants in its mission statement to engage with this question not just theoretically, and to consider the conference itself as a performance, investigating the ethos of its performativity as a first instance or case study.

My presentation is about iconoclastic strategies in theatre and my staging of *No Man*, and I decide to add a performative twist to my talk and finish the presentation with an offer towards the listeners to take part in a try-out iconoclasm of their own. I purchased several small statues (Christian devotional statues, statues of Buddhas, as well as figures of Soviet political leaders) that can be destroyed with a hammer at the end of my presentation. The participants, who are interested in this try-out, can experience what it feels

like to publicly take part in an experimental destruction of figures of icons. I am interested to start a debate with the present artists and researchers about their attitudes towards iconoclasm: in theory, it is relatively painless to analyse possibilities of destruction of icons, but what about physically destroying a statue of Jesus with a hammer? Does the try-out trigger anything in them? For those, who decide to join the try-out, I prepare the following questions:

1. Does the destruction of this statue mean anything to you?
2. If no: can you think of the destruction of a statue/an image that would mean anything to you?

Five people decide to try out this experiment: a statue of Lenin is destroyed, so is a statue of Jesus, a statue of Pope Pavel II and two statues of the Virgin Mary. During the following debate, it quickly becomes clear that the present artists and researchers are quite evenly divided into two camps: approximately half of them deny any kind of relationship or emotional reaction towards the destroyed statues, a fact that is not changed by having personally destroyed some of them. One researcher describes that, apart from the fact that he feels nothing towards the statues, the destruction of the statue in the aftermath of my talk is artificially organised and does therefore not touch him at all. Two researchers state that they find it irritating, almost annoying to be confronted with the, in their eyes, meaningless symbolism of the statues. The other half of the audience has difficulties watching the experiment, some say that they would not be capable of destroying any symbolic artwork, and one female researcher starts crying during the debate. The next day, at the final meeting of the conference, she reads a statement that she wrote in reaction to the talk, describing an emotional connection to all artworks and symbols destroyed in the history of the city of Prague, where the conference takes place. The talk, the experiment, and the debate leave me with a strong impression that irritation and annoyance on the one hand, and indifference on the other are reactions generated by the symbolism of the statues and the topic of iconoclasm: a general sense of unease in one or the other direction, which is something that I encounter as well watching audience reactions during shows of *No Man*.



Iconoclasm in action at the Performance Philosophy Conference in Prague in June 2017



The destroyed statues

Playing *No Man* - Reactions of the Audience

No Man is shown twelve times between March 2017 and March 2019 at the National Theatre in Prague and twice in November 2017 in my hometown of Bremen, in the north of Germany, at the Theater Bremen. We organise two pre-show debates in Prague and one audience discussion in Bremen. The reactions in both cities vary strongly: whereas in Prague, most audience members know the story of Švec and his statue, in Bremen it is unknown. During the debates in Prague, many audience members describe the Stalin monument as a work of art that was imposed on the city of Prague, not as something the Czech actively participated in, some even doubt that it makes sense to talk about this ugly chapter from the past today. At the same time, there is a massive interest in the topic: quite often, older people come to see the show with their grandchildren and many audience members stay and talk about the show and their memories of the Stalin monument in the theatre café. In Bremen, a town known for its liberal politics, people project their own historical experiences onto the story of the Prague monument: many audience members associate the Stalin statue with the Berlin wall, others speak about the development of left-wing utopias during the 20th century. In both cases, it is clear that the monument touches something relevant in audiences in Prague and Bremen alike, a need to reflect upon the influences of ideologies of the past on the world we live in today: an uncanny, almost physical presence in the memories and associations the monument and its story engenders in the spectators. This rare communal context of re-evaluation and connection of old and new is something rare the art form of theatre can offer its audiences. As Erika Fischer-Lichte has proposed:

Theatre appears to be one of the last residues where people can publicly communicate with each other. It is one of the very rare places where bodies can unfold their aura or even magic potential. In this context it seems highly relevant that theatre in contemporary Western culture also serves as a place of mediation between the past and the present. The bodily presence of the performer, in this sense, is endowed with a

particular historical signature. For when plays of the occidental tradition are staged, from Aeschylus to Samuel Beckett, figures appear onstage whose history forms a part of our collective memory. However, they do not appear as in our dreams, imaginations, and memories or as in the new media - rather they adapt a bodily appearance. The performance takes place as a nightly resurrection of the 'dead'.⁵³

The aura Fischer-Lichte refers to is the aura of the body, of the physical here and now. This physical here and now can enter into communication with the "dead" in the framework of a theatre staging, creating a context for constant negotiation and re-evaluation of images of our cultural consciousness. Perspective can play a key role in this process. One's cognition depends on one's environment and on one's perspective. By abstracting the spectator from usual perspectives of viewing, stagings that question the central perspective as a default setting for viewing theatre, can induce reflections on the spectator's own position – in the very physical sense of the word as well as in how the physical position of viewing influences his ethical position and his relationship towards the seen. During the two years we played *No Man*, audience members showed with a variety of reactions: interest and refusal, openness and denial, they liked and disliked the staging - in most cases though there was a clear manifestation of having been touched by the topic of *No Man*. Why was that the case, regardless of the fact whether the staging was shown in the historically and socially very different cities of Prague or Bremen? Maybe it has to do with the fact that all of our audience members, in some way or other, were confronted with some of the ideological and social changes of the 20th century - people in Prague and in Bremen alike experienced these changes and the staging brought up memories and reflections of their standing, perspective and possible changes of perspective in the past. Director Theresa Welge, who saw the show in Bremen and whom

⁵³ Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p. 22.

I asked to provide feedback for this study, described her reaction in an email as follows: „*No Man* asks questions about representation of ideologies and the functioning of ideological impact. Is it possible to change or re-write symbols that represent ideologies and what happens if we try to do so? This topic is definitely relevant outside of a precise historic knowledge of the story of the Czech Stalin monument. For me, the Berlin Wall immediately came to mind as a German equivalent for a monument that was regarded from different perspectives as history evolved. Many personal stories were connected to that. This is how we can connect to a historical event, through the private drama, that's hidden within. To me, *No Man* connects the personal and the historical very successfully.”

Today on the Letná Plateau, on the spot occupied until 1962 by Otakar Švec's Stalin statue, stands a new statue by Vratislav Novák, called *Metronome*; a symbol of time passing after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989. Novák's statue was built in 1991 on the very same granite foundation as Švec's Stalin monument and in everyday Czech the place is still referred to as "Stalin".

The physical absence of an icon is not the same its absence in the collective consciousness. For a society to get actively rid of an icon for good is very hard. That is one of the reasons why iconoclastic strategies in theatre can have an important cathartic function: a staged iconoclasm allows both creators and audiences to feel relief of painful images and symbols that they cannot simply get rid of in real life, but which can be symbolically destroyed within a theatre production.

Iconoclasm as a theatrical strategy implies an imperative of exploring theatrical conventions, premises and assumptions. In the case of *No Man*, this search is reflected in every layer of the work; in the musical, dramaturgical, spatial and directorial concepts. The explosion of the statue in the second part of the production, the destruction of the gradually built icon became the focal point of our show. The demolition of Stalin's sculpture became a creative act for us as the authors of the opera and the depicted characters who, in the third part, were forced to find a new relationship towards the ruins of old ideologies – the destruction generated something new.

The last sentence sung by Otakar Švec before his suicide in *No Man*: "No sculpture, no problem" plays with the famous sentence attributed to Stalin „No man, no problem“, whilst at the same time describing a hopeful misunderstanding of the functioning of iconoclasm coming from a desperate sculptor, whose last wish is to finally demolish the monstrous statue he designed. Still icons cannot be actively destroyed. The only possibility of destruction there is lies in time itself, in the fact that some concepts lose their social or cultural impact and that therefore the gaze of the icons that represent them becomes less powerful. Otherwise, the body of the icon lives on, it takes on different forms and content. The concept of the ruin is a deeply ambiguous one, describing the end of the physical integrity of an object and its possible recharging with new meaning.

Destruction and reconstruction, decomposition and rebirth act as mutually balancing forces of transformation. Each gesture of destruction is also part of a new act of creation. Iconoclasm has the character of a catharsis, containing destructive as well as creative elements. In that sense, the iconoclasm in *No Man* did not aim at a negation of visibility, but at the development of a new reality, a new historical perspective emerging from the debris of the old one.



No Man, first part



No Man, first part



No Man, first part, building the statue



No Man, first part, building the statue



No Man, first part, unveiling the statue



No Man, second part, the iconoclasm



No Man, third part, after the iconoclasm



No Man, third part, after the iconoclasm⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Captions of *No Man* © Patrik Borecký, Národní Divadlo, 2017, except for the second caption on page 66 and the captions on page 67 © Lukáš Bíba.

IV.2 2016 - 2019: *Molyneux's Problem*

Vienna 2016 - Interviews

As already described earlier in this study, during my time in Vienna in 2016, I conduct seven interviews with blind born and seriously visually impaired people, which become the starting point for *Molyneux's Problem*. In this part of chapter IV, I am going to document these interviews, the core results of the interview process, as well as their connection to what is to become the text for *Molyneux's Problem*.

The people I speak to come from very different social backgrounds. The youngest interview partner is a pupil aged 8, the oldest a high school teacher aged 72. I always try to follow the same list of questions aimed at descriptions of formal aspects of the dreams of the interview partners. Some of my interview partners are rather taciturn, others talk a lot, some only pay little attention to my questions or cannot answer them. In general, I never repeat any question more than twice and tell the interview partners, that it is no problem, if they cannot answer, or do not want to answer some of the questions - if that happens, I switch to the next question. Given the fact that interviews are conducted as conversations with these premises, they somewhat vary formally, even though they are all based on the same set of initial questions.

My questions are:

1. For seeing children, the transition from day to night is often associated with anxiety. Was this also the case for you when you were a child?
2. Do you have abilities in dreams that you don't have in life, can you fly, for example?
3. Is there a childhood dream you remember, or what is the first dream you can remember?
4. Do you have dreams that repeat themselves?
5. How do you orientate yourself in the space of your dreams?
6. When you dream of a different place than the place you live in, how do you recognise it?
7. Could you describe a nightmare?
8. What do you perceive as beautiful in your dreams?

The interview partners were informed and agreed with the fact that their answers would be used in my research and artistic work. The interview transcripts have been anonymised for this study.

Interview 1

male

born blind

age: early 70s

My first question concerns the moment of falling asleep. For seeing children, the transition from day to night is often associated with anxiety.

Was this also the case for you when you were a child? The difference between day and night was not so obvious to me as a child. The night is colder and quieter than the day, apart from that the difference didn't matter to me at all. Not even today, because I perceive absolutely no light. I also sleep very well. But there are many blind people who have problems sleeping. Our inner clock is actually set to 25 hours a day. The rhythm of sleep is regulated by melatonin, which is perceived through the eyes and regulates our sleep rhythm. Since blind people do not perceive melatonin through their eyes, they lack this regulator and often have sleep problems. I myself fall asleep again and again at different times, between 20h and 24h.

Do you have a childhood dream that you still remember today?

I generally do not remember many dreams. I can't think of any childhood dream that I could tell you about.

Do you have abilities in dreams that you do not have in life, for example, can you fly? Yes. But I cannot see - that's not possible even in my dreams.

Sigmund Freud says that the dream is the continuation of the day's work, and so I have the same senses at my disposal as I do during the day. But my imagination is active. For example, I sometimes dream that someone is pointing a gun at me from a hundred metres distance. I don't see the person in my dream, I couldn't describe the man or woman either, I don't hear them, but I know someone is pointing a rifle at me.

Would you say that in your dreams you experience situations based on theoretical concepts? That is a complicated question. Everyone has

experiences in dreams. Imagination⁵⁵ means that you put an object in front of your inner eye. The term "image" today has a strong meaning of optics, although there are inner images that have nothing to do with visuality.

You cannot see the man in your dream, but you know that he is there.

Notions are elements of imagination, too. My lived experience with a certain notion becomes an element of my dreamt imagination, as are the characteristics of the notion (whether person or object): which kind of gun is that person aiming at me, does it have two barrels or does it have one barrel, is it a bullet gun or a shotgun? With the person aiming at me it is the same: is he big or small, old or young, etc.? I can neither hear, nor smell the man in my dream, but he is created from the offset elements of my notions and lived experiences of what a person can look like.

Can you recount a particularly impressive dream?

I play chess and took part in a tournament that took place outside Vienna. Because of that, I was forced to sleep in a foreign bed in a hotel. I was thinking about the previous day's games before I went to bed. A big problem in chess is the question which of the two rooks you move to the centre after castling, the right or the left one. I had a dream in this foreign bed in which I was thinking back and forth about whether I should move the right or the left rook. I think I decided on the right one, so I grabbed it, woke up and had the blanket in my hand.

Do you have dreams that repeat themselves? Most of the time these are typical relaxation dreams or dreams of falling asleep, my muscles relax, and I dream of flying or falling. In my free time, I am the conductor of a choir and recently I had to learn new pieces of music, so at the moment I often dream of melodies while falling asleep

How do you perceive space in your dreams? Of course, only with the means with which I usually perceive space. When I dream of flying, I do not fly standing up or lying on my stomach, to look down, but I fly more or less lying with my head up. Maybe my experience of diving is connected to those dreams. I have completed a diver training. For blind people, the beauty of diving is that you can

⁵⁵ Here, the respondent uses the German word *Vorstellung*, which means notion or imagination and is formed out of the verb *stellen*, to put, and the prefix *vor*, in front of.

move in all directions under water. I always dive with company, but I still feel great freedom under water. Just as I am at the mercy of water and its heaviness, I am also at the mercy of the air in my dreams of flying.

When a dream takes them to another place, for example to another city, how do you recognise it? I can recognise cities by their smell, their noise, by the hectic pace of people in it - it is these elements, combined with my ideas about a place, that tell me where I am in my dreams. I don't dream up a previously existing idea, but rather put new places together from these elements.

Are your dreams very auditory?

Of course, you never have any comparison with anyone else. In that sense I don't know. In my dreams there is not always music or speech. What I hear in my dreams serves also my sense of orientation. I understand and perceive space thanks to the clicking of tongue technique. I send out a sound, a click and through this, like a bat, I can perceive how the space around me is shaped. I was a country child from Lower Austria. There was a farm next to our house, to which I rode my bicycle as a child. In order to avoid accidents, I needed a method to find out how the environment is shaped. And so, I taught myself this method. As an adult I learned to refine it.

Are there places or spaces that make you disoriented?

Whenever it is terribly loud outside, I lose my sense of orientation. In summer, it's jackhammers that disorientate me - I can no longer hear the echo of the buildings and run into things crookedly. There are also natural phenomena that have this effect - snow or heavy rain swallow up acoustic clues that otherwise help me find my way around. It can happen that I get lost at the crossroads in front of the school where I have been teaching for 40 years, when there is snow.

Interview 2

female

perceives light and dark

age: late 20s

What elements are your dreams made up of?

My dreams are made out of the same elements I experience it during the day. My subconscious is fed by my daily life. When I dream, I perceive light and dark,

and when I touch something, a table for example, I feel it - I dream just as I experience it during the day when I am awake.

For seeing children, the transition between day and night, the beginning of darkness, is often associated with fears. Was this also the case for you, when you were a child? Because I see light and dark, I don't remember being afraid.

You were told as a child: now it is evening, now we are going to sleep?

Yes, and I also felt it getting darker.

The night is probably also quieter than the day and colder.

Yes, exactly.

Is there a childhood dream you remember, or what is the first dream you can remember?

I can remember one dream in particular very well; it happened when I was in primary school. I was afraid of the streets, especially of cars. But once, I ran in the street because I was so happy and excited that there was a graduation ceremony that day and my mother shouted at me: "Don't run into the street!" A few months later, I dreamt that I was walking hand in hand across a street with a friend and she just let go of me and I was standing in the middle of the street, all alone and surrounded by cars. Not a nice dream. I saw light and dark and felt the hand holding me and suddenly letting go.

Do you have abilities in dreams that you don't have in life, can you fly, for example? No. Maybe once, but that was so long ago: I could fly in my dream. Most of the time I dream that I am talking to people from my environment. I dream of voices I know.

Do you have dreams that repeat themselves regularly?

No, I do not.

Can you move around dreams differently, better or safer than in real life?

Sometimes I can move faster in dreams.

Do you have dreams of music or of smells?

Yes.

Do you have haptic dreams?

Yes, I do too.

Does it happen to you that in your dreams you travel to places other than where you live?

Yes, in some dreams I travel to Upper Austria. My family lives there. Or the Waldviertel - that's where my boyfriend comes from and we often travel there. Often these places get mixed up in my dreams.

How do you recognise where you are in your dreams?

Through sounds and haptic impressions. All places sound and feel differently.

Can you describe a nightmare?

About a year ago, I dreamt that I was riding in a streetcar and got off without taking my cane and handbag with me. I was standing on a street and did not know what to do. Probably this dream was a kind of warning.

What is beautiful for you in your dreams?

I hear beautiful voices or see lights. Once, I dreamt of a melody that was very beautiful. I could even remember how it sounded after waking up. I would have liked to write it down.

Do you play an instrument?

I used to play the guitar, today I sing in the Louis Braille Choir.

Do you remember your dreams for long?

Most of the time I only remember what I dreamt in the morning.

How do you perceive space in dreams? In the same way as now, there is no difference for me. I hear and feel distances and the shape of the spaces I am in and my body in them.

Interview 3

born blind

age: early 50s

My first question concerns the moment of falling asleep. For seeing children, the transition from day to night is often associated with anxiety.

Was this also the case for you when you were a child?

As a child, I was afraid when night fell. I used to take a bus to the school for the blind and I had three friends on that bus. One of these friends always told me about extremely ugly dreams. At some point I became really afraid of going to sleep because of that. I was afraid every evening, as soon as it got 18h or 18h30,

when I was alone, because of the dreams of this friend. I only got rid of that when I was an adult. My friend couldn't help it, I never blamed her. We were 6 or 7 years old when it happened - she still doesn't know to this day what she triggered in me.

Do you have a childhood dream that you still remember today?

Yes. When I was a child, I dreamt that I was sitting on a moving wagon and there were only corpses around me. This is a nightmare I could never forget.

Do you have abilities in dreams that you do not have in life, can you fly for example?

Not flying, but sometimes I dream that I am able to walk alone. In dreams, I can move independently, even in areas I don't know. I don't dare to do that in real life. Otherwise, I tend to dream about things I cannot do, things at which I fail. As a child I had many nightmares, some of them still repeat themselves today. For example, I dream that I have visitors and want to serve food, but I can't serve it because all my plates have disappeared. The napkins are where the glasses should be, my cupboards are full of strange things in my dreams and I don't know my way around my own flat anymore. Or I dream that I get lost somewhere and can no longer find my way home - this dream repeats itself regularly.

How do you orientate yourself in the space of your dreams?

The same way I orientate myself in life. Through acoustic signals, haptic signals, sometimes also through smells.

How do you move in your dreams? In life, do you often move with the help of a stick or with the help of other people.

When I dream of spaces I know, such as my flat, I can move freely. But most of the time I dream of events rather than spaces.

What do you find beautiful in your dreams?

Sometimes I feel safe in my dreams, that is nice. Then when the alarm clock rings, I feel sad. My dreams are emotional - I find security beautiful - but many dreams are about fear of failure. For example, that my mobile phone with voice output no longer works. That the technical devices I depend on will let me down.

How old were you when you understood that most people use a sense that you cannot use?

In kindergarten. The other children from the area where I grew up shouted "blind cow" at me. And when I was about 5 years old, I understood why. Before that, it

was natural for me to be taken by the hand and led by adults, I never questioned that.

How did you experience the school system?

I first went to a school for the blind and then to a normal grammar school with sighted children. In the school for the blind, our needs were precisely met, that was important. We were at most seven children in a class. And when we talked about cats in biology, we were given a stuffed model of a cat to touch. That's not possible in classes with 30 pupils.

Do you have to touch things to imagine them?

Yes. I can touch a tree and get a picture of it. You can't do that with a cloud.

Imagining a cloud is quite difficult even for sighted people.

Sometimes I think clouds are like cotton wool; but then I get caught in a thunderstorm and am no longer sure.

Do you sometimes imagine what seeing feels like?

I have thought about this question long and often. My condition can be compared to looking into the void. I do not see black, only a void, an emptiness. And I imagine colours. I imagine the colour blue, for example, in relation to water.

Can you swim?

Yes. I like swimming very much.

Water is a space that has no boundaries. How do you orientate yourself in water? It helps, if someone swims with me and says, now to the left, now to the right. I love swimming. And that is why I have an idea about the colour blue. I imagine blue as a warm, pleasant colour. Everyone tells me that blue is a cold colour - my personal idea is different.

Interview 4

male

turned blind at three months

age: late 40s

What is the first dream you remember; could you describe it? Can you think of a nightmare from your childhood, for example? As a child I had to go to the gym at school. We had to climb under a bench, and I had the nightmare that I was stuck there and couldn't get out.

You were in a school for the blind? Yes.

And there were physical education classes for blind children? How did that work? Just like in other schools. Only the teachers didn't show us the exercises, but verbally expressed what we should do.

Did you also have swimming lessons? Yes.

How is swimming for you? I do not like it. I don't like to lose the ground under my feet. When that happens, I experience fear.

So, it's not an activity you do in your spare time?

No. I like to splash about, but I need something under my feet.

Do you have abilities in dreams that you don't have in life? Yes, in my dreams I can swim. I can swim very fast and without problems. It is no effort at all for me to swim, even in the sea.

Do you have dreams that repeat themselves? The boarding school often catches up with me in my dreams. There we had our cupboards in the hall. I often dream that I can't find my cupboard and wander unaccompanied through the corridors looking for a room that I can't find. Or I can't find my clothes and can't get dressed, I often dream about that.

Do you have dreams of falling? Just the other day I dreamt that I was lying on the edge of an underground platform and had the feeling of falling.

How do you perceive space in your dreams? Mainly acoustically.

When you dream of a different place than the place you live in, how do you recognise it? Also, through acoustics. And through smells; in my dreams, I can smell a lot, I also recognise people in my dream by their smell. Everything works, just like in normal life, only I don't see anything, just like in normal life, but my other senses work well.

Do you remember your dreams for long? There are dreams that keep me busy for a long time. Mostly negative ones. For example, when I argue with my parents in a dream, it torments me the next day, even though both have been dead for years. One positive dream that I still remember today are radio programmes that I used to work on in the radio station. There is a series *called Freak Radio*, for which people with disabilities work. I have made several programmes for them on the subject of blindness. I often dream about this to this day, a memory that has become a dream. Or recently I dreamt of one of my balloon rides.

When did you make them? The first one in 2011 and the second one three years later. Those were great experiences. One feels relatively little, except for the hot air burning above one's head. But you hear things: a church hundreds of metres below the balloon and the peace and quiet that reigns so high up. This is basically the most beautiful air experience I have ever had. I have already flown with a glider and a helicopter. Gliding is loud, the plane is closed, and flies at a very high speed, so you can hardly hear anything from the outside.

Have you always wanted to go up in the air? Yes, always. My wife and I travel a lot and love to fly. She sees and can describe to me, what I don't see.

What is beautiful for you in your dreams?

There are many dreams that I perceive from a neutral point of view. I myself don't do anything at all and still I am part of some narrative. Everything happens next to me, but I am hardly involved. I like these dreams best.

Interview 5

female

turned blind as a child, perceives light and dark

age: early 50s

What is the first dream you remember?

I could not tell you the first dream I remember - I am not sure. I remember a childhood dream in which I am in nature, on a meadow with butterflies and flowers in the sun. But I remember also having dreams of light flickering.

Do you have abilities in dreams that you do not have in life?

I can fly. I also used to have dreams of failure, nightmares that always happened in my flat and seemed very real. Because of that, I was afraid of falling asleep for a long time. Then, a friend advised me that I should face the fear as if it were a person. And then, in my dreams I tried to look it in the eye. Since I did that, the fear is gone. I only have this ability in dreams.

Can you describe one of these nightmares? They were very tiring and intense. I perceived my room exactly as it was. Someone that I could not see attacked me. I could neither scream nor wake up. In the dream I tried to turn on the light, but that was not possible either.

For seeing children, the transition from day to night, from light to dark, is often associated with fear. Was it the same with you when you were a child? As a child I didn't care. I could sleep anywhere and was never afraid to fall asleep.

Do you have dreams that repeat themselves?

Usually, it's the bad ones. That one childhood dream about light, I've had it before. Or dreams of falling, even falling in front of a tram. When I was seven years old, I fell from a high wall. My mother had a shock, she told me that over and over again. I myself can't really remember this fall, but maybe I process it in these falling dreams.

How do you perceive space in your dreams? Do you move differently than in life? No - I am not faster or slower. Sometimes I dream that I am flying somewhere.

What is beautiful for you in dreams? Everything that is calming and protective.

Which sensory impressions are the strongest in your dreams? Smells hardly ever. Light and dark sometimes - visual impressions. Mainly, I dream of experiences, of memories that repeat themselves.

If a dream takes you to another place, how do you recognise where you are?

Other places feel different. I simply know where I am in my dreams - my feelings tell me that. Feelings can also be used to explain colours to the blind. I, for example, like colours; I love to decorate.

Interview 6

male

born severely visually impaired, perceived light and dark as a child, completely blind since the age of 16

age: early 50s

For seeing children, the transition between day and night, the beginning of darkness, is often associated with fear. Was this also the case for you, when you were a child? When I look back, I think children are not only afraid, but also feel the need for their parents to read to them, for caregivers to be there,

when they fall asleep. That was difficult in my case, because, until I was six, my mother was a single parent and worked in shifts. She was often not there for my bedtime, only my grandparents were present. And, like many children, I often didn't want to go to bed, not because I was afraid, but because I felt I was missing out on something.

Did the night feel different from the day for you?

Because I could still see contours back then, I could feel the difference between light and dark; I could also recognise twilight. During the day I could still see outlines, at night I could not see anything.

Did these outlines then also appear in your dreams?

Yes, during my childhood they did. But now I can't think of any concrete dream from my childhood. In general, I dream in scenes and situations, often linked to daytime experiences or experiences from the last few years, which mix together. As a child, I dreamed several times of a neighbour's boy who suddenly turned up at my boarding school. But in real life, he was in Styria and never in Vienna, where the boarding school was. I have to explain that I actually had two childhoods: a very happy one, at home in Styria with my parents, and a very unhappy one at boarding school. In the countryside I was completely integrated, my mother always tried to support me. I had lots of toys, because a doctor told her that blind children learn to understand the world through model toys. And because I had so many toys, I also had many friends. I missed them very much at the boarding school of the Vienna School for the Blind and I dreamed about them.

Do you have abilities in dreams that you don't have in life?

Not really. Sometimes I dream about limited abilities. For example, I'm standing at a crossroads and there's a lot of traffic. I try to get to the other side, I want to go quickly, but suddenly I am blocked, and I just can't get any further, I only move with very small steps.

How do you perceive space in your dreams?

I hear it and I feel it. Based on acoustics, I can tell a lot about the spaces I am in: whether the space is artificially soundproofed, whether it has high or low ceilings - I can also roughly tell the size of a room. I travel alone a lot, and this is a skill that I trained: I walk with a stick, but there is a lot of other information that I pick up acoustically and that helps with orientation.

Do you also dream of travelling? How do you recognise different places in dreams?

I recognise places in dreams thanks to the design of dream scene itself or from impressions which I have gained of the place in question myself: I travel a lot and like to travel. As a blind person I experience the day with other senses than the sense of sight and then translate these impressions into dreams. I dream especially about haptics and sounds, but also about the atmosphere of places.

Do you suffer from nightmares?

Very rarely.

Do you have dreams that repeat themselves?

I have dreams that repeat themselves, even in different variations, and dreams that continue, where they stopped. Dreams consist of situations that have a beginning and an end and that can continue. In my opinion, to sighted people these situations seem like visual images, although they are more like scenes. We live in very visually focused times. Since the 1990s, I have been working as a guide in the exhibition "Dialogue in the Dark", where blind guides lead sighted people through a kind of invisible exhibition. In the past, we were often asked the question "How do blind people dream?". Today, people tend to ask, "Do blind people dream in images?", because they cannot imagine anything but images.

Interview 7

male

born severely visually impaired

age: 8 years

For seeing children, the transition between day and night, the beginning of darkness, is often associated with fear. Is this also the case for you? I

am not afraid of darkness!

How do you know when it's time to go to sleep?

I am very tired in the evening, because I have experienced a lot during the day. When I am outside in the evening, I can notice that the sun is no longer shining, and it is getting colder. The evening is quieter than the day, it sounds different. When I was little, I even thought that the night smells different than the day.

Do you have abilities in dreams that you don't have in life?

Sometimes, in my dreams, I can fly and do magic tricks.

Can you tell me a dream that you remember?

I will tell you a good dream and a bad dream. In my good dream I was given a magic wand and I could do magic tricks. In my bad dream, a sheep came through the window into my house and tried to eat me. The sheep took me in its mouth and jumped down a flight of stairs. I usually have bad dreams at a certain spot in my bed. I still sleep with mum and dad in their room and when I lie on the edge of the bed, I have nightmares.

Do you sometimes dream of other places, for example the desert?

I can't think of anything now. I dream about things I know, like my cat Findus. I feel in my dreams that she is there. It seems to me as if someone pulls me out of bed at night and puts me in my dream. Sometimes I also dream about music. A lot is possible in dreams.

Do you often dream about music?

Whenever I dream that I am on a rollercoaster, I hear music and I get dizzy.

What do you find beautiful in dreams?

Different things. Once I dreamt that I was struggling against something in the dream and when I woke up, I had the feeling that the whole bed was rocking.

And that was beautiful?

No. But slower than the slowest roller coaster there is.

And can you tell me an unpleasant dream?

I can try, but I'm sure it's strange for sighted people. I'm afraid of F-tones in my dreams, they sound so strange. For example, there was an F-tone in the dream with the sheep, that awful tone it accompanies my bad dreams.

Do you always recognise this tone?

I play the piano; it is not difficult for me to recognise it. Unfortunately, many toy companies use the F-tones for their toys, too.

Results

I record the interview on a mobile device and transcribe them. Each of the interview partners I speak to, has a unique life experience and a unique subconscious reaction to it. Some dream motifs and descriptions of formal aspects of the dreaming itself though are repeated in several, some even in

almost all interviews: many of the interview partners explain that they dream with the same senses that they used when awake (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6). Dreams of failure are a recurring motif, often connected to traffic or stressful social situations (Interviews 2, 3,4,5,6), so are dreams about music (Interviews 1,2,7). Spatial orientation in dreams is often described as connected to sound (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6). Dreams are described as containing non-visual images, or scenes (Interview 6), based on and nurtured by past experiences, feelings, haptics, sounds and smells (Interviews 1-6).

These results are a valuable source of information and inspiration for my work on *Molyneux's Problem*, I draw on the material I collected in the interview series during the writing process and during the preparation of the shows in Berlin and in Prague. The audio recordings themselves also become a source material for Michal Rataj's composition. When listening to the recordings of the interviews, Michal and I realise that my interview partners very often use the verb "to see", variations thereof, and visual metaphors to describe their non-visual experiences. Michal Rataj creates a sound-collage out of snippets of these words and this collage later becomes a central piece of his composition. We conceive the project as a work-in-progress with several different phases. I first want to create a radio play based on the text, recorded in German and in Czech as a co-production of Czech State Radio Český Rozhlas Vltava and Austrian State Radio ORF in Summer 2017. After that, I plan to create a performance piece in German at the Berlin gallery EIGEN+ART Lab and then a staging at the Studio Hrdinů in Prague in November and December 2018.

For the radio play, Michal and I decide that the composition, editing and length of the two versions of the radio play are to be the same, only the voices of the actors change as we recorded different German and Czech speaking actors for both versions. I complete the text for *Molyneux's Problem* in February 2017. The finished play is a dialogue between a seeing man and a blind woman that takes place in the darkroom of a club⁵⁶, in a space that doesn't enable visual

⁵⁶ Darkrooms exist in night clubs since the 1970s. They are typically dimly lit spaces, where customers can go to have sex with people they do not see.

communication and instead focuses all attention on the aural and the haptic. The darkroom in my text allows me to give the dramaturgical setting a simple and clear structure (two people meet, have sex, then part ways), at the same time there is a metaphysical side to the darkness the characters are exposed to. The play has three parts, the first and the second are dialogues about perception between the two characters, the second part is made out of the above-described collage of different verb forms of "to see" in German⁵⁷.

One of the surprising results of the interview series was the fact that many of the interview partners described vivid images in their dreams. The woman from interview 3 for example, described running through a forest chased by a man, who was aiming a gun at her. When I asked her, how she knew about the gun (as she could not have seen it in her dream, in fact she had never seen a gun in her life), she answered that she knew the gun was there and that was that. The images described in the interviews were metaphors for emotional states and situations of the dreamers and influenced by narratives they knew. A seeing person could translate this information into visuality in a dream, a blind person

⁵⁷ The description of the play on the website of Studio Hrdinů reads: "*Molyneux's Problem* deals with dreams of blind-born people: do they relate to visually based imagination? How do they sound? And how do narrative structures form in the dreams of people who never had eyesight and whose subconscious mind does not express itself in images? The title of the project is based on a philosophical question raised by the British natural philosopher William Molyneux from 1688 that addresses the issue of human cognition based on sightlessness: would a blind-born person, given the ability to see through surgery, be able to distinguish a cube from a sphere just by sight alone? Or must they be felt to be assigned correctly? Molyneux's problem is one of the several questions of perception theory and remains unsolved until today. The starting point of the project was a series of interviews which Katharina Schmitt conducted with people who were born without eyesight in 2016 in Vienna and in Prague. Based on this series of interviews and the resulting audio material, Katharina Schmitt wrote a text, whilst Michal Rataj created a composition, describing a darkroom in which a blind woman meets a man who is able to see. *Molyneux's Problem* deals with the confrontation between visuality and haptics, in a performance that initially denies its viewers visuality in a completely darkened space. The focus on haptics, sound and spatial tension enables us to question the superiority of the visual. How much does one see, when one sees? How much does one see, when one doesn't see anything?" Studio Hrdinů, 2019. *StudioHrdinu.cz*. Accessed on May 19th, 2020. <https://studiohrdinu.cz/en/production/english-molyneuxova-otazka/>

into sound, haptics and emotions. For my show, I am trying to create a concept that allows the spectators to create different kinds of images in their heads based on different sensual information they are presented with. I want the sensual information presented to the audience to gradually grow and evolve. During the first half of the show the information will be spatial, haptical and sonic, concentrating the audience members' attention on the space of the darkroom, its soft floor, the presence of the bodies of the other audience members and the performers, the voices and movement of the performers and the surround installation of Michal Rataj's composition. Gradually, visuality will be added; first in the form of short flashes of light in the darkroom, then through a snap-light lightstick used at the very end of the first half and later, in the second half the darkroom will open and allow the audience to experience a central perspective from which they will then watch rather than feel the performers perform.

Performance/ EIGEN+ART Lab

I plan to create two performative implementations of the project: the first at EIGEN+ART Lab in Berlin and the second at Studio Hrdinů in Prague. EIGEN+ART Lab is a project space of the EIGEN+ART Gallery in Berlin Mitte, a field for experimentation of contemporary artistic positions, mainly in the realm of visual arts. In 2017, I contact them with a proposal regarding *Molyneux's Problem*, which they accept. In Prague, I regularly work at the Studio Hrdinů theatre, which is based in the Fairtrade Palace (one of the buildings the Czech National Gallery), and dramaturgically focused on work between theatre and the visual arts - to them I propose to create a staging of *Molyneux's Problem*. In both cases, I plan to create a piece on blindness, perception and the question what makes an image - the first in a gallery - a space dedicated to seeing and visibility and the second in a theatre context. The performance piece for EIGEN+ART Lab is planned for November 2018 with two German speaking performers and the staging with Czech actors is to premiere in December 2018 at Studio Hrdinů. I am interested in exploring the different work modes and modes of spectatorship of the two different contexts.

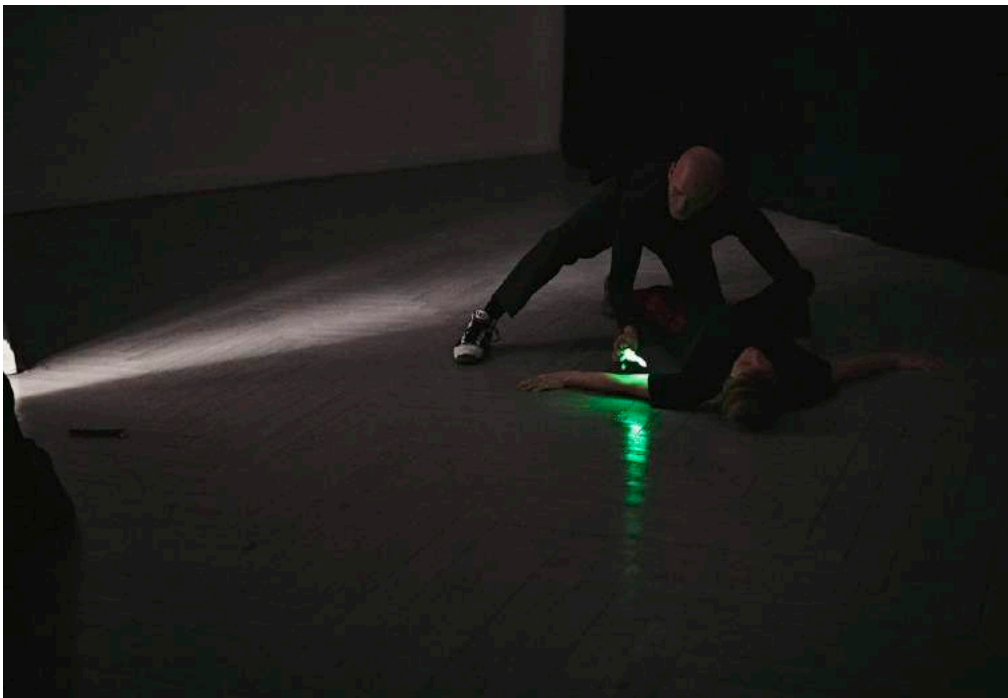
The performance piece is planned to happen in the empty spaces of EIGEN+ART Lab, it is going to have a clear beginning and end, whilst allowing

spectators to come and leave as they wish. The first half of the piece is going to happen in the dark and negate visibility, the second part is going to allow for images to emerge between the performers and be seen by the spectators. The Berlin piece is going to be based on my text and Michal Rataj's composition for *Molyneux's Problem*. The piece is not going to have any classical set, no division between audience space and performance space; instead, the space of the piece is going to be defined by Michal's music in a sound installation, through which our performers Jaschka Lämmert and Volker König are going to move.

I start working on the piece with Jaschka and Volker in the beginning of October 2018. Rehearsing for days with Michal's music, we try to create a structure of movements and situations for the piece. In this case, in contrast to my directorial practice in theatre, I don't try to create images with them that follow a linear logic or are based on their movements and actions in a set design, but rather focus on energetic exchange between the performers in the neutral setting of the empty gallery. We work for two weeks in a rehearsal space in Berlin Kreuzberg and for the last three days before the first show, we rehearse on site in the gallery in Berlin Mitte, where I simultaneously take care of the sound and light installation. There are no dressing rooms, no showers or other infrastructure for a performance piece and I realise that even for a piece as minimalistic as the one I am trying to create, working in between the visual arts and theatre can be challenging in a gallery space that isn't equipped for living artists and their physical needs.



Molyneux's Problem at EIGEN+ART Lab



Molyneux's Problem at EIGEN+ART Lab

We show the 40-minute-long piece four times at the beginning of November 2018 at EIGEN+ART Lab. The audience is made up mainly by people interested in contemporary visual arts. They arrive and leave at all times during the performance, some talk, some move around during the piece - in short, their behaviour makes sense in the framework of a gallery that mainly shows non-live art, but it makes some interactions between the performers and the audience more distant than a theatre setting would. The framing of the space lets some audience members behave as though they were faced with inanimate objects instead of live performers. This selective perception of the gallery crowd is striking to me - it seems as though our show and the physicality of our performers undermine the expectations of the spectators towards what they are confronted within the framework of a gallery space. Although the spatial setting is immersive and we work without any spatial division between performers and spectators, some interactions between performers and spectators are made more difficult by spectators which aren't prepared to acknowledge the fact that they are being confronted with living human beings instead of objects of art.

This makes Jaschka and Volker work harder, their voices become louder, their movements more concentrated and eventually many people in the audience end up connecting with the piece⁵⁸. During the darkness in the first half of the piece, the audience sits still, connecting to the music and the energetic exchange of Jaschka's and Volker's slow movements in the room.

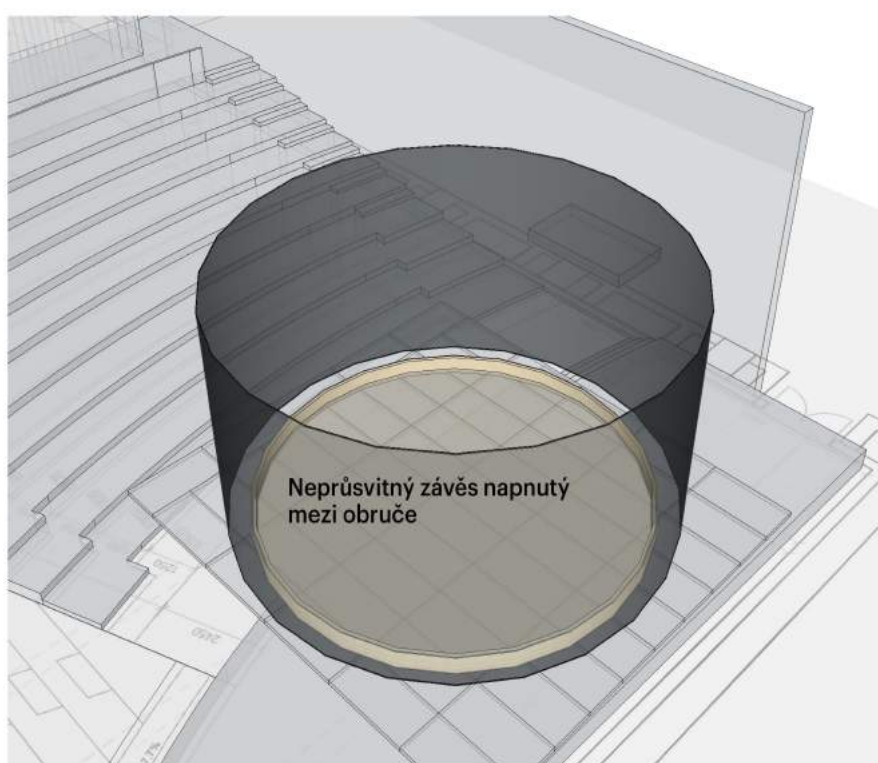
The Staging at Studio Hrdinů

After the shows in Berlin in early November 2018, I travel to Prague to start rehearsing the staging of *Molyneux's Problem* at the Studio Hrdinů in Prague with actors Pavlína Štorková and Jakub Gottwald. The huge concrete theatre space of the Studio Hrdinů was initially built as a cinema in the Czech Fairtrade Palace and does not possess a classical division into audience and stage

⁵⁸ Macháček Martin. "Ich, du und Dunkelheit" [online]. *Divadelni-noviny.cz*. January 20th, 2019. Accessed on January 15th, 2020. <https://www.divadelni-noviny.cz/ja-ty-a-temnota-ich-du-und-dunkelheit/>

space. Instead, the artistic teams working at the theatre have to come up with a spatial solution connected to their dramaturgical goals for each show they create. In early Autumn 2018, I had begun to work on a spatial concept together with set designer Pavel Svoboda, inspired by the basic geometrical shapes described in the letters between John Locke and William Molyneux - sphere and cube - for the concept of our set.

The cube is already present in the rectangular shape of the stage of the Studio Hrdinů theatre. We decide to create a round tube-shaped darkroom made of black cloth, reminiscent of a sphere in the middle of this rectangular space. This space is upholstered and big enough for around 80-90 people to lie or sit-down in. It also allows for absolute darkness in the first part of the staging. Michal Rataj and Pavel Svoboda create a concept for a surround sound installation of speakers placed around and inside the tube. We want the first thirty minutes of the show to take place in the space of the blind character - a space of darkness, voices, sounds, and energetic exchange.



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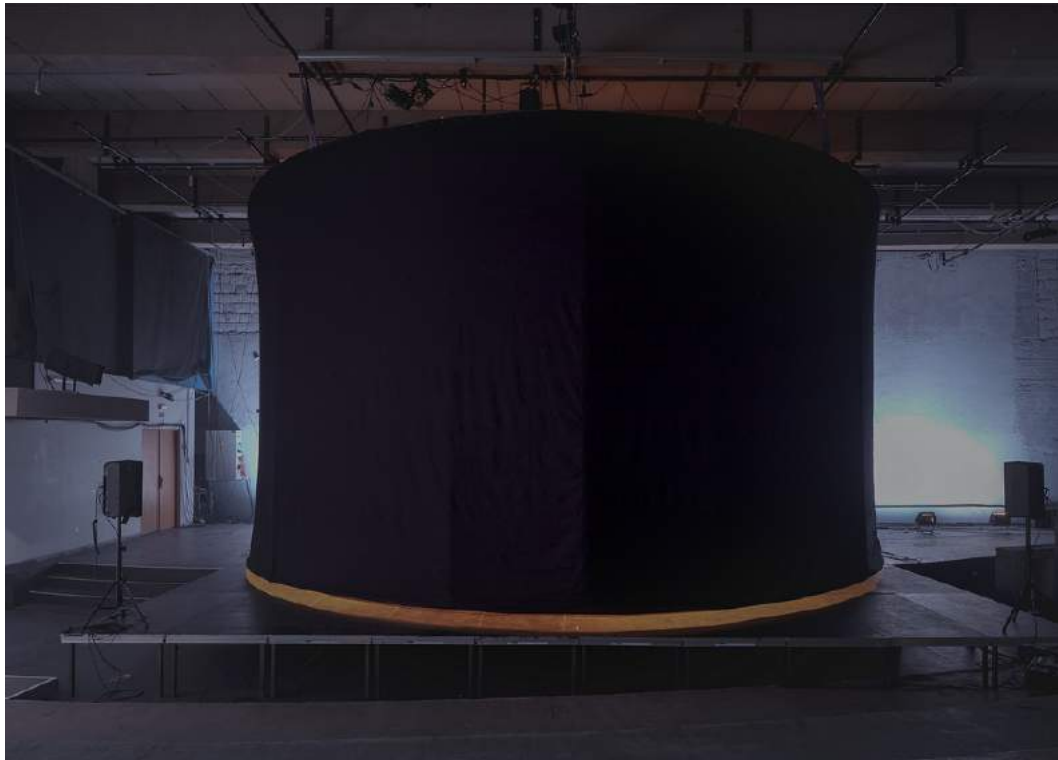
Actualizace: August 17, 2018

03 Závěs

Studio Hrdinů / Molyneuxova otázka / Režie: Katharina Schmitt / Scéna: Pavel Svoboda © 2018 / design:svoboda@gmail.com / 603 266 482

Molyneux's Problem, model for set at Studio Hrdinů by Pavel Svoboda, depicting "opaque curtain fastened between hoops"

Before the spectators are allowed to enter the space, my assistant Anna greets them and explains that the first part of the show is going to happen in the dark and that they can always turn to her, should they want to leave in the interim. The actors mix with the audience members when they enter the darkroom - they are not recognisable as performers. Once the show starts, the lights go out and wave-like sounds surround the darkroom, interrupted by loud beats. Pavlína and Jakub start speaking and moving through the darkness, a dialogue about perception develops. Metaphorically speaking, we are in the space of the blind character. There are only three short flashes of light during these first thirty minutes, each of them showing the two protagonists approaching each other physically, otherwise, there is only darkness, dialogue, and sounds to experience for the spectators. The protagonists debate perception, they explore the question of what makes an image an image and what creates attraction.



The finished darkroom set

At the end of the first scene, during the dialogue of the two characters, the darkroom opens like an eye and offers the audience a central perspective on

the vast concrete space of the Studio Hrdinů. The male character is happy to leave the darkness of the darkroom and runs outside, screaming with joy. The female, blind character follows him slowly and cautiously - she is lost in the space of visibility. The whole second part of the show takes part on the concrete stairs of Studio Hrdinů and asks its spectators to actively change their perspective and turn around. Some do, some don't and most of them need time for this switch from blindness to seeing. The dialogue about perception between the two characters turns into a conflict and the female character decides to leave. When she exits the stage, eyes appear everywhere around the male character. After that the set turns into a blurry grey, the lonely protagonist surrounded by a fading memory⁵⁹, reflecting on vision and darkness after having been exposed to the darkness the female protagonist lives in.

In their seminal book *Thinking in the Flesh*, cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that rational concepts are created as a result of the way the brain and the body are structured and the way they function in interpersonal relations and in the physical world:

We have inherited from the Western philosophical tradition a theory of faculty psychology, in which we have a `faculty` of reason that is separate from and independent of what we do with our bodies. In particular, reason is seen as independent of perception and bodily movement. In the Western tradition, this autonomous capacity of reason is regarded as what makes us essentially human, distinguishing us from all other animals. If reason were not autonomous, that is not independent of perception, motion, emotion and other bodily capacities, then the philosophical demarcation between us and all other animals

⁵⁹ Štefanová, Veronika. "Kolik vidíme, když vidíme? A kolik, když nic nevidíme?"[online]. *Vltava.rozhlas.cz*. November, 11th, 2018. Accessed on January 22nd, 2020. <https://vltava.rozhlas.cz/kolik-vidime-kdyz-vidime-a-kolik-kdyz-nic-nevidime-molyneuxova-otazka-ve-studiu-7701762/>

would be less clearly drawn. (...) The evidence from cognitive science shows that classical faculty psychology is wrong. There is no such fully autonomous faculty of reason separate from and independent of bodily capacities such as perception and movement. The evidence supports, instead, an evolutionary view, in which reason uses and grows out of such bodily capacities.⁶⁰

Inspired by Lakoff's and Johnson's studies on embodied cognition, I try to stage a space in *Molyneux's Problem* that allowed for a rational as well as physical process of reflection on the side of the spectators, an intertwining of body and mind, past and present. Stagings, that re-evaluate the visual and present their spectators with unusual perspectives and images, train the spectators capacity to recognise this interrelation of the physical and the rational that marks their very subjective perspective and perception. This training hopefully enables them to perceive the process of watching and viewing a piece of theatre as an act that they as spectators co-create, an act that implies not only a capacity of perception, but also a capacity of (re)action.

Playing Molyneux's Problem

Molyneux's Problem premieres in December 2018 and is still on the repertoire of Studio Hrdinů today, as I am writing this in December 2020. The stage is designed for a maximum of 80 audience members and on average, the show is visited by 40-50 people. So far, there have been 18 shows of the Prague staging, with more planned for 2021. The premiere is filled with friends and colleagues, who know about my research and are curious to witness the aesthetic experiment we created in our staged darkroom. I am aware of the fact that premiere audiences are usually quite specific and wonder how a less well-informed audience will react to the sensory deprivation at the core of the staging?

⁶⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh*. Basic Books, New York, 1999, p. 17.

During the two years *Molyneux's Problem* is on the repertoire of Studio Hrdinů, I speak to numerous audience members after the shows. Some report that they were a little anxious about sitting in the dark at first, but then enjoyed the sensory deprivation and the concentration it allows for. Several blind and visually impaired people come to see *Molyneux's Problem*, their feedback is also positive. For example, Jakub Kamborský, a blind publicist and dramaturg, described the staging, in a conversation we have after he saw the show, as "one of the more sensitive attempts of a group of sighted artists to enter the realm of non-visibility". Some audience members say they wish the darkness would have lasted longer. They describe the fact of being deprived of visual stimuli as a pleasurable experience, many say that they strongly reacted to the spatial and musical dramaturgy and that images started emerging in their thoughts as a reaction. Dramaturg Ole Graf told me, after having seen the show, that "the creation of different spaces - in a dimensional meaning of 'space' - in Molyneux's Problem made exploring different modes of perception possible in a very concrete, sensual way". Many audience members describe that they enjoyed the concentration on music, space and their bodies in the darkroom set. For two years, not one audience member leaves during a show. On the contrary: quite often, after the show ends, people don't leave the upholstered darkroom space immediately: they like to stay sitting or lying and look at the space, experiencing it in a new, a different light. Several audience members describe an experience of deep calm in the darkness of our set, some fall asleep, some react with sharpened concentration to the fact that they are not confronted with any kind of visual distraction.



Molyneux's Problem



A blind and a seeing character approaching each other in *Molyneux's Problem*



Molyneux's Problem, the moment the darkroom opens



Molyneux's Problem



Molyneux's Problem



Molyneux's Problem



*Molyneux's Problem*⁶¹

⁶¹ All captions of *Molyneux's Problem* © Peter Fabo.

V. Conclusion

In this study I have examined different directorial attempts at re-evaluating the relationship between perspective, visibility, and bodies in theatre today. Based on the analysis of two of my own stagings - *No Man* and *Molyneux's Problem* - as well as on three stagings by other directors - Romeo Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* and Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd*, my research relied on transdisciplinary approaches formulated in the field of artistic research, interweaving theoretical analysis with my own artistic practice and its results.

The starting point of my research was a question about the nature of the artistic image in theatre in a time marked on the one hand by acts of iconoclastic brutality in the very beginning of the 21st century and on the other hand by an omnipresence of everchanging images in virtual media. Relying on Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in which he analysed a similar question sparked by the potency of the then-new mass media film and photography, I examined the relationship of distance, perspective and bodies in theatre in the second chapter of this study. I investigated the terms "perspective", "icon" and "iconoclasm" to analyse how stagings of iconoclasms and staged changes of perspective make the visual in theatre less self-evident and more visible, allowing spectators to reflect actively what they see.

In the third chapter of this study, I examined three examples of stagings that re-evaluate the visual in theatre by questioning the theatre portal as the basic frame for viewing, whilst exploring the spectators' spatial perspective towards the depicted: Romeo Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* and Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd*. *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* follows a changing icon through time, its power fading in front of the audience, laying bare new meanings through and in the depiction of its destruction. *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* exhibits the production of

the pop-cultural iconic through movement, through a 3-D space and new perspectives, physical closeness and repetition. *Crowd* is a homage to the Berlin club scene of the 1990s, presenting its sitting audience with transgressive group experiences as a possible source of violence and beauty and the connection of the iconic and the banal.

I argued that all three shows confront their spectators with new ways of looking at known images and situations (the divine and the notion of the father, on iconic pop-cultural imagery, on transgression in the framework of a rave party) and that in addition, especially in Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement*, the act of viewing is marked as an act implying an inherently subjective perspective: depending on where one stands, one sees different things than the other spectators present. Spectatorship in these shows is reinforced as an active presence with a potentiality of reaction - spectators are made aware of their own presence in the space of the show, they are part of the situation that is created, they engage with it, thus they co-create it, thus they can change it. The directorial strategies employed by Castellucci, Pirici, and Vienne are attempts at introducing the visual under different circumstances and to create something hitherto unseen. This quality of the hitherto unseen is strongly linked to a temporal slowing down of images. All three stagings allow their spectators to spend more time with the images evolving in front of their eyes than they would in real life.

The artistic research section in the fourth chapter started by investigating extremes of reduction and re-evaluation of visual representation in theatre, exploring possibilities of a degree zero of scenic visibility in my own staged works *No Man* and *Molyneux's Problem*, also describing their inception and the practical research it was connected to. It ends by acknowledging the undeniably visual nature of the medium. Having directed a show that staged an iconoclasm and a show staged for a long time in the dark, I learned that every refusal of imagery breeds new images. Theatre, the place for viewing, is an image and a situation machine, creating new images from the debris of old ones. These new images and the spectator's reactions to them can only partially be anticipated. Having shown these two staged works in a gallery in

Berlin, a studio theatre in Prague and state Theatres in Prague and in Bremen, I maintain that shows that attempt a re-evaluation of the visual have a potential of creating a communal context of re-evaluation and connection of old and new, seen and hitherto unseen. Based on my experience, state and studio theatres seem to be better at evoking this kind of communal context than the sphere of the visual arts, as the audience's expectations in state and studio theatres prepares them for a communal exchange between performers and spectators.

Returning to the initial question of this study "What makes an image an artistic image in theatre today?", based on the five stagings discussed here and relying on Benjamin's notion of the aura - a quality based on distance and weakened by the possibilities of reproduction of the work of art - I maintain that shows that re-evaluate the visual in theatre offer unknown spatial, perceptual and metaphorical perspectives on well-known, reproducible or even banal images. They thus lay bare something new, manifested in the social and the temporal component of the experience, in unexpected time frames and perspectives. In these shows, the process of looking at well-known imagery differently is made into an experience, shared by the bodies of the audience members and the performers alike in situations that ask the spectators to reflect their own, unique perspective of viewing and in doing that their way of looking at the world.

The aspect of time plays a key role in this process. In the here discussed stagings staged images are slowed down thus letting them speak to the audience in unexpected ways. An image in theatre can be slowed down to the extreme (as described, for example, in chapter three in relation to the dancers' movements in Gisèle Vienne's show *Crowd*, the iconic pop-cultural images in Alexandra Pirici's *Delicate Instruments of Engagement* or the image of Jesus in Rome Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, deconstructed through and over time in front of the eyes of the spectators). The directorial means of decelerated visual representation allows for a gradual unfolding of layers of meaning of staged images. This makes it possible for the spectator to experience staged images directly and slowly, thus creating a counterbalance against the high tempo of interaction with the visual experienced

by the spectators in everyday life. New layers of meaning of staged images are created by staging changes of perspective and staging iconoclasm. Similarly, a slowing down of staged images can reveal unknown aspects and function as a metaphorical iconoclasm or change in perspective through the means of time spent with an image. Another strategy of re-evaluating the visual are attempts at withholding visibility (as demonstrated in the first part of the staging of *Molyneux's Problem* staged in absolute darkness). These strategies are attempts of redefining and reimagining the visual in theatre in an active dialogue with the audience.

In a cultural moment of never-ending and omnipresent imagery, theatre can create a space of counterbalance by offering communication with the visual through changes of the visual field, staged iconoclasm, attempts at withholding imagery and through a slowing down of images. Stagings that re-evaluate the visual in theatre create a counterpoint to virtual visual distraction manoeuvres by creating communal visual concentration manoeuvres. This is not a universal answer to my initial question, there are different ways of re-evaluating the visual in theatre than the ones I analysed here. But it is my personal answer as an artist working in theatre today and based on the research I documented in this study. Not a general rule, but a plea for slowness in communicating with and through the visual in theatre, creating a rare communal concentration theatre can offer.

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Ethical Principles of the Research

The respondents who provided interviews and gave statements within the artistic research conducted for this dissertation agreed to be part of this artistic research project, as well as with the publication of their interviews and statements within this dissertation.

Appendix

This appendix documents the texts and stagings of *No Man* and *Molyneux's Problem*. *Molyneux's Problem* was originally written in German, my mother tongue. The German version is also the one I chose to include in this appendix as the subjunctive mood (*Konjunktiv 1*) I used to indicate the male character's distance towards what he describes functions best in German. Alternatively, a Czech translation can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S3j35oC50ulr07pUTES9_8mK_NXo52gl/view?usp=sharing (Czech translation by Viktorie Knotková)

The excerpt from the libretto of *No Man* documents the end of the first act of the opera, the demolition of the Stalin sculpture and thus the beginning of the staged iconoclasm at the show's centre.

A simple work video recording of the staging of *Molyneux's Problem* at Studio Hrdinů can be found here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1-iejfYTlseEgSvbUKgbr0lu3BhtOIG7m>.

A video recording of the staging of *No Man* at the Prague National Theatre can be found here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_5CY4ZbeoKAID2nXOaUq_2d7GbX-NRpi/view?usp=sharing. This recording was directed by Radim Filipец and is sold by the Prague National Theatre as a DVD – please only use it in the framework of reading this study. The recording was directed in a realistic style, working with many close up shots and mostly a central spatial perspective - it thus offers a classical video documentation of the staging.

1.

Text of the Play *Molyneux's Problem*

Katharina Schmitt - Das Molyneux Problem

Eine blinde Frau und ein sehender Mann einem Darkroom.

1.

BLINDE: Angenommen: Ein erwachsener, blind geborener Mann, der gelernt hat, mit seinem Tastsinn zwischen einem Würfel und einer Kugel aus demselben Metall und nahezu gleicher Größe zu unterscheiden, und der mitteilen kann, wenn er den einen oder die andere betastet hat, welches der Würfel und welches die Kugel ist. Angenommen nun, Würfel und Kugel seien auf einem Tisch platziert, und der Mann sei sehüchtig geworden. Die Frage ist: Ob er in der Lage ist, durch seinen Sehsinn, bevor er diese Gegenstände berührt hat, sie zu unterscheiden, und mitteilen kann, welches die Kugel und welches der Würfel ist? Wenn der gelehrte und geniale Autor des Versuchs über den menschlichen Verstand denkt, dieses Problem sei der Beachtung und Antwort würdig, möge er die Antwort zu jeder Zeit weiterleiten an jemanden der ihn sehr wertschätzt und Sein untertänigster Diener ist. William Molyneux High Ormonds Gate in Dublin, Irland an John Locke, Juli 1688.

Dass sie mich nicht sehen müsse, um mit mir sprechen zu wollen.

Dass ich näher kommen solle.

Die Musik sei zu laut.

Mein Flüstern zu leise.

Schlafprobleme von Blinden seien eine Tatsache.

Sie sei ohne Augen auf die Welt gekommen.

Anophtalmie: das angeborene Fehlen der Augen.

Ihr Körper nehme Melatonin nicht adäquat auf.

Dadurch resultierten Störungen der so genannten inneren Uhr.

Sie schliefe zu unterschiedlichsten Zeiten ein.

Wie ich schliefe.

SEHENDER: Dazu könne ich nichts sagen.
Wenn ich schlief, schlief ich.

BLINDE: Ob ich müde würde im Dunkeln.

SEHENDER: Im Moment sei ich wach.

BLINDE: Sie könne den Unterschied zwischen Hell und Dunkel kaum erkennen.

Wenig Lichtgefühl.

Nur eine ungefähre Ahnung, wann Tag sei, wann Nacht.

Nachts sei es kälter, alles klinge anders.

Sie orientiere sich anhand von Raumklang.

Wenn es laut sei, sei sie orientierungslos.

Auch Schnee schlucke alle Geräusche.

Wie meine Träume aussähen.

Ihre Träume hätten kein Aussehen.

SEHENDER: Dass ich mir Träume ohne Aussehen nicht vorstellen könne.
Dass ich mir im Grunde nichts ohne Aussehen vorstellen könne.

BLINDE: Was ich dann in einem Darkroom suche.

SEHENDER: Selbst dazu könne ich wenig sagen.
Nichts.

BLINDE: Nichts sei im Grunde auch der Grund ihres Hierseins.

Ich solle näher kommen.

Ich könne dabei auch etwas ausziehen.

SEHENDER: Dass ich ihr nah genug sei, um zuzuhören.

BLINDE: Dass ich nicht wissen könne, was nah sei und was zu weit entfernt.
Dass es Menschen gäbe mit schöner Stimme und kleinem Körper.

Ich aber sei groß.

Das habe sie sofort bemerkt.

Sie müsse näher kommen.

SEHENDER: Dass ich nicht mehr viel anhabe.

BLINDE: Ob ich ihr meinen Arm reichen wolle.

SEHENDER: Ich wolle ihr meinen Arm reichen.

BLINDE: Sie könne versuchen, mir Träume ohne Aussehen zu beschreiben.

Ihr Körper befinde sich dabei in einem Zustand äußerer Ruhe.

SEHENDER: Meine Hand.

BLINDE: Sie träume mit den Sinnen, die sie auch sonst zur Verfügung habe.

SEHENDER: Meinen anderen Arm.

Meinen Rumpf und Beine.

BLINDE: Dass sie an einer Kreuzung stehe, als Kind an der Hand ihres Vaters.

Diese Hand dann plötzlich verschwinde.

Dass sie in der U-Bahn sitze und aus dem Fenster des
fahrenden Wagens falle.

Dass das Ende einer Rolltreppe sie verschlucke.

Dass sie unter einer Turnbank durchklettere und steckenbliebe.

Dass jemand aus hundert Meter Entfernung mit einer
Pistole auf sie ziele.

SEHENDER: Woher sie das wisse, wenn sie ihn nicht sähe?

BLINDE: Dass sie es wisse.

Sie sähe die Person nicht, sie könne sie nicht beschreiben.

Sie wisse aber von ihrer Anwesenheit.

Sie spüre die auf sie gerichtete Pistole.
Jemand wolle sie erschießen.
Sie träume vom Schach.
Von der Frage, welchen der beiden Türme sie nach der Rochade in die Mitte ziehen solle.
Im Traum komme sie zu keiner Lösung dieser Frage.
Sie träume, dass sie tauche.
Unter Wasser seien freie Bewegungen in alle Richtungen möglich.
Auch über Wasser sei sie frei, sie könne schnell laufen.
Im Traum bewege sie sich ohne Hilfe, sie stolpere nicht.
Sie fliege sogar.
Dass sie dabei die Welt aus großer Entfernung höre.
Dass sie an der Kante eines Bahnsteigs liege und herunterfalle.
Ob ich ihr hoch helfen wolle.

SEHENDER: Ich wolle.

BLINDE: Sie träume vom Ersticken.
Dass sie sich selbst an die Gurgel greife.
Sie träume, dass die ihr bekannten Wege sich immer weiter verwinkelten.
Dass sie sich nur mit Mühe und langsam bewege.
Sie verlaufe sich in einem immer größer werdenden Haus.
Ob mir das auch passiere?

SEHENDER: Dass ich mich nicht nur im Traum, sondern auch im Leben verlaufe.
Woher sie wisse, wo sie sei im Traum, wenn sie es wisse?

BLINDE: Dass sie es wisse.
Dass alle Räume anders klängen.
Dass in allen Räumen andere Menschen und Dinge stünden.
Alles, was sie anfassen könne, könne sie erkennen.
Bei großen oder entfernten Dingen sei das anders.

Sie könne keine Wolke berühren.

SEHENDER: Ich sei keine Wolke.

Ich legte mich jetzt hin.

BLINDE: Dass auch sie sich jetzt hinlegte.

Dass sie die Geräusche der anderen Leute hier erst gestört haben;
sie sie inzwischen kaum mehr wahrnehme.

SEHENDER: Dass auch ich nur noch sie höre.

Der anfängliche Lärm im Darkroom sei zu einem Rauschen
geworden. Dass die Erfassung von Reizen über in der Haut
liegende Rezeptoren ermögliche, Berührungen, Druck, Temperatur
und Schmerz zu empfinden.

BLINDE: Dass ihre Oberflächensensibilität gut ausgeprägt sei, besser
wahrscheinlich, als meine, da ich sie als Sehender vernachlässigte.

SEHENDER: Dass die taktile Wahrnehmung bei Menschen und anderen
Säugetieren durch Mechanorezeptoren in der Haut ermöglicht
würde.

BLINDE: Dass dazu die sogenannten Merkel-Zellen zählten.

SEHENDER: Ruffini-, Meissner- und Vater-Pacini-Körperchen, deren
Informationen über Nervenfasern in das zentrale Nervensystem
geleitet würden. Dass der mechanische Anteil der
Oberflächensensibilität Tastsinn heiße, wobei die passive
Wahrnehmung als taktil, die aktive als haptisch bezeichnet werde.

BLINDE: Dass sie eine Vorliebe habe für aktive Wahrnehmung.

SEHENDER: Aktive Wahrnehmung sei auch eine meiner Vorlieben.

BLINDE: Dass sich ihr die Vergangenheit allerdings in Träumen als passive, als graue Zeit darstelle.

SEHENDER: Dass sie nicht wissen könne, was grau sei.

BLINDE: Dass sie sicher wisse, was Vergangenheit sei.
Sie erinnere sich an den Fall der Berliner Mauer.
Sie erinnere sich sogar an die die Reaktorkatastrophe in Tschernobyl.
Diese sei ihre erste Erinnerung.
Sie erinnere sich an alles genau.
Die Erinnerung sei grau.
Sie könne nur in der Gegenwart aktiv handeln.
Ob ich mich umdrehen möge.
Sie brauche Hilfe mit einem Häkchen am Rücken.

SEHENDER: Ich sei geübt im Enthaken.
Die Vergangenheit sei auch für Sehende oft trüb.

BLINDE: Sie erinnere sich an den Klang und Geruch ihrer Kindheit.
Sowieso habe jede Epoche einen anderen Klang.
Was natürlich auch an den Mikrofonen liege.
Das Jahr 1986 klinge anders als das Jahr 1989.
Erinnerungen aber seien klare Erinnerungen, auch im Traum.
Ob ich schon einmal geträumt habe, ich sei blind.

SEHENDER: Dass ich das nie geträumt habe.
Dass ich keinerlei Bild habe von ihren Bildern.
Keine Vorstellungen von ihren Vorstellungen oder Träumen.
Jetzt sei das Häkchen enthakt.

BLINDE: Sie träume auch nie davon, zu sehen.
Sie träume von Wänden, die aus ihrer Wohnung herausgerissen werden.

Von Operationen am Hirn.

Sie sei dabei wach und mit offener Kopfdecke.

Sie träume, dass sich vor ihren Fü. en ein Loch im Boden auftue.

Dass sie die Strasse, in der sie wohne, nicht finde.

Sie träume nie davon, zu sehen.

Ob ich lieber oben oder unten sein wolle.

SEHENDER: Dass sie entscheiden solle.

Ob sie weiche oder feste Berührungen bevorzuge.

BLINDE: Dass ihr ein fester Griff das liebste sei.

SEHENDER: Auch ich bevorzuge einen festen Griff.

Vor allem im Dunkel sei er eine verlässliche Sicherheit.

Was sie glaube:

Angenommen, ein von Geburt an blinder Mensch erhielte die Fähigkeit zu sehen, wäre er dann in der Lage, Würfel und Kugel durch das bloße Betrachten voneinander zu unterscheiden? Könnte er Würfel und Kugel bereits durch seinen Tastsinn unterscheiden?

BLINDE: Das Molyneux Problem.

SEHENDER: Das Molyneux Problem.

BLINDE: Das Molyneux Problem sei nicht ihr Problem.

Der feste Griff erlaube ihr, alles zu erkennen.

Sie sei im Allgemeinen lieber oben.

SEHENDER: Dass mich dennoch interessiere, was sie glaube.

Könnte sie Würfel und Kugel durch bloßes Betrachten voneinander unterscheiden, falls sie zu bloßem Betrachten plötzlich in der Lage sei?

BLINDE: Sie glaube, sie wisse, was sie in der Hand habe.

SEHENDER: Dass sie mich nicht sehen könne.

BLINDE: Dass sie eine Hand habe.

Dass auch ich sie nicht sehen könne.

Was also ich glaube, mit meiner Hand?

Könnte ich Würfel und Kugel durch bloßes Betrachten voneinander unterscheiden, falls ich zu bloßem Betrachten plötzlich in der Lage?

SEHENDER: Dass ich Umrisse wahrnehme, selbst hier.

Dass sie weder Würfel, noch Kugel sei, sei auch im Dunkeln erkennbar.

2.

Sieh.

Seht.

Sehen Sie.

Ich sehe.

Du siehst.

Sie sieht.

Sie sah.

Sie wird sehen.

Sie werde sehen.

Sie sähe.

Gesehen haben.

Gesehen werden.

Gesehen worden sein.

Gesehen sein.

Gesehen gewesen sein.

Sie sieht.

Sie sehe.

Sie wird gesehen.

Sie werde gesehen.
Sie ist gesehen.
Sie sei gesehen.
Sie sah.
Sie sähe.
Sie wurde gesehen.
Sie würde gesehen.
Sie war gesehen.
Sie wäre gesehen.
Sie hat gesehen.
Sie habe gesehen,
Sie ist gesehen worden.
Sie sei gesehen worden.
Sie ist gesehen gewesen.
Sie sei gesehen gewesen.
Sie hatte gesehen.
Sie hätte gesehen.
Sie war gesehen worden.
Sie wäre gesehen worden.
Sie war gesehen gewesen.
Sie wäre gesehen gewesen.
Sie wird sehen.
Sie werde sehen.
Sie würde sehen.
Sie wird gesehen werden.
Sie werde gesehen werden.
Sie würde gesehen werden.
Sie wird gesehen sein.
Sie werde gesehen sein.
Sie würde gesehen sein.
Sie wird gesehen haben.
Sie werde gesehen haben.
Sie würde gesehen haben.
Sie wird gesehen worden sein.

Sie werde gesehen worden sein.
Sie würde gesehen worden sein.
Sie wird gesehen gewesen sein.
Sie werde gesehen gewesen sein.
Sie würde gesehen gewesen sein.
Sie sähe.
Sie sähe.
Sie würde gesehen haben.
Vidět.
Být vidět.
Vidět se.
Uvidět.
Vidouc.
Viděvši.
Uviděvši.
Viděla.
Viděla by.
Byla viděla.
Uviděla by.
Viděla se.
Viděla by se.
Že by se viděla.
Že by se uviděla.
Byla viděna.
Byla by viděna.
Že byla viděna.
Že by byla uviděna.
Byla viděla.
Byla by viděla.
Že byla bývala viděla.
Že by se bývala byla uviděla.
Je viděna.
Je vidět.
Bude viděna.

Bude vidět.

Uvidí.

Vidí.

Že vidí.

Že se uvidí.

3.

SEHENDER: Man stelle sich nämlich einen blindgeborenen Mann vor, der erwachsen ist und durch sein Gefühl einen Würfel und eine Kugel von demselben Metall und ohngefähr derselben Größe zu unterscheiden gelernt hat, so dass er angeben kann, ob er die Kugel oder den Würfel fühle. Nun nehme man an, beide würden auf einen Tisch gelegt, und der Blinde erhalte sein Gesicht; hier fragt es sich nun, ob er, ehe er die Kugeln befühlte, sagen kann, welches der Würfel und welches die Kugel sei? Der scharfsinnige Fragesteller sagt: Nein. Der Mann wisse zwar aus Erfahrung, wie sich eine Kugel und wie ein Würfel anfühle, allein er wisse noch nicht aus Erfahrung, ob das, was sein Gefühl so oder so errege, auch sein Gesicht so oder so erregen müsse, und dass eine vorstehende Ecke in dem Würfel, die seine Hand ungleich drückte, seinem Auge so erscheinen müsse, wie es bei einem Würfel geschehe. Ich stimme diesem scharfsinnigen Herrn, den ich stolz bin, meinen Freund zu nennen, darin bei, und glaube, dass der blinde Mann bei dem ersten bloßen Sehen nicht mit Bestimmtheit wird angeben können, welches die Kugel und welches der Würfel ist, wenn er auch nach seinem Gefühl sie sicher bezeichnen, und mit Bestimmtheit nach diesem Sinne ihre Gestalten unterscheiden kann. John Locke, 1693.

Angenommen, sie erhielte plötzlich die Fähigkeit, zu sehen, wäre sie dann in der Lage, Würfel und Kugel durch bloßes Betrachten voneinander zu unterscheiden?

BLINDE: Dass ich mich schneller bewegen solle.
Mein fester Griff könne noch fester sein.

SEHENDER: Dass ich mich erst schneller bewegen werde, wenn sie antworte.

BLINDE: Sie sei immer in der Lage, Würfel und Kugel voneinander zu unterscheiden.

SEHENDER: Ob nicht Sehen ein Lernprozess sei.

BLINDE: Geometrie sei auch ohne bildliche Vorstellung zu verstehen.
Geometrie sei ein abstraktes Konzept.

SEHENDER: Ob nicht Bilder durch Lernen entstünden.

BLINDE: Für sie habe der Übergang zwischen Tag und Nacht immer so wenig eine Rolle gespielt wie der Unterschied zwischen Zaun und Mauer.

Ihre Bilder habe sie anders gelernt als ich meine.
Was ich gerade sähe.

SEHENDER: Dass ich wenig sähe.
Dass meine Augen geschlossen seien.
Ob mein fester Griff fest genug sei.

BLINDE: Er sei fest genug.

SEHENDER: Ob er fest genug sei.

BLINDE: Er sei fest genug.

SEHENDER: Dass ich mich nicht noch schneller bewegen wolle.

BLINDE: Dass ich mich schnell genug bewege.
Ihre Bilder seien ohne bildliche Anleitung entstanden.
Dass sie sicher wisse, was sie nicht sähe.
Dass sie nicht mehr tun könne, als mir diese Bilder zu beschreiben.
Dass ich nicht mehr tun könne, als sie ihr zu glauben.

SEHENDER: Dass ich ihr glaube.

BLINDE: Dass auch ihre Augen jetzt geschlossen seien.
Sie wolle sich jetzt gar nicht mehr bewegen.
Sie wolle für einen Moment bewegungslos daliegen.
Ich solle dies nicht persönlich nehmen.
Sie schliefe nicht ein.

SEHENDER: Dass ich nichts persönlich nähme.
Dass auch ich nicht vorhabe, einzuschlafen.

BLINDE: Sie sehe nichts.
Sie spüre meinen Arm.
Dass das ein Bild sei.

SEHENDER: Dass auch ich ihren Arm spüre.

BLINDE: Sie spüre einen Arm.
Sie spüre eine Hand.
Sie stehe an einer Kreuzung, als Kind an der Hand ihres Vaters.
Diese Hand verschwände plötzlich.
Sie sitze in der U-Bahn.
Sie falle aus dem Fenster des fahrenden Wagens.
Sie stecke unter einer Turnbank fest.
Das Ende einer Rolltreppe verschlucke sie.
Jemand ziele aus hundert Meter Entfernung mit einer Pistole auf
ihren Kopf.
Die Wände ihrer Wohnung würden herausgerissen.

Die Wohnung falle über ihr in sich zusammen.
Man operiere sie am Gehirn, ihre Kopfdecke sei offen.
Sie könne dabei noch mit mir sprechen.
Vor ihren Füßen tue sich ein Loch im Boden auf.
Jemand fasse ihr an die Gurgel.
Dieser jemand sei nicht sie selbst.
Sie liege in einem Darkroom neben einem sehenden Mann und
beschreibe ihm ihre Träume.
Der Mann halte sie fest umschlungen.
Sein Griff sei so fest, dass sie nur noch schlecht Luft bekomme.
Dass dieser feste Griff ihr angenehm sei.
Dass sie all das sicher wisse.
Was ich gerade sähe.

SEHENDER: Dass ich nichts sähe.
Dass es zu dunkel sei.
Dass ich meine Augen geschlossen habe.

BLINDE: Dass ich sie wieder öffnen solle.
Dass ich genau hinsehen solle.
Sie verschwinde gleich.
Dass ich ihr Verschwinden beobachten solle.
Dass ich sie sehen solle.
Die Lichtverhältnisse seien Nebensache.

2.

Excerpt of the libretto of *Žádný člověk/No Man*

This excerpt from the libretto of *No Man* documents the end of the first act of the opera, the demolition of the Stalin sculpture and thus the beginning of the staged iconoclasm at the show's centre.

Katharina Schmitt/Lukáš Jiříčka - *Žádný člověk/No Man*, libretto

1.

(...)

Voice-over:

Státní notářství projednává dědictví po Otakaru Švecovi, akademickém sochaři, který ve své závěti ustanovil ve válce osleplé vojíny dědicem valné části svého majetku a mimo jiné i zbytku odměny za Stalinův pomník. Zbytek honoráře za práce na pomníku generalissima J.V. Stalina v Praze činí šedesátdvatisíceosmset korun.

Švecová jako duch:

Dílo Otakara Švece.

Švec jako duch:

Dílo československého lidu.

Zmizel jsem.

Všechny své peníze odkazuji osleplým vojákům.

Slepí jsou šťastní.

Nikdy už neuvidí nic.

Hlas ze skupiny:

Již v průběhu XX. sjezdu jsme se vraceli k našim dřívějším úvahám, co bude třeba dělat se Stalinovým pomníkem. Stalinův pomník je daní kultu osobnosti. Svou bombastičností, která je nám cizí, především hlavní postavou je v rozporu jak se vřelostí a upřímností, tak s čistotou bratrských vztahů mezi naším a sovětským lidem. Odporuje politickému přesvědčení naší strany. Je

v rozporu i s tradicemi našeho lidu i s krásou Prahy. Žádáme komisi ze stranických a veřejných pracovníků, z architektů a výtvarníků, aby předložila návrhy na využití místa, kde stojí Stalinův pomník. Samozřejmě nic bombastického už víckrát nepřipustíme.

Jeden hlas ze skupiny:

Stalinův kult byl i u nás překonán na XX. sjezdu.

Sbor:

Náhlé uvolnění energie. Prudké lokální zvýšení teploty a tlaku. Šíří se do okolí jako rázová vlna. Výbuch.

Skupina:

Pomáhá nám v této otázce odborník, referent Dr. Kokeš. Dr. Kokeš řídí destrukci Stalinova pomníku. Plánujeme tichý výbuch. Nikdo si nevšimne zmizení sochy.

Sbor:

Náhlé uvolnění energie. Prudké lokální zvýšení teploty a tlaku. Šíří se do okolí jako rázová vlna. Výbuch.

Skupina:

Bude prováděn odstřel materiálu. Znamení k odstřelu bude dáváno vždy výstražným výstřelem a to 15 minut před odpálením bude vystřelna jedna výstražná rána, 5 minut před odpálením dvě rány a 1 minutu před odpálením tři výstražné poplachové rány. Po první poplachové ráně se musí všichni pracovníci, kteří jsou v místnostech obrácených směrem k pomníku odebrat do jiné místnosti, která je bezpečná.

Dr. Kokeš:

15 minut před odstřelem – jeden kolísavý tón. 5 minut před odstřelem – dva kolísavé tóny. Na toto znamení nesmí se již v okruhu odstřelu nikdo zdržovat a každý musí být v bezpečném úkrytu. 1 minutu před odstřelem – tři kolísavé tóny. Následuje tichý výbuch. Konec odstřelu – jeden stejnoměrný dlouhý tón.

Skupina:

Nemilosrdná opatření jsou nezbytná, aby se světový komunismus výrazně očistil od těchto metod.

Slyšíme jeden kolísavý tón, dva kolísavé tóny, tři kolísavé tóny a pak tichý výbuch.