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**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Devising Selves Through Chaotic Performance  
Explorations in Radical Blackness**

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DIRECTING FOR DEVISED AND OBJECT THEATRE

**DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE**

**Naše Sdílené Já v Chaosu Performance  
Prozkoumávání Radikálního Černošského**

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### **Declaration**

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

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

Prague, date:

Signature of the candidate

### **Warning**

The use and public application of the findings of this thesis or any other treatment thereof are permissible only on the basis of a licensing contract, i.e. the consent of the author and of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

This thesis details the explorations and developments of my personal dramaturgy and performance form. The balancing of interpersonal and emotional materials; searching for connections between performers and the audience. Taking the elements from each person to add to a dramaturgy of performance that pulls from individual stimuli but works as a collective for the performance.

Acknowledging the difference of personal history and perspective but finding a way to meet for conversations. The dramaturgy of connection, and acceptance of difference. From rehearsal moments, artistic inspirations, and outside stimuli; that all led to the form of art that is currently being developed and shown. In this thesis I explore several performances that inspired the development of my personal performative structure.

Throughout this thesis I also go into the differences in the world of American theatre performance and education that I came from before my studies in Prague. Exploring the differences in what is expected from the artist/performer and what is being explored. In this exploration there is also the examination of cultural difference and personal identity. Going through a variety of question that come from learning a new form of devising and dramaturgy in a foreign country and the cultural, historical, and racial expectations and impulses that exist throughout this process.

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá vývoj mého přístupu k dramaturgii a umělecké tvorbě. Zabývá se principy jako je balancování na hraně mezilidských a emocionálních materiálů, hledání spojení mezi performery a diváky, využívání konkrétních osobních podnětů jednotlivých performerů, jež v rámci performance fungují kolektivně, jako jednodílná dramaturgie. Práce se dále zabývá možným dialogem se spolutvůrci i přes rozdílné perspektivy a životní přístupy –přijetím rozdílů a „společnou dramaturgií“. Popisuje proces, který začíná u inspirace a přes zkoušení a další fáze a podněty vede k takové formě díla, která je ve výsledku k vidění. V této diplomové práci zkoumám několik performance, které mě inspirovaly v mém osobním rozvoji a umělecké tvorbě.

V rámci této práce se věnuji také rozdílům mezi americkým performativním divadlem, mými znalostmi z předchozího studia a mým pražským studiem. Zajímám se o spor mezi tím, co je od umělce/performera očekáváno a tím, co tvoří, přičemž i zde navazuji na výzkum ohledně rozdílů kulturních i osobnostních. Věnuji se mnoha otázkám, které se během studia devise theatre a jeho dramaturgie v cizí zemi vynořily včetně kulturních, historických a rasových předpokladů a dalších impulzů, které musím během procesu tvorby zpracovávat.

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**Devising Selves Through  
Chaotic Performance**

**Explorations in Radical Blackness**

## **Introduction**

### **I Have No Idea What I'm Searching for But I Guess I'm Here Now**

These writings are an outline of my own personal dramaturgical explorations during three years of study in Prague at the Academy of Performing Arts, Theatre Faculty (DAMU). From the first performance experience to my current artistic perspective and direction. It covers multiple performances, questions, and life crises that all lead to the evolution of personal dramaturgy, rehearsal processes and artistic inspirations.

During my time at DAMU I wanted to explore how to become an artist for myself, using theatre as my base collaborative medium. There were key aspects to this challenge that I, to this day am still exploring and I continue to develop new pieces. But the original impulse was to use devising as a way to explore the elements of theatre that aligned with my artistic perspective, and to learn which aspects of American theatre did not work for me. Further exploring questions about access, story, space, and self that I had already begun to ask prior to my time at DAMU.

This period of time started with the 4+4 Festival. The 4+4 Festival was introduced to us before we even arrived in Prague, and we were told we would have to devise a performance with Phillip Schenker based on the theme of a particular space. Which, for the 2017 festival was Kasarna Karlín<sup>1</sup>.

This was the information given to us on September 18th 2017:

I am happy we have a nice part in one of the long corridors in the Armybase.  
It is a little labyrinth of rooms, connected among each other with many doors and little corridors.  
So, you will work solo and also in the group.  
I add some photos from my phone,  
just you would have an impression.

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<sup>1</sup> The Karlín barracks are a classical historical five-floor building located in Prague 8 – Karlín. Various units and facilities of the Prague military garrisons were located here, such as the garrison's music band, the military police, headquarters or infirmary. The barracks are considered a cultural monument and are protected by the Czech Republic.



The theme is OVERRULED.

The whole architecture and atmosphere in the building reminds of course of the old fashioned form of army with its rules and hierarchy.

It is the history of the building.

(Also by the time Czechia was ruled by the Austrians.)

But anyway, any kind of time, society, group of people tries to set rules to make the collective function as good as possible (whatever that may mean...).

So it is always a quarrel between following the rules, getting overruled, or to set/keep you own rules and overrule the system/group you live in.

I like to look at the theme open like this.

To work explicitly on the theme army for me has no priority,

but, if you will get a great idea working maybe with that, it maybe ok too.

Phillip Schenker, September 18th 2017, Gmail.

Our first meeting then came on the 22nd of September 2017. Prior to this email we had no clear idea of what to expect from the space or the festival.

This was the first project I made in Prague. After two weeks of officially moving to the city. I made three performances after many trials. Most of which involved an immediate confrontation: with the ideas I wanted to explore in my performances, with myself, and the new people I had to collaborate with. But none of us had any idea of what we were doing as a collective since it was both our first time working together and the first contact with the school. Each of us was coming with a different way of working, background and perspective. For myself, it was a combination of unlearning and reforming the methods of performance I had previously worked in and studied, in order to begin my exploration of the post dramatic.

Essentially the performance pieces I made went in this order:

### **Singer (Is It A Crime)**

This performance was based on an impulse with another student, Lamija, to fill a room with plants and beautiful things. But we ended up creating this ritual space full of dirt and plants and candles and curtains that worked as an instillation when I was not inside and then, once we would cycle the performances again (the whole performance was in a loop so you could explore the rooms and performances at separate times) I would eventually return to the room. Stand on

a step stool behind lace curtains taken from Kasarna and start singing "Is It A Crime" by Sade while inserting all of my millennial anxieties about life and purpose into the verses. During this Lamija would echo some of the phrases and light candles until the time ended and we would move to the next room.

### **Jumping**

This performance was something that was not as strongly received by the audience but was potentially the strongest one for me. When I arrived; stressed, traumatized, angry, hurt, disappointed, and hopeful. I would enter this room full of windows stacked on top of each other and jump rope over and over again hitting the walls. It was all my frustration. Especially based on the devising process for the show. I didn't want to show myself or my blackness or my history and pain as a minstrel show for a mostly white European audience who would look at me and say "ah she's black and from the south and it is racist and violent, but now she's here and showing us just that". I didn't want to show the stereotypes and the pain. But I am also aware of how blackness is perceived in terms of athleticism and strength and how the image of me doing this training looks very different to another person doing it. It was intense and hard and challenging for me and I could see that the sounds of the rope against the walls and its loudness affected others as well. Especially because it was paired with my classmates Arturs and Wayne performing on the other end with Arturs singing a Russian song and having doors slammed in his face. Occasionally our rhythms would match: the sounds of the doors slamming with my rope or the breaks in the song with my jumps.

### **Welcome to the Neighborhood**

This performance was the hardest for me. I didn't really want to do it. But could tell that it was going in this direction. Our director, Phillip Schenker, wanted to pull something out of this performance that I was really resistant to give. Because I really didn't want to cheapen my experiences for the sake of a performance in a new city where I didn't feel comfortable. I didn't KNOW him or trust him yet and do not think trust had been earned on either side yet. So we had to work a lot with the material I had to offer and the theme of the performance. Eventually we came to a medium with this, and instructional for how to enter East Austin as it was when I left. I discussed the police raid that happened across the street from where I lived and the series of raids that were targeting black families as a way of kicking them out of their homes to make way

for gentrification and development. I think Phillip really helped me to find a character and way of describing this reality to the audience while still having real moments and finding something inside myself that would make it so I could perform it the way it needed to be done.

The situation in Texas in general and Austin, at the time and more so today is very complicated. Austin is a city that used to be segregated. And still is in economic terms. The city neglected the black and brown parts of town for years putting money into the north and south sides of the city. My university in Austin was on the south side and for my years studying there I did not see a lot of diversity in the city; it wasn't until I visited a bar in East Austin that I realized how diverse it actually could be. After my studies I moved to the East Side for the rest of my time in the city. Unfortunately, gentrification had started and the wealthy started taking over that part of the city. Getting the city police department on the side of developers. They would raid homes in the East Side with swat cars and sirens and go into homes at night. Sometimes in the evening, they would have a giant speaker that would shout "This is a Police Search Warrant for 1126 Terry Ln" (my old address). However, these were only for all black and Hispanic homes. My home where I shared a property with a white DJ, mixed raced musician and my white boyfriend at the time, along with the homes of white families I knew in the area, were never raided. But you would wake up to that siren and wonder if it was coming for your home. The following year after I had moved to Prague there was a series of package bombs being dropped off in front of Black Austinites' homes. One of my friends who I worked at a theatre company with, her nephew was murdered by one of these. They eventually tracked the terrorist and it was your run of the mill backwoods racist teenager with lots of time, when apprehended by the police he blew himself up in his car. This situation hasn't improved, and the city is currently dealing with the backlash of police brutality and racism along with the rest of the United States following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

People seemed to really resonate with this performance, and it was the only performance where I had to balance myself and the audience in a way. Without scenography. I was more of an actor in a more traditional performance setting. The struggle with this performance was to incorporate the references, which for me were very familiar but, in the new context of Prague theatre, were unknown.

The other two were more parts of an installation and this room had nothing except myself. I wanted to create an experience that was tense, friendly, and accurate. No dramatization for the sake of over-illustration. Which was a difficult task seeing as it was the first thing I did in the city and as an artist.

Jumping in from the US and my previous system of study and performance was difficult. Because I was not fully certain of what I was wanting to do or looking for. But I knew that I would be provided space. Which is something that I previously did not fully have. Being dropped into a completely new world, being asked to devise without a narrative, not having any preceding information to work with about the space, the group, the expectation. The only material you could rely on is yourself. In that space you are able to explore yourself as performative material. So, for the first time I was my own character portrayal of my life, experiences and self. In this realization I never wanted to fully "claim" myself and instead used the different characters I created as a way into a story or an experience. Giving myself freedom and agency to create what I wanted by also creating a space for the audience to see themselves. I wanted to avoid the traps that felt so easy to fall into as a black artist, using illustration of pain or trauma for the sake of interest and drama. I also wanted to create a way of sharing experience that is mutual; in that you must find your own way through it for yourself. It is something I took from two of my favorite artists, James Turrell and Donald Judd. Specifically Turrell's skyspaces 'Twilight Epiphany' and 'The Color Inside'. Along with Judd's cement installations at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, TX. Both use time, space, and autonomy. There is no instruction on how to engage with these pieces of art, but it is up to you to spend your time the way you see fit. This way of perceiving performance and openness is something that I believe is deeply rooted in my home in Texas and the amount of space and time we have and the way we utilize it. Something I did not realize until I brought "Post Industrial Artyšok" the collective performance group of myself, Adam Paník, Jakub Šulik, Antonie Formanova, Zuzana Sklíba, and Emil Rothermel to Texas for a devising workshop, in July 2019. We visited both the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas and "The Color Inside" in Austin. James Turrell's perspective on the spaces he establishes is what I was trying to explore in the performances I made in the 2017 4+4 Festival: "My desire is to set up a situation to which I take you and let you see. It becomes your experience."<sup>2</sup> and with Judd: "Actual space is

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<sup>2</sup>James Turrell: *The Art of Light and Space*, p78

intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface”<sup>3</sup>. Both artists had, at various times in their lives chosen Texas as a place to develop their works and had strong relationships with my home state (Judd) and city of Houston (Turrell).

In Austin, I was not able to articulate that desire of recreating such a way of viewing and, I don’t think I have been fully able to do it here in Prague yet, but the seeds have at least been planted.

The actor of postdramatic theatre is often no longer the actor of a role but a performer offering his/her presence on stage for contemplation. [...] “to a presence in which the performer does nothing to amplify the information arising from his/her presence.”<sup>4</sup>

Upon later reflections, when entering Prague and the 4+4 Festival in Kasarna Karlin, I entered a state of exploring this form of non-performance in myself. And the balances of my own image of myself, my own comfort level while being not only a performer but also a performance material. The way of presentation for “Welcome to the Neighborhood” was to work with the information going through me. Without adding much with my body language or voice. Controlled hand gestures and the friendly yet approachable neutral voice. What I didn’t realize in that time was that I was creating my own relationship to myself as a performer in the post-dramatic sense and my performative relationship to the audience:

The task of the spectator is no longer the neutral reconstruction, the re-creation and patient retracing of the fixed image but rather the mobilization of their own ability to react and experience in order to realize their participation in the process that is offered to them.<sup>5</sup>

This dynamic was an absolute necessity for me, because I wanted to remove cultural and racial bias from my performance, which had a subject matter that was already culturally and racially heavy for myself. Not that the goal was to avoid the discussion but, being aware that my black female body is often used to tell stories that illustrate trauma. How many Europeans and Czechs alike constantly ask me about racism in the US and how hard it is to work with/against this expectation of a traumatic story. Being forced to have a conversation about

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Judd: *Complete Writings 1959-1975*., p.102

<sup>4</sup> Hans Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* pp.134-135.

<sup>5</sup> *Postdramatic Theatre*, p.135.

the pain and suffering *they* want to hear about. This is something that terrified me and that I wanted to avoid. So I had to break the border for myself for illustrating versus being. In a state of being I was able to find the honest reality for myself and present it with an openness others could fit themselves into or not. This also helped to give the louder, harsher moments in the performance more weight. Bringing a grounding force back to the performance. It then strengthened the dramaturgy of the other two performances regardless of the order they were seen in. But the audience aside, it also strengthened the dramaturgy for myself as a performer and each round deepened something inside of me, and gave me the ability to go deeper each time.

I will note this as the first time I was able to really see and experience the importance of dramaturgy for the performer (me) and why I enjoy having the ability to create dramaturgies for each performer so they can rely on their own experience and timeline to make it through longer performative pieces. When reading through *Postdramatic Theatre* a second time, with this perspective I found the concepts of performativity and visual art. How many post dramatic artists come from a visual art background. How this mixture of understandings can break previous understandings of theatre performance and create a new system.

Since my previous theatre education did not explore the post dramatic it was necessary for me to dip my toes into this form of making which also involved the removal of my performative self from two of the three performances I made. In "Is It A Crime" I am present behind an installation of lace curtains. Removing my full self but still performing, which was necessary for my comfort at that time and also, to create a new more neutral ground for myself as a performer and for the audience. The intensity of the newness of this performative identity, with the new Czech audience and European continental perspective that I was not accustomed to made it difficult to jump in fully.

For me, Welcome to the Neighborhood was the first time I really 'met' the audience face to face. In Jumping people only see me through a door for a short period. I had subconsciously made myself a spectre, a ghost, that was trying to materialize and eventually in the end, was comfortable enough to share a piece of my pain, but not to illustrate it. Instead, it was shared as a way of connecting.

And this first attempt at connection via experiences continues throughout my other performances and time at DAMU.

Because this period of my time in Prague (2017-2018) was so deeply rooted in exploring myself, my race and the postdramatic I would like to transition to another point in *Postdramatic Theatre* that leads to an additional experience. I will delve more into the formation of my personal methodology in later chapters. But, for now I want to explain my frustration with the German postdramatic theatre experience I had in Bochum, Germany at the Ruhrtriennale festival:

Since theatre as an expensive aesthetic practice necessarily had to think of ways to survive in bourgeois society through substantial income-and that means through popularity with a wide audience-new risky innovations and important transformations and modernizations have emerged with a characteristic delay compared to the state of affairs in less costly art forms, such as poetry or painting.<sup>6</sup>

The theatre I have worked in and made was always in a balance of funding and style. In the US, the shows I would work on with larger budgets were always musicals. A style that is deeply rooted in entertainment that most people enjoy. Performances audience members can attend even if they're not regular patrons of the theatre. Shows like *Rent*, *The Lion King*, *In the Heights*, and *Hamilton*, have such a large pull because of the popularity and spectacle. I was always used to working in this world, but also, in the less popular world where BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) would make and produce their own work. In this field we would work with resources we had, and while the budget was usually not as large this work was still respected and promoted. However, upon moving to Europe and experiencing the reality of performance here versus the imagined reality I had before moving, I saw that the world of postdramatic, oftentimes lower budget performances were only seen as valid through a lens of Eurocentric values. Which was becoming frustrating to me.

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<sup>6</sup> *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 94.

The first year we went to Ruhrtriennale 2018<sup>7</sup> as DAMU students, the experience both traumatized and inspired me. I had slowly started coming to the feeling that a lot of non-white/non-western performance found itself in a fetishist place. Especially when you began to hear words that involve value systems being ascribed to different artists and pieces. For example, when we were at the Ruhr festival. The artistic director Stephanie Carp said that the theme was post-colonialism but there weren't more performances from colonized countries because they weren't up to the standard of German theatre (a standard that involves having a lot of money.) As I come from a city where amazing BIPOC artists make work with little to no money and rarely receive funding or recognition for this exact same reason for my frustrations. Performances I saw in the festival and throughout my time in Prague had also frustrated me. There was also frustration with myself for feeling as if I had to show a struggle or pain or suffering in order for my body and my work to be seen as valuable. I didn't want to capitalize on my personal traumas for the sake of being validated as an artist.

The 2018 Rhurtrienalle festival portion for students had a theme of post-colonialism. Which we explored via different performances each day. However, via this theme there was a lack of diversity from colonial countries paired with a very unfortunate "BDS" incident that led to other non-European performers backing out of the festival. (BDS, The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement works to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.) When the Nigerian-Scottish band Young Fathers mentioned they support BDS they were disinvited from the festival. But then re-invited after the festival was criticized for this action. But, other artists backed out in support and the band decided not to come after all.

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<sup>7</sup> Every year the Ruhrtriennale invites contemporary artists to play on the monumental industrial architecture of the Ruhr Metropolis. Halls, coking plants, machine houses, dumps and wastelands in the mining and steel industries are transformed into impressive venues at the intersection of musical theater, drama, dance, performance and visual arts. They make the Ruhrtriennale a festival that is unique in the world. The program orientation is largely determined by the directorate, who is appointed every three years. Stefanie Carp is the director of the 2018, 2019 and 2020 festival edition. The artiste associé of these three years is Christoph Marthaler. The Ruhrtriennale 2020 will take place from August 14 to September 20. Stefanie Carp "IN-BETWEEN TIME?" Ruhrtriennale 2018.



This was all happening at once, while myself and other students from DAMU prepared to attend this festival in Bochum, Germany. Coming off the heels of my first year at DAMU and studying in Prague, facing a number of personal and societal pressures I arrived and immediately noted I was the only non-white non-European student in this portion of the student festival. Which made me stressed and entering a space where we were to discuss post-colonialism made it worse. It is difficult to discuss these things in a vacuum of perspective. I learned a lot about value, perspective, and position. Some things I already knew and understood from my experience having to apply for funding and having to use the words people wanted to hear about performances and work. But to go to a festival that takes place in large warehouses and industrial spaces that have been renovated as art spaces (something you would never see in the United States), and the sheer amount of scale and money that went into the German performances we saw, and then hear the artistic director say that they didn't have more performances from post-colonial countries due to a matter of "quality" really upset me and created a frustration I held until a discussion after Mamela Nyamza's performance.

### **Mamela Nyamza - Black Privilege**



"...Nyamza focuses her attention on the hypocritical structure underlying our societies in which everyone is permanently judged and

pre-judged...Nyamza blurs the boundaries between spirituality and the law.

Rejected and unrecognized heroines of the African struggle for independence are brought back to life, judged and perhaps also celebrated.”<sup>8</sup>

This performance was impactful for me. In that moment due to both the context of the larger festival and for the lack of diasporic performance I had been able to experience during my time in Prague. I was able to feel relaxed and in a topic I could feel and be inside of. Which was different from the more German perspectives of a lot of the other performances. And myself, currently exploring feelings of otherness and also a pressure of the expectation of “postcolonial” theatre. I felt my experience was very much my own in this performance. Without a barrier of understanding. A lot of audience members walked out as Mamela undressed and sat on an exercise device in the performance. However, it was the discussion that occurred the next day that I found to be more impactful. It is hard to articulate how difficult and frustrating it is to feel as if your history, culture, performance, is not seen as valid or equal.

Black Privilege embodies the dark irony of the title’s contradiction. A saturation of iconographic sonography contrasts Nyanza’s subdued choreography. The resulting performance seduces a gaze only to return the bright bite of a hot sun.

This performance was my first experience of a new form of making that felt more representative of what I was looking to explore. It was not illustrating trauma of an experience, but more portrayed the experience of one person and how they navigate that experience with the awareness that they also have a relationship to their own history, the white gaze of their home audience and of the German audience of this festival, and their colonial and oppressive history. So to see this form questioned in the post-performance talk and its validity of “why”, the quality of art, and the limits of who can do what on stage caused me to reach a limit to my patience I did not previously know existed.

And at this point I had become very interested in the value that was ascribed so easily to most white American and Western European performances. Even in the United States you could feel this with the type of BIPOC performances you would see, which always involved struggle or suffering. If a work exists outside of this vacuum there is a conflict of what is seen as valuable. The barrier of

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<sup>8</sup>Mamela Nyamza Black Privilege 23 Aug. 2018, Bochum, Germany.

<sup>9</sup> Jamison Edgar, “In Performance: Mamela Nyamza, Black Privilege (The Present Is Not Enough)”.

understanding was a place where, due to the lack of representation for myself, and the ways in which this particular festival was positioned, in an industrial part of Germany where performance spaces were built from repurposed industrial monstrosities, and you could really sense the amount of money going into the arts both in these spaces and the scale of the performances. But a deeper conversation never came. There was a way to explore the various values of understanding, place, and access but it was not easily accessible. Because, in order to continue that conversation each person involved would have to acknowledge their own positions regardless of privilege, be it ethnic, racial, cultural, geographic. There is also the need to deny illustrating oppression, which I will discuss in a later chapter. But going back to Lehmann and the description of these relationships to theatre and the bourgeoisie, I truly felt in this moment that the audience needed to play catch up to the forms of theatre and art that can be presented from different groups and cultural backgrounds:

Postdramatic theatre could and can be (and is indeed) read very differently depending on the culture, the tradition, and the current "scene" of the particular theater of the region: for example, as a critique of the dominant European theater model; or as a practice allied with performance experiments in visual art; or as a critique of a conservative theater practice that remains comfortably secured<sup>10</sup> within the never-questioned frame of a theater of representation.

It was, from this point that I saw how I wanted to begin to explore my own culture, my own value and create performances in a form that can exist in my new European context but also challenge the cultural perspective of my new home. Exploring the systems of value that are seen as good, intellectual, high quality, and worthy of an audience. This is because for me, Europe was always "the place, the goal, the ideal". But culturally, it is different to me and I have found myself finding the beauty in my own culture as the Eurocentric ideals ingrained into my mind from youth slowly fall away. This was the beginning of my own process of exploring quality and value. I started to realize it is perfectly fine to explore your own range of comfort and challenge as a performer and incorporate it into your dramaturgical process. I did not have to attempt to fit into one system of performance. I could create my own that will always expand and grow with me as I grow as an artist. The conflicts of performance and

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<sup>10</sup>Lehmann, In Terms of Performance,

<http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/postdramatic/hans-thies-lehmann>

portrayal I felt were not hindrances but additional material I can use to develop myself and my work.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Who Am I? And Do I Want To Talk To You About It?**

We also participated in the 4+4 Festival in our second year of the program (2018). Coming straight off the heels of Ruhrtriennale and our first writings I was at a place where I wanted to push myself to take up more space. To be larger and more present than I was in the first year. I was finally feeling ready to become more performative but was still exploring the balance of disappearing and being fully present.

One of the primary reasons I chose DAMU and this program in the first place was to learn how to make my own work with my own artistic and dramaturgical perspective. After years of working on projects of others which were always narrative based, I wanted to find something else. My own way. However, in the time frame that I chose to leave the US and move to Prague for this program I had spent so much of my time fighting to be recognized and to be seen and heard as an artist and as a black woman that there were many aspects of myself I wanted to show and claim. But, when the time would come to make the performance or the installation I would not be able to finish it. Because of those aspects of myself I had fought so hard for and did not want to compromise that value by “showing” them for the sake of “showing”. It needed to be earned, by both the audience and myself. Even aspects of my family background that were and in many ways still are difficult to engage with become constant recurring factors in my creative work that I have an inner battle with. How to embrace the softer, more personal aspects of myself and how they come into my performances. Versus the larger more common aspects that previous felt necessary to incorporate. (feminism, blackness, restriction, etc).

I wanted to engage more with myself and my culture, but was now so far detached from it living in Prague. In the DAMU festival Proces 014 we had a presentation Difference and Repetition which was my first way of exploring this desire to connect without having to explain what I myself struggled to fully contextualize. During this time I was also working on our first writing with Branislava. Branislava Kuburovic is my mentor for this thesis, a lecturer at both DAMU and Prague College. She also teaches our theoretical course “Search for Context”, a writing course that prepares us for our thesis. Which would end up being titled “Creation in Diaspora: A Gumbo Recipe” and its partner writing “The

Attempt (And Failure) To Create Good and Meaningful Work” which outlines the struggles I had trying to and eventually failing to create the first performance before switching to another idea. All of these things highlighted the desire to explore and portray my own history in a new way. By August 2018 I was fairly exhausted and didn’t know if I wanted to continue in this direction right away.

### **An excerpt from “The Attempt (And Failure)”**

In April 2018 my life was in crisis. This crisis came from attempting to use my emotional and mental state as material for performance. But this was a problem for a number of reasons.

- 1) Emotions and mental states are fragile and need to be handled with care. If you are going to use it as material make sure you’re doing it in an emotionally safe way for yourself.
- 2) Too much pressure to make something happen
- 3) Getting stuck in a narrative of difference.
- 4) I had put a lot of pressure on myself to PRODUCE. To create something amazing, mind-blowing and meaningful that would be worthy of recognition.

I had to shift this pressure and perspective.

At some point the realization came that I was tired of illustrating the pain and the problems and wanted to look more at the common factors and connectors that could potentially save us. And at this same time we were working to develop a piece for 4+4 in 2018; we were working with Cristina Maldonado on an installation for the festival. Cristina Maldonado is a lecturer at Prague College and was also a lecturer for one of our courses at DAMU involving devising with technology. This was the year that we were to work with her both on this performative installation and also as students throughout the semester.<sup>11</sup> In our process for working through this project we would look at different series of instructions and ways of giving instructions and working with material. I was reading a book about different herbs and witchcraft at the time. While also working on my first writing for our program; which was exploring the diasporic

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<sup>11</sup> Recipes to acupuncture the impersonal space with memory, specificity, identity and one’s own imagination. A set of selected ingredients will alter your perception: find yourself in someone else’s memory, tailor fake news, go through a light massage or simply become part of the room. Explore this live installation, you can observe or follow DIY instructions to establish relationships with the space, to materialize what is intangible and to experience as common, what is highly personal. A study to expand Wurm’s one minute sculptures into perceptual molds and to test the impossibility of Fluxus-like instructions.  
Cristina Maldonado, Phenomenological Recipes, 2018

ties between my own personal history and West Africa. However, I was also really drained from this and wanted to explore other ways of making. So there was the want to not feel rushed into going into something familiar for the sake of producing. I also didn't feel ready to use my personal history again as material for a project.

This all to say: The Lemonade<sup>12</sup> performance was truly a struggle. I did not want to do it and did not have any specific connection to the theme of "phenomenological recipes" at the time. So, for me the struggle was to find my own personal theme and an impulse inside of the theme itself. There is also a personally complicated relationship with my childhood and my grandmother. I am not sure how using my family histories became the subject for my installation but there was a strong resistance against making it wholly about me. It was necessary for my own life to be included than it could only be as an offer to help the audience feel more open. I wanted to, in my second year of studies, be able to be both a black woman AND an artist - together and separate. Which reminded me a lot of Adrian Piper. The American artist and philosopher who has explored her own identity, alternate versions, and genders of her identity in her practice. Her writing "Dear Editor" explores this desire to be seen as an artist without an additional "\*".

Dear Editor:  
Please don't call me a black artist.  
Please don't call me a black philosopher.  
Please don't call me an African American artist.  
Please don't call me an African American philosopher.

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<sup>12</sup> The original title for this performative installation is Libations. But for ease it has been referred to as Lemonade. For this I have incorporated both. I titled it Libations due to its southern colloquialism meaning a beverage with alcohol. Which, in my youth I was told meant a "sweet and cold drink" by the adults in my life. I later realized a libation can also be a ritual offering in memory of the dead. Which I was unaware of at the time. But, it is also fitting for the performance as it was based on memories of my Grandmother who passed away while I was living in Prague in 2012.

Please don't call me a woman artist.  
Please don't call me a woman philosopher.  
Please don't call me a female artist.  
Please don't call me a female philosopher.  
.....(cont.)  
Adrien Piper  
1 January 2003<sup>13</sup>

Being at the crossroads of these thoughts I was also trying to orient myself in this installation. Cristina wanted me to give more of a story of myself and my family and the nostalgic sense I was experiencing at the time. In this time I was also entering a period of realization that I was ending my 20s and thinking back to moments of childhood innocence. My suggestion was selling lemonade on the street as a child in the US and how my grandmother would make her own lemonade at restaurants. What I didn't mention was how the lemonade sold was lemon flavored powder and that when my grandmother would make lemonade it was when we would wait for hours for her to finish eating because she refused to leave a table without finishing food because of her youth during The Great Depression. Something she also impressed on me, where, drinking her lemonade with tears streaming down my face I wouldn't be allowed to leave the table and forced to eat until I was sick. I know it wasn't her fault, and the beautiful moments that I also remembered of her for, would color those memories. But, this balance between trauma, and nostalgia is what I remember in most of my childhood. How selling lemonade as a young black girl would function differently than if I was with my white neighbor. How, in my innocence I wouldn't notice the men making comments about my skin, asking me to get in their cars, or to touch me. The neighbor who, after an afternoon selling lemonade and buying ice cream with the money I made had her dog chase me and pull me by my hair through her yard while she and her sister laughed at me.

There's a line between my own memories, the softness of the sensation of the past, the pain of the trauma I carry with me, and the desire to live with it and also exist separately from it. Because, in the United States as a BIPOC artist you can find the easiest route to funding, and finding an audience, by pulling from your own pain and frustration to create. But, this is a nonrenewable resource and at some point I wanted to be able to pull inspiration from a place that didn't represent that pain.

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<sup>13</sup> Piper, Adrien. "Dear Editor". 1 Jan. 2003, [www.adrianpiper.com/dear\\_editor.shtml](http://www.adrianpiper.com/dear_editor.shtml).



However, during this installation process I decided to acknowledge those moments and put the energy into the work I made, but also keep it for myself. Instead I asked a series of questions written in small books along with prompts and my own answers to these questions. There was a video of how to prepare a lemon for cutting, audio from my grandmother, and my memories, and a series of cabinets. Each cabinet had a number and you would follow this series to the end until you made your lemonade, drank it, finished it and left one final answer in your cup. Everything was provided. Lemons, knives, cutting station, cups, stirrers, sugar, and papers for answering questions. Each cabinet that had a question had a pad to write a response and you would leave it in the next cabinet. Instructions were placed throughout or left on lemons for the participant. I had my own answers left in cups near pictures from my childhood. The act of asking the participants to offer pieces of their own lives made a way for connection and an understanding. Both for myself and for the audience. In another sense, it was also a way for me to try and understand more about the new audience I was wanting to relate to. The newness of my new artistic home in Prague. How was I supposed to expect myself to be able to offer my own stories and histories without projecting an unearned image of pain and trauma from my personal life. I feel that theatre in the way I create it now is a conversation, almost like creating a friendship with a new person. Emotionality and vulnerability is earned over time and has to be developed in a new relationship. In the US, I had a relationship to myself, my performance partners, and the audience that was pre-established by shared cultural references and understanding. Here, that relationship had to be built from scratch. Lemonade/Libations, while being a difficult start for me, also ended up becoming a good research into myself and the people around me. I learned how to explore my own life based on myself as an individual who was choosing what to reveal and what to keep. I also learned how to use softness as a way to work with an audience and encourage participation.

This struggle I had in this performance reminds me of the performance *Spawn II* which is by a South African performer Tracey Rose. Tracey Rose is a performer of whom I will go into more detail in Chapter 2 she is known for her performances and installations. A format that I have not been lucky to see but, one of which involves nudity and the black female identified body. But in a format that is both similar and different to *Mamela* both involve these blocked in spaces, worlds they

create for themselves to commit to an action. No specific choreography or direction. But, a series of challenges and actions tied together. A combination of determination and limitation. Creating the control structure but still maintaining elements that cannot be predetermined. Something in my personal performances and performance system also plays with this. Both in a way where I don't have full control of the situation or event but oftentimes the audience also has to enter that system and play in it. I find the box to be a way of only experiencing that inner conflict and dynamic via observation and as a millennial artist, I feel this is no longer effective. Everything is passively received and information can be seen, processed and then dismissed very quickly. So the tactile experience of interacting with a person, a performer, a material becomes much more real and much more dangerous. It involves more vulnerability. I was always feeling vulnerable making performances about my experiences (Lemonade and Neighborhood) which was a struggle for me because of this question about "showing struggle, or showing oppression". But shifting it to this made it easier for me to perform and be open because both sides had to be vulnerable.

### **Failed Cooking Performance**

The setup:

Invite up to 5 people for dinner, there are items prepared and provided. With a manageable menu (ask for dietary concerns first).

We have three courses, first we make a drink (rosewater lemonade) and then we make an appetizer, (often pico de gallo because I am lazy and most people like it), sometimes we prepare a main course with inspiration from Cici (she was the other performer and time keeper for the performance).

We would time each section and have questions planned for each section and a story/performance we would pair with each part of the piece. The dramaturgy of the piece would lead to a final performance about identity or place by both me and Cici. It is safe to say I hated almost every aspect of this performance. The idea was interesting and it felt big, I was thinking about ways I maintain a sense of home in myself at the time and also how I open up to others. But, this wasn't it. It did help me lay the foundations to my softer performances as the one part I enjoyed of this performance were the interactions and exchanges in between performative moments. There was never enough time for them and it started putting into my mind a question of ways to explore more conversational style performances and also, the aspect of time and timing in larger performances.

How to create a framework that is open and fluid but still moves forward, but also allows space for the audience to contribute to the timing of the piece.

This happened in a period where I had no idea what I was doing or what I was offering as a performer. I felt a block in myself that made it hard to relate to any audience and didn't know what I needed as a director and as a performer to move through that into a better understanding of why I want to make work and what my process could even begin to be. Coming from the Southern US I wanted to create an exchange, a way of getting to know people from DAMU and also get to know myself and Cici who was helping with the performance. Searching for ways to have conversations that are deeper than "hey where are you from? Why Prague? What department are you in?". I started to realize that I couldn't begin to make a performance if I didn't understand who that audience was and what they're like. There was no middle ground.

So it was an attempt to see how far I could push myself to interact with a foreign audience and what I could be vulnerable about. But, it was another form of presenting an idea of myself to the audience. I was always thinking about what I thought the audience wanted to see or what they found interesting which turned into a bastardized version of my own oppression, history and trauma via food and it was hard to manage the timing and authentically guide myself and the audience to an end that resulted in a performance of frustration which, at the last showing only felt wrong. I was smashing something, maybe a potato with a lead pipe or something, and for no reason. It wasn't for myself. My mentor at the time, Cristina Maldonado, said that it was maybe an interesting part but I hated it and never wanted to do it again. So, I had to reexamine what were the parts I enjoyed about that performance. Working with: Intimacy, Timing, Offerings (self, drink, food). One moment, ephemera, a performance that changes every time, be it material, setting, etc.

### **Open Rehearsal**

This performance came after months, and months, of trying to orient myself in Prague, and create a project that was in your face, direct, performative, and all the things I felt I NEEDED to do; and after lots of crying trying to figure out why it didn't feel right making a "show" discussing history and pain, and trying to reach out to people, in a way that was 2 hours long and also very emotionally

demanding for me and also a bit emotionally exploitive. I ditched my cooking performance.

Open Rehearsal was a softer way to explore the dynamics of the school, and say “hello, we are here, I am here, what’s going on”. I was also curious about the things that exist past small talk. So we explored “difficult topics” and “difficult questions” preparing the performers to answer anything openly and honestly. For a 15-minute period that could also be extended depending on how the performer and participant felt. The problem with the performance that never was is that it relied on people being open and ready and you can’t guarantee that with Czech audiences. Culturally the push for audience participation doesn’t operate in the same way as it does in Texas. And I wasn’t at a point to direct Cici (also in the show) and emotionally prepare myself to present the topics to an audience who might not receive it or even do the parts I would need to move the performance forward. So, I changed the frame and made it simpler and with more performers. Creating a space that 1) got people from DAMU interested or at least coming in and saying hi, opening up. Letting them know I am there and ready when they are. Many of the students didn’t even go to the performance but over time, people knew it existed and have been more open and friendly after, even coming in for rosewater lemonade or just some water or a space to chill. The performance was done during our end of semester festival where there’s rarely time to sit or relax unless you’re in Kafe DAMU or sitting on the roof. So this alternative space provided another option. We took in-between spaces in school and, armed with an IKEA rug and a cactus we would set off, and offer fifteen to thirty minutes for conversation. We could discuss something deep or something simple. There were clear rules (not everyone followed them and this bothered me at first, but upon later reflection I think that is good) when you entered the room for your appointment one of the 7 people who were available to talk would let you know that when you’re ready, they would be there are ready to start the performance. Some spaces were hidden, some were walkways full of passing people, and one was an elevator that really pissed off a lot of people (in a good way I think).

This performance is what I think really led to this new phase of work I make and how I started to bridge the internal and external gap between performer and audience and started exploring how to engage audiences in a new way and challenge the idea of what a performance is. Especially in this age of

overstimulation and expectation. When we've spent so much time consuming something in a specific way, does it make us immune to surprises? How can we break the mold and explore new ways of making theatre, performances, and installations; and how can you explore these mediums and cross over in an effort to evolve and survive as well. If there's no theatre space how do we change and grow?

This performance isn't about a specific character but more about humanness. It attempts to forego a lot of the elements of theatre that I was familiar with, in order to explore a more root aspect of theatre that exists inside the interactions. What is it that we need, inherently as humans, what do we neglect, what can we find that in a performance that addresses a deeper aspect of ourselves? How does this form of connection make you feel? Apprehensive, nervous, excited, isolated, safe? It is more than a conversation but it is also not therapy. It explores the availability of ourselves as humans interacting.

I have done this show many times in different settings. In Liberec, Pardubice, Prague. In a cafe, at a theatre, a gallery, the street. Each iteration is different from the one before. The show is never intended to be a perfect replica of the original. It is always adapting. Originally I had trained performers in how to be prepared and open for the experience. But now, I mostly do the performance on my own. The prompt of "difficult topics" is no longer necessary. I think this has to do with the socio-emotional changes from 2018-now and also, with my own performative adaptations while developing the system for this performance. Now that I am more oriented in it myself, I no longer need to push as much for intense material. I no longer feel the need to prove that the performance is reaching an emotional peak. Now, if that point comes, it is great. But, the availability of a human to be in a space ready for anything is more of what the project has developed into.

This was the first time I worked on an interactive performance that was also a small form of installation. Exploring ways of creating this performance system and also showing the availability of the performance and contrasting with the structure of the school and how faculty and students move through this space. Playing with the politics of the school by re-utilizing its spaces and common areas for performance. Windows, staircases, elevators. There was even an occurrence where one student, Kateřina Císařová, was doing the performance in the elevator

at DAMU that leads to the Činohora department (the drama theatre department). The head of this department and director of the National Theatre Jan Burian came into the elevator and began yelling at this student about why she's taking up space in the elevator and stating how useless he thought the alternative performance was, stating: "So I guess I'll just take a shit in this elevator and then we can call it alternative theatre, right?." For me, a theatre school and an artistic space is to be used for constant exploration and this performance was a way of exploring space and interpersonal relationships. I never saw it as a radical act or a challenge of artistic principles. But then I was reading Tania El Khoury's writings on participation in art and came across this quote:

Alternatively, when a performance engages with the ethics and politics of audience involvement, it can do the exact opposite: it can give communities and audience members agency over the outcome of the work. In order to achieve this true interactivity, artists have the difficult task of sharing vulnerability, giving up ultimate control, and allowing audience members to co-create. This is a different practice from offering audiences a chance to participate.<sup>14</sup>

### **Creole Lessons (Lessons in Kouri-Vini)**

I created this performance around the same time as Open Rehearsal. The farther away I am from home the more I find myself looking for the history I previously took for granted. When I was surrounded by my history and the conflicts of that history it never felt as powerful. I was always in a familiar space. But by entering this space that is more culturally homogeneous and distanced from the echoes of colonialism I was once surrounded by made me realize I have to do the work for that visibility on my own. The difference in value systems, the difference in identities is ok. But, how can I represent myself and my history in a way that shows context and pride. Because, being from the US and especially from Texas and Louisiana, we are in many ways connected to Europe. Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Spain and France. Especially the latter two. And so many people forget this. How many Spanish were in Texas, and the French have entirely forgotten about Louisiana and the creole people left there. Sharing their culture with France and the Acadians from up north. We have a rich culture and language that is dying. I regret not learning it earlier and also lament it not being

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<sup>14</sup> Tania El Khoury, In Terms of Performance,  
<http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/participation/tania-el-khoury>

properly taught to me. How do I fix it now? By practicing what I can when I can. And, do people recognize it? Can you identify the evolution of a language? Of a people? In a time when many people around the world and in Europe are so concerned about new people entering the cultural space and changing the reality, maybe a culture like mine, which is a mixture of so many things, can show how it can all work together, and how those changes evolve. But, since no one knows about this history and culture, you have to teach people about it. Which is a gentle way to start.

For this audio performance I invited different students from around DAMU and our department KALD (alternative and puppet theatre) to read words from the app Memrise while I recorded them. It is the only language learning website and app that features my cultural language. I picked a series of introductory words, (I, you, me, him) etc. slowly increasing the length and difficulty of the phrases. I didn't tell them what the language was prior to reading the words so they had no context for pronunciation. After they were done I would ask them what they thought the language was. I wouldn't answer but instead invited them to the performance. For the performance I had written a series of words and phrases from the words they read, I invited everyone to enter the space and face the audience, picking one card with a word on it, reading it into a mic and then sitting down. While everyone read I played the audio of the students reading in the background. Each person would line up and wait to read. Before the audio started I gave an introduction of the language and history and then joined the audience in line to read with everyone.

[O]ur current political climate requires a revolution of the artistic narratives that define our lives, so— like the Greeks before us—we share and reshape the story we tell about ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes a political act doesn't have to be the loudest or most stated. Sometimes interactions are political. Openness is political. In developing this particular series of performances I realized this. I had been through a louder period of personal political demonstration at home. But that energy wasn't fitting for my new home (yet) I also needed a break for myself to rest, recharge and learn more about myself and what I can offer and want to offer. Something I've noticed about the performances I've made and their reception is there is always

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<sup>15</sup> Yuval Sharon, In Terms of Performance, [intermsofperformance.site/keywords/narrative/yuval-sharon](http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/narrative/yuval-sharon).

a connection people want to make that I won't make for them (cultural, racial, etc).

Because I am really interested in the more emotional connection to find a way to meet and then push for something more. All of these pieces were research, and also a way of introducing myself to myself and to a new way of making and interacting.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Creation In Diaspora: A Gumbo Recipe**

I wanted to include this writing in my thesis, as it was crucial in the development of my own artistic language, and the artists I was exploring at the time not only came off the heels of my Open Rehearsal, Failed Performance, and Creole Lessons. But also was finished right before I started making Lemonade for the 2018 4+4 festival. This period of my time developing myself would also lead to the initial inspirations for my thesis project. Marie Antoinette Walks Down An Elegant Hallways Knowing Everyone Hates Her.

There are a number of questions that have grown as I have begun this journey of creating a series of references, language, and theory to utilize while I work through my own personal questions and discoveries of self, society, racism, and oppression. However, I do need to note that this occurs both inside of the issue as a person who embodies these identities and also outside of this as a person who is an individual human being who needs to explore their own physical, mental, emotional, and overall relationships. Both with myself, others, and the world around me. The writings that follow this document my personal journey developing a theoretical language to explore this along with examining the ideas I have personally, the content I want to create, and how to both be aware of what might potentially be in the initial idea in conjunction with examining and finding a way to push and move with the original impulse before I have the change to convince myself the idea is "bad". While going through this documentation I will also discuss other artists and black performance texts that are doing extensive work searching for the language that can expand the theoretical and critical analysis of black performance.

Before we begin I must note that the expansiveness of exploring myself, history, diaspora, culture, evolution, and relationship has been a journey to say the least. Especially in contrast to a largely male, white, and western perspective. Through this I have found the benefit of defining the separation of the "general" performative conversations versus a lot of the perspectives I am exploring. For example, the term "Western" is associated with the Western world, which I am technically a part of being from the United States, so many of the historical and

cultural aspects do fit into this. But, a number of the elements of exploration and identity around race, gender, and identity are better discussed separately from the generalization of “Western” so I will use the general term “Western” as a comparative. (I had to explain this once so I am noting it here for now, it helps me understand the readings and my thoughts better to categorize it like this)

### **Getting Started**

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searching for the language that can expand the theoretical and critical analysis of black performance.

### **Getting into it.**

I've been thinking a lot about the visibility of myself and how I project and perform my culture, background and history. There is a lot going on there, personally for me, the way that I have begun exploring this is through performance and though pushing myself TO perform. But, moving from the decision to perform to actually doing it is a separate milestone. There are points that for me, have come into conflict. 1) the original idea 2) my personal limitations going all the way emotionally. 3) what the piece (in my opinion) ethically needs so I can perform it. 4) what the audience sees.

So, in thinking through these conflicts, I have found a few visual and written references that I will discuss. These discuss the theory and analysis of a work as well as the work itself and the cultural elements of black performance. These elements create a complex system of, cultural call, response, and improvisation. They also work inside a Diaspora that is constantly evolving, commenting, and engaging with itself. Going inside of these elements make me realize that the conflicts I had came from a variety of places socially, culturally, mentally, and historically. After much reference and introspection the best option I believe for me is to have an idea, do it fully, look at it, engage with it in multiple ways, and then continue.

But before we get into my personal works:

### **Visual and Written Representations of Self Conflict**

John Akomfrah and Tracey Rose, these two artists have been etched into my mind as I work through my person, questions of creating. John Akomfrah is a film artist who is known for his large scale video installations that explore themes of diaspora and colonialism. The piece I have seen personally at the Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague was a part of an exhibit called Domestic Arenas<sup>16</sup> that features video installations about cultural crossover, war, fusion, and occupation. I will later address a second piece from this exhibit as well. But for now, John Akomfrah's piece was titled Tropikos The presentation of the images of colonialism and exploitation and discovery as we have been taught to see them.

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<sup>16</sup> Domestic Arenas exhibition, *Galerie Rudolfinum*, 19 Mar. 2018

From the western/conquering side of white men and women in rich clothing facing the fruits of discovery. (squash, potatoes, corn, etc) holding it in their hands as it hangs tied to a tree as if it is gold. Alternated between the images of black bodies at historic slave ports also holding these items. However, the image eventually switches and you see more of the black male and female bodies no longer in "slave clothes" (rags and cotton shifts) instead they are dressed as the colonists, in rich clothing leading a boat to the docks crossing under modern architecture in Plymouth, England. This is also narrated with texts from Shakespeare's "The Tempest".

This piece has been presented by a number of groups throughout Europe, United Kingdom, and the United States. To better illustrate the piece one of the collaborators showing the installation is the River Tamar Project

Akomfrah's starting point for the film was the connection between the waterways of the South West and the slave trade. In this film, the river landscape is transformed into an historic English port to re-imagine some of the first British encounters with people from Africa. Though a fictional narrative, the film is placed in a period when Britain's position as a global, seafaring power coincided with the enforced displacement of millions of African people across the Atlantic. It reflects on the emergence of the 'New World' and the bleak history of the British Empire.<sup>17</sup>

The film draws on the writings of a number of historical seafarers, whilst also referencing classic literature, specifically Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). Akomfrah uses these texts to create a layered setting for the piece. The film uses an approach based loosely on playwright Bertolt Brecht's notion of 'theatre of alienation'.

Adopting the costumes and mannerisms of the sixteenth century, the actors in the film appear in a series of 'tableaux vivantes' or living pictures, which feel both archaic and imaginary. African and European locations, characters and goods overlap with each other, as a representation of the faded traces of stories that we are asked to re-imagine.

This piece resonated with me for a number of reasons. I visited the exhibit with my class and no one else made it to the far room in this beautiful

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<sup>17</sup> *River Tamar Project*, 2014

Neo-Renaissance but in all the films we watched this one really fit where I have been presently. Something inside of my was searching for a new perspective, commentary on the issues I've been struggling with as a read so many stories of pain and suffering coming from the Atlantic Slave Trade, exploring my culture and the inherited viewership of blackness that is rooted in pain and struggle and why it is so hard to escape this. But, walking into this large room staring at these images I was able to exhale and observe and feel understood.



Akomfrah, Tropikos



Akomfrah, Tropikos

## Tracey Rose



Now, this segment for me is strange, because I am speaking on one piece that I have not seen but feel connected to. Something, in its presence and action really resonates with a need and push that is inside me.

### Spawn II

The removal of self. As I started reading *Troubling Vision* by Nicole R. Fleetwood I was introduced to this work by Tracey Rose. A performing artist and theorist from South Africa. Although I missed this performance something in it resonated with me. The removal of all body hair and the shaving of the head have a strong meaning. As I had decided as of 2016 that I would shave less, realizing that the only reason I had started shaving in high school was to attract boys, and later in life, men. However, as I got older I realized that men do not care what your body hair looks like if they're actually attracted to you. At times, like many of us. They simply just want to have sex and whether or not you have armpit and pubic hair doesn't affect the quality of sex. I had also started to remove myself from the male perspective of what is beautiful, compelling, and interested as I grew bored of the male gaze and wanted to do things only for myself. This also occurred in 2010 when I shaved my head completely and attempted to portray femininity through apparel and jewelry. However, this further pointed to a realization that none of these things interested me in the way I was doing them. So the action of doing what I was interested in started to grow. But, going back to this performance, Nicole R. Fleetwood's description of the piece helped me to see the performance of vision and visibility of action as a black woman.

"[...] Rose herself attempts literally to take apart her gender and race as visual objects of marking" [...] "In this part of the installation, Rose is the object of study as she sits naked in a glass cabinet fully available to the spectator's gaze." [Rose] sits and knots her cut hair, and act that she

describes as 'penance'. Yet, in her doing she cannot escape the fact of blackness and femaleness. In her effort to par down, to possibly disappear, her blackness and femaleness are further heightened.<sup>18</sup>

Because as women, especially women of color, all of our actions are so easily politicized the act of doing something with a clear and strong focus can be enough. We don't have to force the message so everyone "gets it". It can simply be. In 2007 Tracey Rose speaks not about her work but about the politics of art, class and society through two sock puppets at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art Forum through the Brooklyn Museum. In this, the two sock puppets are engaged in a conversation of observation and commentary both answering for the artist and speaking opinions she did not represent.

Hmm. Hmm. Did you say it? I spoke it (*sic*) with you. Did you hear why she said why she would not show her work? She said? She said, if she was a man she would not have to be a tour guide. She said that she shows her work not to be seen. She shows her work to be seen. Not to be explained by her.<sup>19</sup>

This speaks out personally. on a number of levels. I will quickly list them. 1) Art 2) Masculinity 3) Expectations 4) Demands 5) Exhaustion. Each time I start thinking about creating a project or working on anything it starts like this. I have an idea. I develop the idea right before I go to bed for at least one week. I become obsessed with the idea. I write it down somewhere. I overanalyze it. Try to justify it. Defend it to random peers and critics in my head. The work dies. "it is as if God speaks directly through him." This is a comment from a teacher about an Erasmus student we had all year. But I always question this. Does God not speak through all of us. I watched myself and other female identifying peers go through a series of self critique, doubt, and then backing down that male identifying colleagues never had in the same way. Why are we always so full of doubt and self destruction even before something can be made? Because I only have time to write one paper at the moment I can't go into depth but I will speak for myself. There are two main reasons I do this. The first is: I hate myself. The second is: Society taught me to hate myself and doubt my intuition and intelligence. My inner critic is so hard and cruel creating can become a challenge. So, making work that is not explained but requires inner analysis is a way to explore how works are created, observed, and analyzed outside of this

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<sup>18</sup> Troubling Vision, Spawn II, p 31

<sup>19</sup> Tracey Rose, Global Feminisms 2007. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OX5iLPLWzPM>

cycle of self hatred and oppressive critique. Adding into this the element of being a black woman I think it is even more radical to withhold explanation. Because, the work we create has a danger of always ending up in a “black hole” of perspective just by the initial compartmentalizing that is done by seeing our bodies and work and categorizing it as “black art” it begs explanation. Globalized blackness, personal blackness, ideal blackness, black sexuality, black identity, etc. In a predominately white industry blackness or non-whiteness is always a contrast. When you have an audience observing your work who may not wholly understand the situations you speak in, it is tempting to provide context or explanation. But, does that not perpetuate a system? The constant expectation that a non-white person has to educate, or explain is something you see often, not only in the United States. At this point in time the most satisfying thing for me is to make the decision to deny anyone this privilege and let them face the actuality of their own thoughts.

### **Daughters of the Dust and the Lemonade of Healing:**

The visions of black female bodies and the imagery of a colonialist past connected through centuries and decades in 2016. One day Julie Dash’s 1991 “foreign” film *Daughters of the Dust* emerged. Telling the stories of a family making a move to the mainland from the Gullah Island of Igbo Landing. The stories of the women in this family and the rich cultural style of storytelling, pain, and emotion mixed with imagery of beaches, tradition and nature and the clothing of the early 20th century (1902) create a piece that perplexed and fascinated audiences at Sundance that year.



*Daughters of the Dust*, Dash, 1991



This film was brought back to the attention of popular culture after Beyoncé's 2016 visual album *Lemonade*<sup>20</sup> released, showing a Creole version of this tale. Featuring references to the Igbo Drowning, old plantation spaces that have been reclaimed as healing spaces for black and brown women. For quite some time I loved these two pieces separately, but it wasn't until watching *Tropikos* and reading about Tracey Rose did all of these pieces began speaking to me in a connected way. There is a joke amongst black people (and I am sure other groups as well) when in a group with white friends there comes a moment when someone says "I wish I could time travel, If I could I would go back to \_\_\_\_\_. Where would you go?" At first, you think of all of the moments in time you might enjoy. And then, you remember something. None of those times were truly made for you. Were truly accessible to you. There are only so many options. But, in re-envisioning these moments in time. Explore what those black and brown stories are and where we can then start to experiment with the presentation of that narrative. The common story and the untold. We can also see the ways that these narratives have affected others inside of this reality. Looking at *Daughters of the Dust* and *Tropikos* together give you great theoretical explorations. Being unable to truly be inside of this moment in time, these artists have explored what this would look like, what the significance of imagery and language could be in these moments. The eagerness to escape the past, the land of slavery, the pain of ancestors for the promise of new opportunities. Being torn from the past and the future, knowing everyone cannot stay in the present together.

*Nana Peasant:* I am the first and the last. I am the honored one and the scorned one. I am the whore and the holy one. I am the wife and the virgin. I am the barren one and many are my daughters. I am the silence that you can not understand. I am the utterance of my name.

*Eli Peasant:* What're we supposed to remember, Nana? How, at one time, were we able to protect those we loved? How, in Africa world, we were kings and queens and built great big cities?

*Nana Peasant:* Eli, I'm trying to teach you how to touch your own spirit. I'm fighting for my life, Eli, and I'm fighting for yours. Look in my face! I'm trying to give you something to take north with you, along with all your great big dreams.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Lemonade*, HBO, 2016,

<sup>21</sup> Julie Dash. *Daughters of the Dust*. Kino International, 1992

On the other end you have the immersion in the experience of slavery, not the end result but the beginnings, the “discovery” of new foods and riches, the beginning of opportunities, the entrances of slave ports. The will eventually lead us to a diasporic series of moments that echo *Daughters of the Dust*.

In *Black Performance Theory*<sup>22</sup> edited by Thomas F. DeFranz and Anita Gonzalez different aspects of what has led to this theory and the different aspects of black performance theory. Each chapter features essays by different writers. In one section we look at the “Diasporic spidering: Constructing Contemporary Black Identities”<sup>23</sup> by Nadine George-Graves. In it she uses the West African story of Anansi the Spider and his folklore as a god of mischief to illustrate how diaspora has spread and how this one god has woven his way throughout the diaspora in his stories. From this point you can also do similar spidering with other themes. Going back to *Tropikos*, *Spawn II* and adding in *Daughters of the Dust* and *Lemonade* into this mix, you can see how the themes of place, identity, visibility, and place echo throughout.

However, in each there is its own diasporic content that reflects the style of viewing, storytelling, and action. As John Akomfrah is Ghanaian and British, Tracey Rose is South African, Julie Dash and Beyoncé are American (although from different regions, and this also affects their style of storytelling). As a woman whose family is also from Houston, Texas and has roots in Louisiana, and as a woman who is also from the Creole group. I have strong connections to Beyoncé's representation of womanhood and identity. Going through the process of reclaiming stories, history, dignity, and place. *Lemonade* and *Daughters of the Dust* almost read as a call and response to each other and Akomfrah's *Tropikos*. *Tropikos* was actually released the same year as *Lemonade*, showing this new way of exploring the past and the self. Both through the poetry of English writers (Akomfrah uses lines from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Beyoncé utilizes poems from Warsan Shire, a Somali-British poet whose words weave in and out of *Lemonade*'s themes of the stages of grief.) While Akomfrah looks to the past, with mirrors of the present through modern architecture of English waterways. Beyoncé looks to the present.

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<sup>22</sup> DeFranz, Thomas, and Anita Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*. 2014

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–44.

The state of black womanhood, the reality of many black southern women and families, through this lens of the spaces of our past and creating a diasporic gumbo of identities that speaks to her audience. Looking at the visual images from this visual album. The echoes of Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* are embedded like roots in the ground. It creates the foundation of womanhood. Helping to construct the image of a community of women healing together, creating bonds of strength. it is as if we have fast forwarded to a continuation of *Daughters of the Dust*, to a time where these great-grandchildren have returned home, to their history, their roots, to create a new culture that pulls from the pain of slavery, the pride of African roots and the strength and boldness that was instilled by their mothers and grandmothers. It is a very different image from the tears of separation as the Peazant family leaves behind, Nana, Yellow Mary, Eula, Eli, and the Unborn Child. It doesn't have the same pain as you hear in Haagar Peazant's voice as she screams for her child "IONA" (I own her) as Iona runs off of the ferry to the mainland to be with her Native American lover on Igbo Landing. It takes all of those memories and builds upon them. All the while showing the similarities and differences of the Creole culture in comparison to the Gullah culture that guides *Daughters of the Dust*. Beyoncé makes it very clear that she knows where she's from including West African stylings, New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians, Bands and Dancers.



*Daughters of the Dust*, Dash, 1991



Beyoncé, *Lemonade* 2016

Baptize me ... now that reconciliation is possible. If we're gonna heal, let it be glorious. 1,000 girls raise their arms. Do you remember being born? Are you thankful for the hips that cracked? The deep velvet of your mother and her mother and her mother? There is a curse that will be broken. [...]

Take one pint of water, add a half pound of sugar, the juice of eight lemons, the zest of half a lemon. Pour the water from one jug then into the other several times. Strain through a clean napkin. [...]

Grandmother, the alchemist, you spun gold out of this hard life, conjured beauty from the things left behind. Found healing where it did not live. Discovered the antidote in your own kit. Broke the curse with your own two hands. You passed these instructions down to your daughter who then passed it down to her daughter.

Warsan Shire<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Beyoncé, Shire, Warsan. *Lemonade*, HBO, 2016,



Beyoncé, Lemonade 2016



Daughters of the Dust, Julie Dash, 1991



## On Continuing

Now with all of this in mind, how do you continue working? Both inside and outside of the complexities of the diaspora of slave trade descendants? Does your identity become wholly this one thing? Can you explore different elements of yourself and also acknowledge the echoes of a past that move around you like fine silk?

How does one come to know subjects as black, or [...] as African American? What are the visual markings?

[...] Black theatrical traditions' use of [...] subjects to articulate processes of radicalization serves as an important domain for understanding how the codes of blackness [...] dominate public discourse<sup>25</sup>

Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, p. 71

These realities are being examined and questioned by many black artists but oftentimes this work ends up in a tunnel of visibility. "Black performance, black theatre, black fine art, black critique) and the ways that this is examined can become a part of the cycle itself. Personally, for me I have been wondering about how to move away from this, or possibly alongside it. Acknowledging its existence, and challenging that form of visibility for myself, and for the audience. While researching this I had a conversation with my teacher where we discussed Adrian Piper and William Pope L. Two artists who, to me, operate inside of blackness and also outside of it going deeper into their own human interest and curiosities. Because I have only had opportunities to experience each artist's work online. I have chosen to pick elements that have stuck out to me, which is through imagery and youtube video footage.

## Adrian Piper

What she considers her first racially conscious artwork, "The Mythic Being: I Embody Everything You Most Hate and Fear"<sup>26</sup> (1975), emerged from this cycle in the form of an oil crayon drawing on a black-and-white photo, the subtitle scrawled over one side, as a lament or provocation. Piper has said that she wished she could make art like Frank Stella's, with no obligation to anything beyond itself, but she eventually realized that she couldn't.

It doesn't occur to her that she's a black artist until it has to," Butler, now chief curator at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, told me, "until she's

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<sup>25</sup>Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visibility, and Blackness*. 2011.p 71.

<sup>26</sup> Adrien.The Mythic Being (1973). [www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video\\_tmb.shtml](http://www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video_tmb.shtml).

made to realize that her race is an issue, and she is made to realize that through her life as a social being in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Looking at Adrian Piper's *Mythic Being* (1973)<sup>19</sup> I was fascinated by the combination of performance and ritual. One thing that strikes me as I observe her recite a mantra from her journal and prepare her drag persona and walk through the streets. There is almost no performance to it. It is just an action that is happening and because of the commitment to the action Piper is so grounded that it becomes normal and the outside actions of the viewers become strange. Looking to her website, a place she directs journalists now that she no longer conducts interviews. I found a myriad of works that show the processing of self and the rejection of visibility of others. I would like to continue the Adrian Piper quote that I mentioned in the introduction of this writing. She continues this combination of identities, and explores the right to claim a whole space. Something I found enthralling in my struggle to name what it is that I am looking for in my own artistic practice.

Please don't call me a philosopher who happens to be female.  
Please don't call me an artist who happens to be black and a woman.  
Please don't call me a philosopher who happens to be black and  
a woman.  
Please don't call me an artist who happens to be a woman and black.  
Please don't call me a philosopher who happens to be a woman  
and black.  
Please don't call me an artist who happens to be African American and a  
woman.  
.....(cont.)  
Dear Editor,  
I hope you will bring to my attention any permutations I  
have overlooked.

I write to inform you that  
I have earned the right to be called an artist.  
I have earned the right to be called a philosopher.  
I have earned the right to be called an artist and philosopher.  
I have earned the right to be called a philosopher and artist.  
I have earned the right to call myself anything I like.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.  
Adrian Piper

1 January 2003<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Piper, Adrian. "Dear Editor." 1 Jan. 2003, [www.adrianpiper.com/dear\\_editor.shtml](http://www.adrianpiper.com/dear_editor.shtml).

These reactions and actions create a space of their own. Now, I am still a “Piper Novice” because unfortunately, the art history education at many universities is separate from “Black Art History” when you address fields of the contemporary it covers a very specific set of artists. And to explore the other words of that searching and expression are left to “African American art history, Latin American art history, Native American Art History” and the like. So for me, finding the connections between my questions and these artists is a recent practice. But this does not make it any less valuable. I believe that anyone can find themselves in these discoveries at any time and it does not mean we are less aware or intelligent. It just means they come to us at the right time for when we need them. I state this both for the audience reading and for myself. For me, Piper is someone I will definitely expand on. The ways that she questions and challenges, and satirizes, remind me of the elements inside me. Even her relationship to her race, being a lighter skinned black woman and moving through the different types of artist and person she is until she removes race from herself altogether, speaks to my experience.

From Adrian Piper I have gained courage, the ability to say, this is what I am doing and I am doing it because I want to. The courage to try things and have the cojones to call them art. To create a library of questions and thoughts, to look through myself past, and present. To take an idea, however insane it might feel inside, and run with it fully and let it live.

### **William Pope. L**

Sometimes I get really annoyed and bored with the inaccessibility of artistic language.

*WP.L:* I find my work “White People Are The Future” and the notion of contradiction used in the same question by you fascinating because everyone knows there’s no contradiction. Several hundred years from now Green

People historians will look back and view White People as the Neo-Egyptians of our times. Apologies, I was trying to be funny. So much for humor. Ha! Contradiction and affect together again at last! Hmm. Could you re-state the question?

*SJ:* Sure. I love the concept of “Green People historians.”

And then I watch a series of interviews from William Pope. L I also read the above interview in Hyperallergic by Samuel Jalbon on July 10th 2015 on his new show at the time “Trinket”. I wasn’t able to fully digest the article until I watched



an interview on youtube "Excerpt from Artist Conversation: Pope. L and Adrienne Edwards" from the Walker Art Center. For me, the way he speaks is in a language I can understand. While I fully admit to enjoying utilizing the full range of my vocabulary I also like to feel included. Oftentimes in artistic conversations it feels as if you have to have been "there" already, knowing references, and points of artist history to fully appreciate the conversation. But even going through his previous works with the speaker. I never felt this way. Listening to him talk openly and plainly made it easier to understand his Hyperallergic interview and understand his work. My favorite part of that interview comes at the very end.

*SJ:* Your work has been everywhere lately from the cover of Artforum to your solo at the LA MOCA. What's next for you?

*WP.L:* The next thing I want to do is have a sandwich and a coke.<sup>28</sup>

The most honest answer. It reminded me of myself and my inability to answer questions. If someone asks me about my life plans or what I plan to do (now). I usually just answer with the thing I immediately want to do next. Because, why do you need to give definitive answers of future plans? it is the future, you can't guarantee what's going to happen to you. You could plan to perform in Paris and then discover a debilitating disability and need surgery. You never know. The way that he enjoys himself, is something that I've taken with me. Even when his art addresses race, it doesn't have to take your entire being and spirit. But I guess this is why he calls himself The Friendliest Black Artist in America©.

A lot of the current discussions around Pope. L's work is surrounding his piece Trinket<sup>29</sup>, but the other works of his that I have been able to find footage of is from a homemade youtube video of Crawl in Portland, Maine where he crawled with others to the "The Abyssinian" from 1828, an African American meeting house and Underground Railroad safe haven. And Burying the Blues<sup>30</sup>, through the Whitney Museum of Art.<sup>31</sup>

I find these pieces interesting because of their relationship to blackness just as a form of existence and understood history and knowledge. The suffering and the

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<sup>28</sup> Jablon, Samuel. "William Pope.L on 'Acting a Fool' and Alternative Futures." 14 July 2015, [hyperallergic.com/221452/william-pope-l-on-acting-a-fool-and-alternative-futures/](http://hyperallergic.com/221452/william-pope-l-on-acting-a-fool-and-alternative-futures/)

<sup>29</sup> Pope, William. "William Pope.L: Trinket." 2015, [www.moca.org/exhibition/william-pope-l-trinket](http://www.moca.org/exhibition/william-pope-l-trinket).

<sup>30</sup> L.Pope, William. "William Pope.L: Burying the Blues." 19 Apr. 2019, [whitney.org/media/291](http://whitney.org/media/291).

<sup>31</sup> L.Pope, William. "April 19, 2013 William Pope.L: Burying the Blues." 19 Apr. 2019, [whitney.org/media/962](http://whitney.org/media/962).

struggle is not forced. Nothing is being accentuated to illustrate for an audience outside of the experience to attempt to empathize with. William L. Pope is just a guy, he's definitely black, and he makes art. You don't have to be black to enjoy or discuss it and he doesn't make you feel unwelcome or unequipped to partake in his artist perspective.

Piper and Pope L. both have a way of embracing and subverting though language and action. They are so often in this in-between space of exploring themselves as people in the diasporic ether. The ways they speak about themselves and their work, even if the work itself directly explores a piece of history or personage creates a new grounding point. And both artists are so fixed in their ways of discussing work that it creates an even ground so there's not even an opportunity to put them in a category of Artist\* Black. I keep this in mind as I begin to make new works. Especially after hearing Mamela Nyamza speak. The importance of being grounded in yourself as an artist, be it by language, movement, radical action or whatever else. This is something that takes time to develop, and something I need to explore for myself as well.

Where am I now? Artistically I can't be everything for everyone. I can only be myself. But these images of time, and the body, and skin are something I have also been exploring. Especially now, being so far from home and thus, othered in a way I have never been at home. Now I need to explore myself in this way as well. How has my environment changed me, how does my body move in this space? What are the body differences of myself and others? Looking at Tracey Rose and Mamela Nyamza I see the potential of the body. Especially as a woman of color to provide more than just a look into myself but into the psyche of the audience. The elements of the body and how much is hidden or revealed can create a great space for exploring diaspora and history.

With the visual works of Akomfrah, Beyoncé, and Dash there is really clear thinking and working through the colonial connections. Akomfrah uses these as a mirror to the relationship between a colonial country and the colonized. Beyoncé uses the imagery of southern roots and plantations to tell about the growth and healing that come from returning to your heritage. Finding your own way through the past and the present to improve for the future. In the case of Lemonade this would be the future of black women. Dash is strongly in between, a fixed point, the electric ground that keeps everything together. Through this I know that it is

ok to explore my history, pain, trauma, and diasporic ties in a way that works for me. it is possible to do this without catering to the Western ideals of making. It doesn't have to fit because although being American not all of my traditions are, and if I want to find that in myself I just have to do it the way that works best for me.

In terms of creating a language and gathering information. I think what I've learned from this is: You just have to DO. The work comes through figuring out these things and processing your place in the diaspora. In failure and success language can be created. The act of finding oneself, creating a space for yourself and through that space working and healing creates a language of its own. So I'll be working on that adventure for some time.

## **Chapter 3**

### **A Woman's Descent Into Madness While Thinking Though Blackness As Marie Antoinette**

I am going to do my best to recollect the process of Marie Antoinette from its formation to now. How I got here. Why the fuck I even made this project. Etc.

Let's go.

After the summer Proces Festival<sup>32</sup> in 2018 I thought a lot about the work I make and its scale. I felt small and thus my performances felt small. I felt insecure in my new surroundings and needed to practice the act of taking up space for myself. As a human but also as an artist. I was used to thinking of theatre on a large scale, a scale that I felt was unattainable for me and the work I was making. I was tired of the traditional theatre space and kept thinking the only kind of performance I could make outside of this was more intimate. But I wanted to do more, this was a combination of my own fear of owning my space as a director and of taking up space. Because, the danger for me in taking up space was also the responsibility that came from owning that role. Something I struggled with in the 2017 4+4 Festival as well. The desire to find a voice and a way of performance and connecting but also the hesitation to be in the forefront and wanting to disappear at the same time. During this time I thought a lot about Wayne, and how he always had large ideas and large concepts. Wayne is my Irish classmate whose way of working most mirrored my own past experience in a more traditional and "western" form of theatre and performance. With a similar background and love of theatrics and musicals. Whenever we would have a workshop or present ideas for our projects in classes, Wayne was always able to present a concept with texture and clarity and grandeur. He always had high expectations and demands that I myself was afraid to claim in my own works.

I started asking myself why I felt it was so impossible to do, and began imagining: if I had anything in the world, all the money and all the resources, what I would want to create? I thought about all the things around me that I

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<sup>32</sup> Proces Festival is the biannual end of semester exam period for our department at DAMU (KALD)

could never have on my own and what I really would love to become if I could, and through this thought process I realized I wanted to be a princess. I wanted to have large things and I wanted a palace. I wanted decadence, access, freedom, lightness, and beauty. I wanted to become the thing I was always told I could never be.

And that was the basic premise.

I had an image of people running through hallways and imitating this frivolous image that I had in my head of what “the European aristocracy” was like. Now I know that European aristocracy is complex and full of history but - I choose not to care. I am from the US and so I am speaking from my generalized perspective. My personal stereotype. I have no issues doing this because of the plethora of works I have seen that deal with American, Indigenous, Black, and Mexican etc. stereotypes. To me, the most radical thing I could do is exercise the right to stereotype the colonial culture I have been forced to exist in.

I have also always loved the Marie Antoinette film from Sofia Coppola. I used to watch it all the time when I was younger and something in it resonated with me. The sense of longing? I am not sure. This failure of a promise. Something inside it had a deeper sadness that resonated with me. And when I connected my desires in a performance to this film I loved, something clicked. So from this point I picked a place that I could use, Colloredo Mansfeld Palace<sup>33</sup>, and tried to get a group of artists to join me in this process.

Colloredo Mansfeld Palace is a building I would pass almost everyday going from DAMU to my work places around Prague. Positioned across from Charles Bridge and having visited it for exhibitions, I knew it was a very large and mysterious space. Having the possibility to work in this space would create the opportunity to have a very unique performance experience given the time period and material I wanted to work with.

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<sup>33</sup> With its rich construction development, fusing the elements of High Baroque and the later Rococo and Second-Rococo adaptations, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace is one of the most outstanding examples of palace architecture in Prague. The Baroque building, located at one of the most frequented sites of old Prague – next to Charles Bridge – grew on the foundations of a Romanesque and Gothic built-up area and a Renaissance house. Its owners included an array of interesting personalities, from Count Joachim Andreas von Schlick, who was executed for his participation in the Prague Estates' rebellion, the Jesuit Order and the Elector of Saxony, the cruel Count de Breda, to Prince Heinrich Paul von Mansfeld-Fondi. Colloredo Mansfeld Palace-Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy

However, before we could begin working in the space I wanted to start with rehearsals at DAMU just exploring what I would want to do.

The first group was: Cristina Manuela, Carla Wyrsh, Antonie Formanova, Marie Anna Krusinova, Myself, and Sai Psyn

And we all just started to explore. It was also a stressful process because it was the first time I worked with performers in an "official way" and three of the people involved are acting students so they expected me to guide them even as we came up with ideas together. So it required me to take on more of a director's position and really be open but able to guide at the same time. For the first rehearsal we all met and lay on the floor lifting each other's bodies, measuring them. Weighing them, giving them attention. From there we talked about things we could do. I also asked everyone to think of ideas they might want to try together to work and I asked them to bring an outfit they've always wanted to wear that they could prepare for another person.

I was actually struggling a lot to balance the role of director and performer. How to have the same presence with a new group of performers who I don't normally work with. Moving outside of the comfort zone of playing with familiar faces. I really wanted to work more with costume pieces and spaces (something I still want to do) but because of the way DAMU works, and the budget, I was unable to do this and we had to improvise. With some advice and exercise from Petra it was also a good way to explore core movements and see what would come from this process for the project. Working past the initial image to get back to that idea. Petra Hauerova is a lecturer and dancer who taught in the MA. DOT program at DAMU and also teaches at the Duncan Center Dance Conservatory in Prague. She was my mentor for this project and helped provide some more movement based exercises to help the performers, and myself. This is not a dance performance but movement and the body were very crucial to the quality of the performance. Especially since we were working with lots of materials stacked on the head and body.

I would listen to podcasts, documentaries, and read about this world I had always imagined through stories and film etc and create a balance between the two rooted in fact but also rooted in fantasy. So we would perform the tasks of dressing, eating and dancing. We would spend one day doing each action. This

would take ages based on this system we created, and the way this extended time somehow until it became almost unbearable, and you could see the impatience and boredom in each performer based on how they each work and their personalities.

For the first performance, we had to shorten this extreme duration to only 90 minutes. To this day we've done the show seven times: three times in Colloredo Mansfeld, twice in Vrtba Zahrada, once in Munich, one 90-minute version at DAMU for the winter Proces festival, one three-hour performance for the MA.DOT showcase. Each performance was done in a different space and each demanded a different type of approach and changed our actions. Types of spaces: Baroque dance hall/gallery, Baroque three story garden, student dance hall, black box theatre. I think there's something about the expectation of theatre's job and audience. Whenever we did it in a more traditional stage setting - the performances in Munich and the 90-minutes Proces performance were for student festivals - the relationship to the audience changed; people were suddenly removed from the action and could become bored, and it became a matter of waiting and sticking out for the actions to happen. Which in the case of this performance always took some time to develop. Its dramaturgy was based on a lot of action in the inaction of waiting for something to happen. It was more about the subtle performance of the performers as people, which was particularly difficult to do across the divide of the traditional stage. Especially in those original beginnings when we worked a lot with time and patience. Testing the audience and ourselves. Which is something I plan on returning to in future performances. Now that there are people who are good at certain actions: Tinka with leading movement, Wayne leading the eating, Jana the dressing, Cristina coming into each task in her own time etc., I think we could definitely cycle through these actions as a group. In reflection it is also about balancing the scale of the space and the actions. And also the quality of materials. The things we use are not all consistently nice. We have old clothes which, at this point, smell like a basement. A table covered in cardboard and yet we are still continuing our illusion of aristocracy.

## The Rehearsal Process

We spent a lot of time developing movements around the spaces. We would play different games where we would mimic our ideas of aristocracy and its systems. The games would also evolve as we grew the groups of performers.

One game we would play especially when there was no rehearsal space was “mimicking architecture”. We would go around Old Town to different parts of the tourist areas or to small passageways and find pieces of architecture or images in the buildings we enjoyed. We would then have to mimic them and create movements. We would also be doing this in our own ridiculous “Marie” clothing for the day, how the designers saw us in that moment or, if no designers were there, how we saw ourselves. Sometimes we would do more physical exercises, working with each other's bodies to get used to being touched and dressed by others.

We would also, in the same type of dress, run down passageways as if “everyone hated us” creating different characters as we went. Or we would, after watching one particular scene from *Marie Antoinette*, mimic the moments when Kiersten Dunst, as Marie walks through the halls of Versailles after finding out news of her Swiss lover<sup>34</sup>, and when she receives a letter from her mother<sup>35</sup>. Another game I invented for this rehearsal process is: Aristocracy (moving in the space like an aristocrat), Democracy (stillness/slow motion), Viva la Revolution (everyone fights), Oligarchy (everyone mirrors each other), Monarchy (pick up one person as a group). We all move through a room and one person shouts the form of government and we all have embodied this in the working together to move from one to the next. In one rehearsal we had each Marie deliver a manifesto into a microphone connected to a looper that affected their voice. The manifesto could be in any language and could say anything they felt about Marie Antoinette and what their version of her would say, or simply what she is about.

A lot of the rehearsal process for this project is based on loose interpretations of larger concepts, exploring the border between historical accuracy and total disrespect. Playing with our own imaginations to create something new. But, also tapping into the childlike aspect of pretending. A time with imagination where

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<sup>34</sup> Coppola, Sofia, et al. *MARIE ANTOINETTE*. Columbia Pictures, 2006.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5hLFyeqftY&list=PLnnv69ccLimN8oGejsStqaDq5bm3tCxAL&index=23>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV1i17MKDjw&list=PLnnv69ccLimN8oGejsStqaDq5bm3tCxAL&index=88> (0.00-0.16)



you don't necessarily need accurate items to fully embody a fantasy. This mostly stems from the limitations we faced in the initial rehearsal process.

We wanted a palace

*Didn't have a palace*

We wanted baroque clothes

*They were not possible to get easily or cheaply.*

We wanted to create a class system

*We are classless plebeians who study theatre.*

We wanted to dance

*Most of us used to dance but are not dance historians.*

For these wants and limitations I tried researching materials. But, realized quickly that it becomes too historical and limited too quickly. But when researching I would find one reference point and then absorb it not bring it to rehearsal and then try to explain and recreate it.

With the clothes we would dump all of the clothes we had and put them on the ground and then I would take a portrait of Marie Antoinette and we would post and dress the performer based on this portrait. Then we would have them move around. The whole time baroque music would play and then after a while we would change the song and the performer would be allowed to dance off all the clothes. Or they would try to get them off in whatever way felt better with the music. And they couldn't use their hands. We would also experiment with the different ways of disabling the performers because, in the videos of dressing <sup>23</sup> we would watch, you would do very little work assisting in getting dressed.

When going through the videos we would always watch them together as a group. That way we would be able to have conversations about what impressions we got out of the things we saw and the inspirations we were using. Kind of creating a new language and way of exploring these themes.

*Eating:* Having all the power with no agency. You can only say what you want but not grab anything for yourself. There is your "assistant" who you have to whisper to who will then shout what you want to two "servants" who will prepare what you want and serve it for you. You cannot grab anything for yourself.

*Dancing:* With the dancing we would watch videos of baroque dances and try to follow the instructions and movements. After this, we would mimic the larger ballroom dance environment and then one person would interject a different style of music in between and we would have to try to continue in the same vein. We would switch and listen to baroque music but dance like we are at a club with our friends.

*Dressing:*<sup>36</sup> We would look at portraits of Marie Antoinette<sup>37</sup> and using bandages, toilet paper, unwanted clothes from other students and performers, and sheets, we would try to recreate the image. Once the outfit was done they would move around the space with baroque music, which would be playing throughout the entirety of the dressing process. They were to explore their new shape and the bodily restrictions from their outfit. After a time, I would play a more modern song that they would listen to to go with the movements, and then we would play a third song that they had to try and remove their clothes during. Without using their hands. The performer couldn't move or see themselves until the end. At the end we would show them images and videos of what happened.

Now I will go into detail of the various spaces we used and how each space functioned.

### *Velky Tanecni Sal*

This first performance was the only version we have done that mimics a more traditional theatre structure. From the beginning I wanted it to be a more open form and with a more open ending but because of the structure of the Proces festival and the time frame we were allowed in the space we instead did a 90 minute version with a specific dramaturgy to fit this frame.

As we were coming up with the shape for the performance we had created three separate sections but each was quite long. Inspired by the societal aspects of Versailles culture during the time of Marie Antoinette. In a period of history and existence where time was not monitored in the way it is today each of these pieces had been rehearsed and developed with the idea of time taking as long as it needed. We were really doing the actions, not stressing about any time

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<sup>36</sup> Coppola, Sofia, et al. *MARIE ANTOINETTE*. Columbia Pictures, 2006.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOIlkCDzH4U&list=PLnnv69ccLimN8oGejsStqaDq5bm3tCxAL&index=7>

<sup>37</sup> Image in Appendix

restrictions. So each action took about 1-1.5 hours. Which we could not fit into a 90 minutes performance.

Originally my idea was to create an open space where you can watch the performers get dressed and go through these daily actions of this insular society. But, when the time came to do it in the shorter period we had to pick elements that fit the system the best and in which ways they would work. For this performance we (tried) to enter the space at the same time as the audience and we would start walking around the space. After some time Cristina would play a British podcast about Marie Antoinette while we started undressing and examining our bodies.

From there we would start to wrap up our bodies and in bandages and start to get dressed by Sai. One by one. And there were four of us. From here we would have to wait until each person was done and then Sai had to make audience members bring a table covered in food to where we sat while we tried to eat in layers of our own clothes that were made to mimic rococo clothing pieces. This also took ages. From this point Cristina would play more of the podcast and start going into audio from a dramatized historical piece mixed with baroque music. After we had a decent amount of the food and tried to eat. We couldn't use our hands fully or move in an easy way. We also had to drink Sekt. From here we would get up and start to dance in our clothing going over and over again trying to dance the clothing off. Once we were basically undone we would start to undo our bandages and examine our bodies again while getting dressed in our regular clothes. Once we were dressed in these we played disco and tried to get everyone to dance and as they danced we would start to put them in bandages and dress them and have them enter our world. This didn't work well but, the idea behind beginning an interaction with the audience was to say "now you've watched us go through this process, now it is your turn". Which could have been managed better but, the danger and fun of that option was we would then have to continue the performance for another hour with the same actions and new participants which is a direction the show could easily continue in for a future version.

### *Feedback*

A lot of people hated the music and dancing at the end. But I figured "fuck it" let's try it. I wanted this to be a never ending cycle where we find more victims

to join this system of elegance and restriction. Some people found the piece to be really interesting and I think it was because it had elements of humor and seriousness.

Some people, Robert Smolik, one of our devising teachers and a lecturer of scenography at DAMU, took the audio very seriously and felt it distracted. But I mostly enjoyed the British drone and tonal quality of the audio and less the content. But I think that's mostly an english language thing.

This particular version worked for a theatre audience (and so did the Colloredo Mansfeld version) because of the structure and the clear dramaturgy. However, I struggled with this version because I wanted it to be less of a traditional performance and it was difficult to create that system in the structure of the festival. We wanted people to move around and engage but it wasn't working. But now, looking from the other end. I think I would like to return to and further develop this version of the performance and see how "Marie" would manage in a theatre setting.

#### *Colloredo Mansfeld*

For this performance we actually had a 3 day residency in the space. So we started by exploring the space and working inside of it. But also from January-April we rehearsed knowing that we would perform here which colored how we arranged rehearsals and the mindset for our work in this period of time. It was a balance of not relying completely on the space itself and also, not doing too much. And finding a delicacy of presence that sometimes screamed or laughed in the moments it needed to. The reason I wanted to have the performance here in the first place is because I knew that I wanted to make something that was between a performance and installation.

Coming from making theatre in the US in a city where there was a huge space crisis I became more interested in the sustainability of performance and theatre inside the traditional theatre environment but also outside of it. I want to be able to make work that can exist in any space and I never want to feel like I can't do my job because of financial or space issues. So, going to Colloredo Mansfeld was a good option in my mind to explore this. It was also interesting to utilize a space

that is so full of history but so empty. The halls and the larger dance room give this beautiful image of a place that was grand, IS grand but is dying. Rooms you can only look at but not walk into because you'll fall through the ground. Floors you can walk on but not too heavily. It is a space that in that time and moment was perfect for the performance. Even in more ways than I realized when I first said I wanted to work there.

In this space we had a variety of Maries. Each performer developed their own character, this exercise was an extension of ideas that came from the first rehearsal process. We noted how the mindset, clothes and settings would create a new drag-type personality for the performer.

Marie Anna Krušinova and Antione Formanova: Actual Aristocrat Maries

Tinka Avramova: Instagram Marie

Jana Starková: Sleepy Marie

Kuba Vaverka: Existential Marie

Jiri Brnula: Spanish Ghost Marie

Sara Vosobová: Hungry Marie

Cristina Manuela: Tragic DJ Marie

Me: The Boss Marie

Wayne Jordan: Maria Theresa, disillusioned and upset. Slightly gossipy.

Cristina: DJ Marie

Sai: The designer who loves to eat

Debora: The grumpy designer

Riin: The stylist

Cristina was a tragic Spanish Princess whose costume could never stay on her body and would always fall off, she was also in and out of place in the costumes we would create. But perfectly, so she fit into the group of "Maries". Because Cristina was also the crucial point. Tying in all of our research with audio from documentaries and podcasts and the baroque, techno, and disco music we would work with in rehearsals. She had her own dramaturgy for the way the performance would sound. It would go from moments of podcast discussion to, electronic rhythms, to baroque flutes, to white noise, to disco, back to podcasts. In one of our most recent performances she brought a looper for the voice. With this we could make octaves and play with sounds layering over the work she was doing with her mixer. In one performance in Munich students asked if the sounds were on Spotify so they could play it later. Cristina responded that she mixes everything live and that each performance is different which the students were amazed by. We however, just kept laughing and asking Cristina to make an album.

For this version of Marie we had one “ground” character who would relate to the audience and the Maries themselves. This character was “Chekov” an actor named Alexandr Von Lyutenskov who at the time had a very Russian aristocratic style. He would tend to all of the Maries, serve champagne, interact with the audience and get them to try on clothes or shoes, or even position them around the space.

Tinka and Wayne were crucial to me in this performance. Because we had worked together so many times at this point it was easy to trust their commitment to their role in space. Tinka’s instagram Marie would interact with the audience, greeting them, documenting moments and playing with the environment. Her Marie was obsessed with selfies and instagram, we even made an Instagram page for Marie and she would also post stories of the show and tag people. Which added a very modern layer to this recreation of the past. Wayne’s character was extremely aesthetic. Marie Therese, Wayne would always be alternating in various combinations of costume. A wig, a skirt, a sweatshirt, with the task of constantly writing, in small books and pieces of paper, texts about Marie Antoinette, thoughts, and observations.

When we started doing Marie in this space we had a constant issue of time. It was impossible to have an official start due to the gallery being open to the public. So we decided that the start would be after I put instructions on the floor. The instructions weren’t really for the audience but more for the performers because they would come when they had time and needed to know what was going on or if something changed. In the back room I also wrote each performer and their Marie and the things they had to focus on that day. It was really about flexibility because, when the dates were discussed previously we didn’t know it was during workshop week. A period of time at DAMU where students have week long workshops instead of their regular courses. Initially the crossover seemed like it might work well but unfortunately made things difficult. I think this is the point of division where the performance really started to become its own entity. But it also became harder to get DAMU students out. I had already noticed that they tend to have a hard time GOING to things that make them uncomfortable. And this version of the project was hard to promote, hard to frame, and wasn’t in the building so it made it harder to get students out. But, the students who did come found it to be really interesting and people were able to enjoy the space or

the performance. (expectation, theatre, being told, and freedom of choice). I did not notice it then but my personal perspective of art and how I enjoy it involves interpreting things on my own, getting lost, missing the point, coming back.

This performance had difficulty in maintaining an audience and fitting into the Czech performative culture. But, because of this I think that's why a lot of the students really enjoyed performing in this piece. It gives them a lot of time for self interpretation and exploration of themselves as people and performers. A space for exploration of their own growing artistic perspectives.

#### *Feedback:*

The woman who worked there and loved the piece (depth later). We also got positive feedback from tourists and other people who happened upon the performance. I think because the room used in Colloredo Mansfeld was designed as a dance hall there was something about this version of the performance that made it come alive and give it a new reality for the moment. It is a space designed for movement and liveliness so changing it from the gallery space that is more used for now was an interesting transition. The woman who worked there, an older Slovakian woman really enjoyed it as well and she was constantly talking about how it made her day more interesting. At this point we realize just how well this performance works for older women as well. Krystina enjoyed this version but preferred the more traditional 90min performance at DAMU and Ewan McLaren, our production and management lecturer LOVED this version.

#### *Vrtbovská Zahrada*<sup>38</sup>

This garden was to be an expansion of the experiment done in Collared Mansfield Palace. I wanted to see how far we could push the boundaries of the performance and also see just how far it could expand. There were a few logistical problems that I was facing at this time, which mostly involved the availability of previous performers and the addition of new ones.

This particular performance also took place in the Proces festival. Which is where it needed to be technically as a part of the semester. But, in practice the amount

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<sup>38</sup> The garden is part of the Vrtbovský Palace no. 373/III. This city Italian-style palace garden is a gem among baroque gardens in the whole of Central Europe. Established on the site of the former vineyards around 1720 at Vrtbovský Palace. The owner Jan Josef Earl of Vrtba entrusted the building of the garden on Petřín hill slope to the architect František Maxmilián Kaňka.

of time this kind of performance demands didn't fit well in the festival and, something I had also noted after doing my Open Rehearsal the year before and the Marie Antoinette in the January Proces festival DAMU does not fully know how to place longer performances in the body of the festival and how to present things that do not fit in the world of "traditional performance" which is not a critique but more of a logistical observation. And, because KALD students have multiple projects that all have to fit in the frame of this festival along with other performances and projects it is difficult to get a full commitment from them in the summer semester the way I could in the Fall. So, with this version I was short on performers and decided to frame my performance as more open with a system that people could join with various levels of understanding.

In theory, based on the system we used in the palace it would work. And I think it did in many ways. More as an installation since the garden was so large. But, the DAMU audience struggled with this version as it involved a lot of independent wandering and hidden moments. There was not one clear dramaturgical pathway (I couldn't even name all of them now if I wanted to). And it was up to each individual audience member to get their own experience from the performance.

What was interesting was to see the differences from a performance standpoint in both the palace and the garden. It was great to see the ways in which the performance expanded when tourists would enter the space. Because both Colloredo Mansfeld and Vrtba Zahrada are both tourist spots and open to the public you would have different groups of people interact with the space. This allowed for multiple venues of exploration and performance. But, due to the scale of the space and the nature of how you move through a garden there were moments where the audience could become lost. Which I actually wanted to happen. Especially with Jiri Brunla who was a form of a tragic Spanish ghost Marie who would run through the gardens making this high pitch sounds and cover his face with a fan. Sometimes you would catch these different Maries in their own moments, of hide and seek or in conversation. Like echoes of a reconfigured past.

### *Feedback*

This performance I actually didn't receive much feedback on. Aside from Sodja Zupanc Lotker, our program leader, and the lecturers who had to provide feedback I think the scale and the timing and number of people were all a very



large experiment. In discussing with Sodja I did realize that people who were more familiar with installation art understood this version more than people coming from a theatre background. So in my attempt to explore other forms of presentation and incorporate different styles I think that this was a really good way to examine everything.

### **Reflections and Connections**

This reflection is surrounding the ideas and processes that came from and before this performance. There are a few things that stuck out to me repeatedly while going over the performances I've made in this time.

Marie Antoinette is/was a character

Marie Antoinette is a state of mind

Marie Antoinette is a way of connecting

Marie Antoinette is a way of exploring the self

Marie Antoinette is a way of opening

A way of closing

A way of growing

A way of becoming

A way of changing

A way of relating

A way of finding a new self

A way of childhood

A way of decadence

A way of destruction

A way of breaking free

A way of exploring womanhood

A way of letting things happen in the moment

A way of living without shame

A way of embodying

A way of finding myth versus self

A way of expectations versus reality.

A way of complete indulgence of self

Through this performance, I learned a lot about my own way of working. It was difficult to claim the role of "director" because I also wanted to be a "performer" but, as the director I had to have ideas, a vision, and the drive to fully realize a

project that I wanted to make, but also participate in and enjoy. For me, that involved creating a system of play and chaos that was understandable but also didn't need constant monitoring and control. It then also allowed me to play more with the performers as we would all get to look from inside and outside of our experiments of "becoming Marie" this was in the more developmental stages, once the form was more clear I took on a more directorial role. In the beginning stages of devising this was the best way to learn how other people interact with the material and its form. Carla, an Erasmus student from Giessen who helped develop the performance and commented on how it reminded her of drag performance. Which, I saw in the rehearsal process. Less of impersonating but creating an entire persona that is both inspired by and separate from the character itself. And then expanded into the failures of becoming the perfect version and the bodily expectations of society. And then, exploded into a menagerie of chaotic and fantastical versions of one character.

Throughout this process I had the actors take a lot of time to work through their characters and am trying to give them space to create their own or evolve their Maries from the previous performances. One of the problems I've been needing to work on is how to get people into the system and not take the chaos for granted. And for people who have never been in it before to concisely clarify what is going on.

So now, when I work with new performers on this project my main priority is to: introduce them to the system and find their characters. Find a system of movement and individual dramaturgy so they could perform independently. And, get them used to the process of dressing. But, I could only do so much with dressing and the actions that take time because a lot of performers did not have long periods of time to rehearse. And rehearsals with dressing take up to 3 hours. Most of Marie's structure and system came from limitations and necessity. But we have added new Maries and each performer still works to develop their own version of "Marie". Now we have: a hypochondriac Marie "I am happy I will die young, because I will still be beautiful.". A philosophical Marie "We are all going to die young it is the only thing that makes sense". A "Vogue/Funny Face Marie" who embodies a cross of American 1950s style and ballroom culture. A, "Slow Marie"

As Miguel Gutierrez states:

I see character as useful when it becomes a door to the plasticity we have as channelers of various versions of ourselves. I am always suspicious of solidity [...] I want to create situations that embrace instability and multi-directionality.<sup>39</sup>

I want to also explore ephemerality in terms of this performance specifically and incorporate the writing form Lisa Bielawa also from In Terms of Performance

My understanding of the use of the term in current artistic practice—and my use of the term in talking about my own practice—entails a different and even contrasting notion of value: rather than something having value for “only” a day, the notion of ephemerality suggests to me that something has value precisely because it lasts for only a day. Such art is precious because when it is over, it is gone.<sup>40</sup>

The temporary nature of ‘Marie Antoinette’ is something that I found to add to its dramaturgy. Because each performance has a loose form/outline that works based on each individual performer and audience member each session is different. Also, in these moments, I also work in character providing directions for performers and audience members. So it is impossible to repeat specific actions and interactions outside of each performance. Also, depending on the performer as well the characters change. Because they are created via a combination of the performer’s desire and strengths they become more real, reacting to each moment in a way that cannot be repeated as it depends on the setting of the performance, and what the mood of audience members are that day. We even set up each performance as its own capsule moment.

Interactive performances are based on risk. To the artist, they may feel like jumping into the unknown during each show. They may drain us, burn us out, or even traumatize us. They may be unsustainable in the long run. Yet they offer this unique opportunity for each member of the audience to be in direct conversation with the artist’s aesthetic and political choices, and to confront their own. To me, interactivity provides a space where art is stripped down to its fundamental core: the direct encounter with the audience.<sup>41</sup>

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My understanding of the use of the term in current artistic practice—and my use of the term in talking about my own practice—entails a different and even contrasting notion of value: rather than something having value

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<sup>39</sup> Gutierrez, Miguel. “In Terms of Performance.” 2019, [intermsofperformance.site/keywords/character/miguel-gutierrez](http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/character/miguel-gutierrez).

<sup>40</sup> Bielawa, Lisa. “In Terms of Performance.” 2019, [intermsofperformance.site/keywords/ephemerality/lisa-bielawa](http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/ephemerality/lisa-bielawa).

<sup>41</sup> Khoury, Tania El. “In Terms of Performance-Participation.” 2019, [intermsofperformance.site/keywords/participation/tania-el-khoury](http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/participation/tania-el-khoury).

for “only” a day, the notion of ephemerality suggests to me that something has value precisely because it lasts for only a day. Such art is precious because when it is over, it is gone. The anticipated goneness defines its value, and hence such art must be experienced to its fullest when it is actually happening.

Moreover, when something ephemeral is happening and we are aware that we are open to experiencing it fully, that openness creates in us a uniquely valuable experience.<sup>42</sup>

This performance is a constant work in progress. The format for this is constantly evolving as I evolve in my own practice. I have to admit there are many more notes and reflections that don’t fully fit in this thesis. Some aspects of the rehearsal process and the performance I will never fully experience or understand. It was a chaotic process for me as a director and became a long form process of exploring impulses and desires in performance and performativity.<sup>43</sup>

Each dramaturgical line gains autonomy and then goes down its own pathway. Making it a surprise both to the spectator and to the performers. Going into this project I didn’t plan on putting so many elements into one performance. But, it helped me to utilize my time in this experimental setting well. Engaging with each aspect of what interested me in art, performance, and theatre. Exploring the questions I had about the sustainability of theatre performance in different forms, and what theatre becomes when it changes spaces and stages. One thing that really resonated with me was the evolution of its forms and how it also became an exploration in mixing mediums. A garden versus a palace, what is the thing inside that makes one easier for an audience with theatre background to engage with? There is a gentleness that has to be used in these mixtures that I did not fully understand in the moments of performance but as a collective we managed to work through these challenges. In each performance we gain a Marie, or lose one but the party continues. Always taking on its own unique life in each new performance. Transforming, shrinking, growing, expanding into a new reality of decadence and chaos.

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<sup>42</sup> Bielawa, Lisa. “In Terms of Performance.” 2019, [intermsofperformance.site/keywords/ephemerality/lisa-bielawa](http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/ephemerality/lisa-bielawa).

<sup>43</sup> I have two interviews from performers that are in the appendix of this thesis.

## Conclusion

### So I Managed To Become A Princess And A Queen, Now What?

This is a continual work.

I also don't think this will be the only form of work I make but for now, having the space to explore the varieties of form of dramaturgy and individual relationships in long form performances is a way of thinking through the ways I see myself as a performer and director. It isn't always necessary to appear or disappear from a single consciousness or identity. But there are times where this can be beneficial, especially when attempting to explore ways of being with other performers and with an audience.

As an artist, my constant question is one of sustainability and survival for myself. And, throughout my time at DAMU I was also questioning how to transition from being an actor trained to work *for* others, to an independent artist making work from my own perspective, and finding out what that perspective even is. Moving from a reality in which you are constantly being "positioned" to exploring a variety of ways you can present yourself, opened up a new array of realities for me in this new way of being in performance. The exploration of where I am in a moment and what is interesting. How to reject the basis of how you would view "theatre" or "womanhood" or "blackness", and moving through those, creating new connections.

I want to briefly mention a performance I made recently, *We Didn't Know What To Do So We Danced* performed on July 17th 2020, for Festival Nultý Bod (Zero Point)<sup>44</sup>. This year the festival opened up a space for artists to rehearse and present work that would have otherwise not have been seen due to the COVID19 Pandemic. I have not addressed this in the thesis at any other point because it was not a part of my work or artistic process during my studies. The performance started as an exploration of methodologies that I began to work with throughout my studies, and also with the desire to explore parts of myself that I had previously thought could not be further explored. This performance is a dance piece that combines a musicianship that I had only begun rediscovering in August

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<sup>44</sup>"We Didn't Know What To Do, So We Danced."  
[www.nultybod.cz/en/detail/99/alyssa-dillard-we-didnt-know-what-to-do-so-we-danced](http://www.nultybod.cz/en/detail/99/alyssa-dillard-we-didnt-know-what-to-do-so-we-danced).

2019 after a breakup, when I started going to jams and playing with various musicians in Prague. Previously, I thought my time as a musician was over, having not had time to properly play or practice since my time in Austin. I also no longer thought of myself as a dancer after two hip surgeries for a disability I discovered when I was 23. I wanted to see how I could explore these art forms and combine them with the devising methods I was now becoming familiar with. Bringing in musicians, dancers, and people who, like myself, had previously danced but no longer danced regularly. Their movement memories of the previously repetitive motions of a past life.

This performance was an exploration of form and of methodology. Throughout it I wanted to continue my exploration making a space for performers to explore themselves and for me to also explore myself. However, this time around the work was difficult in that I was also working with musicians who were not familiar with this form of working and are used to an entirely different system of performance. So I had to go back to the beginning. How I would start, what was the initial thing I would be searching for.

I was back in Karlin, this time in Invalidovna.<sup>45</sup>

Both Invalidovna and the Kasarna Barracks are tied to Czech Baroque architectural history and to a military past. They bookmark my own Baroque/Rococo Fantasy, creating a triptych of spatial explorations that follow my journey from apprehensive Texan unsure of what I am doing to, the slightly less apprehensive Texan who is still unsure of what I am doing, but who knows how I want to explore things along the way. These spaces have such strong histories it is a wealth of opportunity to acknowledge, ignore, reject or embody its presence. In Marie Antoinette Walks Down An Elegant Hallway Knowing Everyone Hates Her the dance hall we worked in reactivated the space in a way that even employees from the Colloredo Mansfeld said was rare.

In Kasarna, we explored its past and our own uncertain futures. In Invalidovna, we offered ourselves.

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<sup>45</sup> It was constructed during the years of 1731-1737, following the example of Hotel Les Invalides in Paris, to provide accommodation for war veterans. The initial concept, which was nine times the size of Invalidovna today [...] Considering its intended size, Invalidovna was supposed to be a small, self-sufficient town, and if it had been completed, it would have been—together with its Parisian predecessor—one of the largest Invalides in Europe. However, even though it has never been completed as originally intended, Invalidovna is still one of the largest Baroque complexes in Prague and the whole of Bohemia.

My relationship to these spaces and the evolution of how I work with space and performers is also reflective of my own personal exploration of myself as an artist.

As part of this thesis, I have attempted to read and digest Fred Moten. Moten is an American theorist who explores blackness, music, history and performance. His words read like a song and when he speaks it sounds almost as if he is performing spoken word. The rhythms of his very large words flowing over one another like water flowing down a rocky stream. All this to say: I have a very hard time understanding him. His content makes sense to me but putting it into a small quote is nearly impossible as what he discusses is so wide and it takes time to go from beginning to end. Which is frustrating because we both speak English natively. But, after the third listen to his talk at MOMA, in the midst of quarantine, I was roller skating through a large park Stromovka and I stopped for water. As I sat with his words going in my ear I stopped and frantically pulled out my notebook and pencil bag which I always carry and started to take notes. It was clicking to me, I had a moment of connection between his words and myself. These are my notes:

Fred Moten: Black and Blur a Combination of Visual Art, Philosophy and History. "Consent not to be a single being." The relationship between a blackness and the ownership of a shadow as a way of controlling your own narrative and history.

The ability to speak or not. To fulfill expectations of societal standards of self, or not. How to explore your own narrative and imagery inside and outside of a history, background stereotype and expectation.

"Decolonization is always a violent event. At whatever level we study it."<sup>46</sup>

I have spent the past two weeks trying to absorb intellectualism and theory. I have to admit, I think I've done a horrible job. I listen, I highlight, but not frequently enough. I try to focus and my practice of working on my thesis for 1-2 hours a day faded into a deep depression towards the end of quarantine and now I'm struggling to find a new balance. It is the first week back to the world, another black man has been murdered by the police and a city is on fire. In this moment as I reread Franz Fanon and try to digest Fred Moten I begin to think about the work I was making in my first year at DAMU. The work I make now, and the person I was when I left the US.

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<sup>46</sup> "On Violence ." *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1977, p. 1

I left the US at a time when I was drowning in death. I couldn't escape the perception of my blackness. I couldn't separate myself as an individual or as a singular entity. I was trapped inside an idea of how I was supposed to function. To perform. To create. Maybe I will not say create. Produce. Produce is more accurate. Constantly illustrating my oppression in performances, in sound design, in lighting. To the point where I didn't know how to just "be" anymore. The question began to rise in my mind: "how do I become an artist?", "how do I push and explore myself?"

I knew the answer (for me) was to leave the country  
I needed distance, I needed time.

It is impossible to exist as anything in the ever growing capitalist dystopia that is the United States. I wanted to explore myself in another space with time, work and the space to get to know myself outside of the systems I was raised in. But my trauma followed. My cravings, my needs, continued to grow. Even as a child, growing up black in the US involved a list of restrictions to fit in, to survive, to assimilate. I never got to fully imagine myself as a princess. I never had this representation for myself. I had to make it on my own.

*The expectations of blackness.*

There is an expected set of behaviors that are optimal for your successes.

You can perform professionalism  
You can perform blackness

But what if you don't.

In Fred Moten's talk "Blackness and Nonperformance" at MOMA he discusses the case of a slave named Betty who decided to return to slavery after being granted freedom.

"The operational impossibility of sovereignty and self determination"<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Blackness and Nonperformance' | AFTERLIVES | MoMA LIVE.  
[www.moma.org/calendar/events/1364](http://www.moma.org/calendar/events/1364). [54:30-56:53]



And how this was an act of non performance. Here I am going to attempt to incorporate a bit of his language and talk into my own space. The questions that arose for me while watching his talk were in two parts. Why would someone return to slavery? Why would someone not want a new way of being. And also, "in either situation was this person granted a voice, consent, personhood?" I had never thought of freedom as an uncertain factor not worth risking. But it is something to consider. I have never thought of what denying an expectation would look like either. But, Betty does deny expectation by returning to slavery.

As a matter of the legal issue of contract at the heart of the case. The Law recognized Betty's free will. But as a matter of the facts Betty curiously even unthinkable asserted and acceded this legal freedom. Against the disapprobation and outright hostility of the abolitionists who had successfully brought the case before Shaw and immediately after Shaw's declaration of her freedom, Betty decided to Return to Tennessee with her owners. [...] a kind of reveling in an enacted threat of a freedom against freedom it haunts any and every promise of freedom the law both makes and guards. Her decision is an a priori fugitivity to [...] the force of this fugitivity is blackness as a performative against all performances of freedom and unfreedom dependent on the historical dilemma of a lack of meaningful distinction between freedom and slavery. The distinction here between performances of unfreedom and a freedom we might reference as the performative of blackness is crucial. [...] in the irony of all ironies [...] we find the formalization of the performance of freedom in the contract doctrine referred to generally as nonperformance.<sup>48</sup>

I remember riding on the plane to Prague imagining what I would create for our performance in the 4+4 Festival. I had so many ideas of listening to Kendrick Lamar, hitting things with rage, setting things on fire, crying, showing my pain. But once I arrived I realized I didn't want to illustrate my trauma for an audience I didn't know or understand. I wanted to just exist as an general "artist" who could use spaces in any way without any context. I wanted to disappear. I wanted to just be inside without showing much. But, I was unable to do this. I tried to avoid discussing what I had left, avoid becoming another "token black

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., [54:30-56:53]

woman” who always brings up race and trauma, who is always being asked to explain and illustrate her pain.

So in listening to this talk. I kept going over this phrase Moten uses in both this talk and his book *Black and Blur*:

“Consent not to be a single being.”<sup>49</sup>

Is this what that feels like? Was I going through a period of not wanting to perform individually and my illusion of a freed self I didn’t feel I was. I don’t feel I am in that same plan now but then, and even in my works, my projects are made in a way where I direct and perform. But I don’t want to be a main focus, instead I prefer to be in the mix, another performer who fits into a landscape. In “Marie Antoinette Walks Down an Elegant Hallway Knowing Everyone Hates Her” I give myself skates, and a wig, and a Rococo dress and walk around. Visually I am different from the rest of the performers but, I also don’t always perform. Sometimes I opt to become a landscape, or a musician, or a tourist inside the performance. Of course, I do give directions from time to time and observe, but, all while being inside of a larger performative entity.

The exploration of the freedom and unfreedom that is also the performance of blackness, and the evolution of my own work from, feeling the need to illustrate trauma. Versus working with various forms that explore lived experience, and trauma through interpersonal improvised performances. The evolution of which took a long period of exploring my own self and the ideas of “blackness” and “performance”. Eventually I started to look not only towards my own history and blackness as a larger concept that was interconnected, but also to the connected histories of my more close to home relationship to creole culture and history. This was something I did not think to incorporate until I moved to Europe and felt the need to explore the ways in which I could relate to my surroundings, and history.

The ability to ask this question and explore the elements of myself and history separately, allowed me to explore the ways in which I can perform and can also refuse to perform parts of myself or culture. Ways I could even, in turn, flip

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<sup>49</sup> Fred Moten, *Black and Blur*. 2017, p.15.

perspectives and attempt to appropriate the culture I was always told I could not perform. To take on an imperfect, and mostly mythical idea of access and wealth.

Embodying the opposite of what I am normally encouraged to portray, avoiding the traps of the "tragic negro" helped to create a new form of performance to go along with my own personal blackness. I don't know how to perfectly articulate it (my thoughts from this) but I will attempt.

Working against the expected. Acknowledging the balance in operating as an individual but also the reliance on a certain expectation of subject matter and performance to fulfill a larger narrative regarding race and identity. Exploring ways of acknowledging the expectations of the audience, yourself, and other performers. Understanding myself as a black artist and performer, I had to learn that there is a possibility to deny a level of access to blackness. Or, hyper-focus on aspects of my own blackness and history that do not necessarily need to be overtly stated to the audience but exist on a more personal level.

Michal J. Shapiro makes an excellent connection between Fred Moten and his book *Black and Blur* and two photographers:

By inter-articulating Mofokeng and Moten, we can observe two exemplary artistic emphases on black and blur. However, while Mofokeng describes his photographic practice as a matter of "chasing shadows" Moten figures his involvement as a romance: "Blackness is our everyday romance". And crucially, the epistemic framing of blackness in Moten's text, enjoins us to view it as something more than mere perspective.<sup>50</sup>

Santu Mofokeng and Roy DeCarava's<sup>34</sup> exchanges that exist without annotation or additional explanation of townships vs Harlem. This is explored in Teju Cole's New York Times article *Victory in the Shadows*. Mofokeng states "Violence is in the Knowing"<sup>51</sup>

It is a way of exploring a form of existence that does not need to be stated, but simply is. For example, creating Marie Antoinette and interviewing different viewers and performers in Czech and Germany and from different countries and backgrounds each person takes a different piece away from the performance.

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<sup>50</sup> Shapiro, Michael J. "Composing Blackness: Moten's *Black and Blur*." *Theory & Event*, vol. 21 no. 4, 2018, p. 982-987 [p.984-985].

<sup>51</sup> *Victory in the Shadows.* *The New York Times*, 10 Aug. 2017

However, one audience member, who is Japanese and Peruvian immediately understood and referenced the performance to the 90s Brazilian television series "Xica de Silva" which is based on the historical figure Chica de Silva, she was a former slave who rose to power in the town of Tijuco, and was in a relationship with João Fernandes de Oliveira, the overseer of diamond extraction for the King of Portugal.

Chica's trajectory remains a significant example of the power of individuals who believe in their own worth and ability to affect social change by altering expected patterns of superior/subordinate relationships.<sup>52</sup>

The radical denial of expectation. While I would love to write an additional chapter that goes into more depth on Chica and Betty, it will have to be saved for another time. I started reading about these two women in the twilight moments of my thesis writing. I couldn't fit them into any other section so I saved a part of my conclusion for them. But also for myself, even though these two women from their stories seem to have radically different experiences, they both work against the expectations of the society they exist in. Using both performance and non performance to create their own reality. Working against expectation, and for your own identity outside of performative expectations.

While I have to admit that this is going to the next level of my own personal dramaturgical exploration and artistic processing. I don't fully embody or understand it yet. But I can tell something is happening inside of me that tells me I'm heading in the right direction. I am not Betty and I am not Chica. But I am somewhere in between. Learning how to become more of a self. Accepting and rejecting expectations.

My dramaturgical process has evolved in many ways as I move through my history, references and work. Exploring ways of creating outlines for performers that allow autonomy and room for personal exploration. Directing in the midst of a performance as a performer, allowing the performance to grow and shift inside of itself. It is a bit like reading a book and then throwing it in the bushes and reciting the parts you remember the most. The rest of the information might be there, but what's more interesting to me is the personal take away. What is

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<sup>52</sup> Pereira, Maria Angélica Alves, et al. "Chica Da Silva: Myth and Reality in an Extreme Case of Social Mobility." *Iberoamericana* (2001-), vol. 5, no. 17, 2005, pp. 7-28[p.173].

important, what is being retained and offered. Working with long form performances in the way that I do, you have to be ok with surprises. It is impossible to control every aspect, and my job is often to monitor time, or energy of the performers and the audience. If something is starting to go away from the collective work, knowing how to redirect focus. When I do give directions in a performance it is always pending what is happening in the moment. Did the audience stay in a room for too long? How do we navigate this? Do we need to redirect focus? These are all uncontrollable variables that change each performance. And we join to prepare ourselves for our line in each performance and be prepared for the challenges and circumstances we'll meet along the way.

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## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### *Additional Interviews for Marie:*

Interview with: Cristina Manuela

#### **When did you join Marie Antoinette?**

Around November 2018

#### **Can you describe your Marie?**

My Marie was the Dj of the Party. The one isolated, trapped in her own mind who expresses herself through the music. The music mixing from my Marie somehow reflects all the possible Marie's lives. My Marie is the one hiding secrets because she is observing all the things going on. My Marie is the real alcoholic Marie and the foreign Marie who can't fit into the high class language from the court. Apparently phlegmatic, carelessness but at the same time ready to help.

#### **What about the performance did you find interesting for yourself?**

The time dilatation, the changeability and the unknown,

#### **Did you find something in it that you were able to explore as an individual performer/actor?**

The freedom of action and the listening of the environment

#### **What space did you enjoy performing in the most? Why?**

Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace. It was my first time devising with sound in real time and It felt like a research process performance. Apart from that, the aesthetics from the space, the whole architecture and the remains of energy in the corner gave some kind of feedback to the actions and created a parallel time or parallel universe of increasing lushness.

#### **What moments in the rehearsal did you find memorable or interesting?**

I especially remember the first ones about handling clothes, dressing impros and ways of eating

#### **Can you describe some of your actions from a performance?**

to drink  
to create a soundtrack  
to eat  
to throw  
to steal  
to dance  
to curse

**What did you do? Any memorable moments or interactions?**

More than doing I have a really strong memory of letting myself be doing, and receiving from the others. When I was being dressed up by the costume maker, all of a sudden and without expecting how the amount (barriers) of ornaments influenced the music I was mixing.

**If you joined Marie after seeing a performance, which performance was it?**

Not my case, I was from the beginning

**Did you feel that your voice as a performer was heard in the rehearsal process/performance?**

Yes

**What were some struggles you had during the performance process?**

Due to the length of the performance sometimes new ideas to keep on going got worn out. As well once in the performance gardens due to the big extension of the place, I felt that my zone of interaction was kind of abandoned.

**Is this a performance you would participate in again?**

Yes

**What was something that you explored with your Marie?**

Above all to build a soundscape in real time by involving all my body and with no clue about what was going to happen next. So I think I have developed an ability to improvise and to be aware and being in the present time during a performance. Also, in this case in particular how to balance the sense of community and the sense of independence and how to knead the time.

**Which space did you find it the most difficult to perform in? Why?**

With no doubts the room inside the Theaterakademie August Everding (Munich). I think in this performance is really important the symbiosis between the space and performers taking in mind the era of the historical events so it was really hard to connect with the architecture and shapes from that space and to adapt our bodies and costumes to a plain and neutral theatre room with a regular audience disposition.

**How did you feel about the rehearsal process?**

I felt comfortable and enjoyed it a lot.

**Did you feel a difference in the rehearsals from beginning to end?**

Yes. At the end of the rehearsals I felt it was difficult to find some triggers or motivations to enrich the process. I think it was because last rehearsals were in some aspects similar or re-used from the ones of the beginning.

**How did you feel rehearsing inside of DAMU versus the outdoor rehearsals?**

Totally different and accurate. Outdoor rehearsing was a nice touch to supply the lacks from the inside building from Damu and for training the interactions with everyday spaces and real people.

**Did you find it easy or hard to perform for the whole period? Why?**

Both. Sometimes everything made sense and It came so naturally but sometimes I felt myself with not much tools to improvise and I was afraid of doing things over and over. Even if I think that this performance afforded to be enjoyed and bored equally.

**What were some observations you had while interacting with the audience during the performance?**

The different approaches of the audience while getting involved to the performance. In the way that some people just feel like watching the events as a voyeurs and didn't want to interact. Another ones were distrusting, another ones were wildly into getting dressed, another ones felt like making a mess, etc. For me this performance revealed different aspects from the audience and because of that the performer more possibly can react to that or change her own actions or make up a new scene depending on their personalities.

**When did you join Marie Antoinette?**

- I was part of the original, first group of Maries, So that was winter 2018/2019, I guess.?

**Can you describe your Marie?**

- My Marie is very aristocratic lady. She takes everything very seriously but she also love to laugh, but not too much. She's very tender, but also cruel. She loves all other Maries but she also knows that she's something special.

**What about the performance did you find interesting for yourself?**

- It was kind of a pleasure to act like you're an aristocrat and you are something more but also you have to be still „on“ and play according to some rules. Sometimes I found myself doing something without meaning but very intently, like you're on some drugs, but it was interesting because I didn't felt bad, crazy or weird - everything was just right in Marie's eyes.

**Did you find something in it that you were able to explore as an individual performer/actor?**

I think the points of my Marie character I wrote upper - because in my normal life I'm not really like this, or I feel bad for „doing nothing“ or act like I'm something more than the others, but it was kind of relaxing to do it and really not feel bad.

**What space did you enjoy performing in the most? Why?**

I can't really tell because all of the spaces had something special or new to explore - the first we did was in the Big dance hall (small group of Maries) when I felt more like in a gallery, especially when we had the moments in kind of choreography.

I think The Palace and Gardens were best with the variability of space and the design/look - both played with us and we could be free in the movement but also the „normal“ acting.

**What moments in the rehearsal did you find memorable or interesting?**

The work with this group of ladies - mostly the beginnings when we changed our clothes, or ate like ladies, or did kind of little parties - the whole exploring of the concept and our characters and work with body and clothing..

**Can you describe some of your actions from a performance?**

**What did you do? Any memorable moments or interactions?**

Mostly it was some movements that were copying the shape of statues, little waving with the hands - my hands were all the time at a higher level. Also I had a lot of time drinking some champagne or around the food. Sometimes I was running as a lady - very little steps.

I remember the moment when I was just looking from the window and doing some movements with my hand, and waving to people outside. I did it about 5-10 minutes. Or I in the garden I was watching the birds and then started to dance for them and with them - that was my favorite moment.

**If you joined Marie after seeing a performance, which performance was it?**

Probably the one in the garden because there I think was the freedom of the performers most significant.

**What about the performance made you want to be involved?**

I was there from the whole beginning so the project was just some idea in that moment - for me it was the work with Alyssa Dillard, then the theme of MA, I saw the movie before, so I was wondering how we will work with it.

**Did you feel that your voice as a performer was heard in the rehearsal process/performance?**

YES.

**What were some struggles you had during the performance process?**

Mostly the time. It is a process where it is good to be there the whole time, so sometimes I was sad that I couldn't be there full time.

**Is this a performance you would participate in again?**

Probably yes, it is also some kind of meditation for me - but I think I wouldn't have that much time for it now.//

**What was something that you explored with your Marie?**

I would say that some, for me, a new kind of acting. I wasn't really acting a role, but still I wasn't really me - or I was but some of my other side. It was interesting to explore this kind of my face.

**Which space did you find it the most difficult to perform in? Why? How did you feel about the rehearsal process? Did you feel a difference in the rehearsals from beginning to end? Where there parts you felt seemed connected? How did you feel rehearsing inside of DAMU versus the outdoor rehearsals? Did you find easy or hard to perform for the whole period? Why? What were some observations you had while interacting with audience during the performance?**

I didn't find none of them somehow difficult to perform, but I think there were different kinds of performative resources. The big dance hall was for me most divided into the performers and spectators. The others were more connected, so

you didn't really know who is still performer, who is spectator, or is someone watching you, or you are doing it just for yourself..

How I already said, the process of rehearsal was changing with the new people joining. In the first period there were just some of us, and it was more like some special group of election. We had some secret tasks and for me it was more intimate. Later i started to rehearsal with new different people, but it was something interesting too, and I could more work on my character - also it created a hierarchy between us - the „origin“ Maries were the highest.

The moment when we went for the first time out of DAMU was very interesting and I was excited - the tasks were littlest different and also the contact with the „audience“ as a normal passing people around.

Sometime the interactions were part of some of the tasks, sometime it just came out of our action - it was interesting to observe how they react to us, or how they talk to us, as an aristocrats, or some weird ladies going around. Usually our conversations were by the table, where the food was - but my character was so aristocratic that she didn't really talk to others..

Sorry for this late sending. I did it for more than one sitting so I hope it is somehow useful - also sorry for my grammar.

Let me know if you need something else, or to explain something.))  
kisses\*

Your Antonie

### *Marie Antoinette Instructions for Audience from Colloredo Mansfeld Palace*

- This is a durational performance
- This is a space to find your inner Marie Antoinette
- Take your time in th space
- Leave and come back
- If you feel so moved you can join us

This is Marie Antoinette Walks Down an Elegant Hallway Knowing Everyone  
Hates Her

## APPENDIX 2

### *Images*



Marie Antoinette in Court Dress

Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun (French, Paris 1755–1842 Paris)



Marie Antoinette Walks Down An Elegant Hallway Knowing Everyone Hates Her

Photo by Miljan Vuletic





Marie Antoinette Walks Down An Elegant Hallway Knowing Everyone Hates Her

Photo by Miljan Vuletic

## **APPENDIX 3**

### *Glossary*

American Theatre: My own personal definition of American theatre, meaning, larger productions in a more corporate form. Big budget stage plays and musicals and their touring and regional theatre counterparts.

Illustrating: The act of showing a situation for the sake of explanation without out depth, for the benefit of the audience.

Being: The act of existing as is, knowing the audience will not have all the details of your personal dramaturgy. Acknowledgement without explanation.

Disappearing: The act of removing oneself from the central focus of a performance. To make a statement of presence, or to deny the audience an expectation.

Being Fully Present: Putting yourself in the central focus of a performance. Acknowledging the audience's expectations and working with them. Playing with stereotypes and curiosity and allowing a conversation.

Expectation: What the audience is used to seeing, in a colonial and racial context. Socially familiar ways of being in a performance as a non-white and non male identifying performer.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, Person of Color

Blackness: A state of being. Black as possible, existing in the history and trauma in the way that works for the individual. Outside of the larger societal stereotypes. Understanding that regardless of the action you are black and it cannot be diminished.

Restriction: A physical limitation put upon the performer that also represents a societal limitation.

Softness: A way of touching topics and interacting that reaches out to the performers and audience.

Failure of a Promise: The acknowledged refusal of an action. The failure is not negative, it is a choice. Alternatively, it is a promise, and action, or an expectation that was offered to the performer without any backing. It was never achievable.

Core: The base offerings of a performer or a performance.

Inaction in the action: The experience of waiting long periods for one moment to begin and end, during a performance. Ex: The eating and dressing stages of Marie Antoinette Walks Down An Elegant Hallway Knowing Everyone Hates Her

Duration: The time frame of a performance.

Long Form Performance: A performance that is not only durational for one day but over a period of days. Ex: The three day/three hour long performances of Marie Antoinette Walks Down An Elegant Hallway Knowing Everyone Hates Her at Colloredo Mansfeld and Vrtbovská Zahrada.

Chaotic performance: My personal form of performance and dramaturgy involving live direction. Each performer has their own individual dramaturgy and list of actions. There is not a specific script for the order of these actions. Just a timeline of events that lead from the beginning to the end, with potentials for interactions with other performers and audience throughout. The direction can be changed and I, as the director can interact with performers during a performance. But, the performance cannot be stopped or drastically changed in the performance period. Thus, while being able to manipulate certain aspects of the performance the whole is not in my full control. Which gives a freedom for both myself and the performer, leaving space for exploration with improvisation, character, and story. Creating a new experience each time.