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Mara Ingea

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LITTLE ACTS TO CONVERSE WITH SPACE

Mara Ingea

Thesis advisor: Ph.D. Branislava Kuburovic

Opponent: Ph.D. Sodja Zupanc-Lotker

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Mara Ingea

Vedoucí práce: Ph.D. Branislava Kuburovic

Oponent práce: Ph.D. Sodja Zupanc-Lotker

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Declaration

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

LITTLE ACTS TO CONVERSE WITH SPACE

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

Prague, date: 15/08/2022

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Abstract

The projects I have worked on during my studies share similarities with one another in terms of elements or approach. This is why I decided to divide this thesis into three chapters, each one of them reflecting one of the major aspects that define my work. My projects are often anchored in the real, in what constitutes everyday life. They also often engage audience members in a more or less active way, and place space in the foreground, as a major component.

The conception of the projects, and therefore of this thesis, came from the wish to communicate with an environment, listen to it and play with it. My aim was to create situations where the audience would be in dialogue with the surroundings. I wanted to create a theatrical machine where all components, including the audience, would work together to put the piece in action. From this starting point came the realization that audience participation and scenography in unconventional settings were deeply linked to one another, and that my interest for one of them could hardly be separated from the other.

This thesis is a reflection on my way of working. It analyses what made me take this direction, and what has inspired me in this process. I am referring in it to some artists whose approaches or topics can be compared to mine, among which a few Lebanese ones that share with me an interest for space and places. My projects won't be presented in a chronological order but in dialogue with the themes and concepts of each individual chapter, with theoretical writings and with other artists' works.

Abstrakt

Všechny projekty, na kterých jsem během studia pracovala, sdílí několik přístupů k umělecké tvorbě. Tato diplomová práce je rozdělena do tří kapitol, z nichž každá reflektuje jeden z důležitých aspektů mých projektů. Všechny charakterizovalo společné téma, to, co si definujeme jako realitu nebo každodenní život. Spojoval je také princip aktivního zapojení diváků a práce s prostorem jako výrazným komponentem divadelního díla.

Má diplomová práce se pokouší analyzovat psanou formou to, o co se snažily i mé projekty – komunikace, naslouchání a hra s prostředím, v kterém se často vyskytujeme. Cílem bylo vytvořit divadelní situace, v nichž by byli diváci povzbuzeni vést dialog s okolím. Chtěla jsem vytvořit pomyslný divadelní stroj, který by jednotlivé komponenty včetně diváků postupně uvedl ke společnému jednání. Má prvotní myšlenka mě vedla ke komplexnější výzkumu aktivního jednání publika a scénografie v netradičním prostředí. Došlo mi, že tyto dva komponenty se vzájemně ovlivňují a že je nemožné oddělit jeden od druhého.

Prostředkem této práce reflektuji svůj způsob myšlení, mé inspirace a impulsy, které mě prováděly uměleckým procesem. Zmiňuji také umělce, včetně několika libanonských, jejichž práce sdílí podobný zájem o práci s prostorem. Své umělecké projekty nebudu v této diplomové práci prezentovat chronologicky, budou zmiňovány v návaznosti s tématy jednotlivých kapitol, s teoretickým zohledněním a porovnáním s díly jiných umělců.

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Introduction

The palpable

“What is your unrealized project, your dream?”¹

The curator Hans Ulrich Obrist often starts conversations with artists by asking them this question. Although his conversations are mainly used to archive thoughts and artistic processes, this future-oriented beginning constitutes for him a solid ground to initiate new projects. If I think about this paper as a conversation with myself and begin in the same way Obrist would, I should start by asking: What project would I dream of making?

The answer to this question is more complicated to me than it seems, and is probably not limited to a simple sentence. I have plenty of little ideas or creative desires I wish to fulfill, but it would be hard to name one clear project. However, these ideas and desires are based on some specific interests and affinities; so perhaps it is towards them that I am going and it is them that have been driving my artistic approaches so far. They are the source of the creative initiatives I have taken so far, and are at the same time leading me towards the achievement of my unrealized dream.

But dreams, just like memories, appear in fragments, or as a “non-hierarchy of images, movements and words”² as Hans-Thies Lehmann qualifies them. So, it might also be that I have already started building this dream and that it is only appearing step by step. It is true that when I look back into the past and into the projects I have done during my studies, I can see that they have a lot of points in common with one another and that each one of them contains something from the others while at the same time touching an unexplored ground. All of them somehow reflect my way of being and of communicating through objects and space.

¹ Obrist, H. U., *Ways of Curating*. Penguin Books, 2015, p. 57.

² Lehmann, H-T. *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p. 84.

I like objects, and I've always liked using them to create. Crafting things is something I have been doing since my early childhood, and it is this love for manual work that has made me choose the path I have taken. I started by making small objects that were either functional, such as boxes, picture frames, etc., or simply decorative. But soon enough I started to get bored by these kinds of objects and began to think about something more exciting: I wanted to make them move. And this is how the dream started, the dream that is still ongoing today. A dream of mechanisms, of objects that move alone, of a space that performs by itself, of a place that communicates with people, a dream of a machine.

Mechanical machines are fascinating to me, for the way they look and for the fact that it suffices to move one single part of them for the whole to get into action. Building mechanical objects or automatons is something I have wished to do for a long time without ever really getting to it. I created objects that could be moved or could be transformed step by step, but never an object that would move or transform itself alone only after being actioned. It is maybe because of my lack of knowledge in engineering and mechanics that I have so far gone for alternative ways of seeing objects move, either animated on a screen, or simply moved by a human hand.

Discovering the work of Jean Tinguely was a great revelation for me. Suddenly everything I had wished to create was standing before my eyes. His machines were moving, drawing, exploding, living, creating a show by themselves³. What I also found fascinating is that all of them had a very machine-like aesthetic, exposing their gears and different pieces of metal. I simply fell in love with his work and it made me want to dig more into kinetic art, this "art that depends on motion for its effects"⁴, according to the Tate Gallery's definition. At the time, my connection to the performing arts was not very strong, but I believe that it is my interest in kinetic art that made me step into the performing arts world. In fact, my true point of interest was not to watch a sculpture move, but was more connected to the multiplicity of senses involved in the process of experiencing the art piece. It is not only about looking at it, but also about moving around it, feeling it moving, listening to its movement and even touching it; in short, interacting with it.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaSGVAO-Ki8>

⁴ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/k/kinetic-art>

This realization also made me reflect on the creative process of such an experience, and it became clear to me that what I was looking for was an interdisciplinary approach to arts in general. Another artist that has influenced me a lot is William Kentridge⁵. Knowing about his work confirmed to me the possibility of creating a whole experience for the audience, by combining different techniques and creating environments. I am referring here to his installations such as *The Refusal of Time*⁶ for example, where he combines video projections with a sound composition played through megaphones and at the center a sculptural object that is, in fact, a machine. This piece of his is not one to be only watched like we would watch a movie in a cinema, although it contains projections, it is not to be only listened to, it is one to be experienced, to be immersed in. It is the entire room that is communicating the essence of the work. Kentridge's work lies on the border between the visual and the performing arts.

This is the reason why it is easy for me to relate to what he does. Having a background in animation, closer to visual arts, I usually think up my projects in terms of materiality and space. Having also a persistent dream of building a mechanical machine, my approach to directing a performance often starts from imagining it scenographically.

In fact, machines have been present in theater from the very beginning of its history, as scenography has an "ineluctable absorption and exploitation of new technologies - something that has typified theatrical production since the *mechane* of ancient Greece"⁷. Of course, stage technologies have evolved since then, and manual mechanical systems are not used anymore in the way they used to be. There are still some artistic groups, though, such as Royal de Luxe⁸, who base their shows on mechanical machines that play a central role in their pieces, being at the same time stage, props and characters. An example for that is their *Giants Spectacular*, the giant puppets walking in the streets, or their show *La Véritable Histoire de France*⁹ (The True History of France), where a giant

⁵ <http://intermsofperformance.site/interviews/william-kentridge>

⁶ <https://vimeo.com/212907506>

⁷ Aronson A., *Foreword* in McKinney J., Palmer. S. (ed.), *Scenography Expanded*, Methuen Drama, 2017, p.xvi.

⁸ <https://www.royal-de-luxe.com/en/>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nw97qDNh3VM>

book set on a public square flips its pages to reveal different environments for each chapter of the piece.

Such machines, although different from Tinguely's - aesthetically of course and also in the sense that to work, they constantly have to be manipulated by humans - are equally fascinating to me, and made me reflect on the true nature of a machine. K.G. Pontus Hultén wrote that "A machine generally means to us something with a practical purpose, a device that substitutes for or extends man's own forces."¹⁰ This idea is exactly what Tinguely was contradicting by creating his "machines that didn't do anything useful", as David Lee phrased it in his article "Jean Tinguely: the Pioneer of Useless Technology"¹¹. Thus, the idea of a machine is questioned; is it because it moves mechanically that an object or assemblage of different parts can be called a machine?

"In the Cartesian system, all material things - human beings, animals, plants, and inorganic nature - are machines ruled by the same inexorable laws, and so susceptible of analysis by the quantitative methods of mathematics."¹² These words, also written by Pontus Hultén, expand the notion of machine beyond the limitations of lifeless objects. Following his thought, we could say that if human beings are machines, the networks they are part of are an interconnection of machines and constitute therefore a bigger scale machine. Coming back to theater, we could apply the same reasoning: a performance is a human-created system that is built as a network of different components that trigger each other to put the whole piece into action. It can thus be considered as a machine in itself.

Perceiving theater as a machine is perhaps what kept my machine-building dream alive. My machine's existence doesn't need to be limited to one single object but can be expressed through an entire space functioning according to its own rules, or through a system of actions responding to one another. It can be contained in one place or have dispersed components; it can involve a single subject or a multitude of them; it can be set

¹⁰ Pontus Hultén, K. G., *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968, p.6.

¹¹ <https://www.digitec.ch/en/page/jean-tinguely-the-pioneer-of-useless-technology-20912>

¹² Pontus Hultén, K.G., *idem*, p.8.

in the present or can be traveling through time; and despite my preconceptions, it can be material, yes, but can also be something immaterial, perceivable through different feelings and senses.

Throughout my studies I have created projects that were, in one way or another, inspired by machines. Using the machine as a dramaturgical tool helped me structure my work and develop systems to make the performances happen. With people, objects and places as components, my machines were anchored in reality and focusing on the environment surrounding them. But machines need to be actioned to work, and audience members were often the ones to launch them, by getting involved more or less actively and becoming a crucial part of the dramaturgy of my work.

I am dividing this paper into three chapters, each of them being about one of the recurring themes appearing in the projects. Each chapter, divided into parts, will present specific aspects of my work and explain the processes I have been through to conceive my projects.

Chapter One is entitled *Reality as Playground*. As the title suggests, it deals with the fact of playing within daily life. The term *reality* refers to a very relative and subjective concept. It varies from one individual to another, changes according to environments, organisms or social constructs. As Elizabeth Grosz wrote:

Reality is mobile. There do not exist things made, but only things in the making, not states that remain fixed, but only states in process of change. Rest is never anything but apparent, or rather, relative... All reality is, therefore, tendency, if we agree to call tendency a nascent change of direction.¹³

Growing up in Lebanon, I have always been confronted to a diversity of social and cultural tendencies, where reality is not one but multiple. In this amalgam of different religions, languages, ethnicities and traditions, everyone lives following their own reality, while cohabitating with the reality of others. Thus, it came quite naturally to start creating my

¹³ Grosz, E., *The Thing*, in Candlin, F., Guins, R. (ed.), *The Object Reader*. Routledge, 2009, p. 127.

own. In the reality I created, objects were very important elements. Imagining they were alive or that invisible creatures lived inside of them developed in me a certain curiosity about them, especially about the broken or abandoned ones. There are a lot of abandoned objects on the streets everywhere, and finding interesting ones to take them and use them, either after transforming them into something else or not, is a practice that I enjoy doing and that fascinates me very much. Those objects contain a lot of information about what they are or what they used to be, but also tell a lot about the environment they are found in, and become a sort of mediator between the space, the time, and the person who finds them. I will expand this idea in this first chapter, but will also talk more about the effects of reality on my artistic practice.

I will refer in this case to reality in terms of authenticity of the performers. I have never liked to be on stage, but I suddenly found myself performing in all of my projects and in those of others. There was a need to be myself in the projects, to bring this part of reality to a created situation. I learned how to differentiate performing from acting, while still believing in fictional stories within reality. Using authentic personal elements also involves a part of randomness, letting things happen sometimes by chance or by accident. And speaking of accidents, what life also brought during my study years is a pandemic... I will also focus in this chapter on the big impact Covid-19 has had on the way of working, and how navigating through restrictions became a tool to create that influenced the choice of formats and strategies.

In Chapter Two, *Audience Participation*, I will explain how spectators played a central role in each of my projects. Putting people in a participatory situation is something that I do a lot and that is probably linked to my affinity for installations and performative spaces. In her book *From Margin to Center*, Julie H. Reiss wrote that “The essence of installation art is spectator participation, but the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another, and even from one work to another by the same artist.”¹⁴ It is no wonder, then, that my desire to create a machine came in pair with the one to invite people to get involved more or less actively in it.

¹⁴ Reiss, J. H., *From Margin to Center*, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England, 1999, p.xiii.

And as Reiss said, there are different levels and kinds of participation. Before realizing this, I have always thought, as an audience member, that I hated to be invited to participate. I was referring, in this case, about those situations where a performer on stage randomly chooses someone from the audience to join them and be a part of the show for a moment. Every time this happened when I was watching a show, I made sure to avoid having an eye contact with the performer and lowered my head to be sure not to be chosen.

But on the other hand, I love playing games and touching things around me. This is another type of participation, one that is more about interacting with materials and not being put in the spotlight. I would be happy to invite people to join such a situation, since I like it myself. But designing an interactive experience is not always an easy task and it requires a lot of elements to be considered. It influences the format of the project and requires a specific system to be organized. Of course, it can be challenging to create a performance that relies, for a big part, on an uncertain element. It is hard to predict how audience members will react, so the challenge is to be able to adapt and improvise according to the situation. This chapter will focus on the link between audience participation and scenography, and on the fact that deciding to invite people to play an active part in the piece influences the way of conceiving the project.

Chapter Three, *Space and Places*, will be about the importance of space in my practice, and will expand a bit more on my final MA project *Do you know a place that doesn't exist anymore? (DYKAP)* [Appendix 7], that has places and memory as central themes. While growing up in Beirut after a long civil war, I often heard stories about places that used to exist but that got destroyed during battles. Living between past and present places is something that I got used to without really realizing it. It developed in me an imagination of what places used to look like, or how life used to be long before I was born. This added to, or contributed to my interest in space design. Here again, I think that my childhood influenced a lot my way of thinking, and my recent projects retain elements from the early crafts I used to make. Already as a kid, I would create environments, miniature ones that would fit into small boxes that would unfold step by step, made with material I would find around. This pattern repeated itself in my final MA project, being only bigger in scale and with a specific motivation.

Is it because my father is an architect, and my mother writes about the past that I instinctively decided to make a project about reconstructing memories of places? Memory and architecture are very linked; “Our recollections are situational and spatialized memories, they are memories attached to places and events”¹⁵, wrote Juhani Pallasmaa in his essay *Space, Place, Memory and Imagination*. I have a good memory, and therefore I get easily attached to places that are or were part of my life. They are important to me, and it is their value that motivated me to put this theme in the center of my work.

The theme of past places is a recurrent one among Lebanese artists, most probably because of the country’s history. Lebanon has seen thousands of years of human generations settling down on its lands, who brought with them their cities and architectural constructions, now in the state of ruins. There is a big number of archeological sites that have inspired artistic works, but they are not the only source of inspiration. Recent history like the civil war has also had a big impact on the relationship of people towards places, and more than once, it has been the core element of artistic practices, focusing on the past, memories, and transformation. I will have the chance in this part to present some of the Lebanese artists I am referring to and whose works share with mine similarities in the research. I said earlier that the motivation for my project *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] came partly from a personal attachment to some places that disappeared, but it is also true that it got very influenced by an even more recent history of Lebanon. My arrival to Prague in 2019 coincided with the beginning of the ongoing socio-economic crisis that the country is facing. This means that every time I was going back home for holidays, I found it transformed, with some places that had closed or had disappeared either because of the crisis or because of the explosion of August 4th 2020¹⁶. I was coming back to an unfamiliar situation, having to readapt to the constant changes each time. This gave me a new perception on the impermanence of space, phenomena I had heard about for all those years and that I was finally experiencing myself quite strongly. It is this that truly inspired my research and that built in me this profound interest for places and spaces that don’t exist anymore.

¹⁵ Pallasmaa, J. *Space, Place, Memory and Imagination: The temporal dimension of existential space*, in Andersen, M., A. (ed.), *Nordic Architects Write: A Documentary Anthology*, Routledge, 2007, p. 192.

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53668493>

Chapter One

Reality as playground

A great beauty of art lies in its potential to offer twists to reality and propose some alternative ways of looking at it. In this chapter, I am going to talk about my practice of working within everyday life: How picking up objects that crossed my way often became the starting point of my projects, how being myself became a way to perform, and how the pandemic of Covid-19 influenced my choices of formats and locations.

1. Finding things

Observing, touching, taking

Accumulating what seems to be useless objects is something that I have been doing since my early childhood. I remember coming back home from school with pockets filled with pieces of broken objects or colorful packaging I would find on the ground. It has even made me earn the title of “Best Finder” among my friends. Of course, each time, I was being told that I shouldn’t pick those things up, that they were dirty, but apparently this hasn’t discouraged me from continuing since I’m still doing it today. I am fascinated by the power of transformation of these objects. One day they are pieces of trash, and the next they become costumes, puppets, props, or whatever we can imagine them to be.

I don’t know how the habit of picking up things from the street started for me. Out of curiosity maybe. Or with the hope of finding a hidden treasure. This practice is not uncommon among artists, since found objects have often been and still are the starting point or the core element of projects from different artistic disciplines. As Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins have written in the introduction of their *Object Reader*, “Found objects are important in art practice, trash is recycled, a forgotten memento is rediscovered and cherished, and an obsolete technology is resuscitated.”¹⁷ They inspire different forms of

¹⁷ Candlin, F., Guins, R., *The Object Reader*. Routledge, 2009, p. 13.

art ranging from street art to photography, books, sculptures or performances. Number of artists use elements of the street as protagonists of their work, but their approach to them varies from simply observing the objects and thus keeping a certain physical distance from them, to taking them and using them as materials.

The photographer Irving Penn for example, made a series of pictures in which he shot abandoned materials on the street, such as chewing gums, paper cups and other objects that he found.¹⁸ Observing what lied on the ground and photographing them or picking them up and taking them to his studio to shoot them there, not only made him become a sharp observer but also influenced the viewers' perception of these quotidian, almost invisible-becoming objects. As Julian Stallabrass said it in his essay *Trash*, "Such a practice is bound up with modern and postmodern scrutiny of the street, with sniffing about in the place where some vestigial community might be found, in the hope of picking up some scent of significance [...]"¹⁹ Abandoned objects carry in them stories bigger than their own that reflect social tendencies.

Each time I encounter an abandoned object, a series of questions runs through my head: What is this thing? Where does it come from? Did it belong to someone? What material is it made of? Is it a part of something else? Would it be easy to use? What can it become? I remember this series of questions popping up in my mind when I first saw the door handles I used in my *Walk in Reflection* [Appendix 3]. Although it didn't take more than a few seconds, this moment was important to me to decide whether or not to go further with my street interaction with them.

Seeing something is one thing, but touching it takes the experience to another level. "Touch is the sensory mode that integrates our experience of the world with that of ourselves."²⁰ It is coming into physical contact with the object, be one with it for a moment, because as Pallasmaa wrote, "the eye is the organ of distance and separation, whereas touch is the sense of nearness, intimacy and affection."²¹ It is the fulfillment of the need to

¹⁸ <https://lesoeuvres.pinaultcollection.com/en/artwork/playing-card-new-york>

¹⁹ Stallabrass, J., *Trash*, in Candlin, F., Guins, R. (ed.), *The Object Reader*. Routledge, 2009, p. 422.

²⁰ Pallasmaa, J., *The Eyes of the Skin*, Wiley-Academy, 2005, p. 11

²¹ Pallasmaa, J., idem, p. 46.

feel it and sense it, to be curious about its texture. The senses of vision and of touch are deeply linked.

Vision reveals what touch already knows. We could think of the sense of touch as the unconscious of vision. Our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience.²²

Touching means that the object is really interesting or worth investigating. It is the analytical step before taking it, when its material and texture are getting tested and approved. It was very surprising to me, when I touched one of the door handles for the first time, to see that its mechanism was still working. Since they were in a container among scraps of wood, some of which probably had been doors, I unconsciously perceived them as non-functional objects. Touching them proved me wrong, and I realized that the door handles themselves were working normally, but that they were deprived of their function because the doors they were attached to had been turned into scraps.

It is usually after touching it that I determine whether or not to take an object I just found. If I decide to take it, it is usually without having a clear idea of what I am going to use it for. If it has a nice shape, nice material or a nice movement, it is this one quality that will convince me that someday it could be useful. In the back of my head the idea of the machine is still there: perhaps this is the one piece that I was waiting for to start building my mechanical object.

Coincidence

It's maybe because of my eternal indecisiveness, but I like the idea of life deciding for me sometimes. More than once, an encounter with a particular object on the street has resulted in this object becoming the main element of a project. Just out of chance, in moments when I had no particular idea about what to do, something appeared in front of

²² Pallasmaa, J., idem, p. 42.

me as if suggesting me to use it. Finding something always feels like discovering a secret or getting involved in a riddle. This curiosity builds up a relationship towards the object that often becomes a fuel for the creative process.

An expert in this field is Sophie Calle, whose work I've always found very interesting because of their interdisciplinarity and their direct link to daily life. Many of her projects are based on the simple coincidence of finding something, or something happening to her. But more than just the coincidence, it's her dedication to accept the offer and grasp the material to make something out of it that makes her work become what is it. An example to that is her piece *L'Homme au carnet (The address book)*²³. This project started when she found an address book on the street, and took it to investigate about its owner. Openness, determination and boldness were key elements for her to achieve her piece despite the critiques about her being too intrusive in someone else's life.

It is true that coincidence becomes a creative tool only when one is open enough to consider anything that crosses their way as a material for creation. The coincidence of finding an object on the street and using it as starting point of a project came to me a few times, like in the case of the door handles that I used in my *Walk in Reflection* [Appendix 3], and the chairs I found with Lukáš Černý, that we used for our project *Ztráty a Nálezy (Lost and Found)* [Appendix 4].

Finding door handles shining among scraps of wood opened up a big potential for imagination in me. Pallasmaa wrote that "The door handle is the handshake of the building".²⁴ In my case, the door handle was more of a handshake with a multitude of creative possibilities; a meeting that resulted in a few months long collaboration. I remember thinking while seeing them, that they seemed so peculiar in this setting, so interesting looking when placed in a context that was not a proper door. And when I touched them and noticed that their mechanism was working properly, I had the feeling for a short moment that they had the power to lead me to another place, and to open whatever support they were placed on. This is what convinced me to take them, and how

²³ <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-savage-detective-on-sophie-calles-address-book/>

²⁴ Pallasmaa, J. *The Eyes of the Skin*, Wiley-Academy, 2005, p. 56.

my fascination for door handles - not attached to a door - started. They are of course very suggestive objects, anybody can recognize them as door handles, which also made them tricky to work with, but at the same time they possess many other features that bring along the potential to add layers of fiction. This is what encouraged me to start working with them and to explore their potentials as objects outside of their normal function of opening doors.

In the case of *Ztráty a Nálezy (Lost and Found)* [Appendix 4], the coincidence of finding chairs dumped in a big container outside of a school under renovation came as a great help for Lukáš Černý and I who were feeling stuck in our creative process. We took one chair each, at first simply because we thought they looked nice and were planning to use them in our respective homes. But when at some point we casually sat on them on the side of the road, and started to watch people passing by, we realized that they could actually become the core of our project. We began to invent stories around them and found out that daily life, and especially encounters such as the one we had just had with the chairs, was a great material for performance. Pallasmaa wrote that “In artistic works, existential understanding arises from our very encounter with the world and our being-in-the-world - it is not conceptualized or intellectualized.”²⁵ Our project came to us by chance. We had tried hard before that to invent systems that were not working and were over-complicating things by trying to come up with new strategies. Eventually what made us move forward was simply to accept what we had found in front of us and use it without thinking too much, just by reproducing a similar situation to the one that had happened to us in our performance.

Coincidence brings a feeling of adventure, of taking a risk. It gives room for improvisation to become a central tool for creation. My final MA project *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] relies a lot on the objects and furniture that are found in the performance venue. The way the audience's places are built depends on what props or scenographic elements will be present in the location on the day of the performance. Here again, unpredictability is a primordial element of the piece. “Se laisser guider par le hasard”²⁶ (let oneself be guided

²⁵ Pallasmaa, J. *The Eyes of the Skin*, Wiley-Academy, 2005, p. 25-26.

²⁶ Méaux, D. *Les Effets Escomptés de la Contrainte chez Sophie Calle*, Nouvelle Revue d'esthétique n°9/2012, p.84.

by chance), as Calle would say, is what gives a piece its identity. And in the case of this last project, it is what makes each performance unique, not only in terms of improvised actions but also in terms of scenography.

Upcycling

The term “upcycling” is not to be mistaken with the term “recycling”. Upcycling designates “the activity of making new furniture, objects, etc. out of old or used things or waste material”²⁷, whereas recycling designates “the activity of treating materials or products using a special industrial process so that they can be used again”²⁸. Therefore, turning materials or objects found on the street into other objects would mean upcycling them and not recycling them.

In addition to my fascination for the shapes and potentials of random objects, another main reason for me to pick them up and use them in my work is the wish to reduce waste. Creating performances or other types of art pieces involves using a lot of materials, and unfortunately, they often get thrown away when the piece is over if they can’t be used again. It is not always easy, but I try as much as I can to reuse old materials instead of buying new ones.

When artists pick up objects that they find, it’s usually to use them in their projects, and therefore, upcycle them. For example, Jean Tinguely’s *Madame Lacasse’s Shoe*, this “ballet of poor discarded scraps that have belonged to people’s lives”, has been described as a “paroxysm of junk in motion” by Pontus Hultén²⁹. Many of Tinguely’s mechanical sculptures feature second-hand objects and reused materials taken from junkyards. But Tinguely is not the only one to do that. This way of working is common among artists, and especially practitioners of *ecoscenography*³⁰, the combination of ecology and

²⁷ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/upcycling>

²⁸ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/recycling>

²⁹ Pontus Hultén, K. G., *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968, p.172.

³⁰ <https://ecoscenography.com/what-is-ecoscenography/>

scenography. In her book *Ecoscenography: An Introduction to Ecological Design for Performance*, the ecoscenographer Tanja Beer demonstrates the power and importance of sustainability in performance making, and talks about ecoscenography as a way of building communities and reducing the environmental impact of projects. The online platform of her book features some pieces from different artists who use ecoscenography as a foundation of their work. Tanja Beer herself presents there some of her projects, among which *This Is Not Rubbish (Strung)*³¹. In this project, installations, landscapes, costumes and scenography are created by using material rescued from landfill. These materials become the core of the artwork through their journey from the place they were found in to the different places they perform in.

I can well relate to this practice of giving a second life to discarded materials, since upcycling is something I have been doing for a long time now. I started doing it already since my younger age, but my need for it has been accentuated during the beginning of the garbage crisis in Lebanon in 2015. The waste treatment system was so badly managed that dumps became saturated and unable to take any more trash. This resulted in rubbish accumulating on the side of the streets and forming mounts of detritus all around, over and under the bins, even flooding onto the sidewalks and sometimes onto the roads. Of course, it also affected the air. The smell of trash invaded the whole place, and the entire country turned into a giant garbage. It was not just bad, it was absolutely disastrous.

During this time, I was desperately trying to find a way to help as much as I could in this situation. All of the recycling points in Lebanon are operated by private initiatives, not public ones (the public sector is extremely corrupted), so people seldom throw their waste into a recycling bin because it requires an extra effort to take them to the recycling company by themselves, or to go through a registration process for a private recycling company to come and pick the trash up from their homes. I took it very seriously to try and collect interesting objects lying on the side of the road that I could eventually use in a project instead of letting them rot on the streets. It also became a sort of challenge or duty to try to find the things needed for a project instead of buying new ones.

³¹ <https://ecoscenography.com/this-is-not-rubbish/>

This has turned into a habit and recurrent practice that has followed me to Prague. Upcycling is now more than just a way to produce or acquire scenographic material; it is a way for me to conceive my projects, a state of mind that serves as a tool for creation. In almost all of my projects or the projects I took part in during my studies, the main props were made of upcycled materials. This applies for the door handles, the chairs, the paper from *Sending Space* [Appendix 1], and even Puppet Daniel from my project *Daniel in Prague* [Appendix 6], who was entirely made out of materials found randomly.

As for *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], it was born with the idea of using ready-made props and objects found in the performance space. These objects we use are often simple furniture from everyday life, or parts of scenography from old productions. We try to create new meanings out of them, pointing out their different qualities. This can relate to the practice of the Australian performance designer Imogen Ross³², also featured on the ecoscenography webpage, in which she describes her way of using found and secondhand objects. She says that whenever working on a show, she always chooses upcycled or recycled materials for her productions, sometimes reusing props and scenography parts from previous projects. Second hand objects carry with them a history from previous experiences, so besides being environmental friendlier than new ones, they also enrich the story-telling of the piece. Ross feels very responsible about the future of her sets: when a production ends, she makes sure not to leave her creations in the theater space, and stores them for them to be reused in another production, either one of hers or someone else's. For her, sharing materials among productions shouldn't be seen as a bad thing, as thought by many people, but as a way to make set design a more sustainable and ecofriendly practice.

I am trying to conceive projects with the same idea in mind; reducing waste and being aware of the environmental impact I produce. Although reusing and upcycling are only one part of ecoscenography, since it expands to the way of conceiving a piece and building a sustainable system or a community life, this movement is very inspiring to me, especially when I think about creating in and for Lebanon (but not only).

³² <https://ecoscenography.com/2021/01/31/resourceful-ingenuity-interview-with-performance-designer-imogen-ross-australia/>

2. Existing in performance

A performance involves the creation of a system proper to it, engaging multiple people and elements to make it happen. Participating in the making a performance requires one to enter its system and consider it as a new reality.

Performing

Being a performer means taking the piece through from beginning to end and carrying some responsibility towards the audience. The performer has the task of communicating information in the best possible way, it is the person the audience will see and will associate to the happening of the actions.

While entering the performing arts world, I was more interested in the work happening behind the scene, like designing or directing. I was never planning to perform, but I eventually did, and it happened naturally. It started during the presentation of the idea of my first project, *A Walk in Reflection* [Appendix 3], involving door handles. I received a comment from someone saying that the fascination I had for the door handles was something particular to me, and that therefore I should be performing to carry and transmit this trait through the piece. I was a bit reticent to this idea at first, but I ended up doing it, and again, this came quite naturally during the rehearsals. This is when I truly understood how different performing and acting are, and that performing mostly consists of being myself while accomplishing some actions in front of an audience.

Performing is anchored in the real. Unlike in drama theater, it doesn't necessarily require to embody a character with a specific personality, or to follow a story. These things could happen, depending on the nature of the piece, but not necessarily. Performance art specifically, encourages artists to follow their true nature while being on stage. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, "the changed use of theatre signs leads to a blurred boundary

between theatre and forms of practice such as Performance Art, forms which strive for an experience of the real.”³³

Performing, in performance art or other performative formats, is based on the authenticity of the performer, authenticity being “the quality of being real or true”³⁴. While performing, keeping the idea in mind of being true to myself helped me to accomplish my role and communicate information. The main challenge was to be present in front of an audience, and mostly, to speak. This is why I tried, at first, to speak as little as I could, but I soon realized that sometimes it was something necessary to do, so I made the effort to do it.

It is uncomfortable for me to speak in public, but I did push myself to perform and to talk to the audience. This makes me question the authenticity of my way of performing. Was I being true to my nature by pushing myself out of my comfort zone? Getting out of my silent bubble was something I had already started doing for some time before moving to Prague. I was used to performing in a context different to theater or arts: in horseback riding show jumping competitions³⁵. Sports and theater performances, although not exactly the same, present some similarities. According to Michael Billington in his theater blog, “both are public spectacles that reflect society and depend on attracting paying customers.”³⁶ After all, sports are a form of social event that entertains people since Antiquity, just like theater. “All sport, at its best, is a form of drama.”³⁷

Competing in show jumping prepared me, in a way, to perform in theater. Similarly in a sports competition and a theater performance, the performer is either alone or with a team (in my case the horse), in front of an audience watching them. The performer needs to be present to deliver a good performance. Being watched while performing is something that I got used to since I started competing. But although I knew that people were watching me and awaiting the result of my round, my focus was not at all on the audience while being in the arena. On the contrary, I forgot about spectators, being focused on the horse and on riding my course.

³³ Lehmann, H-T. *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p.134.

³⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/authenticity>

³⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/sports/show-jumping>

³⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/jun/17/thereslittledifferencebetwe>

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Performing in theater was slightly different for me in this regard. All of the pieces I performed in so far, were participatory performances that required me to interact with the audience, sometimes even speaking to them, which was something I dreaded. However, thanks to horseback riding again, I had already developed some experience in speaking to an audience, which I did while teaching. Teaching requires to speak loudly and communicate information clearly to the riders. Although the information to communicate is very different in a riding lesson than in an artistic performance, I believe that it has given me some confidence to speak in front of people.

Performing and talking to an audience still generates some adrenalin, but I think that competing and teaching prepared me for that. While competing, adrenalin comes from the pressure of doing well, the stake of the result, and the competitors. Usually, when my turn to enter the arena came, the stress disappeared as I started the course, while approaching the first fence. In a theater performance, this adrenalin is also present before the show, making sure everything is in order and ready for the audience to enter, and slowly dissipates just after starting to perform. One major difference that I found between both performing contexts, horseback riding and theater, in addition to the very different natures of performances, is in the body movements. In horse riding, I have never had the feeling of being alone or of my body being exposed to the spectators' looks, because I have always had a companion to perform with - the horse - whose body accompanied and supported mine during the performance. The first time I had to perform in theater, I realized that I was feeling a bit alone, my body having to be guided only by myself, despite the presence of other performers. This is a reason why it is always helpful for me to perform with other performers or with objects, with any other material element that can support me in the actions.

Depending on the format of the piece, performing is more or less demanding, and therefore is more or less challenging to deliver. Being alone on stage to be watched, and having a clear division between performers and spectators is something I tried to avoid. It simply reassures me to create a situation where every present person would get involved in the piece one way or another to make it happen together. Some strategies have to be set to create such an experience. Thinking of a performance as I would think of a game, with various rules and multiple players has helped me to imagine a situation where I would

be comfortable enough being a guide for the audience. This was a bit the thinking process behind a few of my projects, such as *A Walk in Reflection* [Appendix 3], or *DYKAP* [Appendix 7]. These projects involved the audience in an active way, but also required me to be a present figure talking and explaining ‘the rules of the game’ to them at the beginning of the performance.

In her piece *All Ears*³⁸, Kate McIntosh also created a system to help her navigate throughout the show. From the beginning of the piece, she is alone on stage and talking with the audience. She speaks, and people answer her not with words but with actions, by doing what she invites them to do. She establishes from the start a safe space for people to join her, not putting anyone in an uncomfortable position of being in the spotlight for example, and keeping a uniform lighting between the stage and the audience, to set everyone in the same atmosphere. In a discussion she gave after her show during the Prague Crossroads festival 2019, she told the anecdote of how the idea came to her to make the audience participate in the piece: she was feeling uncomfortable being alone on stage, until she realized that she was actually not the only person in the room, but with dozens or hundreds of other people. This is how she decided to include the audience in the show, as a strategy to have some support while performing.

Fiction in reality

Since a performance involves the creation of a system proper to it, working in a performance requires one to enter this system and consider it as a framed reality. No matter how true to everyday reality a performance can be, it always includes a layer of fiction. One possible definition of ‘fiction’ is “something invented by the imagination or feigned.”³⁹ Since the situations created during a performance are imagined by the creative team and follow a specific dramaturgy, they can be considered as fictional even when dealing with ordinary elements.

³⁸ <https://vimeo.com/82259922?login=true>

³⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fiction>

Performing, in contrast with acting, as mentioned in the part above, requires the performers to be themselves, and stay true to their nature. But a performer doesn't behave exactly the same way in daily life and in front of an audience during a show. Entering the system of a performance involves adapting our behavior to it, and thus acting slightly differently than in everyday reality. It is possible that while performing, even if the piece doesn't include a story with characters and lines to learn, a performer embodies a specific persona, or expresses certain characteristics relative to the role they play in the performance. The performer Miguel Gutierrez said: "I see character as useful when it becomes a door to the plasticity we have as channelers of various versions of ourselves."⁴⁰ Accessing a different version of ourselves is a useful tool to perform with. It doesn't mean becoming something else, but expressing a side of us that wouldn't necessarily be expressed if not for the sake of the piece.

In *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], each one of us, performers, has a certain task to accomplish. We do not embody a specific character, but act following some characteristics that are needed to fulfill our role. We are all 'experts' in our 'jobs', and have an attitude that communicate this expertise to the audience. It is not easy to be constantly assertive while improvising, but it adds some quality in terms of performance.

For example, the builders (during the premiere, En-Ping Yu and Mara Ingea) should seem to have knowledge about construction (constructing with objects, in the context of the performance, not constructing actual buildings). This way, not only is the process of building faster, but it also creates some kind of trust between audience and performers, especially when an audience member is asked for help. When sticking to a specific way of performing, being assertive and 'experienced in the field', audience members confronted to us feel more confident following what we ask them for or helping us accomplishing a task. This was a feedback that was given to us during a feedback session: when we are on the job, we are working and have tasks to do to get the job done. There is no time for chatting unless it is to get necessary information, we have to be efficient, especially when we have many places to build. I remember that I was a bit shy, at first, to ask an audience member to wear a worker vest or to remove it when their task

⁴⁰ <http://www.intermsofperformance.site/keywords/character/miguel-gutierrez>

was done, but believing in having a very important duty to fulfill helped me to communicate more directly. Of course, being assertive doesn't remove our right not to know how to do something, and take a bit of time to think about it. This is when it is helpful to ask an audience member for help or for their opinion about how to build a specific thing. Visitors also understand quite fast that it is a task that can be done by anyone, since it only requires some imagination on ways to use objects, although we received more than once the feedback of someone being a bit intimidated when asked to help, fearing to do something wrong or not to have the right knowledge for it.

The archive keeper (Kirstine Hupfeldt Nielsen) has a more introverted role. What this performer does, doesn't necessarily need to be understood in detail by the audience. It should just be clear that she is working, following a certain logic, and that she is establishing links between different messages people write. In addition to this task, twice during the performance, she goes around the space to collect the names of the recreated places. The task of collecting names was also useful for the performer not to feel too stuck in staying on the archive wall only. Establishing connections between messages was interesting, but not enough for the performer to be fully immersed in this activity. The exact role of this performer has never been totally clear to us. I feel like the archive keeper has the potential to be of more importance in this piece, and that the potential of this role hasn't been fully exploited. It is one aspect of the performance that I wish to develop in the future.

The last role present in this performance is the one of the architect, the person mapping the space (Susana Botero Santos). Throughout the performance, her main task requires her to draw what she sees, to represent all the objects present in the space on a plan of this space. She was always very focused while doing it. But towards the end of the show, this performer has the other task of standing up, walking around the space and reading the names of the places, mapped by the archive keeper, while pointing to the position in the room where each place was standing. This action, specifically, requires the performer to accept the reality of the performance, to enter its fiction and believe in it. For example, while pointing to different corners of the space, she could state that "At 7:35, we could visit a grand father's living room here, from its window we could smell the smell of food coming from the Chinese restaurant that was here. At this place there was a bedroom, but it has moved to the other side of the space. Instead, we can swim in this lake, and

next to it there was a church but it doesn't exist anymore..." She spoke as if we had really been in those places, merging multiple realities, the actual space, the fictional one, the past and the present ones.

Adapting to the reality of a show also means adapting to its geography. The worlds created all possess singularities in terms of arrangement and design. Lehmann wrote:

The blurring of the borderline between real and fictive experiences [...] has far-reaching consequences for the understanding of the theatre space: it turns from a metaphorical, symbolic space into a *metonymic space*.⁴¹

Performing in *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], as well as in any other performance, requires to truly believe in the reality of the world created in the piece, as fictional as it may be. As there can be different versions of oneself, there can be different versions of reality. Alejandro Jodorowski stated that "if we lucidly observe our reality, we would affirm that it is poetic, illogical, exuberant."⁴² Each version outside of the ordinary could be seen as fictional, since there is always a part of fiction in reality, in the contexts in which events happen and the ways things are interpreted.

⁴¹ Lehmann, H-T. *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p.151.

⁴² Jodorowski, A. *Psychomagic - The Transformative Power of Shamanic Psychotherapy*. Inner Traditions Rochester, Vermont, 2010, p. 23.

3. Facing reality - working during a global pandemic

Reality and daily life can be fun to play with. But sometimes, unexpected events happen, that push us to modify our normality. In such cases, the only response we can have is to face the situation and adapt to it in the best possible way. This is what happened during the Covid-19, pandemic that forced everybody to stay home and rethink their ways of working. In our case, as theater students, spending almost the entire study period in such a situation challenged our creativity to find alternative ways of performing.

Covid-19 - Juggling with restrictions

In 2020, at the breakout of the pandemic, the state of emergency was declared in the Czech Republic (as well as in the rest of the world), obliging establishments to close their doors and people to stay at home to contain the spreading of the virus. Restrictions were set to prevent group gatherings, and were updated each time the situation improved or worsened. The world was like in pause, but life had to keep on going. Rhythms changed, time felt slower, and people got physically separated from one another but at the same time very connected to each other through this common situation and thanks to the internet. Even though all countries closed their borders, the world got united, everyone having to face, for once, the same problem.

In Prague, like elsewhere, restrictions were applied following the number of cases. So, each wave of Covid brought with it a wave of restrictions, that were changing every once in a while. Deciding to create projects that would be performed in person meant having to adapt to those restrictions, no matter how they changed. As artists whose field is defined by live interactions with groups of people, not being able to work with this crucial element has been very challenging. It was not easy to adapt, but it was necessary. Restrictions can be challenging, but they can also become a tool to create, a guideline to follow. Long before Covid regulations, artists have been making up rules outside of official laws, to make their creative process more playful or more challenging. This is the case for example for writers of the *Oulipo* movement, among which's members we can name famous poets and novelists such as Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec or Italo Calvino. *Oulipo* stands

for *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, or Workshop of Potential Literature. It was founded by Raymond Queneau and the mathematician François Le Lionnais, to “investigate the possibilities of verse written under a system of structural constraint.”⁴³ They were creating rules for themselves to guide their writing and make it sometimes more systematic, to be creative within these constraints.

Queneau himself stated that a classical writer who writes his tragedy by observing a certain number of rules that he knows is freer than a poet who writes whatever passes through his mind and who’s a slave of other rules that he isn’t aware of. (“Le classique qui écrit sa tragédie en observant un certain nombre de règles qu’il connaît est plus libre que le poète qui écrit ce qui lui passe par la tête et qui est l’esclave d’autres règles qu’il ignore.”)⁴⁴ Therefore, being framed by rules doesn’t necessarily mean an impossibility to create, but quite the opposite. Restrictions put creativity at work to come up with solutions in moments when they seem impossible.

My project *A Walk in Reflection* [Appendix 3] was created in part thanks to the Covid gathering restrictions. They influenced the format a lot and guided me to make specific dramaturgical choices. At the time, in Prague, all indoor places were closed but people were allowed to gather outdoors with masks. This is one first element that pushed me to have the performance taking place outside. It is also thanks to this restriction that I discovered my interest for working in public spaces, thing that I probably wouldn’t have realized if the situation would have been totally normal and if we would have been able to work in school. It’s very convenient to work in a classroom, so I am not sure that I would have had the idea of going outside if it wouldn’t have been for this restriction, or in the context of another ‘restriction’, like a school assignment for example.

The challenging aspect of it was that the number of people gathering was limited. The performance couldn’t be made for an unlimited amount of audience members but had to be designed for a small group only. This is not a very big restriction per se, since

⁴³ <https://poets.org/text/brief-guide-ouliipo>

⁴⁴ Queneau, R., *Qu’est-ce que l’art?*, Volontés n° 3, 20 février 1938.

performances with limited audience capacities, like one on ones or other types of small group performances is something that is quite common in the alternative or independent theater scene. In my case, what was the most challenging was that this number of people allowed to meet changed more than once during my creative process. It started with only two people from different households being allowed to meet, and evolved to five or six people at the time of my showing. This influenced my choice of format, but also affected the working process. I started developing the project with two other performers, En-Ping Yu and Eszter Koncz, so we had to find ways to be with the audience members while still respecting the sanitary regulations. This is how we first came up with a walk for one person being guided by different performers through different steps. The project evolved with the restrictions, but also with the weather. We started developing it during the autumn in a park, when the weather was still friendly. But soon the winter came, and staying outside for several hours in a freezing weather became quite hard. This is another factor that influenced the choice of space for this project. Eventually I performed it alone in Pasáž Lucerna⁴⁵ for a group of five audience members, since it had been allowed at that moment.

Respecting regulations was challenging but at the same time it felt like being part of a big game with very serious rules. When playing a game, we are always following the rules that define it, and that's what makes it fun. Liking a game means liking its rules, and that's what drives the will to play. Donald Woods Winnicott stated that "In playing, and perhaps only in playing, is the child or adult free to be creative."⁴⁶ Approaching this situation like a game to play was perhaps the key element to make it more pleasant and to give free reins to our creativity. Seeing playfulness in Covid restrictions is perhaps also something that inspired the project *Games with a City* [Appendix 2]. As its title mentions it, it was a collection of games designed to be played with the city, taking into account the sanitary rules of real life at the time. One aim of this project was to invite people to play despite the restrictions and despite having to be alone. The games were designed to match with the country regulations, while at the same time having different rules, proper to each of them.

⁴⁵ <https://www.prague-stay.com/lifestyle/review/118-lucerna-passage>

⁴⁶ Winnicott, D. W., *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock Publications, 1971, p.53.

Distant dramaturgies

During the pandemic, we started developing distant dramaturgies, to create projects from a distance or for a very limited number of audience members, according to the restrictions. Many different formats of performance came out of this, done either through a screen or even in person while respecting some sanitary rules. Of course, this has not only been done by us, DAMU students, but by artists and performers around the world as well.

Suddenly we could see performances behind windows, behind screens, behind face masks... Performing from a distance became a new normality. In my case, all of the projects I initiated during this time were performed in person. This was not impossible since gatherings were still allowed, although very limited, and the conditions for that changed every once in a while. The first project I worked on at the beginning of the pandemic was *Sending Space* [Appendix 1], co-created with Eglė Šimėnaitė and Valtteri Alanen. It was a performative installation that happened in different spaces and times, and for two types of audiences: geographically distant ones and those present in the space at the time of the showing.

The idea was to send a piece of the space we spent our days at during the lockdown to someone far away who couldn't be there because of the sanitary regulations. For that, we made a big recycled paper out of old pieces of paper, in which we included leaves and seeds picked up in the parks we spent our time in. The performance happened for people in the space experiencing the installation; they were the ones who could tear pieces of the paper to send them to someone else by postal service. But just like in Cristina Maldonado's project *Content*⁴⁷, it also happened for the people receiving the letter, who were the final witnesses of the whole process. What Maldonado named 'mail art'⁴⁸ is mostly intended to the receiver of the package she sends. Mail art is a form that started in the 1960s, consisting in the artist sending a postcard, fax, package, email, etc., containing an artwork - drawing, poem, object, etc. - through post instead of exhibiting it

⁴⁷ <https://cristinamaldonado.com/portfolio/content/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/mail-art#:~:text=Mail%20art%20began%20in%20the,Schwitters%20and%20the%20Italian%20futurists.>

in a conventional way. Maldonado's performance happened long before Covid, but in the same idea of performing for someone from a distance.

Performing distantly doesn't necessarily mean performing online or from different countries, but can also happen with performers and audiences not so far from each other, only not in direct contact with one another. This could be the case for example of audio walks, of performances through the phone or where audience members are guided by performers through a messaging platform. Groups such as Building Conversations for example, used the theme of distance as a starting point to create a phone conversation between two strangers, in their project *Distant Thoughts*.⁴⁹ People were put in contact with one another and were following a given script during a phone call. We were using a similar process in the performative walk I worked on with Arnis Aleinikovas [Appendix 5]. We were communicating with audience members through a messaging platform, sending them instructions about what to do and how to interact with their surroundings while walking, and ending it with a short exchange with them about the impressions they had throughout their walk.

Instructions were a good tool to perform distantly, with the idea that the audience members would create their own performances simply by being navigated by a set of guidelines. Many artists used this strategy to keep on working during the pandemic. From dancers to visual artists, instructions became a new inescapable creative tool to share experiences. They could be designed to happen anywhere, and during the pandemic a lot of them happened in people's homes. The Czech artist Kateřina Šedá in her workshop *Tourist, Welcome Home*⁵⁰, created a set of instructions for participants to visit each other's homes in an unusual way, watching a video filmed by the host, going around their living space and filming it without touching the ground. This kind of playful approach to everyday spaces is similar to the one we used in *Games with a City* [Appendix 2], that we also created to be performed by audience members for themselves and with a minimum of physical social interactions during the lockdown in 2020.

⁴⁹ <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/distant-thoughts/building-conversation-peter-aers/>

⁵⁰ Šedá, K., *Tourist, Welcome Home*, in Jacques, N., Ondrová, T. & collective (ed.), *Subjective Gallery Guide*, Quadro Print, a.s., p.86.

Distant dramaturgies are endless. It seemed hard to come up with some at first, but it soon became clear that the creative possibilities were enormous, and finding strategies to perform remotely or from a distance became something ordinary.

Research as performance

Another type of distant dramaturgy that I discovered during the pandemic was to work on a research and present its documentation. This was the case of my project *Daniel in Prague* [Appendix 3]. The performativity of this research happened not only during its presentation as a performative installation, but mostly during the research process in public spaces. Most of the indoor places were either closed or opened with a limited people capacity during this time, among which schools and universities; so the most convenient thing for me was to work outside and document my process. At the time of the showing, we were able to get back into schools, so I decided to show my work there as a multimedia exhibition, also including some performative actions; otherwise I could also have presented it online since it was mainly constituted of pictures and video recordings.

The research was divided in two parts. The first one was about uncanniness, about people's reaction towards a human looking object - a human sized puppet, referred to as Puppet Daniel - in a daily life context. It followed the phenomenon that the Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori named the *Uncanny Valley*⁵¹, the point in which an object that presents too many similarities to a human being becomes almost repulsive. The German group Rimini Protokoll has a performance called by that name, that explores the same theme, and in which the only performer on stage is a very realistic human-looking robot⁵². Although my puppet was not intended to be that realistic looking, unlike the Rimini Protokoll robot, it shares with it a similarity that was addressed in the second part of my research: both the robot and the puppet were representations of an existing person. The robot was an animatronic double of the writer and playwright Tomas Melle, whereas the puppet I made was a representation of a friend (referred to as Human Daniel in the piece)

⁵¹ <https://spectrum.ieee.org/the-uncanny-valley>

⁵² <https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project/unheimliches-tal-uncanny-valley>

who was stuck in Mexico during the pandemic and who was unable to come back to Prague.

“What does it mean for the original when the copy takes over? Does the original get to know himself better through his [...] double? Do the copy and his original compete or do they help each other?”⁵³ This set of questions that were answered during the *Uncanny Valley* performance, were also questions I tackled in *Daniel in Prague* [Appendix 6]. When Human Daniel finally made it back to Prague in the second half of the academic year, I naturally invited him to join the project. Together we documented the encounters between his family, the puppet and him. This part was exhibited along with the other medias, but was also addressed through performative actions in the space, with Human Daniel telling stories about his impressions and feelings towards the puppet.

The process of this second part of the research was more private and personal, so its performativity was only shown during the installation. On the contrary, the first part was and had to be conducted outside in public spaces and with strangers. In a way, it became a bit like a street performance for passersby, with a puppet going around the city and people watching it. Each time I took Puppet Daniel somewhere, alone or with the help of friends, I filmed the reactions of the startled people, intrigued gazes and surprised reactions. With a different theme but a similar approach, the Iranian performance artist Zahra Fuladvand created her piece *Mirror*⁵⁴, in which a performer entirely covered by a veil, went into public transports holding a mirror turned towards other people. Accompanying her, Zahra Fuladvand was filming and taking pictures of the reflection of people in the mirror. Those recordings were later presented in an exhibition, along with the presence of the veiled performer repeating the same action with the mirror in the space.

This approach gives the project different layers of performativity, in different times and spaces. The first audience members are the people happening to be at the place where the performative action is taking place (in my case, the puppet being carried around or simply being present in a public space), witnessing one specific action in real time, and in

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ <https://www.zahrafuladvand.com/Mirror/>

some cases being a part of it. The other audience members are the ones coming to the exhibition and watching the documentation of the entire process. It also gives space for the unexpected to play an important role. In both *Daniel in Prague* [Appendix 6] and *Mirror* by Fuladvand, the performative action undertaken in a public space was never announced in advance, so the viewers' reactions could only be spontaneous and genuine. The visitors of the process documentation exhibitions on the other hand, could be prepared in advance for what they were about to see, which also brought different levels of expectations and reactions to the project.

During the Covid lockdown, social encounters also happened more and more on online platforms, so another way of researching the uncanniness of a human-like puppet had to be done through a screen. In this project, this was done on the online chatting platform *Chatroulette*, where random users are randomly put in contact with each other to have a conversation. Here again, the first witnesses of this process were the chatting partners themselves, being at the same time audience members and performers of this action. The encounters were recorded and exhibited in the space with the other media.

This type of performance, but also all the other formats of distant dramaturgies we explored during the pandemic, are of course still usable after the end of the sanitary restrictions. They become just another way of making theater, and thus expand our understanding of it.

Chapter Two

Audience participation

With the proliferation of experiential artworks and performances, audiences are invited to move, touch, listen and interact; there is now a need to examine the nature of audience experience away from traditional 'end-on' modes of spectatorship.⁵⁵

This chapter will explore the relationship between the audience and the performance; how scenography can act as an invitation for people to explore the piece not only through vision and sound, how the choice of including the audience more or less actively in the work affects not only their experience but the unfolding of the piece, and all the challenges that come along with this practice.

1. Audience-scenography relationship

Space as a guide

Theater and performance art are often qualified as 'live art', in the sense that the piece of art itself is happening in real time, performed by actors or performers. But does the adjective 'live' necessarily imply that the piece will be brought from start to end thanks to the presence of a living creature? With the emergence of different forms of performance, the term has taken new ways of interpretation, sometimes not relying on a living presence at all.

The live is, arguably, no longer understood as a radical or urgent quality, but more as a medium description that is at the center of a constellation of formats including photography, video, object-prompts, and written instructions. The current generation of artists have pushed this question further by establishing 'liveness'

⁵⁵ Shearing, D., *Audience Immersion, Mindfulness and the Experience of Scenography*, in McKinney J., Palmer. S. (ed.), *Scenography Expanded*, Methuen Drama, 2017, p.139.

as a potential quality of the state of things rather than something attributed only to human presence.⁵⁶

What if a piece was not guided by humans but by space and object disposition? This concept is not new at all, it was already used by Allan Kaprow in 1959 when he realized *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*.⁵⁷ His piece navigated the audience following a spatial dramaturgy: the space was divided into six parts, each of them containing three happenings, and people had to move from one part to another in order to follow the performance. There were performers present in the space, following the scores they were given, but they were not the ones guiding the audience. Each person received three cards on which were noted instructions, and these cards were the ones that navigated people through the happenings.

Human presence as performers doesn't affect the fact that sometimes, the spatial disposition of scenographical elements can have a strong impact on the way audience members perceive the performance and move through the space. Especially in projects that are not traditional shows per-se, audience members sometimes come directly into contact with the set. Arnold Aronson describes scenography as "the process of transforming a landscape into a meaningful environment that guides performers and spectators alike through a visual and spatial field imbued with meaning."⁵⁸

Elements of the space, such as colors, materials, shapes, placing, scales, etc., have an influence on the perception of the audience. It is by coming in contact with these elements that a spectator, or in this case a participant or visitor of the piece, is navigated through the performance, and it is for the creative team to implement the necessary conditions for this to happen. Pallasmaa said that "the task of art and architecture in general is to reconstruct the experience of an undifferentiated world, in which we are not mere spectators, but to which we inseparably belong."⁵⁹ Accomplishing the creation of a world

⁵⁶ <http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/live/catherine-wood>

⁵⁷ <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/18-happenings-in-6-parts/>

⁵⁸ Aronson A. *Forword* in McKinney J., Palmer. S. (ed.), *Scenography Expanded*, Methuen Drama, 2017, p.xv.

⁵⁹ Pallasmaa, J. *The Eyes of the Skin*, Wiley-Academy, 2005, p. 25.

where audience members feel comfortable enough to engage with the performance the way that is wished from them to do, depends a lot on the way the space is organized to frame possibilities of actions and invite people into situations.

Some pieces involving no performers at all, except for the people welcoming the audience members and introducing them to the situation, rely solely on the space to guide visitors through a narrative. This is the case, for example, of the site-specific immersive performance *Kolemdouci*⁶⁰. The space, in this piece, was divided into six rooms, reproductions of portions of apartments, and each of them symbolizing one of the six social classes, according to a Czech sociological survey. Audience members had 90min to wonder around the space, explore the rooms, touch whatever they wanted and listen to audio recordings. As if investigating about someone, they could look into a fictional person's privacy to know more about their life, and build a character out of what they found. The six fictional people pictured in the performance constituted a narrative, discovered only while exploring the space. In this case, space was the central element of the piece that guided the audience through its context. People were free to explore the rooms the way they wanted, which made them build a particular relationship to the space, the characters and the story, each of them eventually getting their own personal experience of the piece.

My project *Daniel in Prague* [Appendix 6] was a performative installation where people could walk around the space and decide freely what they wanted to watch. The way the different media were installed, guided them through the different steps of the research. Although there were also performers in the space, visitors engaged with them only secondarily. This piece was not explicitly participatory, but by navigating freely through the installation and coming into direct contact with the exhibited media, each person experienced the performance in a different and subjective way. The space guided the audience, but also the performers. According to the visitors' interactions with the information, and specifically with the part concerning the puppet's way of travelling to Mexico, Human Daniel performed actions reacting to their choices. When someone voted for a certain position to place the puppet in a box to be shipped, he took the same position

⁶⁰ <https://pomezi.com/projekt/kolemjdouci>

as described on the paper, and placed Puppet Daniel in the same way. It became a chain reaction whose starting point was a scenographical element.

In *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] as well, space is the actor that leads the performance. The piece has four 'stations' that need to be placed strategically in the performing space: the drawing table, the computer table and screen, the archive wall and the storage space. While developing the project, we tested various constellations of these stations, and each of them had a different impact on people's way to engage with the piece. For example, we once placed the drawing station next to the archive wall. This arrangement was confusing for both the audience and the performers because we didn't know how to differentiate the drawing papers from the archive ones. This is how it was decided to have different types of paper for both stations, and to place them in separate corners of the space not to mix them with one another. This spatial solution clarified the invitation of the audience in each of the stations, and guided them more clearly through the piece. Often, the archive wall, that already contained written messages, was the first element people started to engage with, and it helped them to slowly get in touch with their own memories.

The location of the storage space really depends on each venue we perform in, so the other stations have to adapt according to that. The screen, on the other hand, has to be placed in the middle of a longer side of the space, for the practical reason that the performer at this station has to be able to have an overview on the happening. It also enables the audience to watch the screen from wherever they are standing. The specific placing of certain elements can also influence the way people are moving in the space. The venue we premiered the project in, NGO DEI, was a gallery which space was divided in two, one bigger and one smaller area. We decided to place the drawing table in the smaller area, behind the separation wall, although it was far away from the entrance and invisible for people coming in [Appendix 8.a.]. It was the first time we had such a disposition, but this decision was taken so that people could go 'in' and 'out' of the main space (although staying very close to it), and take some distance from the action while focusing on the representation of their memories. In this venue, the archive wall was placed very close to the entrance, which made it one of the first thing audiences started to read.

When we got invited to perform the project in Kaunas, Lithuania, this archive wall also played a strategic role in the way it guided the audience through the space, and informed them about their potential participation [Appendix 8.b.]. The performance venue was the Kaunas City Chamber Theater⁶¹, so the space was a conventional black box. The first thing people encounter while entering it are stairs, usually supporting audience seats. Since these stairs were not removable and were dividing the space in a conventional stage-audience way, the goal was to inform the participants that they could use the entire space and move freely in it, that there was no stage per-se but that the performance would be happening in the whole area. This is why the archive wall was placed on the stairs, also so that it would be a first element people could interact with. This decision didn't keep the audience from sitting on the stairs to watch the stage area, but it encouraged them to move towards the wall to read the messages, and since it was placed on 'their' side, it was a bit less intimidating for them to start interacting with the space, instead of directly coming 'on stage'.

Formats of performances

It is not always easy to define a specific format for a performance. The borders between different types of arts are slowly getting erased, merging formats and creating new forms of artistic experiences for the public. David Shearing wrote that "art experiences are blurring different types of physical, sensory, cognitive and reflective modes of engagement."⁶² Being an audience member in today's art scene triggers various sensations, feelings and thoughts, not limited to a single way of perceiving the piece.

I entered the performing arts world not from a theater background but from my love for crafting objects and my dream of building a machine. It is naturally, then, that I oriented myself towards types of performances that place space and objects in the foreground. As a matter of fact, my main interest lied in installation making, since it is a form that implies creating an artwork in dialogue with space. As David Levine stated, "installation art may

⁶¹ <https://www.kamerinisteatras.lt/>

⁶² Shearing, D., *Audience Immersion, Mindfulness and the Experience of Scenography*, in McKinney J., Palmer. S. (ed.), *Scenography Expanded*, Methuen Drama, 2017, p.139.

have been born in the visual arts, but it is finally gravitating toward its rightful home in theater.”⁶³ Installations generate performativity in a way proper to them, differently than a show would.

Similarly to other forms of performances that are not classical drama theater, such as site specific pieces, or other kinds of formats that involve unconventional spaces, the performativity of installations lies in the relationship between the audience and the space. “Common to all open forms of space beyond drama is that the visitor becomes more or less active, more or less voluntarily a co-actor”⁶⁴, wrote Hans-Thies Lehmann in *Postdramatic Theatre*. And according to Julie H. Reiss, “The essence of Installation art is spectator participation, but the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another, and even from one work to another by the same artist.”⁶⁵ Hence the importance of the audience in making a piece performative, if at first glance it is not. The space calls to the spectators, and in return they engage with it, becoming “integral to the completion of the work.”⁶⁶

During the studies, I have collaborated on projects that have different formats, but that share the characteristic of immersing the audience in an environment where the scenography becomes a tool to interact with, in order to enter the piece. They are not immersive performances per-se, but as Shearing explained it, “immersion need not be considered a goal or destination, but a process that might materialize in the relational encounters between participant and scenographic environment.”⁶⁷ The works I am going to present are works of my colleagues in which I participated, that foreground the interaction between the audience and the space.

*Sensorium - Take a Break from Being Human*⁶⁸, is an interactive, sensory performance directed by En-Ping Yu. Designed for a limited number of audience members at a time,

⁶³ <http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/installation/david-levine>

⁶⁴ Lehmann, H-T. *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p.150.

⁶⁵ Reiss, J.H, *From Margin to Center*, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England, 1999, p.xiii.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Shearing, D., *Audience Immersion, Mindfulness and the Experience of Scenography*, in McKinney J., Palmer. S. (ed.), *Scenography Expanded*, Methuen Drama, 2017, p.142.

⁶⁸ <https://www.kampusybernska.cz/2022/02/04/sensorium-take-a-break-from-being-human-dejte-si-pauzu-od-lidskeho-byti/>

the project invites the participants to build a personal journey while going through different sensory experiences to imagine how animals perceive the world. It was performed in Kampus Hybernaska, in a gallery that used to be an apartment, and that therefore, gave access to multiple separate rooms. In each of the rooms, people could experience a situation related to one specific animal. The agency of the space helped to guide their journey from one animal to another, each experience separated from the other by a break in the common 'Reception Area'. Even if the focus of the audience was not meant to be on the space itself, people came in direct contact with its spatial disposition and its scenography. The space shaped each person's experience, since they had to walk through the gallery to travel from one animal to another, and since each of the rooms was scenographically designed to correspond to the animal that would be performed there.

In her piece *Fasciarium*⁶⁹, Susana Botero Santos invited people to a research laboratory about the human body, exploring identity through the skin. The performance happened in a black box, so the scenography and the organization of the space has been designed for the purpose of the show. This project was also participatory. Audience members could walk around the room and visit the different stations disposed in the space. Each of the station hosted a specific department: 'Organ Transformation', 'Diagnosis', 'Skin Observation', 'Improvements', 'Mirror', 'Transformation Station', 'Experimental Surgery', and 'Pulse' (the DJ). By interacting with the performers in these departments and with elements of scenography, visitors slowly started to wear costumes (designed pieces of fabric) to transform their body, and to become 'Human Creatures'. The costumes they wore were the elements that constituted the scenography: at the beginning of the performance, all pieces of fabric were hanged around the space, but throughout the show they got taken and worn by the participants, hanging on their bodies. This created a particular relationship between the audience members and the space; they were merging with each other to the point when the audience became the scenography.

The last example of particular formats where the audience experience is deeply linked to scenography is *Dreamy Walking*⁷⁰, a performance by Michał Salwiński. It is a performative walk happening in the streets of Prague, in the neighborhood of Žižkov around the TV

⁶⁹ <https://www.divadlodisk.cz/repertoar/fasciarium-104>

⁷⁰ <https://www.svetadivadlo.cz/cz/raiterova322>

tower. Participants are guided by a 'Walker', while listening to an audio recording. Along their way, different fictional characters appear on the street, such as an octopus or a tower watcher distributing hot chocolate. The particularity of this piece is that it is site specific, happening in a public space, and therefore contains a lot of information from everyday life that cannot be ignored during the show. Arnold Aronson wrote that "site-specific scenography foregrounds the spectator's interaction with the surrounding environment and their increased awareness of the emblematic signs inherent within the space."⁷¹ Audience members were invited to pay attention to specific details in a place that might have been familiar to them, and from there, to construct a new reality relative to the walk, during this period of time. Their experience of the piece came from particular elements of the space, in relation with the words they heard in the audio text.

⁷¹ Aronson A. *Foreword* in McKinney J., Palmer. S. (ed.), *Scenography Expanded*, Methuen Drama, 2017, p.x.

2. Ways of participating

Theater is made to be shown in front of an audience. Spectators are involved in a show, regardless of whether the piece is participatory or not, since they are present and react to what they see or experience. People can respond in multiple ways to an engaging performance, by actively participating in it if they are invited to do so, or by staying with their own thoughts, reacting through their impressions rather than with explicit actions.

Experiencing art

“Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and enviroing conditions is involved in the very process of living.”⁷²

Experiencing a work of art is not solely related to what we call “participatory art”⁷³, but can be the case for a viewer confronted to any kind of artwork. Participating doesn’t necessarily mean taking part actively in a piece; it can also means engaging with feelings and sensations, reacting to what is offered. As Julie H. Reiss stated, “Participation can mean offering the viewer specific activities. It can also mean demanding that the viewer walk through the space and simply confront what is there.”⁷⁴

My project *Daniel in Prague* [Appendix 6] was a performative installation. Audience members could walk around the space and watch the exhibited media following the path they preferred. They were not directly called for participation, except in one part where they had the option to vote for one of the different possible positions the puppet could take to be placed in a box and sent to Mexico. But the visitors of the installation, simply by being present and watching what was shown, were participating in it by reacting to its content and forming opinions about it.

⁷² Dewey, J., *Art as Experience*, Perigee Books, 1980, p.36.

⁷³ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/participatory-art>

⁷⁴ Reiss, J.H, *From Margin to Center*, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England, 1999, p.xiii.

David Shearing calls this type of participation a 'mindfulness/awareness' encounter:

In 'mindfulness/awareness' encounter, participants in scenographic environments might become aware of their thoughts, actions and sensory capacities within the experience, thus reflection becomes a particular mode of participation.⁷⁵

Personal reflection is a crucial part of watching an art piece. Abstract art, and particularly minimalism⁷⁶ (sculptures especially), invites the viewer to evaluate their position in relation to the artwork, reflect on its meaning and making the whole situation become performative but also participatory. Michael Fried, in his essay *Art and Objecthood*, refers to minimalist art as 'literalist art', and qualifies it as theatrical. He writes that "Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work"⁷⁷, and "the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation — one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder."⁷⁸ The audience always has a major role to play in the way he perceives the art piece, "for to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent."⁷⁹ Thus, watching an artwork implies building a personal experience out of it, owning it and taking part in it, even if the piece is not explicitly interactive.

Indirect, or 'mindful' participation as would call it Shearing, is also present in formats of performances that are not based on the nature of the space itself, but on the content of a show. It is common to reflect on an audiovisual piece and react to it with feelings and emotions, thus indirectly participating in it and creating an experience out of the situation of watching it. This case applies to theater but also to films, where spectators are not directly in contact with elements present on the stage or on the screen, but where the content of the piece engages them enough to have a sensorial, emotional reaction to it,

⁷⁵ Shearing, D., *Audience Immersion, Mindfulness and the Experience of Scenography*, in McKinney J., Palmer. S. (ed.), *Scenography Expanded*, Methuen Drama, 2017, p.140.

⁷⁶ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/minimalism>

⁷⁷ Fried, M., *Art and Objecthood*, in Candlin, F., Guins, R. (ed.), *The Object Reader*. Routledge, 2009, p. 311.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Dewey, J., *Art as Experience*, Perigee Books, 1980, p.56.

because as Pallasmaa says, “the encounter of any work of art implies a bodily interaction.”⁸⁰

In *Silence and Other Impossible objects*⁸¹, performance by Valteri Alanen, the focus of the spectator is put on sound. During the performance, two performers attempt to set a table for tea by being extremely silent; so whatever sound produced by the show or by a spectator seems to be amplified. As an audience member in this piece, I remember feeling very self-aware of all the micro sounds I was producing, such as clothes friction or even breathing, especially in the very quiet and focused moments. I even hesitated to clap at the end of the show, fearing that it would disturb the quietness that we had been with during the performance. Although this was not a participatory piece, audience members were actively engaged through their bodies and minds, to either blend in with the atmosphere of the piece and try not to produce any sound themselves, or by being aware of the contrast of a (loud) sound they were producing and that was very audible for everyone, with the silence that was floating in the space.

After all, Lehmann stated:

The task of the spectators 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.⁸²

Co-creating

The degree of involvement of audience members in a piece can vary from one project to another, depending on what kind of relationship the creative team wishes the audience to have with them and with the piece. Performances where spectators are asked to accomplish actions are called either participatory or interactive. The line between those two types of engagement is thin, although some artists have clear definitions of one and

⁸⁰ Pallasmaa, J. *The Eyes of the Skin*, Wiley-Academy, 2005, p. 66.

⁸¹ <https://www.altart.cz/program/valteri-alanen-col-silence-and-other-impossible-objects-2/?lang=en>

⁸² Lehmann, H-T. *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p.134-135.

the other, and prefer to call their work by either one of the terms. The performance artist Tania el Khoury was asked to write a text about 'participation', but instead, preferred to talk about 'interactivity'. She defines it this way: "The term interactivity describes both the production process of collaborating with individuals and communities and a performance form that is based on an exchange with the audience."⁸³

Thus, the key elements to interactivity are collaboration and exchange. The reason why she doesn't use the word 'participation' to express these elements is because "a large number of performance productions that claim audience participation are in fact predetermined scenarios in which audience members play the role of extras in the shows."⁸⁴ According to her, making an interactive performance comes from the wish of co-creating it with the audience. Co-creating means that parts of the elements of the piece will be produced by the visitors during the show, and not before it. It also means that the creative power and decision making is not left in the hands the creative team only, who takes the risk of surrendering to an unknown outcome of their work.

Tania El Khoury also wrote:

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." An interactive show is therefore never the same piece twice, as it is transformed with every single audience member.⁸⁵

My project *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] gets a different outcome each time it gets performed, since it strongly depends on what participants decide to share, and on their will to participate in the building process of the places, although the system it relies on doesn't change. I have been calling it a participatory performance, since the audience is free to choose whether they want to participate or not, but following Tania El Khoury's point of view it might also be called an interactive piece. El Khoury said that "interactivity provides a space where art is stripped down to its fundamental core: the direct encounter with the

⁸³ <http://www.intermsofperformance.site/keywords/participation/tania-el-khoury>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

audience.”⁸⁶ The format and dramaturgy of *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] allows performers and audience members to communicate directly with each other, exchange ideas, even inviting the participants to play the same role as the performers if they wish to do so. The performance would actually not work in the same way at all if audience members were not directly involved in its creation.

Audience members responding to the invitation to co-create, offer a creative engagement in the piece. Their input implies them having some sort of autonomy, framed by the context of the performance. Audience members become responsible for one part of the piece, but the actions they take always follow the guidelines established by the creative team. Participants become co-creators in an already established system. Such invitations require a clear communication of what is expected from the audience. In some performances, this invitation comes through instructions, which are a clear sign that specific actions need to be undertaken.

Instructions are a bit similar to rules of a game. A game systematically engages a player to actively take part in it, making this person a creator of a specific situation, along with the other players. Games follow particular structures, each of which organizes players according to rules relative to the game itself. No game results in the same situation twice. The randomness of the different elements involved, such as various participants, a roll of dice, a chance of picking certain cards, different strategies used, etc., makes a game situation unique and proper to the moment it is played. When starting a project, I tend to think about its dramaturgy as I would think about the system of a game, with different participants, rules, actions and consequences. The projects I create don't necessarily result in a proper game to play, but are inspired by games' structures. An important difference would be that in a game, there almost always is a winner and loser, whereas my motivation goes into building a situation with players and rules, where people would interact and 'play' with each other in order to create something together but with no competition involved.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Instructions are an efficient way to communicate to the audience what is expected from them to do, but could also become too directive, not leaving much creative freedom to the participants, and thus making them accomplish some tasks almost mechanically instead of letting them co-create. Of course, this depends on the type of instructions, and is not particularly good or bad, it is just another way of getting the audience actively involved in the making of the project.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, after his collaboration with Christian Boltanski and Bertrand Lavier in their participatory exhibition, *Do it*⁸⁷, wrote about participatory art:

This kind of art, Lavier pointed out, gave the viewer a measure of power to his works, in the making of it. He added that the instructions also gave life to his works, in a very real sense: they provoked not only silent contemplation, but movement and action, amongst the visitors to museums or galleries in which they were displayed.⁸⁸

Active audience members, even when they are following specific guidelines or instructions, make the piece alive in a different way each time it happens, since each person adds their own personal way of doing. Although the ways of participating vary from one piece to another, depending on the format of the project, being interactive installations, happenings or any type of performance involving the audience in a more active way, participants to these projects end up being co-creators of their own experience, if not of the whole piece.

⁸⁷ <https://curatorsintl.org/exhibitions/18072-do-it-2013>

⁸⁸ Obrist, H. U., *Ways of Curating*, Penguin Books, 2015, p.17.

3. Challenges

Involving the audience as an active component of the work is not always easy. The way they react to the invitation is not always predictable, and making the performance rely on this factor is a risk to take. This is why it is primordial to be able to adapt to unexpected situations to navigate the audience in the best possible way.

Different types of people

The world is made of all types of individuals with different interests and different ways of being. Creating a performance that pleases everyone is impossible since each person has their own tastes and (artistic) preferences. I am well aware that not everyone enjoys participatory performances, so it can be challenging to invite people to participate.

Already in my project *A Walk in Reflection* [Appendix 3], I have faced this challenge when being confronted to people who didn't show the same interest as me in the use of door handles. I have a strong affinity for objects and games but not everybody does. My ideal audience member in this project would have been a person who would be intrigued by the door handle in this unusual way of using it, someone who would be curious to explore its many possibilities with a playful approach, and who would be autonomous enough to initiate actions with the door handles by themselves. Of course, this is a lot to ask, and I couldn't have expected to mostly have this kind of audience members.

This piece required an active participation for it to make sense, not only following the walk but really accomplishing actions with the handles. It was relying a lot on individual experiences of the process. I could see more than once that someone from the group was not really engaged and was just following the walk probably thinking about something else. This kind of situation made me feel bad, I was torn between putting more focus on these audience members to make them engage more, or giving them more space for them not to feel forced to join something they are not interested in.

I am not entirely satisfied with the outcome this project, although I was very much into it at the beginning and I was fascinated by these door handles. I decided to stop working on it after presenting it because at some point it became too confusing and overwhelming and I felt like I needed to start fresh with something new. But if I have the chance to work on it again in the future, I would like to finalize it in a proper way that I am satisfied with. The biggest reason for my dissatisfaction is because of my way of performing and of inviting people into the experience. I had a didactic way of introducing them to the material, probably because of my background in teaching. My teaching attitude stayed with me while performing and expressed itself during this project, which I didn't like much.

After this project, I tried to produce pieces that would give a choice to the audience member to decide whether they want to actively participate or not, even in a participatory performance. My final MA project *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], although relying very much on people's input and cooperation, gives the liberty for the audience members to choose to share a place from their life that doesn't exist anymore or to only observe what is happening in the space.

This freedom of choice given to the audience is good since nobody forces them to do anything, but it also makes the task a bit more challenging for us performers. As mentioned above, the piece depends a lot on what the participants will decide to share. This is what activates the performance and what gives it its content. The challenge in that is, therefore, not to force people to participate but to invite them to do so in a way that will make them want to share from their own will.

I base my projects on things that I enjoy doing and on my way of doing things. I communicate through space and objects better than I would with words or sound for example, and I those are elements I gladly think about and work with. Of course, this is not the case of everyone. Each individual has their own way of communication; some communicate easily through speech, others through movement, sound, drawing, etc. Thus, inviting people to join through a mode of communication they are not comfortable with is not an easy task. More than once while performing *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], we were asked if it was possible to write the name of a place and then describe it orally instead of drawing it.

This discomfort in the suggested way of participation is something that might create some reluctance to join actively. But another aspect that could make someone think twice before sharing, is the fear to be exposed. The theme we tackle in *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] is not a very light one and it can get very personal, so I could understand that some people wouldn't want the rest of the audience to know about a place dear to them or a part of their personal life. It might seem paradoxical for someone who creates participatory performances, but I do not like to participate in shows where all the attention would be brought on me and where I would feel exposed. This is why I privileged here the anonymous aspect, for people having the same fear as me not to be put in an uncomfortable situation. One might argue that this feeling of discomfort might emerge even while keeping the anonymity, when watching others reacting to the place they shared. But having a performance where each participant will be fully satisfied is very hard, if not impossible to achieve. Making the decision to create a participatory performance is a risk to take, and we always get into it knowing the challenges it might comprise. To use Tania el Khoury's words, "interactive performances are based on risk. To the artist, they may feel like jumping into the unknown during each show."⁸⁹ But a game is never fun without risks to take, so it is a challenge I am willing to accept.

I have never had specific target audiences when creating projects while studying, but this could be a strategy to navigate people in a better way. Knowing what type of audiences we are performing for, what age or social group they belong to, can help preparing the work and anticipating their reactions. Getting ready to perform for specific people can sometimes be crucial, depending on the nature of the piece. The Mexican artist and performer Lorena Mendez Barrios, along with her collective La Lleca, works a lot with marginalized people and prisoners⁹⁰. In a lecture she gave to us in DAMU, she said that the preparation step is a major part of the work. On the day before going to a prison, she starts preparing herself mentally. Knowing that she is going to perform for and with incarcerated people (the work she proposes is participatory), requires a different type of preparation than if she would perform in a theater space. This preparation also differs if she performs for university students or migrants.

⁸⁹ <http://www.internsofperformance.site/keywords/participation/tania-el-khoury>

⁹⁰ <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2012/06/prison-patio-by-mariana-yampolsky/>

Anticipating the type of social group that will come to the performance and getting ready to interact with them is a legitimate, even necessary thing to do also in more conventional contexts of performances. A concrete situation that I had to face with *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] was when performing it in Kaunas, Lithuania. One very obvious element we had to adapt to was the language. Although in Prague we always performed it in English in an international context, going to Kaunas made me realize that I had to provide a translation to Lithuanian of the written signs, and ask the help of an interpreter to translate my introductory speech. This made me realize that performing this piece in Lebanon - which I would like to do someday - would bring up many challenges that I wouldn't have to face in other places. The language aspect is one of them but not a major one since a lot of people speak English, and if not, we could always translate the signs and speech like in Kaunas. The biggest challenge we would need to face is the traumatic experience that the majority of the population has regarding places that don't exist anymore. Performing there would require a lot of sensitivity and preparation, maybe finding a new way of introducing the topic or doing some research beforehand. Unless it is just me who's a bit scared of performing it there... In any case, it for sure requires research and adaptation to perform in a country that has a totally different context than the one the piece was developed in.

Building expectations

Another factor that plays a challenging role in having the audience participate in the piece is the expectations they have before arriving to the performance. Often, when people go to theater, they expect to sit down and watch a show. Unless the description of the piece says otherwise, this is what usually happens. But while showing *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], although the terms 'participatory performance' was stated in the project annotation, people were surprised more than once about the format. I have learned to make this information explicit from the beginning of the annotation paragraph, but even so, a lot of audience members didn't know the performance would be participatory.

The expectations of the audience start with the performing venue. Spaces have meanings and connotations, and their functions can build up ideas and speculations about what the

performance is going to be like; and this applies not only for site specific locations but for conventional venues too. As Simon Dove stated:

A theater or a gallery is actually a very specific type of site—physically, culturally, and economically. Far from being neutral spaces, these sites have a significant influence on the artwork and often define both the form of the work (size, medium, duration, etc.) and the public’s way of experiencing it.⁹¹

Whether it’s a national stage or a public alley, the venue will have an impact on what people expect to be a part of. It is specifically while performing *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] in Kaunas, Lithuania, that I became aware of the effect the venue could have on the will of people to participate. We showed it in the Kaunas city chamber theater⁹², in a black box. It was the first time the project was shown in a conventional theater space rather than in a gallery. I was expecting people to be shy or reluctant to participate, but not for this reason: we received as feedback from more than one person, that they were surprised about this format that was very new to them, and coming to this venue they were expecting to watch a chamber theater piece.

People going to a gallery know that they will most probably have to walk around the space to watch the art. So, it wouldn’t be unusual to go and watch a performance or a performative act in there and be offered to move around instead of sitting. A theater, however, is made for spectators to watch a show happening on a stage. During the performance in Kaunas, people did participate, even though they were surprised by the format and the invitation to walk on the stage and to explore the theater space in a different way. But most of the participants, after accomplishing some actions “on stage”, were going back to sit on the stairs to watch the rest of the performance happening. In that sense, the space helped to give them a new experience mixed with keeping their comfort and comfortability.

Even in a gallery space, informing the visitors that they were allowed and encouraged to touch, write, draw, and move things in *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] was not so easy. I have a preference for indirect ways of expression, so during the early stages of the project

⁹¹ <http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/site/simon-dove>

⁹² <https://www.kamerinisteatras.lt/>

development I was not giving any introduction at the beginning, except for some welcoming words and telling people that they could walk around and stand wherever they wanted. The idea was to let them explore the space and discover by themselves that drawing a place that they wished to recreate would activate our performative system. Keeping this space as a mystery at the beginning (since nothing or not much was happening before someone took the initiative of drawing a first place) was something I liked a lot but that also created some issues. The key to activate the system has usually been discovered quite fast, in the first few minutes of the performance. The reason why this changed and why an introduction was added, was because it once happened that until almost half of the showing duration, nobody had understood that they could write or draw something, and they were waiting for us performers to make something happen, or were watching the TV screen also expecting to see something appearing there. This was a stressful experience that taught us a lot and pushed us to include a proper introduction to explain clearly to audience members that they could and were highly encouraged to share some places, to witness some development in the performance and in the space.

The amount of information people receive before entering the performance influences the expectation they will have and their idea on participation. Thus, inviting audience members to participate is a process that starts during the creative process of the performance. Depending on the format and on the performers' guidance, people will be more or less willing to engage with the proposed situation. In a participatory piece, what I would consider a success would be to see audience members interacting - more or less actively - from their own will, not by being forced to do it, meaning that the invitation to join was given as a suggestion, not a push.

Chapter Three

Space and places

We exist in three dimensional spaces in which we move, we sense and we feel. And by living in them we make those places be alive too. Places have character, they have their own timings and their own rhythms. Places affect us every day, it is through them that memories are built; they become a part of us as much as we become a part of them. In this chapter, I will talk about practices involving space as an important element of the work, while presenting some aspects of my project *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] in a more thorough way.

1. Exploring the space

What is a space? What is a place?

The terminological difference between a space and a place can be quite ambiguous. Following the dictionary definition, a space is “a continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied”⁹³, whereas a place is “a particular position, point, or area in space; a location”⁹⁴. From this I can conclude that a place is included in a space, it is a part of it, but that there can also be a space inside of a place.

The notion of space is often used in different artistic fields. It is a broad notion that can be adapted to various types of work. In his book *Species of Spaces*, Georges Perec reflected on different kinds of spaces, and on the idea of space itself. He describes it as follow:

Space is what arrests our gaze, what our sight stumbles over: the obstacle, bricks, an angle, a vanishing point. Space is when it makes an angle, when it stops, when we have to turn for it to start off again. There’s nothing ectoplasmic

⁹³https://www.google.com/search?q=space+definition&rlz=1C5CHFA_enLB829LB829&oq=space+definition&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i512l9.3459j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

⁹⁴https://www.google.com/search?q=place+definition&rlz=1C5CHFA_enLB829LB829&oq=place+definition&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i512l9.2856j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

about space; it has edges, it doesn't go off in all directions, it does all that needs to be done for railway lines to meet well short of infinity.⁹⁵

His definition of space is far from the endless void we tend to imagine. Without the material elements that constitute our surroundings, space wouldn't be anything. It is thanks to them that a space is delimited, it constitutes the negative of all material shapes. But there isn't only one and only space; life is constituted of different spaces with different atmospheres. Perec, again, states that "spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and every function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself."⁹⁶

So, spaces have functions, they're different from one another. We live in them, they constitute the environments of our daily lives. Some spaces have names, and some of them have more meanings than others. But when does a space become a place?

In *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], I am asking people about a place, not a space. At the beginning of the creative process, I was using both words to refer to the same thing, as if they signified the same. I wasn't really sure about the difference between them. At that time, I was asking the audience to share a familiar place, not a place that doesn't exist anymore. Although I was still using the term 'space' a lot, the word 'place' intuitively felt more appropriate for the context. In fact, familiarity and places are very linked. As humans, we identify ourselves with some places, they constitute our knowledge and our rootedness in the world. For Edward Relph, "To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know *your* place."⁹⁷

The reason why I adopted the idea of places that don't exist anymore instead of familiar places was mostly to narrow down the possibilities of places and to be more precise with what I was asking from the audience. It was also a thought that had been in my mind for

⁹⁵ Perec, G., *Species of Spaces*, Penguin Selected Writings, 1974, p.81.

⁹⁶ Perec, G, idem, p.6.

⁹⁷ Relph, E., *Place and Placelessness*, Pion Limited, 1976, p.1.

several years before using it in this project. There are thousands and thousands of places that don't exist anymore, but what was particularly interesting to me was the personal attachment we have to some of these places. It is these familiar and very personal places that don't exist anymore and that we miss, that I was mostly hoping for the audience to share. Places like little corners, places that don't necessarily have a name, places that nobody else knows, places that contain personal memories and that are special in some way.

In both our communal and our personal experience of places there is often a close attachment, a familiarity that is part of knowing and being known *here*, in this particular place. It is this attachment that constitutes our roots in places; and the familiarity. That this involves is not just a detailed knowledge, but a sense of deep care and concern for that place.⁹⁸

So, a place is part of a space that we care for, that builds familiarity and that builds our sense of belonging somewhere. While performing *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], the notion of place has been left for people to interpret. I always thought that the word 'place' meant more or less the same thing for everyone, so I didn't think about explaining it during the performance. This was a good thing, because more than once, I've been surprised with people's interpretation and it made me question again what do we call 'place'.

One anonymous audience member wrote a thought during the performance saying "How is an organ a place? Do I have to fit in a place in order for it to become one?" [Appendix 9]. This made me reflect a lot, in addition to one of the places to build that we received: it was a drawing of a head with a lot of curly hair that were circled and pointed at with an arrow, in order to explain that they were the place that didn't exist anymore [Appendix 10]. Other people wrote about "the first time he hugged me" [Appendix 11.a.], or "My father's hugging hands" [Appendix 11.b.], again referring to places. These seemed very normal at the moment, it's only later that I realized that the hug and hugging hands are more of moments that became places, rather than what one would call a 'place'. In that sense, a place could also be a brief ephemeral action that places someone into a

⁹⁸ Relph, E., *idem*, p.43.

remarkable situation. This takes my thoughts a bit farther: being *in* love, *in* pain, or *in* danger; do these feelings or moments get transformed into places when someone is *in* there?

About the drawing of the hair that we received during the performance, it is true that there exists for sure, a space among or inside hair; one in which no human being could entirely fit, but a space nonetheless. By creating a strong attachment to this space, it became a place, perhaps one that is impenetrable by human beings but that can be properly explored by any other creatures small enough to fit in there. This is when my question changed to ‘is there something that could *not* be a place?’.

During the pandemic and the distant dramaturgy projects, the notion of place and space was put on the table, as we have been exploring the virtual space. The group Building Conversation has developed a version of their *Conversation Without Words*, adapting it to an online format as *Digital Silence*⁹⁹. During this online encounter, participants were invited to explore a third space, a hybrid one “that is both physical and virtual”¹⁰⁰. The performance ended in the *Building Conversation Café*, another hybrid place where people could meet and have a drink while staying in their own homes. Although travels were restricted during this period, we were still able to explore spaces and places, sometimes unconventional ones.

Site specificity and dialogue with the space

“A dialogue is something more of a common participation, in which we are not playing a game against each other but *with* each other. In a dialogue everybody wins.”¹⁰¹

Following Bohm’s definition, having a dialogue with space would mean that both the space and us, humans having the dialogue with it, have an equal role to play in the interaction. No one has extra power over the other, it’s an exchange of information where all the

⁹⁹ <https://www.buildingconversation.nl/en/conversation/digital-silence/>

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Bohm, D., *On Dialogue*. Routledge Classics, 2004, p. 7.

participants can share independently and freely. Having a dialogue means listening to the other, answering and communicating in a way that is not necessarily verbal. Space doesn't speak in words but in signs, rhythms, sounds, smells, or lights. There are indeed many forms of communication, and when it comes to having a dialogue with a space, it is important to be attentive to catch the information it is sending.

“Cities are living things... They are not simply a collection of buildings inhabited by people. They have their own energy, energy which lasts across time, which doesn't simply disappear.”¹⁰² Living in a city implicates interacting with it every day, being surrounded by its energies and different rhythms. In daily life, we do that in conventional ways, by simply going through our different daily activities and routines. “For artists however, art and life are the same. There are no boundaries.”¹⁰³ Many artists have worked within everyday life, using the city as a canvas or stage to produce their pieces there.

The situationists for example, explored different ways of being and communicating with the city through experimental behavior. One of their main practices, the *dérive* (drifting), consists of walking through different ambiances in the city with no precise goal. “Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.”¹⁰⁴ Such practices make the deriver experience the space in a new way, even when doing it in a familiar place to them.

Other situationist practices involve the creation of games which aim is to “extend the nonmediocre part of life, to reduce the empty moments of life as much as possible”¹⁰⁵, as stated Guy Debord. “The situationist game is distinguished from the classic conception of the game by its radical negation of the element of competition and of separation from everyday life.”¹⁰⁶ It is a game that is played within a quotidian context, taking all elements of daily life into account. This could be considered as a playful dialogue. After all, Bohm refers to dialogues as a game played with one another.

¹⁰² Winterston, J., in Oddey, A. (ed.), *Reframing the Theatrical*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.54.

¹⁰³ Wiggins, C., *Forword* in idem., p.X.

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>

¹⁰⁵ <https://theoria.art-zoo.com/writings-from-the-situationist-international-guy-debord/>

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Following the same idea of playfulness within everyday life, my project *Games with a City* [Appendix 2], co-created with Daria Gosteva and Martina Znamenáčková, is as its title indicates, a collection of games designed to be played with the city. The project took the form of a booklet which content becomes performative when put into action by the readers. The games were designed to be played alone and with nothing more than things found in the surroundings. The idea was for the players to focus on details from the environment, respond to signs such as sounds, lights, smells, colors, people etc., and integrate these games in their daily activities, as they go through their normal routine. In short, the aim was to be in a constant dialogue with the city. Some of the games possess similarities with the situationists' work, in the sense that they are about walking towards an unknown destination, being guided by some signs from the city.

This project, through its booklet format and the playful way it relates to the environment, can be compared to the book *How to be an Explorer of the World*¹⁰⁷ by the Canadian author Keri Smith. Her book also becomes performative when the readers accomplish the actions she offers. All of the situations she proposes are ways to communicate with the space, be curious about details from daily life and turn mundane places or objects into special elements worth being investigated.

Working within an everyday life context, in contrast with working in a theater space, implies that the piece becomes implemented in a place from "real life", well known by the audience. People living in the city are used to cross busy streets every day, run from one place to another and use spaces for practical reasons or for a specific function. When we start paying attention to certain details when walking on the street, we realize that from these small things can emerge endless ideas and ways to interpret them. Focusing on specific elements can feed the imagination of those who notice them, and can be used to create a different experience of a place.

"...everyday life, performance and fiction are constantly leaking into each other"¹⁰⁸. It is true that fiction and reality can easily be intertwined and that they shape the perception we have of a certain situation. Many artists perform within a daily life context, in specific

¹⁰⁷ <https://kerismith.squarespace.com/books>

¹⁰⁸ Best, A. in Oddey, A. (ed.), *Reframing the Theatrical*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.8.

places which main and original function is not to serve an artistic performance but another defined purpose. Performing in such places creates a new perception of the surroundings for the viewers, but also implicates different types of audiences, those coming specially to watch the performance, and the normal passersby who happen to be present at the same place and time.

During the Prague Quadrennial in 2015, Sodja Lotker curated the *Tribes* project, in which 83 groups from different countries followed a same route across the city wearing a costume that defined their tribe. The proposed route, passing through the city center, was chosen to “create a possibility for tribes to meet Prague’s own tribes: shoppers, working people, mothers with children, tourists, etc.”¹⁰⁹ The tribes were indeed accomplishing everyday actions such as buying things or using public transports, and were thus in direct contact with Prague citizens. This created a certain strangeness in daily life. People passing by at the same moment as one of the tribes could have the chance to witness its presence in the space; but as Lotker mentioned, the ‘real’ audience would be the people working in the area the tribes passed through, like in the shops or the metro, since they would be the only ones able to watch many tribes.¹¹⁰

I experienced a similar situation while working in Pasáž Lucerna for my *Walk in Reflection* [Appendix 3]. Unlike in *Tribes*, the group of walkers was constituted of audience members, not performers. But just like in any type of work in the city, people passing by and watching the action happening turned into spontaneous audience members. It looked a bit strange for these passersby to see a group of people walking and holding door handles. Since this experience was very personal to each participant, it was hard to perceive from the outside what each of them was seeing or doing. The reflection is not an obvious element we can understand from the outside, so it just seemed like a peculiar group of people walking while being very focused watching a door handle. Some of the passersby were stopping to stare or to ask questions, sometimes even taking pictures. As an anecdote, one DAMU student who participated in this walk during the final showing of this project, told me later that her father had taken a picture of this happening the day before as he was walking

¹⁰⁹ Lotker, S., *The Tribes at the PQ 2015 - Introduction*, in Lotker, S. and. Pantouvaki, S. (ed.), *Tribes a Walking Exhibition*, Prague Quadrennial, p.12.

¹¹⁰ Lotker, S., *idem*, p.13.

through the passage, and then showed it to her saying “look what a strange thing I saw today, you might like it”. In addition to participants and ‘spontaneous audiences’, the other witnesses of this performance were the people working in Lucerna, such as the security guards or the construction workers. After a few rehearsals they became accustomed to us and started being a part of it, interacting with us and being amused by passersby’s reactions.

Here is another example of an artwork in dialogue with space: In 2018, the British artist Tom Young realized a site-specific exhibition in Lebanon, in what used to be one of the most famous hotels in the Middle East, the Grand Hotel Sofar, that got damaged during the Lebanese civil war¹¹¹ (1975-1990). The hotel building is still standing, although it has remained unused since decades ago. The exhibited paintings depicted fictional scenes that did or could have happened in each of the hotel shared spaces¹¹². Unlike in an exhibition happening in a white cube, the artwork got enhanced by being exhibited in this particular set-up. The relationship between the site and the artwork went both ways; the paintings sort of revived the hotel, first by their content but also because they attracted people to visit it again.

This sort of dialogue between the artwork and the space also appears in *DYKAP* [Appendix 7]. The space we performed in happened to be an old factory turned into a gallery. We included a lot of its elements in the performance, as well as objects and furniture that we found there. The use of this unconventional space gave the piece a particular atmosphere, and at the same time details of the place were put into focus thanks to their use in the performance.

¹¹¹[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese_Civil_War#:~:text=The%20Lebanese%20Civil%20War%20\(Arabic,one%20million%20people%20from%20Lebanon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese_Civil_War#:~:text=The%20Lebanese%20Civil%20War%20(Arabic,one%20million%20people%20from%20Lebanon)

¹¹² <http://www.tomyoung.com/grandssofarhotel>

2. The political aspect

Whenever art is used to express something or point out an issue, there are high chances for the work to become political. When touching the subject of places, either by being performed in a specific space or being about a certain kind of place - such as those that don't exist anymore for example - the piece might carry a political aspect, even inexplicitly.

The personal and the political

What does 'politics' really mean in an artistic context, and what makes a piece become political?

In one possible definition of 'politics', it is "the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy."¹¹³ In other terms, it is related to decision making on a scale of a country, or any of its smaller units. A performance being political would then mean that it is, in a way, connected to these decisions and policies, either through its topic, it's context or it's tone. But governmental decisions and policies are vast terms that include many notions and subtleties. Basic laws, rights, social duties, or even questions of citizenship, geographical borders, land ownership, environmental policies, etc., are aspects of life that are dealt with through politics. Therefore, a political art piece or performance would involve tackling one of these topics, as broad as they may seem, one way or another.

Tania El Khoury and the Dictaphone Group¹¹⁴ often produce pieces that can be considered political. In her text about participation and interactivity in performance, she states the following:

I have researched the ethical and political potential of interactivity. This approach started from the belief that the politics of an artwork does not exclusively reside in its content; equal attention must be paid to the chosen aesthetic form.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/politics>

¹¹⁴ <https://dictaphonegroup.com/>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.intermsofperformance.site/keywords/participation/tania-el-khoury>

According to her, the political aspect of a performance doesn't rely exclusively on the content, meaning that it would need to be about one of the topics mentioned above, but that it could also be expressed through its format. A participatory, or as she prefers to call it, interactive format could be prone to be political. And since audience participation is an aspect I often work with, I should start questioning its political weight in my work.

I discovered through my projects that something personal can quickly become political, especially when it involves sharing ideas and memories such as audience members are invited to do in *DYKAP* [Appendix 7]. Although I initiated this project from a personal feeling, with no intention of denouncing anything or proving a certain point, I realized that the piece has a political potential, first because it allows and encourages people to express themselves, but also because the subject it tackles, and about which audience members are talking, is the one that involves many actors and laws, taking it further away from something simply personal.

The political aspect of the piece is noticeable through the archive wall, where people could write and hang memories or thoughts about places that they know and that don't exist anymore. Although this wall is still a question mark to me, in the sense that I was never totally convinced about its meaning or how to work with it further, I could see that it was a sort of platform for people to express themselves anonymously. This is the reason why we chose to keep this element in the performance in the first place, without over thinking its function. It's only later, while reading again the messages written by the participants that I noticed some similarities among many of the notes, that contained hints of anger towards bigger forces, hiding behind personal feelings and memories related to the place.

Here are some examples of what audience members wrote [Appendix 12]:

“Old flooded quarry where we used to go for a swim when we were little. They pumped the water out and started mining again wtf...”

“I used to have a country with hopes”

“A huge ‘party’ place Gradjant next to a house where we used to live it was full of drugs, prostitution, gun crime... Owner of this place was an uncle of our ex-minister.”

“The Queen’s peer was demolished as the recent government wants this place.
DECOLONIZE :(”
“Before they robbed us”
“There was a meadow near my grandmother’s house, now there are new houses
and I can’t walk there anymore and catch insects.”

These messages are personal, almost all of them related to dear places, old habits or childhood memories. But the particularity of these selected examples is that behind those personal thoughts, there is a denunciation of a bigger power taking over the place in question, sometimes more explicitly than others. Some of the notes accuse the government directly, but others, using pronouns like ‘they’, without specifying who ‘they’ are, imply that the authors of modifications of the place are simply people who have power over that place. The messages accuse the people in power to stop a place from existing in someone else’s life.

The initial aim of this wall carrying those messages, was for people to share personal memories and give a little bit more information about some places. It was also a good way for audience members to get inspired to share, by reading messages from others. It was unexpected for me to see the political value of it, this wall turning into a safe platform to share thoughts, not only about personal memories but also about bigger forces influencing the places.

As Tania El Khoury said,

While artists might decide to control audience bodies during a performance, it is impossible to control — or even gauge — the audience’s imagination and perception, as those are tightly linked to each person’s experiences and politics.¹¹⁶

When the unpredictability of a thinking person is used as a main element of the piece, and especially when asking an audience member to express themselves on the topic of places that don’t exist anymore, the piece gets engaged politically, and turns into a platform of free expression on the subject.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.intermsofperformance.site/keywords/participation/tania-el-khoury>

Public spaces

The topic of places itself can become political because of the significations and connotations places have, and because of their importance in society. Places involve questions of land ownership, laws, decision making and multiple actors taking part in that. Public spaces particularly, influence and are influenced by political and social life. As their name mentions it, public spaces are spaces that belong to the state, to be put at the public's disposition. Anyone can have access to them. Therefore, working in a public space, or talking about one in a performance can, in a way, become political. The simple fact of expressing something in public can also give the piece a political voice, regardless of the topic being or not political, since it signifies stating a position in front of everyone passing by.

Performing in a public space puts a big focus on the space itself. Public spaces have functions, they are used by people in everyday life, and therefore they carry with them a set of connotations. Performing in such a place implies anchoring the project in the daily reality of the site, considering its 'normal' passersby, and including daily activities as one component of the piece among others. During my studies, and especially during the pandemic, I have worked a lot in public spaces. My intention was never to express something political, but I later realized that the projects could have a political weight due to them taking place in public spaces.

One particular project of mine that took a political aspect because it was happening out in public spaces instead of staying in a private sphere was *Daniel in Prague* [Appendix 6]. If the puppet had stayed at home or among friends, it would have simply resulted in being an inside joke or a private anecdote. Going out in the city made it have a bigger social impact. In addition to triggering people's reactions, it also questioned the presence of a foreign entity in the space. It put focus on the identity of the puppet through some of his characteristics, such as his skin color for example. Since the project was taking place in Prague, a lot of political questions regarding nationality, immigration, or rules, could come out from it.

According to Daniel Victoria who was the person represented by the puppet and who has performed in this project, placing such a human-looking object in a street in Mexico City, the city where he grew up, would generate totally different reactions than it has in Prague. Placing it there might encourage mockeries, violence, or ridicule towards the puppet, coming from the passersby watching it. These reactions in either Prague or Mexico City were not only affecting the puppet, but also Daniel Victoria who could relate at the puppet's situation. Although these were never my intentions while developing the project, it quickly carried these political and social ideas as soon as Puppet Daniel went out in the street to meet the world. Depending on the country and the social constructs, the political aspect of a piece and its political correctness take different variations, and shape the project one way or another. In this sense, whatever project performed in a public space might more or less have a heavy political weight according to the social context it is performed in.

When it comes to Lebanon, public spaces themselves are a controversial subject, due to a mass privatization of lands. Performing there can therefore have a big political and even juridical impact. Tania El Khoury, with the Dictaphone Group, works a lot in public spaces and with a political engagement. She stated:

Working on contested sites in the city, we noticed that we appeared to the media as protestors, to invited audiences as performers, to passers-by as city dwellers, and to some authority figures as a potential threat.¹¹⁷

The Dictaphone Group's piece *This Sea is Mine*¹¹⁸, directly questions the lack of access to the sea through public spaces, and the privatization of the shore. The performance happened on the site itself, and was directly aiming to use it as a tool to raise awareness about this big issue. This is a very clear example of the site being used as a political mean to point out a problem.

Another Lebanese performance artist who worked in and about public space is Rima Najdi with her piece *Happy New Fear*¹¹⁹. She created the fictional character of 'Madame Bomba', walking around Beirut wearing a fake explosive vest. Although the final outcome

¹¹⁷ <http://www.intermssofperformance.site/keywords/site/tania-el-khoury>

¹¹⁸ <https://dictaphonegroup.com/portfolio-item/this-sea-is-mine/>

¹¹⁹ <https://rimanajdi.com/Happy-New-Fear>

of her work was shown in a theater space, Najdi addressed Beirut's public space through several layers. The piece is a multimedia performance that includes a video filmed in several neighborhoods of the city. While shooting it, she had to actually be there, walking among citizens while wearing her explosive vest. Showing the video during the performance while at the same time saying a text about the fear of witnessing an explosion happening anywhere at any time, was a way to take the audience members to this place, reigned by emotions such as stress and fear, according to the performance. Addressing such a dense and intense topic as terrorism brings the public space into the performing space in a very particular way, framing the danger and the fear of sudden explosion as a main characteristic of the place. The decision of picturing the city through one specific lens frames the performance politically, not only because of the chosen point of view of fear and danger, but also because it expresses the impressions of the artist about the place. As a matter of fact, Najdi only recorded the videos in Lebanon but didn't perform the piece on stage there, because of the strong political impact it might have among people.

Therefore, we can say that talking about a public space in a subjective way during a performance highlights its political potential. This is another reason why *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] becomes political. People are encouraged to share information about a place that is dear to them and doesn't exist anymore, but it is never specified that the place in question should be private. The places that don't exist anymore can be public, which means that they are known by more than one person. It happened many times that audience members chose to share a public space that they knew and was dear to them and that doesn't exist anymore. Talking about such places in a performance and sharing personal opinions about them adds to the political aspect of the piece. Indeed, anyone could have a different opinion about a public space, so referring to one in a biased way during a performance could generate debates.

3. Memory and architecture

A big part of the memories we have comes from the places we visit and the environments we find ourselves in. Places are “a profound and complex aspect of man’s experience of the world.”¹²⁰ During my research about the impermanence of space and through the conception of *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], I realized that places deeply mark our different stages of life, and that many of our memories are built around those places.

Building with objects

Juhani Pallasmaa explained:

Actual architectural structures, as well as mere remembered architectural images and metaphors serve as significant memory devices in three different ways: first, they materialize and preserve the course of time and make it visible; second they concretize remembrance by containing and projecting memories; and third, they stimulate and inspire us to reminisce and imagine.¹²¹

Memory is very linked to architecture. Remembering something, any moment or event, involves the remembrance of the place this event happened in. But although places appear in almost all memories, remembering a place that doesn’t exist anymore wasn’t always easy for people to do in *DYKAP* [Appendix 7]. It requires an effort of going back to one’s past and personal life, and it takes a bit of time to access the feelings linked to this place, and to articulate and communicate thoughts linked to them in the performance.

According to the feedback we received, there was always some excitement between the moment of drawing a place and the moment of watching it being built in the space. Audience members were curious to see how their place would turn out to be. Of

¹²⁰ Relph, E., *Place and Placelessness*, Pion Limited, 1976, p.1.

¹²¹ Pallasmaa, J. *Space, Place, Memory and Imagination: The temporal dimension of existential space*, in Andersen, M., A. (ed.), *Nordic Architects Write: A Documentary Anthology*, Routledge, 2007, p. 190.

course, they knew that the place wouldn't be recreated per-se, since it is impossible to rebuild a place exactly the way it was in real life. The places were evoked through the use of objects chosen for the similarities in shapes and colors they had with the drawing of the place. As performers not knowing the real place we were representing, the only source we could follow was the drawing of the audience member, or, more rarely, a verbal description if somebody wished to add something. Therefore, we chose the objects to build with according to their resemblance to elements from the drawing, trying to match with them as accurately as possible.

One particular feedback we received from an audience member after performing *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] was that the way we used the objects reminded them of a child playing. Accumulating objects found around the venue and arranging them in the space in a way that would only be comprehensible for someone inside the performance, would be similar to a child creating worlds using things found at home, in what would seem like a very messy room for someone not following the logic of their game. It is true that a similar effect happens in the performance: the objects are from everyday life, so someone looking at the scene from the outside wouldn't understand what is happening with them in this space. The objects themselves are not transformed during this process, it's only by connecting them to specific pictures and memories that new meanings are attributed to them.

A different kind of project but that has similarities in terms of the use of objects is the exhibition *Do it*¹²² curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist. It was an exhibition which concept was that the artworks would have to be produced by audience members, following the given instructions and using the provided objects. As Obrist says: "The components from which the works were made were, at the end of the exhibition, to be returned to their original context, making *do it* completely reversible, or, you might say, recyclable."¹²³ They used everyday materials in an unusual way, and therefore, "the mundane was transformed into the uncommon and then converted back into the everyday."¹²⁴

¹²² <https://curatorsintl.org/exhibitions/18072-do-it-2013>

¹²³ Obrist, H. U., *Ways of Curating*, Penguin Books, 2015, p.19.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Building places with objects also involves playing with scales. Here again, this approach could be compared to one of a child. The first encounter of children with creating architecture is made through objects and toys, building fictional worlds in different dimensions, and living in them for a short time before these objects go back to their original state of being from daily life. These miniature ephemeral places last only for the duration of the children's games, and so are the places recreated in *DYKAP* [Appendix 7]. The end of the performance brings with it the disappearance of the represented places. It is their turn to be transformed into memories.

“Every time we bring back an old memory, we run the risk of changing it.”¹²⁵ It is possible that the memories of the places brought back during the performance get altered after living through this new layer. From there, new memories are formed and the set-up of the space filled with object-built places becomes a new way for people to remember a significant place from their life.

Playing with time and space

DYKAP [Appendix 7] is about real places, but isn't necessarily site specific. At the beginning of the creative process, I knew that I wanted to make a project that would be performed indoors, not outdoors, firstly because of the practical reason that we were developing it during winter, and secondly because almost all of the projects that I had done so far had been performed outside and I wanted to try something different. *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] was initiated from an experience I had in a place that had changed, that didn't exist anymore the way I knew it. I wanted to transpose this place that I knew - or the thought of this place - into the performing space, and invite others into a similar process with places of their own.

Bringing one place into another, overlapping spaces and mapping them are principles I followed with my team while devising this project. The idea was to combine spaces but

¹²⁵ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/when-memories-are-remembered-they-can-be-rewritten>

also times; bringing past moments into the present, and sharing them with others during the performance. Talking about places that don't exist anymore puts in relation past and present. Before being transformed or destroyed, these places had specific meanings and functions, memorable for those who visited them. These places belong to the past, but remembering them and representing them brings them back, in a way, into the present.

The idea of past and present places exists everywhere, but in Lebanon particularly, it is a sensitive topic that everybody is used to, and that artists often use in their work as a main topic. The civil war that took place between 1975 and 1990¹²⁶ is one of the events that had the biggest influence on architecture and on people's relationship to places, and is, therefore, a period that is addressed a lot in artistic works.

The photographer and art historian Gregory Buchakjian worked on a research and project about abandoned houses in Beirut and its outskirts: *Abandoned Dwellings*¹²⁷. Bringing his camera and some friends along, he undertook the task of listing all abandoned houses that he found and visited them, collecting on his way information about them. Most of the places he visited were destroyed or damaged during the war, and their inhabitants had to flee sometimes in a rush, to escape the attacks and bombings. As Joanna Haigood said, "place is defined by experience and by memory, by the traces left behind by people, nature, and events."¹²⁸ These abandoned houses contain traces of the events that occurred in them. They got physically affected by what happened, and at the same time lost the core of what was giving them their liveliness. Abandoned for several years, these dwellings turned into a state of ruins.

Ruins are remains of architecture, they are structures from the past. Ruins are a kind of place that are often found as main element of Lebanese artists' works. The photographer Fouad Elkoury, famous for his pictures of the civil war, takes ruins as protagonists of his work, or uses them as settings for the images he shoots. One of his projects, the

¹²⁶[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese_Civil_War#:~:text=The%20Lebanese%20Civil%20War%20\(Arabic,one%20million%20people%20from%20Lebanon.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese_Civil_War#:~:text=The%20Lebanese%20Civil%20War%20(Arabic,one%20million%20people%20from%20Lebanon.)

¹²⁷ <https://www.buchakjian.net/publication/abandoned-dwellings-history-beirut/index.html>

¹²⁸ <http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/site/joanna-haigood>

installation called *Ruins*¹²⁹, puts them in the foreground and directly questions their value, or more specifically the value of each of the ruins he photographed.

Ruins are an extremely useful tool to understand past civilizations and get more information about their ways of living. They are a major working ground of archeologists. Situated on a land crossed and conquered by many empires and civilizations, such as the Romans or the Byzantines among others, Lebanon is very rich in archeological sites, filled with antique ruins. It is often subject to archeological findings and researches undertaken through these ruins, to discover more information about the past. Therefore, the job of archeologists could be seen as reconstituting places that don't exist anymore.

The Lebanese organization Silāt for Culture¹³⁰ ('silāt' meaning 'connections' in Arabic) undertakes many initiatives to promote culture and archeological understandings, making them accessible to people. In the archeological site of Deir el Qalaa, where the third largest temple complex of Lebanon after those of Baalbek and Niha used to be, they executed some interventions, along with some guided tours, to offer better understandings of how people used to live there during the Byzantine period (4th - 6th Century AD). The interventions consisted in restituting parts of columns and of an olive press with different materials, easy to differentiate from the original materials. Their goal was to offer a form of visualization for visitors to understand better the way the temple was built and the way the olive press functioned. In a way, Silāt for Culture is inviting visitors to a trip into the past. Their work on reviving places also happened after the explosion of the port of Beirut in 2020. In addition to helping with the restoration of damaged objects, they supported the conservation and restauration of one particular affected historical building in which they used to organize guided tours and exhibitions, keeping it alive and "shedding the light on the families and people who inhabited the different levels throughout the years."¹³¹

We tend to think of archeology as a practice related to very old times, going centuries or millenniums back. But archeology is "the study of the ancient and recent human past

¹²⁹ <https://www.fouadelkoury.com/installrespon.php?id=24>

¹³⁰ <https://silatforculture.org/>

¹³¹ Ibid.

through material remains.”¹³² While working on *Abandoned Dwellings*, Gregory Buchakjian, along with the writer Valérie Cachard, undertook an archeological work in the places they visited. They collected pictures, objects, letters, all sorts of documents they found in the houses, and constituted a big archive out of them.¹³³ The 700 elements they collected were cleaned and classified before being returned to their original owners or given to public institutions. Their research and work eventually took the shape of an installation, exhibiting the photos of some of the 744 abandoned places they classified, taken by Buchakjian, along with different audio-visual medias documenting their working process and the objects they collected.

All the elements they found are proofs of life. They are witnesses of events that happened in the place, of people living there, then leaving it, they are witnesses of the past. Through them, the houses become some sorts of museums about their previous inhabitants. They provide information about them, their habits and their way of life. A place is constituted by the people living in it and the events that happen there, but in this case, the place is also the one shedding light on its own past and its own inhabitants. A contradiction of phenomenon is present here between this project and *DYKAP* [Appendix 7]: in the first one, the place plays a role of information provider. We are in contact with it, not with the people who used to live there, and it is through it that we receive some information about them and that we are able to reconstitute some parts of their personas or of their lives. In *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], the opposite is happening. We are not in contact at all with the actual place, but with the people who used to spend time in it, and it is them who provide the necessary information to get an idea of this place and represent it in the space.

I would also like to point out another difference between *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] and the other projects from the artists and organization I mentioned above, and this concerns ruins. Ruins exist in the present. They are remains of architectural structures that existed in the past, but the ruins themselves still exist. I have realized that Buchakjian, Elkoury and Silāt for Culture all work with places that are in a state of ruins. The three of them can

¹³²<https://www.saa.org/about-archaeology/what-is-archaeology#:~:text=Archaeology%20is%20the%20study%20of,present%2Dday%20New%20York%20City>

¹³³ <https://www.buchakjian.net/film-scene/abandoned-dwellings-archive/index.html>

go and visit those ruins, maybe basing their work there. They address the past through present structures. With *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] however, we are not handling ruins exclusively. It is up to the audience members to share a place that could be in a state of ruins or not necessarily. Instead of going through the structure itself, we pass through people's memories of them to access the past and attempt to revive it.

Despite these differences, the similarity of topics and the interest for places that changed life or that disappeared, are aspects that are common and recurring among many Lebanese artists, many of which I didn't have the chance to name here. I am tempted to think that places, and in this case those around Lebanon, have such a strong influence on us that it feels like a necessity or a duty to talk about them.

Conclusion

The immaterial

I have entered the study program with a dream, that of building a machine. Throughout the years, this dream has concretized, a machine got built, although not exactly in the form I had in mind. I discovered that machines can have all sorts of shapes, and can be composed of other things than chains and gears. Their engine could be human, conceptual or sensorial, anything that would set them in motion. My idea of a machine has expanded, just like my understanding of my own work, after reflecting on my processes. This is why I can only see this conclusion as an opening rather than a closure.

I have always had an affinity for material things. I collect objects, craft some, keep some preciously, regardless of their nature. My objects vary from natural elements to electronic ones. They are all interesting to me. Storage wise, is not the most practical activity to have. My living spaces tend to turn into storages for all kinds of things. Materials inspire projects, they accompany me through daily life. But what hides behind those material things? It is not very pleasant to be surrounded by a multitude of useless things, so there must be a reason for me to amass them.

Juhani Pallasmaa wrote:

The significance of objects in our processes of remembering is the main reason why we like to collect familiar or peculiar objects around us; they expand and reinforce the realm of memories, and eventually, of our very sense of self. Few of the objects we possess are really needed strictly for utilitarian purposes; their function is social and mental.¹³⁴

It is true that besides objects, another thing I easily get attached to is memory. I do not like to forget things, and objects are usually a proof that particular moments have existed. Hence, the fact that behind material things hide immaterial ideas and concepts. Histories,

¹³⁴ Pallasmaa, J. *Space, Place, Memory and Imagination: The temporal dimension of existential space*, in Andersen, M., A. (ed.), *Nordic Architects Write: A Documentary Anthology*, Routledge, 2007, p. 192.

stories, feelings are contained in objects of the everyday, that become reminders of emotions and events.

From these objects get formed spaces. Spaces carry within them a past that weights more than what is visible at first sight. They have history. They hosted creatures, people and events long before we walked through them. Many thoughts arise in my mind following this idea. We are surrounded by the visible and the palpable, but also by all that came before what is here. What goes between what we see? What was here before, and what will come next? The absent is reflected through the present; through attitudes, traces, and signs.

My work often puts in dialogue past and present, presence and absence. Physical absence. It uses materiality as a tool to communicate the impalpable, what used to be or what is not yet there. Objects are a good in-between to travel from one realm to another. Depending on the context they are placed in or the way they are used, they acquire the power of changing meanings, adding some signification, or even telling stories. Objects travel through time, they are witnesses of eras and can therefore be considered as proofs of life. Since I communicate in a materialistic and spatial way, using physical materials to represent what is absent came naturally to me.

My final MA project *DYKAP* [Appendix 7], is probably the best example to illustrate the dialogue between past and present, since it uses materials to represent a place that is absent. It carries memories and interprets them through objects.

This final project has made me question a lot the notion of place. What do we call a place, what kind of places exists and when does a place stop existing? Discussing this topic with others, during the performance and outside of it, broadened my perception of what a place really is. Interpreting the audience member's drawings while performing has also awaken my imagination regarding possible types of places that don't exist anymore. It happened once, that we couldn't understand the place on a drawing, and the first association that came to my mind while looking at it was that this place belonged to a nightmare. Suddenly the possibility of immaterial places appeared, not only virtual ones that I was aware about

and that I had had the chance to explore through the distance dramaturgies specifically, but also the psychic ones.

Another thing that happened during the performance and that has led me to question the subject again, was that more than once, an audience member being asked about a place that doesn't exist anymore, replied with a place that doesn't exist yet. A place from the future instead of a place from the past. Those places, either from the future or from the past, are places at a state of idea. Just like places from dreams or from nightmares, they live in the psyche and are constituted of images, not materials. This raised in me the following questions: if a place is still alive in the mind, although its material structure got destroyed, can we consider that it doesn't exist anymore? And if it is an idea of a place, does it count as a place?

René Magritte, inspired by the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure proposing that the signifier and the signified word had an arbitrary relation¹³⁵, worked a lot on the basis of this concept, interrogating the link between an actual object, its name and its representation. His famous painting *The Treachery of Images*, representing a pipe under which stands the inscription "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe)¹³⁶, produces a similar type of interrogation as I had: If this is not a pipe, then what is it? A representation of a pipe and a pipe as an object do not have the same nature, therefore, it would be lying to call a painting of a pipe, 'pipe', since it is impossible to accomplish the same actions with one and the other, according to Magritte. So, is the idea of a place, a place? We can visit a place, and we could also 'visit' the idea of a place by thinking about it and picturing it in our mind...

There are so many different types of places that it would be hard to treat all of them in the same way, considering their different natures and the different possibilities they offer. There are three-dimensional places from the everyday, fictional places, dreamed places, memories of places, virtual places, future places, familiar places, unknown places,

¹³⁵ <https://literariness.org/2018/03/12/key-theories-of-ferdinand-de-saussure/>

¹³⁶ https://www.schirn.de/en/magazine/context/magritte/rene_magritte_ferdinand_saussure_word_image/#:~:text=Language%20is%20a%20fluid%20process&text=In%20his%20paintings%20Magritte%20toys,the%20automatic%20mechanisms%20of%20thought.

undiscovered places, public places, private places, ephemeral places, very tiny places and huge ones. This list could be longer...

Questioning places also brought me to question time. Places change, their impermanence is a characteristic common to all places. From one day to another, a place gets transformed by the activity and non-activity that happen there. People come and go, move things, animals mark their territories, new smells emerge, leaves fall, then grow again, dust accumulates, walls get moldy, metal gets rusty, light decolorates... And after a longer period, nature takes over. Unless humans do.

I tend to see space as something static, and time as something in movement. It is time that makes space move. But can we even separate them from one another? We move in space through time... or do we move in time through space? Is space a materialization of time? Reflecting about *DYKAP* [Appendix 7] has made me observe the relationship between the material and the immaterial, concept that I wish to explore further in the future, perhaps through the topic of places again, and more specifically through the concept of 'idea of a place' that intrigued me a lot and in which I would like to dig deeper.

DYKAP [Appendix 7] also opened another interesting field to me, which is that of documentary. I was recently talking about this project with a documentary filmmaker friend. He pointed out some similarities that the piece has with the documentary genre. The project is shedding the light on people's pasts in an indirect way, through the places and thoughts they share. This approach could be seen as an alternative way of documenting reality through a performance. It is true that documentaries communicate reality, and this process can be done in multiple ways, sometimes passing through specific elements to express other ideas. Receiving this comment was inspiring, it offered new possibilities and new grounds to explore.

I opened this paper with Obrist, inspired by the way he started his conversations with artists, and considering my writing as a conversation with myself. But how does he conclude his talks? Do they ever come to an end? After all he named them, in his book,

“Infinite Conversations”¹³⁷... It is true that his conversations are sustained, “recorded over a period of time, perhaps over the course of many years,”¹³⁸ but even the longest situations need to end somehow. What follows his talks is usually not silence but action. As he says, “conversations, meanwhile, are obviously archival, but they are also a form of creating fertile soil for future projects.”¹³⁹ Taking action in making new projects happen would be a way to conclude this paper; working on my dream, while the eternal conversation with myself remains ongoing.

¹³⁷ Obrist, H. U., *Ways of Curating*. Penguin Books, 2015, p. 55.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Obrist, H. U., *idem*, p. 57.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Sending Space, 2020

This project was the first one I showed after the beginning of the pandemic. I collaborated on it with Valteri Alanen and Eglė Šimėnaitė. When the borders closed and people were restricted from travelling, many people including us, found ourselves far away from our families and loved ones. This is how we thought: if people can't come to the space we are at, let's send this space to them. We decided to materialize the space into an object easy to send: paper.

We made a 2x2 meters recycled paper in which we incorporated leaves, soil, seeds from the places we visited during the lockdown. This paper was a materialization of the time we spent in Prague during the spring, mostly in the parks since every indoor place was closed. We exhibited the paper in the center of a room on an elevated platform so that its texture and relief could be well observed. It resembled a landscape. On one side of the room was projected the video of the making of the paper, and on the other side was a table with envelopes, pens and stamps. People were encouraged to tear a piece of paper and put it in an envelope to send it to one of their loved ones far away from them. The person receiving the piece of paper were receiving a small piece of Prague. They had the possibility to plant it and let the seeds turn into plants to recreate the vegetation present in the parks, and thus get a symbolic feeling of what it would have been like to be in Prague at that moment.



Appendix 2: Games with a City, 2020

This project was a booklet assembling a collection of games to play, using elements from daily life. I worked on it with Daria Gosteva and Martina Znamenačková in autumn 2020 during the second Covid wave lockdown in Prague. We designed this project with the idea of giving people the opportunity of having an individual experience while still communicating with others from a distance, either a distant space or a distant time. The other idea was to respond to the solicitations of the city, take details into account and focusing on certain aspects that we don't pay attention to every day. We wanted to offer the possibility of having indirect dialogues with people or direct dialogues with the space. We presented this project in a showcase in Stanica in Žilina, Slovakia, as a printed foldable version that visitors could take with them, and as a digital version as well.

On the following page is a presentation of the printed version, designed to be printed on an A3 sheet, then folded to fit in a pocket.

<p>0 - Game for choosing a game</p> <p>For this game you will need: eyes - a mental calculator</p> <p>Look for a number written somewhere around you. This number will be the game you will play. If the number you find is bigger than the amount of games in the book, add up its digits, and their sum will be the number of your game. If there is no number around you, play game 0 again.</p>	<p>1 - Warming benches</p> <p>For this game you will need: a bench - your body - time</p> <p>Find a bench and sit on it, you are warming it for the person who will come and sit there after you. Stay seated until it's warm enough.</p>	<p>2 - Gift exchange</p> <p>For this game you will need: yourself - an object</p> <p>Find a small object that you are willing to give away. Leave it somewhere in a public space as a gift to the person who will find it. You might also find your gift not far away.</p>
<p>3 - Be their guest</p> <p>For this game you will need: yourself</p> <p>Look for an open door. When you find one, step in. If the hosts are there, talk to them. If not, sit there for a while or explore the space.</p>	<p>4 - Share a meal</p> <p>For this game you will need: yourself - money</p> <p>Go grocery shopping. Select in your mind another customer, and buy exactly the same things as them. Even though you won't be with them when you'll cook these ingredients, you'll be experiencing the same taste as them. For an easier version, you can stand in front of a shelf, wait until someone comes to pick up an item, and take the same one as them.</p>	<p>5 - Posting mail</p> <p>For this game you will need: post boxes - something to send - neighbors</p> <p>Place messages or small objects in the post boxes of your neighbors. You can invite them to continue the game if they are willing to. You might also receive something.</p>
<p>6 - Smiling eyes</p> <p>For this game you will need: a mask - eyes - a stranger</p> <p>Establish an eye contact with a stranger. Smile at them, under your mask. Will they smile back at you?</p>	<p>7 - Sending clouds</p> <p>For this game you will need: a cell phone that can take pictures - a cloud</p> <p>Find a cloud that has a particular shape. Take a picture of it and send it to someone. See if they can find the same cloud.</p>	<p>8 - Sending smells</p> <p>For this game you will need: a nose</p> <p>Choose a specific smell you come across from. Share it with a friend by sending them precise instructions on how to find this smell on their own.</p>
<p>These games can be experienced anytime, whenever you are in the mood to play, or when you want to connect with people from a distance. Or connect to things, to places. They are in continuous making. We are still adding. It will never end. Please make games, your own, have a dialogue with your environment. And send us your game by mail. And be bold!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">gameswithacity@gmail.com</p> <div style="text-align: right;"> <h1>GAMES</h1> <h2>with a city</h2> <p>A collection of games to converse with your surroundings By Daria Gosteva, Mara Ingea and Martina Znamenáčková KALD DAMU 2020</p> </div>		

<p>9 - Lead the way</p> <p>For this game you will need: materials you find - patience</p> <p>Find materials around you (leaves, stones, etc.) and use them to draw a path on the ground. You are leading the person who will find it to a specific place.</p>	<p>10 - When you don't know what to do in the future</p> <p>For this game you will need: your name - a newspaper - scissors</p> <p>Count how many letters your first name contains. Take a newspaper and cut out the same amount of words as your name contains letters. Each word should start with a letter from your name. The words you cut out might give you a hint about what your future will be like.</p>	<p>11 - When you feel ugly</p> <p>For this game you will need: a sweet you like - a mirror</p> <p>Take a sweet you like and eat it in front of the mirror. While eating, focus on the taste in your mouth, then on your facial expression. Does the sweet you are eating affect the way you look?</p>
<p>12 - Walking straight</p> <p>For this game you will need: legs - eyelids</p> <p>Find a place where the ground has two different textures that are clearly separated in a straight line, one texture on each side. Position yourself on this line, one foot on each side and close your eyes. Start walking straight by feeling the different textures under your feet.</p>	<p>13 - Some poetry</p> <p>For this game you will need: a pen - something to write on - ears</p> <p>Listen to what people say around you, and write down words or sentences you hear. It will form a poem.</p>	<p>14 - Sing along</p> <p>For this game you will need: ears - a voice</p> <p>Listen to the sounds around you and try to imitate them with your voice. You can also accompany them by making other sounds to enrich the music.</p>
<p>15 - Be them</p> <p>For this game you will need: yourself</p> <p>Go for a walk, and follow someone on the street. For a while, try to be like them: walk like them, have the same energy and same gestures. Stay like them until they stop walking. After that, you can choose somebody else to follow.</p>	<p>16 - Follow the color</p> <p>For this game you will need: vivid color clothes - eyes - something to measure time with</p> <p>Wear vivid color clothes, and walk on the street by following things that have the same color. Set a time limit, when it is over, check where you have arrived.</p>	<p>17 - Follow the wind</p> <p>For this game you will need: yourself - something to measure time with</p> <p>Walk on the street and follow the direction the wind blows. Be ready to turn when the wind changes direction. Set a time limit, when it is over, check where you have arrived.</p>
<p>18 - Follow the map</p> <p>For this game you will need: something you find - a sense of orientation (good or bad, doesn't matter)</p> <p>Collect an object you find on the street (leaf, stone, piece of paper, etc.). This object is your map, connect its lines and texture to the space around you. Start walking by following the ways shown on the map.</p>	<p>19 - Walk away</p> <p>For this game you will need: yourself - something to avoid</p> <p>Choose something you want to avoid (person wearing eyeglasses, baby carriages, dogs, person with white shoes, etc.), and go for a walk. Every time you encounter the thing you chose to avoid, change direction to get away from it. Set a time limit, when it is over, check where you have arrived.</p>	<p>20 - It's calling you (abstract game)</p> <p>For this game you will need: yourself - awareness - creativity</p> <p>Be aware of what is happening around you. Wait for a sign (an outstanding sound, smell, vision, etc.), and react to it. Create your own rules and follow them.</p>

Appendix 3: A Walk in Reflection, 2021

This project took place in Pasáž Lucerna, it was a walk for five people at a time. At the meeting point in the Václavské náměstí tram stop, participants received a door handle that had the quality of being reflective. I asked them to follow me and took them through the passage. Throughout the walk, I was guiding them and navigating them through the different ways of using the door handle.

I framed the experience in a context of live editing of images appearing in front of us. We played with combinations of 2D images that we could see in the reflections in the door handles, other reflective surfaces and posters hanged in the passage, and the 3D vision of people of architecture and objects from the place. By giving instructions at different steps of the walk, I introduced the different ways of looking first in the handle itself only, and later by bringing the image from inside the handle into the space. The idea was for each person to be the director or cinematographer of their own ephemeral film. It was an introverted experience and each one created their own.

We started for example by simple exercises such as selecting what we wanted to see in the frame, staying only in the limits of the door handle's surface. Then we expanded the zone by using the keyhole as something to look through or to frame some elements of the space. Eventually it's the door handle itself that served as a frame to select and separate some elements, and 'place' them elsewhere. One action that we often repeated was to exchange eyes with another participant or with some mannequins or other objects from the space.

This project was the result of a year of experimenting with door handles, from autumn 2019 when I first found them in a container on the street, until February 2021 when I showed the project, after some months of interruption due to Covid. When I found the door handles, they were attached to what used to be doors that were being thrown away during a building's renovation. I got so intrigued by these objects that I took them and decided to make a project out of them. It was not as easy as I thought, and I experimented many different forms and ways of touching them, holding them, manipulating them, looking and listening to them that it became a bit chaotic with too many possibilities. I decided to

narrow them down, even though I loved the big potential of the door handles. This is how I chose to focus only on the reflective quality and to make that the center of the project.



Appendix 4: Ztráty a Nálezy (Lost and Found), 2021



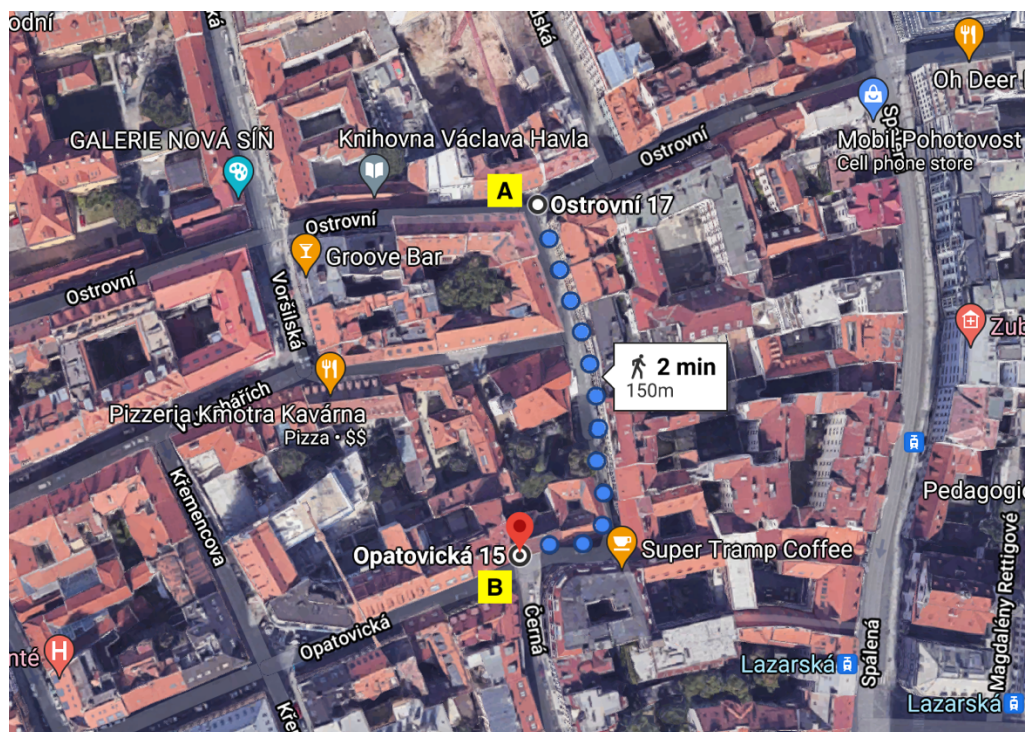
I created this project in collaboration with Lukáš Černý. It took place in Rohanský Ostrov. It was a piece for two people at a time with no performers.

Participants were sent a location via email, along with a picture of two chairs and some instructions. Their first task was to go to that spot and find the chairs. Since the two people arrived separately, they would also meet the other participant at the location of the chairs, and they would start their experience together. On each chair lied an envelope containing a letter and some cards. The letter gave them the instruction to take the chairs and find a nice spot to place them at and sit on them. After that, they would need to put on a 30min timer and start their experience. This experience consisted in observing what was around them. Simply sitting and watching, and letting passersby, traffic, insects and other elements from the space, perform for them. At any moment they could seek help from the cards inside the envelope. These cards could help them building a context, creating a fictional structure or directing their attention. Each card contained a sentence such as “The green man is walking fast”, “Behind this mountain once lived a giant”, “Turn around and observe what is behind you”. After 30min, the participants had to leave the chairs where they had placed them, with the envelopes at the same place, and send a picture of them and the new location to a provided email address.



Appendix 5: Performative Walk in Opatovická, 2021

I worked on this project with Arnis Aleinikovas. It was a walk in Opatovická street for two people at a time, guided through messages. No performer was present on the performance site. This project was focusing on perception, how a given media can influence our natural perception of a place and how repetition can affect our behavior in this place. The two audience members arrived to the starting point separately and had an independent experience from one another. Their first instruction was to walk from a given point A to a given point B. They were asked to send some reflections about how they felt, if something particularly caught their attention or on what they were focusing on their way back to point A. This short journey from A to B was repeated three times. For their second time on this way, the participants received a video of the street, going from the same point A to the same point B, stopping on some details such as wall textures such as wall textures, road signs etc. They could choose to follow the video, look for the shown images in the actual space or follow their own rhythm. The third step of the experience included sound. They received the same video as in the second step but this time including a sound layer telling a fictional story or a dream. This added another level to the experience, as it gave a certain meaning to things that were shown. And again, in both the second and the third step they were asked to reflect about their experience on their way back.



Appendix 6: Daniel in Prague, 2021

This project was a durational performative installation including different media. I made it in collaboration with Daniel Victoria. It started because and during the Covid-19 pandemic, when Daniel (referred to as Human Daniel in this project) got stuck in Mexico and was unable to come back to Prague because of closed borders and other administrative problems. The idea came to make a human scale puppet of Human Daniel and take him to classes, just for the fun of it. But on the day when I was done making it, the school closed again and the puppet had to stay in my room.

The exhibition was a documentation of a research I started developing during the pandemic with the puppet, about uncanniness, people's reactions towards him, and social relationships. I experimented taking him out in public spaces and putting him on the online chatting platform *Chatroulette*. This was one part of the research, shown as videos presented on TV screens. Another part was related more directly to Human Daniel. By the time the project had started, he had been able to make it back to Prague. This other part dealt with the relationship of Human Daniel and Puppet Daniel, the feelings and connotations this whole situation brought, and the reactions of Human Daniel's family towards the puppet. The last part of the project was questioning the future of the puppet: there were two Daniels at this moment in Prague, and none in Mexico. Would this mean that it was Puppet Daniel's turn to go there? If so, how would he make his way there? I called some airlines to inquire about that and got some information from the post office about package shipments. In this part, visitors could contribute by voting about which shipping option they thought would be the best. These options consisted in different positions the puppet could take to be placed in the box.

Position 1:

- 170x50x26cm
- 3kg
- Česka Pošta wouldn't accept it because it's longer than 150cm
- He would need to go with Fedex or other postingservice



Position 2:

- 140x50x50cm
- 3kg
- Can go with Česka Pošta



Position 3:

- 90x50x35cm
- 3kg
- Can go with Česka Pošta



Position 4:

- 70x50x90cm
- 3kg
- Can go with Česka Pošta



Position 5:

- 125x50x85cm
- 5kg (adding a chair for him to sit on)
- Can go with Česka Pošta



Throughout the duration of the installation, the different videos were playing in a loop, some texts and a photo album were exposed for people to read and watch them, the phone call recording could be listened to, and the different shipping options were lying on the table for people to vote for their preferred one. But meanwhile, Human Daniel and Puppet Daniel were present in the space. The puppet was available to be touched or interacted with, and Human Daniel was telling personal stories of how it was for him when he learned about the puppet, how he reacted back in Mexico and what he thought about it when arriving to Prague. And each time a visitor would vote for a shipping option, both Human Daniel and Puppet Daniel would take the same position as shown in the picture. During the entire experience, Puppet Daniel was almost becoming a human while Human Daniel was slowly becoming a puppet.



Appendix 7: Do you know a place that doesn't exist anymore?, 2022

This one was my final MA project on which I collaborated with Susana Botero Santos, En-Ping Yu and Kirstine Hupfeldt Nielsen. It is a participatory performance that tackles the concept of impermanence of space.

People are welcomed in a room where groups of ordinary objects and furniture are installed. Next to each set of objects is a paper on which is represented a place, either drawn or written. The objects and furniture are arranged in a way that resembles the place depicted on the paper. People are free to walk around the space and sit or stand wherever they want. They also have the possibility to write or draw a place from their memory that doesn't exist anymore. As the performance unfolds, two performers start to move objects and furniture in the space, sometimes also getting new things from a storage room or storage corner. They are following the audience member's drawings or written descriptions to recreate the places they miss. The number of objects being limited, the performers have to use the same objects for multiple places. Therefore, some places overlap, and the setup of the space itself is constantly changing. At one point during this process, the performers invite audience members to help them building places if they wish to join, giving them an orange working vest to wear (the same as the performers' costumes), to become a worker themselves.

Meanwhile, two other performers are mapping the space: one of them tracks the physical changes in the room by editing a digital plan of it projected on a TV screen. Through this, the impermanence of the recreated places stands out and people can witness the history of the changes in the space. On another side, another performer is working on a memory archive by organizing thoughts and stories about places that no longer exist, provided by the audience members. Here, the focus is put on the permanence of feelings and associations towards a place. Thus, throughout the performance, the focus vacillates between past and present, internal memory and recreation, permanence and impermanence. And if from the outside the scene could look like an accumulation of ordinary objects or a messy playground, its meaning changes completely when one is inside the performance and witnesses the changes and the links to the recreated places.

This performance is an invitation to remember, to share, and to pay tribute to places that were once a part of our life and are no longer present. It ends with all the recreated places disappearing and the room going back to its original state.



Appendix 8:

8.a. Drawing area in the gallery NGO DEI:



8.b. Archive wall in Kaunas City Chamber Theater, Lithuania:

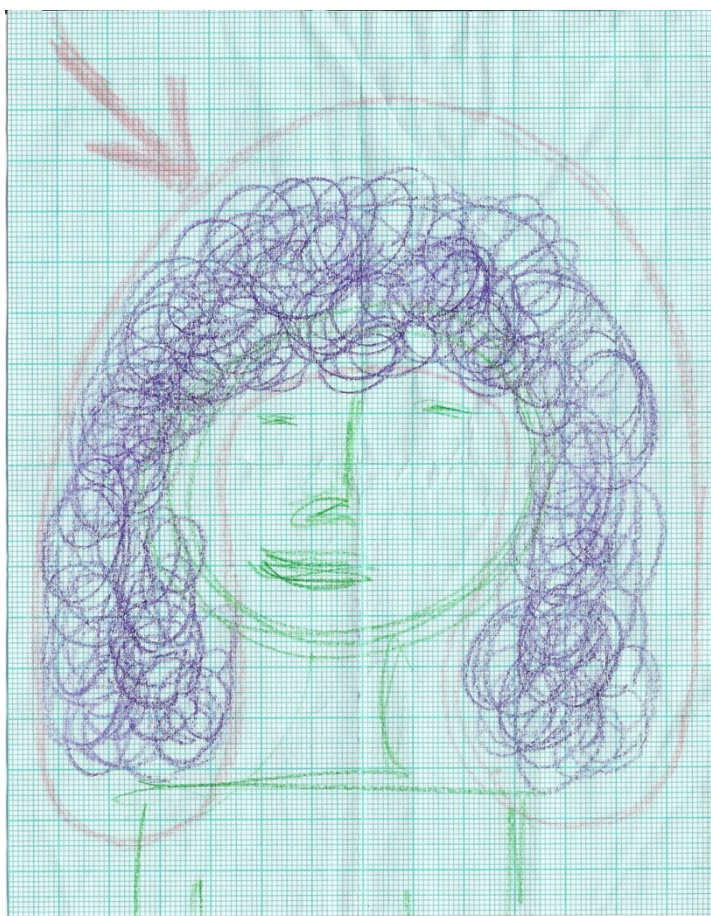




Appendix 9:

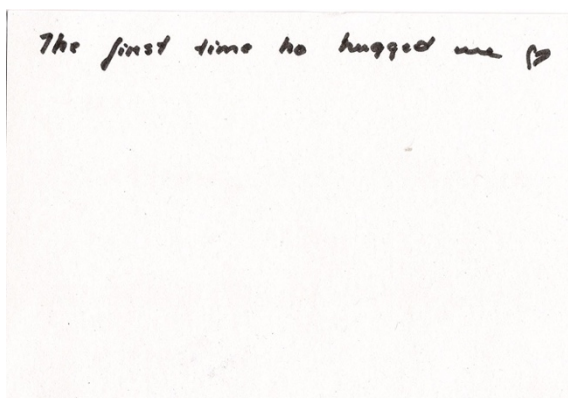
How is an organ a place?
Do I have to fit in a
place in order for it
to become one?

Appendix 10:

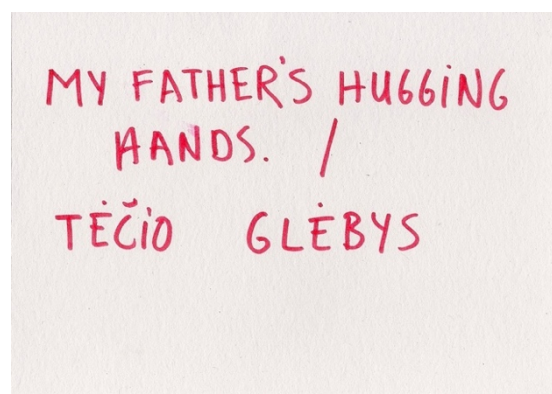


Appendix 11:

11.a.



11.b.



Appendix 12:

OLD FLOODED QUARRY WHERE WE USED
TO GO FOR A SWIM WHEN WE WERE
LITTLE.

THEY PUMPED THE WATER OUT
AND STARTED MINING AGAIN WTF...

I used to have
a country with
hopes

A huge "party" place
Gradjant next to a house
where we used to live. It
was full of drugs, prostitu-
tion, gun crime... Owner
of this place was an uncle
of our ex minister.

The Queen's Pier was
demolished as the recent
government wants this
place. DECOLONIZE
☹

BEFORE
THEY
ROBED
US

THERE WAS MEADOW
NEAR MY GRAND MOTHER
HOUSE, NOW THERE NEW
HOUSES and i CANT WALK
THERE ANYMORE AND
CATCH THE INSECTS

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