

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE
THEATRE FACULTY

MASTER'S THESIS

PRAGUE, 2022

YU EN PING

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE

THEATRE FACULTY

PERFORMING ARTS

DIIRECTING FOR DEVISED AND OBJECT THEATRE

MASTER'S THESIS

ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF SOCIAL ENCOUNTER AND DIALUGUE

YU EN PING

Supervisor: Ph.D Sodja Lotker

Opponent: Marta Ljubková

Date of thesis defense: September 2022

Allocated Academic Title: M.A.

Prague, 2022

AKADEMIE MÚZICKÝCH UMĚNÍ V PRAZE

DIVADELNÍ FAKULTA

MÚZICKÝCH UMĚNÍ REŽIE PRO VYMYŠLENÉ A OBJEKTIVÉ DIVADLO

MAGISTERSKÁ PRÁCE

ALTERNATIVNÍ ZPŮSOBY SPOLEČENSKÉHO SETKÁNÍ A DIALUGU

YU EN PING

Vedoucí práce: Ph.D. Sodja Lotker

Opponent práce: Marta Ljubková

Datum obhajoby: září 2022

Přidělený akademický titul: M.A.

Praha, 2022

Declaration

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

ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF SOCIAL ENCOUNTER AND DIALUGUE

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

Prague, 2022-August, 18

YU EN PING

Warning

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

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I reflect on two projects I developed at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague between 2019 and 2022. My main research topic are alternative ways of social encounter. The research questions are whether it is possible to converse through touch; being together or sharing space; and finding alternative ways of social encounter and dialogue through different senses. My method of research is mainly based on experimenting on materials with participants to arrive at a place to have a dialogue in the format of sensory experiences. I will describe the process of working with performers and finding results together, focusing on my two works “Someone Has Shared A Document With You”, and “Sensorium – Take A Break From Being Human.”

ABSTRAKTNÍ

V této práci reflektuji nad dvěma projekty, na nichž jsem pracovala na Akademii múzických umění v Praze (2019-2022). Mým hlavním výzkumným tématem jsou alternativní způsoby společenského setkání. Výzkumné otázky zní, zda je možné konverzovat prostřednictvím dotyku, bytím spolu nebo sdílením prostoru a dále pátrám po alternativních způsobech společenského setkání a dialogu prostřednictvím smyslů. Moje metoda výzkumu je založena hlavně na experimentování s materiály spolu s účastníky, aby se dostali na místo, kde mohou vést dialog ve formě smyslových zážitků. Popíši proces práce s účastníky a společné hledání výsledků se zaměřením na mé dvě díla „Someone Has Shared A Document With You“ a „Sensorium – Take A Break From Being Human“.

Table of contents

Introduction.....	1
Someone Has Shared A Document With You: Performance description.....	2
Process of Devising.....	4
• Language, and how participants and I share a language	12
Sensorium – Take A Break From Being Human: Performance description.....	17
Process of Devising.....	24
• Developing the experiences.....	29
• Framing and the system.....	40
Reflection and Conclusion.....	41
Bibliography.....	44

INTRODUCTION

When I first started the MA DOT program at DAMU, I was informed that everything could be the material for performance making. *EVERYTHING*, as long as it was an acute interest of the performance maker. This way of thinking created huge confusion and excitement within me, because I was overwhelmed by the endless possibilities, but at the same time I no longer had to generate any meaning in a creative process like I used to; instead, I needed to listen to what I was curious about at the moment. So I listened. I've always been a socially awkward person. I get nervous on a daily basis when I need to talk to people, and sometimes even just meeting acquaintances freaks me out. One time in my early 20's when I was walking on the street, I saw an acquaintance walking towards me and I wasn't sure if we knew each other enough for me to say hi, or how to say hi, so I hid in an alley, waiting for him to pass by. But I also have another alter-ego who is very observant of the crowd around me, therefore knowing what to say, how to moderate the group dynamic, make people comfortable, make people laugh. The best part is: I can't control which version of me comes out at what time. So, I was naturally interested in finding ways to be and converse with others, of looking for and understanding the factors that influence a situation. After some thinking, I made a project proposal inspired by "The Dark Crystal"¹, a puppet movie and animation series about magical creatures. The Gelflings creatures can communicate through touch, seeing each other's memory in a shared dream. I thought that this was such a great way to converse – very easy, not awkward at all. I then proposed to make a project to talk about dreams with another person through massage, intending to create a one-on-one situation to engage with people in their sleep. After my presentation for the proposal, Sodja Lotker, a dramaturg and teacher in MA DOT, told me that in order to do this research I should become a shaman. I

¹ *The Dark Crystal*. 1982. [film] Directed by J. Henson and F. Oz. United States: ITC Entertainment.

said, “but no, I don’t know how to become a shaman”. And she replied, “How hard can it be?” I didn’t know at the time, but later on I would try to become some kind of shaman in the projects described in this thesis.

The dream-massage project was never carried out because of the COVID-19 outbreak, but looking back, because of my fear for social encounter, I think I’ve always been searching for alternative ways to connect with people, and this search continued throughout my semester projects. I see three main themes in my research process: touch; being together or sharing space; and alternative ways of social encounter and dialogue through senses. I kept looking into these themes in many ways, and through several approaches. During my two years at DAMU, I developed various performances and shows. In this thesis I am mainly going to describe two of them: *Someone Has Shared a Document With You*, and *Sensorium - Take A Break From Being Human*. After I describe each performance, I will reflect on the devising process, including the method of experimenting and working with others, audience feedback, and conclusion.

SOMEONE HAS SHARED A DOCUMENT WITH YOU: PERFORMANCE

DESCRIPTION

Someone Has Shared A Document With You is a one-hour online participatory performance happening in a shared Google document for one audience at a time. The audience registers for the performance by selecting a time slot online, and providing their email address. They will then receive a confirmation email from me, including information about time, a link to enter the online performance space, and instructions. Once they enter the shared document, the performance starts. The performance space is an empty page, and the audience can see my cursor, and their own cursor. The audience is instructed to only use “directional arrows” on their keyboard to explore the empty space in the document. Before sending out the link, I prepare the

performance space, which is the empty page, by brushing the first half page using the “spacebar” on my keyboard. This way the audience can move around with arrows without trouble. After a few minutes, I start typing, welcome them into the space, and I give further instructions, enabling the audience to use more functions such as “spacebar” and “enter” on their keyboard to move in the space. With “spacebar” and “enter” they will be able to push my cursor or move the text I’ve typed, creating new possibilities for interaction. I ask if they can take me somewhere in the page, showing they can push my cursor to anywhere in the page using spacebar and enter. They take me, and we stay there for a while. After that I ask them if I can show them somewhere special. I show them how they can nod or shake their head to signal yes or no by moving their cursor. Usually they nod to my invitation to take them somewhere special, so I use press space to push them all the way across the page, and into the grey space that is outside of the page. We stay there for a while, and I take them back. I ask if they like the place, and explain how that was the “place of nowhere”. I can’t talk (type) to them there, so they can always go if they want some peace and quiet by pressing the spacebar non-stop. I ask them to follow me, and I go a few pages away, starting to build a house using symbols. I open the door, invite them in, offer coffee or tea, or go to the roof together. And I ask them if they can show me their place letting them use copy-pasted symbols to build. After they build a place, we hang out there, bringing things inside or outside. Here is when I tell them that if they want, they can use anything on the keyboard now. They might start typing words, or not. We can exchange any kind of conversation. At some point I ask them if they are curious about how I look like. Whether they answer yes or no, I try to show them my “picture”. I tell them to come closer, and closer, as they follow my cursor down the pages, and show them a closed up pixelated photo of a cursor. I ask if they can see the pixels in me, which is what we are made of, just like how humans are made of

atoms. I type: “do you know that humans can never actually touch each other? When they touch, the atoms of them create some sort of magnetic field with the atoms of the things or other humans they are touching, creating sense of friction, but there is actually a micro space between two atoms, like this atom (()) atom. But we as cursors can touch, there will be no space between us”. I get close to them, and we touch. Two cursors will overlap and become one. We explore the action or the topic a bit more, about how we feel when we touch. At some point I tell them I want to remember them, so we should take a picture together. We go to a place where we want to be in the document, and I do a screenshot. I import the screenshot into the document, and tell them they can keep it. We try to slowly say goodbye. At some point I leave the document, and the performance ends.

At many times, this performance didn't go as scripted: I could end up drawing a rainbow with an audience who doesn't understand English well, or having a conversation about how nothing actually exists, or just be cursors staring at each other for five minutes. It is never the same.

PROCESS OF DEVISING

Someone Has Shared A Document With you

- **What is a shared document?**

This performance started during the year of Covid, 2020, when human physical contact became more distant. At the time as part of dramaturgy class, me and other students were writing and editing a shared Google document together about definition of performance-making terms. I was typing in a paragraph, but my sentence kept being pushed away. I realized there was someone else editing in the same paragraph, and a little sign on the top of the page showed it was Kathi Frech, another student. So, I started to interrupt her mid-sentence while she was typing, telling her to stop

“pushing” me, or finishing her sentences for her, and she started to do the same. This little interaction created a haptic feeling of pushing each other, and it got my attention. I started to wonder if I could interact with strangers in a performative context in this way. I talked with my project tutor Cristina Maldonado about this idea, and she advised me to first research on the media itself: what is a shared document, and what does it do? Don’t take it for granted as a tool for editing.

So I sat down in front of my laptop, opened a Google shared document page, and didn’t TYPE. It was the first time I opened a document not for the purpose of writing. For a while I was just feeling nothing, thinking if I should do something. Just when I started to get bored, I noticed that there was some shadow at the edge of the page, that it was grey outside of the page instead of white, and so on. I noticed how something was flickering, like heartbeats: that thing was my cursor (I googled “what is the name of the little black line that marks where you are in a sentence in a shared word document” and learned the word ‘cursor’), and I felt like I was suddenly standing on the page, as a cursor. I tried to press something on my keyboard, some letters appeared, but the letters ripped me away from the position of the cursor. So I pressed spacebar, and I saw the cursor moving. I pressed enter non-stop, the page just kept stretching endlessly, and I felt very small and alone in the vast endless blank page of nothingness. I wanted to find accompaniment, and I started with one person. I was very curious in the performative interaction in one-on-one situations firstly because I’ve never done that before, and I wanted to try. I did a series of experiments in person with strangers just sitting awkwardly together in the previous semester, and it was miserable. I hoped to continue my one-on-one research in the shared documents.

- **Tryout 1 – I start of creating instructions and building, sharing space**

I first asked Mara Ingea, a fellow student, to play together in a shared document. I

sent her an email including the link to the shared document space, and a short instruction asking her to do nothing and follow my lead when we started. I waited for her in the document at the arranged time, and when her cursor showed up, I did nothing for around one minute, hoping that by doing that we can feel the space together. I always thought that the awkward silent moment between two people is a perfect window to feel the space. I typed “hello”, and figured I need to tell her what to do before she immediately starts to type. So I typed, “now you can use spacebar on your keyboard.” Her cursor started moving. I followed her. We strolled here and there together for a bit, measuring space between each other. Then I typed, “Now you can use enter.” Her cursor started to move down the page, at some point it started to go really fast, just like me, the cursor being curious about how far it can go. It was fun to watch it go, but we were losing out connection (meaning that I was not exploring with the other cursor, it was on its own), so I tried to stop it. After some struggle, I discovered that if I managed to get to the stop before Mara’s cursor (meaning on the left side of it), and press space, enter, or delete, I could actually influence its movement. I can “bring it with me”. For example, when I press delete, my cursor moves one step left, and Mara’s cursor moves with mine, and only when my cursor is placed on the left side of hers. Her cursor stopped, and I typed, “Don’t move, let me take you somewhere.” Then I brought her cursor around, playing with speed as if we are dancing. Looking back, the way cursors can influence each other’s movement create a special kind of haptic feeling through visual stimulation, as if we could push, pull, or jump on each other – it works like how in old version Super Mario video games, Mario would “touch” a brick with his head by jumping. This led me to ask the question: “Can we touch one another in a shared document?”

After this moment of moving together, I asked Mara’s cursor to follow me, and we traveled down the pages until I stopped somewhere random. In one of the tutor

interact with me and express themselves if needed.

- **Tryout 2 – The way of being a cursor**

In another tryout with my project tutor Cristina Maldonado we discovered something new. I started the session with simple instructions about which keys Cristina could use, one by one. This time I could see how the performance worked a bit more. The “arrows” should be introduced in the beginning to give a sense of moving in spatial direction the “spacebar” is for exploring space horizontally, and the “enter” key is for going down and stretching the pages. Both spacebar and enter also works as a tool to influence each other’s movements as cursors, to create the sense of pushing something or someone.

Once, when I was exploring alone on the page I accidentally “ran out of the page”. I just tapped on space bar non-stop, and I saw my cursor going to the right side, closer to the edge of the page, and eventually crossing the edge to the other side that is gray. I tried to type there, but my cursor was immediately transported back to the white page. That was special for me because I went somewhere I wasn’t supposed to go in the editing tool, a limbo where I couldn’t do anything (couldn’t type except just being there. This sensation sent shivers down my spine, because it created a kind of special way of existence for me. When I came across Timothy Morton’s writing *Appearance is War*, I felt that the way he thinks about movement describes this feeling perfectly: “The kind of movement this essay is interested in is achieved by a body that’s not only all by itself – it’s also not going anywhere in particular. It’s waving, undulating, vibrating”². As a cursor on the page, I am not going anywhere, and even if I am

² Timothy Morton, "Appearance Is War", in J. Brouwer, L. Spuybroek, S. van Tuinen (eds.), *The War of Appearances: Transparency, Opacity, Radiance* (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing, 2016), p. 167.

moving, I am not “going from A to B”³. I move in direction without destination, because there isn’t any destination to be found in an endless space. As cursors we can simply decide to move, or to stop. And to stop is not to be static; it is to enjoy a certain way of being, to “vibrate”. (quote) I wanted to take my audience there. In this test round, I typed to Cristina: “don’t move, I want to take you somewhere.” As her cursor paused and waited for me, I put my cursor on the left of it and clicked spacebar to “push” it out of the page. And we just stayed there. It was an exciting moment for both of us, because I wasn’t sure if I could push the other cursor out, and she didn’t know that we could actually go out of the page. She said that this moment created a sense of “falling” from the white space to the mysterious gray space, which was repeated in the feedback from other audience members. This can be read as falling from the known white page in which we usually stay while editing a document, into the gray place that is the unknown. It also hints a kind of illusional haptic experience, to fall from one surface to another. I noticed the visual insinuation of haptic feelings are appearing more and more, meaning that seeing how the cursors are being moved in space simulates the feeling of being pushed, falling from one place to another, being in contact to some surfaces, and so on. This brought me back to my original question: can we touch one another in a shared document?

Later in this tryout, being in the time of Prague’s cold winter, Cristina typed to me, “are you cold?” I moved my cursor up and down to simulate nodding, and then her cursor moved closer and closer to mine, eventually overlapped with it, visually becoming one cursor. It felt like a hug, like we were in contact. “better?” she typed. I nodded again. The definition of “touch” in Cambridge online dictionary is, “(of two or more things) to be so close together that there is no space between; to be in contact”⁴). These words

³ Timothy Morton, "Appearance Is War", p. 167.

⁴ "Touch", *Dictionary.cambridge.org*, 2022.

described what the cursors did, that is, when they were moving closer and closer until there was no space visible between them, that is when they touch. The thing is, I believe that we can touch in a shared document, because I felt it when it happened: it felt like a kind of vibration or undulation, as Timothy Morton described. All I needed was to find a way to communicate that with the participant (at this point I refer to the audiences as participants because of how much they are asked to interact with me). In the tutor session with Cristina, we were talking about the post-human, simulated presence of a cursor. A cursor moves according to human expression, it is controlled by the human who is clicking on the screen or tapping on the keyboard, but itself is not a human, so what is it? Cristina asked something funny in the tryout. She typed, “can you follow me? Does it matter if I am not human? Will you still follow me?” I followed her cursor down the pages as she asked me to get closer and closer, and suddenly this picture appeared.



It took me a few seconds to understand she was trying to tell me that this is the person or whatever is behind the cursor. We laughed for 2 minutes for how ridiculous it was. This happening helped me to understand that I didn't need to let the audience know what or what is behind the cursor; instead, the point was to focus on what a cursor is. Cristina shared with me the concept of uncanny valley, or how “a person's response to a humanlike robot would abruptly shift from empathy to revulsion as it approached,

but failed to attain, a lifelike appearance”⁵ to reflect how in this project one could imagine a kind of post-human being behind the cursor, generating words. In case anyone hasn’t noticed yet, I’ve had developed an obsession with this little thing that is called a cursor, and exploring what it was had become my priority, my acute interest. In order to examine the cursor closer, I tried to take a super closed-up photo of the cursor, enlarged it, and saw pixels that form it.




This picture reminded me of how humans are made of atoms, just like how this cursor is made of pixels. I remembered reading something on Reddit about how humans can never touch anything because we are made of atoms, and atoms can’t actually “touch” because the electrons in them repel each other, so even when we touch a thing, we don’t actually touch it, because there is a electronic field between the atoms of us and the atoms of the thing we touch, creating a little space. I have no idea if this was true, but I was inspired.

I saw this as a possible passage to find a physical similarity between human and cursors, for humans to imagine that cursors have bodies, and to engage vicariously in how a cursor exists. Here is how I developed the section of the performance in which I ask the participant if they are curious about how I look like, ask them to come closer to me, to follow me, until we are close, and I show this closed-up photo of “me”. This photo shows that “I” am made of pixels, just like how humans are made of atoms. This is where I claimed that we, the participant and me, are not humans, and we are cursors, or at least we pretend to be. When we touch, like how Cristina moved her cursor closer to mine until there was no space between us, between the pixels, we

⁵ Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley: The Original Essay by Masahiro Mori", *IEEE Spectrum*, 1970.

break the rule of atoms and their electronic field, and we touch closer than humans could ever do. Through vicarious touching, we break the rules of physics. Even if it's clear for the participant that a person (performer and him/her/themself) is behind the cursor and animating it through a keyboard, I intended to invite them to play the imaginary game and pretend for a while that we are both cursors, and we could feel it.

- **Tryout 3 - Introducing high-pixel images**

I had another tryout with Gabriele de Seta, an artist focusing on online ethnographic research. Here is when I tried to bring in pictures, for example to put a picture of a heart and animating it like it is beating, or to put a picture of a field to create outdoor space. It was a complete failure. Anything that is 3D kills the imagination in the document, and it breaks the language of imagining something out of nothing. Anything that is abstract in shape works much better in a sense that it's open for interpretation. This can be a piece of grass ///////////////, or a sound wave, depending on the context of the conversation with participants. On the other hand, later in actual performances I did discover that once a 2D made-believe language is established, it is possible for me to bring smaller-scale images like this, , as a present to put in the house built by the participant when they asked for it. The image has to fit with the scale of the world we share in a document. In response to my present, the participant typed "I am looking at it, I can smell the flower, it's perfect".

- **Language, and how participants and I share a language**

In the beginning of my research, I avoided typing words in the document so I could stop taking a shared document as an editing tool, and take it as a space instead. This helped me believe in this 2D world first, before I could find a way to share it with others. In the process of developing the performance, I understood that I was trying to develop a way of interacting with another person that requires different strategies

including the use of words, and not only words, to build a language we could communicate with.

I will name the elements of how we built this language together. All these strategies are meant to create conditions for, and alternative ways of, having a dialogue:

1. Instructional sentences

The language has to be clear and direct word choice. This part starts when the participant registers for the performance with their email, I will send the instructions before the show that includes greetings, link to enter the document as a performance space, and this sentence: “Once you open the Google Docs page, the performance starts. Until further instructions, you are only allowed to use the directional arrows (right, left, up, down) on your keyboard.” During the performance, I will sometimes use sentences like “Don’t move”, “Follow me”, or “Wait”. These instructions are meant to limit the participant’s movement as a cursor in the document in order to lead them to break the habit of typing, and start being there instead.

2. Naming and showing movements

I tell the participant that they can nod, or shake their heads, and I move my cursor up and down, left and right, to show them how it works and how they can communicate with me without typing. During one performance, a participant was typing from the beginning and starting with small talk, and that meant we were losing contact as cursors, we were chatting like humans and taking this performance space as a typing tool, so I typed: “Wait, breathe.”, and I selected the word “breathe” and unselected it with a rhythm, like this: **breathe**breathe, making the blue bar move to signal the action of breathing. The participant paused, and did the same, joined the rhythm to breathe with me. This also happened in the performance with Petra Tejnorova, a teacher as participant, when she actually

started to communicate with me this way by selecting or copying words instead of typing: she expressed that she didn't want to type because it might break the silent connection. Rhythm is also pretty useful when it comes to creating expressions in movement. We could "run" by moving fast with enter or spacebar, or we could "roll on the page" by moving slower. If I get close to another cursor very slowly, they tend to get nervous, one participant typed, "can you stop staring at me?"

3. *Naming places*

When I build a house, I type, "Welcome, this is my place." When I push the audience off the page, I type, "that was the place of nowhere" after we come back to the white page. When the participant pushed me to the corner of the page, I would say, "what a nice corner." In the tryout session with Lea Kukovičič, an artist and former student in MA DOT, I asked her if she wanted to bring something from the page to her house, she then copied and pasted several words into the house, eventually breaking the structure (built by symbols) of the house. So I named the page "Place of dissolving" in response. This was a strategy to locate where we were, both in terms of the space that already exists in the document (the white page, the gray part, the corner and so on), and of the places we create together, and to then play with what is happening.

4. *Signaling sensations*

As I was describing in the previous paragraphs, I was signaling haptic sensation pretty often, for example using the word "push", telling a narrative about how cursors touch, and so on. Other sensations also appeared in the process of meeting different participants. In one performance, the participant stood together with me on the house of my rooftop, and typed, "I can see the place of nowhere from here." In this way, she was seeing from the cursor's point of view, that insinuates the simulated vision inside of the document. As for the participant who

asked me to bring flower, I asked them if they can smell it, they said yes. I was inviting them to imagine the smell. Tomáš Procházka, a teacher in MA DOT and one of the participants, expressed that he appreciated how the whole performance was silent, yet he could hear rhythm from the movements. I realized that there are so many sensory propositions that either already exist in the space, or generated by the participants and me. These propositions are for both of us to pick up to and to relate to, it was like a buffet of made-believe senses.

5. The improvised conversation

In the middle of the performance, I would tell the participant that they could use anything on the keyboard now. It is an instruction to allow them to type. I chose the timing according to the vibe in each show, but usually it was after we had hung out in the place/house they built. This is usually a good time to start a conversation. Of course it is their choice to type or not, and how to converse, but most of the time the participant would want to introduce what they built. Here, I needed to be careful with what we talked about, and how we talked about it. I wouldn't say I have a clear method or model of conversation, because it simply won't work with every single participant, but I do have a principle of always referring to where we are now at times so we don't drift away to talk as if we are chatting online, and improvise on it. For example, I could be playing football with one participant, and talking about how nothing exists with another, and eventually deleting everything we've created in the document. Here is when I try to listen to the proposition made by the participant, direct or indirect, and lose control. There is a risk of losing the essence of being together in the context of two cursors hanging out in a document. In one of the encounters, the participant talked about how our conversation reminded them of talking with people on Tinder, which was just two lonely people clinging on each other, and proceeded to share information about those experiences. That was the point when we started to slip

out of the context of this encounter, because it became confessional, and the confession was not about our encounter. After this performance I've learnt to develop a way to be a carefree cursor sometimes and ignore certain comments or questions, and simply ask the other cursor to play a game with me (like trying to nod at the same time), or to go to the scripted conversation about atoms and touch, to bring the conversation back to where we are, and what we are doing now.

I would say these are the ways I try to have an alternative dialogue with the participants. I am not entirely sure what they get out of this encounter. Some participants emailed me later to say they could close the shared document for weeks, sometimes even hoping my cursor would show up again. Some participants in the end of the performance said they think we didn't really touch, some said the touch was too much, asked if I could keep distance and don't get closer. Some didn't say anything, or even didn't show up, and some said it was meaningless. I would argue that half of the experience depends on the participant. I proposed a way of having a dialogue, and the participant decides whether they want to take it or not, or how they want to take it. During the performances I often felt like a psychic trying to feel a ghost, figuring out a way to connect with someone from afar according to the clues revealed on the sheet.

This performance is accessible in a way that the participants can be at home sitting comfortably in front of their computers although they do need to have basic English (or Chinese, since I also performed a version of this work in Taiwan) level and know how to operate keyboards in a shared document. On the other hand, I am asking the participants to be alone with me, and imagine with me, at times asking them to feel that as cursors we could merge and lose our individual identity. As Rachel Zerihan notes, "The potential of the one-to-one includes the way the encounter enables connection, engagement, and exploration of the solo spectator. It is – and has to be –

that through relationships with ‘the personal’ one’s politics are stirred, employed, and reckoned with”⁶. Even as the creator of this piece, I was at many times stirred and challenged. In one particular performance in collaboration with the Stanica Žilina-Záriečie festival, I understood the vulnerability of this shared space. In the end of that encounter, the participant revealed that they are an intern working for Stanica Žilina-Záriečie, and they have already screen-recorded the whole performance for documentation purposes, and will show it to the funders. I realized I’ve taken for granted that this shared document is a private space between the participant and me, and although the result of the document might be shown to others, I’ve never imagined having witnesses during the show. This felt the same as being recorded during a live one-to-one performance without being told. This incident reminded me that this virtual space is not any less real than physical space, at least I should trust it has real effects.

SENSORIUM: PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION

Sensorium – Take A Break From Being Human is a 2-hours multi-sensory participatory performance with small amount of audiences at a time. When the audiences arrive, the receptionist (me) first welcomes them into a lobby (in Hybernska 4 Gallery, a high-ceiling space with antique chairs, old-fashioned pattern carpets, a table with food and drinks, and a leopard print table cloth), and she tells them this is a place to imagine how it feels like to use senses like certain animals through five rooms with five different animal experiences, each experience lasting around 25 minutes. They will follow her guide to each room, and when they finish each experience they

⁶ Rachel Zerihan, "Strange Duets: On the Genealogy and Efficacy of One-to-One Performance", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 30, no. 1, 2020, p. 57.

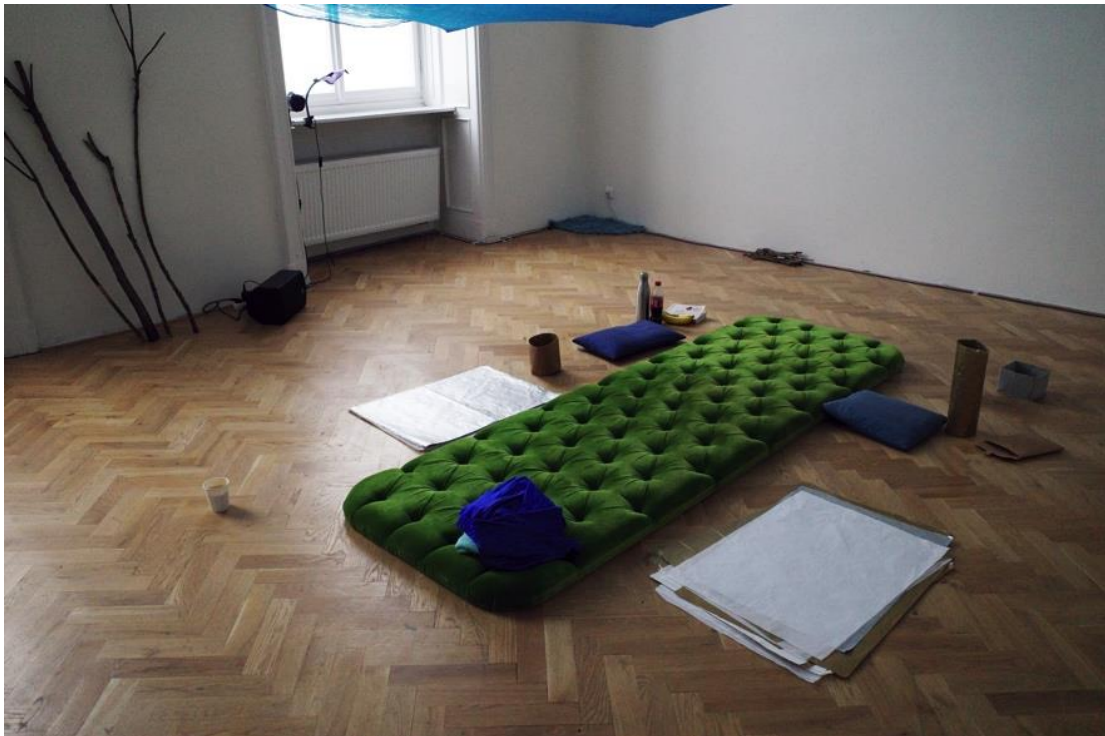
always come back to the lobby to take a break to be guided to the next room where they should go. Before they go into a room, the receptionist puts a string on their wrists, telling them it's for them to become something else. In the next paragraph I will describe each animal experiences, each one happens in an isolated, decorated gallery exhibition room.



1. *Eel* (for 1 audience)

The audience goes through a blue veil to enter the room, where there is a blue net hung up on the top of the ceiling, a mattress on the floor, tree branches are spread in the space, and low volume white noise is playing from speakers. The performer asks the audience to take off their shoes, and sit down on the mattress, offering them some coffee beans to smell to clean their nose palate. The performer then asks the audience to lie down, and starts covering their body with very thin paper. The performer leads a meditation through words, describing the environment in lake water, how the audience's body is changing into something long and scaly, and how they wave their spine to move and swim. While the performer is speaking, she moves the thin paper on the audience gently, like lake waves. She continues to guide the meditation by describing how scent and taste molecules are floating in the water, and how the molecules are floating towards them, sticking onto the olfactory organ on their skin, entering their olfactory system. As she is speaking, she puts hiking hand warmers on the audience's body, and puts a smell source

(bonito flakes, dried fish) close to the audience's nose, simulating the process of feeling taste and smell through the skin like an eel. She says: "now you can smell something, something you know, and you see a creature of your kind approaching, you say hello, stay with it for a while, and you swim away". That is the end of the meditation. The performer starts to remove thin papers from the audience, and they can exit when they are ready.



2. **Mole** (for 1 audience)

The audience enters the room through a brown color veil, the room is dark with a limited light source, and a big piece of black fabric is hanging from the ceiling, covering almost all of it. The performer asks the audience to take off their shoes, sit down on the floor, and smell some coffee beans. She proceeds to tell them about how moles live underground with poor vision, so they mainly orient themselves through smell, but their sense of smell works just like human vision, which is stereo. She puts an object on the floor, and asks the audience to use their

fingers to form a square to frame the object, and close one eye, and the other, and try to always put the object in the middle of the frame. This action shows human sees different ranges from their left eye and right eye, and it is the same for the right and left nostrils for moles, and that is why moles can find food with their sense of smell. She says now we are going to go underground, and at the same time she forms a circle on the floor around the audience with a rope. She asks if it's ok to blindfold the audience, and if not, they can just close their eyes. She puts a smell source (soil mixed with patchouli essential oil in a jar) in front of the audience's nose, checks if they can smell it, and then put the smell source on the edge of the circle, and invites the audience to try to find it with their sense of smell and point towards where it is. After the audience's attempt, the performer asks them to take off the blindfold, take a look at the source, and she moves the smell source to another spot, asks if the audience can find it now, and they can usually find it with vision. The performer tells them how it is for seeing humans to find something with stereovision, explaining that it is the same for moles with stereo sense of smell. The performer asks the audience to put on the blindfold again, asking them to plug one nostril, put a smell source close to their nose, then to plug the other nostril, put another different smell source, simulating the feeling of smelling different things from the left and right nostrils. The performer asks the audience to try to follow the more dominant smell, and as the audience follows the smell they start to move out of the circle, the performer replaces the smell with soil mixed with eucalyptus essential oil, and tells the audience now you can smell the grass, you are coming out of the ground, you are slowly turning back to human again. The audience removes the blindfold and exit when they are ready.



3. **Sloth** (for 1 audience)

The audience enters the room through a green veil. The room is dim, there is a hammock, forest sounds from the stereo, and pieces of tree skin scattered in the room. The performer welcomes the audience and helps them get on the hammock. He gives a pair of sunglasses to the audience and tells them sloths have poor vision, and that's how they see. He tells them the sloth lives in the warm rainforest, and describes how they have special fur that is made of different layers: the first layer is their own hair, like a coat (he puts a sleeping bag over the audience and tuck them in); the second layer is made of little moths living and breeding on the fur (he uses spaghetti to poke the audience gently, mimicking the little moth's movement); the third layer is a kind of algae growing on the fur, it's humid (he puts a sheet of warm wet towel over the audience, and all the layers creates a eco-system around the body, making the sloth smells just like the forest to hide from predators). He then puts pieces of tree skin onto the audience, and repeat the spaghetti moth action, telling the audience "you have very slow

metabolism, you don't have to move much, your ecosystem fur is keeping you warm, predators can't find you, you smell just like the forest". In the end, he tells them that sloths mostly die when they come down from the tree to poop, away from their safe environment. The audience can stay for a while on the hammock, and exit when they are ready.



4. Snake (for 3 audiences)

The audience enters the room through an orange and red veil. There is a long dining table with orange tablecloth; three sets of materials are displayed. The performer asks the audience members to sit down, and she tells them about how a snake flick its tongue to catch scent molecules in the air, and bring its tongue back to the olfactory organ located on the palate, the roof of its mouth. She asks the audiences to find their palate with their tongues. She says, now we are going to try to go further from human and closer to snake, and this means that we are going to try something between smell and taste. On the table there is a tongue-shaped red

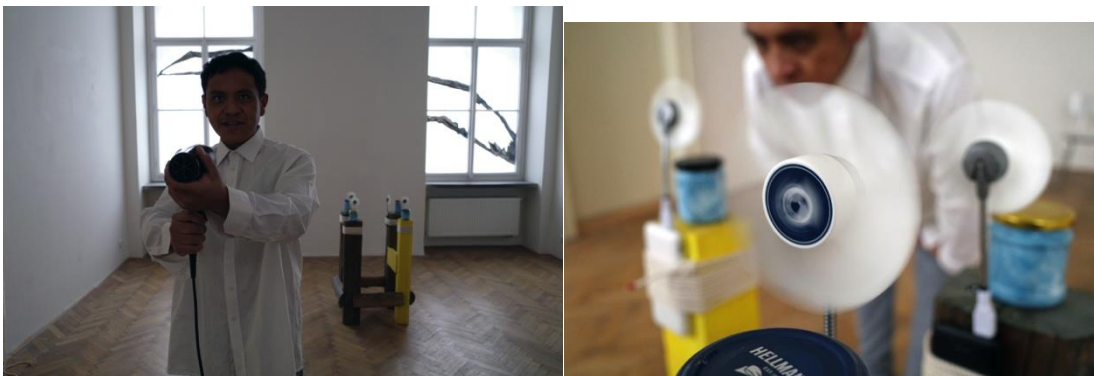
mini-spatula, and a piece of paper with edible powder ingredients spread out. The performer demonstrates how to first moisturize the mini-spatula in a shot glass of water, and “flick” the min-spatula like a tongue over the powder ingredients as scent molecules; some molecules sticks on the tongue, and then she puts the tongue onto the palate, closes her mouth, and circulate the air a bit in her mouth to “smell”. She then proceeds to put a landscape cover onto the ingredients so the audience won’t know what they smell; just like how a snake would flick its tongue out, not knowing what’s coming. She guides the audience to do this tasting-smelling action a few times, describing the landscape they are going through, asking if they can recognize what they like, where the food is, where the danger is. They can share a bit about the experience, and audience exits when ready.



5. *Albatross* (for 3 audiences)

Audiences enter the room through a white veil; there are three chairs, an installation

of smell sources and fans, and a big print of wings on the window. The performer shows them how an albatross's wingspan is as big as the room, introduces its habitat, the long course of flying (sometimes days), and how the smells of the prey from the sea is brought to the albatross by wind currents. Through smell, the animal can make a sensory map for hunting, or find its way home across the planet. He then asks the audiences to stand up one by one to do a "ceremony" to transform into an albatross. He asks them to close their eyes, and start to describe how the audience has big wings, heavy body, and as they are walking to the edge of a cliff, they start to feel a breeze brushing through their feathers; as he is speaking, he turns on a hair dryer on low air flow; as the wind grows stronger, he tells the audience they can feel it is time, the wind is strong enough, they jump off the cliff and the wind catches them, they start flying. After the ceremony, the audience can feel free to fly around the installation with smell sources and fans blowing it to their faces. They are invited to identify what the sources represent for them: where is food? Where is nest? Where is love? They exit when ready.



PROCESS OF DEVISING

Sensorium – Take A Break From Being Human

This project started with my curiosity about the sense of smell. I wished to initiate a research on olfactory experiences to see where I could go. I first started with how

human olfactory organs work, trying to understand how there are scent molecules in the air that enter our nostrils while we breathe, and stick onto our olfactory organ and then merge into our nerves that travels to our brain to us to perceive. After that I tried to gather a few people to do some exercises alone or together and see what comes out. Here are some attempts.

- **Writing a short story**

In the workshop with Mali Weil (Italian based artistic platform, established by Elisa Di Liberato, Lorenzo Facchinelli and Mara Ferrieri), we were focusing on a way of artistic research that is to think of anything as an assemblage, a collection of various things, the process of putting them together without sorting, and to research from a non-anthropocentric viewpoint believing that “making worlds is not limited to humans”⁷. Lorenzo and Mara led the workshop, and they encouraged us to do an exercise to review the materials we are researching on in our own projects as an assemblage. The exercise can be in the format of writing, sound, images, and so on. As my exercise, I wrote a short story from the viewpoint of scent molecules on how they land on a strange planet of human olfactory organ and merge into gigantic nerves, dissolving. This exercise brought me to a way of imagining otherness. Suddenly, my olfactory experience became alien and not so normal anymore.

- **Smell map**

In the dramaturgy class led by Sodja Lotker, she asked us to devise a performative walk for one participant. I wanted to try bringing smell into the walk. In the exercise I paired with Jakub Vaverka, a fellow student. Here I will call him Kuba. In the walk, Kuba was given a pen and piece of paper to mark the smells he picked up on a

⁷ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2017), p. 47.

designated route around Hlavní Nadraží with a spice shop, traffic, sewers, a *trdelník* stand, and so on, hoping there would be stronger smells to be picked up. I then took another route to mark different smells. After our 20-minute walk we met back at the station, and shared the map, and see if we could imagine the surroundings through that. Kuba picked up the *trdelník* and the spice shop, but to my surprise, he also picked up smells like wifi-box, metal, walls and so on. He explained to me that he had just lost forty percent of his sense of smell due to a COVID-19 infection, so he started to imagine smells of things when he sees them, almost like an olfactory hallucination. This part inspired me to go in search of imaginary smells, and led me to the thought that a smell might not need to be there for people to think they had smelled it.

- **Describing smells**

Four fellow students joined this exercise with me to sit somewhere and write down everything they smelled and describe the scents as precisely as possible. The word choice of theirs varies from colors, textures, objects, emotions, to picturing a moment. This exercise revealed to us that there is no common language to describe smell, and it is not always communicable. However, there is some shared access to words like orange, apple, and onion, especially foods with strong odors, or to describing specific moments like the smell when it's about to rain.

- **Smell meditation**

Inspired by the walk with Kuba, I tried to summon scents that are absent in the format of meditation. Eglė Šimėnaitė and Mara Ingea, my fellow classmates, Susanne Kass, a PHD student researching on multi-sensory performances, Tomáš Janyška, Slovakian dance artist, and my project tutor Cristina Maldonado were willing to be my test subjects. Our first session was with Egle and Mara at my place. I offered them tea and then asked them to lie down and close their eyes. As

the session begun, I first asked them to breathe and feel the air brushing through their nostrils and inside of their lungs, and to describe the process of scent molecules entering their olfactory system every time they breathe. I would tell them that there is a scent library in their system that records all kinds of smells they had contact with, and I would name some odors one by one, asking them to try to access the library as I name the scents, seeing what's in there. I started to name things like orange, apple, and onion, and slowly going to other materials like leather, metal, dirty socks. In the next part I said them in a combination like "orange plus dirty socks", "apple plus leather", and so on. I then expanded into describing moments like "opening the window in winter morning", "when it's about to rain", and so on. This went on for about 30 minutes at a slow speed; in the end I brought their attention back to their bodies as I asked them to smell their own hands. The sources I named are inspired by the more shared smell memory in exercise 3 (describing smells). I tried the same process with Susanne. All of them expressed that they could follow it, and it was surprising to know they remember some smells very clearly and were even feeling it physically, but it was disturbing that they were at my home, a place they were not completely familiar with, so they were exposed to lots of new smells that are distracting. In the next tryouts with Tomáš Janyška and Cristina Maldonado I tried to find a rehearsal space that could be more neutral for both of us, but failed in the time of COVID-19 lock-down, and eventually did the session at their homes. Tomáš's thought it would be interesting to introduce other senses like touch because it is very often related to olfactory memory. He also named my strategy of using language as a way to not only lead but to stay together. He thinks the recipient is able to tell if I am imagining together with them or not when I formed the voice. Cristina was not able to summon any smells, but was triggered to curiously smell everything in her studio after the

session. As my tutor for the project, she thought this meditation could be an interesting method to open up people's senses, but it was still lacking motivation to participate in general.

- **Animals**

At this point, I had gotten very lost with all the information I got from the research so far, and didn't know where to go next. There still was animal olfaction on my list of research topics, so I started to look for how many kinds of animals use their sense of smell, since their olfactory organs are located in a different place than humans or have larger receiving surfaces for scent molecules. I was fascinated with alternative experiences, and was wondering if humans could feel in the way the animals feel, and how to work with it. I had a rough idea of using some materials to interact with another person to create the sensory condition of certain animals. I read that ants smell through their antennas by brushing the antennas against surfaces to catch scent molecules. In the tutor session with Cristina, she suggested I try something on her. First we made antennas with craft paper tape, put it on her head, and I moved the paper antennas as I described to her how the molecules are entering through her antennas, and she smelled something sweet, but she could not feel it well enough. She suggested that I take two strands of her hair as antennas and pull them as I describe the same thing. This time the sensation was more present as she could feel me pulling, sensing directions. It was very exciting for me that the combination of touch and verbal guidance could possibly create a passage to the imagined ways animals perceive, almost like I wanted to hack into animals' brains, and use what I find to hack into human brains. I started to do rehearsals in this direction, and eventually developed five kinds of "animal experiences" with five performers. Each performer had unique strategies according to the characteristics of the animals, and in the following sections I will elaborate on

the process of developing each animal experience including my ways of working with performers, space design and framing, reflection, and audience feedback.

Developing the experiences

Eel + Mole

We are artists, not scientists. It was clear from the beginning that we research to be inspired, not to be accurate about facts. We are looking for information that can inspire the project. In the early rehearsals I worked with Mara Ingea and Eglė Šimėnaitė as performers. We met to do research together on the olfactory organs of different animals, focusing on where the organs are, how do they catch scent molecules, and on the animal's *terroir*. I asked them to each pick one animal they are most interested in: Egle chose eel in its larva state as we read somewhere that they have olfactory organs on their skin (this turned out to be false, those were taste buds), while Mara chose mole as we read an article⁸ about an experiment done on moles to prove that their sense of smell is stereo. In the next rehearsal we brought some materials according to the attributes of each animal's ways of smelling. The selection of material was pretty intuitive. For example, for eel, we brought things that might be interesting to be in contact with human skin, like thin paper and fabric, a lamp that feels like light beams underwater, and so on. We laid out all the materials in one end of the rehearsal room, and took the other end as the devising space. I then asked Egle and Mara to select some materials and work individually for 20 minutes to create an interaction to make another person experience how the animal experience olfaction. They could use materials, speech, and space, or anything else to communicate. We had no idea

⁸ Vanderbilt University, "Evidence moles can smell in stereo", *Vanderbilt University*, 2013.

what would come out.

After 20 minutes, we took turns to be recipients and try on each other what we had. Egle asked Mara and me to lie down, close our eyes, and applied thin paper on our skin. The thin paper brushing against our skin brought our attention to how sensitive it is, and the movements of papers resemble the sound of waves. I suggested adding speech guidance here like how we tried in the smell meditation, walking someone through the smells an eel would encounter in its *terroir*. Egle expressed that it was also important to put in the process of body transformation to become something else. We worked together to draft a short meditation text that includes a description of the surroundings and of the body transformation into something long and spine-driven with sensitive skin, and about how the scent molecules in the water are floating and sticking onto the skin and entering the olfactory organs. Here is when I realized that the kind of speech we were looking for should be as simple and illustrative as possible. Metaphoric language creates confusion in this context. At this point I wanted to add smell sources as stimulus to help the recipient imagine. I had brought dried fish flakes as part of the material to be selected from. Of course it was not exactly what an eel would smell, but it was so straight-forwardly fish-related that might trigger imagination, so we decided to use it. To find a way to introduce the smell source, we need to think about the route scent molecules take to enter eel's body. We were trying to create the illusion of "smelling through skin". The sensation on the skin comes first before smell happens. I tried touching one point on the recipient's skin, describing that the scent molecule had entered their body, and moments after putting the fish flakes in front of their nose, intending to simulate that then smell comes from the touch point instead of our mammal nose. Looking back, we were mingling with the effect of synesthesia by specifically intertwining senses of touch and smell. A strategy revealed itself to us that if we could control the factors of certain sensual stimuli we could create passages to

see through listening, to smell through touch, and so on. This strategy continued to reappear in the following devising process for other animal experiences. Egle chose to lead the meditation with very soft and calm voice, and with a very slow speed that leaves space for envisioning between sentences. From working with her on her *Human Sound* project (Šimėnaitė, 2020), I learnt that she has a special sensitivity to the use of sound and voice, and as a trained actor she pays attention to details in the language to open up imagination, and to make a gentle delivery of this experience. I assisted her in the way to pinpoint the logistics and to aim at more concrete word choices.

For the experience of the mole, Mara initiated a game-like situation. She first drew inspiration from the environment of moles, which is underground. She made a circle on the floor with a rope, and claimed it is the circle of the underground, and invited Egle and me in to sit down. Then she tried to explain to us that the mole's sense of smell is stereo, their left and right nostrils can tell different smell sources from the two directions just like how humans use vision. To show me how vision is stereo, she asked us to take turns to close my left and right eyes, and see how each eye sees something different. We then discussed that we need a clearer action because it was not obvious enough to show the difference. So we put an object in the center of the circle, and used our fingers to form a frame to frame the object. This way when we closed our left and right eyes we could clearly tell that the object moved, thus very simply feel the effect of stereo vision. But how can we help the recipient imagine they can smell like this? We were inspired by the scientific experiment done to moles mentioned before. In the experiment, the scientists block one of nostrils of a mole, and test if that influences the mole's sense of direction, and it does. We borrowed this method and blocked one nostril, put a smell source, blocked the other, put another smell source, all to create the feeling of smelling two different things from left and right

nostrils. We were amazed by how strange and disorienting it felt. We hacked our own senses, and got very excited like some mad scientists. Mara then suggested that in order to get closer to the mole, we should be blindfolded because they have poor vision, and can't see almost anything underground. Here Mara initiated another strategy that reappeared in the following devising process, and that was to limit certain senses to get closer to the animals, and in this case to make it easier to focus on the smell source. She then asked Egle and me to follow our noses while being blindfolded, and we learnt that while following smells it felt easier to get closer to the ground, crawling, instead of standing and walking. It was interesting that the way we engaged with the situation with our body made us physically moved like a mole. At this point I worried we are asking too much of the participants (here I use the word "participants" instead of "recipients" because they are asked to engage much more actively than in the experience of eel) since we are asking them to be blindfolded, to smell, and to crawl. On the other hand, I observed that the way Mara delivered the script was very playful and encouraging. In the process of working with Mara on her project *Do you know a place that doesn't exist anymore?* (Ingea, 2022) I learnt that she knows very well how to play games and unlock their performative potential. For that performance, she designed a game system for the audiences to play a made-believe game with the performers as we used random objects to build their suggested places that don't exist anymore. I had seen how her obsession with games has a playful, child-like charm that drew the audiences to participate. So eventually I only added a few transitions in the script on how to lead the participant in and out of the experience; for example, about how they will turn back to human once they crawl out of the circle of underground. We also utilized the smell sources as part of the dramaturgy. The smell of soil was not strong enough, so I mixed a jar of soil and drops of patchouli essential oil and sealed for 2 days, and it became strong enough. Now we

are not only fake scientists, but also pretending to be alchemists. Towards the end of the experience, Mara would provide the smell of fresh grass, which is a mixture of tomato leaves and a few drops of eucalyptus essential oil, insinuating the spatial change from underground (the smell of soil), to above the ground (the smell of fresh grass).

Until this point, we asked Valtteri Alanen, our classmate, to be a test audience for both animal experiences. His feedback was that it was pretty intense, and it felt like some strange rituals. We covered him under papers like we were burying him, and we put him inside of a circle as if we were performing magic on him. I realized, what our teacher Sodja Lotker suggested in the beginning of my study had come true. I was actually trying to become a shaman, to change people into animals by doing made-up rituals. Later on, some audiences expressed difficulty in entering the eel meditation because they were looking for more stimuli. Some experienced the opposite; even thinking they could feel water, algae, and all the other things that we didn't actually put there. For the mole experience, some audiences enjoyed the atmosphere of a school natural history class; a teacher, Petra Hauerova, even said that she wished schools could teach her son about animals like this. Some audiences were bothered by too much text about natural facts. I understood that I was again making sensory propositions as in my previous project on the shared document, but this time I was not only using language, but also actual sensory stimuli. It is up to the audience what they will pick up, and I just needed to make sure that there were enough options and provide appropriate guidance that shows the way.

Sloth + Snake

After developing the first two animal experiences, I learnt that first, I am trying to create ritual-like experiences to transform people into animals; second, it is very good

to have a group of three people including me to work together as each other's test recipient of the experience; and third, I should find performers who interest me, and to listen to their interests, observe what they are good at, and help them say what they want to say and frame it in the context of this performance. I invited Michał Salwiński and Susana Botero Santos, whom I had worked with in the MA DOT program, to join the project and develop two more animal experiences. I had observed that both of them have unique ways of engaging with materials, and intuitively thought it could be interesting for this project. We went through the same process of researching animals and choosing one as inspiration for each of them. Michał was very intrigued by how sloths have a whole eco-system on their bodies that enable them to merge with the forest to hide from predators. From the last stage of devising with Mara and Egle, it was clear that we started accessing the creative process through the sense of smell, but eventually expanding to the use of all the senses in order to complete the experience. In the course of working on the sloth experience, the expansion became even more present. What inspired us was not how sloths use their senses, but instead the way this animal grows a safety camouflage on its body, transforming its presence to smell, look, and feel like part of the forest. Sloths have algae and moths growing and living on their skin, and we named those things as layers: skin, fur, algae, moths, and tree skin that falls on them. These layers then became our main material for devising a way of communication, and that was to insinuate each layer on a human body. Michał had an idea of putting the person on a hammock to get closer to the spatial perspective of an animal that lives on trees. This strategy of changing perspective by putting a person in a non-vertical position already appeared in the experience of mole when we led the recipient to get closer to the ground. It became clear to us that we would try to find things to make the layers we name, and put on a person in a hammock, layer by layer.

We spent some time looking for materials that could create the layers. As a former boy scout, Michal is very close to the forest. It is not a coincidence that he'd be so fascinated by a forest creature. He has an old sleeping bag that we thought could be the fur layer because it provides warmth and volume. Algae grow out of the humidity in the rainforest where sloths live, so we found a towel and made it wet it to simulate that. Michal also has a full bag of tree bark he picked up from the forest for his own forest-related project. With all these materials, we were now ready for a tryout. Susana and I took turns to lie down in the hammock for Michal to perform the layers. He simply put layers on us and said what it is as he did so. We realized that firstly, the smell of the sleeping bag, the tree skin, and the detergent from the towel were very present. We wanted to keep the smelly, mammal-like stink of the sleeping bag, the tree, and remove the detergent smell. I later washed the towel in mate tea to make it smell herbal, plant-like. Secondly, we felt like a baby being wrapped under layers, cradled in a hammock. It was a very nice feeling but it was closer to feeling like a baby than feeling like a sloth. Thirdly, Michal used his fingers to gently walk on the layers on top of our bodies to simulate the movement of the moths living in furs. It was too clear that it was human touch, which drew us away from imagining the moths, and also some people might have problems being touched by a stranger. And finally, what he was saying, and how he said it, was very important. We know about the information about the layers but the recipient doesn't. Therefore, it was central for the action and instruction/description to match, and to not only name the layers, but also to describe them. It was also more effective when he used second person pronouns to address the recipient, instead of addressing a sloth. An effective example would be, he says, "this is your fur, it is very thick and long, and it keeps you warm." As he is saying the text, he puts the sleeping bag onto the recipient.

We replaced the fingers touch with thick spaghettis to make tiny movements on the

body. Using objects to touch indirectly creates an alien feeling because it is hard to tell what is touching you, and makes it easier to imagine otherness. We were trying to engage with the space, the body, and the senses of the recipient for them to enter the world of sloths. Later we added three details for the recipient to engage actively or passively. A thick rope on top of the hammock for them to grab onto, for safety reasons when climbing up the hammock, and for behaving like a sloth, a pair of sunglasses to weaken their vision to get closer to sloths, and some baby spinach put on a spaghetti as leaves on a branch for the recipient to reach and taste. It was interesting that some test recipients said they couldn't see clearly what was being offered (the sunglasses limited their vision), only knew it seemed to be some leaves, so they naturally slowed down as they reached for it, tasted what it could be, thus felt they were actually becoming a sloth by tuning into slower speed of perception. The audiences reminded us that we were also moderating the perception of time through sense deprivation, because by limiting audiences' capacity to see, putting them in the position of lying down, we slowed them down to sloth-speed. Some audience spoke about how again the experience felt like a strange ritual since we were putting layers onto them, making them feel like retrograding to a baby, at the same time similar to being buried as a dead person. Most audiences' feedback for the sloth experience was positive, and some of them didn't want to stop being a sloth. I think part of the reason was that, compared to other animal experiences, the sloth section was the most immersive, involving touch, sounds, smell, taste, all the senses, so it was like a full-sense massage.

For the experience of the snake, we were aiming to start with taste. Land snakes flicker their tongues to catch molecules in the air and then put into two little holes located on their palate where the olfactory organ is. Susana first suggested all of us to put small amounts of food (a tiny gummy bear) onto our palates, and see what

happened. It was hard to taste the gummy bear fully since it was not directly on our tongues, and knowing the context of how snakes smell, we could imagine that little bit of taste coming from our mouth was a way of smelling. But we soon realized we needed to use our imagination quite a lot, and it took too much effort. Susana then suggested creating something visual to support our imagination. She imagined that the scent molecules float in the air, like colorful powders. I got a palette and some salt, sugar, and spices to experiment with. We put food powder on the white plastic palette, and the colors looked too segregated. The colorful spices should tell a story of the snake's *terroir*, where smells are mixed together. Spreading the powders on a white sheet of paper shows better visually how we imagine the way molecules exist in a habitat. Susana proposed a way to use visual representation to trigger imagination, or to show the imagined world through visual design.

We found a representation of the *terroir*, and we needed something to represent the tongue. Instead of fingers, we found wooden sticks for popsicles to dip the powders, and two sticks at a time can imitate two tips of a snake's tongue. With the two tips, we could act the movement of a tongue flickering and catching powders (scent molecules). But how to convince a stranger to put sticks in their mouth? Speech guidance became crucial. It was necessary to translate taste into smell, and it was difficult in view of how close these two senses are. More than that, the recipient in this case is asked to be quite active and occupied, listening to the performer's speech guidance as they put powders onto their palates, and imagining otherness. At this point of the project development, we already had a rough structure for speech guidance, which consisted of information about how the animal uses their certain senses, description of the *terroir*, and instructions, switching between these three kinds of languages at times. With similar strategy we worked out a version of text that first explains snakes' olfactory organ, a short ritual to moisturize our external tongue

made out of sticks, and finally doing the action of flickering tongues and smelling with the palate. After a few tryouts, we got very practical feedbacks from Tinka Avramova, a senior student, and Cristina Maldonado, my tutor. Tinka could follow the visual design, but suggested us to provide a clear image that shows the anatomy of the snake, so the participants (in this case I use the word participant instead of recipient for how much they are asked to actively engage) could see clearly where the olfactory organ is located, and what it is like. Cristina Maldonado advised us to add an element of surprise by covering the colorful terroir. From a snake's point of view, it is not supposed to know what the environment will smell, what scent molecule it will encounter. Adding this element helps putting the participant in the mind of a snake. We took their feedback, and also upgraded the "tongue" with red silicon mini-spatulas that look and feel closer to actual tongues to help with imagination.

Albatross

I invited my course mate Daniel Alberto Victoria to develop an albatross experience together because I wanted to add a flying animal to complete the performance, and he showed acute interest in his semester work *Love, feathers and Javier Solís* (cite), in which he explores the feeling of being an albatross on a personal level. In this process, the main difference was the size of the devising team. It was only the two of us without a third person to see from the outside, and it required a different kind of attention. I would say that after the original brainstorming stage, I became more like a director than a dramaturg or devising partner. We learnt that albatrosses can pick up smells from several miles away from above the ocean⁹. What interested us was not their olfactory organs, it was how vast the perspective is. We imagined they could form

⁹ University of California, Davis. "Wandering Albatrosses Follow Their Nose." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 14 March 2008.

some kind of smell map by smelling the ocean from up above, and first tried to take the floor in a rehearsal room as the ocean, marked where are the island albatross lives, where the food is. With an infrared light pen, we pretended to track smells, and immediately felt it was way too far from anything experiential. Daniel concluded that we should introduce lots of smell sources from a distance, and let the smell go to the participant. The smell of sea, food, nest, sex, love, pollution, and death. I had to again become a fake alchemist. The category of the sea, food, nest, and pollution are more straightforward, we could do like in the case of the mole experience and mix natural ingredients and essential oil to make the smell stronger, for example to mix wood glue with machine oil to achieve an imagined polluted environment. On the other hand, sex, love and death were more like concepts that involve interpretation. It is hard enough for humans to understand and to translate those concepts, so how is it even possible to speak for the albatrosses? We got very stuck at this point, and decided to just go ahead and interpret them on our own. We mixed labdanum oil with salt to make animalic scent representing sex, and found pigeon feathers and burnt with paper to make smell of death, and putting these things in jars to preserve. We found no answer and decided to leave the participants to decide what they think they smell. Even between our final performances, Daniel was still adding things, changing smells; we kept looking for better interpretations, and I ultimately don't think that these exist. We set up small portable fans to blow out the scents because wind is essential for albatrosses. Winds allow them to fly, to hunt, and to land. In order to create the situation of taking flight, we made a ceremony as in the performance description. We used the same strategy of matching action and speech guidance as in the previous animal experiences, in this case to moderate the wind from a hair dryer, and described the process of taking flight when the wind is strong enough. After that, we set the participant free, so they could explore their habitat. I would confess that I

wasn't sure where I wanted to lead the participant in this experience, since they have a ceremony, the freedom to explore, and nowhere to arrive at.

Framing and the system

After developing five animal experiences, I needed to name the performance. First I needed to know what I was inviting the audience members into. Test audiences said the experience reminded them of going to a massage place or a wellness center. I then asked myself again what kind of service I was providing in this wellness center. I again listened to my acute interest mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, and realized that I really just wanted to stop being a human for a while because it is very difficult. This may be a very naïve wishful thinking, but I still wanted to provide this possibility. So I decided to name the performance *Sensorium – Take A Break From Being Human*, suggesting that this was a place to use different senses and to take some time away from humanity. Since the performance is very demanding for the audience members' senses, I wanted to find a neutral space with five separate rooms that did not interrupt each other, and with an additional communal space to rest between experiences, just like how in massage salons the clients would be seated in a comfortable area with tea. Test audience members also spoke about the need to breathe some air between experiences if they wanted to go through three to five times of transformation. A system started to take shape. Audiences will visit, go through a few rooms to experience different animals, and rest for a little bit in between. I made a small board game mapping the rooms, marking the audiences' traffic flow, and realized that a person needed to be there in the communal space to redirect audience members to where they should go. With Anna we tried to figure out a manual for audiences to follow on their own, but eventually decided to discard the idea because it gives the connotation of a hospital situation. I took the role of the "receptionist",

receiving people, giving directions, and chose to engage with them with simple informational language. To complete the ritual-like atmosphere, I would put a string on each audience's wrist when they enter, enabling them to become something other than human, and taking it away before they leave as a closure for the performance.

Reflection and Conclusion

There are a few performances that inspired my work at DAMU. Sissel Tolaas created an installation called "The Smell of Fear", chemically recreating the smell of men's respiration while facing fear, and releasing the smell through touch on the wall¹⁰. She designed an installation that involves touch to release smell, and I took it as a bold attempt to intrude into the boundaries between senses, and later encouraged myself to follow the direction of using sensory stimuli. When I watched "Fantasia" at the 2019 Crossroads Festival in Prague, I was amazed by how much simple text with almost nothing happening on stage could trigger my imagination¹¹. I understood that when used precisely, with simple and clear rules established, language has great power to not only generate images, but to also summon senses.

Throughout the whole process of developing this project, nothing we did was aimed at correctly representing animals; instead, I wanted to find a passage to stop being humans and becoming something else because I was tired of being a human. The dramaturgy was based on speech guidance, sensory stimuli, and the application of objects and materials – all elements that fabricate rituals. These rituals aim to create a passage to be something else, and to trigger radical empathy. Jill Bennett wrote about "heteropathic" and "idiopathic" modes of empathic identification, the former implying

¹⁰ Sissel Tolaas, "The Smell of FEAR", *Mediamatic*, 2006.

¹¹ Národní divadlo, "Fantasia", *Narodni-divadlo.cz*, 2022.

“an identification with an alien body or experience”¹². Although she is writing in the context of global empathy towards the 9/11 world trade center attack victims, this concept explains the way of relating to otherness more generally in my project. In *Sensorium – Take A Break From Being Human*, audience members were not asked to take animals as victims, or to identify with animals; instead, they were receiving sensory stimuli that interact with their bodies, and lead them into narratives that were not their own. The experience was designed as an intense friendly gesture to find “oddkins”, to find invisible connections with something other than self¹³. It is not to think like other beings, but to think *with* other beings. The process of developing the project involved scientific research through the lenses of fiction, fabricating sensory experiences inspired by facts. As Haraway claimed, “science fact and speculative fabulation need each other”, in order to find passage to go beyond what can be felt inside the undeniable limits of human perception¹⁴.

In my first semestral project *Someone Has Shared A Document With You* I created a way of thinking together with another person, and to do research on how to feel virtual space through virtual touch and other senses. Developing *Sensorium* was animated by a very similar approach to try to connect with something intangible. I think I’ve always been looking for alternative ways for social encounters that could transcend awkwardness. Accessing the dialogue through sensory propositions is the infiltrating social protocol I ended up with by making these projects. In beginning of the study, dramaturg and teacher in MA DOT Sodja Zupac Lotker suggested me to become a shaman, I thought it was impossible, but I did dive into the realm of communicating

¹² Jill Bennett. ‘The Limits of Empathy and the Global Politics of Belonging’, in Judith Greenberg, (ed.), *Trauma at Home: After 9/11* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. 134.

¹³ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*, (Duke University Press: Durham N.C., 2016), p. 4.

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*, p. 3.

with people with mediated presence; a little cursor, and to perform rituals on people to transform them into animals, turned out it is possible. What a shaman can summon is quite ephemeral. In both projects I was aiming to create an experience, instead of defining what is touch, and how it is to be like animals. I framed experiences through arbitrary and detailed interpretation, not to be accurate with what the experience is, but to focus on what is the passage to open imagination. In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey explains that when things are composed into an experience, we make use of interpretation and find sufficiently dominant properties that characterize the experience as a whole¹⁵. In the process of developing my projects I learnt that in order to create an experience that focus on certain senses that humans don't have, I have to utilize all the other senses as well to interpret from all directions. In the case of "Someone Has Shared A Document With You", the dominant element to enter touch is vision, and in the case of "Sensorium", the key to enter smell is touch, hearing, and all the other senses. Dewey describes an experience as something that is "continuously merging", with "pauses, places of rest", and these pauses "sum up what has been undergone and prevent its dissipation and idle evaporation"¹⁶. I would apply this to think about the silent moments in "Someone", when nothing is happening, but the contact between two cursors is most present. Similarly, in "Sensorium", audiences expressed how the short break time in between gave them time to digest, to relate, and to feel the ambiguity of their human/non human existence. This way of thinking reflects how I curated these experiences: through careful curation at the level of sensory perception and with the support of speech guidance, it was possible for me to create alternative dialogues together with audience members.

¹⁵ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (Capricorn Books: New York NY, 1934), p. 38.

¹⁶ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 38.

REFERENCES

- Bennett, Jill. 'The Limits of Empathy and the Global Politics of Belonging', in Judith Greenberg, (ed.), *Trauma at Home: After 9/11* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), pp. 132-138.
- Dewey, John, *Art as Experience* (Capricorn Books: New York NY, 1934).
- Haraway, Donna, *Staying with the trouble*, (Duke University Press: Durham (N.C.), 2016)
- Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley: The Original Essay by Masahiro Mori", *IEEE Spectrum*, 1970.
- Morton, Timothy, "Appearance Is War", in J. Brouwer, L. Spuybroek, S. van Tuinen (eds.), *The War of Appearances: Transparency, Opacity, Radiance* (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing, 2016), p. 166-182.
- Národní divadlo, "Fantasia", *Narodni-divadlo.cz*, 2022.
- The Dark Crystal*. 1982. [film] Directed by J. Henson and F. Oz. United States: ITC Entertainment.
- Tolaas, Sissel, "The Smell of FEAR", *Mediamatic*, 2006.
- "Touch", *Dictionary.cambridge.org*, 2022.
- Tsing, Anna L., *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2017).
- University of California, Davis. "Wandering Albatrosses Follow Their Nose." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 14 March 2008.
- Vanderbilt University, "Evidence moles can smell in stereo", *Vanderbilt University*, 2013.
- Zerihan, Rachel, "Strange Duets: On the Genealogy and Efficacy of One-to-One

Performance", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 30, no. 1, 2020, pp. 46-66.

ngea, Mara, "Do You Know A Place That Doesn't Exist Anymore?" 2022

Šiménaité, Eglé, "Human Sound" 2020