

**The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague
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Authorial Acting

MASTER'S THESIS

Experiencing Emptiness

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D e c l a r a t i o n

I declare that I have elaborated the Master's thesis entitled

"Experiencing Emptiness"

independently, under the expert supervision of my thesis, and using only the literature and sources cited therein, and that the thesis was not used within the scope of a different university programme of study or to obtain the same degree or a different degree. I consent to the publication of the thesis in accordance with legislation and with AMU internal regulations.

Prague, Aleksandra Katarzyna Ziółkowska

Abstract

In this thesis, the title of which is "Experiencing Emptiness", I have tried to develop the theme of feeling emptiness and struggling with it – based on my previous theatrical activities, as well as while studying Authorial Acting at the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy at DAMU. In order to take a closer look at this concept, I used an analysis of my own stage work, an analysis of my experiences, an analysis of my own texts that I wrote during my studies and I connected my experience with works of other authors, such as Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht or Ivan Vyskočil. This work is a self-reflection on my own work and my fears. Here I wondered where certain emotions come from in me and where the fear of experiencing emptiness comes from. I came to the conclusion that studying Authorial Acting brought me many answers and opportunities for self–development.

V této diplomové práci, jejíž název zní "Prožívání prázdnoty", jsem se pokusila rozvinout téma prázdnoty a boje s ní – na základě svých předchozích divadelních aktivit a také během studia autorského herectví na Katedře autorské tvorby a pedagogiky DAMU. K bližšímu pohledu na tento pojem jsem využila analýzu vlastní jevištní práce, analýzu svých zkušeností, analýzu vlastních textů, které jsem napsala během studia, a svou zkušenost jsem vztáhla k dílům jiných autorů, jako jsou Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht a Ivan Vyskočil. Tato práce je sebereflexí mé vlastní tvorby a mých obav. Zamýšlela jsem se zde nad tím, odkud se ve mně berou určité emoce a odkud pramení strach z prožívání prázdnoty. Dospěla jsem k závěru, že studium autorského herectví mi přineslo mnoho odpovědí a možností seberozvoje.

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List of Appellations and Abbreviations

- DJ – Dialogické jednání (Dialogical Acting)
- KATaP – Katedra autorské tvorby a pedagogiky (Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy)

Introduction

It was November 2021. Switzerland. Several days spent with Dialogical Acting at the University of Neuchâtel were behind us. We went there at the invitation of the University and Markéta Machková, a PhD doctoral student at University and also my Diploma Seminar teacher at the time.

We walk with no rush, with high mountains surrounding us. We talk about everything, we talk loudly and silently. The calm is disturbed by Markéta's sudden question: "Tell me – have you already chosen a topic for your thesis?" Silence. After a short while it is broken by Viktor's monologue, my colleague from the year, of course. He may not know the topic of his thesis yet, but he certainly has a lot to say. They move away with Markéta a few steps ahead of us. They both immerse themselves in conversation. I think to myself: "Good. Now I have at least half an hour to come up with a topic." That's when I first started thinking about it at all. There was the first glimpse that I would actually soon (at the time it was soon, I didn't yet know that I had almost two years of thesis writing ahead of me. At that moment it was less than a year) I was facing the task of writing dozens of pages on a topic that would become a companion to my further study, a companion to reflection and thought. A companion of embarrassment – when someone asks me to explain what it is I am actually writing about.

Continuing – I'm walking, looking at the mountains, then at Markéta with Viktor (now I'm wondering why I'm writing about the past in the present tense, but I guess it's because when I think about it it's not the past, it's here, now). Continuing – once again – I keep walking, looking at the mountains, then at Markéta with Viktor, who seem to be absorbed to the rest in conversation. I feel a little anxious and jealous. I think to myself that my college friend surely already has a topic, surely he's about to write the first pages, surely he's about to finish that thesis and surely in a few moments he'll defend his diploma. And I'm walking with a nothingness in my head. Without a topic, without even the slightest idea. I would prefer to get some kind of a ready-made list of topics to choose from. And so – what should I choose from if I have nothing? Well, exactly: "from what should I choose, when I have nothing?" – this seems to be the first seed of a topic that will interest me. "Emptiness." At that time, of course, I didn't know it yet, at that time it still needed Markéta's helping hand, which like a magic wand "conjures" something from nothing. Something out of nothing. Interesting, why can't I do that? I can't? I don't want to?

After what seems like a rather long time, Viktor and Markéta end their conversation. Viktor is clearly pleased, smiling from ear to ear. It's time for me to go. I don't expect a smile to appear on my face as well, I just hope to do it without pain and mockery. However, no one mocks me. Markéta sees my uncertainty. Instead of asking about the future, she asks about my past – the topics of my earlier thesis, my high school work. We try to connect the dots. I tell her how during school I often chose topics related to death, incurable diseases, loneliness. The topic of my undergraduate thesis was related to experiencing an illness in

public forums. In high school I wrote about suicide in literature, Weltschmerz based on *The Sufferings of Young Werther*. Markéta and I are also analyzing the themes of my past Authorial Presentations, such as loneliness, the search for happiness, the search for a boyfriend... From word to word, we are approaching the theme that seemed closest to me at that moment – the fear of death, loss, loneliness – and finally – what connects it all – the fear of feeling emptiness, or perhaps simply – the experience of emptiness.

It still seemed to me a not-so "concrete" topic (as it also seems so to me to this day), but at least I had something to refer to, something to "bounce off of", something to examine and look at more closely. There was no pain or mocking. And there was even a small smile on my face. Now all I have to do is start writing...

In order to take a closer look at my subject, I will analyze of my own stage work, my experiences, my own texts that I wrote during my studies and finally, I will relate my practice-based research with works of other authors, such as Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht and Ivan Vyskočil.

1 *What I should actually write here?* First attempt to confront the emptiness

"All you have to do is start writing..." – as I wrote in the introduction. This sentence seemed easy for me to implement at first, but every time I started thinking about what I should actually write here, I just put everything off. When I shared my concern with my seminar teacher, now my supervisor, she advised me to just start writing a kind of a diary with my topic in the back of my mind. This seemed to me to be freeing from the academic form of writing, which had always been something scary and heavy for me. So I started writing, initially quite committed and motivated to keep going. I will present my notes here.

20.09.2022

"I am going by train. The sun appears every now and then in the window. I'm fine with being neither here nor there. I'm in between. Like the sun. Like the sun between the worlds of galaxies. In between, it's like I am not here for a moment. I'm hiding behind a tree. I don't exist, I don't have to make decisions, live in adulthood. In the specificity of the task. I am not here, but I am here even more. I am looking through the window. I dream about very, very long walk and to be with this solitude alone. Maybe not totally alone. I would be surrounded by trees, sun, lakes. Me and the nature. To just walk. To walked into. And to go and just be-between".

21.09.2022

"I am walking alone in a country I haven't been for a while. In a country, where I don't understand the language, but I use it every day. In a country, where I don't know what will happen to me. I feel that I panic. I must meet with someone, fill this time to do something. I need to have a plan, to realize the plan. I can't. I go for a walk. I am lost. I don't know where I am. Why do I go? I don't even have a dog. If only I had a dog, like other people. I would have a reason to go for a walk. But not now. I don't feel good. I regret that I don't have any book, notebook, anything. It would look prettier if I wasn't typing everything on my phone. I don't know what I am looking for, but at least – I started writing. Thinking. My plan is to buy a notebook. And write".

23.09.2022

"And again – the park, the bench. No one around. Only the gentle hum of cars can be heard. A child laughs for a moment. I took with myself a notebook this time. But a pen doesn't work.

What to do... Co dělat? I am using this question all the time in Czech.

I have been thinking, before I came to this bench, about my walking. That it has some meaning. I feel better when I walk slowly. I don't think then where I am going. I am moving slowly with my legs. I put my hands in my pockets and wrap my jacket around me. I look at the ground. Sometimes ahead. And sometimes I just don't look anywhere. Into some emptiness. It's like I'm not looking anywhere and I'm not going anywhere. And yet I go, and yet I watch. What else was I thinking about going or not going? About loneliness - because I'm not lonely. There are people around me, I even have a boyfriend. Yet something keeps bothering me, some fear. Fear of what? Emptiness? What is it really? Fear of that nothing is waiting for me. That there will be no filling of everyday life – in work, in some action, in something what can fill my life and give me a feeling of fulfillment, completion. Something useful, developing, giving energy, strength, inspiration, human dignity. Something that's important. What constitutes my being. Existence. Humanity. [wow, what a big words!]. But what is it? Is it a work? But what kind of? If work give all of these? Will it make me more human than I am now? Will I not feel the emptiness anymore? But what if the dream come true but I will miss this emptiness? Such as if front of people I miss loneliness? I have to come here more often. Here, or somewhere else. At least I feel these circulating thoughts. Those thoughts I can describe although it is hard when I feel with every moment that they are disappearing"

02.01.2023

"I was going to write so hard. I wrote a few pages in September. It's January now. Next year. I was supposed to come to the bench every day and write. But it got cold. I am wondering what had happened from the end of September until now. What filled this time, which I was supposed to spend on writing. I feel that not so much. Because it is not about not having time, this 24 hours, which people would like to extend so much. Because they don't have time. I have. I had. And still...I am so afraid of this unfulfilled time, and yet I do not fill it. I mean I do for sure, there is always something that happens, exchanges. But what about me? And do I need to know about it? "What's going on?" I hate this question. I always say "I'm fine" and quickly add: "And you?", because usually the other person is more effusive than I am. And I know his question won't bother him to answer with more than one word. And in fact, it's not about being flustered, but about the fact that the with other person really "something is going on". There is something in this sentence. And I start to remember, let's say the last days, or the period when we haven't seen each other and I see - emptiness, nothing, a question without an answer. I'm all mixed up. This master's thesis scares me. I don't know what to write there. How to complete these pages. How to start? Maybe I'll start with the books. I have to lean on something. Because not on me."

I started writing down my thoughts shortly after returning from Poland to Czechia. After

an intense almost three-month period in Warsaw, where I had work during the week and on weekends, I returned to Prague and found a lot of free time, a sense of unfilled space and organizing my time anew. I had already finished my studies at KATaP, so I had no further routine, that is, daily responsibilities. I had to plan everything from scratch.

I remember feeling dismay and a sense of emptiness and loneliness. So I started taking long walks and writing down my thoughts. This helped me, but it did not change my situation. The initial motivation in writing turned into irritation and doubt. "Will these written down thoughts of mine be of any use to me in writing my thesis?", "How can I use them when their language is completely informal?", "What should I do with these notes next?". – these and other questions were constantly coming to my mind. Until finally I lost my motivation, the daily emptiness began to slowly fill in with various activities, and for my master's thesis in a sense I just let things go hang, thinking that I actually had a very long time to write it. However, time began to pass very quickly. From summer it became autumn, from autumn it became winter, and from winter, of course, it became spring, where the work deadline began to knock nervously at the door. That's when the prospect of writing a thesis revealed its true face and grabbed me tightly by the throat. Fortunately, I was helped by the aforementioned Markéta, who, from her earlier "role" as a seminar teacher, was "promoted" to supervisor of my thesis. Of course, this sentence may seem humorous and tongue-in-cheek, but the gravity of the situation was as serious as possible. The new thesis supervisor motivated me in her emails. I once again moved into the battle of writing my thesis. And in fact – I finally started thinking about it intensively.

2 My understanding and experiencing of emptiness

In this chapter I would like to focus on creating my own definition of the concept of "emptiness" and derivatives of the word. As I wrote in my notes from my long walks in Prague, the word "emptiness" is an inherent part of loneliness. What then is loneliness as well? Surely one would have to distinguish here between the types of these terms and also in what context they are used. The first is the context of everyday life, my feelings during regular responsibilities, and the second is the context of theater work – my feelings on stage, during workshops, etudes and acting creations. Moving away from the above-mentioned contexts, the invariable factor is my personal feelings, which, regardless of their location whether in the everyday world or in the theatrical world, have a common source – my emotions. From what these feelings and emotions arise I also hope to discover or at least get closer to their origin.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, the title of my thesis got formed from the themes of my previous thesis and theatrical performances, such as death, illness, loneliness, inability to find a partner. All these concepts are accompanied by one word: emptiness. Emptiness, meaning the absence of something. The inability to grasp something or someone, to hide behind something or someone, to lean on something or someone, to connect with something or someone.

This is why I associate death with a sense of emptiness. In my perceptions, dying is a solitary process in which only we ourselves participate, of course, there may be people around us, but the experience itself is a singular, individual one. In the same way, I could talk about our existence in general, which is a lonely road, in the sense of our experiencing and emotions, we are lucky when someone accompanies us on this road, but we can only feel things ourselves.

Emptiness, or experiencing emptiness, is also not owning something or someone – of course, a person is unlikely to be owned, but you can own their attention and sense of being seen. Loneliness, is the lack of a companion, lack of conversation, lack of attention, lack of being seen, lack of contact with another person or oneself. I could equate feeling lonely with experiencing emptiness. In both cases we are dealing with this lack, a sense of nothingness, of unfulfillment.

Are there emotions associated with experiencing emptiness? If we experience emptiness, do we also experience a lack of emotion? Often this emptiness scares me, it makes me develop a sense of anxiety and doubt. However, I wonder if this is what happens when I think about the emptiness and the feeling I may have, but when I actually experience it – I don't experience any emotions. However, is it really possible to experience no emotions at all? I associate this with some kind of an end, a person's vegetation, an illness, something that is hard to come out of and hard to bounce back from. I also wonder at what moments

I feel this emptiness. Probably at times when I don't have much going on in my life, that is, I don't have a regular activity, like work, projects or school. I feel a sense of emptiness often after bigger emotions, like a performance premiere or a trip. At first there is a burst of excitement after important experiences, but then I feel something missing, especially when I know that I don't have a performance or trip waiting for me for a long time and my head is not burdened with daily responsibilities. Just as I returned after a two-month intensive and eventful time in Poland to Prague, where I initially didn't know what to do when I faced the reality of no job and no further studies.

When I recall these experiences and this feeling of emptiness, which is so difficult to describe and so ephemeral and not easy to grasp, I remember that it is mostly accompanied by feelings of anxiety, sometimes even panic. What follows is a strong impact with reality. It's as if all the time I'm in some sense of not being in reality and then a sudden landing in reality – sharp, cold, so "normal". Experiencing the adulthood – also then I am accompanied by similar feelings, as well as fear of old age, death. Fear that after life, absolutely nothing awaits us. What do I mean when I write that experiencing adulthood is associated with similar feelings, such as anxiety, emptiness, panic? And why do I link it to the fear of old age and death? Maybe because I associate adulthood with a kind of isolation. We are no longer children connected by an umbilical cord to our mother. We are responsible for our lives ourselves, and no one will live that life for us. I realize that these sentences may sound very trite, but I am trying to catch the meaning of the unspoken thoughts. All of this is also related to the previously mentioned feeling of overwhelming reality, which, when put together with unreality, can pour a bucket of icy water over us. Adulthood, aging, death – these are natural, real processes that can often be described in poetic, cultural terms, as society tries to assimilate these processes. Society tries to tame the death of loved ones through rituals and ceremonies. We dress the dead in pretty clothes, put on makeup, create an environment of beautiful music, and give it a spiritual meaning, because we are afraid of this ugliness, the decomposition of the body, which reminds us that human life is coming to an end, and after death there may be nothing waiting for us. Everyone believes differently, of course, and many people believe in life after death, while I think most people are afraid of this emptiness. It certainly scares me, especially since I don't have my faith formed in me.

I noticed that the main link to the sense of emptiness in this chapter is death. Fear of death, fear of the end. I once heard from my psychotherapist that every loss we suffer in our lives, every crisis is linked to the fear of death, a certain end. Mourning processes do not only apply to the death of a loved one, but also to other crises and losses, such as the loss of a job, the breakup of a relationship, etc.

I recently had a dream in which I found myself in an empty white room with no doors or windows. Just white walls all around. I had the feeling in this dream that I had died and now there was only empty white space waiting for me. I was terrified. However, after a while I realized that this room did not have to be completely empty. I began to fill it with sound,

singing, the sound of my steps, movement. And this feeling that I was able to "fill" this emptiness with something – soothed me and gave me strength and a sense of freedom, despite the fact that I was locked in it.

I wonder how this dream reflects my sense of fear of emptiness – here depicted in a literal way – whiteness, no other people, no objects, a window to the world, a door through which I can exit, and how in this dream, despite the feeling of fear, I pretend to get out of this emptiness. In this part of my diploma thesis, I tried to create a certain definition of emptiness, and although I may not have been able to find a specific "book" definition, or rather it was an attempt to present such a specific topic, I think that the dream I had other night – can illustrate the feeling of emptiness that I have tried to describe here. It is associated with the fear that there is no support and no way out, but there will always be a solution, and most often it lies within ourselves. We ourselves are the "door" that we can open – with our voice, movement, imagination. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter about the types of emptiness – those in everyday life as well as in theatrical life. However, I do not think that this separation of categories really exists, because emotions related to emptiness come from ourselves, our experiences, feelings, socialization, education, minds, bodies.

In my opinion, this dream is also an allegory similar to what we do at Dialogical Acting – we enter an empty space that we have to fill only with ourselves – dialogue with ourselves through sound, movement and our imagination. Of course, this is not an empty room without a door, the walls are not always pure white, and other people accompany us in this process – and although no one will experience Dialogical Acting for us, the viewers are our companions on this short journey and observers of what happens to us and with us.

In the next chapter I will describe more what Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner is and I will take a closer look at my experiences with this practice-based research discipline.

3 Dialogical Acting and the fear of empty space

Dialogical Acting with Inner Partner (in Czech: dialogické jednání s vnitřním partnerem - "DJ") is a psychosomatic discipline created and founded by Professor Ivan Vyskočil. I might say it is a fundamental subject in our department – Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy. "It is a practical experimentation with elementary principles of a play, drama creation and non-object acting"¹ – as describes Martina Musilová in her article. Further on, Musilová cites a fragment from Ivan Vyskočil's publication that I consider relevant:

*[...] to learn how to do what happens to us naturally when we are alone in front of other people; to be able to do that. The other people, their presence and involvement, are exceedingly important. Their attention, the fact that they are observing, seeing and listening, experiencing what you are doing, what is happening to you in the space with you, objectivizes you. [...] It is a collective experience, a collective living through.*²

I remember my first steps with Dialogical Acting. It was 2020, a total lockdown (due to covid-19), all classes in our Academy were held online, including DJ. Before remote learning, we managed to meet in person for classes led by Václav Trojan. What I remember is the assumption that we go out into an empty space one by one, experiment with our voice and body, and the rest of the students and the teacher (called "assistant") watch what happens. I found it interesting to observe newly met people who themselves also had no previous experience with DJ and let themselves be carried by their impulses, imagination and creativity. Maybe because no one had actually any contact with this discipline before, it seemed fascinating and terrifying at the same time. I wanted to learn more and discover who my *Inner Partner* was, which has been mentioned many times during the workshops. Here I would like to stop and mention concepts such as *Inner Partner* and *Inner Spectator*. Musilová writes: "In Vyskočil's conception devised as a trinity of author–actor–spectator, the inner partner functions as the inner spectator ("inner self," or "inner being"). As the inner spectator reacts, optimally in full expression, she/he becomes an actor".³ As I read it, the traditional division between actor, spectator and author is disappearing, as all three roles interpenetrate and complement each other. The creator appears in the actor, the actor in the creator, and the inner spectator takes on the role of the actor when that role of the actor becomes more expressive. The inner spectator is the inner voice, and thus often becomes the actor actively commenting as well as observing. The concept of Inner Spectator was also

¹ Musilová, M. (2018). *Stanislavski in Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner – In the Neighbourhood with Brecht. Stanislavski Studies*, 6(1), p.79

² Vyskočil, A *Discussion with Ivan Vyskočil about (Inter)acting with the Inner Partner*, 40 in: Musilová, M. (2018). *Stanislavski in Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner – In the Neighbourhood with Brecht. Stanislavski Studies*, 6(1), p.79-83

³ Musilová, M. (2018). *Stanislavski in Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner – In the Neighbourhood with Brecht. Stanislavski Studies*, 6(1), p.80

described by Bertolt Brecht in his essay *On Chinese Acting*. Here he describes the concept: "Another expedient is this: *the actor looks at himself*. Presenting, lets us say, a cloud (...) from time to time he looks at the spectator (...) But he also looks at his own arms and legs, guiding them, examining them, in the end, perhaps praising them."⁴ Brecht's Inner Spectator is crucial to the concept of Dialogical Acting with Inner Partner and Vyskočil's perspective and Inner Partner. These two concepts complement each other to create a picture of what happens in an empty space.

In this chapter I would like to take a closer look at Dialogical Acting in the context of experiencing emptiness. I have been "practicing" this discipline for almost three years, but I still feel that I have not explored it as much as I could (or as much as I would like to). Perhaps it's because it's been quite a long time since the last workshop, and I think DJ should be done regularly. However, when I think back to those early days I mentioned earlier, I remember that I lacked a proper stage, lights, props. I had questions in my head like what should I do here and how should I entertain the audience.

Of course, I'm not going to lie – I miss it all the time and have had similar questions in my head all the time. However, I think that now I am more aware of "what I am doing there" and what it can give me. I ask myself now – why am I afraid of this empty space, why am I missing all these props and lights, and am I able to get in touch with my Inner Partner instead of focusing on the reaction of the audience or observers? Not filling the space, not filling the time (during Dialogical Acting we usually have from two to seven minutes) or "not filling" someone's expectations (expectations of pedagogues, observers or my own). After all, on the stage in theater, where we have plenty of lights or props, we also have many opportunities to "not fulfill" – we can fail to fill a dramatic pause, fail to meet the expectations of others and our own. However, during classical dramatic scenes, we mostly have the opportunity to hide behind something – behind a cup held in our hand, behind a partner, behind a beautiful learned monologue, behind music that creates a given atmosphere. With Dialogical Acting we are almost naked, stripped of what we can "hide" behind. We have "only" ourselves, our voice, our personality, our mood, our impulses, our thoughts. That is how Ivan Vyskočil writes about it:

*The trick we have mentioned, however, is in the fact that every one of the 'inner partners' has, and express their own bodiliness in that single body, which we have in front of our eyes. Their own body's tonus and gestus, or body character. The more original and distinct this is, the more contrasting, the better it is for playing.*⁵

Often, although perhaps it is not a popular opinion, I think of Dialogical Acting as good acting training. This workshop gives me the opportunity to learn about myself, my abilities and my limitations. It gives me the opportunity to listen to myself, just as one might listen to one's

⁴ Brecht, B., & Hewitt, B. (1961). *On Chinese Acting* (E. Bentley, Trans.). *The Tulane Drama Review*, 6(1), p.131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1125011>

⁵ Vyskočil, I. (1992) *On the Study of Acting* p.2

scene partner. It gives a sense of being on the ready all the time to receive new impulses, new thoughts and expressions. Just because we have learned a given text in classical theater, after all, doesn't mean that we already know everything and aren't ready for new ones. There, however, in a sense we have to "cheat" the reality of the stage and listen to another actor as if we were listening to him for the first time.

I also appreciate learning DJ for the fact that it gives you the opportunity to stop and look at everything from a distance. Distance is a very important concept in the context of Dialogical Acting. This connects to Brecht's term of the alienation effect, which I will write about in the next chapters. I remember that, especially in the beginning, being afraid of this emptiness, I tried to fill it with dynamic movement, constant changes, a strong voice, or a joke that would make the observers laugh. I went from one impulse to another, so that not a moment was left empty, a narrow gap through which boredom could enter. Boredom is also a key word in the context of emptiness. I think this is due to a number of factors – our times, in which people live in constant motion and we do not give ourselves permission to be bored, because it means, in this social view, that since we are bored, we are standing still, we are not developing, we are not working hard, and yet this shows the strength of our characters. So this is due to social expectations, parental expectations. Not only the expectations, but also the fear that in those moments of "boredom", stopping I will not be interesting enough, good enough, just enough. So my existence on stage alone is not enough, it must be immediately filled with something that will catch the attention of the audience, of other people. I have to prove that, in a way, I deserve to be on that stage at all. Dialogical Acting often gives us a certain inverse of all this. It gives us permission to stop, to be "uninteresting," but rather shows that we can be interesting without all that, without all those lights, props, accessories, dressing up. All we have to do is appear in that empty space, breathe into it, listen to our inner voice and impulses that often at first seem uninteresting to explore. The DJ shows that there are infinite wonderful possibilities within ourselves and, like in my dream, shows that we can become a freedom to ourselves. During the dialogue with the Inner Partner, it is often these moments of stopping, of being lost, of not knowing "what's next" that are crucial. When we are fighting with ourselves – between this Inner Partner who tells us that something is boring and insufficient and the "other" who asks us to stop fighting and just be and look at these mechanisms. And that's what I appreciate most about this "method" - the fact that everything that happens – is "ok" and we can use (or not use) everything beautifully (or not beautifully) and just be.

I wanted to write in this chapter what Dialogical Acting is - not because of an academic definition, but what Dialogical Acting is from my point of view and in the context of experiencing emptiness. I think I managed to "discover" here many important aspects, such as boredom, social context, fear of being not enough. I wrote earlier that I consider Dialogical Acting as a good "method" of acting, but I think that above all Dialogical Acting is a kind of good "indicator" of how I can think about my life.

4 On the last Dialogical Acting

The last time I was at Dialogical Acting and when I was training DJ with my colleague Viktor for our final Authorial Presentation – and it was after long time of doing it – I noticed that is hard to go back after that time to an empty space, to look on this space, just not to look on yourself. No object that you can hide behind, focus on, to look at, to touch, to be inspired by. So I took a chair. I have to admit that it gave me some memories. Some childhood memories. It's hard to have this memories without anything, but if "something" always must means "something"? Something material. It helps. But what helps as well is conversation. Just like talking to another person and sometimes this conversation generates many topics to tell about. You can't wait until the interlocutor finishes his sentence, because you already have a few new thoughts ready to take off, to manifest. So the conversation helps as well. Conversation with yourself. Contact with yourself. Starting the new topic. But from where to take this topic? From standing, from movement, from silence, from others who did DJ before you, from white noise, from sound which will come. Something will come as soon as we allow it, we open ourselves to it. I am often afraid that it will not come. That I will stand in this empty space like a stone. That I will not write anything to my master's thesis. That nothing will happen. That no thought will come, that I will not be able to look at that thought or that action. If finally this thought will come. And if I will be able to look at it – that I will come to no conclusions. And if I come to these conclusions, I won't be able to put them into words properly. And if I manage to do that, it won't be interesting, funny, touching, something. Because I would like to get a specific effect quickly. And even if it happens, I won't be able to enjoy it "properly".

Of course, there comes a moment of contentment, satisfaction, a smile, a sense of "success", as during the last meeting with Dialogical Acting. I was doing so well, I mean so light, so funny, that I laughed myself and others laughed. And I felt proud. And I felt seen. I felt cool, that I can continue and continue even longer, but unfortunately the rules of the game are so inexorable that someone has to say "thank you" at some point. But even then it doesn't end yet, because feedback comes, good words, looks. And in me there is a constant pride that it's stupid to smile, I need to temper that smile a bit. And then it kind of evaporate. And there is nothing again. And I don't know what it could be instead. And I wonder - if I'm so good, around me only good words, lots of laughter - then why can't I find my place on earth? Why won't anyone hire me? Hire and "water". Every day someone would "water me". "Water me" with attention, laugh, good words. Well, yes - the lack of attention from others - it's definitely related to my childhood.

5 My struggle with capturing emptiness

In this thread, I raise my struggle with capturing emptiness, loneliness, the topics accompanying my master's thesis. Writing this thesis, that is, the process of recognizing and taking a closer look at the topic I want to raise, encounters many questions that may remain unanswered, but may also generate a certain conclusion at the end of submitting the thesis.

The first question that accompanies me, and which my supervisor reminded me of, is how I can transpose my chaotic thoughts about feeling or experiencing emptiness into an academic research work. Am I able to organize my thoughts, although this is not about order and logic, but about clearly formulating and noticing certain minor changes, images, thoughts, observations? And can I use all this, with awareness, to construct a text that will be understandable for the readers? While talking to my supervisor, the thought, perhaps even fear, occurred to me that my actions are intuitive, but they do not have significant self-awareness and theory or knowledge of how to use this intuition or how to present it in a scientific way. When I write about intuitive actions, I mean primarily my intuition regarding actions on stage or intuition that allows me to reflect. Reflections that, in my opinion, do not have full awareness and order. I also noticed now as I was writing these sentences that I often mentioned this awareness and self-awareness. Is it that I don't actually have it or I do, but not enough (not enough for what?) or is it just a natural fear of less experienced students? And am I actually a less experienced student and what does that mean? I'm certainly less experienced in writing theses than many students who are now struggling with writing for example a PhD thesis, but I'm probably not a novice. After all, I finished my first sociological studies years ago, and then I constantly improved my education. On the other hand, it doesn't mean that I am educated, but I have some experience in studying. This failure to stick to the main thread may point to the chaotic nature of my thoughts. It can also show the complexity of the problem that constantly generates new thoughts, and which thoughts create another thoughts. My fear is in not being able to focus on one topic and explore it more deeply, because with that main topic there will always be a new thought. This way it can be difficult, but not impossible, to look at the problem in detail.

Coming back to the side question: will my possibly incomplete awareness affect the quality of this work and why would it be insufficient? This is certainly a thread that will accompany me when writing my master's thesis and which I don't have to fight with, but I can use it when discussing the topic of loneliness and the feeling of emptiness. I can see how much my fear of these shortcomings is closely related to the subject of my work: "experiencing an emptiness". What I actually may consider as an obstacle may be helpful in examining the problem. Because with the experience of emptiness, in my definition, comes the fear of not being enough. Emptiness is a fragile subject, not very 'specific', which can be studied and looked at from different angles. So this topic itself is related to fear, being

insufficient, chaotic and with a constant sense of unfathomableness and difficulty in finding conclusions. Perhaps it is my approach, or rather an inner feeling, or the intuition I mentioned at the beginning, that is closely related to the topic of my work, an inaccurate topic, asking many questions, often without answers, making me feel "unprepared". So something that is an enemy to me can be a helping hand. Something that is an enemy to me can be crucial to getting to know myself and my self-awareness.

6 From Baba Yaga to the Scarecrow: My theatrical experience

In previous chapters, I wrote about my experiences with Dialogical Acting in the context of emptiness, fear of boredom and being underestimated by observers, pedagogues or myself. I would also like to focus in this section on my experiences with the stage and theater practice both at the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU), as well as my previous stage work, as I believe that the context of my relationship with theater can play a big role in the context of the topic of this thesis.

I am currently in Warsaw, where I am starting my ninth season of playing outdoor performances for the youngest audience. We play many fairy tale titles, I play all sorts of characters - from Baba Yaga, a little bird, a goldfish, Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother to a princess. All the characters are very different. During one performance, I sometimes change my clothes two or three times to play a new, next role. Each character has a different characteristic and uniqueness, I often change the timbre of my voice, the way I move. To a large extent, the basis of our stories is contact with the audience and interaction with children. This is a grateful job, and its effects are immediately visible - in the form of children and adults laughing, applauding or coming up after the performance and taking a souvenir photo with the actors. The specificity of this work also lies in a slightly different way of thinking about the character - you build it in such a way as to make it as colorful and characteristic as possible. There is less thinking about your character in a psychological and emotional context, although of course this is also important. So for nine years I have been used to a certain mode of work. We also sometimes play performances two or three times a day in different places in Warsaw, so you have to be in rush mode, and after the third performance you have to be careful not to let routine creep in. So there is rarely any space to stop. Some performances are better, some are a little worse, but then you think in terms of tasks - what can be changed to make it better.

This world is quite different from what we do during Dialogical Acting, but it also brings some similarities. As I mentioned before, there is no, or very little, such a stopping moment. Most of the dialogues between actors is a quick exchange of sentences, and the pace should be kept so that the little viewer does not get bored. Of course, you should also not overdo it, but mostly a faster rhythm is preferable. I have written in earlier chapters precisely about boredom and my fear of boredom, which could be defined by many aspects, such as an unfilled pause, a sense of not knowing or being lost, a fear that the viewer will leave the performance or start yawning. In our performances for the youngest, we do everything to make the child actively listen and react. It's better for the children to laugh or even be a little afraid of the bad wolf than to leave the show and quickly forget about it. The emotions evoked

in a child are important, and emptiness or boredom are the opposite of that. The play is different for a young viewer than for an adult. Although these days I have the impression that this boundary is blurring. Adults are also more and more used to a lot of impulse and stimuli, and when they don't get it - they can quickly lose interest in something. I would also like to emphasize here that in our performances there are also many moments where we care that they resonate, and the child (and his parents, too) takes from it a certain thought, a reflection, rather than just adult actors running quickly and bizarrely around the stage. But still - this is a slightly different kind of theater. Different mainly from what we do at Dialogical Acting.

First of all, in our performances viewer is the most important and his enjoyment of what he is watching. I mentioned earlier that with fairy tales for the youngest, you can quickly see the effects of this - children never cheat in these moments and if they don't like something - you can see it on their faces right away. During DJ we focus mostly on ourselves - our impulses, our dialogue with the Inner Partner, getting in touch with ourselves and following what our body and our voice will bring us. The spectator plays the role of an observer, who is often even "forbidden" to react loudly to what he or she sees on stage, as this can disturb a person who is trying to communicate with himself or herself in an empty space. The spectator has a role as an observer, and is sometimes said to have the task of "wishful attention" - his role is to support the person on stage by watching closely and wishing the other person the best. How Martina Musilová writes in her essay: "The audience also creates an energetic field and an atmosphere, which relates through the inner partner to the student's expressivity and intensity of her/his acting"⁶. The role of the audience is very important here. The actor entering the stage should also be able to find himself in this relationship with the audience. Ivan Vyskočil describes the concept of "public solitude", which is relevant to the actor-spectator relationship in the context of Dialogical Acting:

Basically, it means that whoever is in the space, in the centre of everyone else's attention, tries to and learn to behave, interact and experience as if the others weren't there and weren't watching him, as if he were alone, that is, alone with himself. So first you need to establish public solitude, create it, and then gradually make yourself at home in it.⁷

After a few minutes of Dialogical Acting, we usually discuss together what we saw in the space. We exchange what we saw, comment on which moment caught our attention, what could be developed longer or which moment was crucial for us. Thanks to this shared observation, the person on stage can see what he or she may not have noticed before due to not having the distance or being too fast.

Secondly, the obvious difference is that with Dialogical Acting we work only with ourselves and our imagination and vulnerability. There are no props, no costumes and no stage partners other than our Inner Partner. As I wrote earlier, roles in plays for the youngest

⁶ Musilová, M. (2018). *Stanislavski in Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner – In the Neighbourhood with Brecht. Stanislavski Studies*, 6(1), p.82

⁷ Vyskočil, I., *A Discussion with Ivan Vyskočil about (Inter)acting with the Inner Partner*, p.41-42

are usually quite expressive, often even grotesque and overplayed. With Dialogical Acting, we also can develop different characters that confront and dialogue with each other and play with them, but we have to be aware of this and consciously observe these behaviors. The third difference between DJ and children's performances is the pace I mentioned earlier. Often Dialogical Acting teachers have mentioned my fast pace - whether in movement, voice or going from one impulse or theme to another. They also spoke of my strong facial expressions, which I sometimes did not control. Perhaps these are some influences of children's theater, in which I am very comfortable. Perhaps it is simply my nature, or perhaps it is hiding from the moment of stopping, which can expose the real me. Perhaps behind the layer of humor and foolishness hides a part of me that is ashamed, a part of me that is afraid - of failure, of not being appreciated, of not being accepted, of not being noticed.

In addition to performances for the youngest, I have taken and still take part in performances for adult audiences. I'm not going to describe all my experiences and roles here, but I would like to point out some things that seem to me to be good examples that I could develop in the context of experiencing emptiness.

A key role that brought me many intense experiences and memories is the title role of "Mother" by Polish author Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz ("Witkacy"). It was the role of a woman older than me, who had a difficult relationship with her only son Leon, alcohol and health problems. The description of the character seems psychologically heavy, and so it is, but Witkacy's theater is a theater of the grotesque and absurd. The characters in his dramas are degenerate and "twisted". The title *Mother* was and still is many years older than me. I had to face the role of an older woman being a young twenty-something at the time. Due to the form of theater, which is not realistic theater, the role played by me was led in a somewhat exaggerated way and transformed at times into a grotesque character. I think I have a certain ability with characteristic roles. What helps me with this is my highly expressionistic face, which in Dialogical Acting is not so much a barrier, but something to look at.

However, the director, in order to "take off" a bit from this expressiveness, came up with the idea that we should try to make the character played on stage sometimes "come out" of herself and speak in a more "human" voice of the actress, speaking more "from myself", as me. It was a difficult and uncomfortable experiment for me. It seemed to me that it was difficult to suddenly "strip" on stage of everything the character had managed to become. I thought that standing on stage - even more in a costume, among the scenography, spotlights and audience - is already a kind of a certain stage creation and it's difficult to completely cut yourself off and simply show yourself. Sometimes I also think about this in the context of Dialogical Acting. Because there - we are supposed to focus on ourselves and listen to our natural impulses, but I wonder if this is fully possible in the presence of other people, the stranger audience. Of course, further questions come up - whether offstage we are also able to show our true selves, and what it really means - this truthfulness of ourselves. The thought comes to me that it's about not pretending and not lying, but even

when actor is performing a role, after all, he is aiming for authenticity in what he is doing, despite the fact that, after all, what is happening on stage is not real. It is also certainly difficult to show yourself to others without fully knowing who you are. I think Dialogical Acting helps in the search for self-authenticity, despite the presence of the audience - or perhaps it is these witnesses who help in this process, as their presence can support and activate our motivation. I believe that the presence of the audience whether during DJ or classical theater is a huge motivation that allows you to explore your inner self. Motivation through the presence of other people is also a key concept here. Of course, without an audience there is no theater, but more than once I wonder if I could do Dialogical Acting without witnesses - alone at home or on an empty stage. It is definitely possible, however, every time I tell myself that I will try - I just feel some kind of block. I feel a similar block even when I am supposed to rehearse for my monodrama or Authorial Presentation. I then need a second eye, such as in the form of a camera. I then record my stage actions to be able to watch them. This is because it's hard to be in the middle of the action and at the same time have a distance from what you are doing and have a critical eye. I think there is also something more in it. Although it's hard for me to name it now, but it relates to the previously mentioned - motivation. It's as if the mere fact that someone is watching me (even if it's just the eye of the camera and a video that only I will watch - or maybe I won't even watch it, I just know it's recorded) motivates me to act and gives me a push. Now I also think about all this in an existential context.

This morning going to the theater I was standing at the bus stop waiting for the bus. It was an early Sunday morning. For a while no car was driving on the street, there was no other human being around. All I could hear was an overwhelming silence. I stood for a moment terrified, imagining what would happen if the world somehow disappeared, if it turned out that I was the only living person left on earth. I remember being terrified by this vision, and I thought to myself that I would probably hide in the house at that moment, escaping this enormous emptiness. I often like to sit alone at home, but knowing that there is life out there. That the world is filled with people, sounds, movement. Without people, the world for me would be empty, scary and quiet. It is this emptiness that I am very afraid of. An emptiness that has no life in it, no motivation in it. An emptiness that is quiet. An emptiness that has this huge unfilled space within it. When I try to connect the dots now, I think that perhaps this is why I am afraid of this empty stage space. This empty space can symbolize this empty street, where there is no life, no sense of motivation, no sense of belonging. Belonging to what? To other people, to contact with something.

Fuck knows what it is. I don't have it anymore. I lost it. I lost contact with it. And that contact-that's what's most important, damn it. You either have contact or you just slept through your goddamn life. I don't love anybody, I never loved anybody.(...) And only now that I've met Laura, for the first time in my life I've realized that contact is the only reality we have. And all the rest is illusions and bullshit. And all we have to do on this earth is find contact again. And that means we have to love, love and motherfucking

love.⁸

As Ivan Vyrpaev wrote - to contact with the most important one - the other person, to contact with love. And perhaps I am frightened by this empty space without people, and I am afraid that I will not fill it with my love. And those people, those spectators - they won't see what is inside me. They won't see that love, they won't appreciate me without that surrounding of light, of costumes - that without all this I may be not enough for others. Not enough for contact, not enough for love.

I remember one of the breakthrough moments for me during Dialogical Acting, when I got this banal feeling - the feeling of a given moment. That I really am in that given moment. It seems as if it was one of those perhaps rare moments in life when a person really realizes that he is here, that he is alive, that he is this and not another being. This and not another person. This and not another body. I then began to touch my hands, my skin as if I noticed myself for the first time in my life, felt my warmth, noticed myself, my body, my life in this body and my uniqueness. And not just in general - also in this place and in this particular moment.

I would also like to describe in this section my experience of my studies in Authorial Acting at DAMU. Many people wonder what Authorial Acting actually is, and although many definitions have been made, and many theses could be written about the study itself, I will try to briefly describe my own perspective. These are not classical theater studies. When some friends ask me how I could describe my studies, I quickly answer them: "They are acting studies, focused on individual work, creating and writing our own theatrical projects and monodramas, we work with the voice, with the body. We focus more on getting to know ourselves and our abilities than on building an acting creation. We mostly work with texts that we have written ourselves". And in fact, in response to my friends' question, I am giving some general knowledge of what these studies are - from my perspective, of course, because for every student it's something different, and you could write about many definitions from it.

The key subject is Dialogical Acting, which I have written about before. Another important workshop is Authorial Acting itself. This program is oriented towards individual as well as group work. In our first year of study, we created individual etudes in which we created short songs about ourselves - I remember it was supposed to be a song about our greatness, and we also did scenes in which we placed ourselves in various spaces and situations, sometimes abstract (I invented myself in a room built of chocolate, and at some point the sweets begin to melt, together with me). When I think back to those moments and working on those short scenes, I think they were not easy beginnings. We started working on them while they were still online, and later continued in live meetings. Sitting at home often stimulated my creativity even more, due to the fact that I had a lot of time. I sent proposals for my ideas in the form of short videos. I loved to makeup myself, dress up and create a certain character. What was my disappointment when the recordings did not meet with approval and I learned

⁸Vyrpaev I., *Drunks*, p. 31,32, available online: https://vyrypaev.com/uploads/drunks_eng.pdf

that all this is not about makeup and acting creation, but about showing myself. At the time, I didn't know how I was supposed to present myself and whether it would be interesting to anyone. I also believed that these videos also portrayed me in a sense, only in a slightly different, unusual way. I remember that I also had difficulty singing a song that would be about how great I was, so I started on singing about my fingers, which at the time seemed less embarrassing, but in retrospect I have my doubts about it. The chocolate space was also not the easiest. I discovered (or perhaps discovered what had already been discovered anyway) that I have problems with imagination and imagining something that isn't there. Perhaps it wasn't so much that it was difficult for me to imagine a thing, but to believe that it was actually there. Especially since my scene was abstract and it was hard to relate to reality. I was also overwhelmed by the multitude of elements I had to imagine. I was afraid of failure and being ridiculed - that someone might see my failings. I missed working with objects, which are often inspiring to me and give me more ideas for staging solutions. I've written about my problems with imagination in the context of things that aren't physically there and how I get overwhelmed by the multitude of elements I have to imagine, but the multitude of actual objects inspires me. I'm not just writing about ready-made props here, but also about working with object and form. An ordinary object that I can transform in my imagination and use into something else is something theatrically inspiring for me and pushes me to come up with further ideas. Of course, everyone has their own theatrical methods that are more effective for them, but in our studies we don't work with objects, it's a different kind of theater, and we work with ourselves, our bodies, imagination and voice. And while I miss working with an object, I also appreciate this other side of theater work, which is often uncomfortable for me, but gives me many new clues and ways in this being uncomfortable.

In addition to individual work during the Authorial Acting class, we also had group work. Then we worked not only on our own texts, but also with texts by other authors, such as August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen and Ladislav Stroupežnický. I remember that it was refreshing for me when we could focus on the text itself, the authors we mostly knew, rather than focusing on creating a new text. It quickly became clear that this work was very graceful, but it also brought many difficulties and traps. Certainly this was also due to the too-short time we had in the program, but editing the text so as to maintain the form of the author's theater also proved to be a difficulty. Most of the roles that the pedagogues "cast" me in at that time were, as I expected - characteristic and expressive. We played without costumes and scenography, however, we sometimes used individual props, which was somewhat freeing for me. Such elements of the costumes gave me a lot, such as the shawl for the mourning old aunt - Juliane Tesman. Of course, I could also do it without this costume element, but I feel that when creating a character, it's hard to get into character without even a small element to help get a little distance from yourself. And I think it's the separation from myself - I like the most about theater. For a moment, I can hide from myself a bit and feel like someone else. As Eugen Fink writes in his essay *The Oasis of Happiness*: "The player hides his real self behind

his role and is submerged in it. He lives in his role with a singular intensity (...) The player can recall himself from his role."⁹ I don't know where does this strong need to be in the role come from. Perhaps it's for the reasons mentioned earlier, like the fear of being rejected, unappreciated. Perhaps it is the fact that I feel not enough with myself, that I need to enrich myself with new elements, new costumes and faces. I wonder how much in everyday life I hide from myself behind a layer of humor and energy to fill this emptiness that I feel so often.

In this chapter, I wrote about my theatrical experiences - those earlier and already while studying Authorial Acting at DAMU. I tried to look at these experiences in the context of emptiness. The performances for the youngest children, in which I play characteristic roles, played an important role, as well as performances for adults. I described that past theater practice has influenced my approach to the stage. Even while studying at our department, I missed scenography, costumes and objects I was used to. However, the Dialogical Acting and Authorial Acting classes have brought me a lot of new impulses and freshness. Thanks to these workshops, I can look at myself and my habits. I am afraid of emptiness, which I associate with a sense of boredom, with the fear of rejection and unappreciation from other people. However, I can look at it further and wonder where these feelings and emotions come from. I can wonder what I really want to hide from and what is important to me. In a later chapter, I would also like to take a closer look at Authorial Presentations, which are also an integral part of our work at DAMU.

⁹ Fink, E. Saine, and Saine, *The Oasis of Happiness*, p.23

7 I feel something, but it's not this. My work with Authorial Presentations

As I wrote in the introduction, my previous work with Authorial Presentations has had some influence on the choice of my thesis topic. I found the themes of searching for love and happiness in the context of experiencing emptiness, so I would now like to take a closer look at this work and its topics.

Authorial Presentation is a key program in the Authorial Acting department. This is the final piece that students work on by themselves together with pedagogues, their supervisors. We prepare an etude of about ten minutes on any topic using our own text. We fill this space with movement, sound. We use the "tools", that is, the voice, the body, with which we have worked throughout the year. It's hard to write a concrete definition here. The specificity of Authorial Presentation lies in the distinctiveness and individuality of each of us. We often bring up personal topics, although, of course, this is not the rule.

I remember that before my first Authorial Presentation I spent a long time thinking about what I could share. I started by thinking about what was important at that moment in my life, what I was concerned about, what interested me, what I was missing. After much thought, I decided that the simpler, the better. I wanted to be honest with myself, and I found that there was one topic that sits in my head the most, that I think about often. It was the important issue of not having a boyfriend. And, although it was sincere, the topic seemed too banal to me. I felt embarrassed at the thought that other people would hear about what a lonely person I was. That's why I wanted to present the topic with lightness and cover the feeling of embarrassment with a small dose of humor. I didn't want to make this topic an existential-psychological drama and feel sorry for myself in front of others. I remember one college friend once told me that she admired me for speaking so bravely about my needs in a public forum. I thought that perhaps that was where my strength was. I wanted to be honest in front of an audience, to bring up this topic that is important to me, not to pretend anything. Previously, I had openly admitted many times in front of my friends and friends of my friends that I was looking for a boyfriend. I just decided to start my Authorial Presentation in this open way. I remember that I was very nervous at the time before going on stage, and I told my friend that I probably wouldn't come out because I felt ashamed. But I came out.



1.

"I would like to have a boyfriend. But it's not easy to find someone. I guess...it's not about smiling"

Authorial Presentation during Klauzury at KATaP (23.06.2021)

Screenshot from a video made by Pavel Zajíček.



2.

"I would like to be really close to someone. To find in stranger - a friend. To find someone with whom we will be a loneliness for each other"

Authorial Presentation during Klauzury at KATaP (23.06.2021)

Screenshot from a video made by Pavel Zajíček.

In my first Authorial Presentation, I also tried to meet this issue and reflect on why this topic is so important to me. I said in that Authorial Presentation that it is not just about smiling, that perhaps the "problem" is within me and in the relationships I make with other men. That perhaps this need to "have" someone is a result of certain lacks, a relationship with my parents, something I didn't get from them. I pointed out that I would like to have such a relationship in which I would keep myself and my loneliness. In perspective, I think it was also about the experience of emptiness. Something that was not filled in the relationship with others and with myself. I was afraid and still am afraid of loneliness. I'm terrified of this lack of people next to me - as I wrote in earlier chapters, describing my dream or vision of world destruction. The strong desire to be with someone conflicts with the strong desire to keep myself and my identity. Close relationships with other people often reflect our fears. In a conversation with my psychotherapist, I realized that often we subconsciously treat the relationship and our partner as our parent and expect the other person to take care of us. When we don't get this care - we are disappointed. We pass on to the other person the responsibility for our own lives. I wrote in earlier chapters about experiencing adulthood in the context of emptiness, fear of responsibility, fear of reality. I related this to the sense of isolation from parents that we now, perhaps, are looking for in our partner. I often think that, on the one hand, I would like to stay this taken care of child, who does not need to have this adult responsibility and maturity, but on the other hand I am afraid that by entering into a relationship with another person I may lose myself and my needs in the process. The desire to be with another person is, of course, a natural need for closeness and a sense of security, but it is worth looking at it from another angle, if even in the context of experiencing emptiness and the fear of it.



3.

"Maybe it is because I want to feel accepted. I want to feel beautiful. I want to feel amazing, charming, wonderful, intelligent. I want to feel funny. I want to feel smart. I want to feel normal. I want to feel... I don't know! Sexy?"

Authorial Presentation during Klauzury at KATaP (23.06.2021).

Screenshot from a video made by Pavel Zajíček.



4.

"Or maybe I want someone who will see me? But how someone can see me if I can't see myself?"

Authorial Presentation during Klauzury at KATaP (23.06.2021)

Screenshot from a video made by Pavel Zajíček.



5.

"I like myself. I am enough. I don't need anyone to feel beautiful, normal. I can see myself through some actions"

Authorial Presentation during Klauzury at KATaP (23.06.2021)

Screenshot from a video made by Pavel Zajíček.

Therefore, in my Authorial Presentation, I searched for the reason why I am in such dire need of finding love. I came to the conclusion that perhaps the need to be loved is connected with the need to find value in myself and certain qualities that I find difficult to see without the look of another person. In the other person, perhaps I search to find myself, my sensitivity, my beauty, my presence. I also look for being noticed, because it is difficult for me to see myself by myself. However, I came to a certain conclusion - without noticing ourselves - it is hard for someone else to notice us. It was a conclusion that gave me hope and showed me how important it is to be in contact with myself in the first place.

In my next Authorial Presentations, I wanted to face the theme of the search for happiness. This topic was, in some way, related to the theme of the search for love, and further related to the context of experiencing emptiness. In this Authorial Presentation I allowed myself to use objects - mainly wooden dolls - matryoshkas. I created this presentation from the perspective of a little girl who meets several fairy tale characters on her way, such as the Witch, Frogg King, Happy Dog and the Artist. She asks them one by one where she can find happiness, since her matrioshka friends have not been able to answer this question.



6.

“Have any of you ever been happy? Raise your hand! Me neither”.

Authorial Presentation at KATaP during Klauzury (13.01.2022)

Screenshot from a video made by Pavel Zajíček.

As with the theme of finding a boyfriend, in this presentation I also tried to discover that this desire to be happy comes out of ourselves and it is within ourselves that this happiness can be found. Each character had a different idea of how to be happy, but it seemed that in my character (Isabella) these ideas did not resonate. Just as feeling happiness, feeling loneliness or experiencing emptiness is an individual matter that can only be found inside yourself. The fear of being unhappy, lonely, not surrounded by people is, in some way, a fear of something unfilled. Instead of just being happy - we travel a long way to be able to find this happiness. We read counseling books, attend psychotherapy. We focus so much on finding it all, avoiding fear and our emotions, that we lose contact with ourselves. Sometimes we can spend a lifetime trying to be happy, instead of starting to live here and now and with all our emotions, joy, happiness or even a sense of emptiness.



7.

"It seems that Izabela understood where she found her happiness"

Authorial Presentation (13.01.2022)

Screenshot from a video made by Pavel Zajíček.

In my Final Authorial Presentation (which, at the time of writing this thesis, is still before me), I explore the theme of childhood and the search for contact with myself by the child I was and the adult I am now. The subject of the search - whether for happiness, for a boyfriend, or finally for contact with myself - seems to be a core theme of my presentations or monodramas. In the latest Authorial Presentation, still in the process of preparation, the little girl that I was one day writes a letter to herself in the future, when she is a grown woman. It was indeed the case that I once wrote such a letter, and recently found it at the bottom of my old drawer. I decided to make it the main center of the play. "So I wanted to somehow connect ME as a child with ME as an adult to tell myself some important thing and the most important thing was the strong desire and, at the same time, the greatest fear of this child to never be forgotten" - as I wrote in my script for "Baby Blue" - the working title of my Final Authorial Presentation.

I wonder why I chose this topic. Finding the letter in my old drawer was not entirely coincidental. Together with Viktor, my college friend (who I mentioned in the introduction), we wanted to create our final performance together. It was a long process of conversations and a search for a topic that interested us. We wanted to tell a story about ourselves by showing our childhood from the perspective of two worlds away from each other (literally - since Viktor is from Macedonia and I am from Poland). Therefore, while visiting my family home, I started by

"searching" for the old me in a drawer. And I found a letter, which will appear in my Final Authorial Presentation.

Although I am at the very beginning of the process of creating this performance (it is, of course, an Authorial Presentation, which, as a general rule, is hard to name "performance," here, however, I will allow myself to call it so, because I think that the Final Authorial Presentation, in a way, deserves that name), I think that I may have subconsciously connected its theme with that of my thesis. A lot of dots connect and, as I mentioned earlier, the themes of my previous thesis or previous Authorial Presentations have a common ground, which is the experience of emptiness. In the case of "Baby Blue," the emptiness shows up in the difficulty of contacting myself from the past, the fear of adulthood and of a certain end.

8 I am afraid of feeling failed. Movement, Voice and Authorial Reading class

Here I would like to take a closer look at my experience of emptiness in the context of Movement class, Voice class, as well as my texts that I wrote during Authorial Reading class. I believe that these subjects were equally important in the context of my thesis topic. I would also like to refer to my reflections that I wrote at the end of each semester. The movement classes we had with pedagogues Mish Raisová, Jan Bárta and Jana Novorytová while studying at KATaP were not the usual movement classes I might have previously imagined. They were not classes where we learned dance or specific choreographies. We worked with our bodies, body awareness and psychosomatics. Through multiple repetitions, we prepared our bodies for movement and learned coordination and how to work with a partner.

Movement classes always activated a sense of fear and embarrassment in me. I felt that my body was not enough to complete certain tasks. I was afraid of failure and judgment. When I took acrobatics classes, even before studying at DAMU, I often felt a psychological block to do a particular element. I was ashamed of my body and my way of moving, which seemed heavy and unattractive. In fact, it's been that way ever since I can remember - as a little girl I usually avoided sports mainly because of the fear of being judged.

And although I now enjoy working with my body, there are still some fears and emotions about movement left in me. I feel better in improvisation than in a specific choreography. I also often like to "forget" that actually my body is moving now. I then lose myself in the movements and don't think about the fact that someone is watching and judging what I am doing. I also learn to distance myself and my body, and to accept my limitations. It seems to me that I am the best in a specific task that activates my imagination and when I can express my movement through the character or situation I am acting. But why should it actually be the best? Is it that drawer of my stronger sides I mentioned earlier? It only shows what I know well, what "works" to hide my imperfections for fear of failure. As I wrote in my reflections from the summer semester of 2022:

Often in class, I had mixed feelings, but mostly because of my anger at myself for not being able to do something correctly, some exercise (...) Sometimes I also felt that the pace was too fast for me, that if I didn't understand something, I would like to do it slowly. I also know that maybe there is no time for it, maybe there are too many people in the group and besides - I have to adapt. (...) jumping, seemed annoying or boring to me, I know that repeating them and striving for a specific move is very important. I appreciate this striving for precision that is easily forgotten in our times. (...) I feel that I am a bit more precise and patient now.

I mention my emotions in this reflection - a sense of anger and frustration when I don't know how to do something, and a sense of boredom when repeating specific activities. I wonder where these emotions come from. I think that often the feeling comes from me at the moments when I lose or something doesn't go my way. I take the feeling of failure personally - if I fail in a situation I project it into my whole life, into my whole self-image. Perhaps this is why I fear the judgment of others so much. What if I would accept my "imperfections", demonstrate them and take a risk even if it ends in "failure". What's wrong with failure? For me, this failure is rejection. But paradoxically, this failure often brings a sense of freedom. Freedom from fear, rejection and emptiness. I sometimes recall moments when, during a movement, I knew that I might not be the best at something, but I didn't care and even exposed my "imperfections" even more, laughing at them, which made others laugh too. However, I didn't feel that they were laughing at me but with me. And in this I felt a certain release.

I feel a similar fear of singing, however, I definitely feel more confident in this subject. Maybe it's because I simply enjoy singing more and do it more often, even for myself. In front of an audience, I'm afraid I'll miss the notes, make a falsification or mistake the words. When you sing you are all "exposed" in front of others - you can hear all the tension, stress and uncertainty in your voice. This stress comes from our fears, as well as the tensions in the body that accumulate stress - as my singing teachers at DAMU - Teresa Roglová and Pavla Fendrichová - often said. As with Movement class, I feel better when I am not focusing on the act of singing itself but on the communication. I am most comfortable singing when a certain role requires it, and the more characteristic- the better. Being a given character allows me to hide from failure. I transfer the responsibility of being myself to a character who is stronger than I am. Why stronger? Maybe because it is placed in a particular situation, in a particular space, where it does not feel empty.

Before I will move to my texts written during Authorial Reading class, I think it is important to describe what this subject actually is. It is important to me to write it, because Authorial Reading is, next to Dialogical Acting, seems to be crucial subject in our Department. As Professor Ivan Vyskočil writes about it:

It is basically a matter of reading a text out loud, preferably one's own text or a text that has been authorially reworked, in a group of about twenty participants, who should all have a go at reading. This means that everyone's turn will come. Twice a semester. The reading and the collective discussion about the reading and about what was read usually takes about half an hour (...) The person reading knows (...) that the reading should be a certain kind of authorisation and verification of a text.¹⁰

In the case of our English program we had the opportunity to read and write texts

¹⁰ Vyskočil, I. *Ivan Vyskočil's Introduction to the book Mama isn't Home on the discipline of Authorial Reading*, p.9 <https://www.autorskeherectvi.cz/post/predmluva-ivana-vyskocila-ke-knize-maminka-neni-doma-1?lang=en>

much more often – due to the smaller number of participants. However, I will focus here more on the texts itself and their content, rather than on reading and discussions.

In my texts that I wrote while studying at KATaP, and that I read during the Authorial Reading class, I often brought up the themes of loneliness, passing, and fears related to loss and emptiness. I will cite here some quotes from my texts.

"I stole the geese but not from my backyard. The geese and backyard weren't mine. There was an open gate. I sneaked in. I sneaked in and took some of the loveliest geese. I needed their softness. I needed their softness to get closer to something" – as I write in one of my texts. It is a story about a girl who snuck into someone's backyard to steal geese because she needed their softness. This softness of the geese was meant to symbolize something I lack to fill the void. Something that would allow me to feel warmth and a sense of closeness. I remember that I had already written this text before my studies at DAMU, but at that time it was written in the form of a poem. I presented this poem to my psychotherapist, with whom we analyzed these words I had written down. The geese were meant to symbolize a lost relationship with a person close to me. We also reflected on "the open gate" and "not one's backyard.". Stealing something not from my own backyard can be a metaphor for the fact that within myself I am unable to find what I can comfort myself with. So I have to look for it in other people and steal from them what does not belong to me at all. "However I soon realized that the stolen feathers no longer brought me happiness" – as I write near the end. So I realized that what doesn't belong to me and what I don't find in myself - won't bring me the happiness I desire, but only for a moment illusorily fill the emptiness– "This is how it is when you want to steal other people's happiness, instead of getting your own feathers".

The second text I would like to quote here is as abstract and full of symbols as the one about stealing the goose. It tells the story of a man - Bob - who was a hair, in the literal sense of the word, and because of his difference is rejected by society. "For other people he was just a hair. Invisible hair. Feelings of alienation had been with him since he was a child. How could he play soccer with the guys when he was too weak to kick the ball?". The man suffered from not fitting in with other people. He felt lonely and invisible until he met a little girl on his path, to whom he brought a wig because the girl had lost her hair after chemotherapy treatment. "And this how Bob met little Alinka. For her he was not invisible. Opposite – having no hair herself, she paid much more attention to those, who had at least one hair". The story is in fact about my fear of rejection and feeling of not fitting in, and that you don't need to change and fit yourself to others to fill the emptiness, but you can patiently wait for the right moment and the right people around you. There is no need for masks and covering up something that for one may be rejecting, but perhaps for someone else is the most beautiful thing. As I write in my other text: "I raised my head up a little, about twenty centimeters, because that's where your blue eyes were. I looked at you and made a silly face, because it got too serious somehow". I can relate with this sentence to my sense of humor, which can often be my mask to hide behind when I find myself in an uncomfortable situation. I am often

afraid of serious situations and confronting serious topics and conversations. Perhaps this is because I associate them with responsibility and adulthood, which often seems uncomfortable and uninteresting to me and can bring a sense of failure and emptiness when I am rejected by someone in that confrontation. As I write further on in the same text: "Red rose petals fell on the white sheet. We didn't put the flower to the water. It died. But that's good, that's good. It means that it was real". It also describes my fear of death and the certain end of something. However, I know that this end in this text means that something that is true must die, must end sometime. Better is the end than a life of non-truth, of a masked face. Better is a life filled with many failures, but a life in harmony with yourself. A life of honesty. A life for which you can fight, for which you can risk. Many of these failures, by the way, are illusory. Many of them can also be turned into something beautiful. "Then tears fell from my eyes. Salty, pearly drops. One by one. There was a lot of them. I threw them into the pocket. I decided to make use of them. Maybe a necklace? Because from what else make use of, if not from tears?" - as I write in another of my texts.

In this chapter, I described my experiences with Movement class, voice class and with my texts I wrote for Authorial Reading class. And, although these three seemingly unrelated subjects, they brought me many common perspectives, questions and clues. I took a closer look at my fears and anxieties about being a failure, about being alone or being rejected. I reflected on what these fears actually are and where they come from within me. I came to the conclusion that it is worth watching these emotions and perhaps just accepting them as they are.

9 It's all about energy. Relating to theatrical concepts by Brook, Brecht and Grotowski

In the context of Dialogical Acting, which I consider to be the core subject of our department, as well as crucial to the topic of this thesis, I would like to refer to literature and authors such as Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Bertolt Brecht. All these authors are important in the contexts of our Faculty and the subjects we had during our studies at KATaP. Besides, I consider Dialogical Acting and the experience of emptiness to be a perfect combination, which, through DJ, shows a kind of quintessential theme of emptiness, loneliness and isolation. It is through emptiness, which presents ourselves as we are in the moment, that I can get to the heart of the matter.

"In everyday life 'if' is a fiction, in the theater 'if' is an experiment"¹¹ - as Peter Brook wrote in his book *The Empty Space*. During Dialogical Acting, we also experiment - with our bodies, with our vulnerability and with our imagination. Of course, we experiment in the sense of discovering and exploring our own possibilities, impulses and dialogue with our Inner Partner, rather than in terms of being overly expressive and endangering our own physicality and psyche. In doing so, we are discovering the new - aiming to surprise ourselves, to activate something that was previously unknown or lay deep in the subconscious. Through what is new - we can get to know ourselves more closely. I think that often people are afraid of the new, they are more comfortable to stay in the sphere that is familiar, although sometimes not always proper and valuable for them. I think the same is in my case as well, although I try to observe it. On stage, I often walk the usual paths, using tools that I already know. I know what I am better at, and doing what - is more problematic for me. "I then pull out" from the drawer of my abilities certain schemes and masks behind which I hide, knowing that in a sense "it works." "It works" in the sense that perhaps it will protect me from failure and the judgment of others. I know "what will work" to make people laugh, I know "what will work" to keep children from getting bored while watching the performance. Sometimes I know that a given action, although it will not be risky and spectacular, will at least be at an acceptable level - and that's a lot to protect against failure. I realize that there are many paradoxes in this. On the one hand, I have fear of failure in the context of being "invisible," that is, not being noticed by other people; on the other hand, I have fear of taking risks that might bring me the desired "visibility." I often prefer to be neutral rather than noticed, because the fear of rejection is stronger for me than the desire to win. The circle then closes, because I do nothing to get out in front of my dreams. During castings, I often shut myself away, I don't take risks to show a side of myself that I may not yet know. And, although I know that such an approach will not bring the desired results (that is, it will mostly end in my rejection at a

¹¹ Brook, P. *The Empty Space* (1996), p. 175

given project), I still do it to at least not be remembered as the "different" or the "weird" one. On the one hand, I would like to do something to get that role and I would like to be remembered, but on the other hand, I don't take risks for fear of failure, which I do anyway. I am more afraid of such "human" rejection and being laughed at than of not getting a role or a job. I then have the feeling (I think it happens more in my subconscious) that I don't get the job (like many other people anyway), but at least I won't be thrown "out of the herd", not expelled from society, in a primal sense.

Dialogical Acting allows us to rediscover ourselves. We are in a quite safe space, although sometimes empty and scary, it is safe. No judging, no consequences. I think that many times during DJ I also used old and familiar "tricks" taken from the bottom of a drawer, but there were also moments that allowed me to see myself from a completely different side. And such moments were the most beautiful and crucial, showing that actually "new" is the most important thing. I also remind myself of my last situation, when, standing in the checkout line, I was unnoticed by another customer, who, without seeing me, stepped in front of me in line. This activated a lot of anger in me. I then said - not even to the man - but to myself, that after all I was here and that it would be appropriate to apologize. I spoke these words somewhat to him, but it was not a direct communication addressed to him. However, I pronounced these words loud enough for him to hear. Nothing, however, this customer replied to this, which made me even more angry. I was upset by his not noticing my person. I thought a moment later that I would have preferred the man to respond to me with anything, even something most unpleasant. However, I think now that it's hard for him to respond to me to a communication that wasn't addressed directly to him, and that in some subconscious frame of mind I didn't address him directly, fearing confrontation. I did, however, let my emotions out by saying these lines out loud to myself. I often hide in this way from confrontation and the responsibility of being an adult, and on the other hand redirect my emotions to another person who, except for feelings of perhaps guilt, cannot defend himself and therefore confront me. I connect this situation in the store with the casting situation and the issue of learning about the new and taking risks. When there are times that I surprise myself and step out of my comfort zone, which is me avoiding responsibility and confrontation, I feel a kind of relief, satisfaction and a sense of victory. Victory of myself with myself. Victory of myself with my honesty.

I would also like to take a look at Brecht's term "alienation". This is how Bertolt Brecht describes this term in his essay *'On Chinese Acting'*:

*In the Chinese theatre the alienation effect is achieved in the following way. The Chinese performer does not act as if, in addition to the three walls around him there were also a fourth wall. He makes it clear that he knows he is being looked at.*¹²

¹² Brecht, B., & Hewitt, B. (1961). On Chinese Acting (E. Bentley, Trans.). *The Tulane Drama Review*, 6(1), p.131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1125011>

I first found this term at a directing workshop at the Academy of Performing Arts in Wrocław. We were to present a short improvised scene in two people. The task was only to create an emotional dialogue during which we were to fold the sheet. Initially, there were strong emotions and gestures in this improvised scene. The sheets we folded reflected these emotions - the pieces of cloth were squeezed tightly by us. The second time we repeated the scene, but the task was to hold back from these strong emotions. This time we folded the sheets with calmness, self-control and distance, while having a dialogue on serious and difficult topics. Other students, as observers, admitted that this second attempt was stronger for them. They were able to listen better to the text, and imagine themselves in a similar situation. Previously, the actors gave them specific, ready-made emotions, in which there was no space for their own interpretation. In addition, what struck me most was the contrast that was so important to Brecht. The contrast of strong emotions with controlled voice and gestures. The contrast of cold characters with emotional themes. And yet these emotions were somewhere all the time. Perhaps they were more to be found in the audience than in the actors. The purpose of this conception of "alienation effect" was also to "force" the audience to engage and to take a look at well know situations once more with a distance.

On the other side, Peter Brook writes in the chapter *The Rough Theatre*:

*There was no fourth wall between actors and audience – the actor's unique aim was to create a precise response in an audience for whom he had total respect. It was out of respect for the audience that Brecht introduced the idea of alienation, for alienation is a call to halt: alienation is cutting, interrupting, holding something up to the light, making us look again.*¹³

So the spectator has his imagination and his maturity. The spectator is, as it were, responsible for what he sees. The effect of alienation in Brecht's terms gives time to stop, to look at individual particles from a distance. And to take those particles under a magnifying glass. For some reason, I compare the alienation effect to Dialogical Acting, where we also often look at our impulses and emotions from a distance. We sometimes (literally and metaphorically) take a few steps back so that we can take a fresh look at our actions - this time with more distance. Observers also play a role here - they are, in a sense, responsible for what they see, they take an active part in looking at what is happening on stage, they have the role of "wishful attention" that I mentioned earlier.

I also see here the effect of alienation in the context of emptiness. Paradoxically, distance sometimes brings more emotions, which perhaps do not appear as strongly in ourselves, but transfer to others. Perhaps this distance in ourselves activates emotions in us as well. I remember a monologue from the play "Delhi Dance" by Ivan Vrypayev that I worked on during an acting workshop in Baza Theater in Warsaw. The monologue was the perspective of a young girl who lost her mother. However, she talks about her death, saying that she doesn't actually feel anything. I spoke this monologue and tried to keep my distance,

¹³ Brook, P. *The Empty Space* (1996), p. 87

to speak it truly without emotion. I remember that this coldness I discovered in myself paradoxically brought me more emotion than if I had spoken it in a more emotional way. It was not only stronger for the viewer, but also for myself. I now wonder why this happened. Perhaps it's because we are used to talking about death in an emotional way, and when that emotion is missing - we are terrified by its lack. And here I return to the definition of emptiness and experiencing it, which I wrote about at the beginning of this thesis. I wondered whether emptiness really is "empty," that is, it is not filled with anything, but whether emptiness is emotions. Certainly, in experiencing emptiness, I am surrounded by emotions, such as fear or anxiety. By definition, however, it should be different - there is nothing in the emptiness. And yet there is a huge amount of space to fill it - for example with fear and anxiety. And as in the case of the monologue from Vyrypayev's play - distance and lack of emotion generates paradoxically more emotion.

I would also like to refer in this chapter to the space that Peter Brook describes in his book *The Empty Space*. As the author writes: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged".¹⁴ The author continues by describing that in the traditional understanding of theater you still need lights, costumes, etc., but in fact one person, space and awareness of the audience is enough. But is it really enough to create theater? Shouldn't there also be a certain happening in that space. Perhaps a man entering the stage and being aware that he is entering there and that there is an audience next to the stage - is already a certain happening. As in Dialogical Acting (although this is not a traditional understanding of theater) - a happening can already be called the very act of a student entering an empty space and coming into contact with the awareness of that space, himself and the observers. But is all this enough to create theater? Let's give an example of a certain situation - is a bride entering a church, walking in an empty space and facing the groom, around which there are witnesses to the event - her family, who are watching this wedding ritual - is this enough to name it a theatrical situation? Probably yes, as long as the bride and groom are aware of the space, the other guests and the happening.

Referring to empty space, I also can't forget to mention Jerzy Grotowski and his concept of poor theater. In his article *Towards the Poor Theater*, Grotowski writes:

*By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, "live" communion.*¹⁵

In his Laboratory Theater, this 20th century theater reformer focused on working with the actor, transforming the theater into a laboratory center for the study of acting method. He

¹⁴ Brook, P. *The Empty Space* (1996), p.7

¹⁵ Grotowski, J. *Towards the Poor Theatre*. Preface by P. Brook (1968) p. 19. Translation: T. K. Wiewlorowski.

gradually discarded everything unnecessary in the theater, leaving only the actor and the spectator. He focused on this relationship between actor and spectator. He also gave up the traditional division between the stage and the audience, so that the actor– viewer relationship was further deepened and the boundary between them blurred. Of course, this empty space in Grotowski's approach, as well as the resignation of traditional theatrical elements such as costumes and lights, is somehow a reflection of what we do during Dialogical Acting. Although it is a completely different perspective and approach to stage acting, it has many elements in common. Dialogical Acting, however, can hardly be called an acting method, although, for example, for me, as I have written before - can be a kind of method and work with the actor. This work, however, focuses mainly on the person in the empty space, and he is also responsible for his actions. There is also no Grotowski's relationship between the actor and the spectator. Rather, the viewer here is a witness to the happening. He is involved in what he sees, but he is more of a "complement" and a support or help to the performer. Further, as Grotowski writes:

Why are we concerned with art? To cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness - fulfil ourselves. This is not a condition but a process in which what is dark in us slowly becomes transparent. In this struggle with one's own truth, this effort to peel off the life-mask, the theatre, with its full-fleshed perceptivity, has always seemed to me a place of provocation. It is capable of challenging itself and its audience by violating accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling, and judgment - more jarring because it is imaged in the human organism's breath, body, and inner impulses.¹⁶

The author writes about filling the emptiness and rediscovering oneself by rejecting everything unnecessary. The actor is to focus on his inner self and his impulses. As in Dialogical Acting, which provides many opportunities to explore yourself - and not just in a theatrical sense. As I wrote earlier - DJ gives space to observe and discover what is still undiscovered in us. It gives us the opportunity to get in contact with ourselves, which is often uncomfortable and frightening. In this empty space we are left exposed with everything and can look at what appears under the mask and wonder - why actually this mask appears and what it wants to hide.

Filling empty space can also be done by filling it with gesture, communication, strong will and energy. In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook describes one exercise that he tried out with his actors. It involves one actor sitting in a chair facing the wall, while the other actor sits behind him, seeing only his back. They have to communicate with each other without words. They communicate only through sounds. Concentration and willingness are important:

The actor then found that to communicate his invisible meanings he needed concentration, he needed will; he needed to summon all his emotional reserves; he needed courage; he needed clear thought. But the most important result was that he

¹⁶ Grotowski, J. *Towards the Poor Theatre*. Preface by P. Brook (1968) p. 21,22. Translation: T. K. Wiewlorowski.

*was led inexorably to the conclusion that he needed form.*¹⁷

I can also recall here one of the exercises we had during the Actors' Studio in the Baza Theater in Warsaw. It was based on one person leaving the room, and at that time the group had to decide who among them would be the "child" of the person who had just left. When that person re-entered the room they were to figure out, by means of excluding one person after another, who among the group was his "child." During this task we said nothing, everything was done in silence. The whole group could only look at the person standing in front of them, and that person was to reject one by one the people he thought were not his child until he discovered who among them was assigned that role. I remember that I was the person who guessed who in the group was my "child." Out of twenty students, I managed to find the one who was my "child." This brought me a lot of joy, but also surprise that it could work. It also showed me how powerful energy, intuition and close observation of another person can be. The student who was my "child" simply had this intention in the back of his mind. Perhaps it is this energy, and believing in it really, that is enough to make an event happen on stage. Just like in Dialogical Acting - you need that relationship and contact with the other person, or our Inner Partner. "A happening can be anywhere, any time, of any duration: nothing is required, nothing is taboo".¹⁸

I wrote in earlier chapters about my fears of rejection and loneliness. I also described my vision of a world without people or a dream in which I was locked in a room without a door, and in which I discovered that I could fill that space with my voice or movement. I can now also add - energy. Energy that fills the space, and energy that adds impulse and is the link between me and my inner voice. What exactly is our Inner Partner if not energy?

In this chapter I considered combinations of Peter Brook's, Jerzy Grotowski's or Bertolt Brecht's approaches to the concept of empty space or working with and focusing on the actor and his relationship with himself and the audience. Each of them relates differently to theater and acting methods, but I found many common connections, which I located mainly in the Dialogical Acting classes, which I wrote about at the beginning that they are, in a sense, the quintessence of the theme of emptiness and loneliness. I think that the idea of rejecting what is unnecessary in the theater and exposing what is necessary for the magic to happen - that is, the empty space, the actor, the happening and the spectator, gives us the opportunity to build a sincere relationship - whether a relationship with the spectator or a relationship with ourselves. Of course, with all the theatrical elements, such as scenography and lights, this can also be built. However, I write this in the sense of being able to take a closer look and focus on the relationship. An empty space may be more pointing to what is most important - being in contact.

¹⁷ Brook, P. *The Empty Space* (1996), p.60

¹⁸ Brook, P. *The Empty Space* (1996), p. 65

Conclusion

In this thesis, I focused on the term "experiencing emptiness" in the context of my experiences - both theatrical and more personal. I described my theatrical experiences, those before I started studying at the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy at DAMU, such as performing plays for children, playing characteristic roles, such as the title role of Mother in a play by Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, and directing workshops at the Academy of Performing Arts in Wroclaw. I also focused on my experiences studying Authorial Acting and subjects such as Dialogical Acting, Authorial Acting, Movement class and Voice class. I took a closer look at my texts that I wrote during Authorial Reading or working with Authorial Presentations. I also consulted texts by authors such as Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht or Ivan Vyskočil. This thesis is a kind of a practice-based self-reflection on topics that are close to me: experiencing emptiness, feeling lonely, fear of rejection and being not enough.

I observed that my studies at the Department of Authorial Acting and Pedagogy brought me many opportunities to observe my own emotions and fears. Dialogical Acting, which I consider core in the context of my studies as well as the topic of this thesis, has been particularly important here.

I also described what emptiness is for me to get a better look at this topic. I discovered that my fear of emptiness and empty space comes mainly from the fear of rejection and being not good enough. I've noticed that I often hide behind traditional theatrical elements, such as costumes and scenography. I often choose characteristic roles because it's a quick and easy way for me to show off my best side. Characteristic roles give me a sense of security because I can hide my true self, which I find insufficient for other people to accept me.

Writing this thesis has been an ongoing process, and I hope it won't end when I finish my studies. I would like me to continue to observe myself and my emotions more closely and therefore get to know myself, my needs, my fears – to simply feel a happier person.

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