

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE  
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ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE  
**THEATRE FACULTY**

PERFORMING ARTS  
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**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Somatic and Aesthetic Dramaturgies**

Devising Dialogues Between Bodies and Costumes Through Design Practices

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**Somatické a estetické dramaturgie**

Vytváření dialogů mezi těly a kostýmy prostřednictvím designových postupů

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## Declaration

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

**Somatic and Aesthetic Dramaturgies**

Devising Dialogues Between Bodies and Costumes Through Design Practices

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

Prague, date:

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## Abstract

This thesis is about the research *Human Creatures* that I have been developing since 2019, about creating dialogues between costumes and people's bodies, through the application of somatic practices. The text navigates between a description and analysis of the projects I did during my Master's studies, my interest in the body (biological and cultural studies), the redesign of it through performative costumes and masks, and the acknowledging of the potentials of visual thinking to make performance by rethinking design processes. In the chapters I describe the material produced during the research process of *Human Creatures*, which was quite extensive allowing me to explore different performative formats, with the same conceptual intentions and aesthetic decisions. I also analyse different reviews and feedback that was given to me during presentations in Prague, Czech Republic; Ljubljana, Slovenia and Rimini, Italy. The two main performances are *Fasciarium* (*Lat. Fascia: Connective Tissue*), a participatory laboratory where people are invited to transform their bodies through costumes, by reflecting on their body stories and giving themselves space to release, celebrate and dance. The second is a performative lecture *Anamorphosis*, a monologue in which I open publicly intimate body stories while I transform my appearance with objects. The projects' insights and processes are not presented chronologically but according to the concepts and methods that I was developing to understand different ways in which costumes are tools to transform identity and appearance.

The document examines dramaturgical methodologies I explore for directing performance, from my knowledge in design practices, especially textile design, and from my interest in the human body as an object and as a subject. My methodology includes the combination of concepts and processes that I have used as art director for theatre, but this time giving them performative agency. Likewise, I incorporate into this research, relations I find between how science studies the body and how it can be interpreted in art, an analysis of how we see our own bodies and how we see others according to body culture, and a reflection on how costume and mask are powerful tools to determine, hide or transform identity. I associate my practical results with theory that have been inspiring me, as well as with other performance and artistic projects that I watched and met along the way.

## Abstrakt

Tato magisterská práce se zabývá výzkumem s názvem *Human Creatures*, který jsem začala rozvíjet od roku 2019. Jedná se o vytváření dialogů mezi kostýmy a lidskými těly prostřednictvím aplikace somatických postupů. Text se pohybuje mezi popisem a analýzou projektů, které jsem realizovala během svých magisterských studií, mým zájmem o tělo (biologická a kulturní studia), jeho redesignu prostřednictvím performativních kostýmů a masek, a taky uvědoměním si potenciálu vizuálního myšlení pro vytváření performanci pomocí přehodnocení návrhových procesů. V kapitolách popisuji materiál vytvořený během výzkumného procesu *Human Creatures*, který rozsáhle umožnil mi zkoumat různé performativní formáty se stejnými konceptuální záměry a estetickými řešeními. Analyzuji také různé recenzi a zpětnou vazbu, kterou jsem obdržela během prezentací v Praze (Česká republika), Lublani (Slovinsko) a Rimini (Itálie). Dva hlavní performance jsou *Fasciarium* (Lat. *Fascia: Pojivová tkáň*), participativní laboratoř, kde jsou lidé vyzváni, aby svá těla proměnili přes kostýmy, pomocí reflexi svých tělesných příběhů a poskytnutí prostoru k uvolnění, oslavě a tanci. Druhým výstupem je performativní přednáška *Anamorphosis*, monolog, ve kterém veřejně sdílím intimní příběhy o těle a zároveň měním svůj vzhled pomocí objektů. Poznatky a postupy projektů nejsou prezentovány chronologicky, nýbrž podle konceptů a metod, které jsem vyvíjela k porozumění různým způsobům, jak mohou být kostýmy nástroji pro přeměnu identity a vzhledu.

Dokument se zabývá dramaturgickými metodami, které zkoumám pro režii performance, z mých znalostí designové praxe, zejména v oboru textilního designu, a z mého zájmu o lidské tělo v pozici objektu a subjektu. Moje metodologie zahrnuje kombinaci konceptů a procesů, které jsem používala jako umělecká ředitelka divadla, tentokrát jim však dávám performativní charakter. Rovněž do tohoto výzkumu zahrnuji vztahy, které nacházím mezi tím, jak tělo zkoumá věda, a tím, jak to může být interpretováno v umění, analýzu toho, jak vidíme svá vlastní těla a jak vidíme ostatní v souladu s tělesnou kulturou, a reflexi nad tím, jak kostým a maska jsou mocnými nástroji pro určení, skrytí nebo přeměnu identity. Své praktické výsledky spojuji s teorií, která mě inspiruje, stejně jako s dalšími performanci a uměleckými projekty, které jsem sledovala a setkala se s nimi na své cestě.

*I want to thank all the people who have been involved in the creation of Human Creatures, either with their hands building costumes, with their contributions to content or with their bodies offering images of these creatures. I want to express my appreciation to my tutor Sodja Lotker, who has been an inspiring guide in this new process, and also to Cristina Maldonado and Petra Hauerová. The three of them motivated me to believe in myself and to find in me performing and directing skills that now I take to another new version of myself. I also want to thank my family who supports me in whatever new idea I have, my partner of inspiration and exploration Andrés and to MOTUS and Dr. Hugo Sotomayor Tribín, who opened me the doors of their world with great generosity. Thanks to all the ugly, the beautiful, the sick, the happy, the bored, the shy, the extrovert, the young and old humans. Thanks to the humans who love their bodies and to the ones who don't, this research wouldn't exist without them.*





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## Introduction

To recognize that our body is an entity that can be transformed physically and emotionally is a process that can be triggered in different ways. I use the practice of performance and theatre as a facilitator for anyone who is interested in transiting to other versions of oneself. My research in scenic arts is intended to encourage the re-design of perception and construction of the audience's bodies by creating somatic and aesthetic dramaturgies from dialogues between their bodies and costumes. To create performance with design tools combined with somatic practices to empower the beauty that is in every type of body.

You can always change, you know? Like you change hair colour [...] you can change the colour of your sex, the colour of your chest, of your internal soul, of your own heart, if you want, you can. Escape the cage. Wear a superhero cape-blanket and go, transform yourself now, transform yourself again. Abandoned the other worlds<sup>1</sup>.

This thesis is about how the Master in Direction of Devised and Object Theatre (MA DOT), on the one hand expanded my interest in investigating temporary body transformations, which allowed me to create performances that provoked the redesign of the audience's bodies. On the other hand, the studies motivated me to rethink myself as an artist by using design knowledge and visual thinking as tools to create performance.

Since some years ago I have been reflecting on the performances of the body when it is socially exhibited, temporary or permanently transformed or pushed to its physical or moral limits. This journey started with other two academic projects I have done. First, the project titled *The Grotesque* at Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia in 2010, which was a study on ugliness in body and human behaviours through a proposal of costume design for *Divinas Palabras*, a theatre play written by Ramón María del Valle Inclán. And the second is the dissertation project for the Master of Textile Design at Chelsea College of Art and Design, London in 2012, with the title *Embellished Practices that Beautify the Body* that was about how to beautify the practices of plastic surgery in process through textile pieces. A journey that I consider

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<sup>1</sup> D. Nicoló and Casagrande, E., *Hello Stranger. 25 Years of MOTUS*. Bologna, Damiani, 2017, p. 224.

goes from the exploration of ugliness, passing through abjection, to end now in beauty.

Besides being an artist, I work as an analyst of textile trends for the mass/popular market in Colombia. I think that physical appearance and clothes are many times seen as superficial in intellectual scenarios but for me they are a visual signal of identity and therefore of socialisation. So I instinctively scan the aesthetics of people on the streets, and I try to do it with all my body, feeling and opening my whole body to understand my position in society and -without prejudice- read the variety of appearances that make up humanity. I understand that our body is the materiality we have to live and participate in this world. Identity is like a costume, a mask that can be worn or removed, and body is a medium to shift identity, to touch intimacy, vanity, sexuality and beauty. Body is the physical presentation of social identity of someone and clothes are tools to resignify it.

The drag queen TV personality, *RuPaul* says 'We are all born naked, the rest is drag'. Besides experimenting how to transform audiences' bodies, this project is a new drag version of myself, going out of a defined routine of designing as an art director for theatre and film. In Colombia the art director is the person who puts together the whole aesthetic mood of a theatre play, a photoshoot or a film. Many times this person is the same scenographer, costume designer and props designer. After working for several years I felt I needed to give a special voice to the visual landscapes I was creating. In my country, in the traditional process of staging, the art director is asked to join a project after the content (usually written text) and clear conceptual intentions have been settled. Often I was invited to join a project as a mere female decorator and the visual scenes and elements I was creating were treated as illustrative static paintings interesting to watch, rather than living atmospheres that could actively contribute to the development of contemporary dramaturgy.

The conventional creative process of dramatic theatre, which is still very present in Colombia, is centred on individual authorship, moving away from collective and interdisciplinary approaches. Also the written text in these processes is hierarchized above other elements present in a performance; such as objects, costumes, space,

makeup, sound, lighting and body. In my research these elements have a significant role in the creation of audio visual landscapes to create contemporary narratives, collective experiences and alternative dramaturgies. According to Sodja Lotker contemporary dramaturgy,

is the way a performance unfolds for the audience; it consists of many stage and non-stage elements that interact to create a dynamic performative system of meaning experience. Elements can be physical like bodies, light, voice, objects and so on, or mental such as cultural background, history of the space and so on.<sup>2</sup>

As a designer, I wanted to have a role in the creation of the dramaturgy, the stories and the format of the piece, rather than following the aesthetic and conceptual guidelines that were already established by the director. I felt that the visual references that I have been gathering throughout the years, my academic background in design and communication, my professional experience in the textile industry, the portfolio I built as an artist, and my own creative body had the potential to perform on their own. I had a need to speak out through the aesthetic worlds and textile pieces that I was creating, making them meaningful and proving that visual language is not only for designers or visual artists. I decided to explore the performativity of my body and my identity as a female designer in order to achieve the insubordination of design from the traditional processes of making theatre.

The way we are doing theatre in MA DOT, is not exclusively for people who have a knowledge in drama and background in theatrical stages. 'This is not a bad time to experiment with disciplinary transformation on behalf of the project of generating new forms of knowing'<sup>3</sup>. A motivation I had during my studies was the de-hierarchization of theatrical creative processes, to instead foster more collective and collaborative approaches, where any discipline or theatrical element can become the core of dramaturgical creation. Through devised theatre I found a new body as a deviser of content, formats, stage presence and dramaturgy, with design processes as initiators.

In order to understand how I explored different levels of transformation of the body (whether that of the audience or my own), and in such manner created performative

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<sup>2</sup> Lotker, S, 'The Double Agent. Dramaturgy of Costume', in Lindgren, C., Lotker, S. and Ljubková. M (eds), *Costume Agency*. Artistic Research Project, Oslo National Academy, 2023, p.155

<sup>3</sup> Halberstam, J., *The Queer Art of Failure*, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2011, p.7

dialogues and dramaturgical form, it is important for me to explain through this text, how I use the principle of visual literacy. My background in this field allowed me to translate visual thinking into costumes, which along with landscapes and scripts, worked as tools to redesign bodies. During the 70s Donis A. Dondis analysed the concept of “visual literacy” as an intelligence of more than just seeing and making visual messages. For it to occur, it is needed a basic knowledge of the simplest units of visual information: The syntax of an image and the anatomy of a visual message which includes: basic elements (line, shape, colour, direction, texture, scale, dimension, motion), guidelines for constructing composition, contrasts and harmonies, reading of symbols, and so on. For having visual literacy, she suggests (to visual artists and non-artists) acknowledging the method to learn to read and write text, by starting with the base element: the alphabet.

As I said, I am interested in being able to see visual landscapes more than a static image, more than an illustrative complement of a scene. Scenography ‘is not merely a part of the stage and the background; in it lies the soul of the entire act, the voice of the physical and the sense of the unspoken!’<sup>4</sup>. Visual literacy lets me recognize meanings and dynamics of the landscapes to give them performative agency. ‘Visual literacy implies understanding, the means for seeing and sharing meaning with some level of predictable universality [...] to accomplish this requires reaching beyond personal preference and individual taste’<sup>5</sup>. I used this statement throughout my research, in my case by trying to produce collective meanings from individual bodies through the images I was creating. Although I find Dondis studies quite obsolete today because the rules that she proposed of reading an image are too rigid and its application is fundamentalist in the discipline of design, which is every time more experimental and transdisciplinary, I have used this academic background to be able to break it and find alternative sources of visual knowledge and experimentation in order to create my own rules to redesign bodies through visual landscapes.

Interested in the transition of the audience’s body and my own body as a designer and as a woman, the result of my master studies is a research on creating performative dialogues between costumes and body, by using design processes,

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<sup>4</sup> P. Kumar Dutta, ‘Dramaturgy through Scenography. Understanding how a Dramaturgical Construct is Possible through Design’, *Medium*, 24-02-2018.

<https://medium.com/diarium-da-pacific/dramaturgy-through-scenography-1efd5a3a9de>

<sup>5</sup> Dondis, A., *A Primer of Visual Literacy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1973, p. 182

visual thinking and somatic practices. How can we be aware and amplify our body's stories by creating temporal versions of ourselves (new identities) through performative costumes and actions? I invite audiences to join a community of “human creatures” that I have been archiving from different countries with different somatic and aesthetic contexts. I have presented my work to diverse audiences from Colombia, Prague - Czechia, Ljubljana- Slovenia and Rimini- Italy, noticing that every place and type of audience has a particular approach to the body. I take knowledge from all of them, receiving with satisfaction the diversity of bodies that are part of this collaborative archive that began from 2019.

The material produced during my research in MA DOT, especially the visual one (costumes, fabrics, textiles techniques, drawings, photographs, references, written text/poems) allowed me to explore different performative formats that I will explain further in detail. This thesis is divided into four main chapters, that navigate between my interest in how body's -biological and cultural- studies give me information to redesign it through performative costumes and masks. Also it acknowledges the potentials of visual thinking to produce these images of transformation and performance by rethinking design processes that I was using in other disciplines like art direction and textile art. In Chapter 1 I describe the different performative outputs I produced with the research *Human Creatures*. Chapter 2 presents the topics and theory that have inspired me to create concepts and stories of transformation during the research. In Chapter 3 I explain what is my design process to produce costumes in order to give them performative agency and in Chapter 4 I develop other design practices that have been useful for my methodology of creating dramaturgy for changing my body and audience's bodies, like working with living sketchbooks, creating visual landscapes and performing through a screen as a mask and the table as an extension of my body.

## 1. Human Creatures

Human Creatures is a research that I started in 2019 about the human body's internal and external anatomy and stories, as a field that attracts me in a visual, philosophical, spiritual and kinky way. It is my interest in finding narratives through the reflection of our own intimate diaries and dressing our bodies up with theatrical costumes. Being aware of our body stories (like traumas, conditions, events, self-interpretations); respecting them, questioning them, rethinking them and recognizing them in relation to the physicality of our bodies. By temporarily re-designing our bodies, the research is also an ode to the ugly, the different, the weird, the pain and also the joy.

Conservative societies have imposed on us, through history, different codes about how to look like, to behave, to move. Creating beauty standards and assuming healthy ways of being. I want to reflect on the politics of the body and how they affect the way people perceive their own bodies. By producing emotions through a dialogue between the body (the concept and the frame) and costumes (the artefact). I also have a concern in finding possible safe relations that these narratives and re-designed bodies can produce like new social interactions, mystical approaches, erotic energies, openings, psychological reflections or feelings of enjoyment and humour.

These narratives are expressed using textile surfaces and garments that help me unveil with raw joy, hidden stories that everyone has below the clothes and the skin. The philosopher Hourya Bentouhami states 'If we could see the insides of bodies, they would validate the claim that we are indistinguishable, since we are all subject to the same requirements for the maintenance of life and face the same exposure to disease and death'<sup>6</sup>. I want to create a space where we can all expose our inner bodies and relate with the physical and moral body shames of others and realise that in vulnerability we are all in the same social position. I want to make the audience conscious or even repair (heal) emotions on their bodies, by mirroring themselves through other bodies or by interacting with unknown bodies.

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<sup>6</sup> Bentouhami, H., 'To Appear in Times of Pandemic', *In the Midst* [web blog] Critical Times Interventions in Global Critical Theory, 7-12-2020, <https://ctjournal.org/author/hourya-bentouhami/>

Each piece of garment that is used illustrates a part of the body that has an intimate story and together they form assemblages of different versions of the human anatomy. In the aesthetic of the pieces there is no idealisation or attempt to portray unachievable and marketable human beauty. They are not illustrative portraits that depict realistically a human body. My interest is more to accomplish an amateur but honest and humorous interpretation of reality; of real faces, of real people, warts and wrinkles and all. The creatures designed are certainly not beautiful but the intention of the space is to celebrate our own beauties, which are not celebrated by the standardised beauty or healthy codes.

The organic shapes of the clothes, the textile techniques used, the selected materials, the amateurish drawings on the pieces and the colour palette are curated in a way that the new costumes build an aesthetical language of the whole project. By following the visual design concept of homogeneous composition: the use of visual elements of the same kind or nature but not identical. This creates a notion of group between the new appearances of all the people that have been involved during the presentations of the project. They have been building what I call “human creatures”, which I consider characters that are comical theatrical versions of ourselves, homogenous in the way they look but unique in their own way; just as we humans are.



Archive of *Human Creatures*



I am interested in audiences that want to be aware of their bodies' stories, and that recognize that if we open, we can then transit somewhere new. People that are not afraid of temporarily playing with their identity. 'I will keep forever with me a great sense of freedom and positive energy' said Danila da Paoli, a participant of the workshop and staged party *Criaturas Humanas* during the Supernova Festival in Rimini, Italy. Through the frame I give, I plan that these bodies accept diverse possibilities of themselves within a group, with freedom, joy and also denying normality. For me, no one is normal, everyone is special. When the inner body is exhibited no normalness is granted; diverse and perhaps unfamiliar narratives arise over the new and humourous appearances.

During my studies and with the same research as an umbrella, I have tested different theatrical forms and venues that I will explain in detail next. The material produced during the research process of *Human Creatures*, is quite extensive allowing me to explore different performative forms, with the same conceptual intentions and aesthetic decisions. *Fasciarium* (Lat. *fascia*: *Connective Tissue*) is a staged party that has been presented in black boxes, *Anamorphosis* is a performative lecture that works on stage as well as site specific and also practical workshops, installations - exhibitions, short activations and video performances in diverse venues. Through these formats I have been accumulating a variety of human creatures. Each new creature or group of creatures has its particularities, but thanks to homogeneity they all belong to the same archive. They just transform and adapt, like other natural species. In a collaborative process, where I have spread my aesthetic and conceptual intentions, this project has already had the intervention of audiences from Prague, Ljubljana and Rimini.

### **1.1 Fasciarium (Lat. *fascia*: Connective Tissue)**

*Fasciarium*<sup>7</sup> is a staged party of the human body where audiences are invited to amplify or change their bodies if they are not satisfied with them. Inspired by the narrative of a scientific experiment I designed a visual and auditory open laboratory,

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<sup>7</sup> *Fasciarium* (Lat. *Fascia*: *connective tissue*), 2021 [performance trailer] <https://vimeo.com/783369651>

where visitors can participate in different body experiences: being watched, watching, decorating, sharing intimate stories, showing off, laughing, exposing, releasing, dancing and healing. The new identity that people acquire during the performance transfigures them into a more joyful and comical human identity; into “human creatures”. The project merges metaphors of scientific procedures (like clinical incision or anatomical dissection) together with the making of clothes: sewing together, fragmenting, assembling and repeating parts. A combination of aesthetics, pseudo science, somatic practices and humour. Because of the size of *Fasciarium* (about 15 performers), and my interest in collaborating with “amateur”<sup>8</sup> participants, the show is made along with a workshop, that I will explain later, for local people to become designers and performers.

In Borisav Matic (young critic from Serbia) words, *Fasciarium*

Is pure flamboyance where the audience is invited on stage and where a group of ‘human creatures’ is ready to transform their bodies [...] until everyone is invited to party hard together for the last 15 or 20 minutes of the performance when all stigmas disappear and ‘weirdness’ becomes the norm<sup>9</sup>.

During the laboratory people are able to redesign their physical appearance by wearing a variety of textile pieces and ornaments. This body transformation occurs by temporally redistributing their fascia and by digging into humorous and touching stories of the audiences’ bodies. These pieces are distributed all over a deep theatrical space that looks like a “jungle of textiles”, allowing the audience to feel fully immersed in the material at their disposal. I call these pieces “laboratory specimens” and they mimic the function of the “fascia”, which is the thin tissue that surrounds, holds and connects all our internal organs and skin. Many specimens (textiles) displayed together on the body form a costume; a new body that works as a visual tool to create narratives. The specimens start being scenographic elements by creating the jungle of textiles, later when people start to try them on they become

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<sup>8</sup> I go beyond the concept of amateurism when it is considered as cheap, lacking professionalism or de-skilled. But more about works that stand in contrast to a coercitive mastery of quality in the visual arts. For instance, naive art, outsider art or countercultures art like queer theatre (i.e. the performances by My Barbarian art collective <https://www.mybarbarian.com/> )

<sup>9</sup> Matic, B., ‘Highlights from the Mladi Levi Festival in Ljubljana’, (*CtC->CtI*), 2022  
<https://ctc-cti.eu/portfolio-item/borisav-matic-highlights-from-the-mladi-levi-festival-in-ljubljana/>

costumes and at the end, when worn by people, they perform as characters. The textiles are a tool for display and they make the body visible and interesting to look at. The costumes as characters have performative agency to hide, protect, heal, beautify or disfigure, make someone laugh or feel embarrassed.



*Fasciarium* laboratory. Photo by Michael Lozano

But the transformation of the audience's bodies also occurs somatically with the help of interplays with performers who are acting as "experimental researchers", dressed up as human creatures. Through different scripts in one-to-one interactions, the researchers question intimate stories about the bodies of the audience and with these answers they build live, more textile pieces for them to wear or they create new actions to activate the bodies into the fiction of human creatures.

The experimental researchers are distributed around the space in several departments inviting participants to experience different "body steps". These stations are arranged around the laboratory and they can be visited alone, by groups or in couples. Each one has its own set design to offer a different experience to the body position of the audience: people can be standing up, moving, laying down, sitting at the level of a table or sitting lower than the performer. The main motivation for the researchers is to encourage the visitors to feel sexy, joyful, aware and experimental with their own bodies to be happier and more tolerant bodies within a group. The departments are:

1. Skin Observation: Performers are drawing in fabric masks, faces of the participants as in a parody of realistic live painting sessions. My purpose in this part is to highlight whatever physical element that defines the reality of the audience's face (scars, proportions, moles, allergies, facial hair, and so on), pointing out that every characteristic is part of our beauty. The expressive portraits of the illustrator *Wilfrid Wood* is an interesting reference of depicting facial features that would otherwise make someone uncomfortable<sup>10</sup>.
2. Transformation Station: A step to improve or acquire impossible and fun features of the body, like getting closer to the stars, changing the rhythm of breathing, getting a third eye, etc. Performers choose or adapt textile specimens for the audience to wear, finding relations between the fabric and the body's anatomy, visuals or functions. The relations can be haptic (how does it feel to touch the material), optical (by the drawings or patterns that the materials have) or physical (how the material changes the body).
3. Organs Transplant: Performers have conversations with the audience about internal organs that they have in pain, that have been removed or that they wish to change or add. They create new organs that can be worn by the participants with the same approach to material as in Transformation Station.
4. Mirrors: In this station the experience is more active. People can reflect their new appearances by mirroring their movements in front of a performer who is ready to imitate anything from very small movements in a single position to very large and exaggerated actions around the laboratory, depending on how outgoing the participant is.
5. Activation Center: Another physical station, is a place with gym machines (like static bicycles) that the audience can freely use. This station is interesting to watch when the action is done by a person who already has some costume on them.
6. Creatures Archiver: An experimental researcher who is making live drawings of any new human creature being created or of the participants who are just touching the textile specimens. As soon as any material is touched, it is seen as a new extension and limb of the body.
7. Developed Human Creatures: Performers who are moving around the laboratory and interacting with the audience and the space, as if they are fully

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<sup>10</sup> Wood, W., Portfolio [instagram profile] <https://www.instagram.com/wilfridwoodsculptor/>

transformed into human creatures. A role specially for dancers or movement performers.

8. Diagnosis Center: A department to map during one-to-one conversations, body situations and characteristics by recalling stories from the past and actual situations. The facts are tested through reflexes evaluation making the station interesting to watch. This station has had more problems, because of the trust relation that needs to happen between performer and audience. Some topics that I consider interesting to touch on here are: how spiritualism or religions have affected the way we have enjoyed (or not) our bodies and how societies, including beauty standards, relation to social media, gender and race rights have conditioned the way we see our bodies. This department also connects the space by suggesting to people which other department they should visit next.
9. Pulse: A DJ playing live music with synthesisers and also pre-recorded scripts.



Interactions in the departments of the laboratory of *Fasciarium*. Photos by Michael Lozano

The performative textiles along with the audience's stories activate a group dynamic because the participants enjoy being together while watching the appearances of others and imagining their own. Thus this sense of collectivity leads to the final part of *Fasciarium*, which is a cathartic dance activated by the "pulse". In this part the new bodies recognize each other's new body or their new parts through pre-recorded

scripts, scores and music and they exchange weirdness, delusion and empathy through dancing.



Pulse. Photo by Michael Lozano

In contemporary performances the ways of socialising, including party and social encounters, as a concept and format are a usual topic of interest. For example, in the project *The Dancing Public* by Mette Ingvarsten<sup>11</sup> it can be seen an interesting approach on how the party has produced in humans an extreme feeling of ecstasy to the point that it has conditioned scientific researches (like neurological disturbances and the medical invention of hysteria) and spiritual thoughts ('from possession by evil spirits and curses of saints'<sup>12</sup>). Ingvarsten invites the audience to be involved in a staged party while she is narrating frantically historical events on how intense dance causes uncontrollable corporeal gestures and how one body can motivate many bodies to dance in a mass. It is an inspiring reference for the dramaturgy that *Fasciarium* needs at the end to involve the audience with the highest energy.



*Fasciarium* final Carnival. Photos by Nada Žgank

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<sup>11</sup>The Dancing Public [performance trailer], Mette Ingvarsten

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPBLpWad9BY>

<sup>12</sup> Mette Ingvarsten, The Dancing Public [website]

<https://www.metteingvarsten.net/performance/the-dancing-public/>

In *Fasciarium* the audience is participant as well as spectator. However, the audience is never passive, everyone is included in the performance. Either because they are actively participating in the departments, wearing garments on their own or they are being sketched by the “creatures archiver”. In the performance, there is space to have intimate reflections and emotional experiences on the participants' own bodies on an individual level as well as collectively. The number of participants during the experience is therefore a determining factor; the more participants the more variety of human creatures' presences will appear. Moreover, the results are different each time the performance happens.

## 1.2 Anamorphosis



*Anamorphosis*. Photo by Michael Lozano

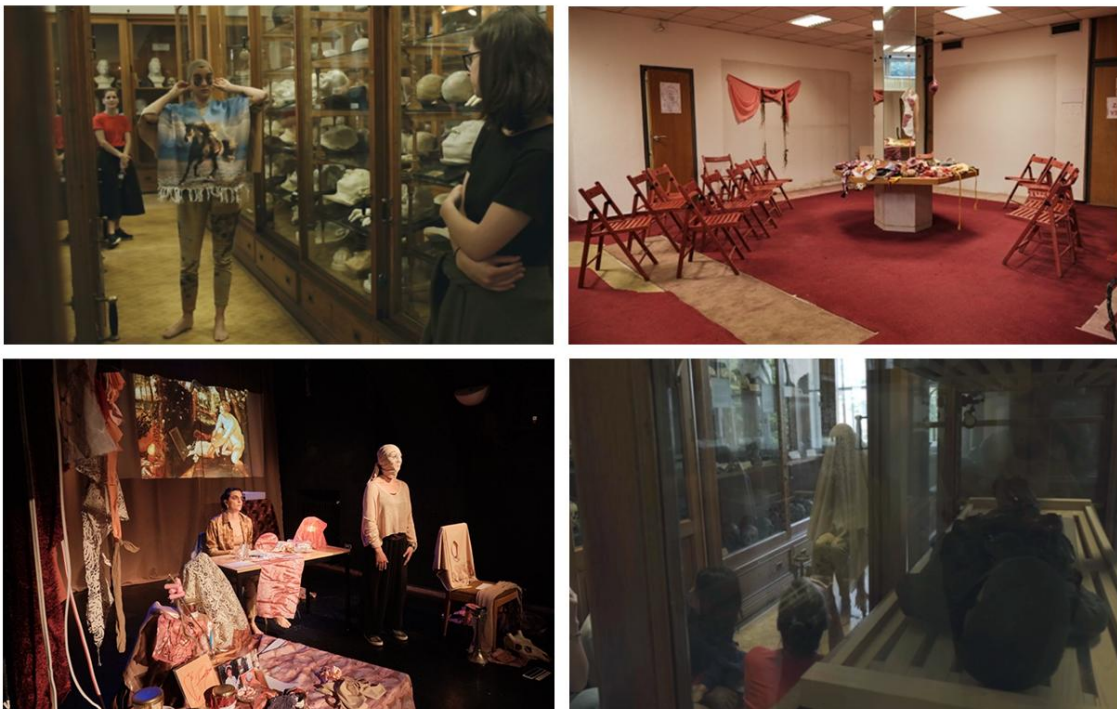
*Anamorphosis*<sup>13</sup> is a performative lecture in which I expose an intimate journey about my body and appearance. By revealing a fragmented archive of a personal diary in a monologue, I open up my female body to reflect on wider social themes that condition human bodies: digital narcissism, sexism, stereotypes of beauty, religious oppression, violence, sexual education and body culture. Through a reading of this diary, interaction with objects and short physical transformations, I expose topics that have been sensitive to the way I see my body. Some of the topics are more scientific or historical facts and some others are personal anecdotes, but all of them are seen and expressed through my subjectivity: the way I have reflected myself in the mirror.

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<sup>13</sup> *Anamorphosis*, 2022 [performance trailer] <https://vimeo.com/783405528>

By these means, the performance questions the complex essence of humanity, biological and social.

The performance has been presented in large and short versions, and it works in theatre stages as well as site-specific like museums of anatomy or places of grooming and dolling yourself up, like bathrooms or dressing rooms. In any of the cases, the closer the audience is to my presence the better.



*Anamorphosis* in different venues. Hrdličko Museum of Man  
Faculty of Science, Charles University / ERPET (abandoned sports) Centrum / Studio Řetízek-DISK.  
Photos by Michael Lozano

The large version starts with the audience entering a space that resembles a clothing shop or a wardrobe of costumes with mirrors, “homey” lamps, clothing rags, hangers and boxes; while jazz music livens up the transformation moment. Some performers encourage people to dress up by attending the audience in the cloakroom, by cheering up the changing through a microphone or by walking around them as developed human creatures.





Wardrobe. Photos by Michael Lozano

The audience, dressed up as human creatures, enters a space that feels like a private dressing room of a woman, and it is where I perform the monologue. In the short version, the performance starts directly at this space. The main set consists of a table, a couple of chairs and video projection. The scenography is made up of several objects from cosmetics and beauty products mixed with designed textiles, designed objects, fragments of text, mood boards, photos of me in different stages of my life and strange objects I have found, that remind me of human organs or living beings body parts (like chicken skin, a skull of an animal, dog food). All of them are arranged as still live paintings, and produce different ideas about my body by being related in an apparently random way. Certainly, I have curated the way they are organised in relation to personal associations I have with the text and to the transformation possibilities that they give me to change my appearance when wearing them from one image to another.





Objects used during the lecture. Photo by Michael Lozano

The lecture is an exploration of my body as a medium that has facilitated me the shifting of relationship with my body, producing different identities of myself. Through exposing painful extreme vanity, intimacy, sexuality, eroticism and beauty, I realise that my body is a medium with constant traces of fragility and pure joy. While writing the script for *Anamorphosis*, I watched the solo performance *Ballad* by the choreographer and dancer *Lenio Kaklea*<sup>14</sup>. It is another example of how a woman self-reflects in a mirror and in her own body context. Through a monologue of movement and text, she shows us how she is emancipating from what the dance practices, patriarchy and beauty practices -like the gym- have imposed on her body. Another performance I encounter during the process was *MDLSX* by *Motus*<sup>15</sup> based on the homonymous novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*. The show is also a monologue about a person who is trying to understand and confront their identity through a fragmented story in different stages of life. The dramaturgy confuses between the fictional and autobiographical. Mixing objects that become costumes, fragments of text, body presence and a playlist of songs, the story is emotionally and powerfully performed by Silvia Calderoni.

The main motivation I had for this performance was to dig deeply into my own personal body stories and my transitions from my conservative school until now, to generate empathetic relations with other people's bodies journeys. The exercise of self exploration and self judgement was therapeutic, facing difficulties in accepting to

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<sup>14</sup> *Ballad* [performance trailer], Lenio Kaklea, <https://youtu.be/-c-gYxVq3BA>

<sup>15</sup> *MDLSX* [performance trailer], Motus, <https://vimeo.com/147019538>

talk about beauty in times of complicated and violent political events and in an environment where thinking about beauty is considered not intellectual enough. However, the opening process was highly powerful in empowerment as a woman, director and performer.

### 1.3 Other formats

#### 1.3.1 Laboratory of Human Creatures. The Workshop

‘We creatures are ready to show ourselves in public and dance after three days of total creative madness in which we investigated being/having a body among fabrics, brushes, brushes, elastics, sponges, latex gloves, etc’<sup>16</sup>.

I have tested different forms of workshops, to explore the reactions, approaches and results that people with different backgrounds have of *Human Creatures*. The workshop designed for *Fasciarium* is for local people who are interested in learning to produce the costumes and to become performers for the departments of the show. The ideal is to mix artists and performers with amateur people, in order to have a group of people working in assemblage. It is interesting that not always the performers are skilled with manual crafts or the visual artists are shy to perform, but the workshop allows space to experiment new places and release. The designing part of the workshop becomes a sort of mechanical process once the context of *Human Creatures* is understood, as we need to produce as many as possible pieces to fill the space of the laboratory. I noticed that when the costumes are ready to be worn, the transformation power starts to appear: people feel hidden so they feel free and start to explore their new body possibilities on their own. The performing part takes a bit more time, as it is necessary to train improvisation with the audience, to keep the answers in the conceptual frame of *Fasciarium*.

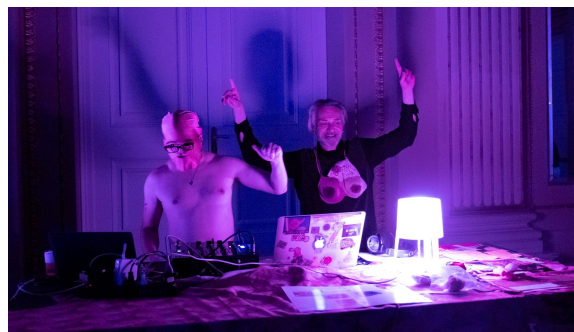
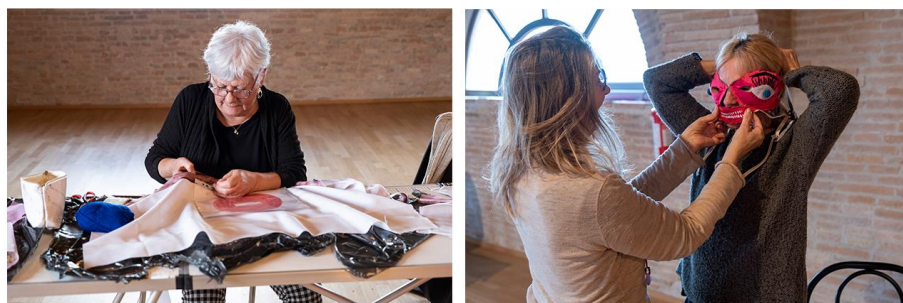
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<sup>16</sup> Danila De Paoli, participant of ‘Criaturas Humanas’ workshop during Supernova Festival in Rimini, Italy [Translation of a message] 2023. Original: “Noi creature siamo pronte a mostrarci in pubblico ed a bailar dopo 3 giorni di totale follia creativa in cui abbiamo investigato l'essere/avere corpo tra tessuti, pennelli, imbottiture, elastici, spugne, guanti in lattice etc.”



Workshop in Ljubljana, to produce pieces for *Fasciarium*.

For the reason that I saw people having fun trying the costumes they just made, I also developed a version of the workshop that works as a performative format on its own, like the one presented in the festival Supernova in Rimini. It consists of three days of practical work of assembling textile pieces and one final day of a party in which the visitors can wear the costumes produced by the participants and become part of the fiction of *Human Creatures*. This format was aimed at people of any age and profile who were willing to be aware of their bodies and that were interested in learning textile practices like dying, drawing, embroidering, patchwork, sewing. In Rimini, the majority of the group were women between their 60 and 80 years old. The workshop focuses on having inner dialogues with intimate diaries that have conditioned the way we look and the way we feel towards our bodies.



Designing process and staged party during workshop in Rimini. Photo by Ilaria Depari

With the narratives obtained in this process, the participants design and produce costumes to achieve body transformations that are able to be experienced during the workshop and the party. During these days we travel between the symbolic of dressing to be undressed (because we are drawing naked bodies) and the dressing to open up (showing oneself from the inside anatomy and emotions). During the party we arrange the pieces in clothing racks as in a wardrobe, marking them like specimens with names assigned by the participants such as “Happy liver” “Infinite joy” “Beautiful ass” “Tender heart” “Human oil squeeze” “Dancing mask” and other names that the dynamic of the workshop makes them express about desires and stories of their bodies. We also exhibit some parts of the process (like notes, poems and sketches), read some manifests that are built collectively during the workshop about the body and we all together host the party by dancing and encouraging people to dress up.

Mi piace il corpo perché non sappiamo da dove vengano la carne e le ossa

Mi piace il corpo perché ci fa dimenticare che siamo mortali

Mi piace il corpo perché ci ospita

Mi piace il corpo perché non e' nostro veramente

Fragment of the manifest '*I like the body because...*' during the workshop in Rimini.

### 1.3.2 Short Activation

A format that also works interestingly is to extract one department from *Fasciarium* and develop it as a whole in a short activation. During Prague Quadriennial 2023 I set up a station during the national day event of the Colombian Pavilion. With a table, two chairs, acrylics and fabric masks I was performing the department of skin observation to visitors who came to have one to one experience and get live portraits. They could choose the kind of skin they wanted from a selection of different colour and pattern skins I cut in advance. During this experience I noticed that it is not always easy to highlight special features of the face of some, because I feel I can break borders of aggression by interpreting, but that if a safe, respectful and fun space is set out -and also if people understand in some level the context of *Human Creatures*- the experience happens with success.



*Skin observation* during the Colombian event *Pragatá Fest*, PQ2023. Photo by Santiago Iregui.

### 1.3.3 Video Performance

In the frame of the same research, I also did a video performance, called *Frankenstein Bodies, An Introduction to Human Creatures*<sup>17</sup>. In the video a man is collecting pieces of fabric that are laying around plants of a moorland in Colombia. The fabrics are in colours that remind skin, and some of them have hand paintings of body parts (face, chest, pelvis and feet) making them look like abstractions of pieces of body that have been removed from a human body. He is using them to dress up another man who is standing still, with crossed arms, staring at the landscape. After the second man is all covered with the costumes, his body is activated very slowly giving life to a new human creature.



Still from video performance *Frankenstein Bodies, An Introduction to Human Creatures*

<sup>17</sup> *Frankenstein Bodies, An Introduction to Human Creatures*, 2019 [video performance]  
<https://vimeo.com/476384536>

Another video performance is *Anamorphosis' Journeys*<sup>18</sup> which I am using as the final scene of the lecture *Anamorphosis*, and also I have presented it on its own, like in the online exhibition *Carnaval Digital 2022*. This video was the outcome of a short workshop I did at DAMU for bachelor actors and with students from MA DOT who had been devising the content of human creatures with me.



Still from video performance *Anamorphosis' Journeys*

I consider the process of directing a video to be smoother. By collaborating with other artists (in sound design, edition, videography, script or storyboard), the aesthetic and narrative scenario is understood quite fast. I tell the team my idea, give them basic instructions and then I stand outside of the scene, behind the camera. Moreover, the format of the video is easier for me because of the editing process. I can cut the actions that are too slow and with not much information and also add some inserts of details from the costumes or the wearers. This brings unexpected and interesting relations to the narrative line, that I am not able to see in the live scene. Further, it makes me think about how each medium has its particularity, changing the perception of what and how the story is told. On video, the human creatures are more aestheticized and in live performances they have an emotional layer so more conceptual and sensory frame is needed for them to be understood. The temporality of experiencing live transformation of oneself or of someone else's, with the sounds of breathing, with the smell of the sweat, with non-edited actions and reactions, with the authentic human presence, gives certain layers of uncomfotability or empathy that not always is felt through a screen mediating.

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<sup>18</sup> *Anamorphosis' Journeys*, 2022 [video performance] <https://vimeo.com/801629517>

### 1.3.4 Exhibition

Due to the large amount of visual material produced, *Human Creatures* has the adaptability to become an Installation. It features parts of the study that has been made to create the creatures through collages of fragments of the process which includes: sketchbooks, moodboards, specimens, textiles samples, objects of beauty, photographs in relation to mine and other bodies' subjectivities and anatomy.



ARTakaway exhibition in Můstek Prague metro station, 2022

### 1.4 Insights of Performing Human Creatures

Having related research to produce different formats is quite helpful. It saves time for research grants or applications and allows to develop the same topic from different perspectives. There is a project called *Climatic Dances* by the visual artist and dancer *Amanda Piña*<sup>19</sup>, which is the fifth part of the long-term project *Endangered Human Movements*. The research is about human extraction of natural resources, ancestral dances, and the human body as part of nature bodies (sea, mountain, glacier, river, etc.). Through it, Amanda and her collective *Nadaproductions* explore several performative formats such as dance performance, video performance, workshop and exhibition.

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<sup>19</sup> *Climatic Dances* [performance trailer], Amanda Piña, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjAuHpgyhM0> and *Divina Presencia, EHM. Vol 5* [exhibition documentation], Amanda Piña, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CfRjRH4DZRQ/>



However, despite the versatility of the exploration of Human Creatures, the scopes have been sometimes confusing while applying to residencies, open calls or festivals. Because of its multiple possibilities, I am still in the process of making clear what are the reachable results in terms of formats. Producers often prefer closed technical riders and descriptions, to determine viability especially in terms of budgets. Presenting them as a big research has been overwhelming and too ambitious for some and even sometimes for me. However this project does have an interesting potential that allows me to adapt to different performative formats depending on the event or the country, and I need to make it clearer.

As I stated, I have had the opportunity to present different combinations of formats in three countries already. In Prague I have mostly presented to audiences that come from theatre or arts fields. They have usually been more experimental and receptive people who are not ashamed of participating, changing appearance or listening to others' intimate stories. The ones interested have mostly been people that I call "bodies in transition", which in my opinion are bodies that are open to queerness (for instance, young people who are defining their sexuality or thinking of alternative body cultures), bodies that are not shy in their body exploration (like dancers or actors), bodies that are open minded in re-thinking their body *status quo*, bodies that are willing to find new temporal and enjoyable versions of themselves. I think that perhaps because of those infinite borders of corporal exploration, for some people, the first versions of the project -especially of *Fasciarium* (*Lat. fascia: Connective Tissue*)-, were limited in dramaturgy, there was a lack of depth in the scripts or they wanted more extreme body transformation (some -dancers- wanted that the costumes provided more restrictions or exaggeration to their body parts). Adéla Gajdošová<sup>20</sup>, a participant of *Fasciarium* said in a questionnaire I made to some audience members after the premier: 'in the end I was little bit bored, because I didn't know what to do after I went to every station...but I felt like something is going to happen more and I don't want to miss it'. These kinds of opinions made me think that the costumes were definitely contributing to create a new narrative, but that the performers' interventions and the general dramaturgy needed to be more linked in order for the costumes to have more agency. I wanted to keep the costumes in the same quality and not go to extreme transformation of completely hiding the body of

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<sup>20</sup> Feedback from Adéla Gajdošová participating in *Fasciarium*'s premier in DISK, through the questionnaire I did called *Body Narratives Through Costumes*

the wearers. It was important to keep the idea that the costumes were a mechanism to amplify different versions of the audience's real bodies.

In Ljubljana the version presented was longer and more ambitious in size. I opened *Fasciarium* with the lecture *Anamorphosis* as an introduction. Because it was in the frame of *Mladi Levi* theatre festival, the profile of the audience were people who are used to seeing traditional and contemporary performances. Some people joined the transition very fast. Boris Matić, said in a review about social engaged performances:

the performance that deserves a special mention – and is socially engaged in a more personal way since it deals with the question of body shaming – It starts as a lecture performance by the artist herself about people's insecurities about their bodies and the conservative society that fuels those issues but ends in a beautifully chaotic party where both the audience and the performers are dressed up in “weird” costumes, overcoming their anxieties by dancing and embracing the strange<sup>21</sup>.

However, a big part of the audience needed a lot more impulses or concepts to belong deeply to the community. Nika Šoštarič, another critic, said that ‘While the second part of the performance is lively, active and alive, the first part - the monographic reflection - lacks dynamism’<sup>22</sup>. For her the stage was too big and quite wasted with my presence. The same for some objects that I displayed around me and didn't use. She added, ‘the missed in the utilisation of other mise-en-scène elements, (not addressing the issues of illusion or fantasy that textiles make possible), did not invite very much the viewer to fully become part of the theatrical experiment of the second part’<sup>23</sup> and become a human creature. Curiously, Some audiences of Ljubljana came to Prague for the showcase of the final projects of MA DOT in 2022, where I presented the long version of *Anamorphosis*. At the end of the show, a group of Slovenians told me that different from the last show, this time they were fully ready to become part of the community and the party. I noticed that this time they had transformed their appearance with more joy during the wardrobe and

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<sup>21</sup> B.Matić, ‘Highlights from the Mladi Levi Festival in Ljubljana’, (*CtC->CtI*), 2022

<https://ctc-cti.eu/portfolio-item/borisav-matic-highlights-from-the-mladi-levi-festival-in-ljubljana/>

<sup>22</sup> Translated from: Šoštarič, N., ‘Laboratorij druge kože’, *Aplavz! Spletni medij Bunkerja in Stare mestne elektrarne*, Slovenia, 29-08-2022

<https://www.aplavz.art/post/laboratorij-druge-ko%25C5%25BEe>

<sup>23</sup> Translated from: Šoštarič, ‘Laboratorij druge kože’

<https://www.aplavz.art/post/laboratorij-druge-ko%25C5%25BEe>

also listening to my stories with the costumes worn gave them the power to acquire a new identity that was less committed to me as a normal human.

This made me think that for *Fasciarium* to work better, it is definitely a good idea to present corporeal stories of other human creatures (like parts of my diary from *Anamorphosis*), because the audience needs to enter the space with much more context for immersion -believing in the narrative and atmosphere- and participation -sharing with confidence their own body stories to performers-. But this presentation of others' or my stories has to be perhaps shorter and more dynamic in rhythm and it needs to include the audience more, like in the showcase where everyone was dressed as creatures while listening to the lecture.

In Rimini on the other hand, I presented a format aimed for adult and elderly people who didn't work in the arts or theatre fields but were curious in exploring the stories of their bodies and learn or do some textile practices. As it was in a frame of the performance festival Supernova, I faced an audience who was fully interested in experimenting with materials, techniques, concepts, shapes in a very honest and joyful way. The people involved got into the fiction of becoming a human creature very fast and the day of the party they were all committed to hosting it, performing, dancing and releasing with a lot of joy. 'Thank you for helping me bring out my hidden talents! Thank you body, thank you creatures!'<sup>24</sup> said Lorella Francesconi, a resident from Rimini who had never performed in front of an audience and who was one of the four women who read the manifests and texts we created collectively. The group was also from the beginning producing flowery and colourful human creatures which made me also prove that each place has its own aesthetic in the community of creatures created, even though there is always the lineament of basic colours and style.

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<sup>24</sup> Lorella Francesconi [Translation of a message] 2023, original: 'grazie per avermi aiutato a tirare fuori i miei talenti nascosti!'



Rimini, Italian *Human Creatures*. Photo by Ilaria Depari

Now, I am looking forward to exploring the research in Colombia, where there is a high conservative culture around the body. The paediatrician and researcher of indigenous and western medicine and sexuality from Colombia, Dr. Hugo Sotomayor Tribín, relates the pains of the current country to imposition of corporeal and sexual practices during the conquest, principally by christianism. This context interests me to see how the costumes would trigger new attitudes against our repressed bodies, how my body stories in *Anamorphosis* would create empathy, and how people would face *Fasciarium* as a participatory performance that demands more interaction from the audiences than the conventional theatre colombians are used to attending. For the moment, the next step for *Human Creatures* is to develop -through a grant awarded by the Colombian Ministry of Culture-, an experimental audiovisual 15 minute piece called *Dance: Flesh and Bone*<sup>25</sup>. It will be an investigation about amateur dances in vulnerable communities in Colombia (such as cumbia dancers in jails, migrant strippers or dance therapies in nursing homes) through creating dialogues between their bodies, the costumes of human creatures and dance as a new transformative force. The intention in order to make the short film poetic and experimental is to interview the dancers through somatic and performative scores.

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<sup>25</sup> Original title in Spanish is *Baile: Carne y hueso*

## 2. Conceptual Inspiration

In this chapter I will present the theory and topics that have inspired me in different moments of my artistic career and that I have used as tools to create narratives of body transformation and produce theatrical formats during the master. Focusing always on body and clothing -costumes in theatre- these topics help me to enquire into strategies and ideas to give political and performative agency to the visual language of the elements in the set ups I make. I will now explain how western science and our cultural perception of the biological body interferes with the way we continuously redesign our bodies in order to be part of a community. This analysis is the “conceptual bed” when I was blocked in ideas, when something was not being clear or when I was going to start a new process of designing costumes that would affect bodies somatically for temporal transformation.

### 2.1 Body in Science



Lise Sarfati, *Russia in the 90's*

A hospital room with foggy windows. A greenish light colours the white tiles on the walls. A body is laying on a bed with arms wide open. A bluish green blanket is covering only its lower part which is completely inactive. We can only see its upper part which is a reddish torso that is waiting to be operated on. The body is there, surrendered to the work of two people that wear white doctor's uniforms. Next to the

bed, on the floor, a piece of what looks like a quite big disembodied fragment of skin. I find the photo by the photographer Lise Sarfati, from her serie *Russia in the 90's*, interesting when removing the human context from the present bodies. In my fantasy I first try to see the body as mere material in order to remove any corporeal convention imposed by a culture. I see the body as raw material for designing and devising, I try to work with it as an object and not as a person.

Perhaps that is why I am also so fascinated in how science studies the body, where parts of bodies are manipulated as working equipment. According to the writer William A. Ewing 'the body is being rethought and reconsidered by artists and writers because it is being restructured and reconstituted by scientists and engineers'.<sup>26</sup> In western medicine for instance, bodies are treated as objects; parts of the body are qualified as units, organs are categorised by names and functions, diseases are treated with pragmatism. Further, as Ewing states, we are in an era when parts of the body can be easily detached from one body and plugged into another and even certain machines can replace organs' functions. A big part of emotions, stories, values, desires and language are -apparently- removed in western medicine to be able to test and give conclusions and hypotheses on scientific investigations. Patients are tools of work and corpses are raw material. Although doctors take into account the psychic of the patients to give assessment, they don't know personally the subject; they deal with, learn and try to repair the object.

However, something that I find questionable and at the same time interesting is how the History of the human specie has been written through medicine studies and scientific research. Medicine has justified social perceptions, imposing in culture types of healthy bodies or good bodies. We can find museums like the *Museo di Antropologia Criminale Cesare Lombroso* in Torino, Italy<sup>27</sup> which is a journey through a collection of research material like anatomical specimens, drawings, photographs, written documents, etc of the scientist Lombroso whose main study was to determine through physiognomic features, which people had a tendency to criminality. Terribly, his analysis was frequently pointing out disabled people, people with psychiatric

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<sup>26</sup> A. Ewing William, *The body: Photoworks of the Human Form*, London, 1994, pp 9-10 cited in Warwick, A. and Cavallaro, D., *Fashioning the Frame. Boundaries, Dress and the Body*, Oxford, Berg, 1998, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Museo di Antropologia Criminale Cesare Lombroso, Università di Torino [website] <https://www.museolombroso.unito.it/en/>

conditions, people who weren't white people or people with tattoos. Despite this type of investigations, along with other common comparative exams like phrenology that were considered as “non-scientific” science, the reports that these scientists and doctors made, influenced the western science that we know nowadays.

Phrenologists believe people are already born possessing character and abilities. And not only that – they believe that you can say what character and abilities a human poses by certain lines, dimples or protuberances on the human head or skull. Do you think they would say you are fun, talented in science or would they jail you just in case because you have signs of a typical criminal? <sup>28</sup>

Although these methods and conclusions about bodies are obsolete, absurd and even ridiculous these days, they also fed the understanding of us as a social specie. Medicine has tried to identify how humans are different from other species but also the variability in between humans; diagnosing who are the most intelligent, beautiful or stronger. This has generated or justified racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination and many other violent attitudes that we are still having towards bodies.



The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp by Rembrandt<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hrdličko Museum of Man, Faculty of Science, Charles University [website]

<http://muzeumcloveka.cz/cs/>

<sup>29</sup> Rembrandt van Rijn, The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp, 1632, Mauritshuis, The Hague [picture]<https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/artworks/146-the-anatomy-lesson-of-dr-nicolaes-tulp/>

Since the great anatomists appeared during Renaissance (Leonardo da Vinci, Berengario da Carpi, Andrea Casalpino, Andrea Vesalius, and Girolamo Fabrici) the 'vision was identified [...]; it challenged the body's presumed holiness, setting out to make visible what is invisible by meticulously investigating the construction and the functioning of the works'<sup>30</sup>. Being able to see (and not only interpreting) the inside of our bodies started to tell us a lot about the outside.

Prayer to the Unknown Corpse: When cutting with the rigid blade of your scalpel on the unknown corpse, you must remember that this body, born from the love of two souls, grew packed by faith and by the hope included in the bosom of his family. He smiled and dreamed the same dreams of children and young people, surely he loved and was loved; he rested and saw happy mornings, and felt nostalgic for those who left. Now he is on the cold black plate, without at least one tear being shed for him, without having a single prayer for him. His name, only God knows, but inexorable destiny gave him the power and greatness to serve humanity, humanity that passed through him indifferent <sup>31</sup>

For me, science studies are as refutable and controversial as inspiring for building narratives. I realise that it is never possible to completely separate the body from the subject. Bodies have more than a physical reality, they have names and meanings within a society -no matter how "unknown" they are-, they are signified by the surrounding, the symbols, the context and curiously by clothing. 'It is dress that has time and has been assigned the responsibility of transforming the incomplete body (referring to the naked body) into a complete cultural package' <sup>32</sup>. However, I believe that the naked body is the first element that is signified by culture (religion, laws, beliefs) and determines how people relate within societies. 'Everything communicates, but communication emerges from cultural constructions, not from the objects themselves'<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, in my research the body is in a liminal state

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<sup>30</sup> T. Maldonado, 'The Body: Artificialization and Transparency' in Fortunati, L., Katz, J. and Riccini, R. (eds.), *Mediating the Human Body. Technology, Communication and Fashion*. Mahwah, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003, p.16.

<sup>31</sup> Translation of verses from the *Prayer to the Unknown Corpse* by Austrian pathologist Karl Von Rokitansky, 1876. Text recovered and translated from Universidad de Los Andes, 'La Ciencia del Cuerpo', Colombia, 2018 <https://uniandes.edu.co/es/noticias/salud-y-medicina/la-ciencia-del-cuerpo>

<sup>32</sup> A. Warwick and D.Cavallaro,, *Fashioning the Frame. Boundaries, Dress and the Body*, Oxford, Berg, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> J. Frascara, 'The Third Skin: Wearing the Car, Ignoring Safety.' in Fortunati, L., Katz, J. and Riccini, R. (eds.), *Mediating the Human Body. Technology, Communication and Fashion*. Mahwah, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003, pp 198.



between cultural meanings and objectual interpretations that are offered to the audience for them to transform and transit.

## 2.2 Social Body

I reflect on the politics and the aesthetics of the body to produce emotions through a synergy between the biological body, the person in society and the costumes as artefacts of identity. Through my job as trend analyst for the fashion industry, I notice the social difference that exists because of clothing. There have been imposed power relations starting with the appearance and the way how the body is adorned to be presented in public. The biological body that is studied by science (the physical that is tangible, the matter, what is inside, the guts, fluids, organs, volumes, the amount of parts that we have or that we don't have) acquires social meanings when it is dressed (or undressed) and exhibited. 'The body has two facts that must be considered: first, the reality of the body as an objective fact, that is, we would say today, that made up of cells, organs, apparatuses, and systems; second, the body as a field of symbolism typical of each society'<sup>34</sup> Human anatomy exists ontologically in each being, but the biological body becomes cultural when comparisons are made between the physical appearances of people. Clothing is a medium for this distinction because it can provoke a rethinking of the physical appearance therefore a new social presentation of the body.

In different levels of involvement, we are all wrapped up in contemporary disciplines of having good, strong, intelligent, healthy or beautiful bodies. The modern rage is to practise different body practices to improve the biological body. They can be temporary or permanent procedures like dieting, going to gyms, anal bleaching, vanity sizing, contouring makeup, cosmetic surgery, personal care products, consumption of vitamins, having the latest trends in our wardrobes and much more. 'The contradictions of capitalism and consumer culture -their simultaneous celebration of the myth of autonomous selfhood and promotion of reification- are reflected by the contradictory body images that surround us all times'<sup>35</sup>. We are

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<sup>34</sup> Translated from H. Sotomayor Tribin, *Corporeidad y Sexualidad. De Índigenas y esclavos negros en la Colombia antigua*, Bogotá, Colombia, Fundación Universitaria de Ciencias de la Salud, 2022. p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> A. Warwick and D.Cavallaro,, *Fashioning the Frame. Boundaries, Dress and the Body*, Oxford, Berg, 1998, p.14

scared of ageing, that our body atrophies, that we don't fit in a group because of the way we look like, we see around actors who don't want to look fat on stage even if they are representing someone or something else, people who dress up fully in black to look smarter or more professional, events with quite strict dress codes, people who envy other people because they are more beautiful, strong or healthy, people who are trying to achieve an unaffordable idealised glamour. John Berger claims 'glamour is for everybody who believes they can be glamorous. Or perhaps more accurately, for everybody who finds that they cannot afford not to be glamorous'<sup>36</sup>. In contrast we also can see people who don't publicly show hints of beauty (like makeup or nails) in order to be taken seriously, people who are not happy with the appearance with which they were born. The transgender youtuber Natalie Winn who has gone through different feminization surgeries says in her video essay *Beauty*:

Why would I spend so much time and money and go through so much anxiety and pain just to change a few millimetres of bone? Isn't all this just extravagant vanity? Some narcissistic symptom of phones but too much? [...] Usually trans people say that surgeries like facial feminization, top surgery, genital reassignment, and so on serve the sole purpose of alleviating gender dysphoria, this discomfort that we feel with the mismatch between our bodies and our gender identity. So what I am supposed to say is that my surgery was a medically necessary reconstructive procedure needed to make my testosterone-weathered facial bones match the 5'2" happy baby bouncing biogirl I truly am inside [...] and there is definitely a truth to that. But hypothetically speaking, I think the reality might not be quite so simple. How sharp is the line separating gender dysphoria from the other kinds of body image dysphoria that drive cisgender people to get cosmetic surgery all the time?<sup>37</sup>

These body practices are painful and insatiable for self-esteem. Capitalist societies are bombing us, persuading us to maintain an unattainable body image but at the same time judge us if we undergo any improvement. The need of wanting to change, of transiting is more complex than it appears because in each case there are different intimate reasons. In my opinion, they at the same time give the possibility to mould and reconsider our own identity in new interesting arenas. I find the rethinking of our bodies profoundly inspiring because it helps us to see the world from different

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<sup>36</sup> 'Fine Arts and Commerce: Women and Art', Episode 4, *Ways of Seeing* [online video], John Berger. 1972, <https://youtu.be/5jTUebm73lY>

<sup>37</sup> 'Beauty', *Contrapoints* [video essay], Natalie Winn, 2019 <https://youtu.be/n9mspMJTNEY>

perspectives than the actual ones that are not working (either in personal or collective spheres). Whichever relation we have with our body, it is a real entity and, as the biologist and queer theorist Brigitte Baptiste exposes in her lectures, it reminds us that it is the physical matter that we have to live the world we live in<sup>38</sup>. However, just as I consider that the corporeal matter that we have is real, I do not believe that it is forever fixed in one state. I find it inspiring how Dr. Sotomayor makes a relation of the concept of transition with indigenous corporeal rites that are based on their belief and cosmologies

The rites of passage or transition rituals are those that occur when people cross certain dividing lines in space, time, or social position: birth, assignment of a first name and a second name, pubertal stages to become adult<sup>39</sup>.

That is why I am interested in “bodies in transition” and also in clothing or costumes as tools to temporarily transform appearance. I consider identity transformations valid for the development of the social human specie. Baptiste adds that ‘diversity is the way in which life expresses itself in a given environment. It’s the exploration of different ways of existing’<sup>40</sup> and she also claims ‘the world was created for us to be different and for us to find our way in this field of opportunity’<sup>41</sup>. In this context, queer and transbiology theorists (like Donna Haraway) have had a refreshing approach to understand human existence as a social species that has the capacity to adapt to the diverse, changeable and complex environment that surrounds us. Their analysis is from a more liberal, futuristic and impartial gaze, unlike the moralists conclusions that some science researches or fashion trends have given when studying socialisation in nature and human beings. For instance, we can see many documentaries about animals, humanising them in conservative behaviours. In the book *The Queer art of Failure* by Jack Habelstarm, the author presents examples of how some animals -for example penguins and albatrosses- have been studied (or at least presented to the public) from traditional and retrograde models of family, of mating, of taking care of their eggs, of having conservative roles in their communities.

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<sup>38</sup> *Nada más queer que la naturaleza* [online video], Brigitte Baptiste, TEDxRiodelaPlata, 2018, <https://youtu.be/zJC1fsaCbnI>

<sup>39</sup> Translated from H. Sotomayor Tribín, *Corporeidad y Sexualidad. De Índigenas y esclavos negros en la Colombia antigua*, Bogotá, Colombia, Fundación Universitaria de Ciencias de la Salud, 2022, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Baptiste, <https://youtu.be/zJC1fsaCbnI>

<sup>41</sup> Baptiste, <https://youtu.be/zJC1fsaCbnI>

Some scientific and cosmetic practices have in a way indoctrinated unfair and biased ways of defining who we are, how we should look like and how we should behave in society. I am open to think that we can be biologically and socially whatever we want whenever we want and theatre has been a great tool to trigger this. I like to imagine body dialogues that are much more queer, transformations that are more daring and in tune with our environment, for example with nature. Bodies that connect and reconnect without fear of forming new social bodies.

### **2.3 The Mirror: To Look at Oneself and Being Look at**

We humans have reflected ourselves since the beginning of our existence, either because of unexpected reflection on water for example, or because of a natural need for titivation. Before we leave home or we are going to an important meeting/event, we check if our body is in position. We have different ways and reasons for seeing ourselves in a mirror. To reflect oneself in a mirror is to be conscious about the materiality of our body, to see it as an object.



Pendant mirror that belonged to pre-columbian civilizations, from about 1.000 years ago, found in the private collection of Dr. Hugo Sotomayor Tribín

I have been thinking about what I am watching while I am staring at a mirror. Am I watching my body as a whole material or am I watching a subjective reflection of a detailed image of me?. Once I made an exercise of removing focus with my eyes and after some time I could manage to see my face as a complete mass. Not by parts, not by details. But this is the only way I can see it entirely, otherwise I am watching parts, particularly imperfections; marks, hairs, things out of what I think should be in

other order. The famous quote by Frida Kahlo 'If I could give you one thing in life, I would give you the ability to see yourself through my eyes. Only then would you realise how special you are to me'<sup>42</sup>, makes me feel sorry for myself, and for the ones who judge their own body with such shame. Thus I wanted to design a space that questioned the subjectivities of different looks, where people would be able to approach a variety of ways of seeing themselves and being seen.



*Anamorphosis*. Photo by Michael Lozano

As I said, *Human Creatures* research is about how we see ourselves, how we perceive our own bodies and it certainly has to be also with how people see our original or transformed versions. From *Fasciarium* I started to think about the object of the mirror as a mechanism to see through our skin. In the first tests I realised that the audience had a need to reflect themselves to check how their bodies were changing with the costumes. First, I tried with real mirrors and discovered that this was the department where everyone was gathering. They were having collective interactions and discussions in front of the mirrors. Then I tried removing them and realised that thanks to the theatrical lights, people were finding any reflection in the surfaces of the rooms, like in the windows. These insights brought the idea of still proposing an idea of mirror, but more personal, more interactive. Less about the object and more about the subject. Also I noticed that without any reflection in the

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<sup>42</sup> Translated from *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura* [twitter profile], México, <https://twitter.com/bellasartesinba/status/1041122469921345537?lang=en>

room and because of the set up proposed, there was another layer of watching becoming stronger: voyeurism. It is the curiosity and pleasure of seeing other people being transformed and in a way it mirrors the pleasure of being seen while one is changing. The voyeurs in *Fasciarium* tend to hide by dressing up very fast and sitting in the dark outside the main space delimited by the theatre lights.



Mirror department in *Fasciarium* (Lat. *Fascia*: Connective Tissue). Photo by Michael Lozano

In *Anamorphosis* I am making more of a sarcastic critic about the mirror and its relation to the feminine, the glamour and beauty codes. I love to watch myself in the mirror as much as I hate it. It is an extremely painful vanity.



Reflecting myself in a mirror designed by Katharina Joy Book. Photo by Michael Lozano.

Men dream of women, women dream of themselves being dreamt of. Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at. Women constantly meet glances which act like mirrors reminding them of they look or how they should look. Behind

every glance is a judgement. Sometimes the glance they meet is their own, reflected back from a real man [...] from her earliest childhood she is taught and persuaded to survey herself continually, she has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others -and particularly how she appears to men-, is a crucial importance what is normally thought of as the success of her life<sup>43</sup>

While writing my body diary, I realised that continuously checking myself in the mirror has been as important to recognize my identity, as being watched and interpreted by others, especially by men.



*Anamorphosis*

*Anamorphosis* is a lecture I build inspired by how I reflect subjectively my corporeal stories and appearance in the mirror. During this performance, my transformation was also achieved by breaking those expectations and starting to expose publicly how I honestly watched myself in private in front of a mirror. Even though I created a safe space to open, I use costumes to empower myself and be able to reveal what I am seeing in my own reflection. Daniel L. Collins states in his analysis about the eccentric observer and subjective viewing that 'anamorphosis has the capability of making the familiar seem 'strange''<sup>44</sup>. The perception of my body reflected on an anamorphic surface (in my case used as a metaphor of painful self-revision) changes from a linear image to a distorted and not permanent perspective.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Women and Art', Episode 2, Ways of Seeing [online video], Berger, J. 1972, <https://youtu.be/m1GI8mNU5Sg>

<sup>44</sup> D. Collins, *Anamorphosis and the Eccentric Observer: History, Technique and Current Practice*, The MIT Press, Source: Leonardo, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1992, p.179 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1575710>



*Anamorphosis rehearsal*

The Colombian philosopher David Zuluaga Martínez states that Hegel proposes that 'a human being can not make up a notion of himself and be himself who validates this notion'<sup>45</sup> and he gives the example of someone who thinks that he is a painter, especially a good painter. He can convince himself that he is a painter, but it is not enough that he confirms that he is a painter and principally a good painter. He continues: 'to confirm the validity of the notions each has of their own, It is necessary another person, other conscience'<sup>46</sup>. The assumption is strong though, mostly if I am inviting to have freedom to be whatever we want. But it is interesting to think that in the same way that we create positive notions of ourselves, we also create negative ones, convincing ourselves that we are ugly, sick, weak, deformed people, and if we are aware that this thought is a subjective creation of ourselves, we can free ourselves from our own reflection and judgement to love ourselves a little more.

As an exercise for rehearsals I proposed to draw live portraits between couples, making the role of a mirror. The two people had to face each other, trying to draw every part of the body of the other. This required a capacity to see the other as an object and not as a subject in order to be highly concentrated in the details. The exercise tended to be fun, because none of us is highly skilled in hyperrealism paintings, so the interpretations we were making of the other were humorous. The line of these amateur drawings were part of the inspiration for the aesthetic of the textiles and I will talk about it after. Yet in one of the tryouts I faced a challenging

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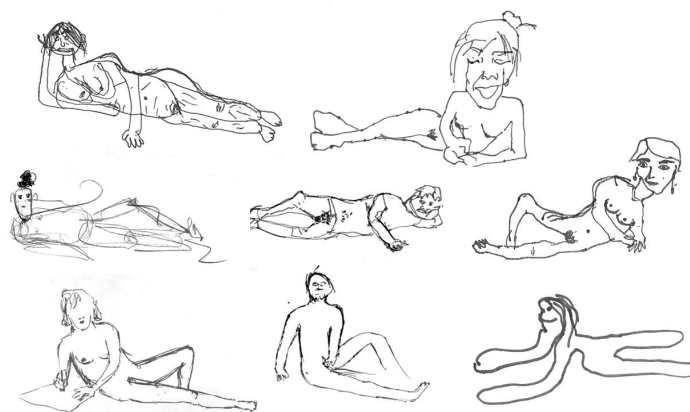
<sup>45</sup> Translated from: 'El feminismo de Simone de Beauvoir', *Urbi et Orbi*, [Podcast], Zuluaga Martínez, D. and Galvis Villegas, O. Interview with Pimiento, M.C, 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3sqVnDeDEXZWTRRDWRmdLC?si=702145feb944948>

<sup>46</sup> 'El feminismo de Simone de Beauvoir', *Urbi et Orbi*, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3sqVnDeDEXZWTRRDWRmdLC?si=702145feb944948>



situation with one participant, who was feeling offended by the action of being watched. The development of the exercise starts by drawing the other in one minute and then the minutes increase, so the watching experience becomes more and more demanding. Until the end, I ask them to imagine and draw the other person naked. A hobby that I have always had is to join live drawing sessions with nude models so I assumed that, in an artistic environment, it could be smooth to try it. Yet, the participant completely left the experience. She didn't want to be in the position of being watched and interpreted by someone who she doesn't trust and she was not comfortable having no control on the interpretation that someone might have on her appearance, especially her naked body.

I did feel (the exercise) got into an invasive or violent territory just because assumptions about what other people look like under their clothes are quite... someone who looks like a woman might have a penis or someone who has a flat chest might have had breasts removed [...] I want to remove myself from that situation because I don't want someone who I don't necessarily trust in that way, to interpret me. I personally find image and visual presentation as a media quite difficult, and I think it can be quite traumatising. Like you know how we are sometimes shocked when we see a photograph of ourselves just because it seems very factual and so the same thing when someone else looks at you and interprets your body and puts it down on paper, it seems like it is factual somehow. When you maybe imagine yourself to be different <sup>47</sup>



Sketches from the live painting exercise during rehearsals of *Fasciarium*

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<sup>47</sup> Message that the participant sent me, while discussing what she felt during the live drawing session. I refrain from giving the name of the participant for respect.

I realised that there are two different layers of interpretation. One is to watch each other's faces and try to be accurate with the real details. In this one I noticed that there is a big difference between noticing your own physical flaws than letting someone else point them out. It is less shocking to watch yourself in the mirror and detail what you don't like, than staring at a mirror that is describing to you what it reflects on. And the other case is when they undressed the other through imagination. There are other kinds of vulnerabilities in the naked body so the second way of interpreting is to a certain point surpassing the limits of the mirror and becoming something else. Now I think it would have been interesting to connect the exercise with the idea of *Human Creatures* made of different body fragments and given the instruction of imagining whatever type of fictional "body under the clothes" the other person could have. For example with less or more parts, a composition of different types of skin, perhaps parts of other species, a mix of genders, or in general a more queer and creative version of the other. The situation made me aware that undressing the other through imagination and interpreting drawings does require a safe and respectful space, or at least people need to know and accept in advance what they are joining.

## 2.4 Fragmented Body

### I do not exist

Here is the ear  
here is the neck  
here is the nape of the neck  
and the shoulder  
this lovely thing here  
is the nipple  
and this here  
flooded with water  
this is the navel <sup>48</sup>

To explain how I developed the costumes that imitate fragmented bodies and how I created the dynamic of redistributing textile parts to produce different possibilities of transformation as human creatures, I need to first explain the holistic complexity of

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<sup>48</sup> Extract of a poem. L. Rodriguez Iglesias, *A Little Body are Many Parts*, United Kingdom, Bloodaxe Books, 2019, p.179

our biological and social body, in relation to body parts and somatic connections, based on western science analysis and some art and cultural examples.

Western medicine considers the body as a complete apparatus that is efficient for the reason that it is composed of many parts which have different biological functions that have somatic relations in the human body. During an interview with the Czech medical doctor Anna Ouřadová, she explained to me that when a patient arrives at the emergency department, the doctors usually consider the story from the psychic point of view, on the same level as the objective results of the physical examinations. This means that for the doctors' assessments the subjective story of the person, about what happened to the part of the body that is in pain, is as important as the objective relation of the biological causes or symptoms. For example people who are feeling anxiety, usually feel they have chest pain and in the worst cases, this can be a symptom of a brain stroke. One cause of this is that the heart and brain are connected and the neurological operation / brain dysfunction is causing the heart to malfunction or vice versa. Connections between our anatomy, body functions and emotional human stories related to body parts, interested me in *Human Creatures* to create imaginative connotations and possibilities of body transformation. By dividing the body in parts, I could discover particular body relations. For instance, the Transformation Station in *Fasciarium* was focused on transforming specific body parts (sight, rhythm of the heart, length of the feet, etc) with imaginative relations of the world of that person (the sky, environment conditions, fantasies, etc).

I have an obsession with museums of anatomy because of the array of different parts and conditions (like diseases) of the body divided in categories to be compared and studied. I have seen, for instance, a museum<sup>49</sup> where it is displayed different digestive systems of organisms starting from the stomach of a blue whale, passing through the human one and ending in the dragonfly's system. The scientific study of bodies by fragments makes me think about the social impact of the examination practices of dissection (to separate into pieces), anatomization (minute detail analysis), vivisection (opening a living being), autopsy (examination of body after death) and dismemberment (extracting the limbs of a living thing). The detachment of systems, organs or limbs -and their exhibition in shelves of a museum- distances us

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<sup>49</sup> Hunterian Museum, The Royal College of Surgeons of England, London [website]  
<https://hunterianmuseum.org/>

from the original body-subject, but through performance it provides me possibilities to create new subjects.



Piece from *The National Archaeological Museum* in Athens

Apart from science museums, another reference I have for understanding body transformation, are the stories of *Frankenstein* and *Prometheus*. In the first one I was intrigued by the concept of a doctor having the power to give life and the allusion to a scientific experiment of creating a new, fantastic creature from the joining of different body parts. I was working with this idea from the first video performance, *Frankenstein Bodies, An Introduction to Human Creatures*. Similarly, I find interesting the mythological story of the Greek god *Prometheus* who stole fire from the Gods and gave it to humans, reviving civilization. These stories are not about making humans or creatures as a reproductive action but rather as a craft construction of an artist. Still what makes me more curious about *Prometheus'* story is the punishment he received from Zeus: to be left chained and eaten by an eagle who ate his liver. Because he was immortal, his liver grew again every night, and the eagle ate it again every day. It is interesting that the sanction focused on one organ, which is in fact the most 'delicate and irreplaceable organ in the human body'<sup>50</sup>.

Another example that I find alluring, is the collaborative chat *Crystal Dildos*<sup>51</sup>, founded by a group of visual women artists, with the purpose to build an infinite archive through Whatsapp, of photos of women's hands in different situations.

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<sup>50</sup> Comment during the interview with the Czech medical doctor Anna Ouřadová.

<sup>51</sup> Whatsapp group created on March 6th 2017. To date it has 52 participants from all over the world.

Female hands with a sky, old female hands, female hands pampering babies, female hands working, dancing, reading, eating, sick female hands, and so on. In one case one participant of the group, who is an illustrator, was having surgery in her arm and there was a call to make a little ritual with flowers, candles and smells, for the movement of her arm. I think that splitting the body into parts has allowed literature, science, poetry and art to go far in the construction of narratives, since each organ has its particular biological appearance and function, its symbolism and physiological purpose.



Stills from the collaborative chat *Crystal Dildos*

In *Human Creatures* I intend to deconstruct the anatomy of the body in order to study the parts separately and find singular performative narratives in each of them. This way I am able to mix them in different patterns and create assemblages of new corporeal organs and systems. When I mean parts it is not only the physical aspect of the body pieces but also the stories and emotions that each part produces in the body-subject. On the aesthetic hand, the fabrics in my project are designed as a collage from the union of images of different parts of the human body. The costumes are then made up of small textile pieces (the ones I called specimens) configured to be worn as separate fragments. The more pieces are worn, the bigger the transformation and the more distance to the audience's original body. This methodology permits the versatility to share the same fragments in different positions or manner every time a show is presented; a part that was worn in someone's face then is used by another participant in the hips. Sometimes this interchange happens

during the same show. Detached parts of some bodies are plugged afterwards into others. On the emotional side, I invite audiences to stop and think in small parts of their bodies, the same way it is possible to stare in detail at parts of the body in a mirror. This is to be able to feel each part with honesty and awareness. If we land to think in our body as a whole I find it more difficult to recall stories, to point where it hurts, to recognize what wants to be improved, to say what I am happy about. Audiences can recognize, for example, that the heart is the organ that pumps blood that carries oxygen and nutrients to the body but it is also the organ that metaphorically is related to feelings, emotions, to love, the centre of the being, to be the core of life and rhythm. Each part is important and the way organs (internal or externally) look like or function distinguish us from the others (biologically and socially).

Now try to put your hair on your stomach.  
Put your hips on your knees.  
Let the butterflies of your stomach free.  
Rely on your intestines, on your bowels.

Fragment of the script of *Fasciarium* (Lat. *Fascia: Connective tissue*)

Moreover, I created the script of *Anamorphosis* by thinking of my body as a totality that is made up of parts. Parts in this case, refers to different corporeal moments (from my teenage years until now), different events and also to body parts. The factual present of my body is the accumulation of many stories and parts that have been removed or rethought in the past. The same as I think that the skin I have now is a collection of small fragments of life.

During my master studies I had the opportunity to develop this methodology of dividing the human body, through the classes of somatic movement where the teacher, Jana Novorytová, was encouraging us to activate a different part of the body per class. We were working based on images and descriptions from an anatomy book to understand the structure of each part, like ribs, head and spine. The day when she showed us the image of the pelvis, I had an enlightened moment. I was feeling a lot of emotions in my pelvis but also I fell in love with the shape. I started to imagine how it would be to transform it, to make a tail grow from it, what it would be if it were huge and indeed coming out of my skin. I also thought about how much pain I

have felt during my life in that area but also how the movement there, like dancing while moving my butt, helps me to set free. The process of fragmenting the body has given me a whole range of imagery to play with and also stories to think about.



Parts of *Anamorphosis* when I refer to my pelvis

## 2.5 How the Concepts are Shown in Human Creatures Performances

Even though my performances are not a literary narration nor an illustrative statement of the theory and social topics I have just presented, I find powerful how through the aesthetics and experience of each piece it can be extracted what are some of my political, social, philosophical concerns, to achieve temporal body transformations. Although it is under the interpretation from the audience's own context, the theatre is a medium through which I can sublimate social criticism, political ideologies, a need to talk about censored topics, psychological fears and many more. In my case, I have managed to develop these topics through a quite important self-referential process and thus I have been able to create content with which more people feel related. During the Mladi Levi festival another critic, Muanis Sinanović, made a provocative and committed comment on my performance, giving me more discipline to acknowledge what I am saying through the costumes and narratives.

The 'performance *Fasciarium* takes place at the intersection of two Foucaultian conceptions of modern power - the medical view and the pastoral power. The development of modern medicine, through various stages, ultimately focuses on

human anatomy, discovering signs of death in the body [...] Pastoral power is based on constant internalised self-examination and confession [...] Modern identity politics and woke politics completely internalize both forms of authority as rebellious behavior; there is the torture of the psyche, which always questions "who I am", and the body, which always wants to conform to something and therefore adapts with the help of different techniques and ways of dressing. The illusory nature of rebellion and the internalisation of power are not reflected in the performance, on the contrary. In the first part, which is a performative lecture, we listen to confessions about sexual development and encounters with different forms of bodies, including a corpse in a river[...]In the second part, where the audience is invited to a "diagnosis", tables, devices and representatives of this same authority are arranged around the stage, dressed in grotesque masks, which can be understood as projections of one's own damaged soul <sup>52</sup>

I think that appropriating the theory and conceptual references as if they affect my body directly, has allowed me to create spaces with messages that makes the audiences think about themselves afterwards. For example, I have had audiences that in the end tell or show me private body stories. Nika Šoštarič, who wrote a rather critical review of my show, also writes 'Despite some poor conceptual and implementation decisions, the viewer still has the opportunity to grab certain ideas and process them at home, in front of the mirror or out in society' <sup>53</sup> This made me think that I needed to refine the composition of the topics I was addressing in relation to the use of the objects/costumes I used in my performance. That is to work better in the dramaturgical dynamics between the visual elements and the themes. But also for me this is for me a sign that what I am trying to say and reflect on, through the performative landscapes I am designing, is reaching the audience in some layer of their body.

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<sup>52</sup> Translation revised by Aljoša Lovrić Krapež. Sinanović, M., 'Tri Predstave'. Aplavz! Spletni medij Bunkerja in Stare mestne elektrarne, Slovenia, 14-09-2022. <https://www.aplavz.art/post/tri-predstave>

<sup>53</sup> Translated from Šoštarič, N., 'Laboratorij druge kože', Aplavz! Spletni medij Bunkerja in Stare mestne elektrarne, Slovenia, 2022 <https://www.aplavz.art/post/laboratorij-druge-ko%25C5%25BEe>



### 3. Designing Performative Costumes to Transform Bodies

The costumes in *Human Creatures* have performative agency because they are the concept, the story and the actors. They develop through dialogues in space, time and action. They determine the dramaturgy by its interaction with other elements like light, text, music or other human presence. Their starting performative role is to be scenography and objects and when the bodies interact with them they become costumes and characters. In *Fasciarium* they contextualise the landscape for the audience to enter the fiction, they are also the tools to transform and at the end they connect the audience in a community of characters. In *Anamorphosis*, in every of the sections, I am using them first as space and objects to go through my script and at the same time I use them in my body to transform my appearance. Costume in *Human Creatures* is a body that works as a visual tool to create dynamics and narratives.



Prototypes of the costumes

In the research, I perform with the transformative power that costume has to go far in imagination. During the performance *Ultraficción, nr.1 / Fracciones de tiempo* by the company Conde de Torrefiel I read this sentence: 'After the skin what we have is imagination'<sup>54</sup>. The costumes are worn over the skin of the audience, giving to their

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<sup>54</sup> *Ultraficción, nr.1 / Fracciones de tiempo* [performance teaser], Conde de Torrefiel, 2021  
<https://vimeo.com/812998217>

bodies new emotional and physical ideas. They act like second skins that cover and restrict or provide movement and meanings. The materiality of this new layer pretends to produce individual as well as collective dialogues with the sensory system of touch (the integumentary system that is the system of the skin). These materials have physical features (composition, colour, sound, smell, drawings) that work as mediators to play as human and non-human surfaces.

In the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius stated that ‘the transformation of the human body, its metamorphosis, is made possible by the costume, the disguise. Costume and masks emphasise the body’s identity or they change it’<sup>55</sup>. Costumes are a technology to transform the body and create a new one. They can affect the psychology (ways of thinking and feeling), the gestures (ways of speaking, walking, performing) and the appearances (ways of exhibiting).

Costumes, that “thing” that takes the shape of a human body, that “thing” that mimics and expresses and hides human behaviour and character – is one of those things that illustrate the complexity of agencies the best. Always between materiality and behaviour, between made and found, protecting and revealing... always in between human and non-human<sup>56</sup>

In my practice, costumes have the power of healing and loosening. Masked bodies are capable of telling corporeal stories that they otherwise would not have been able to express. Costumes access intimacy. Costumes activate the imagination of both the viewer and the wearer. The viewer is seduced by the aesthetics of the new identity; by the shapes, the colours, the textures, the movement of the material. For the wearer on the other side, the textiles and costumes are actors, they heal, beautify or disfigure, make someone laugh or feel embarrassed. When these performative textile experiences are made in groups, a collective dynamic is activated because the participants enjoy being together while watching -and comparing- the appearances of others in a ritualistic state. I like to think that via clothing we can transform ourselves as a species and participate in this world in a better way. Reconnecting with our

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<sup>55</sup> W. Gropius, and L. Moholy-Nagy, (eds.) *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*. Germany: Lars Muller Publishers, 1925. p.15

<sup>56</sup> Lindgren, C. and Lotker, S., ‘Welcome to Critical Costume 2020 conference and Exhibition Costume Agency!’. Critical Costume 2020. <https://costumeagency.com/critical-costume-2020-conference/>

bones, organs, body stories, with our complexes and our happiness guide us to find more vibrant, more colourful, sexier, funnier versions of ourselves.

### 3.1 Translating Concepts into Creative Ideas to Design Costumes

To make the pieces credible within the fiction of *Human Creatures*, I collect visual references of the concepts that have inspired me, and combine them to design the textile pieces. This is the way I give the public a space to go far in imagination when transforming but still stay within the framework. Science for instance, has had a huge variety of methodologies that are good starting visual points to design the costumes and the space where they perform.

The aesthetic elements of the project -like the patterns from the textile pieces- are inspired by images of the body. I imitate body anatomy through textiles techniques (such as hand embroidering or patchwork) and make drawings of macro zoom photography to produce larger scales of tiny parts of internal or external anatomy such as:

- Organs, systems, muscles, skeleton.
- Under the skin elements: Fluids, nerves, proteins (like hair), connective tissues (like visceral fascia, ligaments, blood vessels).
- Identity marks: pimples, wrinkles, birthmarks, stretchmarks, folds, scars, moles, clinical interventions.
- Shapes, textures, volumes, mobility.
- Processes: Dry skin, hormonal imbalance, osmosis, body prepared for stressful or emergency situations (like heart rate, blood pressure, sweat, respiration, digestion and sexual arousal)





Examples of patterns from the costumes inspired by the body

The visual process of dissecting bodies gives me a whole range of imagery to play with, a world of narratives. My main source for accessing these sources is the online gallery of *Wellcome Collection*<sup>57</sup>, a centre specialised in finding connections between science, medicine, life and art in London. By wandering for many years between the images of this gallery and in photographs that I have taken from anatomy museums, I have discovered that many scientific processes apply objects and techniques that resemble the ones used in costume making. For example the shapes of the needles used to sew leather are quite similar to the ones used for stitching wounds on the body, also the threads used are made of nylon or cotton, materials used in clothing. Gause, sponges, tweezers, disposable fabric are some other examples of the materials I have used to create the visual realm of *Human Creatures*, and that can be seen in hospitals. I have also related the idea of mapping, fragmenting and operating on the body with the practice of cutting and intervening textile pieces.

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<sup>57</sup> Wellcome Collection, London [website] <https://wellcomecollection.org/collections>



A life-size wax model illustrating surgical techniques from H. Gillies and S. Macalister archives<sup>58</sup>

The body is marked and the parts are re-thought, removed and re-positioned to be exhibited, the same as the costumes in my performances. I have been developing this design methodology since 2012 when I was researching how to embellish the processes of practices that beautify the body (like cosmetic surgery) through textile patterns.

The final product is, quite literally, the idea of cutting skin in order to operate on the inside. When opening the dresses, the matter (which is depicted in the digital printed patterns) is revealed. I aim for a metaphor between clinical incision and making clothes: sewing together, fragmenting, assembling and repeating parts<sup>59</sup>.



Digital sketches of dresses before textile printing, for my project *Cosmetic Stitch*, 2012

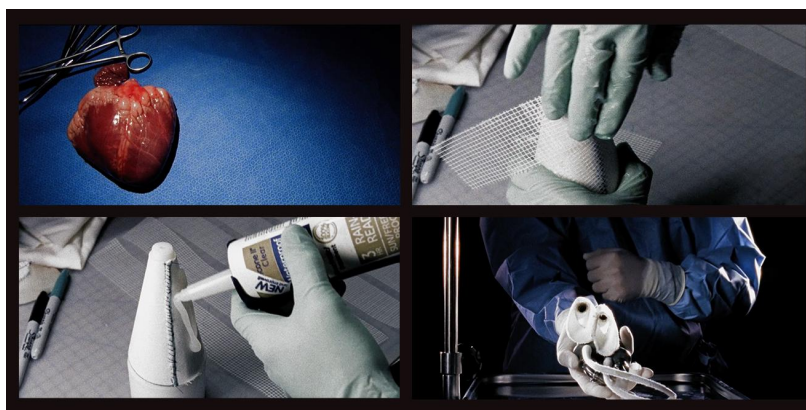
<sup>58</sup> 'The Gillies Archives from Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup' [picture] <http://gilliesarchives.org.uk/>

<sup>59</sup> Extract from the description of *Cosmetic Stitch*, a textile project I did in 2012, [website] <https://www.susanaboterosantos.com/>

The *Modified Bodies*<sup>60</sup> project designed by the artist Snezana Pesic is also an interesting reference of this relation between science and costumes. Her pieces acknowledge the popularity of procedures of cosmetic surgery that deal with the body and skin as if they were costume and textile material. 'The garments are made of soft leather, plastic, and silicone; stretched, stitched, and formed in the same way that the skin is sculpted in plastic surgery'<sup>61</sup>. During an online conversation we had, she told me that for her the most difficult part was to face the criticism of the people who didn't understand the visceral and organic costumes as fantasy but rather believed that they were playing in the realistic and naturalistic field. This was quite shocking for them, regarding for example, that there were in the audience young teenage girls in the public who could be motivated in a wrong way to fall into this aesthetic aspiration. I am surprised by how successfully the metaphor of a medical procedure was translated explicitly to a performative space, making some observers feel discomfort through the materiality.

The documentary *Flatline* tells the story of two bold and visionary doctors who successfully gave a pulse to a man who was dying by replacing his heart with a simple device of their own design. In words of the Dr. Billy Cohn:

We needed a place to put the pumps together and the garage of my house I 've turned it into a shop so I set up a little station there and had things that were available from *Home Depot*.<sup>62</sup>



Stills from the documentary *Flatline*

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<sup>60</sup> Pesic, S., *Modified Bodies*, performative costumes [website]

<https://www.snezanapesic.com/theatre-design/suture-modified-bodies>

<sup>61</sup> Lindgren, C., Lotker, S. and Ljubková, M (eds), *Costume Agency. Artistic Research Project*, Oslo National Academy, 2023, p.105

<sup>62</sup> *Flatline* [short film], Jeremiah Zagar, <https://vimeo.com/46912551>

I am not a scientist nor an expert in operating the body, but I am obsessed with the body that is under the skin and the way it is treated. The apparently amateurish particularities of this effective and powerful device, made me think that it was quite interesting to use the aesthetic of DIY “Do it Yourself” objects in the costumes, and it responded to my non-professional scientific expertise about bodies. To achieve transformation or improvement in audiences’ bodies I needed fun and imaginative textures and drawings, for people to relate and have feelings about their bodies through them. A naive amateur line helped the audience to feel closer to the pieces and to use them with no fear of re-arranging or destroying them. This was likewise helpful when I realised that the size of the project needed the realisation of many pieces. The more pieces of textiles (specimens) designed, the more transformations could happen. And here is where I found a quite beautiful collaboration with builders who were not skilled in visual arts or costume design. The low, or even non-existent, skills in design of the people who have made part of the construction of human creatures is reflected in the whole aesthetic of the project. Thus, I am trying to make representations of real conditions of the body, but because the image references I am giving and the aesthetic style of the collaborators -which include of course the participatory audience who are sometimes intervening the pieces- the costumes end up being abstract, naive, simple in design, interpretations of factual bodies. For me, a quite delightful and exciting way to celebrate the beauty of all types of bodies: through transformation with weird, simple and funny versions of ourselves.



Materials used to create the costumes

### 3.2 Pattern-making from Self-portraits

Another way I was working with the rethinking of the body, this time with the body of the “makers”, is through the methodology I developed for designing the shapes of the costumes. The tailors and seamstresses are not foreign bodies who leave the project as soon as the piece is finished. Traces of the bodies of the designers are recognized physically in the patterns cut, because they are composed by self-portraits. Recalling the design practice of pattern-making in fashion that is usually made with quite strict rules, precise measurements/scales and specialised tools, I realised it was too suffocating for me. I have never been competent in building well-sewn and wearable costumes, because I don't understand the mere idea of sitting on a table to produce pieces for bodies which are not present. For example I can not think of the body as if it is a two dimensional canvas, which is how the clothing is built in pattern-making. Besides, I find it problematic to measure bodies with such rigours millimetres and even worse when the pieces are tried in mannequins. In my opinion, a mannequin is a frame with proportions that are very difficult to assimilate because it is made to standardise bodies, with completely unrealistic human proportions. It is an atrocity against any human dynamism, and used for theatrical costumes cuts the wings of any fantasy. When working on mannequins, costumes are conditioned to the proportions of perfect (inhuman) bodies. By using them as functional mounts to build performative costumes, I can not take into account movement, rhythms, symbolic meanings and creative stories that the fabrics and shapes create on the body, for transforming it organically.

I wanted to develop my own pattern cutting process, where the presence of the body was as important as the rulers and the millimetres. I wanted to explore the three dimensionality and movement of the body which was very much restricted in the traditional pattern cutting. My methodology is fully inspired by the pattern cutting technique proposed by the designer Julian Roberts called *Subtraction Cutting*. For my research I call them *Freestyle Cutting* or *Self-portraits Patterns*. The designer offers for free a technique to build garments, and he invites other designers all over the world to use and interpret however we want his proposition. With this idea he aims at different inspiring things: first that his great idea can be offered to a community who is feeding the technique with each individual's approach, with no



intention of protecting it hermetically for his own use. Second, the way the fabric is cut reduces the waste of material. Third, it considers the body as an object in three dimensions by designing the patterns in tubes and not flat -front and back- surfaces. And last, Roberts' method 'incorporates a chance discovery'<sup>63</sup>, which in my case gives space to experimentation and the result of unexpected and different costume pieces. It is never possible that one specimen is exactly the same as another, but they are kept homogenous through the conceptual frame I give at the beginning, by showing the archive of previous human creatures as visual reference, and through some aesthetic guidelines like the use of colour -which is a palette of hues of skin tones, and includes extreme/not natural solid tones that I see in the body like black, white, primary red and yellow-. My costumes are not sketched beforehand, they appear during this freestyle process of self-portraying.

This process of designing the costumes in my project is what I implement during the *Human Creatures* workshops. I invite people to lay down over the fabrics and with the idea of freestyling, start to draw their own bodies as many times as they want. Then they have to look at their portraits from far and decide what parts of the composed silhouettes they want to cut. The pieces they cut out can be used or reconnected after by them or by other participants for making new pieces. This is the way I obtain costumes that are coming directly from the body and that have an interesting organic bodily shape. Hands, feet, heads are the most recognizable parts and they make nice images when worn by people during the performances.



Self-portraits over fabric during different workshops for designing costumes for *Human Creatures*

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, J., *Free-Cutting*, London, 2013, p.13  
<https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/3060/1/FREE-CUTTING-Julian-Roberts.pdf>

Just after this process, the textile pieces are cut or paste together as patchwork, they are drawn, dyed, stitched, embellished. Costumes are ready to perform.

### 3.3 The Performative Agency of the Costumed Body

In *Human Creatures* I try to create a de-hierarchized community in which we all look the same. Performers and audiences have the same staged presence when we are wearing the costumes, even though we have different body stories and intentions. Costumes and masks are very useful tools for the audiences to be on the same level and also become performers. Here there are no borders between the characters and spectators as in conventional dramatic theatre, here the public becomes part of the narrative and the experience. In the projects I don't need the people to distance themselves through costumes by masking them into something alien to them, I rather want them to believe in the new and amplified versions of themselves.



*Anamorphosis*. Photo by Michael Lozano

The costumes in *Human Creatures* have the role of masks. In history masks have been tools to empower someone physically and spiritually. I see for example the

power of physical transformation that the new faces of Dr. Harold Gillies<sup>64</sup> gave to soldiers after the Great World War, through reconstructive surgery. A new appearance of the face acted as a mask for the soldier to hide an image from the past and present themselves socially with a new and more healthy physicality. Moreover, masks have had power of spiritual transformation by transferring symbolic connotations, assigning roles and producing mystical energies to the wearers.

In the history of symbols, the wearing of a mask is usually related to the summoning of supernatural agencies, in order to ward off enemies or dangers, invoke one's ancestors, commune with the instinctual wisdom of animals [...] or mark alliances in the course of rituals and ceremonies.<sup>65</sup>

Masks are devices to transform into a new character, 'to enhance expressions that are not visible because of the distance between actors and the audience'<sup>66</sup> or to 'feel in anonymity and be able to float around and watch the others'<sup>67</sup>. Also masks 'connote that a person has mastered union with the spirit portrayed by both the mask and the spirit-clothing one wears'<sup>68</sup>. I find the example of my classmate Michał Salwiński quite interesting in this symbolic relation mask-spirit. As a director he is interested in performative walks and he invited me to devise a costume for his performance *Walk with the Boy to the Willow Tree*. Inspired by fairy tales and fatherhood, his projects make me think that by wearing masks he acquired certain powers that belong to ritualistic spheres such as the "power of the word" or the "power of care". I devised with him the costume for the outdoor version of the performance, and his intention was to camouflage with the surroundings and reflect that he is a creature that belongs to that place.

The mask also magnifies the notion of dress as a structure endowed with autonomous powers, based on the ability either to sustain or shatter the wearer's

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<sup>64</sup> Pastels created by Henry Tonks at Aldershot and Sidcup  
<http://gilliesarchives.org.uk/tonkspastels.htm>

<sup>65</sup> A. Warwick, and D. Cavallaro, 'Surface/Depth-Dress and Mask', *Fashioning the Frame. Boundaries, Dress and the Body*, Oxford, Berg, 1998, p. 129.

<sup>66</sup> National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece, <https://www.namuseum.gr/en/>

<sup>67</sup> Feedback from an anonymous audience participating in *Fasciarium*'s premier in DISK, through the questionnaire I did called *Body Narratives Through Costumes*.

<sup>68</sup> Pinkola Estés, C., *Women Who Run With the Wolves. Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1992, p.523

identity, as dramatically evoked by the ancient belief that if an uninitiated subject were to behold a ritual mask, it would instantly die.<sup>69</sup>

Salwiński is endorsed with the wisdom of belonging and knowing the space and story he is proposing, separating himself through the costume, from the real world of the audience.



Costume Devised with Michał Salwiński for *Walk with the Boy to the Willow Tree*.

There is another way of masking and is the case of the performance *Sensorium* by Yu En-ping, also a student of MA DOT. This is a one-to-one performance to join different “animal rooms” where the audience can experience how different animals use their sense of smell. I find it curious how in the sloth room, the director and the performer decided to put sunglasses on the audience, even though they had their eyes closed. A simple and common day to day object permits the audience to travel in imagination and start to focus more on their other senses; principally the smell. Corporal masks can be made from small elements to big designs that cover the full body, to enhance the experience.

Transforming the body with masks, triggers emotional bonds with narratives, with fiction and also with personal confidence for stage presence and for socialisation.

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<sup>69</sup> Warwick and Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame. Boundaries, Dress and the Body*, p. 129

The singer Bjork expresses about the experience of wearing the bespoke masks designed by the visual artist James Merry, that it is both 'hiding and revealing [...] helps me to be more expressive in a way I can be generous to people that I don't know and then I can be more protective and give certain things to my close ones'. She adds that masks help her to produce a 'healthier flow not only when performing but also when she is hanging out with friends'<sup>70</sup>. Masks are tools of transformation not only for theatrical appearances but also to find a new performative version of oneself. One performance that has the two spheres of reality and performative actions and that uses mask (and singing) to create the division are the *Singterviews* in the show *Panic Room*<sup>71</sup> by the singer Loré Lixenberg. In the second part of the show Lixenberg interviews people asking them questions about art, life and death; about the end of the planet Earth. She does it while wearing a mask made of CD's that covers her face.

masks seem to be self-imposed disguises allowing the wearer to impersonate someone, even himself, in a favourable guise; that is to manifest some aspect of the wearer not otherwise visible, whether or not that representation is wholly imaginary, delusional, self-serving, or meets the expectations of others.<sup>72</sup>

In *Human Creatures* performances, there are two paths of redesigning the body. One by keeping some parts of the person's body unmasked and other by completely concealing it. Both ways work for the creatures to exist. The first one maintains the fiction attached to the reality as the audience is still recognizing parts of his/her real body. The second one lets the audience fully disappear in space and the costumes become animated characters on their own.

However, there is a big performative potential when only the face is covered with the masks designed for the project. In this case, even if the body does not have any textile on, the public loses its human identity. I remember that during the final party in Rimini, there was an audience member who transformed his face as soon as he entered the space (all the time, I imagined him as a "he"). He was enjoying the party

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<sup>70</sup> *Nowness Interview* [online video], Björk, 2017, <https://youtu.be/GuoStis3vUA>

<sup>71</sup> *Singterviews*, Panic Room [performance], Loré Lixenberg. 2012-present <https://www.lorelixenberg.art/panic-room-the-singterviews>

<sup>72</sup> R. Brilliant, 'Surface/Depth-Dress and Mask' cited in Warwick, A. and Cavallaro, D., *Fashioning the Frame. Boundaries, Dress and the Body*, Oxford, Berg, 1998, p.113.

alone, although dancing every song with someone different. I never saw his real face. During the performances you meet participants that stay in their new persona until the end. They feel as if they have disappeared and enjoy being unrecognisable, becoming strangers.



*Human Creatures face masks.*

The face masks have the power to give a performative presence to the rest of the body. 'Removal of face releases the body, but also suggests that the person covered is a not negligibly anonymous but on the contrary is important enough to require protection' <sup>73</sup> In *Anamorphosis* I continuously change my facial appearance travelling from the performative to the ordinary, the intimate to the superficial, the beauty to the ugly, the private to what I am proud to expose, and from being myself to a theatrical appearance.

The costumes in the lecture are a guide for me, like theatre cues. I sort of read them in space, creating dramaturgy with the dynamics they are having within the space, the position and their aesthetic. But they are also extensions of my body and corporeal stories. Covering myself with small elements or fully concealing with fabric let me perform and read the script with more confidence. If I hide my face, my bottom body starts to become active; if I cover my full body, I am invisible to the audience and it is easier to tell more traumatic stories. A similar lesson I had with the group in Rimini, where I clearly saw a transformation in the participants while wearing the costumes. Some thanked me for letting them discover new sides of themselves that let them feel open to do new things such as perform and speak in public during the

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<sup>73</sup> A. Warwick, and D. Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame. Boundaries, Dress and the Body*, Oxford, Berg, 1998, pp. 130-131.

party. People from quite different backgrounds and corporeal conditions joined and belonged fast to the community by trying on and having fun with the pieces they were making. Also the conceptual frame of *Human Creatures* inspired the participants to tell funny stories about the body while drawing and also to tell recent news with body parts involved (like an abuser who got caught showing his genitals on chatroulette).



“Grazie per avermi aiutato a tirare fuori i miei talenti nascosti!” said Lorella Francesconi.

#### 4. Other Design Practices as Dramaturgical Tools for Changing the Body

In this chapter I will explain how I translate some practices of design as performative tools to produce images of body transformation, through dialogues between aesthetic material and somatic practices. In order to understand my process, I will also make clear how as a visual thinker I have a particular way of producing and expressing content that is used as part of the process or as result in the redesigning of bodies.

As a designer, my main dramaturgical methodology is to create visual scenarios that will give a frame about the body stories, dynamics and experiences that will be developed. During my visit to the Supernova Festival, the Italian curator and producer Chiara Organtini asked me after showing my project if I ‘have a technique for people (non-artists) to follow the same aesthetic and conceptual guidelines?’. And my answer is yes, I started the master with a toolkit of design practices that I was testing on how to give them relevance in the creation of contemporary dramaturgy and give space to performative narrative to be unwrapped.

During my process, I have realised that I am more of a visual thinker than verbal thinker. The visual literacy that I have been training has given me a way of thinking that hierarchises images of other elements like for example text. There is a test designed by the psychologist Linda Silverman to divide verbal people from visual ones:

Do you think mainly in pictures instead of words? Do you know things without being able to explain how or why? Do you remember what you see and forget what you hear? Can you visualise objects from different perspectives? Would you rather read a map than follow verbal directions? <sup>74</sup>

If you tend to answer yes to more of these questions, then you are a more visual person, like me. One way of seeing is the one directly connected to the eyes, but there are different ways of seeing images, because images come in different ways. W.T.J Mithcell proposes in his text *What is an Image?* that we can speak of images as ‘pictures, statues, optical illusions, maps, diagrams, dreams, hallucinations,

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<sup>74</sup> J. Rothman, ‘How Should We Think About Our Different Styles of Thinking?’, *The New Yorker*, 2023 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/01/16/how-should-we-think-about-our-different-styles-of-thinking>



spectacles, projections, poems, patterns, memories, and even ideas<sup>75</sup>. Music in my research was another type of image. For each project I was selecting playlists that triggered in my mind visual concepts to apply in the costumes, in the scripts, in the landscape. Next I will show an example of how the North American academic and animal behaviourist, Temple Grandin, has another way of solving problems by visualising images. So even though my projects hierarchized the visual, they are not exclusively for people who can see with their eyes. Once I had the experience of having to explain some sculptures that I designed for an exhibition at a book fair in Bogotá, to a group of guides who were blind. The challenge was enormous because before for me it had been easy to explain design elements (colour, texture, shapes, etc) by showing photos. But in this case I learned that mental images can be created from highly detailed descriptions of the pieces. For example, using many adjectives to describe patterns, textures and colours. The more details about what I am looking at, the more information for these moderators to transfer information to the groups they were guiding through my pieces. In the next chapters I will explain design tools, visual/aesthetic and somatic practices, to construct images and produce new narratives on the audience and my own body.

#### **4.1 The Designer Sketchbook**

Whenever I want to theorise or create narratives about the body, what I create in my mind is a bank full of snapshots, that no matter the content, I then scramble and put together with no judgement to find unexpected concepts and design ideas. The composition of this content allows me to design images and topics that are used as a raw material for body transformation. Determining a framework through my main topics and concepts of interest, let me keep the randomness of the encounters of the pictures within that frame. Temple Grandin explains 'that her mind is filled with detailed images, which she can juxtapose, combine, and revise with verve and precision'<sup>76</sup>. Grandin is an inspiration for my way of understanding, enjoying and inhabiting scenarios. She uses her biological condition of being on autistic spectrum

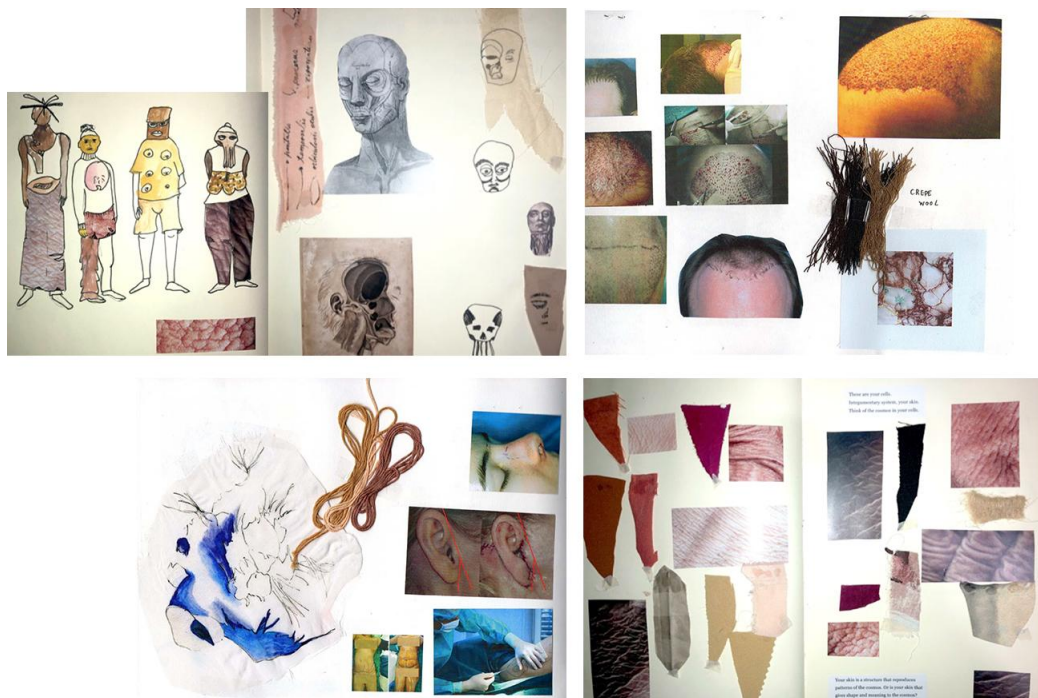
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<sup>75</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *What is an Image?*, The Johns Hopkins University Press Stable, 1984, p.504, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/468718>

<sup>76</sup> J. Rothman, 'How Should We Think About Our Different Styles of Thinking?', *The New Yorker*, 2023 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/01/16/how-should-we-think-about-our-different-styles-of-thinking>

and having a visual thinking, as a gift to perceive patterns and conditions in farms or slaughterhouses that no one else can notice. She is 'capable of visualising farm buildings from the animals' perspective'.<sup>77</sup> Grandin for example stared for days and laid down next to the cattle to realise that because of the circular patterns in which the cows were moving, the cowsheds were better with round corners than straight angles.

The way I can easily conceptualise and share my ideas is through drawings, videos, photos, text and even music arranged as images. Hence I had the big challenge to communicate with clarity this structure to my collaborators so we could all create a synchronised immersive experience for the audience. My scripts to generate dialogues are randomly related images. Books of drawings and photos displayed in a way that particular topics and stories pop out. Sketchbooks, agendas, research books.



Pages of my sketchbooks

The sketchbooks are my main source of work. Also some performative formats have given me the chance to build, as set up, installations which are a literal visual translation of those pages but in three dimensionality. Photographies, objects, printed

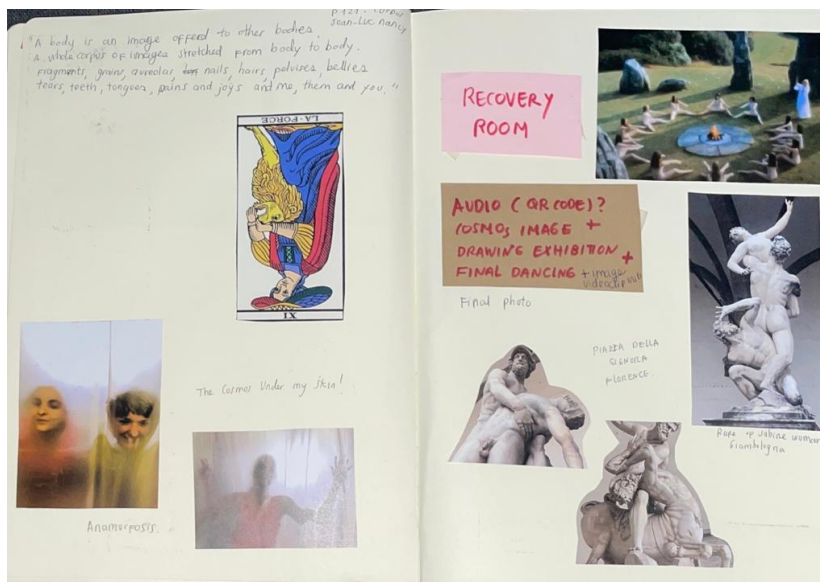
<sup>77</sup> J. Rothman, 'How Should We Think About Our Different Styles of Thinking?', 2023

text, sketches, prototypes, material collected and put together as a still live painting. When the objects are gathered they start to tell me where they should go and what should be added. So to build landscapes, I likewise work with the documentation I have from those set ups.



Collages of material produced during the process of *Criaturas Humanas*, in the Supernova Festival.

As I said, when I build my sketchbooks I do it without thinking much but rather associating aesthetics or fast concepts that the images are giving to me in that precise moment. These -almost accidental- compositions allowed me to discover types of bodies that I wouldn't have been able to imagine any other way. This process supplied me with the visual concepts that I then used to create the dramaturgical structures for transformation. Some concepts were: fantastic bodies, erotic and sensual bodies, botanical bodies, poetic skin, sick bodies, anatomical bodies, body and cosmos, cosmetic bodies, playful bodies and bodies being born.



Concepts that I defined from pages of my sketchbook "Sick Skins" (top) and "Mystical beauty" (bottom)

And how do I give performative agency to these constellations of associations of images and text? To design the performances I need to watch the pages from afar, after I give myself a break from not watching them, so I would be surprised by the compositions, the collages and the concepts. Then I use them as base scripts, I give them life on the stage. I see that whole archives of information as a system to create dramaturgy based on it and this is why the dynamics of my performances reflect how I think through my sketchbooks. The composition is fragmented and they are full of unexpected relations.

## 4.2 Creating Visual Landscapes

Visual is related to the physical,

The Language of the Physical — consists of everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words. It creates poetry in space.<sup>78</sup>

Considering this, with my interest in the power of transforming physically the body, I chose the photo by the photographer Lise Sarfati, from her series *Russia in the 90's*, for the application to the master. It was the first door to start my research on body, costumes and performance. I have always been attracted to photography in which human beings appear. Not only traces of human actions, but the physical presence of a human body. Body is for me the main source of reflection, inspiration and action. And I also like to analyse the relation with the physical surroundings where this body is. As an art director I create visual worlds for actors to intervene, to inhabit them. These worlds give meaning to the characters that they are representing. Therefore, my brain is trained to find the highlights on the objects that are in the images and on what these objects say about the body, on the configuration of the space and on what the space makes us think about the body. It is an aesthetic process of visually deconstructing the whole of an image, of a landscape into the smallest details to find hidden meanings.

I have to note that I take into account that in contemporary performance, 'the drama in dramaturgy stopped being drama that arises between people but became a drama of composition'<sup>79</sup>. And the mental and visual exercise I am making within the landscapes of *Human Creatures* is not about hierarchizing them as characters with dilemmas, crises and resolutions. I am interested in the potential they have to produce an immersive, sensorial -especially visual- and emotional experience for the audience to trust and feel the need to find a new enjoyable identity. The immersive

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<sup>78</sup> P. Kumar Dutta, 'Dramaturgy through Scenography. Understanding how a Dramaturgical Construct is Possible through Design', *Medium*, 24-02-2018.

<https://medium.com/diarium-da-pacific/dramaturgy-through-scenography-1efd5a3a9de>

<sup>79</sup> Lotker, S, 'The Double Agent. Dramaturgy of Costume', in Lindgren, C., Lotker, S. and Ljubková. M (eds), *Costume Agency*. Artistic Research Project, Oslo National Academy, 2023, p.156

quality that my performances have is achieved through the fabrics and the relation of them with the rest of the theatrical elements. The aesthetic impact of the textile pieces and costumes, and the way they perform in space, triggers individual and collective somatic relations of transformation. They give space for the audience to imagine a context, which will allow them to feel their own body and the new body they are building.

The step of designing visual landscapes can come after collecting a good amount of images and concepts in the sketchbooks and compositions. I gather the list of those concepts and arrange them in mind maps in order to find more connections, dynamics and narrative. There is a mental state when I am ready to interpret the insights and materialise them in visual and performative elements such as surfaces (textiles), costumes, objects, light, space and even music. The steps of the creative process, which in devised theatre are not in linear order and could be repeated more than once, would be something like this: Collection of random images and text > Compose collages in sketchbooks > Define concepts > The system of the information collected is an input to create dramaturgy > Associate the concepts > Materialised insights into visual landscapes > Find dynamics and narratives > Build performance > Perform > Feel and sense the landscape and the objects around it.

Two examples that I have analysed from an aesthetic view and that made me think of the rhythm, composition and dynamic that I develop through my sketchbooks and visual landscapes, are the performances *Bros* by Romeo Castellucci<sup>80</sup> and *Liebestod*<sup>81</sup> by Angelica Liddell. Both are a series of images, almost still photographs, one after another, that determine different moments/events. The experience for me, is like watching the pages of illustrated books. In *Bros* every time the actors freeze, we can notice that there are actually many things happening in the frame at the same time: text, people, sounds, light, events. For me, each image, with those elements composing it, has a concept. In *Liebestod* the images are guiding the presence and text of Angelica. Somehow the visual landscape of this performance reminds me of Alejandro Jodorowski's films in which unexpected images and characters arrive randomly to highly aestheticized scenarios. In this case, the landscapes allowed her

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<sup>80</sup> *Bros* [performance trailer], Romeo Castellucci, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGOYKVmVshQ>

<sup>81</sup> *Liebestod* [performance teaser], Angelica Liddell, <https://youtu.be/VxxxXZM8cH0>

to rethink her presence, to vent and be torn, putting her in a space of her own fantasy.

With my research, I have tested that one visual landscape can become different formats; participatory, installative, staged, video, etc. If the basic elements of the composition are clear then I am able to adapt the same aesthetic and emotional content to different scenarios and to keep the transformations within the same concepts. Visual landscapes offer me a demarcated frame to play within it. People are invited to belong to this landscape and take over it to feel it as their private space of transformation. The same as their personal wardrobes or dressing rooms at home, but within the fiction of a scientific experiment.

### **4.3 The Designer's Table and the Screen**

An important element that conditioned the way I was transforming my own body as a designer doing performance, was the table. In the next two chapters I will explain how I was attached to the table as it was an extension / a limb of my body, I will also show how I used it as an interesting mechanism to perform -including the screen of the computer that made part of the world of the table-, and also I will explain how I was able to break it through somatic practices. A constant redesign of the presence of my physical body and of my designer role becoming a performance maker.

The steps that started online because of the pandemic Covid-19, were revealing for my process of becoming a director and performer with a background in design. The working and creative life was completely framed in a physical space with a table, the screen of the computer, a lamp and a chair. The circumstances of the pandemic positioned this space as the main set up and medium to produce dramaturgy with collaborators and to involve the audience, conditioning the formal and emotional results of the projects produced. The absorption of this medium was becoming so strong that I started to see the screen as a mask and the table as a body limb. We were meditating through the computers as if the screens were our skin and the table an exoskeleton. My first intention of designing costumes as second skins for transforming the original human skin, was being conditioned by this imposed digital

era. I realised that a second skin didn't have to be necessarily something that directly touches our human skin, but it could be any other artefact (no matter the material) that we use to mediate with the environment and other people. This second skin includes in addition to textile and materials that cover our human skin, objects that act as extensions -like machines that replace organs (prosthesis)- and costumes that exceed the human skeleton. In this case our human skin was not being fully used. Isolated in our houses we were relieving our exterior and social contact to screens from our devices (mobiles, computers, tablets).

During this time I found an essay by Jorge Frascara titled *The Third Skin: Wearing the Car, Ignoring Safety* that helped me to imagine that objects can be an extension of the body to protect us, express and interact publicly. 'The car is not just a means of transportation; it is also a means of social communication. We wear the car like a costume: For some of us it's a warrior's armour; for others, their team shirt; for others, a sexy expression of their lifestyle'<sup>82</sup>. At the time, for me, socialising and performing through the screen was more comfortable than giving a real live presence to my body in front of the class. I was depending on the screen's own faults: First I was sitting down, second the camera of my laptop was scratched, the internet was unstable, Bogotá is a loud city, by being in another geographical coordinate I was in a different circadian cycle for my creative mind to be active, and so on. Although I had experience in teaching and speaking publicly to big groups I had always felt more comfortable expressing my ideas on the table behind my screen; my sketchbooks and my drawings. By these means the screen and the table were working for me as a costume to disguise insecurities and were triggering spontaneity in my presence.

The example that illustrates this situation the best is the invitation to collaborate in *Visual Potion 01: c.o.n.t.i.n.u.t.i.n.u.u.m*, an online performance directed by Cristina Maldonado in collaboration with the visual artist Isabela Juchniewicz. Without hesitating I was performing for the first time in front of an audience. My physical appearance was transformed by a digital mask that was adding me an uncanny, therefore comfortable, public presence. I was performing in the final virtual room, in a participatory group experience that was 'about the problem of mediated presence on

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<sup>82</sup> J. Frascara, 'The Third Skin: Wearing the Car, Ignoring Safety.' in Fortunati, L., Katz, J. and Riccini, R. (eds.), *Mediating the Human Body. Technology, Communication and Fashion*. Mahwah, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003 p. 196.



the internet, that has been exponentially used during pandemic, managing to confuse us'<sup>83</sup>. The screen as my skin and the table as an extension of my body, were helping me to interact with a personality that is part of me but that I didn't dare to expose without any mediator.



Cándida was a character created with my face in *Avatarify Python*, Deepfake app.

Moreover, I can say that the full mechanism that was used to perform was also working as an extension of my body because all of them were technical resources of my knowledge and I was using them with physical dexterity. It was made up of two computers, one camera, one table lamp, apps (Zoom, OBS, Avatarify Python and Whatsapp), and a digital script that I was reading live on the online platform Miro. All of these elements were working on me almost like costumes and props, to allow me to transform into a performer.



Mechanism built with *Isabela Juchniewicz* to perform *Visual Potion 01: c.o.n.t.i.n.u.t.i.n.u.u.m*

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<sup>83</sup> Translated from: K.Terán, 'C.o.n.t.i.n.u.u.m y la aplicación Deepfake'. *Revista Proceso*, nº 2326, México, Calameo, pp. 68 - 69., 30-05-2021. <https://www.calameo.com/read/004454028a66d648ee3e8>  
Original: 'Se trata [...] acerca de la problemática de la presencia mediada en internet, cuyo uso en pandemia ha sido exponencial, consiguiendo confundirnos'

From then, I understood that I had a relevant performative place: the table. Another example of mediating through a table, is the collaboration I did for *Do you Know a Place that Doesn't Exist anymore?* a participatory project directed by Mara Ingea in which the audience is invited to recall a place for it to be interpreted by us, the performers. Mara is a Lebanese artist with a background in animation and an interest in scenography so I could easily create a visual language of the scenario that she was imagining. Even though the project was already after the pandemic, my role was again sitting behind a table and a screen but this time my computer was connected to a TV or video projector. During the performance I try to materialise the impermanence of the spaces that are being created, by drawing blueprints of the room on Adobe Photoshop. In this situation I also feel familiar with my stage presence. Sitting on a table with my drawing devices is a position I am very used to having. I enjoy the concentration that this setup gives me.



Set up to perform *Do you Know a Place that Doesn't Exist Anymore?* Directed by Mara Ingea.

But there is a big challenge at the end when I have to stand up and tell the audience what places coexisted during three different moments of the performance. The first times I did it, the feeling was like shedding out from the third skin that the technical devices were building on me. Fortunately, as a visual thinker I have very good visual memory so I used the skill to improvise the text and also when I stand up, I brought with me a small arm of the whole mechanism: The printed maps on a board with my own annotations that work as guidance props. In other words, as an extension of my body and memory.

Surprisingly for me, I was also invited to collaborate during my studies, on two more projects where the table was my main performative place and sitting was the main

position of my body's presence: *Sensorium* by En Ping and *Getting There Tours* by Snæfríður Sól Gunnarsdóttir, both students of MA DOT.



*Sensorium* by En Ping (Left) and *Getting There Tours* (Right) by Snæfríður Sól Gunnarsdóttir

These experiences inspire me to analyse my body transformation in space, by using furniture that force me to have specific body positions, tools that work as masks and costumes for expressing myself easier and naturally, and objects to visually memorise my actions, text and scenes. This is how I developed the dramaturgy and script for *Anamorphosis*. Because it was an intimate corporeal diary that I was digging in, first I wanted to find my most comfortable set ups and positions, which of course included sitting behind a table. I needed to trust my space and be able to read such private confessions. However, the script was also about challenging myself, with the notions I had built of my own and discovering new versions and potentials of my body, so I tried through somatic practice to feel where and how my new body positions were going to be. Breaking the table, and replacing it by other mediums, like the costumes of *Human Creatures* or by movements of my body that I would never have dared to make before, were the first approaches to transform into my new version as performer.

#### **4.4 A Designer Breaking the Table through Somatic Practices**

In this thesis, I have been explaining how I managed to produce temporal transformation for the audience's bodies but also for myself as an artist. I already explained how I redesigned the physicality of bodies through costume making. I have been mentioning how these new appearances produce emotions and now I will tell

how I found a completely new stage presence of myself through somatic classes. I have said that the body is an alternative medium to activate imagination, and I learned how to awaken it in my body through somatic exercises. Also these exercises helped me to empower the materiality of the costumes as transformative agencies.

As a designer I am used to work absorbed by the computer screen and an overwhelming amount of visual information I receive daily. I found this quote that started to make me think of my body's habits,

‘Just as children hurt themselves when playing because they are not aware of the fragility of the body, adults, playing with cars and pushed by advertising myths, risk their real skin, ignoring the fact that, at 100 km per hour, the hardness of a car becomes soft if it hits a wall, and all the myths can be destroyed in a second’<sup>84</sup>.

I was also feeling I was risking my human skin relying so much on digital media, and the screen. I am a sensitive person that gets inspiration from external stimuli, and for example the algorithms in the web make me fall in a loop of simple and not challenging enough thoughts. I believe that the way we are aware of the self and the other's bodies is the way we connect to the world. Because of the fast pace of life and the overwhelming amount of information we receive, pushing us to mould our bodies according to specific cultural models, we forget to stop and think of the body as a physical object that is fragile the same way our personal electronic devices may be. This is when digging into the energies and stories of our biological and social bodies is useful, when these narratives are able to connect the bodies with pleasure and with a sense of being and to bring confidence to the body.

Somatic movement classes put me in a new body and mind space, with the possibility to imagine my body as something physical that I could visit or touch to switch on the power of imagination. Same as the power button from my Mac. To switch on the body-imagination button requires special concentration. In my case, the awakening of my body by someone else (massaging for example) is helpful. I get distracted very easily by the painful or stressful thoughts of the day or the visual

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<sup>84</sup> J. Frascara, ‘The Third Skin: Wearing the Car, Ignoring Safety.’ in Fortunati, L., Katz, J. and Riccini, R. (eds.), *Mediating the Human Body. Technology, Communication and Fashion*. Mahwah, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003, p. 199.

stimulus around me. Somatic movement allows communication to go inside ourselves, to be able to open journeys, to have inner dialogues with new or hidden parts of ourselves that we cannot have in daily routines. I want to note that the way I landed into this experience of imagination is by having fun, enjoying it. If it hurts or embarrasses me I get distracted. And is not about ignoring pains or weaknesses but focusing on cultivating the now: the space of the class.



Scenes from *Anamorphosis*, trying different body positions

I had the chance to approach my body to somatic practices, inspiring me to explore a new stage presence, out of the screen. These practices reinforce the idea that in performing arts the human body is an important (in my work is perhaps the main) expressive material. Also the exercises keep me aware of myself, slowly connecting me with the world that surrounds me -which evidently includes other's bodies-. The class showed me that there are alternative mediums for creative processes (besides being in my artist studio in front of the computer) to disconnect from the daily monotonous tasks.

During a workshop<sup>85</sup> I had with the performer Sally Dean I discovered that somatic movement combined with performative costumes was another layer interesting to apply in my performance. Sally asks: 'How does what we wear affect how we move and perceive, and what we create and perform?'<sup>86</sup> Through practical exercises, I learned that the body has physical memory that can be trained, and that the costume can interfere in that memory with its materiality. A person wearing a costume can feel a part of the body more heavy, voluminous, light, tight, with longer extensions, bigger than a human. These new corporeal qualities can activate new images allowing the creation of narratives.

Thanks to this knowledge, I think now I have transformed myself into a more corporeal designer, who is using the staged space as a living artistic studio, and working with the body as an aesthetic and somatic initiator to create dialogues. I am not anymore relying on the table only as a quotidian tool to work that gives me confidence, but as an interesting object that can be physically interpreted as an extension of my body, and that also has a power of transformation just like costumes have. Moreover, somatic exercises let me travel through my body in fragments, to recognize a big amount of stories that I have in each part, which allowed me to activate detailed aesthetical and emotional narratives.



*Anamorphosis* try-out of transformation of my physical appearance, with pieces inspired by my body stories.

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<sup>85</sup> *Somatic Movement and Costume Workshop* [workshop trailer], Sally Dean, <https://vimeo.com/87913938>

<sup>86</sup> Dean, S., 'Somatic Movement and Costume Workshop' [website] <http://www.sallyedean.com/>

## Conclusion

Based on my intrigue to create dialogues between temporary and diverse identities that humans can acquire by wearing pieces of clothing, I worked on producing new theatrical appearances with symbolic, emotional, and physical meanings. Through a visual exploration of human anatomy I found corporeal narratives that I transferred to costumed bodies. The costumes operate as decorative second skin bringing life to new appearances with living and moving bodies that find pleasure in being seen and in seeing new appearances. The biological and social body coexist in my project by creating a small interval between curiosity and discomfort between seductive, poetical, childish and joyful representations of the human anatomy. I proposed spaces where audiences are able to use their body as a conceptual field, transform it as a subject and work with it as a canvas that performs when gestures and somatic relations to their real bodies are activated. Through the research, I learned that fiction is a powerful tool because it allows us to imagine alternative versions of ourselves. Textiles give to the original bodies of the audiences and myself new layers for mediation, to experiment with creativity, openness and joy as far as we wanted.

The process gave me insights as a designer. I usually prefer to have control over the creation steps and the results. My work as art director requires me to be accurate from the sketches to the final results to fulfil the director's objectives. However, in my research I started to appreciate the accidents, the discovery chance, when I opened the design process to amateur/non-artists builders. The structures and the textures of the garments produced started to be the evidence of the environment where the bodies were performing.

My practice and the theory around it are a result of a pastiche of information I have been collecting through visual references, knowledge from other disciplines that I have studied, museums, performances, and films I have watched. The results of my projects are a reflection of these personal archives, creating in my mind a broad world of unexpected contexts and possibilities to create performance. The extensive material collected through my sketchbooks, produced for me varied but related themes, each one represented in its own collage of information (images, text, drawings, references, etc). Even so, I dare to say that such a big amount of interesting information made it a challenge to close and to narrow towards concrete

decisions. On one side, this abundant material gathered was quite useful because the academic scenario was the perfect space to experiment. It let me test and have continuous feedback from different formats, ideas that I had never tried before. Additionally, the way I was collecting the information, by associating unexpected images and text, worked as a reference to create fragmented scripts, to develop my own way of creating narratives and proposing scenes. But on the other hand, I needed to summarise and make concrete the material collected in order to offer my projects through dossiers, to sell them on pitches, or to explain in regular terms to any potential audience what my research is about and what is the experience of being in my performances. It is also important to describe clearly the conceptual relations of my projects with the curatorial topics of the festivals. Because of the versatility of *Human Creatures* I can adapt my political and aesthetical intentions for the sake of the festivals, although I need to do it very simple and precisely. This thesis was a valuable exercise for closing and clearing my main interests and objectives of the shows.

Another reflection I had during my process of describing and analysing my performances was to think about how to make intimate stories a public concern. How are we affected by others' content and how can we affect them back? During my projects I interrogated the tensions between the individual and the community, the private and the public. I noticed though, that the corporal stories that I was touching, like beauty, self-esteem, vanity, body subjectivity, appearance, conservative body cultures, digital narcissism, and so on are issues that make many people feel vulnerable and dissatisfied. Also, there are many people interested in releasing, in liberating their bodies and experimenting with them in public spheres.

*Human creatures* wouldn't have worked with one only character. I found that I am curious about group dynamics, collective processes, and building community. Questions about collectivity, I had when starting the project, were becoming clearer when I indeed started to archive a big and diverse number of contributors and participants. For example I realised that the accumulation of the different backgrounds the collaborators had, influenced the aesthetic and the body motivations produced within the community. I was also questioning myself of what sort of worlds could we build together or if it was possible to create a collective



feeling and identity within a group of unknown people. After showing the projects, I do think that theatre and live arts are disciplines that allow us to interact and express ourselves as individuals in between groups. I believe that collective culture has the potential to develop social changes, preserve values, give new meanings to life and to social dilemmas that we all share as society. I am interested in building common spaces to create awareness of a territory (in this case the territory of our bodies) and build collective interests.

A conflict that group performances have, is also a takeaway I take from my studies. Big formats have a formula that needs to be of measure in order to keep control over the dynamics, rhythm and frame. The number of audience participating influences directly the number of performers and the time they have for engaging with each audience.

I had valuable lessons as a director as well. At first it was difficult for me to propose my intentions to the collaborators because I was myself questioning them. However, the solutions and explanations that I had were completely valid because after all, this was a world imagined by me. I had to trust more in the wisdom of my imagination and in my proposals for the performers or co-designers to believe in it. I noticed this improvement during the two workshops I tried with Bachelor students of scenography in DAMU. In the first one, I brought concrete instructions and during the days of the workshop the room was quiet; the students were discussing only between them and in czech. They were sort of behaving and following rules but not experimenting and proposing. In the second workshop, I decided to create a more relaxed atmosphere, noticing that the more precise I was being, the less clear and enjoyable the exercise was.

I recognized that for the nature of the project, because we are dealing with private and vulnerable topics, it is necessary to create a safe, truly inclusive, space for any kind of body to feel comfortable so people don't feel offended. The body as a theme generates discomfort in many people, due to deep and invisible traumas that exist, and the purpose of the project is not to hurt but to frame it in the sphere of inclusiveness. It is definitely not an easy task as I can't please everyone's feelings and stories. For me the research *Human Creatures* does not make sense if it is

chosen who can join and who cannot. I even think that perhaps in an environment where people are fit, strong, have capable bodies, and have a somewhat homogeneous appearance, it's more difficult to open up and release. For example, in theatre or dance environments where the body is the most important tool of work. Differently are the environments in which people do not expect much from their body image and corporeal capacities, like the one of the women in Rimini who pointed out that their bodies have already been through enough difficult situations and it is now time to enjoy their bodies.

Because of the sensitivity of the research, it is very important for me to have a clear frame. During the activation in the Prague Quadrennial for example, I wanted to be realistic with the details of people's faces but there are some skin and facial conditions that it was complicated for me to decide if I should draw it or not; if it would have been more offensive to draw them or to ignore them. PQ was a safe space and I didn't want to break it, people were in line coming to me, excited to be drawn. This is when I found the fun portraits made by Wilfrid Wood. In every space I do need to make people know what are the real approaches to the body in *Human Creatures*, especially to the audience that don't know my portfolio or research. That is why in *Fasciarium* it is so important to have a clear introduction to make the participants feel comfortable to open. In the case of *Anamorphosis* is a bit easier because who is opening is not them but me, they are spectators deciding in private with what stories to relate or not.

And last, *Human Creatures* research is a celebration to any kind of body. Through the performances I invite people to think that every ugly part of us is beautiful if we want to see it like that. I am proposing a place of awareness and care but it also considers that for some people the body is a cruel reality. Through devising somatic and aesthetic methodologies, I can create dramaturgy and dialogues between people's own bodies or between the group bodies when they are wearing the costumes of the human creatures.

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5. *Fasciarium (Lat. Fascia: connective tissue)*, 2021 [performance trailer]  
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## Appendix 1 - Fasciarium (Lat. Fascia: Connective Tissue)

### Artistic Team Credits

**Direction and idea:** Susana Botero Santos

**Dramaturgy:** Sodja Zupanc-Lotker, Domen Šuman

**Scenography and costumes:** Mara Ingea and Susana Botero

**Music:** Andrés Silva Diaz

**Light design:** Carmen Lee

**Content devised and performed by:** Andrés Silva Diaz, Mara Ingea, Michał Salwiński, Snæfríður Sól Gunnarsdóttir, Daniel Victoria, Yu En Ping, Aljoša Lovrić, Kirstine Hupfeldt Nielsen, Sai.

In collaboration with DAMU, Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, and local performers and costume makers from Slovenia, Ljubljana.

### Shows

- PREMIER. 13.02.2022, with 2 shows at DISK theatre in DAMU, Prague.
- 26.08.2022 Mladi Levi (Ljubljana). Fasciarium + Anamorphosis

**Performance trailer** <https://vimeo.com/783369651>

Videographer: Michael Lozano, Editor: Susana Botero, Original music: Andrés Silva.



## Appendix 2 - Anamorphosis

### Artistic Team Credits

**Direction and idea:** Susana Botero Santos

**Artistic consultation:** Petra Hauerová, Cristina Maldonado

**Dramaturgical consultation:** Sodja Zupanc-Lotker

**Scenography:** Mara Ingea and Susana Botero Santos

**Music:** Andrés Silva Diaz

**Light design:** Carmen Lee

**Video:** Enzo Perrier (videographer), Andrés Silva Diaz (music), Susana Botero Santos (edition)

**Content devised with:** Andrés Silva Diaz, Mara Ingea, Michał Salwiński, Snæfríður Sól Gunnarsdóttir, Nadezda Nazarova, Daniel Victoria, Daniel Gibran Victoria Mancilla, Richard Janča, Howard Lotker.

In collaboration with DAMU, Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and Hrdličkovo Muzeum Člověka.

### Shows

- PREMIER. 27.05.2022 DISK - Studio Řetízek (Prague)
- 10.06.2022 Museum of Man, Charles University (Prague)
- 26.08.2022 Mladi Levi (Ljubljana). Fasciarium + Anamorphosis
- 07.10.2022 and 8.10.2022 4+4 Days in Motion (Prague)
- 04.12.2022 DISK - Studio Řetízek (Prague) DAMU MA DOT Showcase

**Performance trailer** <https://vimeo.com/783405528>

Videographers: Michael Lozano and Susana Botero, Editor: Susana Botero, Original music: Andrés Silva.

## APPENDIX 3- Other formats

### Laboratory of Human Creatures (Workshop)

- Nov. 2021, **Participants:** Bachelor scenography students, DAMU, Prague.
- Feb. 2022, **Participants:** Bachelor scenography students, DAMU, Prague.
- April 2022, **Participants:** Richard Janča, Alena Novotná and Rodrigo P. Esteves. DAMU, Prague.
- 12-14th April 2023, Supernova Festival (Rimini, Italy). Workshop + staged party. **Instructors:** Susana Botero and Andrés Silva. **Local Producer:** Ilaria Depari. **Participants:** Danila De Paoli, Federica Saracco, Giuseppe Mongiello, Ilaria Depari, Lorella Francesconi, Lorena Magnani, Mara Ushapa, Martina Landi, Monica Monikcreo, Paola Carlini, Patrizia Totaro, Silvana Conti, Susan Theresa McKelvie.

### Carnaval digital 2022 (Online Group exhibition)

<https://youtu.be/DaoFq23SusQ>

**Curator:** Camilo Pachón

**Date:** 21.06.2022

### ARTakeaway (Group Exhibition)

<http://artakeaway.cz/portfolio/susana-botero/>

**Organisers:** Zuzana Šklíbová, Petra Müllerová, Kryštof Doležal, Lenka Tyrpeklová

**Date:** August 2022

**Place:** Můstek metro station (Prague)