

Akademie výtvarných umění v Praze
Studijní program Výtvarná umění
**Ateliér intermediální tvorby II / škola Dušana Zahoranského a Pavly
Scerankové**

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

into the welcoming hour 4.0

Vypracovala: Roza Pogosian
Vedoucí diplomové práce: Vaclav Magid
Oponentka diplomové práce: Christina Della Giustina

Akademický rok 2019/2020

Introduction

The field of my research in the works of recent years has become interhuman, extrahuman, interspecies, hybrid and mutating relations. This field of research is closely related to the study of the concept of “the other” and attempts to split and dissolve this concept in the process of interaction, mainly in the course of performative practices. In this text, I will briefly talk about the methods of working on the performative research project “into the welcoming hour” which I have started during the master's program at the Academy of Fine Arts (AVU), Prague and about the process of creating a diploma project, which is a continuation of this research, as well as about what has been inspiring me along the way.

History of research and performative actions of the ‘into the welcoming hour’ project

I think it would be impossible to talk about my graduation project without devoting to the history of the research project ‘into the welcoming hour’ from the beginning of its existence.

The first part of the series of projects 'into the welcoming hour' was implemented on 8.2.2019 in the City Surfer Office Gallery where I have invited for cooperation a group of young people from the Organization for Aid for Refugees (OPU) together with a group of performers from faculty of Alternative Theatre in DAMU. There we have created an immersive performative installation, where participants were sharing their personal stories related to their life experiences connected to their identities and the local situation in relation to these specific social questions.

After that I have decided to expand it into a long-term performative and sociological research project. With our second performance which was taking place in the Botanical garden of Průhonice park on 25.5.2019 we became an open collective where and started the work on our research.

The performative side of the research is focused on developing choreography and scores for improvisation involving sound, voice and movements aimed on finding different ways of communication and cooperation with each other and with other living forms. The sociological part of the research is aimed at increasing the level of diversity and enabling intersectional encounter through building the trust and decoding relational patterns.

We chose a botanical garden as a scenery to perform in because it is a place where a diverse forms of life meet and adapt to co-exist. Parks and botanical gardens are artificially created spaces that perform incubation and protective functions. The environment is designed to suit each plant, to keep it alive and to ensure development for a variety of species brought from different climates. It is a model of how in one microclimate it is possible to create conditions for the life of a wide range of species inhabiting our planet. We decided to take garden as a metaphor for harmonious and ecological coexistence of society.

The third part 'into the welcoming hour 3.0. The plant way interpreting service' was taking place on 26.11.2019 on the MeetFactory, Prague, during the exhibition 'Manifesto of the Interpretative Class' 27. 11. - 26. 1. 2020. During this project we were trying to find the ways of communication with plants, through developing specific movements, sounds and breathing sequences.

Small actions such as for example performance in collaboration with Darina Alster during the lecture of Magdalena Sipka in GAVU as a part of the exhibition of eco-cell AVU; and 'Flower meditation' in Vz lenta-space (This was a continuation of the study of alternative forms of interpersonal and universal communication through the Flower Meditation technique developed by Laura Huxley. In this case, the context of meditation is transferred to collective actions in a specially built space, which creates the ground for creating new social-communicative solutions); and others were taking place in between big performative projects as well as the work on the book that includes personal stories of the participants of the project.

The group is ever-changing and ever-expanding and the basis of the research indepthens and inreachens with each new experience. Different scores and training techniques need to be applied with every new group of performers and participants. This long-term research has allowed me to design new strategies and gave the opportunity to apply knowledge on practice and experience the role of facilitator.

Description of the diploma project

Having collected the experience of previous actions and the methodology studied in the course of research, I created the basis for the project, which I present as my diploma work.

The idea of the 'into the welcoming hour 4.0' project is that the space is divided into 3 zones. In the first zone, various social and individual issues are manifested, they are pulled to the surface, released through bodily movements, voices and sounds.

Then follows the tea house, which plays the role of a transit zone, which is a 2x2m cube covered with a translucent fabric in which one of the performers conducts a tea ritual. This is a portal that serves as a transition to the inner garden space - the third zone. The inner garden is a representation of a certain vision of the eco-system, a metaphorical utopian station where species meet.

In essence, my diploma project is about creating an environment in which the performance takes place. It can be viewed both as an installation that exists by itself and registered in itself the imprints of the work that took place in the course of preparation, and from the point of view of a performative action in which the installation essentially acts as a stage / decoration for a performative action. However, I would like to insist on considering the entire project, where the preparation process itself is an integral part of the project, since in the course of developing a performative action, a group of participants forms a certain microcosm - the habitat in which we go through each stage, form a certain idea of what it might be a model of society, proceeding from our common desires and modeling a certain microtopic reality that we live in during a four-hour performance.

The performative action is built according to the Gesamtkunstwerk principle. Dancers, performers, musicians, painters, photographers and videographers, both professional and amateur, are taking part in the performance.

We are incorporating a non hierarchical structure of the group as much as it is possible, but at the same time taking the roles of choreographer and facilitator when it is needed.

One of the main tasks in creating a project is finding the right balance in the distribution between choreography as such and improvisation techniques. In working with the participants, I am responsible for preparing the mental and emotional vocabulary needed for improvisation. For this I use various techniques which I describe further.

I was lucky to get the opportunity to work in collaboration on this project with incredibly talented choreographer Pape Ibrahima N'diaye who has the understanding of alternative theatrical methods and huge experience in butoh dance, traditional african dance and afro-fusion. He has created a structure which in the piece plays a role of markerpoints that are gluing improvisational parts together. His approach has brought a lot of strength and depth to the performance. By bringing our creative thinking together we were able to develop performance which combines dance and something that goes beyond dance and theatre.

One of the main techniques that I use are the techniques described in the book "Viewpoints" by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. Viewpoints is a philosophy translated into a technique for training performers; building ensemble; and creating movement for the stage.

There are Physical Viewpoints (Spatial Relationship, Kinesthetic Response, Shape, Gesture, Repetition, Architecture, Tempo, Duration and Topography) and Vocal Viewpoints (Pitch, Dynamic, Acceleration/Deceleration, Silence and Timbre).

We are also applying some principles of viewpoints for building up the structure - we use the 'montage' technique, 'building up and dropping'. This method was inspired by Meg Stuart's piece 'Damaged Goods'.

For each part of the performance we were discovering how to encompass particular sensations. For example for the first part of the performance we were working with such notions as distrust, alienation, anxiety, fear, anger, mistrust, traumatic experiences and so on. The transition zone is a very meditative and trance-like part, where we only use our voices and involve the viewers into the process by offering them tea in the tea house. The preparation for the third part requires the most discussion and mind work, as we are to build the vision of the world which is coming from our dream and to formulate the affirmation of the non-anthropocentric relations between species inhabiting our planet, represented in the metaphor of the garden. There is a complete absence of structure and only improvisation and the notion of coexistence.

Together with „View Pointing“ techniques I have been also incorporating basic theatrical exercises according to the method of Anton Chekhov, Augusto Boal and his "games for actors and non-actors" and choreographic techniques "Gaga People Dance" developed by Ohad Naharin and other psycho-physical methods that we have reworked and reappropriated for the performance.

Big inspiration for me was the project '(Re)housing the American Dream' by Kirsten Leenaars. Her project is a collective forum for refugee and American born children to engage critically with their intersecting issues of immigration, segregation, housing, and happiness. It is structured as a three-week summer camp in Milwaukee's Near West Side and documented in a format of three-channel video. The project has a blogue and a lot of additional materials such as blueprints, catalogue, blogue, and archives. That's why the whole preparation for the performance has a

huge role in this project for me. It is not just the work on the performance, but a big team-making job.

Performative Group

*“... to look is the opposite of acting.
The viewer remains motionless in her place, she is passive.
To be a spectator means to be deprived of both
the ability to know and the ability to act.”*

Our group has no limits for age, race, national and cultural identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or any other identity marker. I invite professional performers and people who do not have experience in this sphere but share the values of the project.

In our project, it is not only that the spectator is a participant, but also the performer himself is an observer. As Guy Debord expresses the problem of the passive spectator / observer in the formula: "The more they observe, the less they live"¹, in our performance we involve the viewer in the action, since we cannot remain in the viewer / beholder position in a situation where society and social problems and tasks are discussed. And at the same time, performers are observers of what is happening during the improvisational part of the performance.

In the first part, the viewer is involved in the action with active emotional participation, when pressing problems arise, affecting the viewer as well. Similar to what Rancière describes with reference to Plato's discourse on theater:

“...we need another theater, a theater without spectators. Not a theater with an empty hall, but a theater where the passive optical relation contained in the word itself would obey another relation, which is contained in another word, and this word denotes what is happening on the stage, the drama. Drama means action. A theater is a place where moving bodies perform an action in front of living bodies that need to be set in motion. The latter, however, can refuse to realize this ability of theirs. But this ability again asserts itself, it is awakened by the performance of the first, the intellectual impulse that creates the idea, as well as the energy produced by it.”

Rancière J., The Emancipated Spectator p.4

In the second and third parts, it is important for us to lead the viewer through the narrow gate and invite them to the environment that we have created based on our vision and idea of the ecological solum.

¹ (Debord G. Society of The Spectacle p.30)

Differential presence

'...presence might be used to name 'a feeling of being fully alive to the audience and other performers, a feeling of supreme control and power, but also paradoxically an openness to the contingencies of a live performance.'
(Suzanne M. Jaeger)

Performance studies help to understand more about the transcendental essence of being in the present. The performers are in a quantum time system because they pass over each fraction of a second at a moment of 'here and now'.

"Can one be 'present to' ('with', 'in' or 'among') difference as becoming rather than being; and in what sense can performance be said to offer such encounters with a difference to the artist and audience?"

Laura Cull, Differential presence: Deleuze and performance. 2009

Pushing the boundaries between the performer and the viewer, through the involvement, the viewer ceases to be a spectator and becomes a co-operator. In this way, accomplices can easily touch the notion of presence and go through the narrow gate of 'here and now'. Differential presence never arrives or ends, but is always complete in and as the process of becoming. It comes of presence as an encounter between a self and an other (or between an identity and difference), and of presence as involving a relationship with metaphysical being.

Presence, as 'the state of being before, in front of, or in the same place with a person or thing', is redefined as being among the other, 'within it, together in a zone of proximity'. Joined together in this zone people can start building an eco-systemic commune according to their vision of the future, which comes from a dream. Because the auratic mode of presence allows us to meet with our true selves. Perhaps by pulling out from the above-conscious an answer to the question "what do we want?" we will find out that our *volonté générale* is to be happy and live in prosperity and abundance. Not only coming from an ethical hedonism with the will to maximize happiness but most importantly to experience the joy of contemplation.

When an individual follows the principles of empathy, the concept of another ceases to be meaningful, and this is where I see the root of solving many social problems facing us as a society at this stage. In a world where the processes of globalization, the rapid development of cyberspace, the threat of an environmental catastrophe and global pandemics provoking anxiety and, at the same time, the growth of social distance, are taking place, it is incredibly important to look for and find new points of intersection and connections of various forms of emancipation. In my opinion, it is now already illegitimate and ineffective to resolve issues separately in different social groups. And the way out of the situation is not inclusiveness, but intersectionality, the search for common ways of liberation and the combination of different ways of emancipation.

Identity politics, which has become so closely embedded in the principles and rules that govern the modern cultural environment, leads to disunity. With the difficult recognition of their social and historical conditioning, gender, race and class cannot provide the foundation for belief in "essential unity".²

² Haraway D. A Cyborg Manifesto 1985

Intersectionality is “the most important theoretical contribution of feminology (...) to date”³ and, in short, means an approach to identity that recognizes that different categories of identity can intersect and coexist in one person, creating a qualitatively different experience than that which gives a singular identity feature.

Inner Garden

"il faut cultiver son jardin" / "je třeba pěstovat svou zahradu" / "We Must Cultivate Our Own Garden"
Voltaire, *Candide* (1759)

Our model is not based on any of the existing ideologies, since the prefigurative culture is not based on the continuity and patterns of previous generations.

In my performative work, I am inspired by the metaphor of the garden, not as a garden of Eden, but as a permaculture garden in which everything grows in symbiosis and cooperation.

To create a vision, it is also important to take into account that this microclimate is inhabited not only by human beings but also by different animals, plants and mechanisms. This is why I'm focusing on interspecies communication and always thinking beyond human subjectivity.

In the philosophy of Donna Haraway, the concept of the symbiosis of species precedes the discussion of open ontologies that extend between the spheres of the human and that which extends beyond it. Haraway writes: “View is a dance connecting a tribe (kin) and a kind”⁴. And we are talking not only about biology but about the various discourses of reality and fiction, which penetrate the relations of people and other creatures.

Gender, racial and class consciousness is an achievement imposed on us by the terrible historical experience of the conflicting social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism. Who counts as "us" in my own rhetoric? What identities can be found to substantiate such a strong political myth called "we", and what can justify enrollment in this collective?

Haraway D. "A Cyborg Manifesto" p.12

The search for the connection between the human and non-human leads us on the path to a new sensitivity, revealing the presence of the animal in the human environment, culture, history, both before and after humanism. The human, modern, emancipated subject ceases to be a reference point. In its place comes the post-humanistic, unstable and nomadic subject.

Animals always shared one fate, one planet, crises, wars, and natural disasters with people⁵. We involve animals and non-human in general into our constructs of nature and culture, making them a part of biopolitics. This practice changes the concept of life and death, health and disease, and introduces new forms of extinction. The understanding of the “wild” is blurred and ceases to be associated with the immediate naturalness of nature. The boundaries of the wild are opened up

³ MacCol, L., «Difficulties of Intersectionality», *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, issue 30, 2005, p. 1771.

⁴ Haraway D. *When Species Meet*. P. 18.

⁵ Haraway D. *When Species Meet*. P. 75

by the vitality of machines and the culture of animals. In the context of post-anthropocentrism ⁶, the displacement of the boundaries between nature (zoe) and culture (bios), the question is about the possibility of overcoming the crisis of humanism through interactive inclusion, affirmative processes of “unnamable being”, “becoming with” non-human agents in the conditions of nature culture and new media-ecologies.

We have never been humans and only humans in a biological sense ⁷. We are an incomplete result of joint formation with non-human Others through the separation of emotions, biotas, through “becoming wild” in the process of elusive metamorphoses of human-non-human subjectivities.

It is necessary to look at the posthumanistic subject and its ability for various recompositions. By implanting one's body through another subject, an opportunity is created for building empathic and ecological behavioral patterns. The man, the plants, and the computer in this case are the companions, which makes it possible to create nonanthropocentric relationships. We all inhabit the natural culture, where matter appears as a living and self-organizing substance, outside of which the opposition of technological and natural loses its negative value.

Self-Reflection

In the course of creating the work, many changes from the original plan undoubtedly appeared, and their own difficulties arose. The biggest challenge for me is organizing a group of people. I would like to get more knowledge and experience in the field of facilitation. In general, my activity over the course of three years of study opened for me a wide field of experiments and opportunities for research and practice of various performative methods. Working with a large group of performers allowed me to realize myself as a facilitator in practice to apply the methods I learned, discovering new contexts for myself and diving deeper and deeper into what is really important for me as an artist.

During the creation of the diploma, it was valuable to immerse yourself in work on one project for a long time.

In the future, I would like to dive deeper into the development of my own methodology, which has already begun to form in the course of my research, to expand the scale of performative actions and the process of preparing for the action itself. Also in the future I see the development of this project in international collaboration and the creation of a semi-documentary film.

⁶ According to Braidotti, even if we accept it or not, we inhabit a post-anthropocentric reality in which the temporality of the Earth is intertwined with human history, and geological assemblies are gradually becoming a part of politics, subjectivity and sociality.

⁷ Bakke M. *Bio-trans-configurations. Art and Aesthetics of Posthumanism*. Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2015. P. 90.