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DOCUMENTATION AS TRANSFORMATIVE TOOL IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE

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PREFACE

This project is a part of my ongoing research on transformation of both myself and the environments around me. It is an attempt in understanding the intersubjective nature of an individual as a premise of such a transformation. It started in September 2020 with a development of a durational performance piece that has never happened, and it reaches a certain end with this text being finished in May 2021. It is a process-based rather than a goal-oriented artistic research. Although at each stage of the work I had a plan that would span from the initial phase up till the successful conclusion, I preserved a privilege of ignorance for myself. Thus, after each stage the whole process would be reconsidered and changed in relation to what had been carried out before. This privilege of ignorance consisted in an approach of looking for the things I still don't know or don't understand in a work I do instead of drawing out conclusions on what I have proved or "successfully" achieved.

The whole thesis is built upon feminist approach and autoethnography. The methods applied in the development of the projects were documentation, memory-work, physical theatre improvisation and disidentification.

Design of the research consists of six stages:

1. Installation "interrogation room": working with the topic of abuse in intimate relationships; personal belongings and writings as documents. *Try-out in a glass box of Tartu Arts Centre (November 26th, 2020).*
2. Research and development phase: on guilt and shame; performing memory-work; physical theatre improvisations. Collaboration with Maria Paiste. *Carried out between December-February 2021.*
3. Expanded installation "interrogation / room / in progress": documentation of the process of making as a part of the final work; shame as a censor; violence as a main object in the project. *Set in Vent Space (Tallinn, Estonia), 9th-13th of February 2021.*
4. Research and development phase: problematics of identity politics; practice of listening; on insignificance; on recursivity.
5. Online audio-performance "Insignificant audio-performance in three acts": on the contemporary relations of time and space. Collaboration with Maria Paiste. *Performed at the Festival of Spooky Action at a Distance on the 4th of April 2021 at e7lektron.*
6. Final written work as yet another project: processes of documentation and overwriting.

It is also important to note that up till the fourth stage of the research the work was done in the frame of identity politics.

At the beginning the documents and the processes of documentation were simply the methods of work which were to be put aside when the final project would be done. However, at the third stage of the thesis, documentation became the core of the installation and it drastically changed the course of the activities that followed. Despite the diversity of forms and all the transformations, the main question of the research was transcending the whole process: “Where am I speaking from?”

The full list of projects’ documentations is available in the Appendix 2, the technical sheets could be reviewed in the Appendix 3.

The written part of the master’s project consists of the preface, two parts, conclusion, list of references, three appendices, summary. Volume – 45 pages.

1. “INTERROGATION / ROOM / IN PROGRESS”

“Time loses its power when remembrance redeems the past.”

Herbert Marcuse, “Eros and Civilization”¹

1.1. Where am I speaking from?

This is where I started from – a desire to free myself from the weight of the past through an artistic practice. Not yet defined, neither conceptualized nor named. At the basis of it were Marcuse’s ideas on the processes of remembering and forgetting in societies. According to him, in repressive society forgetting is not only essentially human phenomenon which is “an indispensable requirement of mental and physical hygiene without which civilized life would be unbearable; but it is also the mental faculty which sustains submissiveness and renunciation”². We are made to forget what caused our miseries by those in power so that we can continue to endure them. Marcuse claimed that evoking those buried memories is what makes liberation possible.³ Here is where the decision to turn to memory studies appeared. The fact that the Frankfurt School of thought, of which Herbert Marcuse was a part, is based on Freudian ideas with a great deal of attention paid to sexuality led to my own orientation shifting towards intimate relationships. From there the topic of sexual and emotional abuse arose. At this initial stage of the project my thinking was heavily informed by the frame of identity politics to which I will come back in Chapter 2 in more details.

Another major influence at the beginning was an article “Border thinking and disidentification: Postcolonial and postsocialist feminist dialogues” by Tlostanova et al.⁴ Speaking from today, I can say that at that time I have misread almost the whole piece taking away only two points, the need for transformation and discovery of our positionality. Transformation mainly lied in the disruption of the “dominant logics and imaginaries in knowledge production” while the question of positionality was enabling the tools for such transformation.⁵ Although the article was on border thinking and disidentification as feminist

¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2015), 234, <http://rbdigital.oneclickdigital.com>.

² Marcuse, 233.

³ Marcuse, 233–34.

⁴ Madina Tlostanova, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, and Redi Koobak, ‘Border Thinking and Disidentification: Postcolonial and Postsocialist Feminist Dialogues’, *Feminist Theory* 17, no. 2 (August 2016): 211–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700116645878>.

⁵ Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, and Koobak, 213.

tools in the processes of decolonialization (primarily of knowledge), I have completely ignored those points and the necessity of reading into them deeper. However, since it was my ignorance that led me where I am now, I find it essential to set out my misinterpretations here.

I'd start with the first draft description of the project that has never happened, but which ideas transcended almost the whole process:

“WHAT’S LEFT OF US”⁶ aims at reimagining theatre as a social experiment space within which social *transformative tools*, elaborated theoretically, could be applied in practice.

The performance would deal with subjects of *gender-based violence* and abusive relationships through the characters of The Subject and The Chronicler. The artists in collaboration with the researcher will explore *the relationships between the ones who remember and the ones who commemorate*. Between the (hi)stories we live through and the (hi)stories we read about. While concentrating on autobiographical memory-work, the piece will search to establish and stage a *non-repressive relationship* between the characters usually presented in *the frame of domination/oppression*.

Through the reworking of traumatic experiences, the artists would try to address self-censorship related to sexual and emotional abuse while searching for the ways of individual’s *liberation* from it.

Highlighted words in the description strongly refer to the ideas taken away from Marcuse and Tlostanova et al. The general intention here could be summarized as *consciously applying the tools of border thinking and disidentification within the process of memory-work to create a performance narrative through which personal liberation from traumatic experiences could become possible*.

Apart from that the power relations between those who remember and those who commemorate also send us back to the cultural (collective) memory studies’ theories which were informing my work. I was considering cultural memory as always a result of constant intellectual and political negotiations⁷, where “our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning

⁶ “WHAT’S LEFT OF US” was a working title of the project before “interrogation / room / in progress”.

⁷ Jan-Werner Müller, ‘Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory’, in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491580.001>.

of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.”⁸ According to C. Weedon and G. Jordan, “in recent decades, collective memory in national contexts has been challenged and augmented by a range of interest groups, often not previously included in hegemonic constructions of the nation, who are fighting to have their histories acknowledged, documented and commemorated, with the aim, in part, of reshaping national stories.”⁹ “The politics of memory as a research paradigm”¹⁰, in my case, was lowered from the socio-cultural level to the personal which led to working with autobiographical memory.

Autobiographical approach in the creation of an artwork has been long present. However, as a feminist practice and later as a widespread trend in performing arts in general it was installed in the '70s taking its roots in “The Personal is Political” slogan of the Second Wave feminism.¹¹ As formulated by Sidonie Smith, “autobiographical practices become the occasions for the staging of identity, and autobiographical strategies for the staging of agency”¹². Autobiographical performances were for women a stage which allowed them to inscribe their female experiences into a male-dominated fabric of public discourse. Going further in the autobiographical, I could say that we also simply can't run away from it. Cultural norms, myths and structures are embedded into our identities' formation and thus into our personal memories. “The memory burden for the individual is then different; it has more sources outside the person's own experience”¹³. Or, if we refer to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, “the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective”.¹⁴

Based on everything mentioned above, my artistic research was supposed to kick off with a durational performance within which personal documents (diary entries, photographs, returned letters etc.) would have been reworked into other, renewed objects. Now, another term that is important to highlight in the draft description is *self-censorship* which I perceived as the main obstacle to liberation. It has originated from the practice of already working with the objects involved as with *documents* to what I'm turning now.

⁸ Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (2003) in Peter J. Verovšek, ‘Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm’, *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, no. 3 (2 July 2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1167094>.

⁹ Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan, ‘Collective Memory: Theory and Politics’, *Social Semiotics* 22, no. 2 (April 2012): 144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2012.664969>.

¹⁰ Verovšek, ‘Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past’.

¹¹ Dee Heddon, ‘The Politics of the Personal: Autobiography in Performance’, in *Feminist Futures?*, ed. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), 130–31, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230554948_9.

¹² Heddon, 133.

¹³ Katherine Nelson, ‘Self and Social Functions: Individual Autobiographical Memory and Collective Narrative’, *Memory* 11, no. 2 (January 2003): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1080/741938203>.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 3. Dr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 126.

1.1.1. The nature of documentation

Before 1950s both a *document* and a process of *documentation* were very different from how we perceive them today. The documents were text-based items only and documentation was a process of organizing them.¹⁵ However, together with the development of digital technologies, the whole idea of what information is has been redefined. In 1951 S. Briet proposed a different definition, “a document is “any physical or symbolic sign, preserved or recorded, intended to represent, to reconstruct, or to demonstrate a physical or conceptual phenomenon””¹⁶. Documents were no longer simple presentations of facts. It became possible to use them “as (new) evidence for some purpose”¹⁷.

These new purposes and general shift in understanding of what a document and a documentation is were reflected in the art practices in the '60s. “It became less and less clear where and when the artwork stopped and documentation of art began”.¹⁸ Today the use of documents and documentation within the art works became so omnipresent that it often goes completely unrecognized as such. Or rather, the use of it became naturalized.

One of the most explicit examples is Lola Arias' ongoing project that she started in 2012 called “My Documents”. It is a series of lecture performances where performers share the contents of one of their folders on personal computers. “Artists from different backgrounds present personal research, a radical experience, a story that secretly obsess them.” In 2020 she also made a global online edition “Share Your Screen”.¹⁹ Another explicit example could be the online performance “The Reader” by Liis Vares and Taavet Jansen where the software for creating digital documents became the stage itself.

Apart from that documentation became one of the defining characteristics of almost any curatorial/artistic-curatorial practice. At the last exhibition at EKKM in Tallinn, “Tiger in Space”, the whole part of it, “Department of Tigers”, was created out of all kinds of documentations regarding tigers in combination with the theoretical literature exhibited within it. In Fotografiska Tallinn it's also hard to see an exhibition where documentation of its preparation, of the artist's processes wouldn't be mixed in with the works. As with “Places Beyond” of Erik Johansson, the props used in his photographs were also present in the space as documents

¹⁵ Michael K. Buckland, ‘What Is a “Document”?’, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 48, no. 9 (September 1997): 805–6, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4571\(199709\)48:9<804::AID-ASI5>3.0.CO;2-V](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571(199709)48:9<804::AID-ASI5>3.0.CO;2-V).

¹⁶ Briet in Buckland, 806.

¹⁷ Wilson in Buckland, 808.

¹⁸ Christian Berger and Jessica Santone, ‘Documentation as Art Practice in the 1960s’, *Visual Resources* 32, no. 3–4 (October 2016): 202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2016.1241030>.

¹⁹ Lola Arias, ‘My Documents’, *Lola Arias Artist's Website* (blog), n.d., <https://lolaarias.com/my-documents>.

together with the video footages of him working and creating those works and the wall-texts describing his thought processes. Another latest exhibition at Fotografiska Tallinn had documents as its core. It was “Color Lehmitz” of Anders Petersen where instead of his iconic photography project “Café Lehmitz” the negatives of those photos with the notes on them made by Petersen were enlarged and exhibited as *works themselves*. In addition to it, two other video footages, one with the author’s narration about the people on the photos, the other – a short documentary on the photographer, were part of the exhibition.

In the 60s’ the use of documentation in art works was either a part of the institutional critique (interestingly, this is what the creators of the “Department of Tigers” directly refer to also²⁰) or the tool for empowerment since it allowed for the rewriting of the documentations used (which turned out to be the case with my project “interrogation / room / in progress” as well).²¹ Today it’s either a rule for setting a “proper” exhibition or a reflection of our personal everyday practices of dealing with digital documents and processes of documentation which no longer are the monopoly of archivists, information scientists etc.

For this project, I have gathered all my belongings that were in one way or another related to my previous intimate partners. Those became the *primary documents* I’ve been working with.²² The transformation of those objects was meant to be material and visible. After trying to change their photocopies with the methods of layering, painting over them and collaging, I discovered the use of embroidery in contemporary photography practices. And it was through embroidering those objects that I realized that they cannot be fully changed. Whether I layer them one upon another, paint or write on them, collage them together, they are still there – but hidden. With embroidery it became obvious because it’s a practice where most of the work done could be reversed. I could take the threads away and see all of the objects almost untouched. Other methods were making this hide and seek game just a little bit harder. At this point, I have asked myself for the first time, “What and why am I hiding? And from whom?” Although I was sure about the decision to work within the field of autobiographical, I still couldn’t let myself expose all the details of those events. Back then I tried to explain it by bringing up the term *self-censorship* which implied both the outer influences (how collective or

²⁰ Marten Esko, Vanina Saracino, and Lea Vene, eds., *TIGER IN SPACE at the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM)* (EKKM, n.d.), 113.

²¹ Berger and Santone, ‘Documentation as Art Practice in the 1960s’, 203.

²² S. Briet distinguishes between primary and secondary documents (the latest referring to the previous ones). Later within this paper different levels of documentation performed in my projects will be clear. Briet in Buckland, ‘What Is a “Document”?’, 806.

social bans us from reaching out to certain phenomena even within our own psyche) and individual conscious action.

Trying to understand what those forces preventing me from exposing the objects are, I went back to the article by Tlostanova et al. and one of their main claims, “We are where we think”²³. Thus, hand in hand with Bourdieu’s habitus, performance art from the ’70s and politics of memory, I misread that claim as the need to peel off all the multiple layers of one’s identity and then – and here is my main misinterpretation – *to root oneself in them*, to make sure that I go on speaking from the chosen places in me. Although it was quite an unfortunate take on the ideas regarding border thinking and disidentification, it was a fortunate turning for me to explore at that time.

This initial stage of my work culminated with a trial set-up of the installation in the glass box of Tartu Arts Centre, November 26th, 2020 (see figure 1.1, 1.2, 1.3).

1.1.2. “interrogation room”

During the process of organizing the space and preparing the documents I have rethought the final form of the project from a durational performance into an installation.

While experimenting with the documents’ transformation, their out-of-context nature for the viewer made me look for the ways to create this context for each of the objects so that they could get a story of their own. Together with the autobiographical (that is also often a part of the so-called confessional art practices²⁴) I started working on “confessions” for each of the objects, short texts that would talk about the events and/or my state during those events at which the objects were created and/or acquired. However, each of the written pieces was directly referring to



FIGURE 1.1. TRIAL SETUP OF THE INSTALLATION IN THE GLASS BOX OF TARTU ARTS CENTRE

²³ Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, and Koobak, ‘Border Thinking and Disidentification’, 214.

²⁴ For example, see ‘Sophie Calle, Prenez Soins de Vous’, Gallery, *Perrotin* (blog), n.d., https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Sophie_Calle/1/prenez-soin-de-vous-set-complet/12963#; ‘Vera Iona Papadopoulou, Artist’s Personal Web-Site’, n.d., <https://veraiona.com/>.

those material objects I gathered. For example, one of the objects was a draft of the letter I wrote to one of the partners in August 2019. In a “confession” (as I called it at first) I would re-write the sentences from the letter in third person, neither changing nor adding anything, e.g. “She mentions how sincerely glad she would be for whatever makes him happy”. Afterwards, I would over-write the written “confession” by inserting my perception of it from the point in time of over-writing (also in third person), or by adding the description of the related events from before or after the letter was written, e.g. “In less than a year her therapist would ask her what makes her happy. She wouldn’t know how to answer”. During this writing in third person (or depersonalized writing), documenting what’s been said, done, thought, experienced, I felt as if I was testifying to something before myself (and before any imaginary viewer). It felt as an interrogation of myself performed by me. The objects turned into *evidence* and the confessions into *testimonies* forming couples which could be recognized by the numbering system of the objects. With the need to censor myself, I would embroider both the evidences and the testimonies. This brought about the general aesthetic of the installation – *interrogation room*.

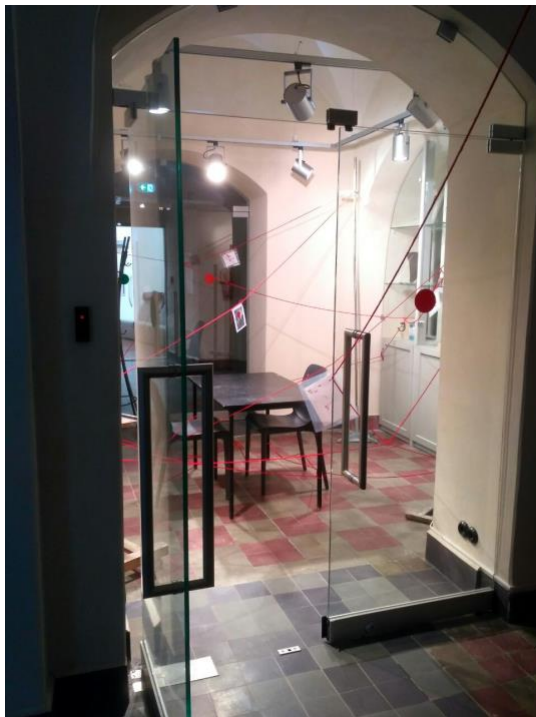


FIGURE 1.2. TRIAL SETUP OF THE INSTALLATION
IN THE GLASS BOX OF TARTU ARTS CENTRE



FIGURE 1.3. TRIAL SETUP OF THE INSTALLATION
IN THE GLASS BOX OF TARTU ARTS CENTRE

With further development of the work and the documents included, all the *reproductions* of the objects were put aside (for example prints of the scanned negatives or digital photos, newly acquired cigarette pack instead of the saved one etc.). I opted for a hyperbolized materiality of the situation that would reflect the heavy presence of itself and its own historicity

and act as an anachronism. For this reason, I found a typewriter which, at first, was used to create the testimonies and later became a part of the installation itself. At the end, 7 couples of evidences and testimonies were chosen, each referring to a different relationship. However, opting for the hyperbolized materiality, I needed to discard certain objects leaving the testimonies with nothing to refer to except the empty folder (see figure 1.6). At the same time, I had objects to which there was no testimony written simply because there was nothing to add (see figure 1.13). It was a returned letter which had everything to get the story of it if desired, the letter itself, the envelope with the stamps indicating that the letter was sent, delivered, never picked up and sent back (see figure 1.14). Another testimony had itself to refer to – an instant photograph of its uncensored version (see figure 1.8). Two testimony-evidence couples are missing entirely (No.1 and No.4).

The whole play between what is the evidence, what is the testimony, the overwritten texts of the testimonies and the red thread which not only embroiders the documents but the space itself is, first and foremost, an attempt to reflect the memory structure which is the basis of the “interrogation room”. It refers to the particular events but also to itself, tries to establish connections and form at least some sort of linear causal narrative – and fails. This failure (or rather – impossibility, but also unnecessary) finds its expression in one of the evidences being burned through (see figure 1.14), another – burned through and ripped into pieces (see figure 1.10), and the negatives chosen in a way that person’s face isn’t there (see figure 1.12). This was also caused by the need to preserve people’s privacy.

By December 2020 the objects and the installation plan were finalized (see figure 1.4 through 1.14).

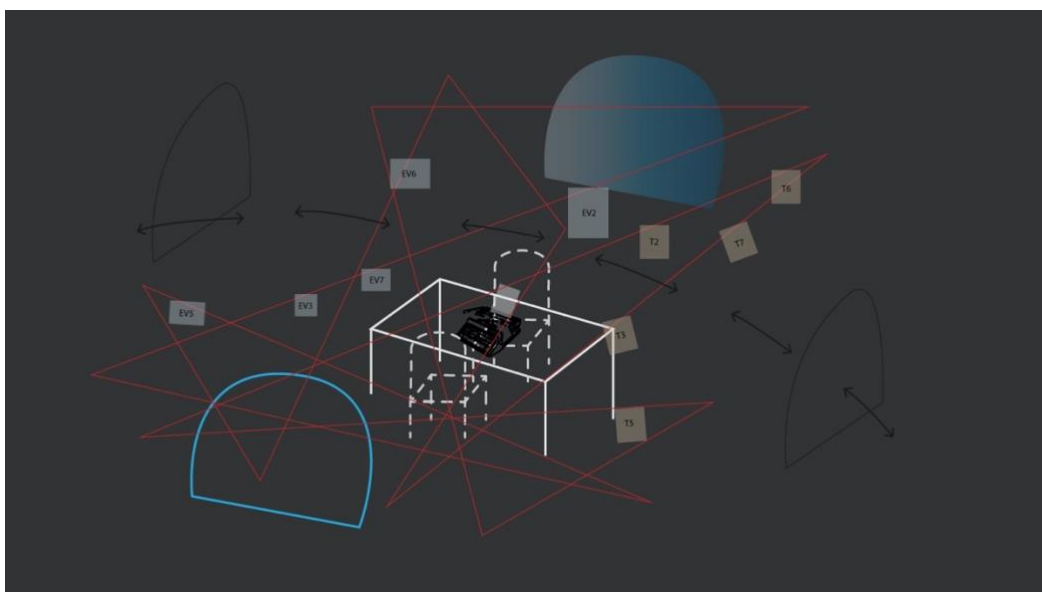


FIGURE 1.4. INSTALLATION PLAN

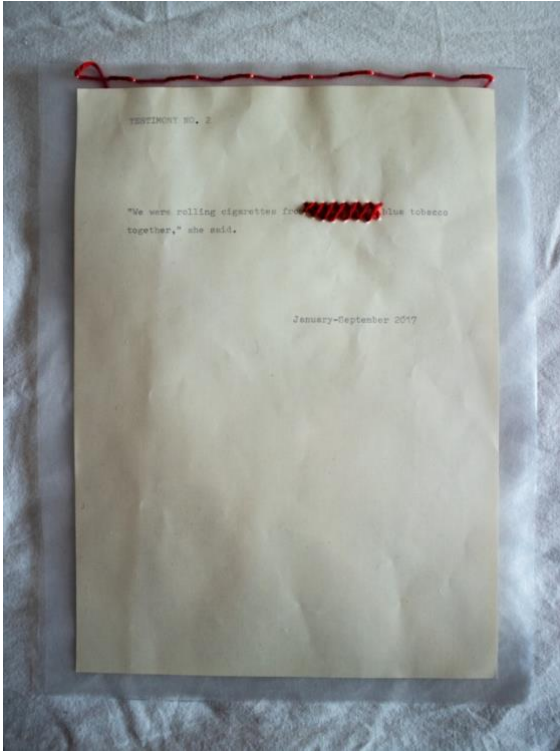


FIGURE 1.5. TESTIMONY NO.2 (INSTALLATION
DETAIL SHOT)



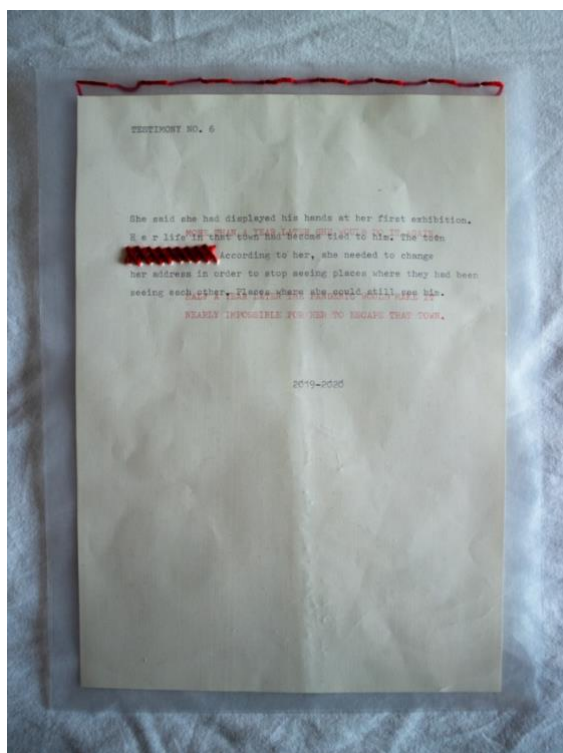
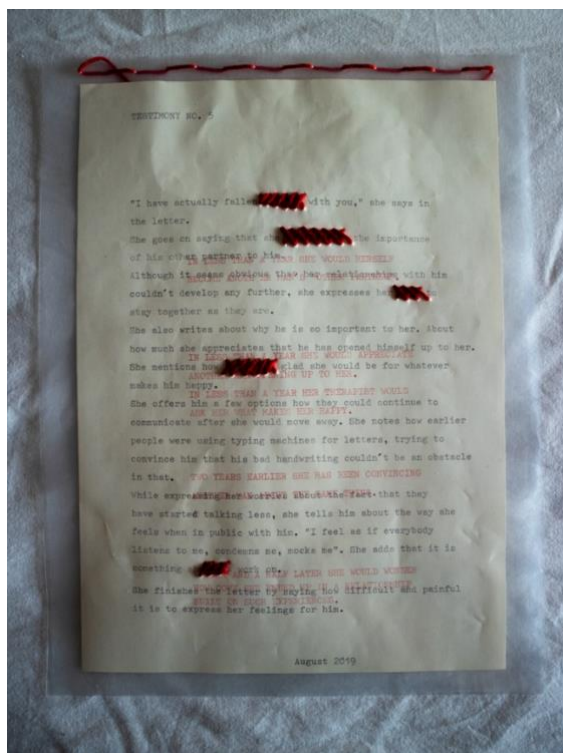
FIGURE 1.6. EVIDENCE NO.2 (INSTALLATION
DETAIL SHOT)



FIGURE 1.7. TESTIMONY NO.3 (INSTALLATION
DETAIL SHOT)



FIGURE 1.8. EVIDENCE NO.3 (INSTALLATION
DETAIL SHOT)



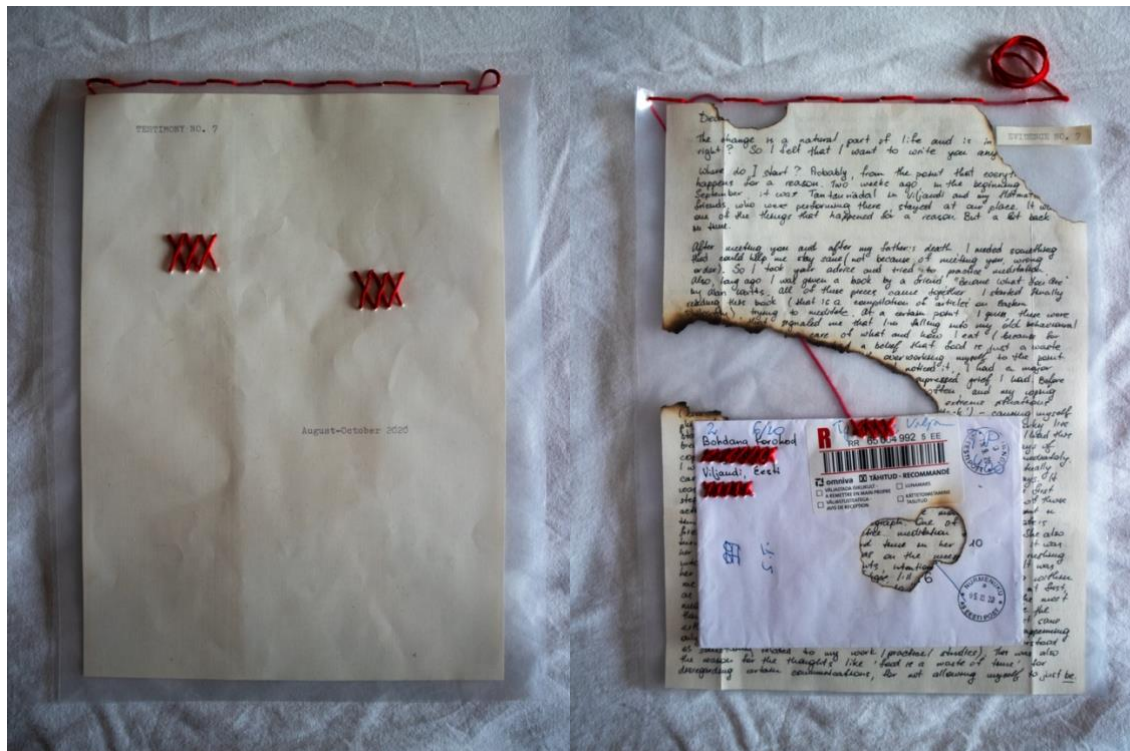


FIGURE 1.13. TESTIMONY NO.7 (INSTALLATION
DETAIL SHOT)

FIGURE 1.14. EVIDENCE NO.7 (INSTALLATION
DETAIL SHOT)

While still trying to follow the question “Where am I speaking from?” at this stage of the project there were few major aspects still unclear to me. Firstly, *what those outer influences causing this self-censorship are exactly*. Secondly, *why the reflection upon and reworking of these documents are not bringing neither any liberation from those events nor a simple relief, but rather create a sensation of being in a vicious circle*.

1.2. The concept of self-censorship: delicate complication

To address the issues mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph, I was advised to resort to *memory-work* as a research method. This method is described as feminist²⁵ and “explicitly liberationist in its intent”²⁶ which also justified its use within my research. Since it depends on being performed in a group, I have been collaborating with Maria Paiste throughout the whole second stage of the research.

²⁵ Jenny Onyx and Jennie Small, ‘Memory-Work: The Method’, *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 6 (December 2001): 773, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700608>.

²⁶ Onyx and Small, 774.

Memory-work is done in three phases. Phase one is writing down certain memories following a set procedure.²⁷ Phase two is a collaborative analysis of the memories.²⁸ Phase three is further theorization of all the material.²⁹ Within my artistic research the method wasn't followed rigorously since the group consisted of two people only and phase three hasn't been performed in its fullest.

The set procedure for the Phase 1:

- “1. Write 1 to 2 pages about a particular episode, action, or event (referred to by researchers as a *trigger* or *cue*). [...]
2. Write in the third person using a pseudonym. [...]
3. Write in as much detail as possible, including even what might be considered to be trivial or inconsequential. [...]
4. Describe the experience, do not import interpretation, explanation, or biography. [...]”³⁰

For this phase I have chosen six cues based on the topic of the installation – *emotional abuse, sexual abuse, silence*³¹ – and on three emotions which seemed to pierce through the literature I've been working with³² – *pain, guilt, shame*. I wouldn't present here neither the documentation of the exercise nor the detailed analysis of the memories worked through due to the confidentiality concerns and because this information wouldn't be of relevance for the better understanding of the process.

As a result, the following conclusions were drawn from the application of this method:

- 1) all the memories were constantly referring to the feeling of personal guilt;
- 2) the writing on the cue *shame* was the most troublesome and the least fruitful as if everything related to it was somehow blocked;
- 3) although our experiences differed, our responses to them were similar;
- 4) the similarity of the responses could be traced back to the particular environments we were brought up in and childhood events.

The similarity of the responses consisted in

- 1) the acceptance of mistreatment;

²⁷ Onyx and Small, 776.

²⁸ Onyx and Small, 776–77.

²⁹ Onyx and Small, 777.

³⁰ Onyx and Small, 776.

³¹ Silence as in *not speaking* (ukr. мовчання).

³² Although looking backwards, those were the emotions that subconsciously were the undercurrents of the work all along.

- 2) difficulty in sharing the experience with anyone caused by the feeling of *personal* guilt;
- 3) feeling of guilt for bringing this mistreatment *upon ourselves* as the first response (even regarding childhood events when we were 7-8 years old);
- 4) experience of inner contradiction (e.g., realizing that you're being mistreated but continuing to endure it as a given).

Through this exercise I realized the need to explore possible connections, if any, deeper between different memories. Trying not to force those connections, we tried *physical theatre improvisation* as a research method. The space was delineated into zones with a tape. Each zone corresponded to a certain memory (in total there were *six memories* of ours which we described to each other in detail and were working with during the process). Maria was performing, while I was directing, documenting, and analyzing the responses. To find the connections we posed a task of transitioning physically and verbally between the zones.

The procedure was as follows:

1. Choose two events to work with based on the need to understand them (e.g., Maria would choose one childhood event of hers and I would choose one of mine; initially the only point of connection was that they both are approximately from the same age).
2. Only two events are explored at a time simultaneously.
3. Perform a specific event taking the position of everyone included in the memory always speaking in first person.
4. Shift your place from one event to the next one (that is designated by physically separated zones in the space) *seamlessly* (it should be done whenever a certain connection/similarity/causal effect between the two is experienced by the performer).
5. Change between the two events as many times as there are possibilities for it.
6. The process is stopped by a director. However, the performer is free to stop at any time whenever she might experience any emotional or mental disturbance.

After working with all six memories three main conclusions were as such:

- 1) the Other in each situation always has a greater authority;
- 2) the Other has a full authority of defining and drawing boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not;
- 3) the Subject tends to avoid expressing herself directly, especially regarding sexual behaviors and desires.

At this point of the process, I was constantly coming back to what was called before *self-censorship*. However, through the application of memory-work and physical theatre improvisation exercise we have discovered that behind most of the experiences there were very similar feelings which we defined as guilt travelling from one context to another. We have also specified three different dimensions of guilt depending on the experiences: *guilt for what I did and did not do*; *guilt for what has happened to me*; *guilt for what I feel*. At the same time this omnipresence of guilt and its multiple manifestations seemed to overshadow something behind it, something we could not yet identify (or did not want to). A certain emotion feeding this confusion and overlapping of terms.

While I was at this research stage a new production of Polish theatre director Małgorzata Wdowik was on the way. The name of it was “Wstyd” (Shame)³³. Out of my personal interest in her works I stumbled upon her interview on that production where she elaborates on her triptych “Strach” (Fear), “Gniew” (Anger), “Wstyd” (Shame): “All these emotions are usually perceived as the negative ones. Often, we avoid experiencing them. At the same time, they are among the fundamental emotions which give us the understanding of who we are and the way we function in the world. Inability to confront them, avoidance lead to them being used in socio-political contexts as tools for manipulation and control”³⁴. Here shame came up again but what’s more importantly – the question of avoiding it.

During memory-work, writing on shame was the most troublesome, while within each memory there was a difficulty in sharing the experience with anyone else. The improvisation brought about the avoidance of expressing oneself directly. **Self-censorship turned out to be a delicate complication of a much simpler phenomenon that is shamefulness.**

1.2.1. Shame of the “interrogation room”

At this stage of the project, I got a chance to continue working on the installation during a one-week residency at Vent Space (gallery space in Tallinn, Estonia). During this intensive work period I had three main tasks:

³³ All translations in the text are mine unless specified otherwise.

³⁴ Natalia Jeziorek, ‘„Wstyd” w Nowym Teatrze’, *Vogue Polska* (blog), 23 December 2020, <https://www.vogue.pl/a/wstyd-w-nowym-teatrze>.

- 1) to explore the already existing installation setup from the first stage of the project through the prism of *shame* and notions related to it, such as *vulnerability* and *femininity*³⁵;
- 2) to track the changes of perception of my own memories during the process;
- 3) to enhance the installation by finding the way out of the vicious circle mentioned before (achieving the liberation from the past).

To fulfill these tasks, I have been leaving notes on the installation objects (evidences and testimonies) as a way of re- and over-writing them and the related memories. Each step of this writing was recorded with the camera. Most of the documentation shows the order of the objects being re-written and over-written which is not at all linear. Other videos were more of a video-diary documenting main shifting points of perception of my memories. As a result, I've used the first kind of the documentation to compile one video where the changes occurring to each of the objects and the installation as a whole are displayed from the No.1 to the general view.³⁶ At the final installation view the video is being projected opposite to its material setup (see figure 1.17 through 1.20 and the video documentation of the installation³⁷).

Firstly, the mentioned shift was obtained by an exploration of shame as “a road to vulnerability”³⁸. According to Thorgeirsdottir, western philosophical thinking with its roots in the male-dominated culture and shaming of the feminine has excluded the vulnerable from its field as weak or embarrassing. The binary structure of thinking such as strong/weak, male/female has also caused the positioning of both shame and vulnerability along these boundaries. This has turned empathy into a “neglected condition of philosophical thinking due to the prevalence of a combative style of doing philosophy”³⁹. However, within the psychoanalysis shame has long been seen as “an entrance to the self”⁴⁰. It is through shame that we experience our own selves for the first time.⁴¹ This double nature of shame being a formative emotion of our personhood and “a means of social influence and control”⁴² explains why experiencing and acknowledging it

³⁵ Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir, ‘Shame, Vulnerability and Philosophical Thinking’, *Sophia* 59, no. 1 (March 2020): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-020-00773-w>.

³⁶ Bohdana Korohod, *Video Part of the Installation (Full Version)* (Vent Space, Tallinn, Estonia, n.d.), <https://youtu.be/EyxgXJxQCQY>.

³⁷ Bohdana Korohod, *Interrogation / Room / in Progress (Vent Space, Documentation)*, n.d., <https://vimeo.com/529694926>.

³⁸ Thorgeirsdottir, ‘Shame, Vulnerability and Philosophical Thinking’, 11.

³⁹ Thorgeirsdottir, 13.

⁴⁰ Kaufman in Stephen Pattison, *Shame Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/5001733>.

⁴¹ Pajaczkowska & Ward in Carole Shadbolt, ‘Sexuality and Shame’, *Transactional Analysis Journal* 39, no. 2 (April 2009): 165, <https://doi.org/10.1177/036215370903900210>.

⁴² Pattison, *Shame Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 148.

could take an excessive amount of labor. Thorgeirsdottir also distinguishes between two kinds of shame, the perilous one that is “unprocessed, unacknowledged [...] expressed in dominance, anger and denial of vulnerability” and the redemptive one “that has potential of becoming transformative, a motivation for change”.⁴³

Precisely this denial of vulnerability expressed in my work before as *self-censorship* was my “structure of aggression and defense”⁴⁴. As Miryam Clough notes, it is “a short step from shame to blame, contempt and anger”⁴⁵. The realization of it has led me to see that,

“The very structure of “interrogation room” is violent in itself. It is was my act of aggression and defense.

Now, I want to overcome it.

It’s not an end point. Neither it is a point of concentration. It’s actually where I start from.

To open this space of vulnerability, I need to acknowledge this.

I was just fucking angry, basically. #1”

The quote above was the first major overwriting of the whole installation which is also reflected in a beginning of the video projected in the space.⁴⁶

As with the first instance of ignorance mentioned earlier (the misinterpretation of border thinking and disidentification), this instance of ignorance regarding shame, vulnerability and their correlation wasn’t set aside but rather put at the core of the “interrogation / room / in progress”. Still sticking to the aesthetics of the interrogation room, the spaces on the floor where the overwriting was taking place are marked with a red tape as a place of a crime scene, as another form of documentation (see figure 1.15, 1.16).

⁴³ Thorgeirsdottir, ‘Shame, Vulnerability and Philosophical Thinking’, 12.

⁴⁴ Thorgeirsdottir, 12.

⁴⁵ Miryam Clough, *Shame, the Church, and the Regulation of Female Sexuality*, Gender, Theology, and Spirituality 20 (London New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 73.

⁴⁶ Korohod, *Video Part of the Installation (Full Version)*.



FIGURE 1.15. PART OF THE INSTALLATION (DURING THE PROCESS)

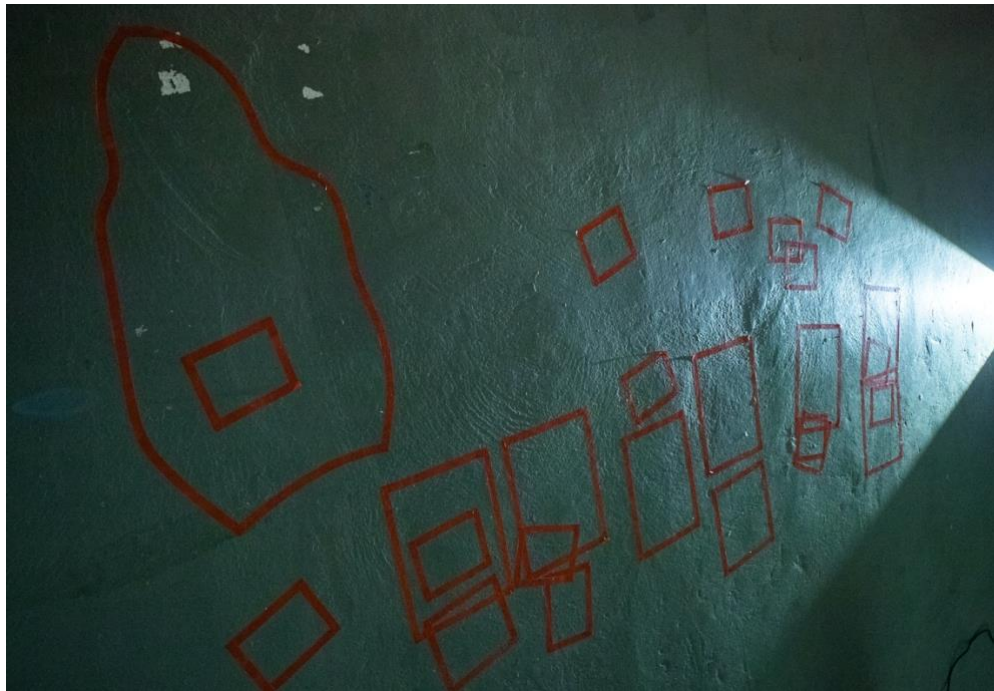


FIGURE 1.16. PART OF THE INSTALLATION (FINAL VIEW)

Although first two tasks of this stage of the project seemed to be accomplished, the third one – that migrated from the previous stages almost untouched – remained, namely “How do I get out of here?”

As an attempt in answering that question, I have decided to resort to the memory structure implied in the installation, more precisely to the “closeness of the connection between autobiographical memory and fiction”⁴⁷. To refer to that I picked up a different kind of documentation that has been in my disposal – a series of recorded interviews on memory from

⁴⁷ Nelson, ‘Self and Social Functions’, 130.

June-July 2019. Participants of the interviews were my friends, colleagues, and relatives.

Interviews consisted of four main questions:

1. What do your memories mean to you?
2. What is the worst memory you have?
3. What is the happiest memory you have?
4. Which memory are you afraid to forget?

A compilation of the responses to these questions has formed a soundscape for the installation. As a draft, the video documentation of over-writing the installation objects was positioned next to the translation of the soundscape on the screen.⁴⁸

As a result, “interrogation / room / in progress” had four levels of documentation,

- 1) evidences which are personal objects;
- 2) testimonies which directly refer to the evidences (document them);
- 3) video documentation of the *process* in Vent Space where references to both the evidences and the testimonies are made;
- 4) this text which refers to all previous three levels.

Due to coronavirus restrictions, I couldn’t have a full-scale residency showing. However, I had a chance to invite 4 individual viewers separately whose impressions on the results of the work became key points for the next steps within this research and for the final actual movement towards a resolution. And this need to move forward motivated the title change of the project into “*interrogation / room / in progress*”. The conclusions of this stage were as follows:

1. **Omnipresence of violence.** At first, this was intentional in relation to the general topic that is gender-based violence. However, the viewers noted that they sensed this violence coming from me as well and what’s more – most of it I have directed against my own self. By performing the role of the interrogator of myself I have become my own executioner. At this point the abstract vicious circle was finally defined: after being abused, I have channeled my anger in the work, while continuing to reproduce this violence towards myself. At this point it became clear that the truth wasn’t lying in the past or in the reconstruction of it. *By localizing the truth somewhere in the past, I have been reinforcing the presence of this past in the now.*
2. **Overemphasis on gender identity.** As Simone de Beauvoir has written, “We are shown woman solicited by two kinds of alienations; it is very clear that to play at being a man will be a recipe for failure; but to play at being a woman is also a trap:

⁴⁸ Bohdana Korohod, *An Excerpt of the Projected Video with the Translation of the Soundscape and the Soundscape Draft* (Vent Space, Tallinn, Estonia, n.d.), <https://youtu.be/KUt4f8W1HiA>.

being a woman would mean being an object, the Other; and at the heart of its abdication, the Other remains a subject”⁴⁹. Apparently, I’ve been trying to play both games. And I lost. When having identity as a master frame for all the experiences, thoughts, behavior, and self-identifying as a woman at the same time, the predictions are that very soon you’re going to get stuck. While answering the very first question of this research, “Where am I speaking from?”, trying to unravel the multitude of my identities, I haven’t even realized that I don’t need to fit my speech into the already existing, defined and gendered loci.

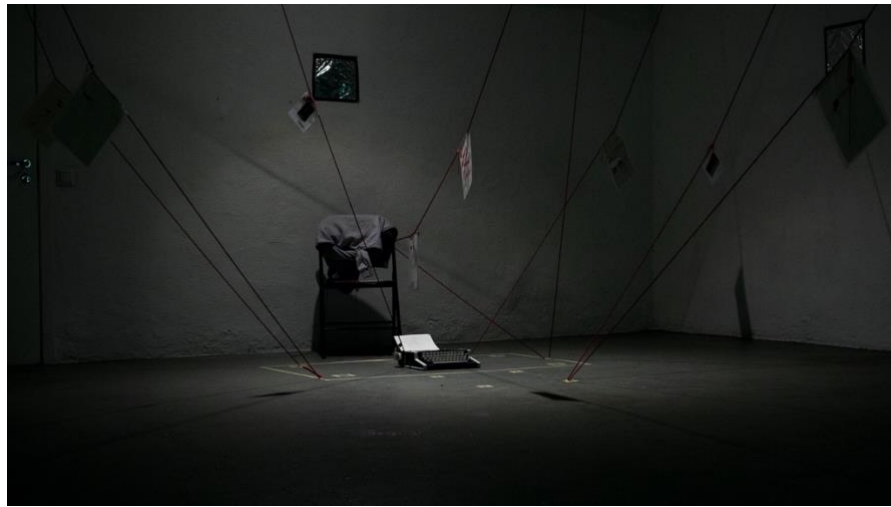


FIGURE 1.17. PART OF THE INSTALLATION (FINAL VIEW)



FIGURE 1.18. DETAIL SHOT OF THE INSTALLATION (FINAL VIEW)

⁴⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), <http://banq.lib.overdrive.com/ContentDetails.htm?id=00038A93-7B24-4653-94E6-9C4689DA09EA>.

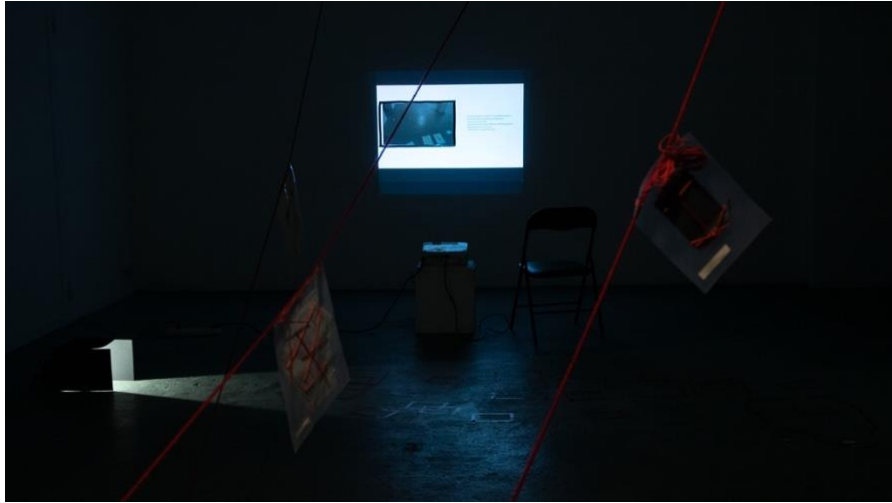


FIGURE 1.19. PART OF THE INSTALLATION (FINAL VIEW)

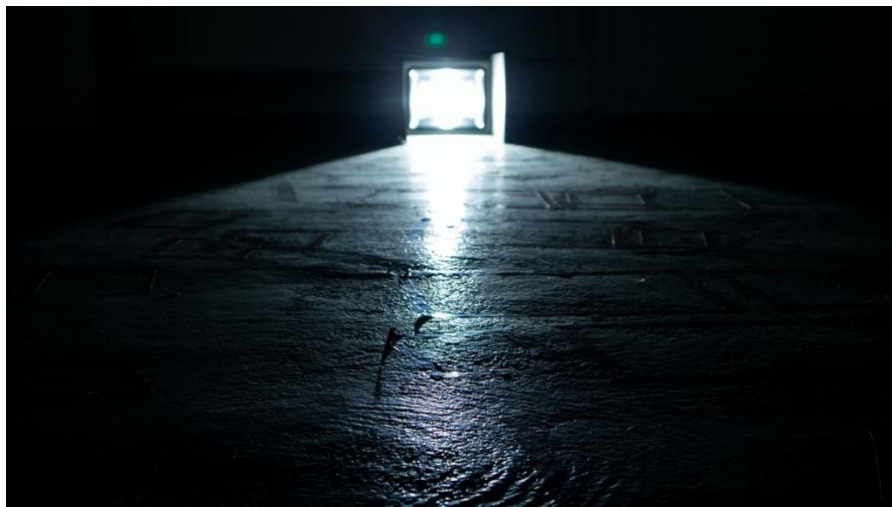


FIGURE 1.20. PART OF THE INSTALLATION (FINAL VIEW)

2. “INSIGNIFICANT AUDIO-PERFORMANCE IN THREE ACTS”

“The truth does not lie in the past but in the future.

Truth is not always already given; it is to be produced.”

Armen Avanessian, “Overwrite: Ethics of Knowledge – Poetics of Existence”⁵⁰

2.1. “Identity is a trap”⁵¹

After half a year of work with the topic of violence, it turned out to be extremely hard to find the way out of it. The first difficult choice to be made to get closer to the exit was to leave this installation alone and accept the fact that the exit was never really there. The difficulty lied in the sense of betrayal of oneself. As if not going on with it, not operating the concepts included in the work would mean that I give up, that I am a “bad feminist”. I landed at the same inner contradiction I was trying to tackle. A major change was needed.

The impulse towards a new direction came from the least expected place, a novel. “The Festival of Insignificance” by Milan Kundera. A story on the absurdity of the totalitarian regime of Stalin in the USSR told through a swollen prostate of Kalinin, a statue garden in the park and a man’s birthday party.⁵² And as Ramon, one of the novel’s characters says, “Insignificance, my friend, is the essence of existence. It is all around us, and everywhere and always. It is present even when no one wants to see it: in horror, in bloody battles, in the worst disasters. It often takes courage to acknowledge it in such dramatic situations and to call it by name. But it is not only a matter of acknowledging it, we must love insignificance, we must learn to love it. [...] As you mentioned yourself: the perfect performance...and utterly useless, the children laughing...without knowing why – isn’t that beautiful? Breathe, D’Ardelo, my friend, inhale this insignificance that’s all around us, it is the key to wisdom, it is the key to a good mood...”⁵³. This novel made me question my own premises of diving into past traumatic memories to liberate oneself from their influences. I felt like I managed to finally distance myself from my work (and everything it included) for the first time. When you reach this bird’s-eye view, the

⁵⁰ Armen Avanessian, *Overwrite: Ethics of Knowledge - Poetics of Existence*, ed. Bernd Klöckener, trans. Nils F. Schott (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 105.

⁵¹ Franco Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry*, Semiotext(e) Intervention Series 26 (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018), 108.

⁵² Milan Kundera, *The Festival of Insignificance a Novel* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016).

⁵³ Kundera, 113.

issue at stake loses its power over you. It lets you look it straight in the face instead of having it on your shoulders.

To look it straight in the face, I turned to Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s work “Breathing: Chaos and Poetry”. In its summary “increasingly chaotic rhythm of our respiration, and the sense of suffocation that grows everywhere”⁵⁴ are mentioned, with spasms and despair tagging along. In this essay written in 2018 the state of suffocation was intensified by the case of Eric Garner being strangled to death by a police officer and the author’s personal experience of asthma.⁵⁵ Yet, in 2021, with not so remote murder of George Floyd and Covid-19 severely affecting lungs all around the globe, suffocation seems to have become a new mode of respiration. But this is not what lured me into reading this, let alone marking the ideas developed by Berardi as a (new) departure point for the next stage of my work. What was so seductive is his “premonition of a possible harmony inscribed in the present chaos”⁵⁶ and the fact that the author has also described his work as “an essay on therapy”⁵⁷.

According to Berardi, the main reason behind contemporary states of self-loathing and depression is the so-called “identitarian frenzy”⁵⁸. “Having lost any faith in the universality of reason, having no access to the sphere of decision making, people cling to imaginary identities based on the mythologies of nation, race, and religion”⁵⁹. By grounding ourselves in the multiplicity of our identities, by having the seeming freedom to express it, to express whatever, we’re under constant pressure to do so – to scream in full lungs about all we do not agree with, about where we and the others belong or do not belong. “Now, power emerges from the storm of inaudible voices. [...] Social sound is turned into white noise and white noise becomes social order”⁶⁰.

In his work I encountered the concept of disidentification⁶¹ for the second time. However, only then my ignorance about it became apparent and I’ve seen why and how I misread Tlostanova et al. before.

In other terms this approach (related to disidentification) could be understood better by referring to xenofeminism. It could stand for an “emancipatory abolitionist projects – the abolition of class, gender, and race”. However, to be able to reach this state, the universal must

⁵⁴ Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, ‘Breathing: Chaos and Poetry’, *MIT Press* (blog), n.d., <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/breathing>.

⁵⁵ Berardi, *Breathing*, 15.

⁵⁶ Berardi, 9.

⁵⁷ Berardi, 11.

⁵⁸ Berardi, 63.

⁵⁹ Berardi, 63.

⁶⁰ Berardi, 27.

⁶¹ Berardi, 109.

be reworked first. If it is not done, then “the abolition of class will remain a bourgeois fantasy, the abolition of race will remain a tacit white-supremacism, and the abolition of gender will remain a thinly veiled misogyny”. Xenofeminism denies any reference to “purity”, essentialism, or static definitions. It sees itself as an open-source software which constantly mutates based on the changes and inputs performed by the users.⁶²

Getting myself acquainted with such approaches to identity politics as of Berardi and the xenofeminist working group Laboria Cuboniks was like getting a grasp of the fresh air. “Let a hundred sexes bloom!”⁶³ The most important influence it had on me and my further work was that longed freedom which turned out to be a freedom from the need to define myself in the fixed terms, to claim the exact position I speak from in order to legitimize the words I say for someone else. This shift in thinking was also accompanied by the shift in the form of the project I’ve been working with.

2.2. Listening in the digital

During the search for a new form for the next step in the project’s development, I have continued my cooperation with Maria Paiste. At that time, we haven’t had an option of working in one physical space anymore since we were based in different cities. For that we came up with a way to communicate on distance without the need to spend endless hours on Zoom. We agreed to share with each other any kind of information in any form in such a way that it would be a response to the previous “sharing”. We ended up sending each other photos of collages, videos, sound recordings. With time, the diversity of forms was narrowed down by itself to two only, video and voice messages on Messenger.

Before, I have already mentioned Berardi’s stance on sound in contemporary society. To elaborate on that more, “in our contemporary connective postindustrial society, [...] power is no longer constructed by silencing the crowd (for example, through censorship, broadcast media or the solemnity of political discourse), but is based on the boundless intensification of noise. Today, social signification is no longer a system of the exchange and decoding of signifiers, but a saturation of the listening mind – a neural hyperstimulation. While political order used to be effected by a voice proclaiming law amid the silence of the crowd, contemporary postpolitical

⁶² Laboria Cuboniks, ‘XENOFEMINISM: A Politics for Alienation’, Research Platform, *Laboriacuboniks.Net* (blog), n.d., <https://laboriacuboniks.net/manifesto/xenofeminism-a-politics-for-alienation/>.

⁶³ Cuboniks.

power is a statistical function that emerges from the noise of the crowd”⁶⁴. Barthes has also referred to the pollution that prevents listening that “is deleterious to the living being’s very intelligence, [...], its power of communicating effectively with its *Umwelt*”⁶⁵. He has also emphasized that “freedom of listening is as necessary as freedom of speech”⁶⁶. Both works posed two main questions for me, “*How do I not add up to the general noise?*” and “*How do I create a situation where freedom of listening is at its core?*”

Partly, the answer was in Berardi’s work. For him, poetry is what opens up the field of possibilities, is excessive in its meanings, is ambiguous.⁶⁷ In a way, Berardi’s poetical therapy is xenofeminist striving for queerness. This brought up the idea of *poetical listening*, of creating a performative situation where sounds become a poem, where audience has nothing else to do except for listening but also where there is no need to form one unified understanding of the spoken. If we are noise, let’s make it poetical. At this stage a decision to work with a form of an audio-performance was made which was also reinforced by Salomé Voegelin’s theorizations on “sound’s ephemeral invisibility [that] obstructs critical engagement”⁶⁸.

It was time for building a passage. For which the everyday was the material. With Maria we agreed to keep exchanging the voice messages through Messenger every day during the months of February and March 2021. The only requirement was that they would be related to the observations of the everyday, of the routine. At the same time, I was also doing sound recordings of my routines in the apartment I live, from the sound of watering the plants to the sound of my heartbeat. All in all, we were documenting either the sounds of the everyday or the everyday through the sounds (language being one of them).

During these very simple processes we have observed some peculiar phenomena, *the unpredictability of time, place, and the way of listening*. With a voice message, you record it at one time referring to an event at another time while knowing that it would be listened at a certain third time. Apart from that, whatever it is you’re sending in this way you are time-limited by the app since you have only one minute to deliver whatever it is you’re saying. So, if the event doesn’t fit into one minute, its time relations get even more blurred by being separated into several one-minute pieces. Regarding the place, usually you record the message at one location about the event in another space while knowing that the message would be listened in a

⁶⁴ Berardi, *Breathing*, 26.

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, ‘Listening’, in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (Univ of California Press, 1991), 247.

⁶⁶ Barthes, 260.

⁶⁷ Berardi, *Breathing*, 20.

⁶⁸ Salomé Voegelin, ‘Introduction’, in *Listening to Noise and Silence. Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (Continuum, 2011), ix.

completely different environment. The way of listening is related to already mentioned questions of time and space but also to the hardware, phone, computer, or earphones, to the volume and its changes and to the language we listen *in*.

Exploring these phenomena, I got acquainted with a documentary film “Hyperstition: A Film on Time and Narrative”. One of the topics mentioned in the film was the disintegration of space-time and reconsiderations of the logic of time as such. It starts with a question “What does time mean?” before “What is time?” and suggests that “we can make time not into temporality but into geography. [...] You can make time depend on the action: when there is no action – there is no time”.⁶⁹

Considering that the audio-performance we were making was meant for an online environment, this space-time disintegration became even more apparent. Audience members are in different geographical time zones. The performance itself takes place in an undefined web-territory with no time zone whatsoever. Audience leaves and comes unnoticed at different parts of the performance. The signal is always delayed blurring the time by slicing it into the second of being sent and the second of being received. In digital, ephemerality and abstractness seem to be not only the qualities of the environment but its language. “We seem to be living in an expanded present, a present in which several temporalities and times take part in what is perceived as present and as presence”.⁷⁰ To a certain degree digital communication technology, Internet in general have reformed our very structure of sensing time and space, it made possible the simultaneous co-existence of oppositions.⁷¹

Although, as Berardi claims, “the acceleration of cyberspace breaks the rhythm of mental time”⁷² causing distress because the speed of our mind can’t keep up with the speed of data, resistance to it provokes only a greater pain. As a way-out Accelerationists suggest “intensifying rather than resisting”.⁷³

This disintegration of space-time, its acceleration is what I wanted to include in the audio-performance as its main structural units.

⁶⁹ Christopher Roth and Armen Avanesian, *Hyperstition: A Film on Time and Narrative*, documentary, 2016, <http://hyperstition.org/>.

⁷⁰ Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund, *Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity & Contemporary Art*, 2016, 16.

⁷¹ Cox and Lund, 21–31.

⁷² Berardi, *Breathing*, 42.

⁷³ Roth and Avanesian, *Hyperstition: A Film on Time and Narrative*.

2.3. Insignificant script

The performance was meant to happen in three parts. However, following the idea of the unpredictability of space and time, the parts were also dislocated. The audio-performance that premiered during Festival of Spooky Action at a Distance at e^{lektron} on the 4th of April 2021 could be considered as the second act.⁷⁴ The first act took place on the Facebook platform during the previous Festival's days. From the 1st till the 3rd of April each day a separate piece on where⁷⁵, when⁷⁶ and how⁷⁷ of the performance was published. The third act in this system is the one the listener experiences individually. At the same time, in a parallel system the three acts are the very positions of *where*, *when* and *how*.

The content of the performance is the voice messages and the sound recordings from my apartment. All the voice messages we have been exchanging together with Maria for two months were transcribed and then allocated to one of the groups in relation to what happens in them. The same procedure was followed with the sound recordings. At this stage *three groups of sounds were gathered*, "*where*", "*when*" and "*how*". As a result, the group of "*where*" had bodily sounds and messages on experiences of spaces around us. The group of "*when*" had the sounds of routine activities (making coffee, brushing the teeth, opening the curtains etc.) and messages on psychological states or states of the weather. The group of "*how*" had the sounds of the nature mixed in with the automated voices and messages in languages other than English.

Afterwards, in each group only some sounds and messages were chosen as key ones from which the final script was formed. To push the disintegration of space-time further, we decided to separate the backgrounds of the voice messages from the spoken words in such a way that you hear the soundscape of the message first and then the message itself. At the same time, all the messages were changed into a past tense forming a narration of some unidentified events that have happened at some time in the past. Those backgrounds which also were the sounds recorded in my apartment were the images of where, when, and how respectively. So that in the beginning of each part you could hear almost all the backgrounds mixed in and then once again disintegrated and scattered. Introduction to each part and then some phrases in the work were

⁷⁴ Bohdana Korohod, *Documentation of the 'Insignificant Audio-Performance in Three Acts'* (e^{lektron}.art, 2021), <https://youtu.be/GMUXxlM-Lk>.

⁷⁵ Bohdana Korohod, *This Is an Image of Where*, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/elektron.art/videos/787144058906683>.

⁷⁶ Bohdana Korohod, *This Is an Image of When*, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/elektron.art/videos/3837543809673400>.

⁷⁷ Bohdana Korohod, *This Is an Image of How*, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/elektron.art/videos/173007027994469>.

also performed by the automated voices. The full script of the performance could be found in the Appendix 1.

Initially it was planned not to have any images whatsoever accompanying the work but to make it clear for the audience that the stream is on and there are no technical issues, we decided to stream a view from the window of the apartment.

As a result, “Insignificant audio-performance in three acts” had three levels of documentation,

- 1) transcribed voice messages and recorded sounds;
- 2) the script written out of those messages and sounds;
- 3) this text which refers to the whole piece.

In sum, this project could be seen as a passage away from the “interrogation / room / in progress”. It’s an opening into the beautiful unknown and into this text which is also a project recursively including both the audio-performance and the installation.

CONCLUSION

In the frame of this artistic research two projects have been realized. The installation “interrogation / room / in progress” in Vent Space (Tallinn, 9th-13th of February 2021) which included material objects, soundscape, video, and lighting design of the gallery space. The second project, “Insignificant audio-performance in three acts”, was performed online during the Festival of Spooky Action at a Distance on the 4th of April 2021 at e⁻lektron. The sound recordings, mixing of the soundscapes of the performance, and live audio and video streaming set-up were done by me with the assistance of e⁻lektron team. Both projects were built upon the practices of documentation. In the first case, documentation started as the process of organization of already existing documents and later – of creating the secondary documents referring to them (evidences and testimonies), and developed into the video-documentation of the process of rewriting those objects which was included into the final work. While the audio-performance’s script consists of the documented voice messages shared by me and my collaborator Maria Paiste, and the sound recordings from my living space.

As it was shown in this paper, documentation and documents had different meanings throughout the times and practices, and various applications. However, whatever the uses were, the nature of documentation seems to always work as a recursive practice. The document always sends us to something else within it and by introducing the document into a certain work, the changes happen at three different dimensions: what the document refers to, the document itself and the whole work. If documentation within the work is consciously used in the frame of recursive thinking, it could become a promising tool for transformation. Within this process “you can’t go back because you end up at a different point from where you started”.⁷⁸ And this is exactly what happened with my research. Starting from the form of durational performance and the topic of gender-based violence, through the recursive use of documentation practices within the work, I was landing at a different field each time: the first installation, the expanded version of it and finally a completely different territory of an online audio-performance. Documentation as a part of an artistic practice, despite being seemingly directed towards the past, always moves forward.

Initially, there was no intention to work with recursivity. My motivation to work with documentation lied in my personal practice of collecting objects and the desire to achieve some sort of liberation through the transformation of those objects. However, the step between

⁷⁸ Roth and Avanesian, *Hyperstition: A Film on Time and Narrative*.

“interrogation room” and “interrogation / room / in progress” that was essentially recursive was the one that brought about this desired transformation. Even though both form- and content-wise the relation between “interrogations” and the audio-performance could seem unclear, the “Insignificant...” is that completely unexpected new space where I ended up through the recursive practice of documentation.

Becoming aware of how my thinking was tamed by various constructions of identities and by the belief that the truth, or the solution, to be found in the past events is probably one of the most liberating feelings I have experienced. Even though it was filled with ignorance, going in circles and unnecessary reliving through unpleasant experiences, at the end it led me to the way out – to the multiplicity of new and unexpected possibilities, “Insignificant audio-performance in three acts” being one of them.

In relation to recursivity Avanessian also mentions that “it concerns the problem of one’s own entanglement and speaks to the general difficulty of situating oneself, of rendering transparent the position of one’s own thinking and writing – something that cannot be done simply by adding an extra dose of self-reflection”.⁷⁹ And here this question showed up again, “Where am I speaking from?” The circle has closed. Directed use of documentation – which is in itself recursive – in artistic practice could be a way of disentangling oneself from the multiplicity of places we are speaking from. This could be a powerful tool for transformation used in artistic practice, a practical application of such a feminist postcolonial approach as disidentification.

⁷⁹ Avanessian, *Overwrite*, 9.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 “Insignificant audio-performance in three acts” full script

INSIGNIFICANT SCRIPT

(An image “ON AIR” is drawn on the window.)

Typing sound.

VOICE:

I don’t know where you are listening, but I know the way it sounds...

Pre-recorded soundscape of heart; abruptly cut.

Sound of the plane; cut.

MARIA:

I was outside on that day, walking. And I saw a plane flying. I asked you whether you could believe it. It was blinking, winking its eye. Constantly. I told you it was calling me, to come along.

Sound of a light switch being turned on and off repeatedly for about 5-10 seconds; abruptly cut.

MARIA:

It was very dark inside. However, I still didn’t feel like turning on the lights. Luckily, I had windows from which I could look outside. And the evening light was just beautiful. At that time I was relieved that the spring was coming.

Sounds of watering the plants, scratching by turning the pots on a plate; abruptly cut.

BOHDANA:

On that day I finally discovered the names of my roommates. I also felt a bit uncomfortable since with one of them I’ve been living together since October 2019, for more than a year and with another for just about a few months.

Sounds of watering the plants continue for a few seconds; abruptly cut.

BOHDANA:

Kalanchoe, Schlumbergera and Aspidistra. Those were their names.

Sound of watering the plants naturally ends.

BOHDANA:

I have also told you back then about my other roommates, of whose bodies I needed to dispose of. The ones who would also eat my permanent neighbors while refusing to leave the apartment. I couldn’t do anything about that, so I just let them die their natural deaths.

Typing sound.

VOICE:

I don't know when you're listening, but I know the way it sounds...

Pre-recorded soundscape of when; abruptly cut.

Sounds of a clock ticking; abruptly cut.

MARIA:

I was looking outside the window. The snow was falling. This was exactly what I had to do at that time. And it was fine. I was in Viljandi and I asked you whether it was wintery back in Tallinn too.

Sounds of a clock ticking; abruptly cut.

MARIA:

Or in Narva. I didn't know where you were exactly. I also didn't know why I was feeling guilty for not being happy while everything in my life was so great.

Sounds of typing on a keyboard on iPhone; abruptly cut.

BOHDANA:

I told you I would continue with a voice message since typing was taking so much time. When I left Tallinn, the weather was getting extremely wintery. And by the time I reached Narva there was already a storm. We couldn't even go for a walk or see anything, so we spent the whole day in the apartment instead. And half of the next day too.

(Silent pause for 5 seconds.)

BOHDANA:

I told you I had no idea where the last message ended.

Sounds of a calm heartbeat; abruptly cut.

BOHDANA:

I told you that sometimes I get this intense desire to write to some people that I miss them. But then I would realize that we've met like one or two times in our lives and they might not even remember me anymore. And...What I was trying to say was why do we believe that we can miss only those whose presence in our lives was major, long-lasting?

Sounds of a fast heartbeat; abruptly cut.

MARIA:

I told you how I once had a really intense moment with another spectator during a theatre show. I thought our eye contact lasted for what felt like centuries. Apparently, it was a couple of minutes. It was one of *the* most intense meetings I've ever experienced in my life. So...I really missed that girl.

Typing sounds.

VOICE:

I don't know how you're listening, but I know the way it sounds...

MARIA:

(the binary code of "listen to me" starts in Estonian)

01101100 01101001 01110011 01110100 01100101 01101110 00100000

BOHDANA:

"Die Grenze wird also nur in der Sprache gezogen werden können und was jenseits der Grenze liegt, wird einfach Unsinn sein".

(The excerpt of "HOW" with automated voices (only) starts.)

("Are you listening?" in morse code.)

BOHDANA:

Kas sa kuulad?

(MARIA stops reading the code and her sounds of heavy breathing are heard.)

BOHDANA:

(immediately continues reading the code in Ukrainian)

01110100 01101111 00100000 01101101 01100101

MARIA:

I couldn't breathe properly. And it wasn't going away. I wondered whether technology had enough room to transmit it.

(Binary code reading ends at the same second with the last word in the previous phrase.)

(Silent pause.)

BOHDANA:

At the end of one of the messages I asked you whether ultimately it all made sense.

(pause)

(Everything below is in whisper.)

BOHDANA:

Ти слухаєш?

MARIA:

Kuidas?

BOHDANA:

Adesso.

MARIA:

And here?

BOHDANA:
И здесь.

MARIA:
Kas sa kuulad?

BOHDANA:
Как?

MARIA:
Now.

BOHDANA:
Anche qui?

MARIA:
I тут.

VOICE:
Stai ascoltando?

BOHDANA:
How?

VOICE:
Сейчас.

MARIA:
I тут?

VOICE:
Ja seal.

(pause)

(Everything below is in a normal voice. Background sounds are fading in.)

MARIA:
I don't know where, or when, or how you are listening, but...

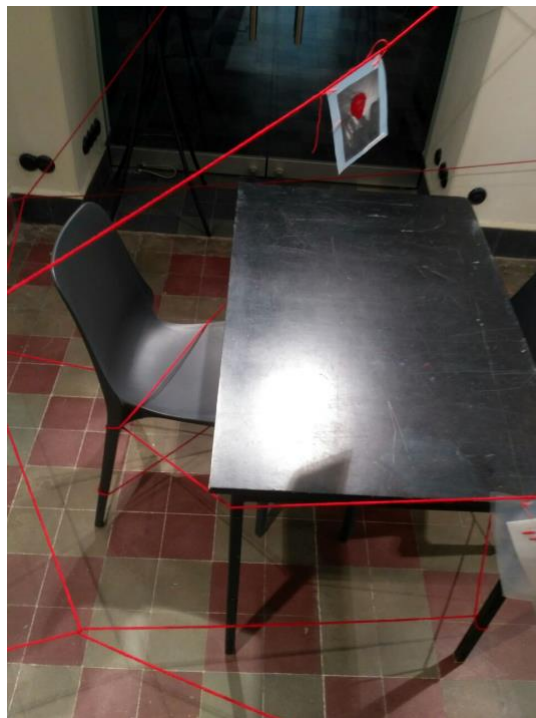
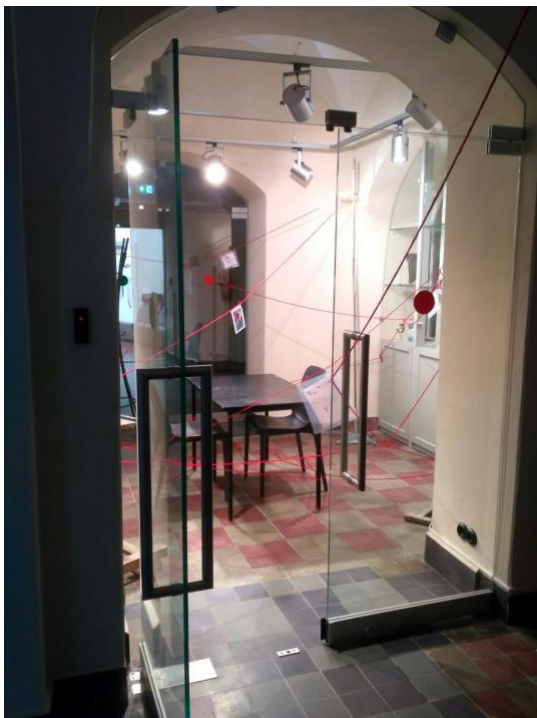
BOHDANA:
Do you?

(background sounds start to fade out into nothingness)

THE END.

Appendix 2. Full list of the projects' documentations

1. “interrogation room”, Tartu Arts Centre, 26th of November 2020



2. “interrogation / room / in progress”, Vent Space, Tallinn, 9th-13th of February 2021

Video documentation of the final installation: <https://vimeo.com/529694926>.

Video part of the installation (full version): <https://youtu.be/EyxgXJxQCQY>.

An excerpt of the projected video with the translation of the soundscape and the soundscape draft: <https://youtu.be/KUt4f8W1HiA>.



3. “Insignificant audio-performance in three acts”, online audio-performance performed at the Festival of Spooky Action at a Distance at e⁻lektron on the 4th of April 2021

Documentation of the “Insignificant Audio-Performance in Three Acts”:

<https://youtu.be/GMUXxlVlM-Lk>.

“This Is an Image of Where” (published on the 1st of April 2021):

<https://www.facebook.com/elektron.art/videos/787144058906683>.

“This Is an Image of When” (published on the 2nd of April 2021):

<https://www.facebook.com/elektron.art/videos/3837543809673400>.

“This Is an Image of How” (published on the 3rd of April 2021):

<https://www.facebook.com/elektron.art/videos/173007027994469>.



Appendix 3. Projects' technical sheets

“interrogation / room / in progress”:

1. gallery lighting system,
2. LED street projector,
3. EPSON projector,
4. MacBook Pro (also used for sound output).

“Insignificant audio-performance in three acts”:

1. 2 microphones Rode M5,
2. RODECaster Pro,
3. 2 pairs of headphones (audio-technica),
4. Black Magic Cinema Pocket 4K,
5. Lumix Lens 14-140 mm,
6. ATEM Mini Pro,
7. MacBook Pro.

SUMMARY

The aim of this graduation thesis *Documentation as Transformative Tool in Artistic Practice* is to discover the ways of transforming both the Subject and its environment through the process of disidentification. The research is based on two master projects, “*interrogation / room / in progress*” and “*Insignificant audio-performance in three acts*”. Mainly feminist and autoethnographic approaches are used.

This thesis first presents the process behind an installation “*interrogation / room / in progress*” with the final setup done in the gallery Vent Space between 9th and 13th of February 2021. At a first stage the focus is on the topic of abuse in intimate relationship and the use of personal belongings as documents. Later, guilt and shame are explored through the author’s collaboration with Maria Paiste with memory-work and physical theatre improvisation as research methods. Finally, the project’s inquiry into relations between shame, femininity and vulnerability are described. This first project leads to the recursive use of documentation of the process withing the artwork which allows to open unexpected spaces for further research. Among them are problematics of identity politics, practice of listening and recursivity itself.

The second part of this thesis is on “*Insignificant audio-performance in three acts*” which was performed online during the Festival of Spooky Action at a Distance on the 4th of April 2021 at e⁻lektron. Through processes of documentation of the every-day the relations of time and space are explored.

As a result, the process and research behind both of the projects leads to the conclusion that the recursive use of documentation in an artwork could be a powerful tool for transformation of both the Subject, their Object and the environment they work in. However, since this is a creative-practical master thesis this could still be considered a hypothesis which offers a space for a further more thorough study.

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