

‘IF’: Planning, Research and Co-creation of an Existential Installation-performance

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ABSTRACT:

In her article “‘IF’: Planning, Research and Co-creation of an Existential Installation-performance” Rita Sebestyén offers an account of the research period and performances of the experimental, action-research based and interdisciplinary performance ‘IF’. The installation-performance was co-created by a group of Norwegian, Danish, Swedish and Hungarian artists, and conceived and produced for an international audience. ‘IF’ poses a series of existential questions throughout four interactive installations that allow the audience to interact and become co-creators of the performance, together with the performer-facilitator. Using biology, anthropology, mathematics, elements of gamification, sociology and futurology, this performance is a cross-disciplinary and cross-genre experience, and its research cycles are of both scientific and artistic interest, as the author points it out.

Keywords: art and science, performative pedagogy, gamification, co-creation, action research.

IF is a cross-over genre: a participative performance using four interactive installations that invite the audience into different levels of action and interaction, by choosing life-circumstances: gender, lifespan, friends, relations, society and future. A performer leads the whole game of existence, orientating the audience among the rules of the games; reacts and responds to their actions, and, at well-defined moments, acts out roles related to the four stages-installations. The stages are constructed around four different algorithms, which gradually lead the audience from strict rules to choices, this way giving the opportunity to them to take the performance over, step by step. Participants can choose at each stage the level of their activity from watching to acting, and can decide on the gender, lifespan, personal characteristics. They receive small human figures as avatars to represent their game-selves in this parallel

world. In this specific space, the audience and the performer, even the light- and sound designer can freely mingle, without being confined by the classical partition of stage and auditorium. The first stage is a small laboratory: a microscope placed on a white glass table and connected to a computer. The samples placed under the microscope can be observed magnified on the screen of the computer. The second stage is a miniature garden on a big size round mirror: soil, small stones, water and plants can be placed and arranged on it. Later on, the five-six centimetres tall human figures will be placed here. The third stage seems to be a playground with five societal hardships, written in chalk on the ground, which, during the performance, will come alive similarly to a manipulative TV-show, with red and white elastic lightbulbs. The fourth stage is a transparent plastic cube, filled with water. Here, at the end of the game-performance, the participants will decide how and who can be saved from the former hardships and go towards the hope of smoother waves. We provide the audience with a set of rules at each stage to build a parallel identity, community, society, and their own interwoven narratives. The performer oscillates between the role of an actor and that of a facilitator. From this phase we started researching together with various audiences. Due to the multitude of artistic and scientific fields included in our work, in the following I will refer exclusively to primary literature. Further description proceeds along the following steps: 1) Research environment concerning venue, community, terminology and the text of the performance, 2) Research method including planning, action and evaluation and finally, 3) The outlook towards a new epistemology of collaborative performances.

1) Forsøgsstationen (The Lab Station) is situated in the heart of Copenhagen, in Vesterbro district, around ten minutes' walk from the central station. It used to be a smaller cinema which, with very little reconstruction, is now able to provide with four rehearsal spaces of smaller and bigger sizes. It is run by an NGO, which aims at giving space and opportunity for artists to liaise and proceed with their performative experimentation. For intensive research processes, the members of the community can apply for exclusive use of one of the venues, for about two-six weeks, when they can build in their sets, and rehearse for free with all amenities provided; even with access to some light and sound equipment. The application form is a thorough one, with questions regarding the originality and artistic depth of the conception, and the board of the organization decides about whom to provide the opportunity. If approved, the artists commit themselves to full attendance during the rehearsals, to the general community rules of the venue, and, most importantly, to hold two open research events for the whole artistic membership at the end of their research period. At the end of each season, Forsøgsstationen organizes an open event, when all researchers of the season present in twenty minutes each the hypotheses of their research, the process and the outcome. All four venues are set for this event, members of the community and other invited professionals can

freely attend each session and give thorough feedback to the researchers-artists. The research feedback form is similar to the application form; here the researching artists have to articulate, step by step, their process and the outcome they reached to.

The format proposed by Forsøegsstationen is rather uncommon in performing arts environments, where art as research, practice as research, performance as research are often regarded as free-flows of ideas and trials, habitually not using systematic and scientifically grounded phases of self-reflection and reflection. Likewise, there is little possibility of repetitive cycles in the rehearsal process designated for mock audiences, when artists can refine and reiterate their work based on the reflections of either occasional or selected spectators (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, *Reflexive Methodology*). Terms like inspiration, gut-feeling, sensing are recurrent in the narratives on rehearsal processes, while we often fail to define what we exactly mean by these notions or how we exactly achieve different states of minds. Failing to articulate the process and the performance event by the artists themselves is also rather common in the performing arts, claiming that the artist as a doer should not be faced with the responsibility to talk about their own process (Conquesgood, "Performance studies"). Thus, talking about artistic processes by using inherent terms, often lack the clarity and punctuality of a scientific discourse, moreover, verbal articulation is often even regarded harmful for the artistic inspiration, which should be a highly spiritual, holistic, emotional and indescribable phenomenon opposed to any rationalization, logic or scientific discourse, depending heavily on the historical contexts and conceptualisation (Grant, *All About Process*). History of arts, religious studies, anthropological studies and, maybe most eloquently, cognitive sciences do have well-defined terms and methods, too, which would enable us to design adequate epistemologies in artistic processes. Several methods and terms have penetrated into the academic discourses on the performing arts in the last two decades. However, for a performing artist, it is not organically and naturally part of the creation process to follow qualitative or quantitative research plans referring to their methods, and if necessary, deter from or refine them. Artistic and scientific methods were often seen as divergent ones, which cannot be transferred to one another. This disruption was highlighted in the middle of the 20th century (Snow, *The Two Cultures*), and then followed by a series of publications mostly focusing on description and documentation of art-and-science processes, also sometimes attempting to initiate theories, especially during the last decade.

We, the artists and researchers were of various backgrounds, and I was anticipating that we would have to elicit basic notions among ourselves throughout the work. Terminologies, concepts and conceptions about theatre and performativity can vary from culture to culture, but they also can have very diverse connotations in different theatre schools, methodologies and practices. We had to be prepared to stop repeatedly and build up our own vocabulary to be able to communicate about our

rehearsal process and the aims we would like to achieve. The main challenge was to detect those notions and concepts that we would have not suspected to be lacunas in our discourse. In the beginning, we confined ourselves to an everyday English, without terminologies used by any of us in the cultures and theatre principles and methodologies we had had as a background. Almost term by term, we built up our work-language to talk about the process. This language has become a performance-specific language about 'IF', in a larger part because the performance was itself a cross-genre event, and thus we could adopt and transfer only a couple of terms and notions used otherwise in more traditional theatrical contexts and methodologies. Apart from this, the scientific terms from the fields we used in the performance: biology, anthropology, environmentalism, religion and philosophy merged with our discourse.

We all have different mother tongues, and none of us is a native English speaker, also we were preparing a performance for an international audience in Copenhagen, having in mind that at the same time our best chance to disseminate our work will be to travel to international festivals. Here, the use of English as a text and script of the performance was the question: how we express our thoughts in order to reach out to wide audiences whose mother tongue is, in a vast majority, other than English? Simplicity, openness and the possibility for a broad range of connotations were what we strived for in the delivered texts. In the end, the script has become similar to a film script: there were a set of instructions for the performer who was at the same time the facilitator, with instructions on how to deal with the audience, how to offer them the possibility to actively participate in certain, well-defined situations, and was also giving alternatives on how to improvise and respond to a range of possible reactions of the audience. This part of the text is considerably longer than in a case of a theatrical play, adding up to more than two thirds of the whole script. And there were the fixed texts to be learnt and delivered as an actor, where we opted for a simple, clear and explicit language, being at the same time poetic, open to some interpretation, and following a mostly iambic rhythm. The poetic cadence of the actor's texts also helped both the audience and the performer delineate between the freer, more improvisatory parts of the performance, these being open to participation at the same time. Even though the composition of the space remained the same, with the audience freely mingling around the four installations, the lyrical texts, the light and sound design emerged as almost classical theatrical moments in which the actor and audience were separated by performative elements, and the audience, up till now, has never interfered with these three to ten minutes monologues. Similarly, when the quotidian, casual, and more improvisatory text parts followed, it was a clear sign to the audience that they are taken back again into the modes of participation. As these entities were constructed around the four installations, the text and the performance as a whole gained a rather predictable rhythm,

very similar, though considerably longer than breathing; inhaling and exhaling the air.

2) It is essential to highlight that artistic methods used in performances can be, and in many cases are, valid ones, leading to complex, deep and meaningful experiences. Also, certain artistic methods are transferrable to some scientific fields with significant gain. What I would like to stress here is that several scientific methods are regarded by artists as invalid or irrelevant ones to their practices, and that this prejudice is worthy to be questioned, for the mutual benefit of science and art. Moreover, performing arts as a wider and inclusive term than theatre, encompasses script writing or devising, adaptation of texts, actor training including embodiment, movement, voice, dance; also set and costume design, music, sound, light design, and often involvement of diverse media, too (Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*). This way it becomes much more complex than any other art form, and to which, most of the times, there are separate curricula or training for stage directors on how to lead actors and acquire technical knowledge, too. There have been various philosophical and practical attempts to teaching and learning stage directing skills and conducting rehearsal processes, all being bound to diverse acting or directing schools which heavily depend on the given cultural contexts and historical periods. We were looking for a more flexible context to frame our work, and, in the end, we developed our own action-research methodology.

Action research as a method was originally conceived as a co-operative enquiry, a community-based learning, mostly for educational and healthcare purposes (Pavlish Pillsbury and Dexheimer Pharris, *Community-Based Collaborative Action Research*), intertwining practice and theory, and with the participation of all parties: in the case of education, for example, both teachers and students. It had valuable outcomes in emerging education design (Baumfield, Hall and Wall, *Action Research*) and cross-cultural education (Armstrong and Moore eds, *Action Research for Inclusive Education*). Throughout IF, we opted for the model of action research built on the following steps: diagnosing, planning, taking action and evaluating, as follows in educational contexts (Costello, *Effective Action Research*), and as some elements of the performance reflect and ironize with the classroom situation.

As part of the diagnosing phase, we aimed to develop an artistic format which assures an ample aesthetic value and experience allowing at the same time the audience to act and interact; take part each and every time in the creation of the performance; be the object and the subject of it, together with the performer. The uncertainty caused by the unpredictable action of the audience members often questions and risks the artistic value of participatory events, mainly used for initiating social healing, with the scope to empower the participants and give voice to underrepresented and marginalized layers of the society. Practices for individual and social healing mostly stem from the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*), and the Pedagogy of the

Oppressed (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) and their followers, where the ludic character of the performance is emphasized. Thus, applied theatre and socially engaged theatre were regarded as socio-political events rather than art forms, with a tacit agreement that in the former one the social, whereas in the latter one the aesthetic value should be at the core of creation. Drama and theatre in participatory frameworks were used as tools for social transformation, and discourses around them rarely included aesthetic consideration. Our hypothesis was that there is a possibility to build an event based on a series of well-defined rules, where participation is based on genuine will of collaboration, and where artistic value has equal priority with the co-creative action. Within the realms of conceptual (or rather post-conceptual) art an artistically strong concept allows actions where traditional artistic skills are not necessary (Sperlinger ed., *Afterthought*). Similarly, relational (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*) and dialogical art (Kester, *Conversation Pieces*) places emphasis on the relation and dialogue which emerges throughout the common experience facilitated by the event, and this is placed at the core of the artistic creation rather than producing an art work. In a broad sense, performance art and performing arts are relational, dialogical artforms. We also took in consideration the critique of relational art (Bishop, *Artificial Hells*), arguing that non-hierarchical co-creation is impossible to be carried out, as the idea, the concept and the fact that the participants are under certain social pressure to act, in practice skew the idealistic notion of rhizomic structures. Therefore, we opted for building the rules and communicating them steadily, assuming some kind of orientation and leadership over the performance, and making them unequivocal, rather than denying or hiding them.

Planning in this case meant focus on space. According to the conception of the performance 'IF', the main delineation between auditorium and stage was completely removed, and instead we strived for a fluid common space where the gaze and attention of the audience is not unequivocally oriented towards a main action or a stage. The performance leaves an open possibility for the audience to choose the target or object of their attention, also, it is allowed to be dispersed, scattered in space, or move from one stage to another. However, through the actions and monologues of the performer, through her instructions, and the lights and sounds, there are always highlighted spots, actions, speeches, orientating the attention of the audience, with the function of guidance in the space. We conceived the space of the performance as an amoeba-like organism; changing and moving, taking different shapes, however, still maintaining some flexible 'cell-walls', which define the inner content. The action and all those present, define the eternally fluid and somewhat still definite space of the performance. The actual playing area is meant to be changing every moment, as it is defined by the installations, the actions around them, and the interactions of all participants, including artists, in the co-creation. With the idea of constructing a parallel world, starting from scientific research, also the most tangible and most ma-

terial factors of our physical world, ‘IF’ aims to be an eloquent example for heterotopia (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”); the overlapping realms of our current societal constructions with those of the imagination. As a consequence, the performances, depending on their ever-changing narratives woven by the interactions between participants and the installations, the participants and the performer and facilitator, and among the participants themselves, lead to utopic or dystopic projections of the actual temporary community. Similarly, we constructed the installations in a way that they require a focus on close, very small objects, for example, in the case of the microscope or the small garden with the small-scale human figures and real stones, soil, water and plants. This close focus then changes to the big-scale space, as the participants talk, interact, or follow the performer. Repeated focus-changes also trigger alternative perception and cognition of the surroundings, and they lead in and out of the parallel or meta-realities, and the material, physical feature of the context. The four-partitioned structure of the space and the performance was built from the planning stage around a series of associations. The games were based on specific algorithms.

<p>1st stage Element: air. Association: genesis. Setting: laboratory; microscope with samples. Sense: taste, tactile. Character of the performer: teacher. Level: individual. Action: choose your gender and your lifespan. Game: choice from a range of possibilities.</p>	<p>2nd stage Element: earth. Association: Eden. Setting: garden; a miniature live garden. Sense: tactile (soil, pebbles, sand, plants). Character of the performer: mother. Level: community. Action: chose character traits and behaviour. Game: board game: throw the dice, probability.</p>
<p>3rd stage Element: fire. Association: Apocalypse. Setting: lottery show. Sense: visual, smell. Character of the performer: power-figure. Level: society. Act: debate and vote for the less painful. outcomes of recent societies. Game: combination and permutation.</p>	<p>4th stage Element: water. Association: Rescue. Setting: fleeing by the water. Sense: hearing, tactile. Character of the performer: preacher. Level: spirituality. Act: whose life to save? act, debate, persuade, invent. Game: free choice.</p>

Action implies the use of art and science methodologies. I regard inspiration as an act of reading the world. By reading I mean the active, discourse-creating process that enables us to approach, perceive, investigate and engage in a dialogue with our surroundings. Below I will give a more detailed account of the first stage, where the participants choose gender and lifespan, as this is the stage which caused the most unexpected situations both throughout the research and the performances, as they intertwine the least obvious two fields: biology and performativity. In the other three stages the community-building, the social sensitivity, and the decision-making open-ended interactive games are more known already in the performing arts world. I will give a summary of them.

Gender and lifespan were the main questions when building up the individual characters of the game. We researched the anatomy of microscopical organisms, where these two features could show a wide variety. We soon found unicellular organisms and creatures living in the water, and added to them the item leaf with vein, because of the recent discoveries of the communication among the trees. The five organisms we selected were: Paramecium: a slipper-shaped unicellular, able to reproduce themselves both asexually and sexually; Planaria: flatworms which are hermaphrodites; Spiro Gyra: called also water silk, a fresh water green alga; leaf with vein; and finally, Hydra. With very little changes of the scientific texts and being faithful to the biological facts, we conceived four videos of less than one minute each, where the performer appears as a young scientist in a TV programme and explains the existence of the first four of these creatures. These creatures and their explicit explanations, beyond the Anthropocene, open up our perception to a wide variety of existence. As an example, the text on the Planaria follows:

Planaria. Planaria are flat worms, with very simple organ systems. Through their body wall, oxygen enters and carbon-dioxide leaves. This is the way they breath. There are both sexual and asexual Planaria. The sexual Planaria are hermaphrodites: they have both testicles and ovaries. In asexual reproduction, Planaria can be cut in small pieces, and each piece will regenerate into a complete organism. In fact, if the head is cut in half, it is possible for the Planaria to regenerate two heads and continue to live. This way, Planaria are immortal.

While on the screen of the computer the audience sees the performer explaining the organisms, she is there in the physical space, too, and places the samples of the organisms under the microscope for the audience to see them. Hydra, the last sample is delivered live by the performer, the lights change, we deter considerably from the scientific text, and open up towards the imagination, entering into the world of the performance:

Hydra is a small, fresh-water animal. It grew big and scary only in the imagination of the Greek mythology. They describe her as a giant fire-breathing beast with several heads. But in reality, she is tiny, and has one single head. Living in the water, Hydra inhales and exhales through her skin. (breathing) She's been around for hundreds and thousands of years, in this world. Because, you know what? She's immortal.

Yes, it is true. Hydra does not die and does not age. Hydra can duplicate herself, she simply divides her cells. She gives birth to her own clone. The genes are passed on, the genes will never die. Hydra never dies.

Scientists have been researching Hydra for many years, for her immortality. And cut and cut again and put her under the microscope. To see her cells, to find out her secret. To get to know her. Where is the link between Hydra and humans? How to live forever?

How can humans live forever? (more to herself)
How can, humans, live forever.

Throughout the research events we experimented a couple of methods on how to offer the widest variety of living conditions and existence to the participants and give them both the opportunity and inspiration to open up for endless choices when it comes to gender and lifespan. First, we simply left empty paper slips for them to write whatever they wish to; at another event we released a soundscape where different voices stated diverse gender variations. In the end, we opted for a pile of paper slips on which we printed around forty possibilities, for example: 20% male, 40% female, 40% not sure, and told them that they can make up similar combinations, and left hundreds of small blank paper slips for that. We proceeded similarly with the lifespans. The feedback we received was that after five different batches of interesting and new information absorbed through the videos, by spoken words and through via the screen, the participants found the data too overwhelming. They needed to focus silently and have lengthier time, change of the media, and the use of the written word. We stick to the paper slips: a part suggesting gender variations, a part being blank.

The second stage is the garden, and here the game is more open and more complex, too. In the very beginning of the second stage, the participants are given small-scale human figures, which we call little persons in the performance. We painted them each in one colour: there is a yellow, an orange, a green and a blue one. The significance of the colours will be discussed later. The actor here proceeds as a facilitator, as hands out to each of the participant or participant groups their little people, tell them that this is their bodies given by birth, and ask them to tell if they are satisfied with what they are provided with. As the little

people come in female, male and children forms, in most of the cases they are different from the previously chosen gender, and open ways to short narratives and discussions among the participants. After this, the participants select two characteristics for their further lives, out of more than one hundred printed paper slips. They place the little people in the garden, and from this moment, a freer board game starts: in smaller and bigger sizes, there are more than eighty dices from which the participants can select any number of dices they wish and throw them. The game lasts three rounds, and the number of spots on the dices are associated to simple algorithms, this way any number would lead to one of the rules of the game. The rules of the game are written in a huge book, from which the actor reads them out loud, and the participants can act accordingly. More or less free activities are associated to the rules; an example for a freer one is: move close to the little person you like the most and organise a party for their birthday with as many details as you can, in three minutes; a closed rule is, for example: you are out of the game for one round. As there are four little persons in the performance-game, altogether twelve actions are orchestrated through the game. These twelve actions are designed in a way that several community relations can be developed through them: positive and negative emotions, actions, interactions are facilitated through them. The participants act according to their earlier selected features and make friends or enemies in the garden.

The third stage is a simulacrum of the simulacrum: it looks like a playground, with five words written in chalk on the floor: bunker, epidemic, eclipse, slavery, flood. We called this stage the lottery of the humankind. The participants get to select three out of the five hardships, and act as a society: overcome, make rules, find a leader, to see how they can cope with the three hardships selected. To all five of them we associated a game, somewhat similar to Boal's games, being built on trust, leadership, embodiment, bodily interaction. The simple setting of chalk-texts on the floor opens up to a vibrant context of a TV lottery: the five hardships become associated with five red lightbulbs, hung above the heads of the participants, and taken, one by one, by the actor, who will instruct the participants what to do, how to interact to overcome the given hardship. Manipulation, which is often in the focus of debates about participatory, relational, dialogical arts (Bishop, *Artificial Hells*) is openly revealed and used; the participants here get to know that the actor-facilitator who led the pleasant and thought-provoking game up till now, will drive them into the most dangerous adventures with a smile on her face. However, she helps and gives instructions, but the community of the participants have to take decisions and act together or nominate someone to act on behalf of them, and either overcome or remain in the given hardship.

The very last stage, the acrylic cube with water, is the possibility to escape from this situation. The performer delivers the last part of the monologue of Hydra:

Like I said, Hydra is a very important creature to me. She can duplicate herself. She can start a new life. And this is called budding. Hydra budding. She can grow a second self on her body. The new Hydra is identical to the parent organism. The new Hydra is genetically 100 percent reproduced. It is the same person. And this way, she saves herself. She saves herself for a future. What do you do with your life now? What do you do with your body now? What do you do with your community? Can you save someone? Who would that be?

Hydra, whose monologue in the beginning of the performance was delivered live and interwoven with definitely subjective texts and emotions, is not, however the frame of the performance. As a silver line for the actor, we decided that she herself is Hydra, who invites humans into her space to show them wider perspectives of existence and takes the lead to alter the power position between natural surroundings and humans. There is very little hint in the performance that the actor actually takes on this role, and we deliberately did not want to leave more hints or certainty about it, so that the participants rather sense than rationally decode the clues. In the very end of the performance, she invites the participants to seek for departure towards a more rewarding form of living and leaves them one plastic bubble in which one little person can be included and dropped into the water in the cube, being sent to nicer waves. The actor, with this last gesture, leaves the participants on their own, and remains in the space in her own quotidian persona, staring back perplexed if any of the participants approaches her to ask for a rule, hint, or help. Very soon, the audience understands that they are on their own and have to act accordingly. At this stage, the difference between time lengths and outcomes is the broadest. I mention here the two extremes: in one case, one of the participants, while the group was contemplating and discussing what to do, grabbed the bubble, put their little persona in it, and dropped into the water, ending brusque the game and the performance. On the other extreme, while the long discussions were emerging about who and why deserved to be saved, again, one of the participants took the bubble, all four little personas, and with a long, focussed and very refined work, she managed to squeeze all of them in. Before and after that, in several cases we tried this out ourselves, but in the best case we managed to enter two little personas in the bubble. The space is filled with smaller and bigger allusions and shapes of quadrat and cube (the dices, the acrylic cube, the glass table), circle and sphere (the lightbulbs, the yoga balls, the bubbles, the circular mirror). Some of them play in the game, some of them don't, some of them are not meant originally to take active part in the performance, but then were used by the participants at certain moments. During one research event,

one participant realised that there are at least ten more similar plastic bubbles on set and took them and sent all little persons towards escape, placing each of them in separate bubbles.

Throughout the rehearsals, we had three types of research cycles: the first was with artists invited to events, the second was with a small mixed group of artists and scientists, who gave feedback on both the scientific accuracy and the performative and interactive dramaturgy and the narrative of the event. And finally, we advertised some free events with mock audiences, preferably unknown people, who would also give feedback on the emergence of the process. Though we were prepared to show them parts or the whole run-through of the performance, followed by a survey or structured talks where we can have feedbacks from them, the audience re-directed the script: they simply stopped, asked questions, gave advice, shared ideas, and were keen on repeating the stages over and over again, to our biggest surprise, actually, behaving similarly to actors at a rehearsal. Very soon, we understood that the performances themselves are also research events, in an ever-evolving change and articulation of the ideas and notions depending on the participants' predilection. The research events and the feedbacks led us to understand that this kind of performances cannot simply begin as a traditional theatre piece. First, there is no space delimitation between the actor and the audience-participants. Second, there is a need for a prelude for the audience to enter into a mind state where they allow themselves to move freely, to act and interact. Finally, and most importantly, the parallel world, built by us and by the small and always changing temporary community which attended the research phase was so experimental, that there was definitely a need for a smooth introduction which will then slip into the performance, in an almost imperceptible way. We held the first five performances at Bådteatret: The Boat Theatre, which is a real old boat, floating on the sea in the luxurious harbour of Nyhavn, in the very heart of Copenhagen, and which, as a venue, enriched the connotations of the set, text and actions, and gave a sensorial experience with its smooth sway. Given the miniature scale of some of the props, and the fact that our intention was responsiveness towards each and every attendant, we recognised that the maximum number of participants can be of twelve, in four groups of three people, each of these groups being responsible for the life of one little persona. We needed symbols and signs to symbolize the group belonging, to create these fluid team-identities, and we needed more tactile and earthly experience to compensate for the seemingly cold or rigid technical equipment: the microscope, the screen, the use of videos, the light bulbs and the overall lighting and sound. In the lobby, which is the bar at the same time, while my colleagues served the coffee and the wine, I served the attendants with yellow, orange, green and blue coloured spots on the back of their hands, giving each colour one by one. This immediately restructured the audience: none of those who came together were part of the same group. On the other hand, those who had the same coloured spot on their hands, exchanged glanc-

es, sometimes asked questions, even engaged in discussions with each other. The groups started to form. We opened the door to the space, and the performer, half as an actor, half as a facilitator, asked the audience if they were ready to play, and then let them in, through the narrow door, one by one. The light- and sound designer was visible, the actor walked around casually, and, as there were twelve active participants and sometimes twelve more, who agreed to enter and be present without playing, at least two other people from our group were present in the space. We deliberately waited with the acting part of the performance for at least five-ten minutes. At the four installations we placed small inscriptions, similar to those in the museum, which instructed the audience. For example, at the microscope, they could observe their hair, nails, face, skin, being displayed and magnified on the screen. The garden was a bare mirror, and in jars we placed around it soil, pebbles, water and greenery, and the inscription asked the audience to build a garden with the given material. When the audience explored the space, built the garden, and felt relaxed enough, the actor started the videos with the small creatures, showing them under the microscope, and the game began. By the microscope we placed four bigger stones, marked with yellow, orange, green and blue dots, and these natural, though lifeless, tactile, round-and-rough stones represented the lives of the avatars, on which, with a silver pen, the participants could write their gender, lifespan, and characteristics. These stones gathered throughout the series of performances, and in the lobby, we soon made a mini-exhibition of them, having the audience linger in front of them and guess their role and significance. We took off with two awkward endings, when, after the escape-story we all stood somewhat puzzled and in silence. The feedbacks helped us realise that we have to invite the audience to linger in the space after the action per se had ended. They needed to spend some free time around the installations, to contemplate, as they had just written a story into it. So, we decided to let them stay as long as they would like to, and the same casual light and music came back from the beginning of the performance. In some cases, the audience stayed long, talked, and even engaged into discussions with us.

3) The recent term 'performance design' shows the attempt to carry out structured and complex processes through planning and applying the aesthetic values, form and content for the use and shared experience of the audience, in other words, to conceive it as an applied art form. The conception of design comprises the act of construction, using scientific methods and measurables and deeming significant socio-political and economic factors, while having a focus on the aesthetic, too. Similarly, terms like participatory, collaborative, co-creative and audience, attendants, participants slip along the narratives and discourses created around these cross-genre performances. In 'IF', we used scientific and artistic methods and not only performative elements, but also visual arts and installation art. The event was called action-installation, installation-performance, performance art, participatory game, gamifica-

tion-based performance, experience design, immersive storytelling and performance in narrative space. Looking back in history; from ancient rituals and mythologies, community storytelling and performative practices to artistic canon-breaking manifestos of the -isms on the turn of the 19th and 20th century, there are a series of co-creative processes within the frames of strong artistic conceptions, with the austerity of philosophical-aesthetic value creation, and often having social, political, and even economic agenda. Still, we do not have a more or less coherent terminology, neither epistemologies for developing and documenting, analysing these phenomena. I would like to draw attention to this lacuna and urge a cross-disciplinary endeavour for the emergence of a coherent language, terminology, conceptualisation of them.

Credit:

Writer and director: Rita Sebestyen.

Performer: Minni Katina Mertens in Copenhagen and Sara Vilardo in Naples.

Light and sound designer: Ivan Wahren.

Dramaturge: Mira Nadina Mertens.

Assistant: Stine Ebbesen.

Music: Ya Tosiba

Support to the research: Forsøgsstationen, Copenhagen, 2017.

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Author's profile:

Rita Sebestyén, PhD, has been the artistic director of Othernessproject since 2014. With her practice-based, cross-disciplinary approach she conceives cross-genre performances to offer hands-on experience of the most intriguing philosophical, aesthetic and societal questions: cross-cultural encounters, otherness, social inclusion. Besides workshops and presentations in the UK, Germany, Greece, Denmark, Sweden and Portugal, she has taught at BA and MA level in Romania, Hungary and Denmark. Her collaborative projects have been recently published in New Zealand and the USA, too.