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(RE)CREATING INDENTITIES AND WORLDVIEWS THROUGH ROLE-TAKING IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THEATRICAL VS 'REAL' FRAMEWORKS.

- Based on the Performance Theatre 'Seven Tales of Misery' -

Gdańsk 2007

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ABSTRACT

The identity creation takes place on the social level through interactions with various others. What is more, the process of shaping the perceptions of the world, as well as the self-awareness, is determined by the cultural context, in which one is entangled. Such a biased social embeddedness, inevitably narrows people's cognitive capacities. This thesis emphasizes the importance of holding multiple social roles, and accumulating various life experiences, in the process of self-development and one's individualization. Importantly, the latter is also conditioned by means of shifting between different social frameworks, each of which has its intrinsic rules and focuses, therefore entails individuals' changing angles of perception. One example of such influential frameworks is investigated: the interacting and improvisational performance theatre – the case study.

Fiction is a substantial component of the reality. Therefore, exploring the world and the 'self' should be done through different channels. Looking at the reality from within the fictional framework turns out to be highly influential in shaping one's identity, worldviews and deeper understanding of the ambiguity of the social reality. The performance is also discussed from the perspective of its responding to the needs of the postmodern subject. As argued, the individual living in the era of pervasive freedom and still growing individualization, is in constant search for new experiences, approaching his/her identity as a project. In the technologically mediated social life people are in need for authenticity, more intimate and close social encounters, as well as for freer expression of their subjectivity. The latter is being constantly suppressed by the cultural "directives" of how to perform the official social roles – those, as a result, are the most realized parts of the human being's self-definition.

This thesis argues, that the wider spectrum of various and differently framed social experiences, the more individualized one becomes, and therefore the more self-sufficient in terms of cognitively approaching and explaining the social world and the 'self.' Pluralism of the roles one undertakes – whether temporary or repetitive, whether in reality or in fiction - provides one with psychological well-being and better integration into the society. Moreover, it has the potential to extend one's emotional, intellectual and perceptual capacities, as well as to provide the enriching of one's 'overall identity.'

STRESZCZENIE

Tworzenie tożsamości odbywa się na poziomie społecznym poprzez interakcje z innymi ludźmi. Co więcej, proces kształtowania zapatrywań na świat, jak również samoświadomość, uwarunkowane jest przez środowisko kulturowe, w którym jednostka jest uwikłana. Takie stronnicze społeczne zakorzenienie nieuniknienie zawęża ludzkie zdolności poznawcze. Praca ta podkreśla znaczenie, jakie niesie różnorodność ról społecznych oraz skumulowanych życiowych doświadczeń, w procesie samorozwoju i stawania się jednostką. Co ważne, te ostatnie cele zostają również spełnione poprzez zmiany ram społecznych, z których każda posiada swoiste zasady i cele, a to umożliwia jednostkom większą plastyczność pod względem postrzegania rzeczywistości. Jako studium przypadku, przedstawiony jest przykład ramy wywierającej tego typu wpływ: interaktywny i improwizowany teatr 'performance'.

Fikcja jest nieodłącznym elementem rzeczywistości. Dlatego też poznawanie świata i siebie powinno odbywać się za pomocą różnych kanałów. Spoglądanie na rzeczywistość z wewnątrz ramy fikcyjnej okazuje się niezmiernie ważne w kształtowaniu tożsamości, poglądów na świat, oraz dla głębszego zrozumienia kompleksowości świata społecznego. Przedstawienie 'performance' jest również omawiane pod względem tego, jak reaguje na potrzeby jednostki w erze postmodernizmu. Żyjąc w świecie wszechogarniającej wolności i rosnącego indywidualizmu, człowiek wciąż poszukuje nowych przeżyć i doświadczeń, traktując swoją tożsamość jak projekt. W życiu społecznym zapośredniczonym przez technologię, ludzie mają potrzebę autentyczności, bardziej intymnych i bliższych relacji społecznych, jak również potrzebę mniej skrępowanej ekspresji swojego 'ja'. Te ostatnie jest nieustannie tłumione przez kulturę, która normatywnie reguluje jak odgrywać formalne role społeczne – one, w rezultacie, stają się najbardziej uświadomionymi elementami ludzkiej definicji siebie.

Praca ta ukazuje, że im większe spectrum doświadczeń społecznych, które są różnorodne i należą do różnych „ram", tym bardzie zindywidualizowana staje się jednostka, co z kolei prowadzi do większej samowystarczalności w poznaniu i wyjaśnianiu świata społecznego i własnego 'ja'. Pluralizm ról, w które wchodzi jednostka – czy tymczasowych, czy powtarzających się, czy w życiu realnym czy fikcyjnym – zapewnia jej dobrą kondycję psychiczną i łatwiejszą integrację w życiu społecznym. Ponadto, wielość ról poszerza zdolności emocjonalne, intelektualne i percepcyjne człowieka, a także wzbogaca jego 'tożsamość całościową'.

ACNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

The key issues of this paper is the process of identity formation through interactions with others, with an emphasis on the argument that interactions with physical presence, no matter if in real life or fictional, are the most significant factors shaping individual's social and psychological life. This thesis is based on and inspired by my acting experience in the theatre. People's understanding of different cultures, better understanding of the world in its whole, and – what seemed the most important – people's self-knowledge, is a function of authentic experiences of various social situations and different role-takings. This thesis investigates social interaction theories - of Erving Goffman (1959; 1986) and Randal Collins (2004) – as well as the case study of the last year's interactive performance theatre 'Seven Tales of Misery,' set in Copenhagen in September 2006 and directed by Signa Sorensen, a Danish artist. Moreover, this thesis elaborates on the interrelatedness of fiction and reality and their co-operation in educating individuals to the world and shaping their identities. The inspiration and theoretical framework for this argument is taken from the scientific conference titled 'Educating to the Real World by means of the Fictional World', which took place in Gdańsk in December 2006. I argue that complimentary relation of fiction and reality enriches people's identity, embraces well-being, and contributes to a deeper and more open-minded understanding of 'self' and the world around them.

This research grew out of my inspiration from spontaneous observations of and participation in interactions with various 'Others,' beginning from the period, when I was much more vulnerable to various influences coming from my social environment. Reflection on society as a whole or its different subcategories, often follows a reflection on myself. Considering myself against others as co-representatives of human nature, and at the same time as culturally alike or different individuals, helps me find similarities (empathy) and differences (tolerance) - essential for discerning the complexity of the world and for appreciating diversity that makes the world both complicated and richer. Approaching the two questions will give the reader the idea about my reasons to focus on such subject: Why I became a sociologist?; and why I became an actress?

Why I became a sociologist

My interest in the subject came out of my own felt limitations of myself, self-restrictions, as an individual fixed in the social structure, routinized by socialization and

highly influential, though not fully internalized socio-cultural norms. My observations of the society proved that being deeply "fixed" in one culture is highly one-angled and creates a prism through which we define the notion of reality that tends to be dangerously universalizing. Taking for granted the "normality" that we became used to and internalized, makes us conform tacitly – as Garfinkel notices[1] – to the social world that has been "arbitrarily" constructed. Intrusion of alternative discourses into the existing social order - which we are usually far from questioning - provokes reactive responses from inside members of this "sanctioned" system. This kind of unrealized anchoring is limiting for an individual who becomes disabled from unbiased self-development and from creatively transforming the reality. The argument is that taking various roles is important for overcoming the above mentioned limitations. Even more important is to take roles outside of one's cultural context. Being situated in an unknown cultural environment, being faced with situations one never, or merely, imagined, or creating a character in a theatre play, uprooted from one's regular time and space – all such experiences enable people involved to extend the variety of their initial identities. Learning theories about society and individuals anchored in a society, which I often referred to in the daily observations of the social life and my personal experiences in interactions with other people – all this gave me a valuable theoretical foundation for interactions in practice – in life and, then, while acting. I became fascinated by the realization how different aspects of social life influence people's identities and how improvised interactions teach an individual his/her "self", social skills and general "life" skills. What took my interest was performing new social roles as a means of extending people's imagination, understanding the previously unknown areas, and creating their open-mindedness to the complexity of the world.

Why I became an actress

My participation in the "Seven Tales of Misery" theatre performance - the case study – resulted from my eagerness to experience myself more fully and more authentically. In order to gain more self-knowledge and also – the most important – to uproot my inhibitions about improvisation and locating myself in unpredictable, potentially discrediting situations, I decided to act. I was aware that there are so many experiences and emotions I would never have an opportunity to try, and/or so many of them that I would never dare to expose myself to. What I found the most interesting, yet very challenging in terms of the performance and placing myself in the fictional world, was in accord also with my interviewees' impressions:

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[1] see Collins, p. 103-104

escaping from everyday personality; taking different roles in the changed framework; experiencing oneself as "someone else" (in a sense of discovering different sides of oneself). I was also convinced that fulfillment is the child of going beyond the personal boundaries. It also seemed to me that the only way of dealing with fears is facing them, instead of escaping from them.

What is important in my approach is that also short-term roles, tiny life experiences, temporary encounters and emphatic observations are all potential components of identity formation as a process. The stress, however, is mainly on social interactions as the most influential factor in creating people's identities. Nevertheless, I admit that indirect contact with the world, like for example through books, non-participant observations, and even dreams (that are obviously also affected by one's existing in the society) play important role in forming an individual's personality. However, because it is not my intention to go too far into psychology, and because the conviction is that most of the forces affecting identity comes from the social level, my focus is intentionally put on social interactions.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis has three main focuses. First of all, it employs general theorizing on tendencies and needs of the contemporary society with the focus on identity formation through the process of taking different roles. Secondly, its composition is threaded with my personal, retrospective experience as a participant and an observer of the theatre performance. This will be supported by the general and – when relevant – detailed description of the project, in terms of the story presented, form of artistic expression, potential and actual influence on the audience and the actors. The third important component is an overview and an analysis of the in-depth interviews with co-actors and directors, conducted in Copenhagen in November 2006, meaning two months after the performance finished. The main questions addressed, was their experience itself, the experience they shared with other participants through improvised interactions, and impact - in terms of identity (re)creation - this theatre had on them and on other people involved. They were also asked about their observations on the contemporary condition in the society and people's quests being satisfied by that kind of performances, which renders the latter attractive and successful. I consciously and intentionally give the actors voice, quoting them extensively instead of only paraphrasing their discursive responses. Therefore, chapter 5 may be deemed untypical, but, I argue, form highly valuable contribution to the whole composition of the thesis.

In terms of literature on social interactions, focused upon in chapter 1, the theoretical direction is mainly based on Randal Collins (2004), Erving Goffman (1959; 1986) and Peggy Thoits (1983). In addition, I will also use some theories like Bauman's (2001) and Berzonsky's (2005) on subjectivity and identity creation in the postmodern condition. Collins contributes to the subject matter with his theory on interaction ritual chains as a set of cumulated interaction rituals that carry their symbolic content through further social interactions, influencing them and shaping their emotional level. It is emotions that are major motivating factors in the social life. For him, Emotional Energy (EE), a crucial component of interaction rituals, is either embraced or decreased during social interactions. The argument is that the more affective a ritual of interaction, the more influential it becomes in terms of shaping one's overall identity.

Goffman's (1959) theory of role taking in his metaphorical paradigm of the social life as theatre, is a second important approach. Various presentations of 'self' through performing social roles in front of others, are the most conspicuous, and the most realized, faces of one's

identity. It is important to underline that this thesis regards the complex network of an individual's roles - whether real (actual) or fictional (theatrical) - as a main identity builder. "Frame Analysis"(1986) – another book by Gofffman - is going to provide a foundation for the theory that a change of social framework influences the definition of situation, therefore changes the principles and general mode of social interaction. He claims that people tend to understand their reality by perceiving it through the primary frameworks. [ELABORATE more]

Another theoretical approach employed in chapter 1, is the theory by Peggy Thoits (1983), presenting Identity Accumulation Hypothesis and seeking the correlation between multiple identities and psychological well-being. She argues that people integrated in the society - those holding many social roles - find their existence more meaningful. The argument, inspired by this author, is that multiple identities extend and enrich an individual's personality. The world is complex and also people holding complex identities and taking part in a wider variety of social domains, become more accustomed and included in a society, than people with only few identities. In accordance with the case study, described more briefly in chapter 2, the argument of this thesis is that performances like 'Seven Tales of Misery' provide individuals with differently framed, strong and influential experiences. They well respond to postmodern conditions, in which people want more and more freedom, more control over their lives and over their experiences. Postmodern subjects are driven by constantly new demands, bottomless desires, capricious wishes (see Bauman 2001). They want participation in place of alienation. All those needs, it is argued, can be perfectly satisfied by Signa Sorensen's performance projects. There has been a wide interest in her innovative works, both in artistic and academic field, yet still not sufficient for covering such a new and interesting theatrical and social phenomenon – not sufficient, at least, in the field of sociology.

While investigating the performance as the process of creation and a source of social influence, this experimental project, fully interactive and improvised, does reflect contemporary tendencies of the Western society, being at the same time a product of them. Moreover, I will shortly refer to one essay by Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen (2006) and his analysis of interactivity in the previous projects by the same director – those marking a similar-to-'Seventales' pattern. His essay is valuable, because it is written from an audience's perspective, being at the same time analyzed by a student of Dance and Theatre from the University of Copenhagen.

'Seven Tales of Misery,' as a genre, places itself on the threshold of two domains: theatre and performance art. In chapter 3, the book "Postmodern Theatre" by Lehmann (2006) is to be applied to categorize some distinctive features of the two mentioned. Of special significance for the subject matter, is the shift from the principle of influencing the audience (theatre), to self-transformation of the artists (performance). Lehmann, along with Nightingale (1999), also draws attention to the importance of theatre in today's rationalized, technologized world.

Chapter 4 - on methodology – explains the superiority of qualitative methods over quantitative for the sake of investigating the subject matter of this thesis. The research method is based on interviews with actors and directors, as well as on my participant observation from the performance. Respondents' observations, their own experiences, memories and recalled conversations with people from the period of performance surface in free-floating conversational form of unstadarized interviews. Then discourse analysis is applied in order to interpret the complex responses, which are to be widely integrated into chapter 5. The latter is fully dedicated to the findings from the analysis of the interviews with actors. Those interviews were highly discursive and free-floating, touching on such delicate matters as personal experiences from the performance, recalled emotions, impressions, as well as opinions on the actual and potential impact such performances have on participating individuals. Thus, with the intention to use those precious materials as exhaustively as possible, I decided to extend simplified conclusions to more detailed review of their responses. This requires including many relevant quotations, which give the reader more approachable picture of what happened in the fictional framework and why. To be able to understand the potential influence of such an improvised theatre on interacting individuals, it is more effective to shift back and forth between fiction and the meta-level of the analysis. Therefore, multiple quotes on identity formation and self-exploration, presented in chapter 5 are highly supportive for the comprehension of the whole thesis subject. Actors' narratives partially contribute also to chapter 8 and 9. Full versions of the interviews I conducted are stored in my private archive.

Throughout chapter 6, the theme of theatre as identity-shaper is elaborated upon. For the purpose of this matter, I describe my own experiences from the performance, with the focus on those which influenced me individually. This is to be additionally supported by the essay in Sociology of autobiography by Robert Brym (2006), writing on the transformative power of theatre, as an example using his own case. He describes how acting in drama changed his inner 'self' and the perception of the world. Complementary to the section on

influential powers of role-taking is the reference to 'sociodrama' workshops I participated in (December 2006 at the Department of Pedagogy, Gdańsk), as well as to the academic conference (December 2006 in 'Łaźnia', Gdańsk) on educating to the real life through fiction. This is all included in chapter 7. Both workshops and the conference elaborate on educational and therapeutic effects of one's stepping into the fictional frame. Such "universe" can be a means of undergoing perceptual transformations that have a potential impact also on the real life. Departing from that, one of the principal themes to be explored is the complementarity of fiction and reality in the cooperative process of shaping one's identity and helping to deeper explore complex dimensions of such an abstract phenomenon as the Reality. Fiction is another dimension of reality and not - as it has been often argued - its antithesis. The simplest supporting argument for that is the fact that everyday social reality is also constructed, therefore - one can say - constitutes another fiction. At this point, relevant is Goffman's (1986) theory that people tend to use various "fictions" to confirm social order. Moreover, S. Neubauer's (2006) lecture stating that people are not able to reach reality by any other means than fiction, is another contribution. As sociologists claim, people make their reality, but then, in turn, are inevitably constrained and shaped by the social structure they themselves created.

Chapter 8 touches upon the notion of authenticity as high-valued condition for stronger individualism, as well as a means of retreating from excessive consumption of reproduced goods and images. 'Authenticity' is applied to such fields as experiences and 'self,' to debate over people's quest for more 'authentic' experiences to feel more 'authentic' self. Peterson's (2005) theory on social discourses of authenticity is discussed.

The final chapter, the 9th, focuses on something that in our times is the most desired "good" on the social market, namely: experience. In the article on 'experience economy,' Pine and Gilmore (1998) deem experience presently the most effective factor that attaches people to certain trademarks, institutions, interactions, social roles, etc. The argument presented is that Signa, through her performances, mediates people's experience of creative (co)creation.

In Appendixes - following the pictures - in order to give the reader a more in-depth overview of the idea of this theatre project, some supplementary materials related to the performance 'Seven Tales of Misery' are included. Reading them is optional, and is mainly addressed to those who find the performance interesting not only from a sociological point of view –this, I hope, I covered exhaustedly in my thesis - but also as a story telling, and therefore have a wish to explore it a little bit more. The stress, however, to become familiar with the provided texts, can turn out to be useful for better understanding of the inside of fictional frame – a perspective also used to express my personal experiences in the character I

played. In Appendix 1, you find the background story of 'Seven Tales of Misery' as a ritual, forming a general foundation, on which the actors were supposed to create and develop their characters. In addition, Appendix 2 includes a reading to support questions provided by the director. The reader can gain an overview of what the complex process of creating and internalizing such character may start from. Appendix 3 presents a very general biographic background for Danka – the character I played. Throughout Appendixes 4 to 7, there are reviews of the performance published by Danish newspapers, translated into English by 'Plex' – a company hosting the project.

It is extremely hard to examine the social influence of theatre on people – participants. However, what one of the themes in my interviews researched was that this kind of highly interactive theatre changes people to some extent. The more people push themselves to be involved, the bigger the extent of change they go through. I need to underline, that I intentionally centered my interviews on actors, as they go into their roles and character-creation process in the most conscious mode. It is so, because they can be deeply integrated into their characters, while at the same time holding distance to a role. As Goffman (1959) writes, nobody is in better position to observe a performance, than one who has designed it. [2] Another hypothesis is that such an interactive theatre as 'Seven Tales of Misery' affects the participating audience too. As audience were not interviewed, this issue is only discussed based on the actors' experiences with the audience, which was repeatedly touched upon during the interviews.

As the reader will be able to sense, in my debates on the contemporary society, I will strictly focus on the Western world – globalized, complex, plural and individualized – part of which is also Denmark, where the performance took place. Theorizing about the theatre performance - a case study, will be done on the 'meta-level,' so from within the 'real' frame. However, there is a constant shift to the fictional frame, especially when describing my personal affective experiences. The latter are obviously crucial for better understanding of the performance from the sociological perspective.

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[2] Goffman 1959, p. 110

Chapter 1.

Identity creation in social interactions

Identity: subjectively defined, socially-constructed

Definitions of identity, like definitions of culture are countless and still multiply whenever another author tries to theoretically approach this highly abstract phenomenon. However, in this thesis, the theoretical departure is Berzonsky's (2005) definition. As he conceptualizes it:

> … identity is a self-construct, a mental representation of one-self, not a substantive entity that exists in itself. [3]

Whenever (if ever) identity is possible to "catch," it is only to be caught in here and now, and only by an individual holding that identity. Such individual owns his biography, fragments of which – both conscious and subconscious – are an intrinsic part of the overall identity. The latter is called so to make it possible to connotatively distinguish between that, and those fragmented "identities" that a lot of sociologists and psychologists, like Thoits (1983), use in the meaning of social roles. Some authors, like for example Berzonsky (2005), oppose the term 'multiple identities,' regarding it as "oxymoron," and stressing that 'identity' itself from a definition means something singular.[4] Nevertheless, as the notion 'multiple identities' has become quite popular in social sciences' debates, for the sake of this thesis I will use it in a sense of separate social roles – whether temporary, or repeated in everyday routine – performed by an individual and contributing to his/her 'overall identity.' This - to my best knowledge – has not been used by any theorist before. The connotation of this key theme refers to one's self-realization – at a given moment - of who one is as an individual. Berzonsky (2005) writes:

> (…) one's sense of identity is not a category separate from the roles, attitudes, motives, autobiographical experiences, identifications, standards, values, goals, self-views, regulatory strategies, and the like from which it is composed.[5]

Inspired by that, the 'overall identity' consists not only - yet mainly and the most consciously – of social roles performed in Thoit's sense, but also of all the interrelated and accumulated experiences, social roles, dreams and biological factors, such as, for example,

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[3] Berzonsky, p. 129
[4] Berzonsky, 2005, p. 133
[5] Berzonsky, 2005, p. 133

gender. It is problematic if homosexualism or transsexualism is biologically or socially determined, and it is not an issue in this thesis. The important point is that factors like sexual orientation or gender, to a great extent influence one's identity. Nevertheless, there is an undoubtedly interesting and controversial theory by Judith Butler (1999) on the origins of gender-identity. She writes not about the essence of gender, but about its production along the culturally determined standards of what is considered "natural" femininity and "natural" masculinity. Butler claims that conspicuous behavioral and mental signifiers of gender are not the expression of nature, but are socially constructed identities, based on cultural normative discourses. As she claims, certain activities, modes of behavior and desires are:

> ...*performative* in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is *performative* suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.[6]

The social regulates heterosexual ideals of femininity and masculinity, making an illusion of gender as a pre-destined core of human existence. Following Butler (2005), we stress the fact that identities are socially constructed, no matter if they are temporary social positions or such a seemingly objective and "ever-lasting" factors as gender. According to Goffman (1959), self-presentation is oriented towards showing the audience – partners in interaction - idealized, therefore selective image of self. 'Self' is not human's substantial core, but - as Goffman observes - scenic effect, created by a certain staged interaction.[7] It is formed when witnesses of a performance start interpreting it. Identity, thus, as mentioned before, is formed in interactions, on a social level of existence.

Identity as a project

People often say: "I've changed," searching for causes in some breakthroughs in their lives or a turning point inspired by a traumatic/wonderful experience. All this, however, is the long-term accumulation of tiny and less tiny experiences shaping one's identity. Those experiences can be seemingly unimportant, and then filled with significance when confronted with other interactions/experiences that follow. They can also be forgotten and then "reproduced" through often uncontrolled and unexpected associations with some new events. It bears relevance to Collins' (2004) theory of 'interaction ritual chains': social interactions are mutually influential and form chains that develop, carrying one's emotional energy that influences one's well-being and self-perception. It can be argued then that identity is

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[6] Butler, 2005, p. 173
[7] Goffman 1959, p. 129-130

constantly created through the chain of social situations, a chain of 'interaction rituals' (IR). The author, uses this term after Goffman's (IR), claiming that symbols originating in social interactions are carried throughout sequential interactions – interaction ritual chains:

> Rituals create symbols in first-order, face-to-face interaction, which constitutes the starting point in an array of further second- and third-order circuits in which symbols can be recirculated. (…) How meaningful those recirculated symbols are depends on what level of emotional intensity is reached in the first-order social encounters in which those symbols are used.[8]

If we consider all the significant experiences as symbols, we can say, analogically, that those experiences form chains, contributing to one's overall identity and influencing other interactions to take place. The greater amount of symbolic experiences one goes through, the wider ranger of those experiences to be used by one as resources in further social encounters. Collins focuses in his book on so-called emotional energy (EE) as "the social emotion par excellence" and distinguishes that from commonly recognized particular emotions like fear and joy.[9] In order to build an interaction ritual, people need to involve emotions, which are then transformed into other emotions.

> Short-term situational emotions carry across situations, in the form of emotional energy, with its hidden resonance of group membership, setting up chains of interaction rituals over time.[10]

Biographical identity vs. role-identity

Treating identity as a project entails approaching it as something highly subjective to the individual, and under constant construction. Each symbolic interaction and each single experience is "collected," more or less consciously, and absorbed by the individual as part of his/her overall identity. Each is also a fragment of constantly projected, accumulative biography. This thesis' notion of 'overall identity' is similar, in terms of meaning, to what Goffman calls "biographical identity." He claims that an individual entering a social role carries such identity with him and expresses some part of it, depending on a situation and its frame.[11] It can be argued then, that in certain frames, this expression is freer, so one's identity can surface more. This free-floating of one's biography makes one feel more authentic, truer to oneself. Such biographical identity is reflecting one as a person, and not as a social role one performs at a given moment.[12] People, however, often know themselves more from their

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[8] Collins, p. xii
[9] Ibid, p. xii
[10] Ibid, p. xii
[11] Goffman 1986, p. 573
[12] Ibid, p. 573

official social sides, i.e. roles and positions in the society. The argument of this thesis is that changing the framework enables us to explore our different role-potentials that are otherwise suppressed by our main activity - which does not need to use 'irrelevant' for the role resources from our personality. Social roles are, therefore, often "utilitarian." Making use of the wider range of our human sides, makes us 'richer' as individuals, provides with well-being and does not reduce only to main social roles that we are attached to in our everyday interactions. That is also what we can call the more 'authentic' self. During the presentation of one's 'self' in front of others, one has to be selective in terms of exposing certain parts of one's personality and behavioral styles, while eliminating those sides that contradict the normative and expectational ideal of a role performance. However, as Goffman (1959) claims, if one is, nevertheless, attached to those "irrelevant" or undesired for a role sides of one's 'self,' one indulges in them in the "backstage" of a performance, a different framework concealed from looks of others.[13] In this way, we can regard those unofficial activities - not destined for the actual "performance" – as often more authentic in comparison to staged social roles where one disguises oneself in various masks. Here the debate over limiting frames and non-authenticity of everyday life begins. Goffman observes that instead of just indulging in one's real feelings while fulfilling various social tasks, one fulfills those tasks in a way that the performance is impressive for others who watch.[14]

In "Frame Analysis" (1986), Goffman elaborates on this issue again. According to him, there is a relation between persons and roles they undertake. That relation is determined by the frame, or - as he also names it - "the interactive system." How much of the of role-performer's 'self' is to be spotted while performing a role, depends on how much space for that is left by a role in a particular social situation. He further emphasizes:

> Self, then, is not an entity half-concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them. Just as the current situation prescribes the official guise behind which we will conceal ourselves, so it provides for where and how we will show through, the culture itself prescribing what sort of entity we must believe ourselves to be in order to have something to show through in this manner. [15]

The individual's identity, as we see, constantly changes, as the proportions of its components to be enhanced change - according to situational and cultural demands attached to a certain social role.

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[13] Goffman 1959, p. 116-117
[14] Ibid, p. 121
[15] Goffman 1986, p. 573-574

Agency within social structure

If a current situation is a source of clues for an individual about what and how to do in that situation, it means that for Goffman the social structure in terms of power, is above agency. As Collins notices, Goffman is a limited social constructivist, because he claims that it is rather the situation that creates an individual (with his social role) than an individual (actor) shaping and controlling a situation through presenting his "idealized" self in front of others – the audience. [16] This thesis follows such a paradigm. People make their reality, but then, in turn, are inevitably constrained and shaped by the social structure they themselves have created. An individual's valuation of a particular identity and its hierarchical position among other identities possessed is mostly dependent, according to Thoits (1983), on one's cultural or subcultural embeddedness. Whether in choosing, sustaining or changing of an identity, the role of culture is to form a direction for personal values and priorities in those processes.

Therefore, it also influences the level of one's commitment towards an identity. The latter is measured, as Thoits claims, by a number of network ties related to this identity, subjective, affective importance of those ties, and the "multiplexity" (overlapping) of those ties.[17] Following such path of argumentation, it can be said that it is the society and social interactions that create individuality and personalities. It does not, however, deny the social constructivist theory, saying that people subjectively create and perceive reality. Berzonsky (2005) stresses that events themselves are not "unreal." It is only their meaning, interpretations and significance that are socially-constructed and depend upon non-objective frame of reference, meaning "a set of values, goals, standards." [18] Berzonsky's (2005) claim, following Kelly (1955), is that biological and social phenomena exist independently of an individual, but his/her understanding of the reality is based on theoretical constructs he/she applies to them. [19] As we see, society is socially-constructed in a sense that it exists through people's perceptions and interpretation. However, our interpretations and cognitive trends depend on culture where we are embedded. Berzonsky writes that knowledge and cognition are relativistic, and dependent on context.[20] One could say that it is framework-specific.

> Knowing is considered to be a constructive process of subjectively creating meaning, and those constructions always take place within a particular socio-culturally based

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[16] see Collins 2004, p. 16
[17] Thoits 1983, p. 176-177
[18] Berzonsky 2005, p. 128
[19] Ibid., p. 130
[20] Ibid., p. 127

context of implicit assumptions, values, theoretical constructs, attitudes, and signs and symbols. [21]

Identity formation takes place on a community level through interactions with role-partners. There is no "self" without society and others, against which we create ourselves developing into separate entities. Durkheim (1915) writes:

> The only source of life at which we can morally reanimate ourselves is that formed by the society of our fellow beings; the only moral forces with which we can sustain and increase our own are those which we get from others.[22]

Relevant at this point is also the notion of looking-glass self that Thoits (1983) mentions after Cooley, and the notion of taking the role of the generalized other that he mentions after Mead. The self-perception is based on how partners in interactions perceive us (and our particular position in an interaction). Thoits completes these theories adding that others' perception of us is also affected by the general cultural worth of a position we hold.[23] Therefore the 'subjective' is strictly interrelated with the 'objective' (assuming that cultural worth of a particular social position is relatively more objective in comparison with our subjective self-definition when performing such role). Our identities are strictly connected to and dependent on repeated and temporary interactions with others. Interaction is - as Goffman (1959) defines it - individuals' mutual influence of on each other's behavior, while in direct and physical presence.[24] People perform roles in front of and for others.[25] The foundation of the whole social theory included in "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," is the argument that everyone always, everywhere, with bigger or lesser awareness performs a role. It is through various roles that we know others and 'self.'[26]

Multiplicity of identities and its advantages

The argument is that the more identities one holds, the richer one's social experiences. We need to emphasize at this point, that by 'rich experience' we do not mean good or bad experiences. This subjective valuation, in turn, would depend on social status, the affective attachment to certain roles and the level of emotional energy one reaches in certain

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[21] Berzonsky 2005, p. 127
[22] Durkheim 1915, p. 473
[23] Thoits 1983, p. 175, 177
[24] Goffman 1959, p. 109
[25] Ibid, p. 110
[26] Ibid, p. 111

interactions. In the strict sense, 'rich' means various, and the variety of experiences and roles undertaken in one's social life enrich one's overall identity.

It has been widely debated among social psychologists that holding many identities tends to lead to dissonances. However, as we read from Peggy A. Thoits (1983):

> … multiple identity involvements do not necessarily result in role strain or role conflict (…)"[27]

According to her, different identities are not simply separated, but they rather tend to overlap, especially when one holds multiple social roles. She claims that the more identities one possesses, the more interrelated those identities become, and the same role partners can be role partners in interactions attached to a different identity.[28]

Thoits divides individuals into two groups: integrated (with multiple identities) and isolated (with few identities). The lack or loss as well as possession or gain of the identity influences a person psychologically, and socially. As Collins (2004) claims, high emotional energy gives one well-being. For Thoits (1983), well-being is achieved thanks to a wide variety of identities in a sense of social roles. Her theory is that integrated social "actors" (those possessing multiple identities) are more prone to gain mental-emotional well-being than the isolated people (those holding few identities).

> The greater the number of identities held, the stronger one's sense of meaningful, guided existence. The more identities, the more "existential security" (…)[29]

By being situated in a wider range of different social encounters and ties (and roles – following Goffman), individuals become more "individualized." Collins (2004), influenced by Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, writes:

> (…) the greater variety of social situations, the more unique each individual's experience, and the greater variety of individuals.[30]

Not only can previously unknown situations change a person's identity, but they can also add more 'material' to make such identity richer (through a variety of experiences) and the individual's biography more unique (individualized).

As mentioned before, most of person's identities (social roles) are anchored in and reflect his/her culture or subculture with its values and role-expectations. Such cultural bias is inevitable, yet highly limiting for individual's personality and for understanding other cultures or people that conspicuously differ from us. It is worth considering, though, that an individual

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[27] Thoits 1983, p. 183
[28] Ibid, p. 184
[29] Ibid, p. 175
[30] Collins, p. Xix

with a lot of alternative identities, is often less engaged in following the norms attached to a particular role, because, as mentioned by Thoits (1983), one has to balance and distribute one's limited time and energy resources among different identities.[31] Thus, one is not that engaged in each of one's formal roles, based on biased cultural norms. By changing roles and involving ourselves in new ones, we become able to look at the reality from different perspectives. We can discern relativity of social discourses.

Identity loss or identity gain can have comparable results. Thoits (1983) argues that identity change is influential both to integrated and isolated members of the society.[32] While gaining a new identity (a social role), one is able to extend one's behavioral, ideological and emotional horizons and discern alternate dimensions of the social reality, previously known only through the prism of a set of lesser number of identities. Inspiration and a fresh way of looking at the world are fed by changes. When one experiences an identity loss, on the other hand, it can allow one to see the normative and affective structure of such identity in a different light, from a different angle - thanks to being now an outsider to this social role. Dismantling the structure through distancing and questioning gives a person a space for relativism and criticism. If we assume, after Collins (2004), that a person holding multiple identities is more individualized - he/she might be much less dependent on culture in terms of values, choices and personal preferences. It may also correspond to the theory of personal commitment to a role.

An important points is that there is not always a direct correlation between the time and energy one invests into a particular identity, and one's personal commitment to that identity. Such argument is inspired by Rosenberg (1979) and Mark (1977) that Thoits mentions juxtaposing them with theories that claim that commitment is strictly determined by one's cultural embeddedness. The two, however, claim that commitment depends on "psychological centrality" attached to a certain role or identity or on subjective importance of this identity for the indiviual. Some identities and single experiences may give a person a lot individually and create a strong attachment. 'Seventales' experience was intense and influential in my case - so in the case of other actors I interviewed - even though it was only our temporary identity. If to talk about any hierarchy of identities, it would be those identities that give one affect, discoveries, satisfaction after effort, feeling of inclusion and other 'assets' as components of Collins' (2004) 'emotional energy.' It is argued that if one cumulates multiple and various social roles and experiences throughout one's life, one

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[31] Thoits 1983, p. 178
[32] see Thoits 1983

becomes more individualized, more open to different variants of reality. And, most important, one's values, personal choices and perceptions are less narrowed to culture in which one is entangled. Participation in 'Seven Tales of Misery' performance was an experience that to a certain extent released me, and many other actors, from too much dependence on society's rules of various kinds – or at least helped me realize that it is possible. At this point, this hierarchically high experience is going to be partially uncovered for the reader.

Chapter 2.
Seven Tales of Misery

The performance „Seven Tales of Misery" took place in Copenhagen and lasted for three weeks (from 9th to 30th of September 2006), everyday from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m., except for Mondays. It was an interactive theatre - or performance theatre, set in a four-level building designed in a bleak"[33] style and composed as a model of the Earth. The performance was stageless, involving the audience, fully improvised, created without any script, only with very general director's (Signa Sorensen) idea about what we want to achieve in terms of the story. Actors were given trust and freedom with one condition that they cannot ruin the general framework of this story.

The official (fictional) frame

The framework was as follows: we all live in this old, three – level old house; we are the followers of the Prince we love. The Prince is the leader of the cult. The house constitutes a model of the Earth, with seven 'continents' (Asia, Arabia, Germania, Arctica, America, Africa and Russia) and a Gypsy 'refugee camp,' symbolizing the world's populations that do not have a homeland. We are performing the ritual of recording continents' miseries on holy tapes – that is carried out by two continent ladies on each continent; the misery tapes are going to be then taken by the Prince to the North Pole and erased there by the force of the magnetic field. This will result in erasing the excess of miseries from the real world; we believe in God, 'Das Magnale Magnum' (great magnetism) - we believe in magnetism, in that there is negative and positive pole in each creature and in all materia. The purpose of the ritual is to bring back the balance to the world that is now ending, because of an unbalanced amount of evil misery that outnumbers the good. For the sake of effectiveness of the ritual, we, the cult, need the presence of guests from the outside world representing misery-soaked population of the Earth. After successfully finishing the ritual, the Prince will fertilize all the

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[33] As directors explain it, 'bleak' is a "word descibing the look of certain objects and styles, (...) something offering little or no hope, unpleasantly cold and damp (...) bleak is often old and neutral to any fshion (...) something which is seldom seen, timeless in its expression and a little off-beat. Bleak things are usually cheap and worn out things of poor quality. The former Soviet is generally very bleak." 'Bleak' is an intrinsic part of Signa's logo and she was extremely strict about maintaining that to the last detail.

ladies from the seven continents, representing diverse nations on Earth. In this way, in the future world the balance between the good and evil will be brought back again.

Due to only general, therefore a very open story framework, as well as improvisational and interactive mode of the performance, the ending was not known, and the continuing story depended on a story from the previous day. More than sixty actors participated - some of them amateur, like myself, some more or less professional. Each of us was required to develop his/her own character, mainly based on the character's past life, created by each actor before rehearsals. Actors were only given their character's name and a position in the cult. There was a hierarchy within the cult, the "division of labor" and different forms of contribution to the whole ritual. This, however, was not permanently fixed, but also shaped during interactions. The cast looked as follows: The Prince – the founder and the leader of the cult; the Lady of the Law; Ernie (the spiritual father); continent ladies; control technicians – responsible for the efficiency of holy tapes capturing misery rituals and circulating - like veins within a human body - around the whole house; music and dance troupe – contributing to many rituals, enhancing the aura of the ceremony; leaders of the house who guided the incoming guests in terms of rules within the cult and its religious philosophy; shifters, taking care of the overall functioning of the house, and the "Gypsies." Except for seven 'continents' and a Gypsy 'refugee camp,' that were composing a model of the Earth, the rest of the building played the function of the cult's house. It included such rooms as the Great Hall where the Prince resides, a café, a chapel, a balcony – a place where one can talk to God, a spiritual father's room (Ernie's room), the music and dance troupe's dressing room, the sleeping quarters, where leaders and shifters sleep within their 'marriage groups.'[34]

Actors, as mentioned before, were given only the official position within the cult's structure, and the remaining personality "gap" was left to them to fill with the content. Some people were creating their new identities for weeks, and some being very detail-oriented. People were deeply involved in the story. For a month and a half, everybody was involved, first in six-hour-rehearsals, everyday except for weekends, then in 6-hours-playing, everyday except for Mondays. This period of everybody's life was almost completely filled with the story as long as one wished to remain focused, professional and effective in developing his/her character and relations with other actors. Such "well-prepared" identities were nevertheless constantly being shaped, reshaped, verified, and altered as the story proceeded – all through interactions with co-actors and the audience. The performance was in English, but

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[34] Leaders and shifters were matched within marriage groups that changed periodicaly according to the rule of 'Lady of the Law.' It was natural for the cult system of reproduction and of enforcing the family's solidarity.

because of seven continents created in the house, multiculturalism was highly praised and native languages were considered "exotic," more authentic, thus more appreciated. Different components of the story were happening simultaneously, so that neither the actors, nor the audience nor even directors were able to capture and experience its whole narrative. All the performance itself was treated as a great ritual.

Social frameworks

This thesis focuses on complementarity of real and fictional frameworks in the process of identity formation. At this point I will refer to Goffman's (1986) "Frame Analysis." However, to be able to follow some relevant aspects of his theory, it is essential to understand some basic terms involved in the book. For him, the real social world is interpreted by people through primary frameworks, out of which we can distinguish two main frameworks: natural and social. Social frameworks provide people with the background understanding of events. He describes actions of an agency as "guided doings" that make him/her follow the "standards," social valuation of a certain action. The doer's motive and intent determine which of the various frameworks of understanding he/she applies to a particular situation. Thus, people tend to generate the meaning of an event by applying primary frameworks to it, and a type of framework they choose help describe such an event.[35] Goffman writes about 'real' social events and their "keyings":

> Actions framed entirely in terms of a primary framework are said to be real or actual, to be really or actually, or literally occurring. A keying of these actions performed, say, onstage provides us with something that is not literal or real or actually occurring. Nonetheless, we would say that the staging of these actions was really or actually occurring.[36]

Keying is a process of transforming the actual event, already meaningful (because perceived through some primary frameworks), into a play.[37] One of the basic keys present in our society is 'Make-believe,' with dramatic scriptings as its subcategory.[38] As the author writes about them:

> (…) their deepest significance is that they provide a mock-up of everyday life, a put-together script of unscripted social doing, and thus are a source of broad hints concerning the structure of this domain.[39]

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[35] Goffman 1986, p. 22, 24
[36] Ibid, p. 47
[37] Ibid, p. 43-44
[38] Ibid, p. 48-54
[39] Ibid., p. 53

'Seventales' performance was highly realistic and strived for achieving the feeling of authenticity: authentic scenography and objects; authentic ethnic groups; improvisation resembling "unrehearsed" mode of everyday social interactions. It provides a "keying," a "mock-up," to use Goffman's (1986) terms, of what can happen in the reality - a religious cult, a subculture living in the middle of Copenhagen - the normal mode of Western urban life. The internal realm of such sect was conditioned by its own philosophy, everyday habits and laws. The cult was strictly exclusive towards the outside, however - the story said - for this particular mission of erasing the misery needed external guests as a necessary factor to successfully fulfill the intended ritual. Incomers to the house had to surrender to the rules, for instance be ritually cleansed by the two 'Virgins of the Doorway,' as the miseries they bring from the outside world could affect the efficiency of the ritual. Everything from the beginning to the end was happening in the fiction.

The framework determines interactions to take place within. Like is a case of any frame, certain aspects in 'Seventales' - like scenography, "biographies" of the characters, and the general story-line[40] - have an impact on interactions and the production of meaning in the performance process.[41] Skjoldager-Nielsen's (2006) writes about generation of meaning in the process of placing an object within a certain social context. He uses D. von Hantelmann's description of the concept of 'performativity':

> The notion of performativity (…) centers on the possibilities and limits of productivity – the ability to produce a meaning, to provide an experience or to create a situation. We all know, for example, the meaning of a door: you enter or leave a room through it. But asking about the performativity of this door points to the situation it produces, which might be integrative, segregative or exclusive. Or towards the actions that can take place with or through this door, like slamming it and thereby performing a certain culturally coded convention of arguing. So, in a nutshell, performativity leads us towards a situational understanding of culture, to a situational aesthetics (…)[42]

In 'Seventales,' the whole framework was composed not only by objects, but also by the people within the house who were "filling" the house, as if completing the scenography. Objects - with their location against other objects and the way people were using them – altogether with live actions made the whole picture, the meaning of the framework that in turn influenced the experience.

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[40] see Appendix 1
[41] See Skjoldager 2006, paragraph 13
[42] Skjoldager-Nielsen 2006, paragraph 14

Three dimensions of the performance

Debate over what composes the official frame of 'Seven Tales of Misery' can be approached from two different sides: is it a theatre for the audience that pay the fee, or a cult carrying out a serious ritual and inviting outside people - the guests - to participate? It is crucial to understand the multi-dimensions of the performance. On the meta-level, 'Seven Tales of Misery' was a performance theatre created by artists and visited by audiences. Goffman (1986) would call it the level of actors and theatre-goers. The rest happened exclusively in the fiction, which rejected the first level even when checking people in. Even buying the tickets by the audience and undressing in the clock room belonged to this frame - from welcoming guests at the door and dressing them in ritualistic costumes to the point of letting them out of the house. All "offstage" actions were made part of the fiction.

The second dimension is: we are the cult performing a ritual of high importance, to participate in which we invite guests, namely outsiders. The third level is a part of the second one. Misery rituals are, in a way, play in a play. Continent ladies, with the help of other followers and guests are performing and recoding those rituals. Those are a crucial part generating meaning and bringing forward the miserable realities of the surrounding world. Those small rituals also justify the whole event. They require temporary transformation of the cult members into various characters. In 'Russia,' for example, Queen and Princess Russia would shift between roles embodying Stalin, a homeless child, a prostitute or a victim of 'Kursk' submarine – all for the sake of the multitude of single misery rituals contributing to the final goal of erasing miseries. It is important to stress that during those small scenes, obviously not everything had to be realistic, we also played with symbols substituting the real. It was not, however, treated as if we were now playing theatre – the discourse of the second dimension remained throughout the play: we are recording the sound of misery. Political issues were repeatedly touched upon by means of a method close to representation, however it was only happening for the sake of and during the misery rituals. In such moments, we represented, reflected what is really happening or happened once in the real world. It was this "make-believe' framework that Goffman (1986) writes about. Outside of such rituals - which are treated as a necessary illusion inside of the 'real' play – we did not represent in a sense of mimesis. We simply gave our real presence in interactions, being the religious cult.

Different from "classical" theatrical framework

During the process of my character creation, I tried to internalize some important features of my character's identity that I finally never really showed clearly in front of the

audience. I often wondered if some people noticed those things anyway, without really being shown any corresponding conspicuous actions. It does not correspond to how Goffman (1986) perceives actors in a theatre play: as trying to show their characters in their entirety and as visibly as possible. Moreover, he claims that on the stage, actions are seen in a compressed - simplified, but completed – form. This is unlike in the real world, where this kind of "overview" is possible only in retrospect, so by "constructive reflection."[43] However, what we - the actors - considered artistically valued, was leading us to a different direction. Trivial activities like drinking tea or peeling potatoes, relaxed conversation with the audience (the guests), slow motion of 'nothing-really-going-on' instead of only conspicuous, loud action and provocative scenes. In such seemingly uninteresting moments – as if the plot were never to culminate - there was room for discerning details and reaching authentic intimacy with actors who seemed as ordinary human beings as the audience. Moreover, such equality encouraged to participate and open up. In 'Seventales,' the audience participate directly, however – contrary to how Goffman (1986) characterizes theatre[44] - not in the entirety of the story and without having a simultaneous overview of all the aspects present in the fictional time and space. That makes the performance even more realistic in a sense that in the real life we are also not able to witness different events and phenomena at the same time. What is more, the life "script" is being written by current happenings - and so was "Seven Tales of Misery" performance.

Goffman's theory also suggests that the fictional story is provided to the audience democratically (evenly) and with artists' efforts to achieve meaningful and understandable (and therefore effective) audience's impression. This is the rule which is not followed in our performance. The most beautiful and valuable interactions were those – and most of the respondents had similar opinion - on a relatively intimate level, when the story was happening between myself and one or very few people, outside the very mainstream of the story. Such situations might have been discriminative, in a way, towards others not involved, but, at the same time, this mode of improvisation resembled human relations from the real life. So, there was no evenly distributed "information state"[45] - referring to Goffman's term - provided for the audience, who in the traditional theatre witnesses the same portion of the story, in the same tempo and in the same time and space. It was characteristic that often only a few people could notice some of character's states, their "biography" that was hidden under the surface.

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[43] Goffman 1986, p. 138
[44] Ibid, p. 130
[45] Ibid, p. 133-134

Often, only a few could have the experience of discovery, which was given specially for them. Neither directors nor actors took responsibility for the level of audience's understanding of the context and their definition of the situation. Like in life, it was their own task to investigate the (fictional) reality through interactions with other people.

On the intersection of fiction and reality

What was interesting, was this interconnectedness and overlapping of fiction and reality. There were some people who, outside rehearsals, would go to a pub for a beer in their characters to practice in order to become more familiar with theirs and others' fictional personalities. The backstage is commonly treated as a transient place between the stage and the reality, a place where fiction and reality are in friction, so it is hard to distinguish the boundary. In 'Seventales' performance, it can be said, the backstage is happening on the stage, so in this mixture between the fiction and the reality one participating can gain distance to both. From one side, one can posit himself outside of the reality frame with its social order, norms and conventions. From the other side, one is able to stand outside the fictional frame for example in the process of questioning the fiction. There can be situations, in which the fiction goes too far, crossing the border and intruding on the territory of reality. It is claimed that through such intrusion, fiction can change the reality, by breaking its inner structure and provoking different angles of perceiving it. As Frank – one of the interviewees and a co-director - said:

> What Signa can show is that we all have to be aware that there might be situations we act like we never thought of. If there's a right situation and as right push we can get triggered to things we never though we might ever do.

Elaborating on the possibility of the freedom of the unrestricted improvisational acting during the performance, I notice a paradox, which in this case can be called a 'vicious cycle.' In this "playground" of role-talking, people feel free and secure due to the lack of real consequences for their doings in fiction. From the other side, however, they are also likely to feel more insecure and afraid, as such freedom is shared, meaning other people are also unrestricted. Since the rules from the real world are left behind the door of the house, new rules were introduced that many of the audience is not sure about. As Peter, one of the interviewees said, it was creating another world with totally new rules. One might be as scared by the unpredictability of the interactions within a fictional frame and of other people's (other characters') boundaries – in a similar way as, for instance, fearing a child, which is not well socialized, not bounded by various cultural conventions and tactfulness.

Participation

It was fully the audience's decision and responsibility whether to be involved in the story, in interactions. Those who participated could first of all find the story fascinating to explore, but also experience the influential potential of the whole framework. Skjoldager-Nielsen[46] (2006) was a type of audience that took active part (in '57 Beds' and 'The Black Rose Trick')[47] in terms of role-taking and discovering the universe through interactions with others. In his article on interactivity in Signa's performances, he recalls from '57 Beds':

> I make the acquaintance of many characters, and I am eventually able to piece together stories. (…) In order to make my approach to the characters easier, I take on the persona of a traveling poet seeking inspiration.[48]

It was, nevertheless, difficult to understand complicated network of relationships and personal stories, full of contradictions and paradoxes. None of the performers helped him to understand. Instead, they deepened confusion, indirectly hinting at extreme relativism of what is commonly termed 'reality.' He recalls a meeting with a depressed character, Adam:

> During our conversation, an angel[49] sits down behind him. I tell him that everything will be all right, because he has a guardian angel. He throws a glance over his shoulder and answers, 'What are you rambling about? There is no angel!'[50]

'57 Beds' was abstract, momentarily metaphysical, and often cognitively unapproachable. Skjoldager-Nielsen writes:

> Only on the meta-level does the ritual produce meaningfulness in terms of a surrendering to a greater reality beyond my comprehension, possibly with religious/spiritual undertones.[51]

I know of many audiences – some of whom I talked to personally – who restrained from "dipping" into the story and interactions, due to the lack of familiarity with the unknown framework and the lack of understanding of the meaning of its fragmented elements. Using Goffman's (1959) notion, they had difficulty in making the definition of the situation, therefore they felt insecure and tried – although it was little possible - to act only as

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[46] Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen was an audience in '57 Beds' and 'The Black Rose Trick' and then a performer in 'Seven Tales of Misery'
[47] '57 Beds' was a continuous and improvised story like 'Seventales,' lasting five hours a day, but twice in a two-week performance (12-24 Feb 2004) they played twelve hours during the night; 'The Black Rose Trick' (4-14 March 2005, Malmo) lasted for ten days, 24 hours.
[48] Skjoldager-Nielsen 2006, paragraph 6
[49] Contrary to highly realistic performance 'Seven Tales of Misery,' '57 Beds' was much more abstract containing also fairy-tale-like characters. After '57 Beds,' however, Signa turned more towards 'the real' when creating performances
[50] Skjoldager-Nielsen 2006, paragraph 7
[51] Ibid, paragraph 16

spectators. When talking about a potential change of identity, I bear in mind particularly those audiences, who allow themselves to become part of the fiction, those deeply involved and actively interacting. As Skjoldager-Nielsen (2006) claims, if we overcome this comfortable and secure separation between actors and audience,

> ...then both conflict and redemption can intoxicate us, with a potentially transformative effect.[52]

Origins of the idea

Signa Sorensen's inspiration for creating such improvised and interactive performance installations came, as she says, from her experience in a nightclub, where she worked as a private dancer and a 'Champagne Girl.'[53] She explains that she learned much from those interactions that felt natural and intimate, being at the same time located in an "extreme" universe, much different from the world outside. Then, as she says, she transferred this idea of close interaction with the audience to a different context, the artistic context. She adds that she has also been interested in other phenomena, that I would call sociological aspects, such as social situations and social institutions being "staged" in a particular way in order to function appropriately. What fascinated her was changes in human behavior that are determined by such staging of different events and interactions. Moreover, she is interested in the very common nowadays phenomenon of power structures, what it means to be an individual, and how people "fit" themselves in a social system. It can be said, therefore, that she creates alternative ways of exploring the social reality and the 'self' inside of it.

Pin-pointing a genre

In Goffman's (1986) "Frame Analysis," there is a distinction between types of performances. As Goffman underlines,

> ...these distinctions among performances refer to the official face of activity, not to its underlying character and intent.[54]

I consider 'Seventales' belonging to a couple of Goffman's types. First of all, it is similar to a dramatic scripting, for the existence of which the audience is crucial and for which the audience is charged. This type of performance is the most pure. Secondly, it is a mixture

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[52] Skjoldager-Nielsen 2006, paragraph 21
[53] One's role is to encourage visitors to buy champagne and private dances
[54] Goffman 1986, p. 125-126

between instruction and entertainment. In a fiction, the audience are obliged to take an introductory tour by so-called leaders of the house in order to become familiar with rules within the cult and its religious philosophy. The entertainment is probably the most surfacing motive of the audience to visit the house – to be surprised by the unknown, to be emotional and impressed in a fictional-realistic, fascinating world. Finally, the performance can be applied to another type, that including ceremonies like weddings and funerals. The rituals of cleansing the world from miseries, although in fiction, were part of the serious world and were rendered significant as a thought-provoking reflection of the real.

Signa Sorensen calls her works 'installation performances.' To be able to reach a better comprehension of her artistic "trademark," it is worth employing an analysis of Signa's performances by Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen (2006), as one representative of the audience's perspective. We were performing together in 'Seven Tales of Misery,' and before that he was an audience in '57 Beds' and 'The Black Rose Trick' – the two performances that inspired him to write an analytical article. He expresses his perspective on those projects:

> Signa's works are made up of dynamic and polycentric processes through which the audience's and actors' perceptions unfold. The dramaturgy does not deal with the composition of a set production culture. It creates a framework and provides material for emergent constellations of elements and meanings, which the interactivity between actors and audience brings to life, individually completing the network.[55]

Inspired by Jensen's (1998) definition, he calls her performances 'free interactive theatre.' Such is characterized by employing audience as co-creators of the performance, by discovering, freely interpreting the fictional universe, as well as making their own stories along with performers.[56] He regards Signa's interactive performances as "improvisational role-play with an associated reality effect or performative realism – ultimately creating individual meaning."[57] He also sees it as a space for identity creation through the experience that can retard our ability to distinguish between fiction and our own reality – "two levels of one and the same reality: the real, physical meeting."[58]

Theatre reflects current social tendencies: interactivity

Skjoldager-Nielsen's (2006) observations lead to a statement – similar also to one presented by Benedict Nightingale (1999) - that art-works always reflect societies with their current ideologies and social tendencies. The former author says that interactivity was a key

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[55] Skjoldager-Nielsen 2006, paragraph 28
[56] Ibid, paragraph 1
[57] Ibid, paragraph 20
[58] Ibid, paragraph 21

factor in creating productions like those of Signa's. Interactivity is well adapted in our, as he calls it, 'performative culture,' where identity is constructed as a project by the individual, who presents his/her created 'self' in front of others[59] – a concept taken after Goffman (1959). Like in real life, we cannot have full control over interactions and people involved in those interactions, also in fiction, Signa allows a similar unpredictability. She gives away a lot of control over her performance, in a sense that she has a very democratic attitude while selecting her actors, and no clue about entering audiences.

Such an interactive process, a performance installation, is not only mimetic acting – a principle of theatre – but, as Mads, an interviewee, puts it, "is about searching the limits of one's own world, searching for frameworks of social interactions. And a framework sets a definition of a 'social game.'" For the sake of those explorations, Signa, as an artist, deprives herself of the ability to control the performance and leaves to the audience a wide space for their own interactive initiative to co-create the fiction and to set its limits. It is a new phenomenon that considerably marks the shift in the contemporary art, reflecting at the same time the condition of agency in the Western society. Worth discussing are tendencies of the postmodern theatre that are to a big extent substantiated in Signa Sorensen's performances.

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[59] Skjoldager-Nielsen 2006, paragraph 23

Chapter 3.

Postmodern Theatre

In his book "Postdramatic Theatre," Lehman (2006) tries to present the features of this new genre that distinguish it from classical theatre and, especially, from dramatic theatre (with its principle of pre-text). Postmodern tendencies in the field of theatre turn the theatre in the direction of performance art. It bears reference to Skjoldager-Nielsen's discussion on 'performative culture' we are living in.[60] In performance, even if it may still represent mimetically (being a work of representation), its main focus is shifted, and now located in the process between the stage and the audience. As he writes:

> When it is not the 'objectively' appraisable work but a process between performers and the audience that constitutes the artistic value, then the latter depends on the experience of the participants itself, i.e. on highly subjective and ephemeral reality compared to the permanently fixed 'work.'[61]

Thus, it can be stated that objective artistic value depends on the subjective experience. It well reflects contemporary social tendencies of excessive subjectivity and the wild quest for new experiences. His argumentation proceeds to the point in which he admits that because of the above, it is highly difficult to draw a clear border between a performance or other seemingly alike forms of expression, like for example a mere exhibitionist behavior. Therefore, as he says, categorizing something as performance is determined by the artists creating one, instead of being an objective artistic domain. The core purpose of a performance, namely the communication between artists and the audience - is the last, if not the only one, determinant of an artistic valuation:

> The performative positing (*Setzung*) cannot be measured by previously determined criteria but above all by its *communicative success*. It is inevitable that it is now the audience – no longer just an unaffected witness but a participating partner – that determine the communicative success.[62]

As we hear from Signa, the idea of performance of such kind, came out of the need to create a differently framed universe, where close and intimate interactions between the participants take place. The improvisational mode of those interactions gives both naturalness and spontaneity, instead of pre-designed acting, with at the same time unpredictable outcomes. It makes the framework highly authentic, reflecting interactions in the real life.

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[60] see chapter 4
[61] Lehmann 2006, p. 136
[62] Ibid, p. 136

The reception by the audience – that actually should not be called 'audience' any longer – becomes more important than the original intension of an artist or any possible message he wishes to put forward. What matters in the performance theatre (not theatre performance or theatre play) are interactions that break the 'Fourth Wall.'[63] Lehmann writes:

> It [theatre] has to become a communicative exchange that not only admits to its momentariness (the transitoriness traditionally regarded as its deficit compared to the lasting work) but asserts it as indispensably constitutive of the practice of communicative intensity. [64]

Dealing with the extreme and the 'self-transformation'

As Signa's performances are most often called performance installation, or performance theatre (not theatre performance), elaborating more on the phenomenon of contemporary performance is more than relevant at this point. Lehmann rightly writes:

> In 'Performance Art', the action of the artists is designed not so much to transform a reality external to them and to communicate this by virtue of the aesthetic treatment, but rather to strive for a 'self-transformation.'"

What matters is the artist's body used both as subject and object of action, therefore, as he writes, the "aesthetic distance" of an artist and an audience is eliminated.[65]

Even though I find this new phenomenon fascinating both from an artistic and sociological point of view, this paper does not allow me to step on a more detailed territory of this subject, therefore I will present only two examples of extreme performances, mentioned by Lehman in his book. The artist Booby Baker, in her performance titled "Kitchen Shows," invited guests to her kitchen where she presented a dialogue about women's enslavement in the kitchen and physically marking her body in each of more than ten actions she took.[66] The other example of using an artist's body as a direct carrier of meaning is the performance by Marina Abramowicz, in which she exposed her body fully to visitors' actions, allowing them to do anything they wanted. There was also aggression and sexual humiliation, up to the moment when one audience forced a loaded gun into her hand and pointed it at her temple.[67] The author notices here an interesting analogy with old-times' spiritual rituals that are, in a way, transferred by artists to the contemporary context.

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[63] a metaphorical reference to the separation between actors playing and seated spectators
[64] Lehmann 2006, p. 137
[65] Ibid
[66] Ibid, p. 139
[67] Ibid, p.140

Theatre as ritual

Schechner, quoted by Lehman regards theatre as a mixture between the entertainment and the ritual.[68] Benjamin (1999) underlines the ritualistic origin of any art. The unique value of any authentic work has its basis in ritual. "It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function."[69] Mechanical reproduction, however, as Benjamin further writes, separates art from its dependence on ritual. Rituals belong to the present, whereas reproduced images – to the past. Whether we talk about traditional, magical / religious rituals, or about contemporary and secular ones, they are still "enchanted" and surrounded by an aura. Theatre, thus, when treated as the ritual, is enchanted, without being deprived of its aura.

Durkheim (1915) also searches for the source of principal artistic forms in religion. A rite, is embedded in the serious life, even though it involves elements of entertainment, recreation, as well as unreal and imaginary components. Rites, as he proceeds, fill members of a community with energy resources:

> After we have acquitted ourselves of our ritual duties, we enter into the profane life with increased courage and ardour, (...) also because our forces have been reinvigorated by living, for a few moments, in a life that is less strained, and freer and easier.[70]

In the performance 'Seven Tales of Misery,' we did not deal with such risky and extreme bodily 'experiments' as described earlier by Lehmann. However, our performance also entailed a heightened responsibility of the performers having given away a lot of control to the audience. By doing so, they were exposing themselves physically and emotionally to such unpredictability of improvised interactions. We could say that on the one hand, it was an extended freedom among actors. However, on the other hand, there was actually freedom on both sides of interaction, which always implies the potential of real risk - not only theatrical and "represented" one.

Theatre – bringing back spontaneity and affect

Lehmann (2006) emphasizes that in contemporary theatre, "politics of perception" do not take the form of a strictly defined discourse or a political message, "but rather a basic disrespect for tenability or positive affirmation."[71] He observes that nowadays anything, even

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[68] Lehmann 2006, p. 139
[69] Benjamin 1999, p.76
[70] Durkheim, p. 427
[71] Lehmann 2006, p. 186

the most controversial issues, can be touched upon in theatre. Moreover, what is characteristic is that they are not approached through the prism of certain morals or ideology, but simply shown, opening the space for individual reaction. His socio-cultural observations lead him to the conclusion that in that way even taboos – which mainly originate from culturally-determined affective reactions to certain occurrences – can be rationalized, and therefore de-mythologized. In such a phenomenon, he sees a risk for people to eliminate their spontaneous and emotional reactions and judgments, instead focusing only on sensibility and intellect:

> In light of this observation of the progressive breakdown of immediate affective reaction, we have to realize the growing importance of a certain cultivation of affects, the 'training' of an emotionality that is not under the tutelage of rational preconsiderations.(…) It will increasingly become an important task for 'theatrical' practices in the widest sense to create playful situations in which affects are released and played out.[72]

Here conspicuous is the direct reference to Benedict Nightingale (1999) and his predictions on the XXI century's theatre. The latter, he claims, will carry a burden of mission aimed at providing liberating and inspiring haven for people fed up with the fast pace of life and expansion of the 'virtual.'[73] Lehmann further explains:

> (…) it falls to the theatre to deal with extremes of affect by means of aesthetics of risk, extremes which always also contain the possibility of offending by breaking taboos. [74]

In 'Seventales' performance real and often strong emotions floated due to risk-entailing physical closeness and the breakage of social taboos of various kinds. Postdramatic theatre, as Lehman states, is a mixture between the ritual, the physical presence and the interactivity. The performance 'Seven Tales of Misery' included all those elements. As we read from the author's:

> (…) the combination of a naive or blasphemous execution of a magic ceremony, interactive performance, and production of presence is an illuminating motif for postdramatic theatre. [75]

At this point the subject matter and the above theories are to be investigated more extensively, and – what is the most important – more deeply with the support of analyzed interviews with actors from the performance 'Seven Tales of Misery.'

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[72] Lehmann 2006, p. 186
[73] see Nightingale 1999
[74] Lehman 2006, p. 186-187
[75] Ibid, p. 141

Chapter 4.
Methodology

Qualitative research is the most relevant method to use to address questions relevant for this thesis. The emphasis is on actors' personal experiences, impressions they had and opinions about the 'Seventales' performance.

During my time-limited stay in Denmark (3th-12th November 2006), I managed to conduct nine in-depth interviews with actors (alltogether eleven actors as two interviews were questioning two people at once) from the performance 'Seven Tales of Misery.' Some of had taken part also in other Signa's Sorensen's projects before – whether in role of actors or audience. The selection of the respondents was rather practical than carried out at random (which would be more representative). First of all, it was highly important for me to interview directors who were also taking part as actors – those were crucial for this research. The rest of the respondents were chosen according to two main factors: mainly their availability, and secondly, my personal interest in them as actors and/or characters. I need to underline that the whole performance was international in terms of acting crew, even though most of them were Danish. Since the interviews took place more than a month after the show had finished, it was difficult for me to reach people from Argentina, even Norway and Sweden. All the interviews were conducted fully in English, because that was also the language of the performance.

My scientific approach towards the qualitative research was constructivist. It departs from the paradigm that both interviewee's narratives and my question-formation and interest-orientation create the reality. Here lies the weakness of such approach when striving for scientific validity. The analytical results are always affected by researcher's interpretations, as well as by interviewees' limited ability to express complex emotions by using the language. At the same time, however, no other method is as effective in gaining possibly the most in-depth understanding of respondents' experiences and feelings.

The reality is socially-constructed, and this construction is, first of all, influenced by the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee, and obviously also determined by the socio-cultural environment each of them comes from. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), the epistemological attitude is based on the belief that "(…) the knower and known interact and shape one another."[76] Bearing that in mind, I intentionally shared also my impressions and opinions with the interviewees, in order to create the atmosphere of

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[76] Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 33

informality, equality and the feeling of 'exchange.' Such approach was also a stressed principle during the play and turned out to be highly effective, as the audience were more eager to open up and be/explore 'themselves'. Not only the performance was interactive, as is underlined repeatedly in this paper, but the interviews investigating that performance were no less interactive. Miller and Glassner (1997) are supportive towards that viewpoint: "(…) an interview is (…) an interaction (…) in which both participants create and construct narrative versions of the social world."[77] I was aware that all the people involved in the interview – whether myself, as the interviewer, and one or two people questioned at once – were mutually influenced by what was said by others. Nevertheless, I notice a precious advantage of it: all of us were given the opportunity to extend our personal perceptual horizons concerning our 'self' and the performance, and come up with new conclusions. Such 'exchange' of experiences and impressions gives fertile ground for the realization of the existence of other ways of looking at the same things. For achieving that – and this is the core of the investigation - we need either 'Others' or a change of framework. That is why merely asking fixed questions and obtaining answers is not enough to gain satisfactory analytical results. In qualitative method of interviewing, a researcher needs to be relatively flexible and observant and know intuitively when a certain question needs further explanation. Therefore, in order to reach more or less common terminological consensus, and as a result, a better mutual understanding, questioning is very conversational in this specific kind of interaction – an interview.

The constructivist approach is the point of departure both for choosing the subject for my research, for its categorization and also for my questioning orientation. To quote Denzin and Lincoln again:

> (…) the narratives, or stories, scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism).[78]

The authors further adds:

> The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis).[79]

Ontologically, my paradigm is characterized by the relativism of multiple, constructed realities and I realize that what I hear from my "informants" is always only one of those

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[77] Miller and Glassner 1997, p. 99
[78] Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 9
[79] Ibid., p. 29-30

realities. I will try, nonetheless, to find some patterns in the perceptions of people I interviewed, because, as we read in Miller's and Glassner's, although reality is discursively constructed, it does not mean that it does not exist "outside" of the interview.[80]

I decided to be more narratively "active" during the interviews, also because the presence of some key aspects, definitions of which were far from explicit. For instance, the notion of authenticity could be understood on various levels, so it was necessary to explain what I mean when asking about it in accordance with this particular performance framework. As there might be many individual definitions of this ambiguous notion of 'authenticity,' I had to make myself understood from which side I look at it and what do I compare it with, while applying it to my subject matter – then, of course, I ask about their opinion.

According to Patton's categorization [81], most of my questions were "experience/behavior questions", "feeling questions" and "opinion questions". I am aware that, as the interviewer, I was not neutral for them, or any third party, so from one side, it could have an impact on them, as we had common acquaintances. However, on the other hand, there was a closeness and trust between us, after having shared fascinating and strong experience of the performance. In addition, the communication during the interview was smoother due to the fact that all of us were familiar with the whole idea and framework – both from the backstage and front-stage perspective. In that way, I was able to employ a presupposition format of questions to straight away ask about a phenomenon/experience instead of first asking about its factual existence. For example, I could ask how they experienced the blending of fiction and reality in the performance, instead of first asking if there was any.

As we read in Danzin's and Lincoln's (2003): "The interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artistic and political."[82] I chose this free-flowing mode of interviewing people (what Michael Patton would probably call "the informal conversational interview"[83]). My intention was to give them the opportunity to go through this 'Seventales' experience again and reflect on that from a distanced and more critical perspective, while at the same time still recreating emotions. As I noticed, this "journey" back to the performance would often change – slightly or significantly – what they had said before, since the interview

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[80] Miller and Glassner 1997, p. 102-103
[81] see Patton 1990, p. 290-293
[82] Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 37
[83] see Patton 1990, p. 280

was also a process of (self)reflection that led to new explorations. Sometimes, apparently non-related questions were leading to a highly relevant information.

After coding and pattern-searching, as Gill (2000) claims, a discourse analyst should focus on interpretation of functions of certain characteristics of the discourse.[84] It means that, as an interviewer, I should find some cause-effect chains and the functions of actors' responses, in terms of how they replied and what issues they particularly emphasized or repeated. I made an effort to choose relevant categories, sort the narratives into those categories and analyze the material searching both for patterns and "anomalies."[85]

Categories essential for the research are regrouped based on themes:

- actors' general experience of the interactive theatre and its actual and potential influence on the participating individuals
- embraced 'authenticity' of the experience thanks to physical presence, intimacy in interactions and 'reality effect'
- blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality
- questions on contemporary tendencies, conditions and values of the Western society, all in reference to the performance.

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[84] Gill 2000, p. 180
[85] Gill 2000, p. 180

Chapter 5.
Actors' perspective

Even though the interviews were not standardized, I managed to find some discursive patterns reflecting what most of the respondents agreed on.

One thing has to be clarified. Since the intention is to give the reader a wider and a more detailed overview of actors' discourses on the performance, this chapter is not limited to a brief synthesis of their responses. Instead, after categorizing the answers and the conclusion, an extended version of findings is to be presented, including multiple quotations of the actors' responses on the relevant issues related to the subject. Issues such as: exploring the world and the 'self,' as well as the identity creation in the process of interacting within the frame of 'Seventales' performance. Actors' views concerning the notion of authenticity and tendencies of the postmodern 'subject,' are to be included in the following chapters. The purpose of a wide elaboration on the interviewees' responses is to avoid, at least to some extent, missing important narratives from the interviews that are always inevitably omitted in the process of analytical generalizations. As Silverman (2003) rightly notices, "(…) every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing."[86]

The first theme around which my questions circulated was the *phenomenon of blending of fiction and reality in the performance*. I asked my respondents *whether they experienced that, and in what way, provided they did.* Moreover, *their observations about the audience's experience* in these terms, was another issue of interest. What I was curious about was *whether, in such a blend, emotions are real* even though they originate from the fictional framework. All the respondents admit that a lot of one's real identity is included in one's character. It seems that it is natural to do for the actors. From another side, it is quite impossible not to do it, as it is a full improvisation and no background story of the character is able to cover all the unpredictable happenings, feelings, reactions. In such cases, thus, one takes "affective" resources from one's own identity. Actors also agreed that, to a higher or lesser extent, blending of fiction and reality is there, which often makes people – the audience especially, but also actors – puzzled about the boundary. Some of them, who elaborated more on this issue, underlined the high importance of creating such confusion, because in that way

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[86] Silverman 2003, p. 348

it was thought-provoking and implied reflections on what the reality is and how complex it can be. All of them also claimed that the blurred boundaries of the two realms made the performance itself even more realistic.

The second question – the key one - was related to *identity creation while role-taking in interactions set in the fictional framework*. I was interested in *the potential of such performances to influence worldviews and self-perceptions of the participating individuals*. Strictly connected to that was a question *whether fiction reflects the reality and, if it does, can people, interacting in fiction, explore the reality and 'self' more?* The focus was on the influence the performance had - according to interviewees' observations - on people in general, as well as on actors themselves, taking under consideration their personal experiences and emotions. All the respondents admitted that the performance does reflect on the reality – at least on some of its aspects – and has the potential of providing people with clues of how it can feel in the real world. The repeated statement was that the more people make themselves involved in interactions in fiction, the more the experience becomes influential for their identities. It can provoke reflexivity over who they are as individuals, why they interact in certain ways, and how they react on particular issues – often uncomfortable, controversial and politically incorrect.

Another theme touched upon during the interviews, was the *notion of authenticity*. I asked my respondents *if they consider Signa's performances more 'authentic' than, for example, the traditional theatre*. What the question was mainly focused on was the authenticity in a sense of less "processed," less mediated, and closer to reality and people – meaning closer to the sources of experience. The respondents perceived the performance as relatively more authentic experience than what can be provided by regular theatre, in which the separation between actors and the audience can be felt stronger. Therefore, the most common association they had in terms of authenticity in the performance was the fact of interactivity and direct presence. That, in turn – and it was emphasized by all the respondents – made it possible for people to feel more authentic in terms of the freedom of expression in the "democratic" environment, where everyone could take part and contribute to the whole creation. As for feeling of self-authenticity, the interviewees also stressed the longed-for opportunity – in 'Seventales' - to release oneself from the pressure and complex structure of norms and standards of everyday frame.

The next question is their opinion about *why the phenomenon of performances like that turns out so attractive both for actors and for the audiences*. I asked them about the *Western world's contemporary needs that such interactive, improvised theatre responds to*. They were giving interesting discourses about different directions postmodern subjects go into. Some of those responses on the issue will be discussed with more details below, however, the common denominator of all the answers was that it is people's search for freedom that renders such a fictional universe fascinating and needed. People want to feel more individualized and freer from the limiting frame of everyday life. Moreover, as most of the interviewees stated, contemporary subjects have growing demands, want strong experiences and special treatment. They want to be subjects, not objects, therefore they are eager to be in the middle of the experience.

The final question was *how valuable for them was the experience of being in the performance, and whether it can be said that Signa is selling the experience to people*. As turned out in the interviews, all the actors considered the performance an inspiring, influential and highly precious experience. Most of the actors admitted without hesitation that Signa Sorensen - through her performances - is selling strong experiences both to actors and the audience. Some of them made the response more precise, claiming that she does not sell the experience itself, but provides an inspiring framework/playground for people's individual experiences and new discoveries in the process of interactions with others.

Now the reader is given the possibility to gain more in-depth overview and better understanding of the above mentioned findings with the focus on exploring the reality and oneself from the perspective of a different frame. Multiple examples are provided from the performance in order to place those inevitably abstract generalizations into the actual context, in which the actors' experiences originated.

Blending of fiction and reality

When asked about the boundary between the fiction and reality, Paul[87] said that from the time we start, to the time we finish the performance – there is no boundary. When a spectator comes in to the fictional universe, as soon as he stops being a spectator – which is

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[87] An audience in 'Seventales'; a performer in '57 Beds'

the principle idea – the boundary disappears. What is more, one makes one's own reality out of different parallel realities – both in the performance and in everyday life. By referring to the religious cult that Signa has presented in 'Seventales,' he also said: "Like some of Signa's ideas now, we have a lot of people who use spiritual reality as the real life. I think they [the two realities] are parallel. I don't cut out things." As he says, the real and the unreal are mixed both in fiction and reality, in various proportions and focuses, however, depending on the context.

In terms of perceiving the world differently by locating oneself in a different context, Sille and Peter[88] say that while changing framework, one gains new eyes for perceiving reality. One starts discerning details, and realizes how one's criteria for judging people change. In such circumstances, they met in the fiction[89] (she as a performer, he as an audience) and then stayed together as a couple in the real life. Peter recalls meeting Sille in fiction: "I don't really think that I saw her character. I really saw her." They had deep connection when in fiction – as humans, not as characters. They did not know each other before, so it was even easier not to approach each other through the prism of fiction. Peter took her character's story for real, believing that she was really married and had children. This story was only the background "biography" of her character – he found out after the performance. They met, playing with fiction - it was, however, playing with fiction by authentic people holding their personalities. Therefore, the emotions, the connection were real and stayed so in the "real" life. Peter expresses: "Everything was just for fun. What we did was not real, but still as real as it gets."

In terms of fictio-realistic blend and self-exploration while in character, Signa[90] describes:

> Sometimes it's surprising because sometimes my character just gets its own life and you do what your character wants, but, of course, my character comes from me, so it's really what I want to do. Normally, afterwards, I found out that I really wanted to experience this, but it wasn't maybe so conscious before.

When entering the house, the audience – at least those not familiar with Signa Sorensen's performances – come with the traditional approach of treating it as a theatre. As Goffman (1986) writes, both actor and an audience have dual self, in a way: an individual, while acting,

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[88] both took part in 'Seven Tales of Misery.' Before, Sille participated in 'The Black Rose Trick,' where Peter was an audience.

[89] the case described comes from 'The Black Rose Trick' (4-14 March 2005, Malmo) – Signa's performance lasted for ten days, 24 hours.

[90] Author and director; her character: Lady of the Law

is a person - with his/her capacity as an actor - and a stage character. In terms of the audience's side, a theatergoer is the stage actor's equivalent, whereas onlooker, like a character, participates – having signed a make-believe contract - in the unreality onstage (FR, p. 129-130). According to Goffman, when they start to participate in this make-believe "game," they are "transformed into collaborators in unreality, (...) sustaining this playful unknowingness."[91]

Symbolically signing a contract to participate in illusion, the audience treats such framework as theatre, as something not real. From that position, they are eager to play this make-believe game, to partcipate in this realized 'unreal.' However, if suddenly artists pull them out of this 'unreal' and enlighten them that this is not real, then the visitors become puzzled and start to reflect more on reality itself. Djawed[92] reminisces two situations. Queen Arabia, playing a Muslim woman forced to cut off her clitoris. People approached her and kept asking: 'aren't you hurt?' Then, she would look at them and say: 'Oh, I would never cut my clitoris off! Are you stupid?' Another example comes from the same 'continent.' The theme of the day was 'war victims,' and 'Queen Arabia' performed a ritual embodying an Iraqi woman, who lost all her family in bombings and who was insanely going around, carrying a doll, treating it like a live baby – her own, saved baby. The audience - used to regular theatre - were playing around as if the doll was alive. They became puzzled, however, when Anise approached them saying: "this is not a real baby, you know that, right?" Djawed explains:

> I'm talking to them like they are stupid and they are not part of the reality. (…) That was only part of a ritual and people were constantly confused. We played a lot with this 'theatre-not theatre' thing and in that way, I think, we made it stronger, because we forced people to see the performance as serious as reality in a way. (…) I was breaking the illusion in the illusion.

By intentionally breaking the 'make-believe' illusion (e.g. this is a baby; this is cutting off the clitoris), he at the same time, broke the illusion that this is theatre. Such practices made the audience confused about the boundary of fiction and reality. Djawed treated the guests as if they were "not part of the reality." In this way, he wanted to convince them that it was real. It

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[91] Goffman 1986, p. 136
[92] his character: Anise (Lady Arabia) - a woman with male body

was, actually, very realistic, because for the fanatic, deeply-believing cult what happened in the house was all reality they had. Mads[93] claims that:

> … the basic impression of the audience was entirely another world that they have never been in before and are never gonna be in again. (…) It's so real that people are actually forgetting that it's a theatre piece.

Interestingly, even actors were often unable to distinguish between those two realms. Sometimes, when this universe was so real the insecurity appeared. There was a case where even a mother could not be certain if her daughter is really suffering, or just playing. Eva[94] recalls her thirteen-year-old daughter, who on one day symbolized abandoned and suffering children of the world (this ritual is described later in this chapter): "(…) it was quite hard for me. I found her in a kitchen, crying, and I was thinking: 'Oh, my God! Is it Sasha crying or her character crying?'"

Real emotions

Sasha cried again after the performance. It turned out that both of her identities were crying. She said that she cried as a relief and also, that she cried all the tears she did not released while being in her character. Going into one's character and trying to be "true" in a new personality, must build up a lot of emotions that influence a person embodying a role.

As all of the interviewees agreed, many emotions in the fiction are real. It is impossible to feel anything only as a character. Louise[95] recalls sadness that both her character and herself were going through, when she was matched by the 'Lady of the Law' with another marriage group. Feeling derived from the fiction turned out to be very contagious to the real life. She says that those strong feelings were over when the performance finished. So was with my character's hatred or love for a particular character. Arthur also said that when his character wanted, for instance, to hurt somebody, it did not mean that himself as a person wanted that, too. As we can see, certain kinds of emotions and behaviors can become evident only in certain frameworks. Nevertheless, it starts to belong to one's accumulated life experience. Paul says that if he sees or does something in fiction, he always takes this with him to the real life. He adds: "Everything we do makes everything

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[93] His character: Aron, a control technician
[94] Her character: a control technician
[95] Her character: a shifter

else." What he means is that every action and interaction – from any framework - leaves a track of itself in one's memory, in one's identity, and is taken by one to other interactions.

Those fictionally-framed emotions - really, yet only temporary occurring - build emotional energy[96] that floats throughout future interactions in the real life. The argument is that it is good to change frameworks and experiment with identities in order to become familiar with different sides of oneself and enrich one's personality. Louise, again, says the emotions were over when outside of the character, however, she says:

> It was a little scary, because when you feel like this it's no longer acting, it's real. (…)
> In the end I really had a feeling that I was in this cult - this world with my fellow followers and this house was my whole world. It surprised me.

Louise was involved in the story, momentarily even to the extent that it scared her, as we read her words. This realistic world was very absorbing in its distinctiveness from the routine of everyday life. She remembers when straight after some emotionally intense performance, she went for a birthday party to one of her friends. She felt she could not "fit in." She also found that the everyday world is irrelevant in comparison with what she was going through in 'Seventales' realm. The conversations among people about job and trivial things seemed shallow to her. When a framework changes, the whole reality changes. There are different rules, people discern different things, priorities change, and different sides of identity surface.

Djawed reminisces one situation supporting the theory that the emotions in fiction are real and influential for an actor. He remembers when Queen Arabia, the Prince and plenty of awaiting audience started to force Anise - his character - to take off her veil.

> (…) they were taking my clothes off and I was actually quite angry – real anger. It was anger on behalf of Anise. I could feel like suddenly I had to defend her (…) So in that way it was authentic.

Signa is convinced that in her performances real emotions surface, because, as she says, "it's about dedicating your real emotions to your character."

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[96] See Collins 2004, p. xii

In-depth exploration of the reality and the 'self'

In terms of the possibility to know the reality deeper by means of Signa's performances, it was agreed among the respondents that 'Seventales' can give people a clue of the functioning of the real life. For Arthur[97], the performances reflect the reality very much, which can be visible in interactions of actors during the play, which are often analogical to their relations in the real life, in terms of sympathy, distance, connections, etc. He adds that "you get very much the skeleton from the real life and then you put the fantastic on top."

Eva discusses the process in which fragmented events in the performance - sometimes absurd, unnecessary or exaggerated and extreme - start to form themselves into an interrelated and a unified whole, uncovering its hidden meaningfulness and purpose:

> Sometimes I think: 'well, this is a bit too far-fetched' and 'this is a bit too much, like a bloody playground.' But towards the end of the show – maybe I'm slow, I don't know – then it's like: 'Aha!, now I get it. Now I see, now I can really follow and feel and understand, and in a long way agree that we did it and why we did it. See, feel and understand that it actually had a purpose. (…) Yes, we are also mirroring what is going on in the society.

In terms of self-eploration while in the fictional framework, I mentioned earlier why I decided to play: to expose myself to the unpredictability of improvisation and, through that, to explore my limits and the level of being "framed" by the society. Eva - who in 'The Black Rose Trick' played a very authoritarian and masculine character - says: "I chose in the last performance 'Seven Tales of Misery' a different character, to be able to try and explore and investigate into the more feminine, lesser aggressive sides of myself." For some, like for example for Eva, such motives can lie "under-the-surface" – existing as a need, but less consciously. It is analogical with what Signa said that often only after experiencing something in a play, she realizes that she needed that, but it was not conspicuous before. Because her character and herself are interrelated, she was subconsciously pushing her character (or her character pushing her) into certain interactions. With awareness or not, it is influential.

Eva also mentioned another case where the aim was to discover something about oneself. One of the actors' motives to join the performance was his eagerness to explore more sensitive sides of himself as a man. Djawed's wish was similar. As he says, he wanted to make a "critical approach to gender," playing a woman transforming (physically) into a man

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[97] His character: the Prince

and reacting against this manlihood. When planning and developing his character, he describes:

> I could start like a woman and become a man during the play, so I could approach my masculinity in another way - as I did when I was small, because then I was eager to become a man and tried to develop a lot of standards and role-play.

It seems that fiction can provide a distance to oneself as a means of discovering closer-to-the-bottom qualities of one's personality that we often take for granted as stable features. Sarah[98] talks about the emptiness she felt when the performance was finished:

> Something really magic happened. It's not that I miss Anita, but I miss the whole little 'bubble' of the 'Seventales' reality, cause me, Sarah, has invested such a great part of me in exploring new sides – sides that I hadn't had before. (…) I got a chance to explore some forgotten parts of me, my own character.

People who let themselves to be involved in the fiction, are potentially capable of discovering new, unrealized assets of their personality. Interestingly, it turns out that not only can they live out their hidden emotions, fears and fantasies, but they can also more effectively reach their intellectual potentials. Mads claims that when one puts oneself in another world by taking a role, one has a chance to discover some of one's hidden potentials. Interestingly, he mentions an interview on 'Seventales' that he and Djawed gave at the university, in which they were in characters and answered questions from their characters' positions:

> The most fascinating thing was that we couldn't tell everything from being Mads and Djawed. We talked like being Anise and Aron. And in a more efficient way – that's actually the most funny thing. I talked to a guy and he called it 'performer knowledge' – it's like you reach some parts of your brain that you are not able to reach when you are just the everyday yourself. And it actually gets enormous amounts of intellectual capacity and emotional capacity. (…) I think that all this is extended consciousness.

Becoming more self-aware when faced with the problematic

Arthur claims that through performances, people can notice things that are similar to phenomena in the real world and then reflect upon that. This reflexivity, as he says, often comes afterwards, from the distance. I find it corresponding with Frank's[99] story:

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[98] Her character: Anita, a shifter
[99] Actor and co-director; his character: Ernie (the spiritual father)

In Meintz, in a show about women's trafficking and prostitution 'Secret girl,'[100] there was one woman - she gave an interview (...) and I saw this interview on TV in a hotel room after the show. And she was asked about the performance and she said: 'when I stepped in there, in this performance, in this specific world'… she said she was shocked and said to herself: 'this can't be theatre, this goes too far, this is not right, this is too close.' So she went out. When she was at home – she said to the interviewer – she had second thoughts. She realized that what we were showing is reality. And actually, reality is much, much worse than what you can show on stage, or as a fiction, or even if you play in totally realistic Signa Sorensen's performances. Always reality catches you. And then we had a purpose to show it – because it's happening and it's even worse - the real life. So she thought up that we are doing something very important. We were right to do that, even in this kind of framework. So she went back. (…) What happened to this woman: she acted very emotional to run out for the first time, and when she was home her intellect was triggered again and she was thinking: 'Why I was acting like that, why I was emotional?' And then her intellect was saying to her: 'You know what, you acted like that because you know it's real, and it's happening and that actually scared the hell out of you. There was face you don't want to see. Go back!' And she went back.

According to C. Dziekanowski – a lecturer on the academic conference in Gdańsk[101] - it is easier to remember things that frustrate or scare - because they provoke reflection - than those appearing easily and naturally. As Mads claims, a performance like 'Seventales' makes a potential of understanding the reality more deeply, for example what it means to be a cult, as well as many severe political situations that were pictured during the misery rituals on seven different 'continents' and that people could also experience bodily. I would like to mention here one ritual – which I heard both from Mads and Djawed - that took place during a play, on the continent of 'Arabia.' They were showing a picture of a stoned woman from the Middle East, and then, in Djawed's words (playing Anise):

Queen Arabia started asking: 'Do you want a story?' And the audience would always say 'yes.' Then she rises up, pushes me down on the floor and kicks me (…), then she tells some audience to hit me with the stones and some do it and some don't. Then we confront them with the picture and ask them why they did it, and they tell that she told them to do it. Then she explains them that they [oppressors from the picture] also did that, because they were told to do that, and in that way we will never stop the misery. So in that way, it was a nice twist, because they were expecting a story from 'Ali-Baba' or something like that, and never realized that the story had already begun when she asked them if they wanted a story. We left them with the question about morality.

Mads thinks that thanks to such interactions, people are able to experience with their own bodies some things that are normally far away from their everyday life or from their culture. He comments on the same ritual:

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[100] one of Signa Sorensen's previous performances
[101] 'Education to real world through fictional world' - 12-13 Dec 2006, Łaźnia, Gdańsk

> It was really a nice experience for the audience. Some of them were really offended: 'I didn't do it because…'; 'I'm not like them'; 'I'm not like one of those people in the Middle East throwing stones'; 'That's not me.' She really got them insecure and this political part was very beautiful.

Djawed claims that people, the audience, can explore themselves and the reality better through fictional interactions, giving as example the above described ritual of stoning in 'Arabia.' He said it forced people to think, to be more individualized and more conscious to take responsibility for their own actions and their consequences. He tried to push them to act in fiction as they really are, and not as audience. He explains: "You can actually raise yourself up to be in fiction. Of course, Mariana is acting like Mariana, but I'm approaching her like in this [fictional] world." Eva says that the idea of such a performance theatre is:

> ...putting yourself – because it's in this framework – slightly on the edge, being slightly extreme. Even though visually sometimes the misery was neat and clean and quite perfect, all the layers underneath are pinpointing and paying attention to lesser beautiful sides of life, (…) issues that we might not be so proud of.(…) It's to try to explore and to try to investigate into a bit darker sides of oneself.

She says that the audience can know themselves better when some controversial issues are being put on the edge that make them reflect upon. It can change their worldview and the perception of the reality. Such performances make people think about their attitudes and the way they normally deal with things and other people in life. She gives the example of the same ritual – already mentioned - that brought strong motions to her daughter. The theme of the day was 'The misery of the children in the world,' when her thirteen-year-old daughter embodied that misery. Eva recalls her daughter:

> …standing on the end of the throne, by the stairs and Arthur, the Prince, gave everyone the glass of cherry wine and told them to spit on her to symbolize the blood that has been shed for children throughout the world, throughout the history. And all the audience that night spat, except one. (…) instead of spitting on her feet she kissed her feet.

Afterwards, she also talked to a mother of one of the actors, who said to her: "Imagine what they actually did, no one was opposed! They just stood there, spitting on this child…even though it was a fiction (…)" For Eva, the most important thing such theatre can give to people is awareness:

> Becoming aware of what we do in art, in the world, and thinking about how you address people and how you treat people (…) That's very important that you're aware of what you think you might come up, or what might come out on the other side [outside the fiction].

Eva admits that Signa's works can be a means of exploring oneself better if one does not know who one is, or is unable to truly express oneself. She gives an example from one of the previous performances '57 Beds.'[102] She recalls a seventy-year-old woman, an audience, who visited the performance twice and then spent the whole night during a long-running performance:

> I think she was slightly transsexual – it was something about gender anyway. (…) she moved into this universe and she just stayed there. There were many really weird, strange characters in '57 Beds,' and she was taken so well care of by everyone. She was true to herself, she was taking part by being herself - for the fist time maybe in her life. People, who appeared real being performers (…), being emphatic and being focused and listening to her, spending time, smoking cigarettes, walking to the café, going for a shit or whatever. Embracing her story. (…) She stayed until eight o'clock in the morning and then she said: 'thank you for the best hours in my entire life.'

In this sense, such interaction in a different framework, can help to find one's identity or to become more harmonious with one's identity. Eva says that even touching one soul is worth all the effort of acting and preparations. If the performance can make one person reflect on his/her behavior in life, and make his/her feel respected for whom he/she authentically is - then it is the most important, she says. In terms of audience's experience, Signa says: "(...) They come to reflect on their own identity when suddenly they are in another world, where their identity is something else."

Djawed claims that he knows himself better now, after the performance. In his case, he could not choose his character fully by himself, so he was made to sympathize with the personality that he otherwise would not find so interesting in the real life. He admits, however, that it taught him tolerance and more understanding for people whom he would normally ignored. Moreover, he was able, thanks to the fiction, to gain a better overview of the political debates in the Middle East:

> When they were taking my veil off, when I was feeling angry, I could actually feel what the debate was about with those Muslim women, when they want to take their veil off. Then I felt like they wanted to take my clothes off, and enforcing me, saying that it would liberate me and that it was good for me. I didn't feel that it was good for me. I actually felt like it was a kind of rape, in a way.

Before, as he says, his attitude to those issues was rather ignorance, as not concerning him directly. After being in such role of a Muslim woman, forced to give up wearing the veil, he has more "under-the-skin" understanding, and has become totally against it.

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[102] It was a continuous and improvised story like 'Seventales,' lasting five hours a day. However, twice in a two-week performance (12-24 Feb 2004), they played for twelve hours during the night.

The reality is not 'black and white'

Frank claims that Signa's performances reflect the reality and help people to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the world:

> We often are confronted with the world through titles, through media for instance, like TV, newspapers. And these titles are very rough. They say, for instance (there's a title about women's trafficking): 'the pimps, some years ago held the prostitutes like cattle,' and the public is reading that. And of course this is clear what they think: 'these guys are assholes'; 'this is awful business, poor women, they have to go to jail – these guys,' and this is the end of it. It's a clear judgment (which is an o.k. judgment), but this gets no inside: why the women are there?; why they are not able to get out?; what is about these guys - why they have power at all?; what kind of people are they? (…) Now we played "A secret girl" in Germany and we played a 24-hour-performance installation: Signa , Arthur and me. And we showed exactly this trafficking, so for the first time here people - who normally see it on TV, read it maybe in books if they are interested, or just in news and through titles, and then get a comment - get to know suddenly a pimp…and a prostitute. And they talk to them and they get insides of those persons, which never would have before. And now they are starting to realize that it's not that easy just to judge and then to say: 'O.k., that's it.' This problem is much more complex, because that is a human problem and not just a problem of law and order. And titles and the news and magazines call for law and order and not for the inside understanding.

Being closely confronted with controversial issues, helps people discern their complexity, which is much less possible when merely watching or hearing abstract stories from the distance. Arthur is convinced that such performances are influential and have the ability to open up people's horizons and make them "greater," in a way – as long as people let themselves go into this world and give in to unpredictable experience. Since people can be confronted with things that they did not know, or if there are things they do not like or did not learn to like, then, as he says, "suddenly you get surprised by your own feelings." In this sense, it can shape identities and alter one's perception of oneself. What is more, as he proceeds, those performances are not merely about giving information, but allowing people to explore different sides of common truths. In that way, they can understand more than just black and white facts – understand, for instance, why actually people kill each other. He comments on that: "(...) and that's very difficult if the killer is a white guy and comes into an airplane or WTC, or when he's your son or somebody you like. Suddenly you have to think totally differently about the motivation (…)" Signa says:

> Things aren't really black and white, there are a lot of things that make life very complicated and probably also that makes us close our eyes to a lot of things, because they are very complex or make it hard to do something. But we have o deal with those things, we have to see that this is what's actually happening and it could happen to anybody, it's not just something happening far away, it can also happen here in

Denmark that it would be a totalitarian regime and dictatorship – it's not a very long time since those things were here in Europe. They were very extreme. We tend to say that these things are impossible anymore, that it wasn't us, that we didn't have anything to do with that. But it's still very close to us and I think it's important – instead of just saying: that was evil; that was somebody else. To see what's really inside of us that makes those things possible.

Sarah says that people have a chance to escape from 'themselves' for some time and then, after they come back to reality, they can realize they found out new things about themselves thanks to the temporary distance to their everyday personality. Moreover, she says, they have a chance to react to some extreme political issues being shown. As Sarah says about some scenes in 'Seventales': "(…) this is real blood, real flesh, people screaming, people being kicked – it gives an opportunity to reflect over really important things that are going on in the world at the moment." Louise says her parents and friends (as audience) were comparing 'Seventales' to reality. She recalls:

My father – he hated it, because he didn't understand that it was fiction, for him it was so real and he was shocked that people were actually obeying the leaders and doing things that they would never do outside.(…) People didn't think about if they wanted to do this or not - they just did it immediately. He asked me: 'Signa – did she create a cult in real life?'

For Sarah and Louise performances can create identities and help people know themselves better. Louise notices that they often have to make decisions whether to involve themselves in some interactions. They are also forced to think when the pressure is to do something they do not want to do. Sarah says that such performances demand certain reflection and raise questions: 'why did I not go and help this slave who was being beaten?'

'Seventales' made both Sarah and Louise freer. They found it inspiring and influential. It made them focus on new goals, value different things. For Sarah the performance made her change her priorities, by releasing more individual, more authentic 'self.' She realized after 'Seventales' experience:

I don't have to know where I'm heading and that I'm gonna have a career. Maybe it's o.k. for me being right here, right now, just being me (…) I don't have to play by society's rules. (…) I only take 'Seventales' 'bubble' as a gift for seeing what kind of directions I can push myself into. And it helped me make the choices in the real life.

This temporary freedom from everyday 'self' and distance toward daily life and its norms, does not make life easier after the performance. However, she adds, it certainly gives more awareness of the complex system that makes life complicated, and at the same time puts

pressure on people to be fully responsible for life decisions they make. It gives more awareness of the difference between the two modes of living.

Chapter 6.

Theatre as identity sculptor

Myself in the character, character in me…

The above presented findings give explanation why such an emphasis is put on the role of theatre as a significant contribution to the identity formation theory. According to Goffman (1959), people perform not only in theatre, but in everyday life, during social interactions, through which they present themselves to others. To what extent social reality is "real," is indeed a subject for debate, as long as we take a standpoint that it is socially-constructed. As we look at the complexity of the subject matter with the focus on the social influence on an agent and his/her identity, art definitely should be taken under consideration. This is because it is also a social construct, which – importantly – is intentionally created in order to influence. This thesis places theatre over other great fields of art, first because it is the most interactive, therefore relevant for my subject of interest, and secondly – the closest to myself in terms of personal passion as a hobby and the strongest inspiration for my specialization in sociological studies. Theatre has a power to discover, create and transform. Through theatre, artists take the challenge to draw attention to current events and processes, express today's fears, propose solutions, give hope… It is not surprising that more and more often, more and more social theorists, therapists, teachers, even politicians, point at theatre, or art in general, as a valuable and effective means of social and individual change.

An interesting case of transformative forces of theatre is presented by Robert Brym (2006) in his sociological, autobiographical essay on the role of high school drama experience in shaping his identity and directing his future academic path. Growing up in Canada in the sixties in a poor Eastern-European Jewish immigrant family, he suffered degrading treatment and exclusion from his social environment. In the position of ethnic minority, the only haven of security and acceptance he was given was at home. He could not find his place in the world, lacking self-awareness and individuality.[103] He recalls from that period:

Around the age of fourteen or fifteen, I recall thinking how desperately I wanted to hold my own opinions, to know where I stood in the world, to adhere to a set of principles that could serve as consistent guides to life.[104]

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[103] See Brym 2006, p. 245-250
[104] Ibid, p. 250

He seems to have lacked a rich, and an overall identity. His immigrant experiences from his youth – mainly composed of feeling of exclusion and humiliation – limited a number of social roles to hold. He was mainly a family member, a part of a rather estranged religious community and a schoolboy of an 'inferior' type. A significant turning point in his life, was when he won a casting – to the surprise of all his bullies and all students who were ignoring him - and received the main role in a theatre play. As he recalls:

> From a developmental point of view, playing Tony in 'West Side Story' was by far the most important event of my youth. The role acted as the first section of a bridge across my adolescence. It served this function by elevating my social status, making me more self-confident, helping me to begin discovering parts of myself that I had not known before, and teaching me that I could act rather than merely be acted upon.[105]

Taking from a temporary role to life

Theatre multiplied Brym's partial identities (in a sense of roles undertaken) and made him a confident, self-conscious, rich and fulfilled man. In retrospect, Brym gladly admits that the process of creating the character, and "becoming" (internalizing) this character, influenced him in a sense of absorbing some virtues of the character inside him. What is more, theatre helped him to break his weaknesses and cross his inner limits, for example, he managed to transform his lack of self-esteem into creativity and self-expression and the butterflies in his stomach that he had before the premiere, all "flew away." He further writes:

> Like those old American social-psychology experiments which show that role-acting can cause attitudinal change (making a speech in favor of civil rights caused the experimental subjects to develop more pro-civil rights attitudes), I learned self-confidence (…).[106]

Speaking the words has the power of affecting a speaker, and embodying a role, along with its identity, can hold an even higher potential of influence. A character can also, as Mads mentioned in the interview, extend one's consciousness. This he experienced, along with Djawed, when he handed voice on to his character to answer questions in the interview on the performance, given at the university.[107] Analogically, Brym also learned a lot from the character he played. This temporary role turned out to have long-running consequences for him as a person. He expresses: "Tony taught me that I might be capable of a virtue I hadn't even recognized before. Playing the role of Tony literally extended my self."[108]

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[105] Brym 2006, p. 252
[106] Ibid, p. 253
[107] see chapter 5
[108] Brym 2006, p. 253

According to Berzonsky (2005), 'self' and consciousness are not inherent qualities in the individual. All the psychological processes and reflexivity comes with the individual development.[109]

Brym also recalls another role that had a great impact on his identity – 12th century's Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury:

> For a 17-year-old schoolboy in 1969, it took a great leap of imagination to comprehend how someone could be willing to die for his spiritual principles, and a real extension of self to play the role in a convincing way.[110]

Bad social experiences from his childhood and youth had been repeatedly convincing him that the no-way-out role of being merely an object of other people's actions, and never an individualized subject, was the only role he is destined to take. Performing different roles in the theatre, and performing them well, gave him self-confidence.

He concludes his experience after forty years:

> (...) although I was not conscious of it at the time, it is evident now that the drama programme provided a social matrix within which my self was encouraged to crystallize and strengthen.[111]

Brym claims that he always treated drama as giving him much more socially and emotionally than artistically.[112] He admits that the theatre experience taught him to resolve the emotional problems with his identity and relations with the "unfriendly" world in his teens. The rest of questions he approached in a more intellectual manner during his later sociological studies focusing on issues that were concerning him personally throughout his youth period: class conflicts, assimilation practices to the dominant culture, rebellion against authority. He writes: "At an emotional level, the drama programme helped me to formulate and pose the questions that framed my first researches and thus enabled me to become an academic."[113]

In my case, the direction was opposite. I first gained sociological knowledge and then complemented it with acting experience. The latter, however, not only influenced my academic field specialization, but also my identity. There is thus an analogy between Brym's and my own case in terms of change in my perception of the world after playing in the theatre. When I was in my early teens, I used to look up to the Western World, juxtaposed with Poland, my country – relatively backward, poor and unimpressive just after "dethronizing" communism. Looking at my nationality from a more practical point of view, I remember

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[109] Berzonsky 2005, p. 129
[110] Brym 2006, p. 254
[111] Ibid, p. 255
[112] Ibid., p. 256
[113] Ibid, p. 257

feeling the disadvantage of being Polish, whenever I lived abroad, where my social opportunities were constantly being impeded because of my citizenship. Therefore, nowhere and never could I feel sufficiently integrated in a new social framework. In the performance 'Seven Tales of Misery' my 'Polishness' was appreciated and valued, because it could fill the role I played with "authenticity." As Princess of Russia, a fictional continent "inhabited" - by Irina[114] and me - with a peculiar mixture of Russian and Polish identity, I was to represent Poland, its culture, its history and its miseries. It is important to mention that I learned a lot about my country, because I had been preparing stories and pictures for people, who were listening about what happened there in the past, what happened to Danka – my character, and, of course, also what happened to Iwona, yet less directly. What I was giving to people, was a mix of personal experiences, stories I heard and read about in newspapers and books, and also my imagination of how something I have never experienced might be like and feel like. Thanks to a new framework I was situated in, I found myself looking at Poland with fresh eyes, and actually being touched by it, by many of its aspects that I had stopped noticing a long time ago. Probably because being so embedded in its reality, which prevented me from taking a distanced standpoint, essential for any reflexivity. I started to discern the beauty of the Polish culture and the distinctive features of Eastern-European region, which Poland represents. I was able to see the beauty of its patriotic-ideological struggles throughout the history, undeserved suffering of people and their restlessly following ideals, which showed beautiful naivety in fighting with all kinds of oppressors – always from the position of the weaker, the beaten. The performance taught me more love for my country, appreciation of its culture and understanding for its mentality.

My character's emotions – my emotions

While showing pictures to people and telling miserable stories about Poland – and it was one of my tasks as an actress – the fiction "infected" me with those feelings and emotions were becoming real. After the performance, I can find inside myself a deeper understanding and more empathy, at the same time fascination towards this widely connoted 'Russian continent' that generally refers to the Eastern Europe. When I was playing emotions, in the beginning as fulfilling the actor's role, but as time went by – and it surprised me – I started to really identify with the suffering, absurdity, backwardness, unjust and hopelessness – with Poland, with Russia. In those terms, performing in 'Seventales' taught me a lot. I realized that more and more I am becoming concerned about people not listening (I felt anger), or their

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[114] Her character: Queen Russia; name before joining the cult: Rita

inability to understand due to the lack of similar experiences (I could feel helplessness, melancholy, sometimes irony or resignation).

After role-taking in some "misery rituals,' I gained the ability to more deeply imagine how it might feel to be a humiliated prostitute, escaping into drugs in a hopeless decadence, intertwined in a vicious cycle; how it may feel to have power and abuse it over others; or to have eerie feeling of being locked under the unexpected "deathly" shower, when embodying the victims of German concentration camps and Holocaust. Here, I elaborate more deeply on some rituals that took place in the fiction and were of high importance for me from the artistic, but especially the individual point of view. Iwona helped Danka feel for real, by means of reaching to her memories and imagination. Danka, in turn, gave Iwona the possibility of materialization of those emotional experiences that otherwise would only be existing in highly abstract, imaginary sphere.

There were times I could, while playing my character, allow myself for a dose of "insanity," unconventional behavior, felt freedom I normally do not have in the everyday framework. At the same time, I could discover different sides of myself. In this fictional context, the fear of being judged was considerably reduced. What is more, a variety of personal capacities and individual ways of existence, was not only allowed, but appreciated. That is probably one of the main reasons why a seventy-year old woman whom Eva mentioned in the interview, could easily express her 'otherness.' Her identity, not accepted in the real life, in the performance was respected and even embraced, making her feel "relevant" in such a fictional, yet realistic framework.

Performing a certain role was most authentic when I was able to find Iwona in experiences and emotions of my character. On the continent of Russia, we once performed the ritual of the misery of witch hunt. I experienced very realistic feeling of eeriness, helplessness at the same time, when I in the character was unjustly punished for someone else or simply out of people's superstitious backwardness. It was degrading when suddenly somebody aggressively forced some slimy substance into my mouth – it turned out later to be butter. Not only my character felt humiliated, it actually had a lot in common with rape, I imagine. That is what Lehmann (2006) tried to describe when mentioning artists invoking themselves to actions of audience with the key principle of self-transformation. [115] Of course, the extent of those artists' interactions implied more far-fetched consequences, yet the main idea was comparable. In 'Seventales,' there was real violence, real sex, real whipping of bodies – everything, however, within one's boundaries. The decision to cross them, was also individual

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[115] See Lehmann 2006

at all times. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the close interactions involved total strangers, was enough to generate risk - as long as we can treat unpredictability as a potential risk. What is important, the actual level of such risk is impossible to estimate.

During the ritual of the misery of prostitution and women trafficking in Russia, I (Danka) could feel real anger and fear when the character Adamo (playing a pimp for his ritual) beat me, pushed me and offended me. I also felt desperate – yet senseless, because even worsening the situation – eagerness to help Rita[116] towards who he was even more severe. This ritual was planned, however its content and its form only slightly discussed. I did not expect such strong emotions, thrills and spontaneous reactions when I saw him hurting her. It had much in common with strong empathy towards a character, internalizing his/her emotions to the extent that we cry over his/her sorrow, unjust, absurd suffering, or feel ashamed of him/her as if taking part of responsibility, of blade on our shoulders. It was an affectively strong experience. In that volatile moment, I really hated Adamo.

When I (my character) was giving to others, when I was looking at the Prince with love, those feelings were coming easily. I was convincing too – for the same reason: emotions were real, although in fiction. Those feelings were easy to generate in this strongly-tied community, isolated "haven," where that love was common, conspicuously shared by the fellow followers, and even enhanced by the mission of the cult. I also loved stronger, yet more sadly, when I felt remorse for being unfaithful in the beginning. [117]

When taking aggressive or authoritarian roles, on the other hand, I realized that I was also very convincing – like in the case of playing love - as if I was internalizing the character's feelings. I could feel I am in power, which turned out to be quite pleasant, I could at the same time imagine how potentially addictive power can be. I let go emotions that I normally despise and refuse to imply in my personality: a mixture of domination, caressing aggression (like a hug of Death), psychological cruelty, cynicism and hidden hatred. Releasing emotions that are always rejected by the 'ego,' was, can be said, cathartic, in a way, but also made me indifferent and 'burnt out' for some time afterwards. That indicates evidently that the emotions were real. I also had one confrontation with one man from the audience whom I "employed," during the misery ritual, to help me (Russia) build a 'Berlin Wall' on the continent of Germania and imprison its citizens. I was very cruel, in my role, to 'Lady Germania' who was then embodying the oppressed German people from the eastern (communistic) side of the Wall. It was a psychological humiliation under the mask of

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[116] the unofficial name of Queen Russia

[117] See Appendix 3 for the background story of 'Princess Russia'

motherly protection (that was, at least, how I imagined Russian "protection" over conquered nations). The man was not helping me - I realized after a while – he "froze," sitting and staring with fearful expression at how I was treating her. What scared me then? It was his sight of being shocked and scared by what I was doing. As I said, my values do not allow such emotions to enter my everyday personality, however, I appreciate experiencing them in that framework. I could come closer to the feeling and try to understand it better. I discovered that holding power was pleasant, but did not bring happiness - only a short-term pleasure and a temporary feeling of a strange kind of freedom. 'Seven Tales of Misery' provides a challenging opportunity for all the people involved to expand their identity.

For the audience – especially those more passive or those used to the regular theatre – it may require more time to discover this potential of the framework where they can enter lightened from much of the burden of everyday identity. In terms of identity creation, Djawed says that when the audience enters the house, their identities change significantly, because everyone is given an identical white cloth, so "it takes away their ability to signal what kind of persons they are, what class and taste they have (…)." It provides a kind of 'blank card' to distance themselves to cultural signifiers and norms, and reach a connection with a stranger that can be 'anyone.' It changes their reality and makes them more insecure, as they are no longer able to cooperate and interact with others like in the real life. They can experience insecurity from one side, but from another – more courage to become someone else, as well as open-mindedness to approach people with no presuppositions. I would call it an experiment of freshly and creatively discovering the world.

Educational and therapeutic function of theatre

Nightingale (1999), writing about the theatre of the XXI century, refers to Lluis Pasqual, an international director, who expressed his admiration towards artistic and personal competencies of English actors. As he said, they were open, generous and so eager to releasing their inside demons on the stage that a lot of money in England has been saved on psychiatrists.[118] People have the opportunity to live out their fears, fantasies, and it has a highly cathartic potential. What is fascinating about it, is that such emotions generated in fiction can be real and deep, but not contagious to the real life with concrete emotions like love or hate for a concrete person. Instead, those temporarily experienced emotions are carried

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[118] Nightingale 1999, p. 51-52

by the individual in the form of emotional energy, in the sense in which Collins (2004) understands it.

In the 'socio-drama'[119] workshop I participated in[120], we were presented different methods of problem solving through creating small drama scenes with role-playing. Such methods are becoming more and more popular tools for pedagogues who mediate pupils' going into pre-suggested roles in order to help them extend their imagination and look at the reality from different perspectives. Two participating teachers were recalling one drama session they carried out with a group of children among whom was a bully, a few bully's "supporters," a humiliated child and a lot of onlookers – that is how the relations in the class were like in the real life. When during the drama session, the teacher distributed the roles and the bullied was supposed to play a person of a strong and prestigious social status, whereas the bully's part was supposed to be helpless and rather alienated, the latter became rebellious. It took the teacher time and effort to convince him that "it's just a game." So the roles from the real life were turned by 180°. The real bully was able to imagine how it feels to be estranged in a group, and the bullied showed more confidence and also expressed other sides of his personality.

Goffman (1959) describes "psycho-drama"[121] – which is very close to sociodrama in form and purpose - as a therapeutic technique, in which individuals take roles with no script, yet with good results. As he explains, it is possible due to the fact that we can take inspirations and skills to act from memorized resources from the past. A role which we used to identify with, enables us to later perform it in an artificially created and mediated fictional frame. What is more, another source of inspiration how to act is remembering roles that others once performed in front of us. Interestingly, this gives us the opportunity to transform ourselves from who we were then into someone who was acting towards us in that particular interaction. Goffman calls this phenomenon "anticipating socialization" – we learn in advance the reality that now becomes the true reality for us.[122]

According to the teachers from the drama session in Gdańsk, taking the role of other holds a great potential of extending pupils' horizons. It teaches tolerance to the difference and it changes their attitude to other children and the world in general. All because, one can say, it's not just a game...

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[119] : improvised performance, in which people enact roles as a means of exploring or improving the relations within a group [source: Bańko 2005, Dictionary of Foreign Words, p. 1159]

[120] December 2006 in the Department of Pedagogy, University of Gdańsk

[121] metod of group psychotherapy where members of a group enact in improvised scenes their experiences, conflicts and fantasies [source: Bańko 2005, Dictionary of Foreign Words, p. 1038]

[122] Goffman 1959, p. 123-124

Chapter 7.

Fiction as a means of exploring the World and 'self'

As mentioned many times before in this thesis, individuals and their identities are deeply influenced – whether the individual realizes that or not – by the society and the complex social interactions within. Although I undoubtedly agree with it, my intention is to extend the meaningfulness of this theory also to interactions in the "unreal" dimension of life. Those two realms of life – fictional and real - seemingly contradictory, are complementary in creating individual's identity. The fiction helps the emotional truth surface more freely. Whereas social reality suppresses the excess of affects[123], no exaggeration ever exists when it comes to fairy-tales.

'Real' versus 'Unreal' domains of life

One of the sociological observations by Erving Goffman (1986) is that people, as social beings, have the capacity to use actual activity as a model for farther transformations. The latter, as a result, generate "unreal" realms - new genres that fulfill different purposes: "for fun, deception, experiment, rehearsal, dream, fantasy, ritual, demonstration, analysis, and charity." He calls them the "lively shadows of events."[124] People can approach those fictive realms as part of the reality. Goffman proceeds: "(…) we can become engrossed in fictive planes of being, giving to each in its turn the accent of reality (…)"[125] He notices that a common paradigm is to contrast those two basic realms - real and unreal - treating the real one as much more closely connected to what is actually going on in the world, whereas the unreal as merely modeled on that. However, as he further writes, the real activities of the individual are highly dependent on cultural standards concerning those activities and social roles he/she undertakes.[126] Here, it is easy to notice the resemblance to Thoit's (1983) theory about the cultural valuation of an identity as a social role.[127] As we can see, 'the real' is culturally-constructed. Interestingly, Goffman also emphasizes that culture itself often draws from such sources of representation as folk tales, characters in movies and novels, advertisements, myths and religious philosophies, all being the root foundations of moral traditions of a

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[123] see Lehmann (2006) in chapter 3
[124] Goffman 1986, p. 560
[125] Ibid
[126] Ibid, p. 562
[127] see Thoits 1983

community.[128] Those intrinsic components of the culture are constantly referred to by members of the society, even though they cannot be objectively called ''real." Here is where the fiction intrudes on real or actual dimension of life. Goffman writes that everyday life often turns out to be a "typification of quite uncertain realm status."[129] He also calls them 'supportive fantasies.' Those unreal elements of social life are being created to prove meaningfulness of the social order. People tend to construct various "fictions" in order to confirm their reality. Goffman states:

> What people understand to be the organization of their experience, they buttress, and perforce, self-fulfillingly. They develop a corpus of cautionary tales, games, riddles, experiments, newsy stories, and other scenarios which elegantly confirm a frame-relevant view of the workings of the world.(…) In countless ways and ceaselessly, social life takes up and freezes into itself the understandings we have of it.[130]

Discovering "fiction" of everyday reality

As Goffman (1986) rightly notices, people tend to take the framework of everyday social life for granted.[131] Taking things for granted, continuously staying within one frame, disables reflection and critical thinking. What causes a threat to self-consciousness is being mesmerized by the routines of daily social practices and not noticing the fact that paths we follow are just a small part from a wide range of alternative ways of existence. We are living unaware of the real forces that push us to certain behaviors, judgments and different social practices. It is worth referring to Garfinkel, whom Collins (2004) points out as an important contributor to sociology of emotions. Garfinkel argues that humans' cognitive skills are limited and that people tend to use conventions not out of belief in them, but in order to avoid questioning them – questioning their highly arbitrary construction. His "breaching experiments" demonstrated how emotionally (negatively) people react to the realization (artificially provoked by the author) that the reality, the social order they constructed, turns out to be false. Garfinkel managed to "enlighten" people in this direction, by "pushing" them into situations, in which they became aware of humans' tacit agreement on the particular meaning of things in the social context. He also showed them the actual origins of some of their interpretation of the social world.[132] What can be done, is to uncover for people real

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[128] Goffman 1986, p. 562
[129] Ibid, p. 562-563
[130] Ibid, p. 563
[131] Ibid, p. 564
[132] see Collins 2004, p. 103-104

conditions maintaining social order, or any allegedly objective social fact, by the method of breaking this fact and showing its opposite.

The intention of this thesis is to emphasize that this is exactly what fiction can do with the reality. Reality is socially constructed, so is fiction. Therefore, both of them can cooperate to build people's identities and their understanding of the world. Garfinkel opens people's eyes to absurdity and actual relativism of socially constructed everyday reality. Performances like 'Seventales' are also able, yet by different means, to play such a role. People are, of course, incredibly faithful to their fixed outlook of the world. As shown above, "(…) emotions that uphold reality come forth in intense form when the social reality is broken."[133] A perfect example is the case of the woman that Frank mentioned in the interview[134], whose strong emotional reaction to the reality presented in the performance made her rebellious and leave this fictive world. Collins' conclusion on Garfinkel is that it is not cognition – which, in fact, turns out to be highly limited - but emotions that hold society together.[135]

Fiction – the only channel of approaching reality?

Szymon Neubauer (2006), on the conference, presents fiction as the pragmatic construction of the reality in a sense that it brings meanings and order to the world. He emphasizes that the world is impossible to be cognitively touched by humans. It is only the world of representations - which serves as a means of understanding the world itself - that is approachable. Fiction, it can be said, mediates the world. He draws attention to pervasive 'panfictionalism' of the postmodern world – the only contact an individual can have with whatever beyond him, is through fiction, which is a commonly used tool to make the world accessible and understandable. Fiction is able to organize the reality in such a way, that it becomes communicative. There is a three-level relationship: a person does not approach the world directly, but always through fiction: person => fiction => world. The human beings' life is all about interpreting. The world without fiction would be a world without men.

Goffman (1959) describes that one is not able to fully understand a social situation, yet still eager to predict its final result. Therefore, one grasps at various "simplifiers" (clues, trials, partial suggestions, gestures interpreted as reflecting interaction partners' attitudes, symbols of a social position, etc.) with the hope to anticipate what is going to happen. If reality is unapproachable, one has to base one's definition of the situation merely on its

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[133] Collins 2004, p. 104
[134] See chapter 5
[135] Collins 2004, p. 104-105

pretense. Paradoxical is - as Goffman writes – that the more a person is interested in knowing certain reality, the more he/she has to depend only on shallow semblances of it.[136] Lacking direct access to things, we tend to employ signs of their existence – but those are not things at all.[137] Provided that, we should accept the fact that reality - like fiction – is socially constructed and consisting of many unreal elements, to. If we want to know the reality, we ought to approach it from various frameworks. As Neubauer notices, in the contemporary Western world, fiction is no more being eliminated, but instead - after discovering its influential potential – it is exploited. Obviously, fiction can be "exploited" for many different purposes, including for manipulation. This thesis, however, strictly focuses on explorative powers of fiction, emphasizing that we do not talk about making individuals better or worse, but about enriching their identities, extending their horizons. Such a function of fiction for a human life is touched upon during the 2006 conference 'Education to the Real world through the Fictional world.'[138]

Fiction and Reality as complimentary realms

The key theme of the conference was fiction, being appropriately used as a means of educating children - cognitively and emotionally - to real life. Even though it was mainly focused on the educative role of fiction for children's sake, it was underlined that humans learn throughout their entire life. It is also claimed that the best fairy tales for children are those that can be addressed to adults as well. The motto of the conference is inspired by the quotation by Romana Miller: "Prevention from living in a closed space and in infertile time has to be started in early childhood, and this mission can be undertaken by the fictional world."[139] It was claimed that for the construction of truth about a human, we need to express this truth through many different ways that often cross. Pedagogues should not serve dry facts about the existing world, but, through using fiction and art, ought to teach skills to understand, not merely to accept social reality.

K. Pankowska, in her lecture, agrees with Gadamer and Wittgenstein, that fiction is essential in the social world. She is also inspired by S. Morawski, who claims alike: through fiction we reach the truths of our human existence. Fiction can extend our human potential,

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[136] Goffman 1959, p. 127
[137] Ibid, p. 128
[138] translated from Polish [Wychowanie przez świat fikcyjny dla świata rzeczywistego]: 12-13 December 2006 in „Łaźnia" - Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdańsk
[139] translated from Polish [Obronę przed życiem w przestrzeni zamkniętej i w czasie jałowym trzeba już zacząć we wczesnym dzieciństwie i tej roli może się podjąć wychowanie przez świat fikcyjny] – quotation from the conference brochure

which normally is limited by human condition. M. Palaton gave a lecture examining the educative function of religious myth as influential fiction. He underlines the distinction between the myth, which extends imagination, and dogma, which limits it. Dogma does not leave space for one's creative and critical thinking. It merely serves discursive facts to be accepted. One of the arguments in this thesis is that being "prisoned" in a social world and inability to look at it from a distanced perspective, also closes human imagination. As B. Didkowska and W. Limont - other lecturers - argue, people should be taught from the early childhood the skill of existing in different realms: real, virtual and imaginary, each of which has its own, intrinsic rules. Otherwise, they are likely to experience cognitive chaos. G. Penkowska puts a similar claim: the boundary between a fairy tale, a commercial, the virtual world of media and the real world, have to be explained to children, because those realms exist in parallel and all influence children's identities. There should be a harmony of experiences from the real and the unreal world.

This teaching and explaining has to be done by mediators of the fiction, however, it should not be done in an authoritarian way. It means they should not serve as 'dogmas' – like Palaton[140] would coin it - because these are not developing one's personality. What are, then, non-dogmatic methods of enhancing people's creative and developmental potentials? First of all, the world presented to children by means of fiction should not be selectively "served" to them after filtration of improper issues/images, in order to protect them. The safe and balanced dose of opposite aspects of the complex world should be maintained, without explicitly indicating their positions on a "plus-minus" scale. One of the most interesting themes of the conference was the debate over the censorship of the fiction. Some pedagogues tried to discredit some cartoons soaked with aggression and evil, proposing a solution to mark the good by the beauty, and the evil by ugliness. In reaction to that, Andrzej Ciążela in his lecture, stresses that distinguishing the world according to only two colors can distort children's view of the reality that is actually far from being black and white. Children, if they are to be socialized to the world, cannot be served only sweet bunnies and ugly wolves, because life is much more complex. 'Seven Tales of Misery' performance showed the ambiguity of the reality. A person, a phenomenon, seen from inside, and, more importantly, seen as a whole, is surprisingly much more difficult to judge than simply in terms of right and wrong, good and evil

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[140] see his reference to the distinction between religious myths and dogmas – chapter 7

G. Zielińska talked about the XX century's Psychodrama - that was mentioned before by Goffman (1959) – that by taking fictive roles can deepen participants' knowledge about the humanity and teach them reflective thinking. According to Piotr Odyseyak Niewiadomski and his lecture, the range of available knowledge to possess is constantly widening. Technological developments outgrow the emotional capacity of a human being. Therefore, as he claims, school should not teach mere knowledge, but the skill of absorbing knowledge, the emotional development and the curiosity towards the ambiguous world.

Discovering 'self' by means of various frames

As Goffman writes, people in everyday activities are constrained by cultural standards of tactfulness and definitions of the situation. Therefore, they explore themselves less than while in a different, less serious frames.[141] It is because other frames have different essence, form, and boundaries, so that people have a possibility to know themselves from previously-unknown sides - often more authentic. Feeling authentic means a closer approach to the core of our personality, retreating into the framework where we as ourselves feel more 'relevant,' and where there is no pressure of overwhelming culturally-based expectations from us. Goffman (1986) observes:

> Realms of being other than the ordinary provide natural experiments in which a property of ordinary activity is displayed or contrasted in a clarified or clarifying way.[142]

M. Puchowska in her lecture relates to Orzechowski, a theatrologist, who shares the conclusions from his working experience at schools. According to him, pupils, through acting, learned more about themselves, discovered their new potentials and broke the weaknesses. The fiction extends the personality and the consciousness. As part of the conference, in the final discussion on theatre, it was commonly agreed that what is the most important is not the final product of the ready performance, but the whole process of creation prevailing the play. In 'Seventales,' the creation started weeks before the premiere, when each actor had been developing his/her character. In Appendix 3, the reader can find the background story of Princess Russia. Even though the crucial process of creating her identity was after the actual beginning of the performance – during interactions with the audience and other characters – this story pushed many interactions in certain directions, or at least gave them inspirational point of departure. In this way, it was the ongoing process to the last day of the performance

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[141] Goffman 1986, p. 572
[142] Ibid, p. 564

and in this way, we learned even more. We learned human emotions, their boundaries, their needs, and the sense of life.

Chapter 8.
Seeking Authenticity

As Nightingale (1999) rightly writes, even in the era of digital technology with all kinds of new artistic forms it entails, the institution of theatre will not stop being essential. It gives people something undoubtedly important that cannot be provided by other channels of art: human contact, risk and the possibility of making mistakes. That is what makes theatre a theatre and what makes the theatre indispensable.[143] Such statement is related to one of my questions to the interviewees: *whether, according to them, such interactive and improvised and fully unscripted performance as "Seven Tales of Misery" seems more authentic and "humane" to them.* What I meant by this question was that, supposedly, theatre like 'Seventales' is more democratic in that it enables to discover the universe presented from a level of much more equality - comparing to other forms of art, like film, for example, which is reproduced.

Whatever reproduced – belongs to the past, only physical contact is set in the present. In these terms, film, for example, can be called less authentic, because it can be edited, corrected, and, what is most important, is not live. The separation of actors and the audience, of course, appears also in a traditional theatre. We all know the feeling of distance between us – as recipients of art, and artists are often mythologized as extraordinary "gurus" on a different level of consciousness that we do not have access to. In 'Seventales,' the audience were so close to the actors that they could easily "X-ray" mistakes they made or fakeness they showed. According to Nightingale's book, the theatre of the future will be a desired retreat from spiritless rooms full of innovative technological equipments, a theatre in which people will seek life and contact. Therefore, performances, to be able to comfort such needs, will be held in small spaces where the audience is able to look into actors' eyes, hear their breaths and sensuously check if they are real.[144] Such closeness is extremely important, and the argument is that the interactive theatre is a domain of art that eliminates the distance the most, creates intimacy and relieves people from loneliness and shallowness of everyday social relations. What is their authenticity? This thesis argues that it is experiences that are less mediated, of closer physical presence, sensuous, or generally those of more direct contact with a source of experience - a person or a thing one is interacting with - can be considered

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[143] Nightingale 1999, p. 11
[144] Ibid, p. 14, 18

more authentic. All the interviewees concertedly agreed that Signa Sorensen's performances are deemed more authentic.

More authentic experiences

Actions in the performance – like in the real life - are shifting on the continuum between the shocking and the ordinary. Even though some scenes are extreme, for instance in terms of violence or sexuality, there are also moments that members of the cult lead normal life, such as cooking, eating, reading, visiting fellow-followers. That seemed very realistic. Mads interestingly says: "I think that the frustration of being there when nothing was happening, also made you think more about: 'Ok, nothing's happening because it's so real'."

Eva says: "Since Signa's performances are more realistic, they are at the same time also more 'honest.' Organic food is more 'honest.' Talking to friends directly is more 'honest' than 'my-spacing'." Such extravagant and spectacular shows like, for instance, 'Holiday on Ice' make people, as Eva says, more alienated as an anonymous part of the mass. In contrast, in Signa's projects one becomes 'somebody,' an individual, an important part of something. Eva claims that this framework is "closer" to the participants. In this way - she says - it is more 'humane' than the alienation generated by the exclusive 'extravagance' of illuminating spectacles, where everything is "too perfect" to be approachable by the ordinary people.

Mads emphasizes that even though the whole framework was pre-designed, it was created in a way that made the detail-oriented scenography look highly realistic and sensual. Mads recalls a girl who

> ...couldn't stand being in low continents, because it was so smelly and dirty in 'Africa,' smelling of cabbage in Russia, and all so hot. All this scenography really provokes your senses.

Except for authenticity in a sense of immediate, sensuous experiences, Mads finds another factor that contributes to the felt authenticity. He refers to some interactions that seemed very chaotic as if badly suited to the pathos of the ritualistic design of the house. Contrary to the theatre play, which is repeatedly rehearsed to perfection before being staged, the story of 'Seventales' definitely cannot be considered as pre-designed. He remembers one situation:

> When the audience see that the food is being brought from the kitchen to the café (…), they can see that it has been made and somebody is carrying it. And suddenly something happens and then some audience is being asked to help carrying the soup, or, then a Gypsy comes and steals the food. It can't be pre-designed, because it looks so chaotic (…), all the social interactions are imagined like a part of a 'soup' thing. All those social interactions are almost disturbing the actual meaning of the frame, of the pre-design. That makes it very authentic.

Peter noticed that when in fictional frame, people's actions are more spontaneous, more expressive, not suppressed by the normative pressure of the daily life. It seems that one acts by instinct, making the experience and the 'self' more authentic. From Djawed's point of view, Signa's projects are more 'humane' in a sense that, first of all, they do not give people some fixed idea about definitions and judgments, but, instead, provide the experiment, in which it is possible for one to change oneself and try different kinds of personality, to find the most authentic ones. Secondly, since it is improvisation, it is not demanded that one will play one's role perfectly. It refers to what Eva suggested, that it is more approachable for ordinary people. Finally, it makes it more 'humane' experience, because, as Djawed says, it helps to accept people having different abilities. Analogically, this is what Paul has to say about people being inside the performance:

> They can make mistakes and they can find their own tempo, and they can find their own thing they wanna do to this performance – that's very interesting, very good. That's open.

Authenticity is a highly abstract category, and therefore we only pick a small piece of this interesting discursive phenomenon – to functionally apply it to the subject matter. It is, nevertheless, a very conspicuous issue in the postmodern times. Peterson (2005) claims that in the global era of homogenization, where distinctive social and cultural features blur, both individuals and social groups, e.g. institutions or companies, make efforts to present themselves as unique and authentic.[145] Such 'authenticity work'– namely, practices aimed at discursively making a thing or a person look more authentic - can be done in different ways, as the author notices. 'Seventales' performance is authentic in a way that all the 'continents' (except for 'Arctica') in our model of the Earth, were inhabited by "natives," or people having roots in a certain place in the world. Peterson would call it 'authenticity through ethnic/cultural identity.' [146] Following Lu and Fine (1995), he draws attention to the fact that authenticity can be highly valued in service industry, where the focus is on customers' experience, not only the mere consumption of goods. He writes:

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[145] Peterson 2005, p. 1084
[146] Peterson 2005, p. 1086-1087

(...) the ethnic appearance and role performance of cooks and waiters is crucial to customers' evaluation of the authenticity of the food in ethnic restaurants.[147]

Another field in which authenticity plays an important role is art. Peterson touches upon art communities, where, as he notices, artists are often judged not according to the quality of their works, but more based on their "virginity' in a sense of not being influenced by the fine art world and related education. Approaching it in such a way, we can say that Signa and most of her amateur performers are authentic. Her lack of formal theatre education enables her to develop her own instinctual mode of creating, rather than based on theoretical standards. Therefore it has the potential of a fresh and more spontaneous approach to theatre. This is 'authenticity through status identity.'[148]

In terms of the performance theatre, the focus is mainly on seeking authentic experiences and seeking a more authentic 'self.' Peterson (2005), inspired by Grazian (2004), writes about blues fans' journeys to Chicago, which is considered the home of the blues music. There are different forms of "consuming" the 'blues' experience, from the most commercial and "up-dated" (suited to the present), to the highly inflicted in the times of the origins of the tradition. In terms of the latter type, the author describes tourists, who despise the non-authenticity of commercialism of 'authentication work' and choose to visit run-down pubs located in the South Side African American ghetto, where originally in 1950s local musicians played blues. Peterson notice: "Interestingly the few intrepid tourists who venture into this world take the dilapidated conditions as marks of heightened authenticity."[149] People tend to claim authenticity for themselves by means of selecting experiences that they consider 'authentic.'[150] Another source of felt authenticity is being authentic as an individual, living harmoniously with oneself, or, as Peterson coins it, "remaining true to the authentic self one has created."[151]

Self-authenticity

Self-authenticity is, of course, much more difficult to investigate. However, findings confirmed the hypothesis that in specific theatrical framework of 'Seventales,' people could feel freer, more authentic. As we know from Goffman's (1959), one creates one's identity through he presentation of 'self' in front of others. A person tries to give the audience the

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[147] Peterson 2005, p. 1086-1087
[148] Ibid, p. 1088
[149] Ibid, p. 1088
[150] Ibid, p. 1088
[151] Ibid, p. 1089

impression that such presentation through the performance of role is in accord with reality, instead of being a mere falsification[152] - namely, a discrepancy between the facade maintained and the reality. When the same person, however, believes in "realness" of the role he/she performs, then we can say that by identification with the role he/she feels more true to the 'self,' being convinced that the illusion enacted is reality. If this illusion, this mask we wear while in our role, is in harmony with our self-image and an ideal of role we intend to perform, then this mask constitutes our truest 'self.' Goffman notices that such perception of our own role is an essential part of our personality.[153] Most often it is difficult to distinguish between the mere play and the expression of true 'self,' because, as Goffman (1986) notices, social roles can seem more real than one's own biography. It is due to the fact that the authenticity of the 'self' - like our identity - however subjective, is born and developed in the social context.

One issue needs clarification. This thesis claims that the performance like 'Seventales' gives people the possibility of being more authentic, more "themselves." From the other side, it suggests that such a fictional framework provides a free space for people to try different roles, in a sense of Thoit's (1983) multiple identities. It has to be stressed that in those various roles, in confrontation with various people and often challenging interactions, it should still be 'themselves' who are involved in the fiction. It can be called, in a way, 'becoming someone else,' but only in the sense that one takes a role that might not happen in reality or might take a different form in the real life. The point is to try, for a temporary period, to internalize a character, to be able to live out the motives and emotions that drive this character, to be able to understand the world from the position of this character. It is obvious, especially in the improvised theatre, that a character absorbs a lot of identity of a person that seemingly only gives it a body. All my interviewees confirmed that there was a lot of themselves in their characters and the influence was often mutual. What is more, one's character gives one a possibility of expressing one's identity more freely and entirely. As Goffman notices:

> Interestingly, in everyday affairs, one is not always aware of a particular individual's part in life, that is, his biography, awareness often focusing more on the role he performs in some particular connection – political, domestic, or whatever. Contrariwise, he notices, part is the common concern in drama, much less attention being given to a character's special roles.[154]

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152 see Goffman 1959, p. 119-120
153 Goffman 1959, p. 110-111
154 Goffman 1986, p. 129

Being inspired by that, if the theatre centers on exposing the character's biography as a whole, and not his/her fragmented social roles, it does not surprise us that first of all fictional characters are more authentic, and secondly, they are more interesting.

Two in one: closeness and authenticity

Walter Benjamin (1999), in his debate on contemporary works of art, writes about the death of the "aura," the uniqueness that results from the phenomenon of distance to the object. It happens tkanks to the process of mass reproduction of objects and images. He draws attention to:

> ...the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction.[155]

It confirms the hypothesis that people nowadays have the urge to have closer contact with things, with people - to be able to sense them in a more direct way. However, to satisfy this need, they turn to the technology-mediated practice of reproduction of objects - at the expense of their aura and the 'authenticity' in a traditional sense. Departing from Benjamin, the analysis of the performance 'Seven Tales of Misery' shows that its attractiveness is to a great extent determined by closeness, but at the same time, it cannot be called reproduced. It is neither reproduced, nor even pre-designed, with the exception of the scenography - the latter, however, was very authentic. 'Seventales' universe provides people with strong experience of both physical closeness and authenticity.

The framework of the performance encourages spontaneous social encounters that bear a lot of emotional potential because the distance between the participants is dismantled. Why is it valued today? Mads notices that today - as far as the entertainment industry is concerned - there is a growing tendency towards social interactions that give people the possibility to more develop things in their own way, making their experience more unique. He notices that nowadays, the phenomenon of creation is turning more and more to the "ground-level," being more reachable, available and democratic, so that everybody can be an "artist." He searches for an explanation for such a tendency, first of all in today's feeling of alienation, secondly in the quest for new experiences, and finally, in people's enthusiasm for immediate experiences. Immediacy is often connected with sensuous experiences, that in 'Seventales'

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[155] Benjamin 1999, p. 75

was provided by the scenography and by direct interactions of physical presence. The latter satisfies the need of intimacy.

Paul notices that it is very important in our times to be touched, not only physically, but "being able to be together: be uncomfortable or comfortable, or just be together as people - and not knowing everything about each other, but just being touched, being moved (...)" His observation is that people live in fear, lack trust towards others - to a big extent thanks to media – and are scared of contact. He says that it is good to escape from that by means of intimate contact with others. As Maria Ossowska (2000) writes, the crowd is not a remedy for felt loneliness, nor is the increasing surveillance control.[156] Nowadays people seek authentic, intimate social interactions filled with affect, which is the most - as Collins (2004) claims - influential and motivating factor of human actions.

In the traditional theatre the audience's passive participation - even when emotional (provided they sympathize with actors' fortunes and misfortunes) - creates certain distance, the feeling is to stay 'outside' of the story. That kind of separation, while still sharing the same space and the same ritual (here: a theatre play), would be called by Collins (2004) a "stratified ritual." A ritual where spectators are 'alienated' from the actors and "prevented from approaching them, thus leaving the high degree of bodily contact as a solidarity ritual reserved for the elite in the center of the ceremony."[157] In contrast, the access to potential physical contact is to a higher extent equally distributed between actors and the audience, participating in the 'Seventales' performance. All this undoubtedly renders the experience more authentic.

Pankowska, inspired by Baudrillard (1994), describes the modern shift from the rule of mimesis to the rule of simulacra. She discusses 'techne,' the area in which technologically created immaterial reality is being created. Human cognition is no longer limited to unmediated, direct experience. Through electronic media we distantly "touch" the reality that we have never directly experienced. As the reader has already noticed, this thesis emphasizes that the individual is touched by various channels of influence from the social world. The argument is that direct (of physical presence) and authentic (not reproduced) experiences based in interactions with others, are the most fruitful in enriching people's identities.

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[156] Ossowska 2000, p. 102-103
[157] Collins 2004, p.57

Chapter 9.

Mediating the experience in 'Seventales' – why does it sell?

Inclusion and the emotional energy

Following theories by Collins (2004) and Thoits (1983) on the importance of social inclusion, the argument is that people seek a sense of belonging and participation - the less mediated, the better. Thoits (1983) also writes about integrated versus excluded individuals, emphasizing that the latter are much less likely to maintain their well-being. According to Collins (2004), successful participation in an interaction, elevates people's energy. He writes:

> Social structure, viewed up close as a chain of interaction situations, is an ongoing process of stratifying individuals by their emotional energy.[158]

This stratification is a result of the distribution of power and status (on the continuum between acceptance and rejection) of individuals involved in social interactions. According to him, both power and status interactions influence individuals' level of emotional energy being carried in individual's set of symbols into another interactions.[159] Order-givers gain or, at least, maintain emotional energy, whereas order-takers lose it. As he further explains, people holding others' attention and the group's focus, and therefore successfully performing a group member's role, raise their emotional energy. Marginalized or excluded individuals experience the lowering of emotional energy, which cumulates over time affecting their future interactions. [160]

Equality or power relations between artists and the audience?

An interesting issue at this point is the question whether there is always a power relation between actors and the audience? If yes, is power more equaled in 'Seventales' performance, because visitors are involved? Or quite the opposite: is actors' power enhanced, because they ambiguously shift between fiction and the 'real,' which, as a consequence, makes the audience cognitively and emotionally confused about the boundary between those two domains?[161] It has been stated that 'Seventales' is a mediated experience, however, only

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[158] Collins, p. xiii
[159] Ibid
[160] Ibid, p. 118
[161] see chapter 5 for examples

in terms of the general framework, whereas the interactive content and the authentic presence is to be created and filled with meaning by all the participants. Signa Sorensen provides a playground for the individual experience of experimenting with one's boundaries during social encounters. This is the almost non-discernible mediaton, merely consisting in allowing access and then giving the audience the freedom of choice in terms of discovering the building and deciding what and how they wish to approach. However, there is another way of mediation. 'Seventales' context also forces people to participate, to witness, they are led into the directions of confronting problematic issues - often severely pictured. Signa, talking about some extreme 'misery' scenes the audience witnesses or is made to participate in, admits that they are often puzzled, even scared due to the felt uncertainty whether it is happening for real. What is important, she considers it a valuable factor helping to overcome narrow-mindedness in perceiving the world:

> Sometimes they need to feel scared, especially here in Denmark. People never really have many problems, they feel secure and also very bored. They think they know how everything is connected, and if they are suddenly in a place where they don't know how everything is connected, then maybe they wake up a bit.

One can say that in 'Seventales,' the experience of exploring the world and the 'self' is slightly mediated, leaving plenty of space for individuality, creativity and searching for one's own ways of thinking and feeling. Such mediation of experience with a high level of freedom in the process of educating through fiction to the real life, was strongly emphasized in the conference.[162] Good "leadership" is beneficial for extending people's emotional and intellectual qualities, especially that a limited range of frameworks we deal with in everyday life, is unable to provide such identity-challenge. Teachers and artists should be this kind of leaders.

Seeking freedom, escaping from freedom

Djawed claims that Signa is opening up the door for everyone to become an artist. For him art is "expressing yourself with things out of yourself." For Peter, analogically, people long for more freedom, escape from the pressure of persistent and judging eyes of the society. In Signa's performances, the pressure decreases. Moreover, people are able to see, thanks to this peculiar framework, that it is allowed and accepted to be strange, different from others.

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[162] see chapter 7

Sille sees the reason for the success of such performances in that they present a more extreme reality and more extreme individuals. According to her, we - the people - need "to be 'more' than we are now." It seems, then, that it is a human condition that one strives for less restrained expression of oneself as a person, for experiencing more extreme affects. Lehmann (2006) noticed the potential of theatre as one of the few institutions that are able to remind people how to experience emotions that became unbelievably rationalized nowadays. Eva says that in such a "slightly on the edge" performances, people are forced to look, in a more active way, inside themselves and just be themselves - this is a very cleansing experience. In Mads' point of view

> ...in a way 'Seventales' is an example of partly anarchistic zone where people live for certain times and can let go a lot of things that put them in frames. People can act as if they were free.

As can be noticed, the search for freedom is a human need most often mentioned by the respondents. Freedom and the addtional context of close interactions is what makes people's experiences uniquely inspiring as a possibility to look inside for truer inner 'self.' Sarah discusses the attractiveness of Signa's works:

> When we were kids it was so wonderful to slip into a fictive world. As adults we still have this craving, this urge to slip into other reality, go away from all this daily life and our problems and meet other people in this different reality, and just play along in the fiction.

As she observes, Signa creates a great interactive playground for such experience that does not happen in reality much, as people are so controlled. And the most important thing for the audience is a possibility to participate. People are attracted to the performance because they can put aside the everyday boundaries and everyday personalities. Sarah's observation is that we are living in the highly complex world where we hold a great responsibility for our steps, as every single choice, as she says, pushes one's life into a new direction. From Djawed's point of view, people nowadays want more control. They want to control how they live, who they become, since they approach their life and their identity as a "project." From the other side, however, they feel too framed, so they would like to lose control, but…in a controlled way. For him, people have a need of stabilizing their identities, but the Western, capitalist society demands from them something quite the opposite: to be infinitely flexible and to always have a pro-innovation attitude.

> They [people] want to be more stable, so that they can relax, but the problem is that demands now are quite contradictive. Cause in a way you have to be very professional and have a professional approach to show that you have control over everything. But, at the same time, there are those demands that you have to be flexible and relate to different kinds and types of people. Also to like new ideas and change your work and your routine constantly. (…) But it's quite hard, because if you have been sitting in a school bench - like those who earn fifty thousand or more [DKK] - at least twenty years, they cannot be that flexible because they don't know how to do it. They cannot interact with different kinds of types [of people], because they have been interacting with the same kind of people all the times. Sometimes they get those identity crises, I think.

There is a daily pressure from the society to be constantly flexible and overwhelmingly responsible for all wrong choices or any failures to keep up with the pace of still our changeable life. According to Sarah, one could retreat from such distress by entering the 'Seventales' universe and just give in to all its strict, unquestionable rules and fanatic, simplistic religious beliefs. One could be active and at the same time forget oneself in being led by cult members for whom life is much easier thanks to one philosophy that they attach to anything in order to explain the functioning of the world. The rules in this framework were already made for the guests to follow, therefore poople did not feel pressuring the freedom of choice. Sarah expresses: "It's such a relief to step into a world where the set-up is already there and there are rules." Following what she says, in 'Seventales' people are able to get rid of the everyday's boundaries, experimenting with their 'self' in a different framework, while, on the other hand, are led by artists into challenging and explorative directions. Signa agrees: "When you make a universe like 'Seven Tales of Misery,' it's a smaller universe and it gives people a possibility to have a better overview of it and at the same time they feel guided."

'Wish'- driven consumption of experiences

 Bauman (2001), in his article "Consuming Life," regards the contemporary subject as a whimsical individual, who restlessly seeks pleasure. The latter, however, does not come from reaching a goal, but from mere pursuing it. According to him, the least endurable thing in human life is remaining in rest, with no adventures, passions and efforts.[163] He writes about a shift in human condition with the advent of the consumer society. One's principle is no longer the functional satisfaction of needs, but constantly incited narcissistic desires. In comparison with 'need,' he defines desire as "much more 'fluid' and therefore expandable than need because of its half-illicit liaisons with fickle and plastic dreams of authenticity and

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[163] Bauman, 2001, p. 9-11

the 'inner self' waiting to be expressed." [164] He even mentions - after Ferguson (1996) - another shift in motives for consumption: from 'desire' to 'wish,' which is even more free-floating, irrational and immediate. [165] People's motivational factor in postmodern life is the bottomless desire for affective, still new experiences. They make sure that when one experience is finished, another one is starting. Bauman (2001) describes the consumer society as one in which "constantly finishing and beginning again from the beginning" is commonly available way of life.[166] The argument is that the principle of one's life in the Western, postmodern world, is the consumption of affective experiences that provide still fresh material for continuous identity (re)creation.

Quest for emotional experiences and mediation of such experiences

Collins (2004) underlines emotions as a key factor pushing members of a society to motivations and initiatives, even those initiatives that seem very rational and instrumental (disenchanted). The network of situations is regarded by the author as "a market for interaction rituals."[167] Inspired by Bauman (2001) and his theory on today's quest for new experiences, this thesis adds a different notion derived from the economic language: 'a market for experiences' – the stronger affectively the experience, the more attractive and motivating the interaction providing that. What is more, emotions are mostly connected to direct participation. The more closely the individual is confronted with things and people, the more emotional the experience. The level of emotion, in turn, influences the depth of reflection that is most often provoked by strong affect or confrontation with something surprising/shocking. Bauman, again, claims that it is no longer needs that motivate people to consumption, not even desires, but even more leaking wishes, in which it is impossible to pin-point any patterns. In the Western world, we entered the epoch of pervasive, never satisfied consumption of experiences. It is not only a cultural shift. It touches countless fields of the society, also the business.

As Pine and Gilmore (1998) write, the last great economic shift was from the industrial to the service economy. Nowadays, however, experience is becoming the highest and most promising economic value. They notice that the idea of selling strong experiences is no longer a domain strictly attached to theaters and theme parks."[168] Contemporary people are

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[164] Ibid, p. 14
[165] Ibid, p. 14-15
[166] Bauman, 2001, p. 12
[167] Collins, p. xiii
[168] Gilmore and Pine 1998, p. 99

in need of affective and memorable experiences. Many companies nowadays use this potential, focusing on providing customers with experience surrounding products or services they offer. In that way, people interact with co-customers, and with products around which the "mythologized" experience is built, creating an attachment to the brand that "mediates" such experience. This is what composes the brand's immaterial value, generated from the network of individual experiences that form an overall happening.[169]

People do not just drink coffee anymore – they are consuming the experience of being surrounded by an aura: they receive individual treatment from hosts of a coffee shop; who sell "authentic" coffee from Brazil; which is being served in a traditional way. Or, customers given the possibility to choose from tens of flavors and exotic origins; having them freshly grounded before tasting; finally buying some selected beans as a gift for friends. That is the individual experience that Gilmore and Pine are describing. People want to decide on their experiences, be in control of creating their realities. They, at the same time need mediated experiences, but mediated in a limited way, where a wide space for subjectivity and co-creation is left for them. As the authors further explain the phenomenon:

> While prior economic offerings – commodities, goods, and services – are external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. Thus, no two people can have the same experience, because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event (like a theatrical play) and the individual's state of mind.[170]

How to seduce today?

In terms of the entertainment industry nowadays, Eva notices that people like being seduced, but they have more and more demands it terms of what and in which form it is "sold" to them. Eva explains: "We live in the age of information. We know so much about so many aspects of each thing that we don't want to be cheated anymore (…)" Therefore, the form of seduction has to be very surprising, highly aesthetic and spectacular, in order to appeal to people. She says:

> We [artists] have to be more and more spectacular, more and more different. Everything has to be faster, bigger, more. So it takes more machinery or more technique, or more 'extravaganza,' more colors and more light to seduce people. Because we don't buy anything less than very close to perfect.

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[169] Gilmore and Pine 1998, p. 98-100
[170] Ibid, p. 99

She adds that Signa follows this tendency in a way that she brings innovation and impressive scenography, however, she turns the seduction in another, surprising direction: becoming more realistic, authentic, honest. In conclusion, there are two ways of seduction: either the spectacular "extravaganza" with fireworks, or – like Signa - being extreme in another, deeply realistic way – sometimes extremely severe, sometimes extremely trivial.

According to Arthur, Signa's performances "sell" so well due to people's quest for new experiences. Secondly - and importantly - they want to be in the centre of actions, instead of looking up to an artist's piece and admire it from a marginal position. His impression is that people want to decide what they experience and who they follow. What is important, they seek a special treatment as subjects, not objects of action. Signa thinks alike, explaining:

> It's individual experience. I think it appeals to modern people that you get something at that moment – no one else, it's specially for them. I think they like that. (…) It's also something that comes with this freedom that we have in modern times – that we can want things for ourselves, make some kind of demands and not just take what comes from some authority.

One can say that since the power of creation in 'Seventales' is more equally distributed between performers and the audience, both groups come out of this ritual with a raised level of social energy. The feeling of control over the interaction – thanks to inclusion - with a dose of mediation of a new, memorable experience altogether compose the experience that people strive for in the postmodern Western world.

CONCLUSIONS

The key aim of this thesis is the departure from the common sociological theories on the identity creation in social interaction, and then extending them by focusing on the social influences in the fictional framework. The theme of agency being determined by the society has been widely debated on among sociologists. Thus, theories by such authors as Goffman (1959, 1986), Thoits (1983) and Berzonsky (2005) have been employed to present the individual's entanglement in the social structure. The way this thesis extends those theories is by presenting the subject being exposed to a wider spectrum of potential influences, including those coming from the fictional frameworks. We have learned from Goffman (1986) that the change of social framework changes one's reality, as each of the frameworks has different rules, and different prisms, through which the world is perceived.

Identity (re)creation takes place on the social level. Culture is where our identities are mainly created. It regulates what is praised as valuable, and what is eliminated as deviant.

It was concertedly claimed by Goffman (1959), Thoits (1983), Durkheim (1915) and Skjoldager-Nielsen (2006), that we form ourselves and our experiences during social interactions. The reality we discursively create, affects us ordering certain behaviors, perceptions, values.

Such felt cultural entanglement was my main concern as a member of the society, as a sociologist, and then finally motivated me to join the improvisational, interactive performance as a means of distancing myself to my everyday framework. My intention was to experiment with fiction and use it to challenge my limits and the internalized frames. The results? Cultural anchoring, in this thesis regarded as limiting for agency, was again confirmed – paradoxically – in the fictional frame. I realized that the boundaries I was not able to cross-playing Danka resulted from Iwona being influenced by her socialization. Therefore, in fiction I found myself still "framed" by the norms and restrictions from the real life. It is true that I was able to "liberate" myself from them to a large extent, approaching my identity with fresh eyes and discovering its new faces. However, at the same time, the "social" inside of me was accompanying me even in fiction, putting strain on my freedom - that proves that 'blank card' in new frameworks is only partially possible. My experience did confirm the theory that the cultural anchoring implies a wide and complex network of consequences in different domains of life: personal choices, values, perception of others, self-perception, cognition patterns, etc.

Although this thesis follows the above mentioned sociologists' theories on subjects being inevitably influenced by culture, in which they are rooted, it also presents the possibility of liberating them from such cultural strains that narrow their perceptual. Inspired by Thoits (1983), as well as by my personal acting experience, the argument is that the more identities one possesses, the more one becomes independent of cultural ranking of social roles one performs, and independent of the cultural prism of looking at the world. It is because there is a wider range of identity alternatives, which the individual can turn his focus to, as well as the wider range of angles from which one can perceive and judge. As long as one collects more and more personal resources – in a form of various roles and experiences – one becomes more individualized, as Collins (2004) claims. In such case, the strength of the influence of a certain role on our identity can depend more on our individual valuation: what we gain out of such experience – both emotionally and cognitively. The two latter are strictly connected. It is during affective experiences that we know ourselves the most: "why do I react in this way?"; "why do I feel anger?"; "where does this fear come from?" etc. What is more, it is common that the recognition of anything that disturbs or contradicts our "fixed" worldviews and unquestionable beliefs, incite strong emotions. As Collins (2004) – inspired by Garfinkel[171]- writes, people are very reluctant to accept uncomfortable "truths" uncovered for them, e.g. that the social world is organized in a simplified, arbitrary and fictional way. Therefore, as Collins claims, society is more based on emotions, which uphold such a fictional social order, than on the objective cognition.

Thus, what this thesis focuses on is to go beyond regular frames, either consciously or unconsciously, both intentionally and when forced or provoked to do that. Unconscious or unwanted "liberation" from frames results either from the unpredictability of social life and mechanisms of risk present in human interactions, or from the mediation of experience, which is often done by teachers and artists. This form of mediation is needed for the sake of leading people in the direction of confrontation, new challenges - also those unwanted, unpleasant, uncomfortable, yet true, therefore extending our horizons. Those mediators of experience provide us with the opportunity to be faced with things, events and interactions that we do not know personally, and which probably we would never have the possibility to experience.

Benjamin's (1999) observations has been used, saying that people are striving for "real" and "closer" experiences has been a starting point for the argument that the performance 'Seven Tales of Misery' is considered more authentic, unique, involving closeness and at the same time not "reproduced." It is also less mediated than other forms of

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[171] see Collins 2004

art - like for example the film or the "classical" theatre - since the experience is individual and to a large extent left for the individuals to create on their own. What is mediated in 'Seven Tales of Misery' performance, is not the experience in itself, but the possibility of and the potential of individual experience – a departure into the unknown. The artist provides a framework for the experience, which she at the same time does not control – she leaves it to be continuously created, like it also happens in interactions of everyday life. And therefore in fiction, like in everyday life, as Goffman (1959) rightly expresses, social interaction is like gambling.[172]

Peterson's (2005) theory has been employed as a foundation for searching for the signifiers of authenticity in the performance. It is argued that people strive for authentic experiences, and when identifying with them, they themselves feel more authentic. In reference to Goffman's (1959) 'Presentation of self in Everyday life,' as long as the individual believes in the performance he/she gives in front of others in social interactions, it results in a deep integration with that role that makes him/her feel more authentic. Authenticity is more likely to be present, when one's overall identity has a possibility to surface more while taking a certain role. However, as Goffman (1986) notices, performing a social role filters different elements of one's 'biographical identity' selecting only those supportive, not disturbing, for the image one creates during a social interaction. People suppress plenty of different sides of their identity when framed by everyday life - rules of which are culturally constructed. In frameworks, where one can more freely express and touch various faces of one's inner 'self'- like in the fictional frame, for example - one feels more 'authentic.' Following Goffman (1959), in everyday life, one wants to be seen by others in the best light. However, in character, one wants to try oneself in a new, more authentic "light." Here being "true" is more important than being "good."

Following Thoits' (1983) theory, it is argued that the more identities and life experiences one accumulated in one's biography, the more meaningful one's existence, and the more open-minded one's outlook is on life.[173] Not only school in a sense of educational institution should use various channels of teaching to help children with wide self-development and exercising creativity. I treat all the potential social influences - also those of fictional origin - as a school of life. Robert Brym (2006) writes in retrospect: "What I learned

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[172]   Goffman 1959, p. 126
[173]   see Thoits 1983

from drama was not art but life."[174] Art and fiction do not have to be beautiful, but realistic, to help humans learn to creatively transform the world and be able to live in parallel worlds. What is more, it does not matter if the theatre is intentionally educative/therapeutic or has a different original purpose. The outcome and social consequences it generates is what matters.

This thesis is also inspired by Bauman's (2001) theory on modern times' freedom and whimsicality of a subject,[175] which results in still growing demand of to chose one's own way of life. Postmodern subject strives for more control over his/her life and experiences, since he/she approaches identity as a project. Signa's performances, as has been shown, mediate the peculiar experience of solidarity in the diversity. Diversity not only in the sense of multicultural casting, but also in that she provides interactive arena for relatively free expression of subjectivity in the process of one's exploring now differently framed identity through the confrontation with others. The compressed network of highly individual experiences – which is also the feature of the 'experience economy'[176] this thesis mentions – at the same time forms the dimension of shared experience, felt sense of belonging, and inclusion. The latter, according to Nightingale's (1999) theory employed, is highly needed in times of alienation in technologically mediated world. We employed Collin's (2004) theory on emotional energy (EE), which provides well-being, and which to a high degree depends on people's inclusion in a group interacting.

In the performance's fictional framework, it is not the matter of disguising human identity, but about discovering it by extending it in the process of taking different roles and testing personalities. Aggression or love played by me is the aggression and love expressed in my way: it is my body, my emotions, my reactions, my experience – an intrinsic part of my personal reality, my overall identity. Robert Brym (2006), presented in this thesis, also highly appreciates school drama as an experiences that taught him life and extended his identity: "What a lesson in existentialism acting turned out to be! (...)"[177] Goffman's (1959) theory searches for theatre in the reality, I discovered he reality in theatre.

As has been hinted in this thesis, fiction is taking a more and more privileged position in the social reality. Theories such as Goffman's, Berzonsky's, as well as Neubauer's and many other lecturers' from the conference in Gdańsk, have supported such an argument. What is more, I am sure more and more social domains are going to employ fiction in the service of a better efficiency of those domains. Fiction, as a form of therapy and education is already

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[174]   Brym 2006, p. 257
[175]   see Bauman 2001
[176]   See Gilmore and Pine 1998
[177]   Brym 2006, p. 255

being used –yet still too little - at schools. Business also notices its great potential. As Gilmore and Pine (1998) observe, certain companies more often employ theatre troupes in order to provide their customers with new, memorable, emotional experiences.

I am much aware of the fact that this thesis does not cover the whole complexity of the phenomenon of (re)shaping people's identities through role-playing in theatre. What is more, it only focuses on one example of fiction, one domain of relatively new, experimental domain of postmodern art. I realize that bottomless angles of approaching the subject exist as a means of exploring it inter-disciplinarily. I hope further researches will farther investigate the phenomenon that has been only partially covered in this thesis. There are still plenty of sociological aspects of the subject matter that exceed the theoretical frame of this thesis. What I find interesting as a subject of the future explorations is employing theatre as a method of integration and conflict-resolution between different cultures - by means of employing methods similar to sociodrama/psychodrama sessions.

Cultural exchange through interactive art, and presenting to people the cultures and the realities that are distant from their own everyday frameworks – all this extends people's horizons and helps to appreciate the enriching, educational potential of confrontation with different "Others." In terms of my acting experience, in retrospect, I realize that I needed a change of framework, as well as others, to be able to know my country better and appreciate its values. It has been argued in this thesis that pluralism and the diversity extend people's socio-cultural consciousness. Ethnically and culturally homogeneous countries like Poland may be less likely to be open-minded - to, first of all, discern, and secondly, to accept diversity - than countries where everyday framework is multicultural. Especially in countries that were long living in a closed framework of communist, discourse-operated 'micro-reality,' it is extremely important to enrich personal and cultural identities through interactions with other cultures and social experiences within different frameworks.

Thanks to the 'Seventales' performance, I had the opportunity to experience the Polish culture in the process of sharing it with people – strangers to Poland. Through cultural exchanges people extend their horizons. I was presenting my Polish culture and my 'self' in front of others. By internalizing feelings of my character and by making narratives in the previously unknown manner, I was creating the new reality – shaping my perception of my culture, at the same time shaping myself, as I have always been a part of the Polish culture - like it has always been a part of myself. I was exploring my culture from the position of being an outsider to it and at the same time still its representative.

Signa noticed that the national mentality and culture can be easily explored through theatre. Performing in Argentina had different consequences - in terms of interactions and social communication and openness to various others - than while performing in Denmark. Theatre, as we know from theories by Nightingale (1999) and Skjoldager-Nielsen (2006), does reflect social tendencies. It is also argued, however, that the direction of influence goes both ways. It has the potential of shaping identities – especially the postmodern improvisational and interactive theatre that realistically resembles social encounters in the real life. And yet at the same time, being the longed-for scene for freer expression and an exploration of one's identity. In this thesis, along with Nightingale (1999) and Lehmann (2006), we saw the great potential in the contemporary theatre that is going in the direction of integrating the performers and the audience in the mutually influential process of the creation of new meanings. It is no longer strictly artists who serve paradigms to the spectators, providing them with ready political messages. Now, instead, the principle of performing is the process of communication and exchange of ideas, experiences. It provides a priceless mixture of demonstrating one's distinctiveness and the felt sense of inclusion into a social group, leaving the individual with the high level of emotional energy.[178]

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[178]   see Collins 2004

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[beginning from the top left, clockwise]

1. The Gypsy camp
4. The wedding of a marriage group

2. Princess Arctica and the little Gypsy
3. The cafe

[beginning from the top left, clockwise]

1. Anise in Arabia   2. Princess Asia and Queen Asia

4. The meal in Russia   3. The chapel and the Prince praying on the balcony

[beginning from the top left, clockwise]

1. Lady of the Law and her brother
2. Cult members in the Great Hall
4. The Prince and continent ladies
3. The Prince

[beginning from the top left, clockwise]

1.The whipping   2. The misery ritual in Russia
4. Aron, the control technician and the holy-tape recorder   3. The misery ritual in Arabia

[beginning from the top left, clockwise]
 1. Anise among the guests   2. Adamo, the Gypsy
 3. The procession to the 'Little Mermaid' – carrying the Prince in the boat
 4. By the 'Little Mermaid' - Saying good-bye to the Prince who is sailing away with the holy tapes

<u>Appendix 1</u>

Below, the general framework of the story - around which actors were then creating their characters - is presented. [It was written by the directors]

Background story of 'Seven Tales of Misery'

Arnie Ziegler has been traveling with a circus together with his father (a worker, not an artist) most of his life, working hard from a very young age. At the age of 16 he decides to run away. From the city of Gmunden he disappears to the mountain named Traunstein, where he knows his father cannot follow. He plans to stay in the mountain cabin until the circus has left the city.

It is a foggy and cold spring day. As he reaches the large cross on top of the mountain he finds a newborn baby lying on the ground beneath it. He decides that he cannot leave the baby there even if bringing it to the cabin would mean that he eventually would have to talk to the authorities and go back to his abusive father.

However, on the way to the cabin he meets a woman who is willing to take care of the baby and promises to deliver it to the authorities.

Arnie Ziegler stays in the cabin for seven days. He never returns to the circus and never talks to his father again. For the next 20 years he travels around Europe (mostly Germany) working here and there (at building sites or doing magic tricks and gambling in bars). His only steady interest is magnetism. He is a self-made inventor of magnetic apparatus of various kinds.

The lady on the mountain never brings the baby boy to the authorities, but raises him herself in the mountains where she lives isolated from the world. She calls him "Der Prinz vom Traunstein", and he is brought up to believe that he was born by the mountain itself. He learns about the world from a few old books and from looking down on Oberöstereich from above. The myths about Kranawitha, the wicked witch of Traunstein and the sweet mermaid, Blonderl from the mountain lake are very real to him. Many times he runs to the lake and begs the mermaid for protection from the anger of Kranawitha, when he has done something wrong.

Exactly 20 years after Arnie Ziegler found the baby boy by the cross, Arnie Ziegler sees the Traunstein mountain again on a painting in a hotel room in Hamburg while copulating an African prostitute. From that moment on he is obsessed by the finding out about the destiny of the boy.

As no register or archive mentions the boy, Arnie Ziegler decides to return to the mountain. After searching for months he finds the cabin of the mountain woman and "Der Prinz vom Traunstein". He is invited to stay for a while. Immediately he feels drawn to the prince (not in a sexual way) and the more time they spend together, the harder it becomes to leave him behind. Arnie therefore decides that it is time for the prince to see the world and asks him to come with him. The woman, however, will not let the prince go. In desperation Arnie finally pushes the woman off the mountain while they are picking blueberries together. He tells the prince that it was an accident and the two men leave for Hamburg together.

To celebrate the arrival of the prince in the world Arnie shows him his own favorite place; Reperbahn – the strip club street of Hamburg. They go to the nightclub All The World where exotic dancers from different countries entertain and offer their services. The prince is impressed and genuinely believes that the women of the club represent the populations of the planet.

For the next 13 years the two men travel around. Everywhere the prince shows up, people gather around him like around a prophet. Arnie enjoys the enormous attention which the charisma of the prince draws. Gradually a group of followers form around the prince. They treasure his every word as divine truth and soon a cult comes into existence.

Magnetism becomes an important force in the prince's view of the world. He also believes that in making symbolic models of places, people or situations he can influence the real world, and that the part represents the whole (multiscale phenomena - this will be explained in details in the acting workshop).

13 years after the prince left the mountain he starts feeling unwell, like a dark force is trying to draw him back there. He identifies this force as Kranawitha. His followers also start feeling the influence and several among them become possessed by the witch. Fear and sorrow reign and the followers beg the prince to find a cure from this evil curse. They tell the prince that

this must be a sign that it is time to clean the misery off the planet before it destroys everybody. Meanwhile the prince has realized that Kranawitha and the woman who raised him in the mountain are the very same person. More than ever he needs the protection from the mermaid. He figures out that the only safe place must be Denmark, the land of the mermaid which has no mountains at all.

Arnie Ziegler organizes for a house in Copenhagen (The 7th House of The Prince) and the prince makes a plan for a big ritual to free the world from misery and destroy the power of Kranawitha. For one year all the followers work on changing the house into a detailed model of the world following the directions of the prince.

Finally the prince and Arnie go to All The World, the nightclub in Hamburg, to collect a selection of women representing the 7 continents of the world.

The Ritual

We will build a model of the earth in the name of permanent magnetism, that in form of tape symbolize the blood veins of the planet A multiscale phenomena to create a new, transhuman generation free of misery.
With help of ferromagnetic triangles, we will capture all the world's misery by recording it onto a tape. When this is done, the world is prepared to be fertilized by the prince.
To secure the successful maturation of his offspring, the magnetic-misery-master-tape has to be erased by the magnetic force of the Earth's north pole.

Here is a short description of the misery recording system (see graphical network diagram):

Each continent is a little sound studio and is equipped with an old mixpult, several reel-to-reel tape recorders (machines) and an archive of continent-specific sounds on magnetic tape reels. Each machine is connected to (hard) scengraphic elements with an audio-transducer. The audio transducer will set the elements into vibration. This vibration creates a very special sound depending on the material of the element. These sounds are picked up by contact microphones. The lady continent uses her own microphone for her or any other present voice.

With this apparatus and her assistant, the lady continent can mix down a certain composition of misery onto the tape loop that is connected to one of the two decentral control rooms. The operators in the decentral control rooms transfer that composition onto the tape loop, that is connected to the central control room. Only Arctica is directly connected with the central control room.

The operators in the central control room record the sound onto the misery-master-tape with the meta-master-machine by the throne of the prince.

The meta-master-machine is connected to three cardinal machines, that roll:

1. the "monitoring loop" to the attic, where the followers live. Up there are several machines that play that sound with help of audio transducers through the walls, furniture and the pipes of the central heating system (for a better audio transmission through the pipes, we drain the water from the central heating system).

2. the "sales loop" to the shop, where we copy the sound on small reels and sell it to guests per meter (as it is only a copy, that misery can not do any further harm, no matter how that guest is using it).

3. the "accumulating loop" to the tape cutting room, where operators cut a copy in pieces and edit a new order of that sound. This new order will be sent by couriers back to the archive of the continent, where the composition originally was created. In that way, the compositions of the continents are accumulating along with the ritual, as the sound of misery is recorded layer upon layer...

To coordinate this ritual, we use telephones that do not ring, but blink.

Appendix 2

Questions *[provided by the director to help actors develop their characters]*

Age:
How old is the character? Has the character been with The Prince a long time?

Special skills:
What is the character particularly good at? (languages, special knowledge, practical stuff...)

Position:
What is the character´s position? Is the character satisfied with this position?

Family relations:
Is the character related to any of the other characters?
Does the character ever think of his or her family in 'the outside'?
Did the character give birth to any babies in the cult – or before?
Is the character pregnant? – or did he get anyone pregnant?

Marriage relations
How is the relationship to the other parts in your characters marriage? Has the character any feelings towards anyone outside of the marriage? Is the character satisfied with the leader of the marriage – or is the character the leader?
If the character is not married (for one or the other reason) what does the character feel about that?

Special relationships:
Does the character have a favourite relationship to anyone?
Who does the character trust in the most?

Relation 'the outside'
How does your character feel about 'the outside'
How does your character feel about the audience?
Would you character like to go outside or is he/she afraid?

Life Story
You may write a short overview of the characters life.

Temper
What is the typical mood of the character?
Is the character open or shy?
Does he/she establish contact with the public? – or with the other characters?
Does your character become angry or sad sometimes. When?

Mistakes:
What was the worst moment as a follower of The Prince? (Could be a small thing like spilling coffee or a major fuckup.)
Does some mistake from the character´s former life haunt him/her?

Golden moment
When was the happiest moment in the characters life? (With The Prince or before)

Secrets:
Does the character have any secrets. Does anyone know about it?

Weaknesses
Illness, fears, vices?
What does the character do to cope with these?
What would make the character totally freak out?
What would make the character shut off?

Strengths:
What is the character really good at?
What is the character proud of?

Activities:
What does the character do during the day (and night) – and what does he/she do during the 5 hours when the public is there?
What does your character do in his or her spare time?
What is your characters favorite duty?
What is your characters favorite way of enjoying himself?

Passion
What is the single state of being that will bring the character to final happiness (approval, respect, control, love, etc.).

The witch:
Was your character ever possessed?
Did he/she ever witness another character being possessed?
How does your character deal with the threat of the wicked witch Kranawitha?

The Prince:
Describe why your character believes in The Prince.
Describe why your character thinks The Prince is good?

The big mission:
Does your character ever doubt if it is possible to save the world from misery?
Why does he/she carry on anyway?

Appendix 3

Below I present the created background biography of my character, Princess Russia

(unofficially Danka)

Princess Russia – a background story

I was brought up in a Polish village close to the eastern border. My mother was Russian, my father Polish. We were poor, but relatively not the poorest family. Quite happy – common everyday struggle kept us closer. A good example of love between man and woman created a vision of how it should be. I was more attached to my father, he thought me a lot, he never had money for educating himself, but he was a self-learner and read a lot, he was my window to knowledge, so, being stuck in this micro-world of the village I used my imagination while listening to his stories about outside. My relationship with my mother was much more shallow, I loved her, but we lacked this speechless connection, that secures and inspires even if absent. She poured all the best of her love and touch to my father and plants in the garden.

Suddenly (or maybe gradually – that was hard to notice) she changed. I don't know who she met (we supposed with my father that it was this man from a circus that came to our village), or what kind of "inspiring" dream she had (the dream that kept coming back and would haunt her every night when she was lying next to my father), but I know, I could feel – this helpless and scary feeling – that this occult world totally swallowed her, she became totally obsessed with magic. She became a stranger to me, to us. She simply put dreamed her love away, she never looked at my father with a sparkle again, she ignored me totally. She started to read some suspicious occult books, would disappear to the woods and collect some herbs and dead animals. This woman was still beautiful – the only thing that reminded me of my mother, cause I lost her. She attracted attention in the village, started to sell her magical practices to desperate help-seekers for little favours and goods. One day she disappeared, my father started drinking. I could be 13. I hated everything associated with her: Russian nation, magic, flowers..

We heard after two years that she went to Moscow, doing the same, but in a more sophisticated form – magical practices to help businessmen get rid of the competition or get the loan back, attract love..

One day, after years, she came back, to take her "little girl".
[She must have given me something – a plant, mushroom?- cause I went dizzy and then I remember nothing. She wanted to make me her "assistant". I escaped.]

My character hitchhiked in Poland, then Holland when she met those street artists, she fell in love, but it was this kind of impatient, selfish love, living in a "bubble", experimenting with drugs, living on a street, or on squats – freedom, indulgence, a sense of community. They ended up in Hamburg, they needed money, how could she financially contribute to the group? Clashes began, blaming each other, frustration. She was lonely and felt like being alone, she went to a club called "All the world", she needed some booze, spent the rest of "her" (group's) money. Asked for more – on a credit. Refused. "Do you have anything to pay with, my dear?" – asked a woman behind the bar. She didn't. She couldn't imagine doing that. She suddenly felt this desperate urge to see her father, yes, she has to come back. She needs money, though. She decided to do it, "only once", "that's nothing", "just for the sake of my father", "only once and never again". She did. It wasn't enough to get to the village, she was pulled by the group again.
Several times it happened again, then more often, then she stayed in with girls – permanently. It lasted about year and a half since the first time, she was part of a club for less than a year, till the Prince took her (them) from there.

[I liked dancing, then I could have control, I hated those 'turned on' guys visiting, only twice I got passionate, it was almost like making love – almost, cause that very context would spoil everything. Others were rather off-putting or disgusting.]

She got used to it, she remained cold, so cold that protected, she let them do whatever they wanted and scorned them. Suffering, being an object to them, but looking down on them.
[Ernie totally didn't suit any pattern, first I thought he was a freak – he doesn't wanna fuck; then I got suspicious – he'll listen carefully to the story of my life and then he'll cut me into pieces and fuck each of them separately; then I started to trust him (*she usually got close to people in her own, slow tempo*), wait for his visits and at the same time tremble that he's gonna leave one day like my mother did].

One day Ernie introduced us (girls) to the Prince. He was kind, good looking, a bit living in his own world, we talked sometimes about life, he never visited me to fuck. He was special, he pulled like a magnet.

My character is a bit moody, sometimes excited and impatient, sometimes quiet and passive. She's also a bit jealous, doesn't like to be commanded. But she can show a lot of respect when she believes in somebody and admires her/him.

She's quite suspicious and usually doesn't believe in disinterested intentions . She's a kind of person that becomes easily alarmed when it comes to associations, she believes that everything is interconnected and if something happened once than definitely it will repeat, cause life is a circle.. Therefore when she hears of that absurd idea about the Prince who intends to erase misery from the world it seems too ridiculous to her, especially that she hates everything connected with any kind of magic and "mystery" of rituals (reminds her of her mother).

Yes, but… "of course, I'll join, it's my honour to live by the Prince, contribute to the misery ritual and finally give him a child". *She did it all for her own interest, she pretended to love and to believe in the mission, she wanted those "weird community" to give her a hand with getting out of this terrible, cosmopolitan, red fuck-market. Then, she'll escape again, of course, she's good at that. She'll come back to her father, after these three years she doesn't even know if he's alive, but if he is, he must be a a very sad person.*

[Ok, I'm safe now, I can escape, but… no! I'll stay a bit longer, not to leave Rita and Miss Germania yet, and people from here make me wanna live in a way. Where should I go? My village? Poverty is such a misery! Alcoholism (my father), broken love (my parents), abandoned children (me) – misery wherever you go. My mother? – using people's fears and dreams for her own profit – she's such a miserable woman! War! – my grandpa told me a lot of stories.. Drugs! Prostitution! The Prince sees it too, he wants to fight it. His mind is so virgin in a way, his ideas look utopian, straight from a fairy tale! But he is right, he is right! The happiest I was as a little girl when dreaming about saving the world. Then being so sceptical and shallow… Traumatic discovery: I'm very miserable woman, I used those people for my own interest, I pretended love and devotion, just to be taken from a club – pitiful! All the miseries being part of my life – they were present everywhere I went. Suffering is so universal. One single soul like me is the example of the whole world suffering! The Prince is right. Maybe if we get rid of misery in our little world, then it's gonna be erased in the whole world. We should try at least. I believe in that now, I can't believe I believe! When the ritual is over I'll bring my father here to the community, he's gonna be happy again, like I'm becoming happy being with the people.

I feel so guilty that I was unfaithful, but more than that I'm afraid to confess! I should tell the Prince and Lady of Law, but I'm scared, I wanna stay here so much!]

[Me and Rita on one continent! I like her, but I hate Russians, Russia did a lot of bad to Poland like my mother did a lot of bad to me and my father] – now we have a mission,

though, we have to overcome prejudices if we are to succeed in erasing the misery, we should start from ourselves.

But she's attracted to her somehow too, she's fed up with men and, at least for now, if she could feel fascination, also erotically, it would be towards a woman.

[So, we're having a baby with Rita (JUST A SYMBOL – EMPTY SWINGING CRADLE, THAT WE'RE GONNA TREAT WITH CARE AND A BIT RITUALISTIC MANNER), a baby in a cradle as a symbol of peace between Russia and Poland. As it's a paradox that we keep together, as we had tensions, on the continent we give an example of representing and overcoming them at the same time – there's our "baby" in a cradle.

Below, the reader can find the following four reviews of the performance by Danish

newspapers (Appendixes 4 to 7).

The Magnetism of Misery

Performance. Signa Sørensen and Arthur Köstler together with audio artist, Martin Stig Andersen, have moved into PLEX, and with their 'Seven Tales of Misery', have created an interesting, cult-like universe.

Af Vibeke Wern
(Engelsk oversættelse: PLEX)

"It's just like being accepted into a real cult," says a young girl as she exits the door of Kronprinsensgade after having spent a couple of hours in the performance installation 'Seven Tales of misery'. A very accurate description of what it's like to visit this open performance at Copenhagen's newest music theatre, PLEX – formerly home of *Den Anden Opera*.

In the hands of Signa Sørensen and Arthur Köstler, along with audio artist Martin Stig Andersen, the building on Kronprinsensgade has been transformed. Once home to both a Freemason's lodge and a Pentecostal mission, it is now both a fairytale-like yet scarily cultish representation of a world full of religious, secular and political rituals – including, for example, a total devotion to Coca-Cola.

As soon as I enter, I am welcomed by two brides who initiate the cleansing ritual, then we are taken and dressed in white cassocks. The cult would rather not have that we bring too much misery with us into the building where the naïve Prinz von Traunstien (played by Arthur Köstler) reigns in his regal wig and lederhosen, enthroned in the Grand Hall with a rather provocative mermaid at his feet. A living image of a charismatic religious or political leader who, with help from his followers, endeavors to maintain the world's balance and free the globe from its misery.

A second preacher, Arnie Zeigler (Der Prinz' spiritual father) regularly appears, encouraging the audience to participate in healing singing. An interesting audio element in 'Seven Tales of Misery' is the collection of old magnetic reel-to-reel tape recorders that run throughout the building and record stories and sounds. Inspired by the late American composer David Tudor's use of audio-transducers, Martin Stig Andersen has created a fully functioning and well-balanced sound universe with an unceasing, deep base note, which can be sensed by both body and ear. The building itself becomes a sound-emitting body – magnetic tape circulating through the rooms like veins able to pick up bad vibrations.

As in Sørensen and Köstler's previous performance installations, 'Seven Tales of Misery' delves into the aesthetics of decay and disbandment. Retro objects lead the mind to cold-war Eastern Europe, as do the militantly dressed leaders who show us round. And once again, the two artists guide the audience into the subtle question of control and freedom, seduction and submission, as well as authentic and constructed reality.

To those who are familiar with their former works, the format of the performance installation, in which audience members decide themselves the extent they interact with the performers, will be of no surprise. Throwing yourself into the stories is what "Seven Tales of Misery" is all about. Stories such as those of the seven ex-prostitutes who, in each or their chambers, represent the different continents. In these continents, unrest and imbalance smoulder under the surface and in the connecting halls and on the stairways homeless refugees converge.

The format and content of "Seven Tales of Misery" is without doubt interesting and thought provoking. Logistically, however, the work falls slightly short, as those involved are insufficiently able to accommodate so many people arriving at the same time to the Prince's house. With a long wait to get in, the dynamic effect is somewhat lost.

♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠

Berlingske
Press Review 15 Sep 2006

Fascinating misery

Powerful installation theatre experience religious sect

By HENRIK LYDING

My greeting comes in the form of a loving kiss on both cheeks from a bride dressed in white. Following this, uniformed guards take over. However, their tone is mild, not harsh.
We have entered the house of a sect – a religious sect. As new recruits, we are given white gowns to wear and are guided round. Appropriate in a building that once belonged to the Pentecostal Movement and before that, home to a Freemasons lodge. After this, the building became Den Anden Opera and now it houses PLEX music theatre.

The seven continents
PLEX's first production is a terrific piece of installation theatre. It boasts a cast of 60 and has transformed every room of the building into a religious *drop-in* centre.
We wander round lead by two soft-spoken, young disciples who tell us about the Prince, his birth and how he first met with the world's misery.
We file past the Prince in the throne room and visit the seven continents, symbolised by seven young women, all the time accompanied by a backdrop of reel-to-reel tape recorders constantly collecting a multitude of misery and sending it on to the Prince, who then erases it.
We meet the world's displaced souls, visit the dormitories of the disciples' – who are married four with four – we observe their small chapel, view their modest kitchen in which simple food and we visit the women of the seven continents.
The colourful and happy Africa, the direct and blunt America, the cabbage-tainted Russia. And before we're let loose on our own, a ribbon of magnetic tape is tied around our wrist to protect us from the misery.

Fantastic experience
Now it's more of a sense of being brainwashed that creeps up on us – that's how thoroughly well executed and convincing the performance in Signa Sørensen and Arthur Köstler's total installation is. The old building provides a fantastic feeling of by-gone days with its faded wallpaper, worn-down staircases, grotty attic rooms and damp-stained basements. And the many performers, from princesses and beggars to the disciples themselves, fulfill their roles with an impressive combination of authentic reality and theatrical mystique.
As installation theatre goes (a field in which the duo Signa Sørensen and Arthur Köstler are well versed, with a number of success performances under their belts) it doesn't get much better than this. There's a feeling of landing in a frozen pocket in time and on an unknown continent at the same time. There is also a definitely threatening element as the universe being depicted by the production symbolises the mixture of tyranny and total devotion that unfortunately is all too prevalent in the real-life religious sects of today. Luckily here, unlike in these real-life sects, you are able to walk out the door once you've seen enough.

MOHGENAVISEN
Jyllands-Posten
Press review 14 Sep 2006

Languid Loops of Misery

The boundaries between voyeur and participator are eerily blurred in Signa Sørensen and

Arthur Köstler's fascinating performance installation 'Seven Tales of Misery'

PERFORMANCE
By Mette Garfield
(Engelsk oversættelse: PLEX)

Kilometres of old-fashioned reel-to-reel tape runs from floor to loft, along twisting corridors and through chambers, halls and stairways.
Seven Tales of Misery **has taken over PLEX, the building that formerly housed Den Anden Opera.**
The house reverberates with the creaking sounds of the tape players. *Loops* **are the main audio characteristic, giving a constant impression that the tape has got stuck. Whispering voices and a plangent cello tone flow through the walls and the carefully chosen, dated old furnishings.**
It is the magnetic tape, which physically and as a *soundscape***, links this shabby world together. A world inhabited by soldiers, scruffy gypsies, singing Russians, Arabian princesses and dancers dressed in bridal gowns. And the magnetic tape becomes an important symbol in this micro-universe and its tale of a Prince who has passed on to his followers his belief that magnetism is crucial for the world's survival. The prince's followers – the people who have taken over the building at Kronprinsensgade 7 – have a mission to maintain this world's balance. They do this by recording misery onto magnetic tape and then erasing it. It is in actuality this languid sound of misery which beautifully penetrates throughout the building surreptitiously enchanting the audience.**

Crawl under a dress
Any voyeuristic tendencies you may have are easily satisfied in this building. In the café you'll find everyone behaving as ordinary café guests. They smoke, drink coffee, and speak in hushed voices with and about each other. Then suddenly someone crawls under someone else's dress to be 'cleansed', as it's called. The level of intimacy is overwhelming.
It's easy to sense how the different stories in *Seven Tales of Misery* **take on their own lives and grow. You certainly get the urge to remain seated – or come back another evening: The production unashamedly absorbs the audience's time.**
It's also possible to take it a step further and interact with the residents – you can even talk to the Prince, who mildly and in a friendly tone tells that this beautiful and sad universe is only like this because it's a copy of the real world.
That's why spectators need courage and curiosity to open the doors on their tour round. You never know what's on the other side.

Information
Press Review 12 Sep 2006

On the Track of Misery

With her lavish theatrical journey, performance pioneer Signa Sørensen has created a

spectacular paraphrase of theatre as a ritual.

PERFORMANCE

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

PLEX (formerly Den Anden Opera) Seven Tales of Misery. Concept and staging: SIGNA (Signa Sørensen and Arthur Köstler). Music: Martin Stig Andersen. From 6pm to 23pm. Until September 30.

I should never have eaten that powder. But once you've entered Kronprinsensgade 7, you do the strangest things. The orange powder lay alluringly in a soap kiosk by the entrance under a sign saying 'Key'. And who wouldn't want to have the key to what was going on in the building?

The entire building, which appropriately once served as a Freemason lodge, a Pentecostal missionary church and Den Anden Opera, has been taken over by a prince-cult and transformed into something reminiscent of an Eastern European hotel from the time of the iron curtain. Every detail has been brilliantly staged by Signa Sørensen – with Arthur Köstler – who recently received the Association of Danish Stage Director's merit award for outstanding achievement for her groundbreaking performance installations such as '57 Beds' and 'Night Finder'.

As a visitor, we bring with us the raw material that holds the entire house together: *misery*. As soon as I enter, I'm met by a smiling bride who begins cleansing me of my misery by caressing my aura, chanting mantras and lastly, kissing me on the forehead. This is the sole aim of the cult: to remove all misery from the world and restore balance. SIGNA is definitely not averse to message theatre. Instead of passive audience participation, Seven Tales of Misery envelops us into an interactive cleansing ritual in. Perhaps the *wellness* trend has infiltrated the theatre?

With a polite tone, the strict, cult members, all in crisp, brown uniforms, begin taking us in hand. We are clothed in white, linen cassocks before proceeding, single file, on a tour of the opulently decorated building. At the centre of this universe, we find the large throne room where a massing group kneels around a young, full-bosomed woman. Dressed in a slinky nightdress, she is lies and writhes upon a podium of dark red velvet. She is, as many others turn out to be "in a state of imbalance". Only *Der Prinz* can cure this by laying his hands upon her. He (Arthur Köstler) sits regally in the background dressed in a wig and Lederhosen, surrounded by a collection of constantly running reel-to-reel tape players acting as the regalia of power. The 148 tape players, which can be discovered in every room, emit the crucial electro-acoustic spherical sound, which permeates the building through walls and floor: this is the sound of misery.

I discover this when I end up in the domain of Lady Russia, one of the building's seven lady-virgins. Each lady-virgin represents a different continent. With a backdrop of steaming pots of borsht and the realistic super-kitsch Russian interior she shows the chosen visitors pictures of barbed-wire re-enforced work camps and orphaned children and asks us to record out responses onto the tape. All this recorded misery will then be sent to Lady Antarctica and erased – operation Misery accomplished with one press of the delete button.

Gradually, disturbing by-gone Germanic undertones reveal themselves through the cult's undertakings and the mixed continents (all women! Here, men are only servants) from the mud huts in Africa to the Japanese Geisha rooms. In actuality, could it be not misery itself, but miserable people who are deleted? The entire squadron of

brown-uniform-clad cult members aim to preserve their uniformity – not only among the 60 inhabitants of the house (who carry out their roles with infectious credibility) but also among us outsiders. We are stage-managed as full members of the cult.

Looking beyond the obvious religious or political references that may be derived from 'Seven Tales of Misery', the strength of this piece of total-theatre lies in its paraphrasing of theatre as a ritual. The entire building is in actuality a mega theatre stage. A depiction of theatre as entrenched from the outside world and an elitist cult. Was it not Aristotle who talked of theatre as a cleansing, a catharsis. And uniformity, this is the formative process around common human misery, which we are expected to take home. The most challenging aspect of 'Seven Tales of Misery, is the contrast between controlled uninformativity and varied diversity. Potentially, it's a case of 'all power to the audience'. Each one of us has the opportunity to create our own performance on the background of the uniform story.

Unlike in her previous performance installations, in which the audience was immediately let loose to visit the different rooms and tableaux, in 'Seven Tales of Misery' Signa has very cleverly created a framework story which is communicated trough the guise of a guided tour. After this, it is left up to the individual audience member to move around and form opinions through dialogue with the characters. For example, joining the sex-drenched cult with its lady-virgins surrounding the prince – a typically distinctive characteristic of Signa's works, however here she performs in an almost back-seat role of a military Lady of the Law.

I never made it that far, because the powder began to kick in giving me a sore stomach. Perhaps this was purely in my mind – a placebo effect. Whichever was the case, it is evidence of the power of the theatrical magic SIGNA is able to create. The mighty cult of the theatre.

Monna Dithmer
(Engelsk oversættelse PLEX)

POLITIKEN
Press review 15 Sep 2006

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I hereby declare that the Master Thesis I have submitted has been written by myself, without any unauthorized help, and that no portion of the work herein has been either previously published or submitted in support of a degree or other qualification to this or any other university or institution of learning. Any parts, words or ideas of the thesis, however limited, which are quoted from or based on other sources have been acknowledged as such without exception.

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