

8. 12. — 5. 2. 2023  
(Galerie Kostka)



# Jan Matýsek: Fuj Tajxl!! Stick Your Finger Through the Death.

**Ján Gajdušek: What is your opinion on the crisis of masculinity which you reference in your Fuj Tajxl!!! video?**

**Jan Matýsek:** Fujtajxl is basically an audio-visual essay for children trapped inside bodies of adults. It has elements of a children show and functions as an experience simulation of an initiation ritual. I mediate an encounter with a devil or shadow archetype who guides our inner child on its journey through the underworld where we experience symbolic situations of transforming certain traits, memories, primal fears. Thus, we get a chance to redefine our adult life as we observe it from the point of view of our child state of mind. I try to breach the boundaries which we have around us. I am aware of potential dangers, which is why I acknowledge the fiction and behind-the-scenes moments that serve also as an awakening from the hypnotic states of the ritual simulation. In general, when it comes to the crisis of masculinity, which is often reflected in my social circles, it lacks a deeper psychological or even spiritual perspective. I do not think that we are in the crisis of the masculine gender. I believe that the masculine aspect of every one of us is in crisis. I try to research different ways of healing this unwell man. During my research, I experienced a vision of a current man in his immature form as he regressed and became a boy again. For that reason, I am interested in initiation rituals, such as a transition from boys to men, as a possible therapeutic solution to the crisis of masculinity phenomenon. Initiation rituals have specific traditional symbolic steps which are analogic to the monomyth language: the boy represents a state of an exile, the initiation journey through the underworld as encountering the shadow and integrating with it, death of the boy, ascent from the underworld as finding the path to self, to our adult image. These images create a story. Using such a symbolic construction and applying it to something specific, familiar, I try to create a state of hypnosis, suggestion, which causes personal or even transcendental experiences. I hope the video installation itself will serve as an initiation into such processes. In pursuance of self-perception and perceiving others, I am learning to observe similarities. I believe it to be one of the paradigms of my praxis. We can talk about a soul of an individual, whether mine or of a viewer, but we can also talk about the soul of our society and see a direct connection. When I “heal” my inner man, I also “heal” his superiority of our society.

**JG: How do you depict the character of the devil contextually?**

**JM:** I see the devil as an executive power of patriarchy when adults try to adapt children to their world system. However, I started to perceive the relationship between a child and the devil in a much more comprehensive manner from various points of view through literature, and I reached the conclusion that their relationship is ambivalent. Their statuses of the victim and the perpetrator are interchangeable. We can understand it as the devil being an executive power or patriarchy and a child being the victim, meaning it is in danger, somehow whole and must be split. On the other hand, we can understand it as the devil being a wild man archetype, who is in touch with nature, sexuality, and everything suppressed. From a psychological point of view (regarding the crisis of masculinity), a boy is an immature man who regressed and acts as a boy who stagnates in this state.

The devil personifies everything forbidden which is too wild, perverted, wet, anal. It made me think about unseeable things, the displaced parts of self which manifest themselves through us or collide with our existence from the outside. It was difficult for me to accept this topic and it took me a long time before I was able to desubjectify from it. The fact that I was researching the psychological masculinity (a masculine side of every one of us) introspectively at the time alongside with conversations on the crisis of masculinity all around me may have helped me. I discovered a diploma thesis by the Austrian anthropology student Ilona Grabmaier *Masculinity in Crisis?* which describes the Krampuslauf, a parade of devils. It is an initiation ritual of boys dressed up as devils who act in an aggressive and machoistic manner which allows them to enter the world of grown-up men. It made me research the devil archetype even more thoroughly, for example, its aspect as an executive power of patriarchy which uses fear to make children obedient and assimilate into the world of adults. I realized that everybody has a similar experience with passing on our bad traits, essential parts of our personality, to a devil or something else. Still, it is important not to lose contact with these. *Fuj Tajxl!!* is a reunion with our child fears. The devil is a long-neglected shadow which acts in an infantile, mad, and sexual way. We reconnect with the devil through wild perversion.

**JG: Have you ever been under hypnosis?**

**JM:** No, I have not, but I have been interested in it for a long time and would like to fathom it, not in a sense of mastering it but researching it as a method, for example, as a certain shamanistic mindfulness. Hypnosis itself may appear manipulative, but it may not be so, too. It can be something we dive into and forget our limits, perceptions, and what defines us here and now for a moment. Such states may transform us, in my opinion.

**JG: The *Fuj Tajxl!!* video features the devil's mouth as a medium of enchantment which brings us under notional hypnosis or into altered state of consciousness...**

**JM:** What you say is true, but not necessarily. I am trying to transform hypnosis, if we will call it as such, from words or verbal suggestion into something like audio-visual choreography. Basically, I do not want to work only with the usual verbal suggestion when I say that you are supposed immerse yourself into something etc., but instead, I am aiming for certain visualised hallucinations, visual choreography, or trance. For that reason, I am interested in the audio-visual composition itself at the moment.

**JG: Do any other artists that you follow take this approach, too? It occurs to me that some artists at the end of 19th century, such as the symbolists, were able to mediate an immersion into the visualised inner self.**

**JM:** Yes, I am interested in works of Hilma af Klint who created big meditative pictures used as doors into somewhere. I try to make my gallery installations in the same manner. During the initial phase of developing *Fuj Tajxl!!* (as exhibited, for example, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague), the entire installation was thought to be a storyteller who speaks to us as we find ourselves before the face of a guardian who guides us through our inner self.

**JG: I would like to get back to the video title. You said that by using the expression “fuj tajxl” (ew yuck), an imaginary boundary or distance is created as are two worlds which are divided by a chasm, a point of nothing. How did you come up with that? Is it based on personal experience or are you alluding to a more general problem which you see as a part of conservatism or patriarchal way of perceiving the other?**

**JG: Could it be a type of self-censorship?**

**JG: I am also interested in your purely formal creative language which is connected with bold colourfulness and the use of the specific visual-haptic material moment I noticed in your videos. For example, the devil's hairs are made from the cheapest fake fur, the lips are plastic, which all creates a specific comprehensive image/perception...**

**JG: How do you see the sexual aspect which is an important part of your video?**

**JM:** This magical formula, besides others, creates and forms the devil inside us. We cut off pieces of ourselves. The Czech “fuj tajxl”, “fuj tajbl”, “fuj tajfl” sounds like the German name for the devil – der Teufel. We use this interjection of disgust as a spell to create the devil who is us. It is the distance both inside us and inside the society. I focus on this “enemy”, the shadow which we as individuals and society create naturally. I use the shadow as a theme to outline a more comprehensive picture of ourselves. I refer to it because the thought of realizing what I am when my mindfulness shows me what I am not disrupts our artificial limits and one-sided perception of reality with it. Basically, I aim for what completes us or goes beyond our self-image. I believe that one way of achieving such transcendental state is through meeting or integrating things that are not parts of our identity, whether in personal or collective dimension.

**JM:** Of course, both conscious and unconscious. We displace so much stuff every day without even realizing it. For me, the key thing is that we were somehow whole during childhood, and we began to strip away pieces of ourselves throughout our lives due to upbringing, thus creating something that is “not us”, that being our self. The “not me” becomes the shadow, materializing in the devil. For example, as a part of the Czech tradition of Saint Nicholas visiting children on the 5th of December, they are forced to pass on all their bad traits to the devil. The magic of the passing on is evident in this case.

**JM:** Both the prototype and result are always based on my ideas or visions. When I imagine them, they are usually made from an unrealistic material and either shining or moving somehow, they can be jelly or lava... I always try to work it out, put it into a specific visual framework, such as a children show, and enhance its material reality using other contexts. For example, the mouth is an evident reference to a specific pornographic or sexual context. I see a magical aspect in such contradictions, ambivalence, and when I use such sex-related materials and apply them to something like a children show. I like cheap context-related materials and mix them with something that only appears to be context-related but is actually used for completely different purposes. I enjoy connecting contradictions as I believe it is magical, a trigger, to connect the highest with the lowest. What is also important for me is collaborating with Natálie Pleváková, who is an irreplicable part of all our audio-visual works. We enjoy working together very much and we just have to start an official duo project, finally! Recently, I also started to collaborate with Anna Sedlmajerová, who is an amazing poet and wrote a screenplay in Czech, which is a first for my praxis.

**JM:** From my perspective, the sexuality is included in the shadow. It is something we try to hide in the first place. Personally, I perceive it as wildness which is typical for the devil character and displaced from our civilisation. I see it as a mean to connect contradictions as well. The exhibition is intended for our notional inner child, but I expect only real adults to come and let their memories be evoked.

**JG: Could you tell me something more about your costume and scenographic work? What is your approach concerning specific narratives of performances or plays?**

**JM:** I enjoy making people doubt their senses to give them the impression that the senses are not absolute as there is the extra sensory perception. It is all about the experience of the spatial situation. It is the idea of the psycho space (a space which is not experienced through senses but through psychological language – images). This may be why I create videos as it allows me to reconstruct the psycho space, meaning the world where physics does not work. What I have never liked about the theatre scenography were especially the technicality and utility, which may not be its conditions but still represent preconditions that define it. My work is based on certain ideas and theatre plays are based on texts which are essential for me. So, I read and circle the words which catch my interest somehow and I draw specific situations during my first reading which plays the biggest importance for me. This is how I do everything in my praxis. I use graphics and images to create storyboards which encapsulate the plot. My videos are created in a similar fashion as I use drawings to create several levels of the plot and, based on my vision, I try to materialize in a manner which may be completely contextually different from the situation contents. It is a method of theatre scenography which is too physical for my taste. I am more interested in inner experiences, which also concerns my installation. When an illusion takes place and our senses are shaken, the extra sensory perception and other space perceiving take hold.

**JG: So, your approach to costume making is similar to your approach to videomaking? Meaning you have to create it in a physical way and then make it less physical in postproduction...**

**JM:** Yes, and this is why I enjoy images which come back from the beyond-real dimensions into those real and material ones. Generally speaking, I see the virtual world or digital form as parallels to the unconscious or the psychological.

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