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How Little is Enough?

Testimony of a Pilgrim

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How Little is Enough?

Testimony of a Pilgrim

Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir

Testimony of a Pilgrim



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This book is a key component of a PhD thesis derived from the artistic research project; *How Little is Enough?* and contains the essay *Testimony of a Pilgrim* and manuscripts from the four performances that are central to the research project. The entire PhD thesis is mediated through an on-line exposition on *Research Catalogue* using mixed formats. The exposition encompasses the complete research output in three categories: *performance archive*, *research publications*, and *method development*, linked by the overarching essay that also appears in this book. The performance archive includes *No Show* 2020, *Island* 2020, *Strings* 2022, and *Pleased to Meet You* 2022. Research publications consist of the video articles “How Little is Enough? Porous & Embracing Dramaturgy for Transformative Encounters.” (JER, 2022) and “How Little is Enough? A Quest for Existential Sustainability.” (JER, 2024), together with the podcast series *Transformative Encounters* (SoundCloud, Spotify, 2023). The two methods presented in the exposition are *method* and *how-little-is-enough approach*.

For a detailed overview and in-depth investigation, please visit the Research Catalogue exposition “How Little is Enough? Sustainable Methods of Performance for Transformative Encounters”, doi.org/10.22501/rc.1414313.

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Testimony of a Pilgrim

“It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with.”

Donna Haraway

Prologue

I love soaking in water. Everywhere I reside, any places I travel to, I will seek natural or manmade baths to immerse myself in, preferably warm water where I can lie and let go. It is also where the idea for this text emerged after months of writer's block. I am situated in Malmö, my birthplace. I am lying in a bathtub in a modest residential block in Sofielund not far from where I lived as a child and had one of my first childhood memories from. We had just moved to a new neighbourhood, and I had no friends to play with. I remember sitting on a fence watching children play in the playground, but not being able to establish contact. In my loneliness, I would spend hours in the bathtub to soothe my lonely heart. Still today, I soak in water when troubled, and it helps. The act of letting the mind go allows the body to do the thinking, and new openings will emerge. This time in the water, made me realise that my PhD project is in fact a pilgrimage which begins with that little girl in the water, her longing for connection and her existential resilience.

*This is a story about an adventurous child
who often moved to new places.
She repeatedly had to adapt to unknown neighbourhoods
and find new friends.
She developed a skill of
looking, listening, and adjusting to new environments.
She came from an island where everyone and everything was understood through
stories.
That is how she understood the world.
She was curious about people, places, and things and from a secure distance she
would
create stories about them.*

*When she grew up to become a performance maker,
she would create performances that held space for people to bring their own stories
into an
encounter with other stories
to better understand themselves
and how to proceed
in a changing
world.*

The Quest

The pilgrimage started formally in January 2020 when I enrolled as a PhD candidate at Malmö Theatre Academy as a part of a transdisciplinary graduate school at Lund University. My urge was to find a meaningful way to be an artist in a distressed world. I started the journey with the following mission statement:

In my research project, *How Little is Enough?* I strive to produce, through minimal means, transformative experiences that counteract consumerism and a society of hyper mediation. The project is concerned with values such as existential sustainability, personal responsibility and appreciation of personal experiences, vulnerability, tenderness, uncertainty, genuine exchange, and imperfection. The intention is to stimulate the important discourse on sustainability within performing arts practices and open new perspectives to the role the arts have in a possible solution to current global challenges. The research furthermore aims at bringing my practice into conversation with sustainable development with a particular focus on personal values, human needs, and quality of life. The central research question is:

How to construct a sustainable method of performance for transformative encounters?

I ventured out to explore ways of responding to a global crisis with my performance practice within a context of 16 other PhD projects from all the faculties of the University under the name *Agenda 2030 Graduate School*. We were 17 PhD candidates, like the 17 goals of Agenda 2030, UN's sustainable development goals. My project, *How Little is Enough? Sustainable Methods of Performance for Transformative Encounters* was at the time, the only artistic research within the graduate school that hosted projects from medicine, political science, social studies, philosophy, law, business, and ethnography among others. During my journey, the graduate school grew, eventually taking on more PhD fellows and a group of

post-doctoral researchers. These fellow researchers were my companions during my pilgrimage, together with my peers at the Theatre Academy, six other performing artists dealing with listening, caring, co-creating, democracy, postcolonial performance, truth, frictions, and conflicts through different performative formats. All these fellow travellers were my influencers, they inspired me, expanded my context, and helped me read my compass.

Luggage

To be a pilgrim entails embarking on a voyage, into an unfamiliar or foreign territory, with the intention of discovering fresh perspectives and deeper insights about oneself, others, nature, or a greater purpose. Such a journey has the potential to instigate a profound personal metamorphosis, and upon completion, the pilgrim reintegrates into their everyday existence with the acquired wisdom and transformations (Morgan, 2010).

Before I start telling the story of my research pilgrimage, it is essential that I acknowledge the baggage I brought with me – comprising personal experiences, worldview, and social status. As I will later explain, this baggage turns out to lie at the core of my discoveries.

My personal pilgrimage had started many years prior after experiencing life changing events, professionally and personally. As a person, I had become more and more critical of the world order that had moulded me as a person and my way of acting in the world. I was in a leadership role at the Iceland University of the Arts (IUA), and I started questioning my ways of being a leader and a pedagogue in a higher education institution, of being an artist, of being a parent to adult children, and a life partner to my husband. I exposed my privileges to myself and began to study how I could be a servant to my surroundings, and how I could deepen my listening to the needs of things and beings around me. First, I needed to take a good look at myself, finding out who that little girl in the bathtub had become.

What I saw was a privileged white, educated, middle class woman. A daughter of a medical doctor and a librarian, one of six siblings that all had university degrees in different fields: in the arts, medicine, and economy.

I was brought up in a patriarchal society but strongly influenced by the feminist movement of the eighties in Iceland. In my childhood home, I grappled with conflicting influences from both patriarchy and second-wave feminism. My father was a prominent figure in society, but also suffered an addiction that would affect the wellbeing of the family. My mother had given up her academic studies after only two years of study, to support my fathers' studies and later to become a housewife. The growing family moved between places and countries for the sake of my father's career as plastic surgeon. My mother encouraged me to be true to my inner calling and supported me in whatever I chose to do. She was attentive to my needs, loving and positive. She saw me. My mother brought me to witness the historic moment when the people of Iceland greeted the first woman president on the morning of June 30th, 1980. I was just 14 years old at the time. The newly elected Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, a single mother, stood proudly on her balcony in a handmade woollen dress crafted by Icelandic women, embodying the perfect role model for a teenage girl – as was my mother. Not only did Iceland have a female president but also a women's political party in parliament until I was 31 years old. My mother gradually built up strength to stand on her own and after more than 30 years of marriage my parents separated. At the age of 60 she graduated from university for the second time, now as a librarian, a job that she would hold until the end of her working career, just before she vanished into the black hole of Alzheimer.

When my wakeup call came, I was a mother of three grown children, with a husband I'd been married to for more than 20 years. Before pursuing my artistic education, I had gone on a spiritual journey that culminated in a BA degree in theology. I had worked as a performer, director, writer, dramaturg, artistic leader,

and a lecturer. For more than half of my professional life I held secure jobs and leadership-roles in different professional contexts. I had worked as a performance maker both in institutions and as a freelancer caught up in a production cycle, constantly making work for a market in a field that was driven by the laws of commerce, dependent on expectation and demand from paying customers. I was living a lifestyle of the privileged, consuming, and doing my share to contribute to making the world go on. I had properties in Reykjavik, and an electric car, traveling the world for work and pleasure. Professionally, I had access to cultural and social contexts in Iceland and had built a good network in the Nordic and Baltic countries that presented further professional opportunities. The shift inside me happened gradually as I grew increasingly discontent with the neoliberal politics of education and culture.

Within education, I noticed how the students were shopping for brands when choosing their education and how universities catered to that market. During a nine-year period, as dean of the department of performing arts at the IUA, I witnessed a development where even the language we were using took on more and more the terminology of business. Our education became a commodity, and our students our paying customers (until 2024 arts students had to pay a high tuition fee in Iceland) who sometimes refused to take responsibility for their own education. I didn't like the lack of diversity in my surroundings, in terms of people and ideas, and how decisions were made, but maybe the biggest dissatisfaction was how easy it was for me to navigate this patriarchal structure. The two conflicting value systems of my parents lingered in the fabric of my body, like a dual energy that forces itself into the operation of the mind and body, taking turns to lead. The hierarchical structure of the patriarchy was sure to hold, paving my way to power and respect. Until it came falling down.

The shift started with a crash landing in my marriage, followed by the death of my father. The structures I had leaned into collapsed, giving me the choice to persist,

adapt or transform, the three variations of resilience (Haider & Cleaver 2023). I went willingly towards transformation.

Like in kintsugi, the ancient Japanese art of repairing broken ceramics with gold, my husband and I renewed the spark in our relationship by gluing the broken bond between us with what constituted gold to us: attentive care, mindful presence, and sincere commitment to a life together. We submitted to a renewed foundation with the golden cracks as a reminder of the precarious nature of life.

With my father, I buried my ego, taking on new worldviews with changed behaviours and a mindset inspired by Buddhist teachings.

I was looking for a new meaning to overcome my challenges and through kintsugi I found the concept of wabi sabi, a Japanese concept that opened my eyes to a new understanding of the world. It is both an aesthetic and a worldview that celebrates impermanence and looks for beauty in the imperfect. It values the old, the withered, the rusted, things with history and appreciates their *suchness* of existence, the way things are (Koren, 1994, Suzuki, 2011). I saw everything in life as impermanent and the self as a collection of different things and attributes interconnected to their surroundings. I was deeply critical of the capitalist society, observing how it commodifies everything and everyone, pressuring for relentless optimisation of every opportunity for growth (Rosa 2022). I felt the energy of consumption pumping life-force through my veins like a drug, and I repeatedly tried to resist its powerful pull.

Early on in my career, I sought to liberate myself from the commercial aspects of theatre. In Reykjavík, I founded a theatre collective named *The Professional Amateurs*, dedicated to creating performances free of charge for the public without relying on financial resources. Our currency was time; we borrowed and recycled materials, accepting only artist grants to buy our own time. By abstaining from money, we fundamentally transformed our landscape for theatre-making,

reshaping every aspect of the creative process. This shift not only inspired the development of sustainable methods in theatre-making but also became the cornerstone of my research, embodied in the how-little-is-enough approach.

During the healing phase of my marriage, I collaborated with *The Professional Amateurs* to create a participatory performance centred around the theme of love, that was called *Eternal Piece on Love and Lovelessness*. Drawing inspiration from letters exchanged between lovers at various stages of relationships, we encouraged guests to share their personal experiences of love and heartache. I integrated children into the performance to facilitate dialogues with the audience, recognising their potential to evoke moments of tenderness and emotional connection. The performance contained ritualistic elements, with guests reporting a sense of catharsis during the experience. This was my first major participatory performance and the first time I had used real life experiences in my work. The actors were in the role of facilitators, and I had stepped onto the stage and embodied the work. The experience left me with an urge to create a format where I would leave space for the guest's creative minds and where I could encounter them more directly. Since then, I have not worked with actors on stage, and my practice moved from making performances on stage for a *receiving audience* into creating site specific performative frameworks for *participating guests* to render their own stories into.

A couple of weeks after the opening night of the performance, I had yet another blow to my system. My sister died a sudden death from cancer. It was in 2015 and in a state of grief I went to Paris for a sabbatical. After staying with my husband in the city for some time, horrific terrorist attacks occurred in our neighbourhood. On the 8th of November, I went to the Bataclan music venue to enjoy a concert with Nina Hagen and only five days later this same place was turned into a slaughterhouse. Life felt very fragile, uncertain, and unsafe. My western values were under attack, values that I both stood by but also criticised. I was in an exis-

tential crisis, full of doubt, searching for meaning, feeling vulnerable but also full of love and tenderness. In this state I started making work that is the foundation for my current artistic methods. The first work after Paris, I made in Cirava, a socially deprived town in Latvia. The work was called *The Last Supper* and was a contemplative performance walk, a participatory performance dealing with existential questions, searching for the things that constitute *quality of life*. The performance took its guests on a journey between stations of contemplation, where voices from the local community would recount stories from their lives and ended at a dinner table, where guests were asked to imagine their last supper. This performance would be the genesis of the method that I am now developing in my project.

Then came the #me-too movement. When it reached Iceland, I was still a dean at IUA, and my mother had just passed away. This was the third death in the family in three years and my heart ached. In my sorrow, all my decisions were tender and loaded with meaning and purpose connected to my state of mind. Again, I was prepared to jump on board the train of transformation, now with my colleagues at the Department of Performing Arts, to make swift changes to the study culture. The #me-too movement gave me an excuse to reconsider my own leadership strategies and I sought inspiration in life coaching techniques. I undertook formal training in life coaching that would immediately bleed into the development of pedagogical approaches, assessment protocols and would serve as a general leadership tool for me. In essence, the method revolves around posing potent questions and identifying opportunities. It entails analysing what works rather than focusing on failures. The method requires deep listening on the behalf of the therapist, pedagogue or leader, and a belief in people's innate wisdom. It revolves around empowering people with agency and accountability for their own journey. The coach assists clients in articulating their existing knowledge and facilitates discovery through a structured process of questioning and visualisation. It was during a life coach session, that I decided to embark on a PhD education in

Malmö, the city where I was born. The question *How Little is Enough?* is, in terms of life coaching, a so-called *powerful question* that can generate constructive answers, opening up meaningful insights, opportunities and new paths of living.

During the structural changes at my department, the housing situation of the school was also compromised. Mould was detected in the building and the whole department needed to relocate abruptly. Everyone working in the building, students, teachers, and others were frustrated, discontent and angry at management, and I was a part of the management. I was caught up in a storm that I had no power to calm. After my personal and professional ordeal in the years before, my body and soul refused to support me and started failing. This was the point where I broke down. My privileged position made it possible for me to take a sabbatical and travel to Japan. The strong Japanese bathing culture allowed me to spend hours in geothermal water, healing both my body and my soul. The Japanese culture, with its Buddhist beliefs and aesthetics — Shinto and the connection to nature and the more-than-human, deeply affected me. While in Japan, I found a strong intergenerational connection that provided comfort after my recent experiences of loss. The culture, history, and the nature of this exotic but familiar volcanic island acted as a mirror, helping me to reflect on my own values and experiences. While in Japan, I applied for an artistic PhD at Malmö Theatre Academy, that offered me a place, starting in January 2020.

Through much privilege, opportunities, as well as challenges, falls, and resurrections, I acquired the skills and motivation to embark on a PhD pilgrimage. The values that emerged from my professional and personal experiences became the guiding light for my journey.

*All is not lost.
I feel the shift between generations
on my own skin.
Love that is transferred between people,
lingers after they have been buried.*

*It feels like I am connected to my source of motivation,
an intergenerational and interspecies affection
that points to the future.*

*The love that was handed down to me
transfers to my children.*

*I wish that they will live in a safe and just world
in peace, breathing healthy air, and drinking clean water in harmony with other
species.*

Love brings hope.

Base Camp

When I started my PhD in January 2020, I was still a dean, but eager to embark on the research journey.

As I was about to navigate structures inherently tailored for individuals like me, I grappled with the paradox of being both a product of, and a critic of, the prevailing system. I had become acutely aware of my privileges, mindful of my blind spots, and was ready to broaden my perspective and embrace transformation. Motivated by a personal call for sustainable methods of performance, I was compelled to confront my own contributions to the crisis through my lifestyle. With my backpack fully packed with questions, doubt, and self awareness I took the first steps of the pilgrimage.

I connected with my peers in Malmö Theatre Academy, and within the first month, ideas for my first two performances emerged. I met with my colleagues from Lund University's cross-disciplinary Graduate School, Agenda 2030, and was truly impressed by their different competences and expert knowledge. This encounter immediately sparked a concept for a third performance.

While in Iceland, I made agreements with the Reykjavík Art Festival to produce the first work of my research project and with the *Akureyri Theatre Company* and *A! Festival* to produce the second performance on an island off Iceland's north coast. However, my plans were altered by the arrival of Covid-19, leading to adjustments to comply with restrictions. Despite the severity of the global pandemic and its devastating consequences for many, the changes forced upon me ultimately worked to my advantage.

As the department's dean during the COVID-19 crisis, my primary focus was on seeking solutions to meet the needs of my students. Once new structures were in place, everything slowed down. The pressure of productivity lifted and for a

privileged person like me, with a secure income, surrounded by family, it was an opportunity to slow down. It was a rare moment in history where global priorities shifted from growth and profit towards human needs and safety. The skies cleared, pollution decreased, and it felt paradoxically right in its apocalyptic way. My project aimed to explore minimalistic ways of creating performances, and the pandemic provided an opportunity to test these ideas within the limitations it imposed.

Companions

During the pandemic the IUA's studios stood empty, and I sneaked into the ceramic studio to meditate through throwing on the wheel while listening to Donna Haraway's book *Staying with the trouble*. With my hands deep into the clay, I immersed in her speculative fabulation about an entangled world of beings living in a society of compost. Her description of the interspecies kinship resonated with me, and I wanted to accept her call to stay with the trouble that comes with being involved and entangled. During the involuntary separation from society during Covid-19, I tangibly felt the need for meaningful connections. Unlike many people during the social restrictions, I was fortunate to be living with my family, including the more-than-human entities that were a part of my surroundings. Haraway's claim that "we become with each other or not at all" (Haraway 2016) deeply resonated with me, in my relational existence. She talked to me about the necessity to stay present in the encounters with others not despite of but because of the complexity.

Through my throwing hours in the company of Haraway's thinking, I came to understand that the research I was embarking on was personally situated and that my research methods, topics, and findings would be highly subjective. In my artistic inquiry, I was entangled in my situation and with the diverse agents that belonged to it. Nonetheless, I would be the one to tell the story in the end. I would see things through my eyes, and I would speak with my singular human voice. I could not escape who I was, and I needed to come to terms with the forces that had shaped me.

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with;
it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with;
it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds; what worlds make stories. (Haraway, 2016, p. 12)

Haraway's call to be mindful of the origins of our knowledge and the role of my situatedness in the research has informed the navigation of my research journey. At every step, I was reminded of my existential, social, environmental, interspecies, and intergenerational entanglements, thanks to Haraway.

Apart from Haraway I have been inspired by thinkers from different schools of thought such as affect theory, new materialism, deep ecology, critical theory and ecopsychology. Early on, I was influenced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick with her writings on touch (2003), and Deleuze and Guattari with their writings on percept, affect and concept (1994). Timothy Morton and his object-oriented ontology has been a faithful companion with his perspective on the symbiotic real, the human experience of the sixth mass extinction and his thoughts on how love should replace efficiency in the response to the global crisis (2007, 2013, 2017, 2021). Being interested in aesthetics and its relation to values, I invited Yuriko Saito to *walk with me* for a while with her writings on everyday aesthetics (2007, 2017) and Jane Bennett was a great inspiration in her writings on the enchantment of the everyday (2001). bell hooks spoke to me about love and commitment (1999), Sara Ahmed on critical terms about objects of happiness (2010), and Mary Jayne Rust opened my eyes to nature's potential to heal (2020). These thinkers have been my companions in my artistic research, stimulating my thoughts. However, my focus has not been on examining or contributing to these theories. I have tried to stay close to the artmaking, speaking with my own voice from the midst of an entangled standpoint of the practicing artist.

I see my artistic role as being someone that skews the view of our everyday life, creating possible new insights to the daily rituals that make up our world. This view can be related to what Timothy Morton describes as an *aesthetic dimension of causality* where reality is framed in a certain way, so the patterns become visible, and all the objects become super real (Morton, 2013, p. 67).

The four performances that are a part of my research project, all revolve around a guest-host concept. In these performances, guests are invited to interact with their hosts in diverse settings such as homes, communities, or workplaces. The guests encounter the everyday lives of their hosts, providing a mirror to their own lives and values. With the most minimal means the experience is staged to distinguish art from life, making it a timeless affect independent of the lived experience. I find resonance with Deleuze and Guattari's expression of how artistic experience stands apart from other affective encounters. They claim that the essence of art lies in its ability to preserve, and what it preserves is a *compound of sensations* encountered through a composition: "Composition, composition is the sole definition of art. Composition is aesthetic, and what is not composed is not a work of art" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 191). The affect itself becomes the artwork, individually experienced by each guest. When I talk about affect, I am referring to the accumulation of senses, emotions, and the cognitive resonance an experience has (Schnall, nd). This notion resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's discussion on composition, while the theatre scholar Erika Fischer Lichte uses the term staging or *mise en scène*.

Fischer-Lichte (2008) states that the *mise en scène* is responsible for the performative generation of materiality, attracting the audience's attention while highlighting the act of perceiving itself. Through staging, even inconspicuous elements become remarkable and transfigured, prompting spectators to recognise their own transformation by the performance's elements. She defines *mise en scène* as a process aiming at the re-enchantment of the world and the metamorphosis of its participants (p. 189). This

process of skewing the view, similar to Lichte's notion, reveals a new perspective on reality for my guests. Through a *mise en scène*, seemingly ordinary elements within specific settings become remarkable and transfigured. My performances aim to facilitate this re-enchantment of the world, blurring the lines between art and everyday life. The work seeks to stage or highlight certain fragments of reality within specific settings, allowing art and non-art to coexist harmoniously. The staging is an invitation to view certain things through a new lens, the lens of the host; the other. I am interested in creating this awareness of affect that Lichte speaks about, and the staging brings about. In my performances I invite participants, guests, and hosts, to view everyday objects and daily routines as objects of artistic interest, or in other words, enter an aesthetic dimension that consists of the causality of their own daily actions (Morton, 2013). Morton talks about these experiences as a miracle or magical:

We live in an infinite non-totalizable reality of unique objects, a reality that is infinitely rich and playful, enchanting, anarchic despite local pockets of hierarchy, infuriating, rippling with illusion and strangeness. In this reality, objects are perfectly straightforward, with no transcendental or hidden aspects. Yet precisely because of this very fact, objects are completely weird: they hide out in the open, under the spotlight. Their very appearance is a kind of miracle. (Morton, 2013, p. 55)

Even though I might be interested in magic and miracles it is not motivated by an urge to seduce people into forgetting the seriousness of the imminent global and social crisis. On the contrary I invite the spectators to become aware of themselves in the work, remember who they are, what they strive for and why. In my work I work with real life experiences. There is a host and there is a guest, each one representing themselves and bringing their stories and values to the table. The focus of many contemporary theatre works working with real life experiences, is to shed

light on traumatic experiences, violence and social injustices addressing feelings of shame, fear, and insecurity, creating empathy towards the victimised other. This sometimes takes place through documentary or verbatim theatre, giving the protagonists agency and even a central role as performers on stage. This is a noble task and can be constructive for all involved when made with artistic rigour and tender care. I have chosen to approach lived experiences from another angle inviting the guests to look for the qualities in the everyday actions, inspired by Jane Bennet (2001), who says in her book *The Enchantment of Modern Life*: “To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday” (p. 4). Bennett argues that rehabilitating enchantment in the world and exercising the ability to experience wonder can contribute to the strengthening of ethical behaviour. Bennett describes her mission like this:

I dust off and shine up [...] the experiences of wonder and surprise that endure alongside a cynical world of business as usual, nature as manmade, and affect as the effect of commercial strategy. [...] My counter story seeks to induce an experience of the contemporary world – a world of inequity, racism, pollution, poverty, violence of all kinds – as also enchanted – not a tale of re-enchantment but one that calls attention to magical sites already here. (Bennett, 2001, p. 8)

In alignment with Bennet’s perspective, my project centres on the exploration of the positive aspects of everyday life, using Sarah Ahmed’s concept of *happy objects*. By focusing on these moments of joy and wonder, I aim to offer a counterbalance to the prevailing narratives of cynicism and disillusionment. Ahmed defines happy objects as “objects [that] become happy, as if happiness is what follows proximity to an object” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 21). Ahmed is critical towards the normative *happy objects* that can have the opposite effect and trap people in an evil cycle of trying to obtain certain things to appear happy. A circle like what Lauren Berlant describes as *cruel optimism*, when the thing you desire is actually an

obstacle to your flourishing (Berlant, 2006). The American dream turning against you. Through my work I try to unravel the personal *happy objects* and focus on what brings contentment and a sense of purpose to people's lives, aware of the destructive nature of the normative objects of happiness that both Berlant and Ahmed point out. The body of work asks its spectator what qualities they are looking for in their daily lives and what makes them belong and feel at ease with the world they live in. It is my belief that beauty exists in the lives of every being, all that is needed is just to shed light on it and cultivate it.

First Stage – *No Show /FjarVera*

I had already started to develop *No Show* during a residency at the Inter Arts Centre in Malmö, in the year 2019. There I had begun to explore the solitary do-it-yourself performance model that became the format in *No Show*. In Malmö, guests were invited into a home of a stranger and through a series of handwritten letters from the host, they were invited to perform tasks in different places in the home; to observe, to act and to contemplate. It was a model that I wanted to explore further. In *No Show* in Reykjavík, I wanted to emphasise the encounter between guest and host, and added personal letters from the hosts, describing their everyday life, providing the mirroring of values and everyday decisions. I had chosen five hosts in different neighbourhoods of Reykjavík that represented diverse social groups. As the first creative process in my artistic research, I needed to establish a research method and to map my artistic practice. Because of the pandemic, the performance period was stretched from presenting all four homes during one week to three months, giving me ample time to stay with my artistic method, make small modifications and conduct interviews with participants and guests while still working on the piece.

Artistic Toolbox

In my Letter two in the *No Show exposition* on Research Catalogue (RC) I describe my artistic method like this:

For each performance the method produces a framework that invites guests to render their own stories, emotions, values, and experiences as the core content of the performance. The framework distinguishes between three types of guest participation: action, observation, and reflection. The work is site specific and human specific and engages individuals, local communities, the more-than-humans, and other stakeholders into the creative process.

The work is concerned with personal values and how they relate to quality of life. The method produces work that functions as a vessel for narratives that participants, guests, and hosts, bring to the work. The practice is not occupied with representation as such but rather the singular presence of each participant that re-present themselves by engaging with the work. The aesthetic and dramaturgical approach is porous, dependent on what the spectator brings to the performance and what she sees as part of it. The work provides the spectator with "a map to navigate" (the dramaturgy, the route) and a "backdrop" (the site) to bring out their stories and to test their own ideas and values. At the foreground for the artistic method is question making. The work strives to produce actual questions that are mediated through the performance and transcend the layers of the experience. (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2014 (2021a))

With this method in my bag, I started my research. Through the journey I would gradually collect insights into the method's affordances and explore its effects on agents involved, guests and hosts.

Interviews and Ethical Considerations

When starting my inquiry, I was eager to delve into my new role as an artistic researcher and test out qualitative research methods to better understand the effect of my method as an instrument for change. During the process of making and presenting *No Show* I conducted semi structured interviews with participants, both guests and hosts, from which I extracted insights and details that would inform my thinking and doing.

Through the interviews with the guests, I came to understand the potential of my instrument, that was comprised of a porous performance structure, personal encounters, and an ethical rigour that manifested in the attention to details of care, in the collaboration, and in the accommodation of the guests.

I received indications that the work, with its combination of tender care for the guests, the reflection of the indirect encounter between guest and host, and the guests' interaction with the environment, offered a highly personal experience and thus presented a potential for transformation. The porous structure provided guests with space to think, reflect, and weave their own stories into the performance. The work is unique for each person, and I had limited control of what was brought into the porous structure of my creation as this passage from Letter Five in *No Show* exposition on RC, bears witness:

These testimonies manifest to me the complexity of a single experience and how potent a porous dramaturgy can be, where you as an artist balance between control and loss of control in an artwork instigated by you and yet runs off on a course of its own, not only in one direction, but multiple directions, as many as the persons encountering it. (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021a))

Some of the most important findings during this first process concerns the ethical challenges and ways to deal with the precarious power structures that present themselves in participatory work dealing with everyday experts and lived experiences. In the *No Show* exposition, I describe a relationship I had with one of my hosts in one of the works, a person with Cerebral palsy living in a socially deprived situation. Our relationship was marked by unevenness in terms of physical abilities, social and economic standing, as well as status and privileges. During the process of creating the work, we both had to stay with the trouble in a complex power relation trying to negotiate a place to meet midways and co-create the performance each on our own terms. Despite the inherent hierarchy of power in this situation, we both needed each other. Her life was partly entrusted to me, just as my life was partly in her hands. We became each other's agents, using the work as a means to engage in and interfere with each other's struggles. In this delicate negotiation, balance is precarious, and trust becomes essential (Knúts Önnudóttir, Letter III, 2024 (2021a)).

This precarious balance is to be found in all the works, manifesting as a sensation of entanglement and inter-dependency.

In the fifth letter of the *No Show* exposition, I discuss various ways in which guests might mirror or relate to the content of the piece. This could involve viewing the host as a role model, seeing oneself as the subject, identifying with the host, or having an abstract or aesthetic experience akin to connecting with nature. I also highlight the significance of the tactile, embodied, and immersive elements of the experience as a crucial component of the transformational trigger. However, what I particularly emphasised is the level of care and trust that guests discovered, enabling them to surrender to the experience and become open to vulnerable aspects of themselves.

I mention three aspects that I find pivotal to my practice of creating potentially transformative experiences: Firstly, establishing a safe and nurturing environment that encourages openness; secondly, building a personal connection with the guest, truly seeing, and caring for them with genuine affection; and thirdly, sharing something personal, embracing imperfection (Knúts-Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021a)). The feedback I got through the interviews were both affirming but also pointed towards areas of development. In Letter five of the *No Show* exposition, I say:

Based on my findings, I now have an urge to create an opportunity for the guests to revisit the work and to disseminate the affect in a proximity to the experience. I intend to develop new formats for having genuine communication in the work and I will also take seriously the guest's need for being safe and being seen. (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021a))

The participants' sense of safety and integrity was crucial to me, and it became evident that I wanted to emphasise a safe space in the work for its participants, both guests and hosts. Ethical considerations manifested in different ways and during this initial artistic project within my research, I felt ethically challenged

on many levels. Firstly, I was collaborating with non-professionals and secondly, I was collecting personal testimonies as research data. I did the utmost to be clear about my motivations, expectations and responsibilities and had written consent from my collaborators and interlocutors. But the challenges lay in decoding the hierarchies that were embedded in the social fabric. That meant understanding my own position, as a known figure in the Icelandic performing arts scene, and a person of power, both when collaborating with hosts but also when conducting interviews with guests. In Letter Three of the *No Show* exposition, I delve into the ethical aspects of my artistic research (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021a)), and as I conclude in my exposition, the major ethical challenge may lie in my desire to instigate transformation in my guests. This is a question that I still have not fully answered for myself.

Research Toolbox

Early on, I identified my research approach as action-based research (Jokela, Hiltunen & Härkönen, 2015), using the method's cycle of actions as a guiding structure. However, I eventually moved away from conventional methodological definitions. I experimented with adapting post-qualitative methods (St. Pierre, 1997) and weak theory approach (Sedgwick 2002, Stewart, 2008), but finally I settled on the term artistic research *me-thod*. This approach, akin to my artistic practice, is a pluralistic methodology. I instinctively apply mixed methods of thinking, making, and mediating, drawing inspiration from various research methods within humanities and sociology. Still, my research follows the structure of action-based research, alternating between phases of making, analysing, and developing, then repeating the cycle in a spiral, gradually adding to the situated knowledge from my artistic practice. I analysed the process of *No Show* and developed a strategy for the next work, focusing on areas within my artistic method that required further attention or were underrepresented. The development of the second artwork within the research, titled *Island*, overlapped with *No Show*, with elements flowing directly and organically into the creation of *Island*. My primary goal was to establish a frame-

work for dialogue within the performance, shifting from a guest's solitary mission to creating a structure for a collective journey. The performance setup in Hrísey, a place categorised as a *fragile settlement*, provided an opportunity to directly address questions of ecology and sustainability. In my research questions, I was deeply concerned with sustainability. I wanted to tackle issues such as empowerment, equality, inclusivity, well-being, existential sustainability, consumption patterns, and finding ways to reduce the carbon footprint of performance making. Hrísey, the island, functioned as a symbolic representation of Earth, shedding light on the existential, environmental, social, and economic challenges it confronts.

Sustainability

Imagine a world in which we consider the impact of our decisions on the earth and on the seventh generation ahead, in which humans no longer see themselves as the superior species, in which all aspects of the web of life are truly respected as equals, in which rationality and intellect can sit beside our animal selves (feeling, intuition, and our bodily senses) as equal partners in our guidance. Imagine a world in which humans' express gratitude toward all who support us in every breath. Imagine. (Rust, 2014, p. 48)

Thus Mary-Jayne Rust, an ecopsychologist, starts her article titled "Daring to Dream?" where she offers strategies for society to pave way for necessary changes to behaviour and mindset in times of ecological urgency. The strategies are to enable humans to move towards an ecocentric value system away from an individualistic consumer driven anthropocentric culture that is destroying the planet. As many other thinkers Rust bases her ideas on the fact that humans are one with nature, not separated from it. Nature is as much inside of you in the micro-organisms that make up your body as something that is *out there*. Many thinkers of deep ecology and related strands of thought are critical towards the romantic idea of nature as something to admire or the consumerist notion of nature being a product to entertain you or help you to wind down, or that it needs to be rescued (Rust, 2014; Morton, 2007).

These thinkers are critical of the concept of nature and even refrain from using the word. Rust speaks of *other than human world* whereas philosopher Timothy Morton refers to the natural world as *symbiotic real*; a wider ecosphere, non-hierarchical solidarity of humans with nonhumans (Morton, 2017). In my writings I use *more-than-human* about non-human entities: other beings, things, landscapes, and plants. However, I am not opposed to using the word *nature*. When contemplating nature as a phenomenon of the physical world, it is crucial to recognise the human body as part of nature. As my supervisor, environmental philosopher Guðbjörg R. Jóhannesdóttir, along with philosopher Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, argue in their article “Reclaiming Nature, by Reclaiming the Body”:

If we really want to get beyond understanding nature as something outside of us, and truly sense and understand ourselves as natural or environmental beings who are a part of the earth’s ecosystem, we should direct our attention to how nature as the biotic, inner/outer environment is experienced and sensed in and through our bodies. (Jóhannesdóttir & Þorgeirsdóttir, 2016, p.39)

Both environmental philosophy and ecopsychology present ecological approaches to transforming people’s worldviews, behaviours, and, most significantly, their well-being. As individuals’ consumption patterns and economic growth policies continue to negatively impact the planet, the resulting climate change and looming global environmental crisis also affect people on a psychological and emotional level. For those who take the global call for change seriously, such as the young activists marching with Greta Thunberg, the struggle is fuelled not only by hope but also by more destructive emotions like fear and anxiety. This form of eco-anxiety is well recognised by psychologists and, at its worst, can be paralysing.

Naturally we are seeing a rise in what many call ‘eco-anxiety’ or ‘eco-grief’ as the situation worsens. These are not pathological symptoms to be treated by

therapy, rather, they are healthy responses to a world in crisis which need to be shared and held in community. (Rust, 2020, p. 7)

There are also other common psychological reactions to the imminent environmental situation recognised by psychologists, such as defence and denial. Joseph Dodds uses Freud's kettle logic to explain how many react to the crisis (Dodds, 2011, pp. 41-43).

The logic goes like this:

1. It's not happening.
2. It's not my fault.
3. There's nothing we can do about it (so I can just get on with my life as usual).

Dodds explains:

Psychoanalysts have long known that defences need to be tackled carefully. Perhaps green campaigns, as worthy and as truthful as they may be, might at times have caused more harm than good, representing a 'sledgehammer' approach to tackling eco-defences. (Dodds, 2011, p. 41)

While I am not as sceptical as Dodd when it comes to green campaigns, I do lean against strategies that are less direct and do not risk evoking these negative emotions. Fear is not existentially sustainable for human beings. In the work I make I try to nurture hope and create positive attitudes towards the future, through connection and affection. Rust speaks about resistance as an implicit part of change (Rust, 2014, p. 49) and points out, that an awareness of the risks involved when instigating changes is vital. As an artist I can see an opportunity to contribute with positive images or imagination for the future that counteract these paralysing tendencies. Through my art practice I am looking for the right conditions for transformation in the context of performance, asking what moves people profoundly and what

drives them to action. These questions have naturally led me to the field of deep ecology and ecopsychology that study and nurture biophilia and mindfulness and appreciate felt emotions.

When we do allow ourselves to feel, we might find a whole range of strong emotions, such as anxiety and fear about the future, despair at our lack of political will, grief for so many losses, guilt that we continue to be part of the cause and more. While therapy has helped us to become more emotionally literate interpersonally, we are still a very ‘stiff upper lip’ culture in relation to the bigger picture; when we block out our feelings, we lose touch with the urgency of crisis. (Rust, 2008, p. 160)

Within my practice I want people to get in touch with the urgency of the imminent crisis from relating to constructive feelings that do not risk being blocked out. For me it has been a mission to find a constructive and positive way of creating an awareness of humans’ place in the web of life and an understanding of what makes us really feel good and creates a sense of belonging and harmony with our environment.

The goal is not to preach, shame, or correct, but rather to nurture hope by focusing on what is worth living for and fostering an imagination for a brighter future. The strategies that Rust presents in “Daring to Dream?” involve communication and care. She is adamant about creating a language for a new worldview that does not separate man from nature and thus enables the mainstream population to envision positive images for the future, to bring ecopsychology into the theory and practice of professional care. The methods of ecopsychology in essence involves nurturing people’s connection to the more-than-human world by restoring the bond with their natural environment. As a Jungian psychologist, Rust relies on images, myths, and imagination. One of the myths Rust describes is the “myth of

progress”, a belief in the progress of technology and knowledge that will solve the problems for us. But in fact, technology alone will not do the trick; urgent action of changed behaviour is needed. Yes, we should dare to dream, and we should train our imagination to create positive images for the future. But we urgently need a hook, a valid reason for wanting to change the perspectives for future generations.

The Icelandic novelist and activist Andri Snær Magnason makes a sound argument in his book *On time and water* for how we can fuel the desire to make the future our business (2020). He describes a situation where he sits with his 10-year-old daughter in his 94-year-old grandmother’s kitchen, born 1924. They bear the same name, Hulda, and there is a strong bond between them. He asks his daughter to calculate what year she herself will be 94 years old, and after calculating she says 2102. Then he asks her to imagine that she sits in her kitchen with her 10-year-old great granddaughter and asks her then to calculate when her great granddaughter will be 94.

The answer is 2186.

I've one more puzzle. How long is it from 1924 to 2186?' Hulda does the maths. 'Is it 262 years?' 'Imagine that. Two hundred and sixty-two years. That's the length of time you connect across. You'll know the people who span this time. Your time is the time of the people you know and love, the time that moulds you. And your time is also the time of the people you will know and love. The time that you will shape. You can touch 262 years with your bare hands. Your grandma taught you; you will teach your great-granddaughter. You can have a direct impact on the future, right up to the year 2186.' 'Up to 2186!'

(Magnason, 2020, pp. 16 - 17)

What better motivation for change than love and genuine connection to another being?

Second Stage – *Island / Eyja*

When creating an approach to the second work of the research, in Hrísey, based on my findings from *No Show*, the time spectrum of love that Magnason presents in his text was key. Another key element was the dialogue. In a video essay in the Island exposition on RC, I describe the approach like this:

My findings revealed the transformative qualities of the genuine exchange in the host-guest relationship, the enriching impact of the tactile, embodied, and immersive experience and how a caring atmosphere creates trust and thus possible change. What is added in *Eyja* is the continuous verbal and sensory communication that the dramaturgy brings forth.

(Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021b))

Together with Gréta Kristín Ómarsdóttir, a colleague from Hrísey, I created a work about what it means to belong, and examined existential, social, and ecological questions. The work explores what belonging entails and how something can belong to something else. We both had personal attachments to Hrísey and were concerned with the future of the habitants of the island, that was categorised as being a *fragile settlement* by the Icelandic Regional Development Institute, a term used for towns and villages where future livelihood of the human population was at risk. We invited the children of Hrísey, as the future of the island, to take a central place in the performance, guiding guests through a participatory journey around the island, through landscapes, cultural landmarks and into private homes.

The performance started on the ferry to the island where guests were provided with passports that would be stamped at different stations on the island. The guests would then travel in small groups through the different stations, with a child as their guide. The child perspective and energy were the glue that held the

work together as they played a central role in the performance. During the experience the guests were invited to engage in a dialogue with hosts and other guests to discuss, imagine, and contemplate various tasks.

The affect of the human encounters and the dialogue was profound and manifested in different ways in the work. Through the hosts I heard many accounts of moving situations. One of the hosts recounted a touching interaction with a guest who was an immigrant with a few years of residency in Iceland. They shared stories about their respective challenges, and the guest was deeply moved by gratitude towards his own community, eventually shedding tears in the host's kitchen. Reflecting on the encounter, the host admitted feeling surprised by the emotional impact it had on her (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021b)).

I agree with Magnason when he highlights, in his story about his daughter and grandmother, that intergenerational love is a perfect guide towards sustainable behaviours. In *Island*, the children intuitively led us to these thoughts. They were the heart and soul of the project, contributing to the affective atmosphere of the performance while also likely being the most profoundly affected. The children's empowerment was tangible, as indicated by a teacher who observed a notable increase in the self-esteem of the youngsters, prompting them to take an action against the municipality regarding their rights. She noticed a significant shift in their attitude, which she attributed to the project's influence (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021b)).

Porous and Embracing Dramaturgy

Doing two performances back-to-back produced a lot of research data in a short time. One of the key findings was identifying the dramaturgical tool I was using. I took departure in Kathy Turner's term *porous dramaturgy* (2014). Porous dramaturgy points to how I invite content from participating agents to sieve through the pores of a performance structure that is mainly based on question making, mindful observation and embodied engagement. In her writing, Turner describes

the porous structure as embracing (Turner, 2014), whereas I split the term into two elements, the porous and the embrace. Where the porous refers to a structure that provides a space for guests to render their stories, ideas, and values into the performance. Whereas embrace refers to the *holding environment* (Winnicott, 1953) the work seeks to create, in terms of care and attention to the needs that the invited guests might have. The work aims at holding space for its guests to contemplate their own personal experience of the world, their stories, values, and worldviews. The porous and embracing dramaturgy became one of the key concepts that I decided to unfold and explore in relation to my research questions. As I elaborated in my video article “How Little is Enough? Porous & Embracing Dramaturgy for Transformative Encounters.” (Knúts-Önnudóttir, 2022), this approach to performance structure serves as a response to my research question, providing a framework for facilitating transformative encounters.

Relation Specific Performance

When disseminating my first two works, initially through online expositions and later by mediating some findings in the peer-reviewed journal for video articles, *Journal of Embodied Research*, I found myself using terms that I eventually outgrew. Changing my vocabulary was essential. Some terms no longer served me; I couldn't align with their overall meaning and context. It was crucial to experiment with words, discover the right language, and speak with my own voice.

Two terms I previously used to describe my method were *site-specific performance* and *human specific performance*. These terms emphasised the role of the hosting agent and their environment. Site-specificity highlighted the contribution of the environment (Pearson, 2010), while the human-specificity coined by Nullo Facchini, former artistic director of *Cantabile 2* in Denmark, referred to performances tailored to each participant's unique experience (Facchini, 2020). Both terms captured crucial aspects of my performances and their relationality to the guest's self and surroundings. However, when I encountered the term

relation-specific performance introduced to me by installation artist, Charlotte Grum, it resonated deeply with me. In an unpublished essay (Grum, 2012), Grum describes her own performance as relation specific. While Grum didn't provide a comprehensive explanation, she used the term to describe a performance that centres around individual experiences and their connections to the performance site and objects, encompassing all associated elements. As I interpret it through my own work, relation-specific performance unfolds in the interplay between the guest and the various agents present during the performance. It transcends both the site and the individual, humans, and the more-than-human. Relation-specific performance narrows the gaze to the individual guest's experience and acknowledges the different types of interactions they may have during a performative experience. All theatrical experiences have a degree of relation-specificity, but in my performances, it is the relationships that are forged that define the work. In my overall dissemination, I have decided not to extensively elaborate on the term *relation-specific performance*. Instead, I have chosen to explore different aspects of relationality present in my work using the term *performative encounter*. I will address this later in the text, particularly when examining my final performance within the research. *Relation-specific performance* truly deserves its own dedicated artistic research, a topic that will not be fully explored within this context.

Me-thod

When analysing the creation process of *Island*, and looking at my artistic methods, I came to recognise the inherent subjectivity present in all aspects of my work, whether as an artist or a researcher.

This is where my baggage became significantly important, and I took all my objects out of my backpack to understand how they were at play in my work.

My methods are a manifestation of who I am, and what skills and insights I have gathered in my life. They reflect my education, background, experiences, and

personal preferences. Being a theologian, I am interested in existential questions. As a life coach, I am using mindful observational practice and powerful questions as an artistic tool. The focus on fragile and broken subjects and my interest in using elements from wabi sabi and kintsugi, belong to my experiences of loss and of the healing period that I spent in Japan. Even the little girl in the bathtub is present in my practice with her needs for relations and meaning. My mother's example of care became my ethical compass when creating the *holding environment* that I had identified as being important to my practice. The urge to remove myself from the work and create a platform for others to share and create, is a result of the structural changes I undertook, from a patriarchal worldview to more feminist methods of caring, listening, and sharing. The sustainability questions, and the reduced production are directly related to my critique of consumerism and of how I imagined the future of my own children, now being the oldest generation alive in my lineage. Paradoxically, when wanting to remove myself from my works, I became the work. I started to call my method, *ME-THOD*, reflecting this fact. In Greek the word μέθοδος, *methodos*, means pursuit of knowledge, *meta* meaning in pursuit of and *hodos* that means a way. I like to understand my artistic methods as *my-way*, *me-thod*. I am creating performances from my situated experiences, knowledge and skillsets that reside in my body and in my person. I cannot claim that I am unique, but I can claim to have a unique view from inside this entangled situation of the practicing artist from where I can mediate what I see, feel, and think. It is not out of self-interest that I make my claim, I am rather pointing out that this is the case for all artists, and researchers.

After accepting my subjectivity as a researcher, I made an important decision. I felt an urge to articulate my motivations for doing the research and clarify to whom I was addressing it. After being involved in academia for two decades, and being a dean of a department when I started my pilgrimage, the professional needs of my colleagues, the role of the arts in society and the future of performance were im-

printed in my professional DNA. During my time as a dean, Iceland University of the Arts was establishing an understanding of artistic research, and I found it hard to convince my colleagues in the field of theatre and performance, of the benefits of doing artistic research. It is to these Icelandic colleagues and peers that I address my research. To engage with these colleagues effectively, I needed to communicate using my own voice rather than conforming to conventional academic methods of theorising and problematising. My research path was designed to develop sustainable artistic methods for transformative encounters and to articulate findings and experiences to performance makers and researchers to further explore, recycle and redefine. My criticality should manifest in detailed investigation of openings, on what works. I wanted to pay attention to qualities and not focus on finding flaws. I insisted on speaking with my own voice, a porous voice that was affected by things I loved and thoughts that moved me. I have used varied mediation formats, allowing the content to influence the format. When disseminating *No Show*, a performance using letters, I disseminate the work through letters. When disseminating *performative encounters*, I do it through a podcast series based on performative encounters with my peers. This cappa text is in the form of a testimony, allowing me to bring you on the transformative journey with me.

Through my supervisor, philosopher Guðbjörg R. Jóhannesdóttir, I was introduced to the concept of *embodied critical thinking* (Schoeller, Thorgeirsdóttir, & Walkerden, 2024). Together, we utilised *Thinking at the Edge*, a method developed by Eugene T. Gendlin (Schoeller, 2023; Gendlin, 2004).

This method recognises the accumulation of knowledge stored in the body and aims to systematically release and use this knowledge. It involves a series of processing sessions between two or more individuals, employing various sharing, listening, and mirroring techniques. These sessions facilitate the development of new language, images, theories, and ideas. The participants tap into their felt sense, containing

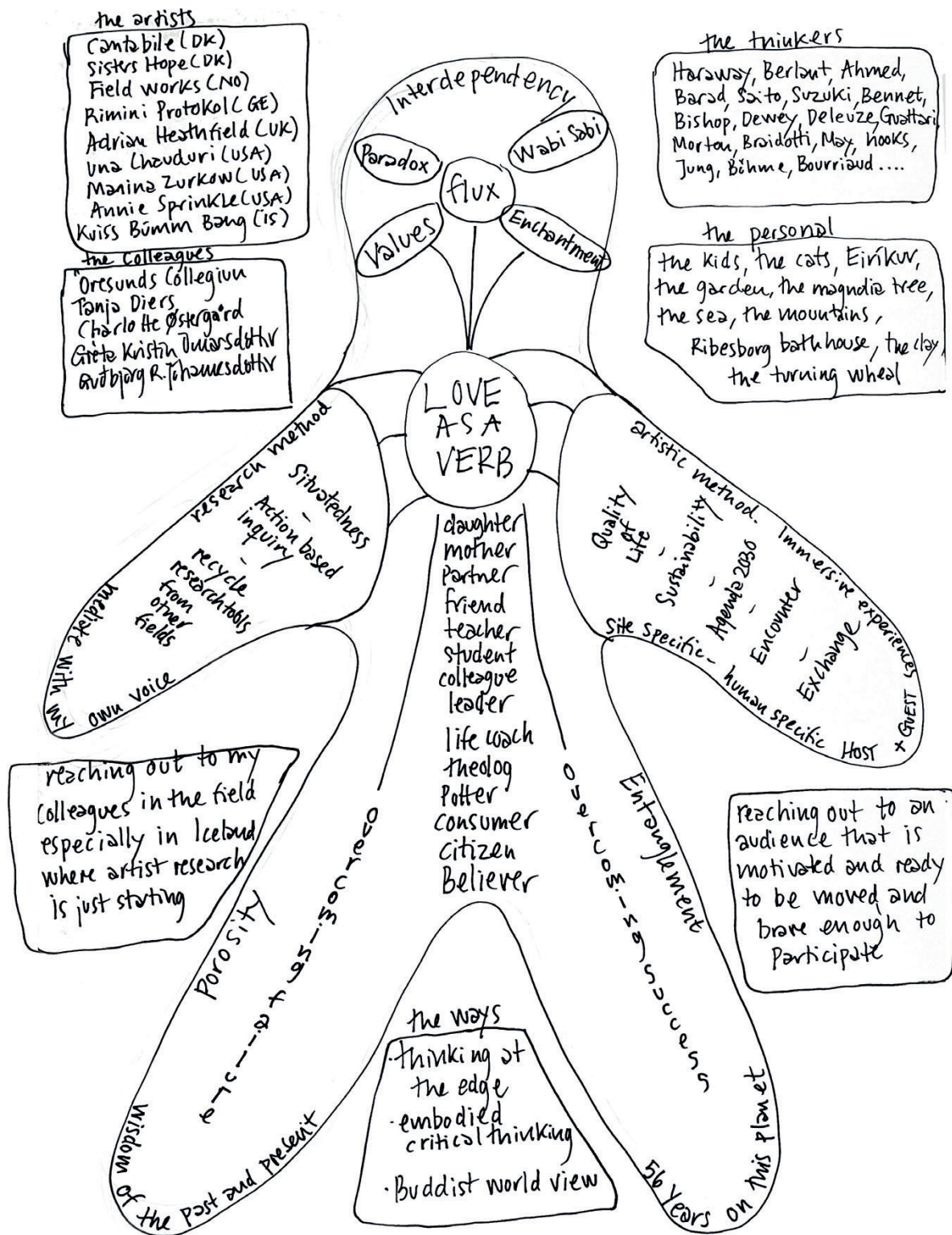
knowledge that is situated in the body, and move the thinking from the rational mind to include the body. These practical exercises have contributed to the development of my research methods and my understanding of my embodied knowledge.

My immediate surroundings also affected my thinking and decision-making; my husband, children, research colleagues, extended family and friends, the artists I was inspired by, the thinkers I was reading, and not least my peers in Iceland, the people I wanted to address my research to. I was heavily entangled in my subjectivity, and I saw value in it. Rather than resisting the affect it made on me, I went along with it and started to monitor its progress.

Me-thod is a pluralistic artistic and research methodology rooted in my personal and professional background and skill set, used with intuition, and guided by embodied criticality. This approach differs from the rational and fiercely critical methods often found in scholarly fields. The pluralistic approach facilitates cross fertilisation between different fields and creates a more entangled outlook on knowledge. In *me-thod*, objectivity does not exist; it is based on subjectivity, which I strive to be transparent about.

To help me understand my entangled method I drew a picture of how I saw myself and my environment.

THE ARTIST RESEARCHER AS AN ISLAND



The drawing was made in connection to my halfway seminar in December 2022.

Fellow Pilgrims

I situate myself amongst a growing number of performing artists who are occupied with sustainable development, green strategies and the relation to earth and the environment. I have been inspired by many likeminded artists and thinkers like Una Chaudhuri and Marina Zurkow (The Dear Climate Project, n.d.) and Annie Sprinkle (The Ecosexuals, n.d.); three American women that focus on imagination, creation, and humour in their artistic response to the global crisis. In the Øresund region, where I am based, there are artists and collectives that are dealing with the same questions in similar ways as myself. These are groups that are either concerned with the future of the planet or have developed performative strategies to invite their guests to co-create their experiences. What they have in common is that they are artist researchers who are dedicated to an inquiry into the affordances of theatre and performance, especially the transformative power of participatory performative experiences.

The Copenhagen-based cross-disciplinary performance group, *hello!earth*, stands as a pioneering force in Scandinavia, particularly in the realm of developing strategies for participatory and immersive performances and fostering nature interconnectedness. Known for their innovative approach, they have devised techniques to engage participants as co-creators in immersive durational performances, participatory walks, and explorations of urban spaces and natural environments. Their repertoire includes the creation of site-specific installations and interventions, alongside ongoing investigations into various formats for participation. Collaborating with a diverse selection of partners, ranging from professional artists to biologists, journalists, philosophers, social scientists, and everyday experts, *hello!earth* has cultivated an approach they term *social sensitive spaces*. Through their work, they explore the qualities and potentials of collectives and collective action while delving into themes related to post-capitalist living (*hello!earth*, n.d.).

Another Copenhagen based performance project, *Sisters Hope* led by artist researcher Gry Worre Hallberg, is exploring the poetic dimension as a strategy to create different futures for humans to inhabit a sensuous society. They look at their practice as an “intersection of immersion, intervention, activism, research, and pedagogy” (Sisters Hope, n.d.). The collective invites their guests to inhabit their work for a longer duration; to eat and sleep and do things together within the staged settings. In her recent PhD, *Carving the path towards a sustainable future through aesthetic inhabitation stimulating ecologic connectedness*, Hallberg concludes that establishing a meaningful and sensual relationship with one’s environment leads to greater sustainability (Hallberg, 2021).

Cantabile 2 in Vordingborg, Denmark, have been developing their participatory practice since 2007 and have created a term for their performance approach, *human-specific performance*. Human specific performance invites an audience to render their own ideas, stories and experiences to a format that is designed to give room for personalised performative experience. Human specific performance relies on a personal engagement and is based on a series of encounters between the participants: guests, hosts, and artists. The work is often immersive and non-fictional, and the dramaturgy is based on ritual- or game-based structures (Cantabile2, n.d.).

These three companies in my local area are all actively developing strategies to engage their audiences by creating spaces where guests can transform their stories, ideas, and worldviews into a performative platform for reflection and contemplation. Their approaches resonate closely with my own artistic practice, providing a valuable professional mirror that I deeply appreciate. While they are not the only artists or collectives exploring these themes and strategies, they exemplify a growing trend among artists and a shared need within the artistic community. These initiatives highlight the increasing importance of creating immersive and participatory experiences that go beyond traditional forms of art consumption, encouraging active engagement and dialogue with the audience.

Third Stage – *Strings*

The inception of my third project took place during my initial meeting with colleagues at the Agenda 2030 Graduate school in January 2020. Following a weekend at a bathing resort in the countryside of Scania, where I immersed myself in water with my peers while discussing their projects and aspirations, I felt compelled to create a work about and with them.

Intrigued by their motivations for pursuing research, I was inspired to delve into their childhoods to trace the roots of their motivation and drive. Upon sharing this idea with the group, I was met with eager excitement from everyone.

From the onset, I was interested in creating direct encounters between the researchers and guests. I intended to employ a strategy informed by findings from previous works on transformative experiences, specifically focusing on how revisiting and processing an experience is crucial for lasting impact. In my earlier works, many interviewees noted that meeting me again for a follow-up interview enhanced the depth and strength of the work, providing them with an opportunity to gain new perspectives from their experiences (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021a)). Consequently, I made the decision to organise two events within the same project, offering guests the chance to revisit their initial experience not through interviews but through a sequel performance.

The overarching theme for the work was that everyone is a researcher and has the potential to effect change in the world. The two parts of the piece were distinct in nature: the first part, *Strings I: We Are All Researchers*, involved one-on-one performative encounters between a guest and a researcher from Agenda 2030 at their workstation in Lund University. The second part was a larger gathering, with the title *Strings II: The Hub*. The gathering took place in an old ceremonial location at

the main campus of the University. In the performance, we introduced a playful concept called the *school of research*, where members of the graduate school hosted workshops on research practices. These workshops were centred around themes of *Care, Connection, Empathy, and Love*. Guests enrolled as students and participated in four small workshops, gaining insight into the *fundamental principles of research*. At the culmination, they *graduated* from the school in a ceremony where certificates were handed out. My colleagues assumed the roles of teachers, I was the headmistress, and all participants, including hosts and guests, were outfitted in white laboratory cloaks to emphasise the scientific ambiance of the setting.

The How-little-is-enough Approach

Strings was a big enterprise, logistically complicated, with many participants. Despite this, I was the sole member of the artistic team, and the production rested primarily on my shoulders. Dating back to *The Professional Amateurs*, founded in 2005, I have been using a minimal production approach that I have reduced even further during my research. In the video essay, *Island*, I describe my production method like this:

The research question *How little is enough?* refers to the level of production needed to create a performance that has transformational potential. Here we already have a site, multiple stories, and concerns. The place has resources and infrastructure that can be mobilised. I recycle, re-organise and re-frame.

(Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021b))

The question, *how little is enough?* has engendered an approach to theatre making that incorporates reduced production, being attentive to what is already in place and figuring out what is needed. The question is relative, and is influenced by the situation where it is applied and can refer to materials, energy, labour, distance, numbers etc. Throughout my journey, my primary goal has been to induce the transformative potential of a performative encounter. Along the path toward this objective,

I consistently apply the how-little-is-enough approach to decision-making. This means that at every stage of my research and creative process, I am mindful of what is truly essential for creating an environment that can foster transformative encounters. Whether it's selecting a host for the performance, choosing a site, or determining the thematic framework, I consistently question how I can accomplish the desired outcome using the fewest resources, minimal energy, and avoiding unnecessary complications.

According to this approach, the aim is to minimise the production, not necessarily to scale down or create minimal performances. Despite the reduced production, my ambition is always to create eclectic work that strives to make an impact, involving communities, landscapes, and big ideas. The method is attentive to what is already in place at the site, reorganises the inherent content, and creates a framework around its participants. When downscaling the production, I had removed all the excess from the process, only using essential resources. This also meant that I had removed creative partners and external producers. I was doing all the labour by myself, and I had big ambitions for the performance. I was working with over 20 non-professional collaborators who needed encouragement, guidance, and support. The logistics of the one-on-one performative encounters were extensive and the burden of doing two-in-one performance was beyond what I could take on physically and emotionally. On top of that, I was conducting research, with added activities such as documenting, collecting materials, and interviewing. I was on a verge of a burn-out.

To keep track of my condition, I kept a personal diary through the process. When disseminating the project my main findings lay in this diary. A significant lesson I learned was recognising that my own energy is a limited resource that I needed to take care of. Thus, I had to safeguard my existential sustainability. This required me to prioritise my own needs, marking a shift from my previous focus

on the needs of others or the demands of the work itself. When implementing the how-little-is-enough approach and scaling down the production, I seriously underestimated the labour of responsibility inherent in the artistic process. The burden that I felt was threatening my wellbeing, was the sensation of being solely responsible for the whole thing; producing, creating, and researching. This is what I wrote in my diary on April 1st, 2022:

In STRINGS I am responsible for:

- the personal stories and other personal details of my participants and partners.
- the wellbeing of the people involved in the encounters, guests, and hosts.
- the work I send into the world and partly its affect on the guests that encounter it.
- the material that is shared with me in my research.
- the knowledge/experiences that I create and mediate through my research.
- the methods that I create.
- my own existential sustainability.

... and I make myself response-able to all these aspects.

I have created a porous creation method that invites me to think about responsibility as something that I share with others rather than taking the whole thing on by myself. So, I cannot blame the method for my stress. But it is true that I have brought it on myself by reducing the production and taking on a lot of roles by myself. Maybe there is too much of the old parameters inside of me. I need to question my expectations of the process.

Note to self: Responsibility equals Ethics.

(Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2023a))

An aspect of the how-little-is-enough approach is also applicable to the production of research output. I have followed the Japanese principle of *hara hachi bu* of only filling the stomach up to eighty percent. To you, my reader, I serve small plates that each one by itself will not satisfy your hunger but between them and along with what you bring into the porous structure, there should be enough nourishment for your own journey.

Existential Sustainability

Encountering the challenges in the process of making strings helped me recognise the true essence of the project. My research revolved around *existential sustainability*, transcending from the motivation, through the practice, into the meeting with the guests.

I had been introduced to the term during my first year at Lund University and was invited into a transdisciplinary working group that was exploring existential sustainability and how it related to different fields of research. At the time, I was not ready to commit to this line of research, so, I let it go. However, when the time came and I was standing on the edge of a cliff about to fall, existential sustainability took centre stage in my pilgrimage journey, leaving me no choice but to carry it along in my backpack.

Existential Sustainability has recently gained attention from scholars across various academic fields such as sociology, health, religion, arts, and design (Loor, 2022). This term encompasses the systematic care and innovative methods required to meet fundamental human needs. In a speech by Archbishop Antje Jackelen of the Swedish church in Uppsala in 2018, she introduced the concept existential sustainability. Antje emphasized the urgency of existential health issues, stating

that without existential sustainability, there is no guarantee for any other form of sustainable development – social, economic, or environmental. She discussed the significance of meeting our spiritual needs and the role that arts and culture play in contributing to existential sustainability (Jackelen, 2018).

The concerns raised by Archbishop Jackelen resonated deeply within me. Questions on sustainability are anchored in my motivation to do work. The existential questions related to the individual are particularly important. I firmly believe that being existentially sustainable as a human being, an artist, and an artist researcher is a prerequisite for any artistic or intellectual creation, or any development that involves human resources.

In the video article, “How Little is Enough? A Quest for Existential Sustainability.” (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024b), I delve into what I mean by the term existential sustainability and how I see it manifesting in my creative processes and performances.

*I am existentially sustainable
when I am nourished,
physically, mentally, and spiritually
I am motivated to do
meaningful work when
I feel purpose,
when I find myself in a friendly environment,
exchanging experiences
with human and more-than-human
peers.*

Mission

As I am clear about in my writing, I am on a mission. I use my performances as a vehicle for my own vocation and I invite other humans and more-than-humans on a ride with me. When I am describing my intentions, I often say that I am researching the instrument of theatre making. The word *instrument* evokes negative connotations in many artists. It may point to the systematic instrumentalization of the arts in authoritarian regimes, but I want to claim the instrument for me as an artist. As I see it, I am exploring the potential of theatre as a transformative tool in relation to sustainable development, using my work as instrument for change. I am intrigued by the impact artworks can have on individuals involved; artists, collaborators, and guests, potentially contributing to systematic changes. I am committed to understanding how my artistic output influences my guests. However, I am utterly opposed to external authorities attempting to instrumentalise artists. This distinction should not be misinterpreted with when artists utilise their expression as a tool for their own purposes. Freedom of expression is paramount in all artistic endeavours, and while discussing artistic methods as instruments may be controversial and provoke reactions from some colleagues, performance serves as a powerful platform for influencing both humans and non-humans and can be used for various motives. It is crucial for an artist to be clear about their intention. Transparency regarding motivation and methods is critical, particularly when navigating the complexities of privilege. Therefore, as a person of privilege, I approach the use of my instrument with caution. Instead of postulating truths, I am committed to fostering a platform for agents from diverse backgrounds and abilities to engage with existential questions. These questions transcend mere social and racial issues, providing a space for profound exploration and dialogue. While I do not always succeed in drawing a diverse group as guests to my work, the method I am applying to my performances may work for different contexts and can be applied as a tool to address any social question, due to its porous nature.

Coming back to *Strings*, and my precarious mental and physical state during the creation process, it needs to be said that I pulled through this ordeal and the performances were well received. The interviews I conducted with my peers in the graduate school confirmed the transformative potential of the method. They describe having a new outlook on their research and a deeper connection to their source of motivation and sense of purpose. However, the experiment of dividing the performance experience in two to provide the guests with an opportunity for a deeper reflection, failed. I couldn't evaluate the effect because there weren't enough guests for both performances. Additionally, the performances were so different and intense that guests had no chance to reflect during them. My existential crisis during the process took over and the reflection space was not a priority. The concept of having a space for reflection within the experience emerged organically during the fourth artistic work within my project, *Pleased to Meet You*, as I will explain in the next chapter.

Fourth Stage – *Pleased to Meet You*

I had created three performances within my research project: *No Show*, a performative encounter with an absent stranger in their home, *Island*, a performative encounter with a community on an island, and *Strings*, a performative encounter with a group of researchers at their workplace. While the presence of the more-than-human had been tangible in these performances, the focus had largely been on human encounters. Furthermore, in terms of the how-little-is-enough approach and scaling down the production, I was prepared to push the boundaries of what was possible. Therefore, it felt like a natural progression to develop a highly minimalistic performance that would place the more-than-human world at the centre. This led to the creation of a do-it-yourself performance involving non-human agents.

I introduced the idea to *Lokal, International Performance Festival* in Reykjavík, a festival focusing on work in progress, and was invited to try out the concept at their joint festival with *Reykjavík Dance Festival* in November 2022. I invited three more-than-human entities around the festival hub, in the city centre in Reykjavík, to join me, a pond, a community of birds and a lamp inside the festival building. I sensed a positive reply and initiated the work, creating three do-it-yourself performative encounters with these new friends.

At the festival desk guests could pick up a do-it-yourself box, containing a performance kit including a manual/manuscript and props to perform the work. From there the guest would generate the work by following the instructions and using the props. This initial trial felt like a significant step towards concluding my research and answering the fundamental question: *How little is enough to create a transformative encounter through performance?* It was a guest-host scenario, featuring a performative encounter between two entities: a human and a non-human. Utilising a porous and embracing dramaturgy, the performance facilitated numerous secondary

encounters. The piece remained intentionally simple, employing no non-renewable resources. It highlighted the entanglement of all lifeforms and provided a mirror for guests to test their values and worldviews and their place in the world order.

One challenge I struggled with was to protect my own existential sustainability. I was doing everything alone. The piece was not as logistically challenging as *Strings*, and the more-than-human participants were not as demanding as the humans, but the solitude was tangible, and the responsibility felt burdensome. In my last diary entry for *Strings*, I wrote a comprehensive list of my own needs, a manifesto for honouring my existential sustainability as an artist.:

- I need to be in touch with the things I love and that nourish me.
- I need to be present in my body.
- I need good motivation for doing work.
- I need to stay close to my values.
- I need creative partners.
- I need moral support.
- I need practical support for production and promotion.
- I need to articulate my own needs and organise the work around them.
- I need to understand the needs of my collaborators.
- I need to share the responsibility with my collaborators.
- I need to tap into an organic flow of things and avoid forcing things to happen.
- I need to listen to myself.
- I need to enjoy the process.

(Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2023a))

In Reykjavík, I failed to honour my *manifesto of needs* but when I revisited the piece in Malmö in March 2023, I took the list seriously.

I brought costume designer and artistic researcher Charlotte Østergaard onto my

creative team to design new boxes around the performance kit. As I had anticipated, collaborating with Østergaard brought everything together effortlessly. Having someone to bounce ideas off of, lifted the burden and liberated my spirit. Another aspect that also fell into place was the *reflection space*, which I had overlooked during the creation of *Strings*. By structuring the experience in three parts with space in between, there arose an opportunity for guests to internally reflect between these encounters. Furthermore, I provided each guest with an opportunity to sit down and write down highlights from their encounters in a book. These reflections often took on a contemplative nature, where guests would delve into the relationships between their relation to the host as well as the connections between the human and more-than-human in general. These written testimonies echo the written tasks from *No Show*, where guests were invited to write lists or letters inside the work either to themselves or their hosts. In interviews it became evident that these written assignments made an impact on the guests and triggered transformative reactions (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2021a)).

Transformative Encounters

In *Pleased to Meet You*, my primary goal was to focus on the transformative encounters. However, despite my ambition to create such encounters, predicting whether an encounter would indeed be transformative presented a challenge. The nature of what triggers transformation in individuals is deeply personal, prompting me early on in my research to seek a new term for the tool that fosters such transformation. This tool emerged as *performative encounters*, offering a degree of control. I would even define the format of my performances as performative encounters.

From my perspective the performance starts when I, as the artist, encounter my collaborators in a *staged* setting, an arranged situation within the frame of the creative process. Subsequently, the collaborators, now acting as hosts, encounter the guests of the work, who in turn encounter the site, including other guests and

the more-than-human environment. All participants, the artist, guests, and hosts, encounter their inner self: values, stories, prejudices, and emotions. Ultimately, the guest encounters the artist through the artwork.

A distinction exists between the primary encounter, that of the guest and the host, and the secondary encounters that arise as a consequence of this primary performative setting. These secondary encounters can be the most transformative, particularly those that occur on a deeper personal level. Only the primary encounters can be planned, but secondary encounters can be suggested and anticipated, by tactile, visual, or cognitive prompting in the dramaturgy and kinaesthetic or visual composition of the encounters. The title of the piece always refers to the primary encounter. Some of the performative encounters are indirect, like an encounter between a guest and an absent host. Both these agents experience the encounter, but not simultaneously.

In my understanding, a performative encounter can possess attributes that may or may not lead to transformation, depending on conditions that I explore in the podcast, *Transformative Encounters*. The podcast I made as a part of my research to unpack the affordances of performative encounters.

In the introduction to the podcast series, I describe the term like this:

When I use the term Performative Encounters, I am referring to a meeting between two or more agents that takes place in a staged setting during a performance. The encounter can be between humans or between humans and the more-than-human; people, animals, things, landscapes, temporalities (geological time, the future ...) and phenomena like values, paradigms, or forces like the weather. These encounters are performative in the moment they are labelled and understood

as a part of or related to a performance or heightened moment of religious or social ritual. Performative encounter is an exchange between two or more entities that has the potential to create new meanings, understandings, and relations or strengthen knowledges or relations that already exist. These encounters can either be tailor made or they can occur organically within a performance. (Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2023b))

I concluded that what makes an encounter transformative is partly the tactile and embodied experience and the cognitive resonance that a person connects to their pre-existing personal values and beliefs. These experiences create a new understanding, and the person has transformed. The fact that the encounter is performative is imperative, as this is what makes the moment count, a clear frame around what can be a subtle but profound revelation.

Being consequent in my how-little-is-enough approach, I only invited guests to my podcast series that happened to cross my path during the production period in spring 2023. My guests were: Maaïke Bleeker, dramaturg and theorist, Gigi Argyropoulou artist, activist and researcher, Charlotte Østergaard, costume designer and artistic researcher, Tanja Diers, dramaturg, and artistic researcher, Sofie Lebech, theorist and performance maker, Erik Pold performance maker, Liv Kristin Holmberg, performance artist and artistic researcher, and Sima Wolgast psychologist. These guests provided a width and depth to my thinking about the affordances of the performative encounter that I would not have gained otherwise.

Through the transformative encounters I had with my peers in the podcast, I came to realise that I could utilize the term *performative encounters* as a lens through which to view the dynamics within a performance. I employed it to examine various types of revelatory moments, both external and internal, viewing them as interactions

between entities. Additionally, I adopted a broad interpretation of the duration of a performance. In my perspective, the performance begins long before the actual staging begins, encompassing the experiences that guests bring to the work, and it continues as they exit the staged setting, carrying the affect to develop further in the world.

What I concluded towards the end of my inquiry was that a performance can be seen as a series of external and internal encounters facilitated by the setup of the performance.

I set out to explore performative encounters as a dramaturgical tool to use in designing participatory performances, but instead I found a term that gives me an insight into what happens in a performative situation. Sure, I will be able to use the tool. To set up and pay attention to the actual meeting points between agents, pay attention to ethical aspects, understand my guests, the holding environment, the use of play and so on. But the notion of the aesthetic experience being a series of encounters between different elements is a thrilling discovery. A discovery that is in line with my wish to create relation-specific performances that are designed to incorporate the many different realities that happen to come together during a performance.

(Knúts Önnudóttir, 2024 (2023b))

Through transformative encounters with fellow travellers, in my podcast series, and engaging in dialogues about what performative encounters could mean to them, I felt I was reaching my destination. This is where my journey seemed to conclude. Not because the path had ended, but because it was a point where the path split, presenting me with a choice for a new journey and different paths to follow. These professional peers all had rich practices and theories, that pointed in different directions, grounding me once again in my situated knowledge, which was in a state of flux, changing with every new encounter. It was time to return home.

The Return

The Carrier Bag

I am a collector, and as I was about to complete my pilgrimage, with my research backpack full of things I had collected on the way, I was reminded of Ursula Le Guin's *The carrier bag. Theory of fiction*. In her book she reimagines the narrative of human origins through a story about a bag. In her retelling, technology is not depicted as a tool of domination but as a cultural carrier bag – a vessel for stories, memories, and collective wisdom. I had reached my destination, fulfilled my mission. For me it wasn't about bringing back the ultimate truth, but rather being able to tell the story about the process of going through various stages, experiencing the highs and lows of artistic research. The story about being imperfect and human, collapsing, rising again, doubting my methods, and questioning my intentions.

I returned home, not with a single profound revelation or artistic knowledge, but with a collection of items gathered along the way. These are the pieces of insight, experience, and challenges that have shaped my journey. Each item with its own story and purpose.

There is no hierarchy in the bag, when I reach down with my hand, the findings randomly land in my palm: guest-host situation, love, care, affect, bond, playfulness, embodiment, tactility, do-it-yourself-performance, maps, stamps, passports, imperfection, relation-specific-performance, site specificity, human specificity, blindness, privileges, mirroring, values, transformation, impact, proximity-distance, impermanence, hara hachi bu, vulnerability, tenderness, collapse, awkwardness, forced intimacy, disobedience, kintsugi, wabi sabi, inner gaze, outer and inner dramaturgy, connection, empathy.

However, there are things bigger than the rest, such as; *existential sustainability* – the mission that provides a source of motivation that transcends the layer of production; *porous and embracing dramaturgy* – the dramaturgical tool that creates the condition for personal engagement and transformation; and *performative encounters* – the relational format, a term through which I understand the instrument of performance.

Other large items in my carrier bag are, *me-thod* – a pluralistic and situated artistic/ research practice, and the *how-little-is-enough approach*.

Question and Answers

The objects from the carrier bag can be used to answer my initial research question.

Q: How to construct sustainable methods of performance through transformative encounters?

A: Through performative encounters that serve as a platform for guests and participants to reflect on their lives and values to others, both human and more-than-human agents. The encounters foster an affective bond between participants and their surroundings. This connection has the potential to nurture aspirations for sustainable behaviours.

A: Using a porous and embracing dramaturgical approach in a playful setting where guests and participants render their stories as content, may enhance existential sustainability of both artists and other participants, by facilitating meaningful connection between humans and the more-than-human. Porous dramaturgy may reduce the artistic production and lift the labour of production, if basic needs of participants are being cared for during the creation process.

A: Using the concept of *me-thod* offers a pluralistic artistic and research approach. This approach is existentially sustainable for artists, departing from embodied knowledges that are situated and utilised with intuition. It also draws from a professional artistic skillset that is both personal and rooted in sustainable values.

A: By using how-little-is-enough production approach, utilizing already existing platforms, infrastructures, and materials. The approach strives to give space for old and new stories to emerge and spark meaningful dialogue and contemplations while reducing the carbon footprint. The approach is based on the belief that you do not have to travel far to find meaningful materials.

A: Existential sustainability serves as a foundational pillar for broader sustainable development. The arts, with their ability to evoke meaning and spiritual connection, play an important role in fostering these connections between humans and their surroundings. When guests are invited into a performance setting as whole individuals, encouraged to share their knowledge and perspectives, and given the space to be truly seen and cared for, the work establishes a framework for affection and can engender new relations. These connections not only enrich the performance experience but also have the potential to contribute to enhanced existential sustainability of people. In this context, the performance setting becomes a space where guests can bring their entire selves, including their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. By engaging in a dialogue that goes beyond words, the performance invites guests to explore their connections to the environment, to each other, and to themselves. This holistic approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of nurturing these relationships for the well-being of individuals and potentially, the planet as a whole.

Through this process, guests may find a renewed sense of purpose and connection to

their surroundings, leading to a deeper understanding of their role in the world. This, in turn, can inspire actions and attitudes that contribute to solutions to the global crisis.

A: The arts, with their power to evoke emotions, provoke thoughts, and inspire change, are uniquely positioned to facilitate transformative experiences, and contribute to a more sustainable and interconnected world.

The Walking Dissertation

This text stands as a testimony of the journey of an artistic PhD pilgrim who ventured far from home for many years, only to return transformed. Rather than a traditional written dissertation, the research has manifested in embodied experiences that now reside within the pilgrim. You could say that the PhD pilgrim embodies the essence of a dissertation, moving through the field of performance with a carrier bag full of objects to utilise, demonstrate, or display for peers, providing inspiration or practical use. The pilgrim is me. I am a living testament to my situated and entangled knowledges.

The little girl from the bathtub in Malmö, has now arrived in Hvalfjörður, Iceland where new journeys can begin. In a place called Vindheimar (Windworlds), I have discovered a location that aligns with my artistic vision and can embrace my evolving practice. I am increasingly compelled to delve deeper into relation-specific performances and nurture a profound connection with nature with my artistic practice.

*I stand on my balcony in the sunset,
facing the ocean, mountains,
an industrial plant and a whale station,
a beautiful yet intricate scene
in our complex and turbulent world.*

*I have moved to the countryside
where I can unfold my transformed artistic practice into
the natural landscapes,
inviting new and returning participants
to create bonds
with their inner and outer
mountains, oceans, or power plants.*

*In a few minutes,
I will be soaking in warm geothermal water
in a home-made bathtub on the beach.
I will expect a local seal to pay a visit
and greet me from the sea
looking me in the eyes
searching for a connection.*

How Little is Enough?

I hope that the testimony of my artistic research pilgrimage will inspire other performance makers to embark on a pilgrimage of their own, to further explore the territories and bring back new insights and more carrier bags with new tools and gems.

During my whole journey I have been asking myself:

How Little is Enough?

The answers have been many, as it always depends on what context it is posed against. To conclude my testimony, I will leave you with my most consistent answer, a question in itself:

What is needed?

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Manuscripts



FjarVera / No Show

No Show, or *FjarVera* in Icelandic was performed in the middle of the pandemic, summer of 2020 at the Reykjavík Art Festival in five homes in different neighbourhoods of the city. The performance was a solitary experience, moving from one zip code in Reykjavík to another, each edition open for one week at a time. The hosts were absent during the visits, but an occasional pet was present during some of the performances.

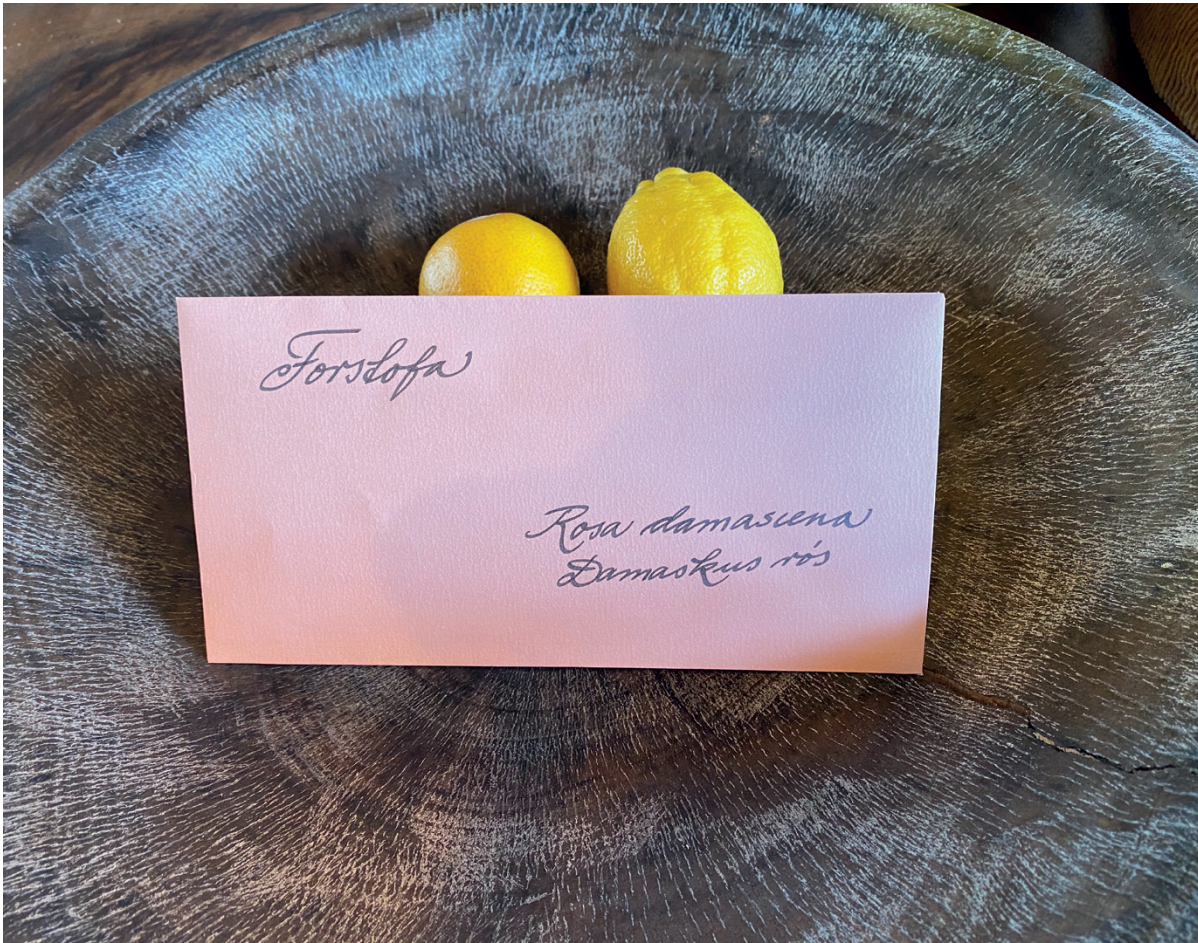
Trust is the sole key to this work. It is far from being natural to open your home to total strangers in the middle of a pandemic and even more exceptional to share with them your personal stories, thoughts, values and hopes. I am grateful for the generosity and courage of my co-creators that chose to trust me and unknown guests with their homes. I thank Sveinbjörg and her family, María and her folks, Karolina and Ýmir, Björk and her friends and relatives. I also want to thank my own family for allowing me to open up our home, Eiríkur, Hera and Benjamín that I share home with and my sons Benjamín Þorlákur and Ísak who also appeared in the piece. I am forever grateful for the trust I have been shown.

This was a vulnerable process in unprecedented times that touched me profoundly and the experience will stay with me forever. I also want to thank Reykjavík Art Festival for supporting me and producing the work with tender care and responsibility.

This script is only published as a documentation and does not give a comprehensive image of the performances that entailed so much more. The actual work is interactive, and the affect is created by a combination of the physical presence of a guest in a stranger's home and the associations that emerge in the guest's mind when encountering the work. In this version of the manuscripts, I have left out instructions on how to navigate the homes.

Reykjavík, January 2021.

Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir.



108, Fossvogur

Entrance

Pink damask scene / Damascus rose

Dear Guest,

Welcome to Búland 28.

Here live:

Sveinbjörg choreographer

Svenni engineer

Diljá an art student

Lísbet secondary school student

Úlfur elementary school student

Bono dog

I have left envelopes for you that contain a letter, a description of a ritual, and tasks that involve observing, contemplating, and doing things in my home. Although I guide you through the work, you are the main character and the only spectator of what goes on.

Each space has a certain aroma that represents the character of the space.

This space has the aroma of damask rose.

When you have read the letter and completed the tasks, put the letter back in its place. The work ends when you hear a knock on the front door after about half an hour or as soon as you have read all the letters.

I trust you with my home and hope you enjoy your time with us.

Yours, Sveinbjörg.

Action

Take off your shoes and coat and hang it in the closet.

Guest bathroom

Punica granatum / Pomegranate

Unlike the bathroom on the ground floor, there is rarely a queue here and you never hear an impatient knock on the door. Here you are truly alone with yourself. This is the place in the house where I come closest to being a stranger, as this space is specially designed for you, the guest. We all have our rituals. Some are carved in stone while others are fluid. I have listed some of them and will share them with you during the visit. Now I would like to invite you to perform a ritual.

Ritual I

You are a guest in a family home, and you begin your visit by washing your hands.

Action

Wash your hands.

Look in the mirror.

Observation

Check out your face, lines, and colour.

Look deep into your eyes.

Now notice how you feel inside.

Notice your thoughts and expectations for the work.

Contemplation

Think about the meaning of hand cleansing.

What do you need to cleanse?

Kitchen

Melaleuca / Tea Tree

The kitchen is the heart of the house. In the morning or when I get home after work, the first thing I do is to light a candle that is lit while people are in the house. I love spending time in the kitchen cooking and nourishing myself and the people around me.

Can I offer you a fruit or a drink? Coffee, tea, or mineral water.

You can take your drink with you while traveling around the house.



Ritual II

You need to pee. You knock on the bathroom door, call to let your mum know you are there. Then you curl yourself on the corner sofa until the door opens. After peeing and brushing your teeth, you take a seat by the kitchen island and watch cartoons while you eat your cereal. Your dad sits at the dining table and reads the papers.

He asks you to lower the volume.

Action

Clean up after breakfast and wash the dishes.

Observation

Notice the layout of the kitchen.

Contemplation

How is the organisation in your life?

Is everything in place?

Dining room

Citrus sinensis / Wild oranges

The dining room serves as the frame for family-quality-time. Here we nourish both body and soul. We have each our seat at the table and come at all times of the day to work, draw, study, read, eat and to be a family.

At seven o'clock every night we gather for a family dinner. Then we tell each other stories about the events of the day and together we try to raise Bono who always wants to sit at the table with us. Not everyone is happy when I turn on the TV news, but it is something I grew up with and want to share with my children. Here we practice being part of a community, have conversations and try to understand the world around us.

Ritual III

You are the first to wake up. The house is asleep.

You take a shower and after you have walked the dog you pick up the newspapers. You spread out at the dining table with your breakfast and read the newspapers while you drink your morning coffee.

Action

Check out the vocabulary used to train Bono (on the fridge).

Find your seat and sit down.

Imagine being a participant in the family conversation.

Observation

Look in the mirror and see the person sitting at the table.

Contemplation

What nutrition is on offer in your home?

How were you raised?

Living room

Boawellia ia carteria / Frankincense

Sit in the corner of the corner sofa and read the letter.

I like to sit here, in this spot. The space is open, bright, and spacious. Everything in here has a meaning and is related to something in our stories. Under the table are photo albums that we often browse to recall moments from our past, even Bono likes to grab them. We think some of the photos are silly, they reflect a time when the world was different.

The works on the walls all have a background story. The Horse is by a Spanish artist Lluç Queralt Baiges, given to me by Svenni after I had premiered a dance work for mares. The piece combines our passions for life and art. It means so much to both of us.

Ritual IV

You start the day with a shower. You choose an appropriate essential oil to put in your face cream. You give yourself plenty of time to get ready for the day.

You fold the clean laundry and fill one washing machine.

You hear the people upstairs talking while you make the bed.

When you are alone, you have a cup of coffee and sit down on the sofa with your cup before heading to work.

Everything is perfect.

Observation

Notice the space.

Notice the light.

Notice the smell.

Notice the temperature.

Notice the colours.

Notice the view.

Action

Browse one photo album.

Contemplation

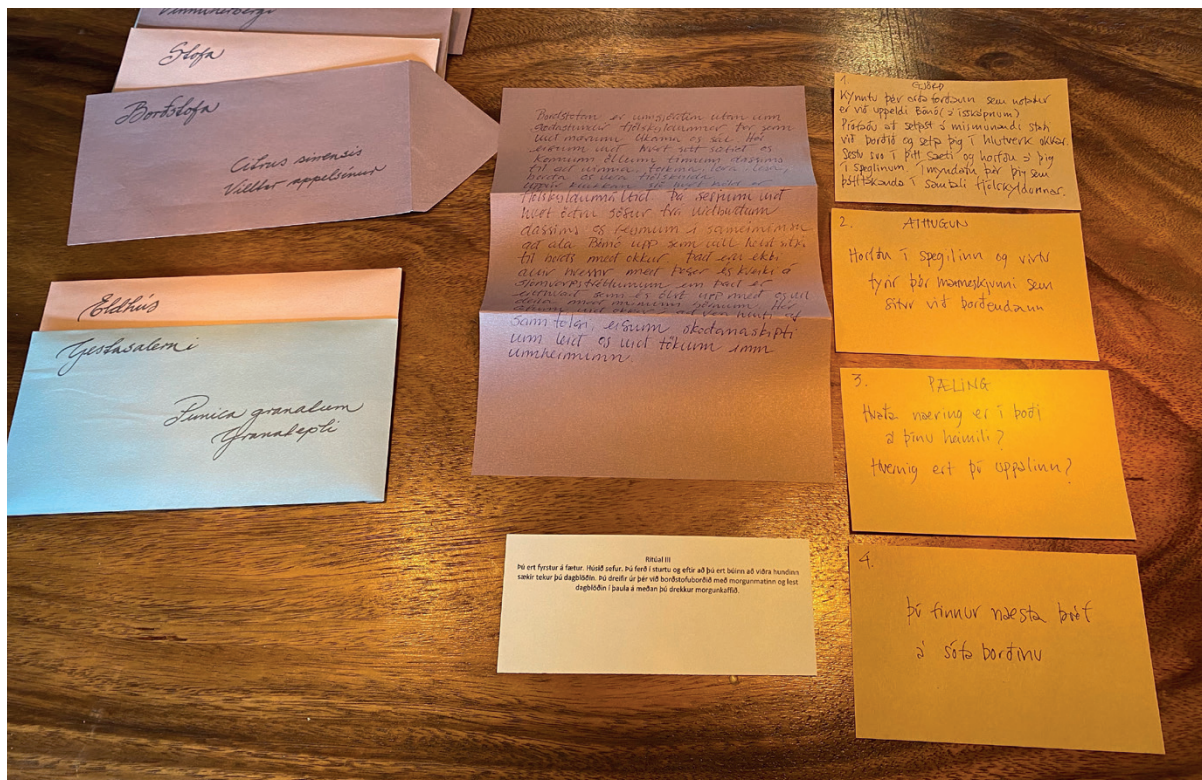
What does your context look like?

Where do you like to be?

Study

Citrus Limon / Lemon

This is a perfect place to work and concentrate. During the pandemic many e-mails and reports were written here, also meetings, ballet lessons, mathematics lessons and exams.



Ritual V

It's a school day and you have to go to ballet class. You run up the stairs and into the study. There you turn on the computer and start the class. Ballet Barre. Your mom has taken her mat into the living room, where she is doing Pilates. You try to recall what your mom pointed out to you over the weekend when she gave you and your sister a lesson on the grass in the garden.

Action

Lie on the mattress, close your eyes, take three deep breaths, pull your knees up to your chest – give yourself a good hug.

Straighten yourself out and stand up.

Sit down at the table and write down a list of things you want to learn.

Take the list with you as you go.

Observation

Notice the things that can be categorized as tools in this space.

Contemplation

What tools do you use in your life?

What tools can't you live without?

Mirror

Mentha Piperita / Peppermint

This is where Bono has the best view of the house, he lays here and watches over the house when everyone is asleep or away.

Ritual VI

You've looked after the house all day. You hear a key turned in the door and you pop up. You greet your master, wag your tail, and try to tell him everything that happened during the day. You get a hug and some compliments.

Observation

Notice the doors to this place?

Action

Count the exit routes from here.

Contemplation

Do you have an overview of things?
What are the escape routes in your life?

Staircase

Rosmarinus officinalis / Rosemary

The stairs are the main musical instrument in the house. People run up and down the stairs all the time. The driving force is the search for lost things.

The pace is either fast or slow, the steps assertive or gentle and someone shouts: Where is Bono's leash? Has anyone seen my jacket?

Ritual VII

You come home from school with your girlfriend. The two of you enter the house laughing and the dog cannot conceal his joy of seeing you. He dances around you and tries to lick your faces. You laugh even louder, and you try to make him calm down. You tell your girlfriend. "We got him to calm the family down, but if anything, we have become even more tense."

You love this dog.

Action

Try to run down and up the stairs.

Observation

Notice the soundscape you create.

Contemplation

Have you lost anything important in your life?

What do you need to run after?

Bedroom

Lavandula angustifolia / Lavender

The basement is deep and still – here we rest well. Before I go to bed, I drop soothing lavender oil into my palms, rub them together and inhale the scent.

Ritual VIII

You're going to sleep.

You apply soothing oil to your palms and inhale.

Action

Drop one drop of lavender oil on your palm,
rub your palms together and then apply them to your nose.

Inhale the aroma.

Observation

Close your eyes and notice your breath and the affect of the smell on you.

Contemplation

If this house was a body, what part of the body are we in?

Sofa

Pelargonium graveolens / Geranium

Dear Guest,

This is the last letter.

I invite you to find a place in the house where you can sit and read about the last ritual. Soon you will hear a knock at the door and the work will be completed, but you can leave the house sooner if you wish.

We thank you very much for your visit.

Greetings, Sveinbjörg and family.

Ritual IX

You are a house. Inside of you, people and animals travel in organic patterns
through the veins of your body.

There is a constant movement within you that moves between floors and pumps
life into you with rhythmic beats and soft strokes.

You have been blessed with the absence of viruses and other uninvited guests.

Your life is a dance piece, and the dance company includes
six permanent dancers and numerous guest artists.

101, miðbær (City Centre)

Entree

Lilium bulbiferum / Fire Lily

Dear guest,

Welcome to Klapparstígur

In this house live:

Steinunn theatre maker

Eiríkur Smári philosopher

Hera hairdressing student

Benjamín music student

Bellatrix cat

Gleymmérei cat

(Benjamín philosophy student)

(Ísak, salesman and engineering student)

I have left envelopes for you that contain; a letter, a description of a ritual, and tasks that involve observing, contemplating, and doing things in my home. Although I guide you through the work, you are the main character and the only spectator of what goes on.

In each room there is a flower that characterises the space.

In this room it is a Fire Lily.

When you have read the letter and solved the tasks, please put the envelope where you found it. The performance is over when the doorbell rings in about half an hour or when you have read the letters and are ready to go.

I trust you with my home and I hope you enjoy the stay.

Best wishes, Steinunn.



Forslofa
Lilium bulbiferum
Edulis



Ritual I

You are a guest in an unfamiliar house.
You bow deeply to the hosts, their lives, lifestyle, and values.

Action

Take off your shoes and hang your coat on a hanger.
Stand in front of the mirror and bow three times.
Once for the house
Once for the people living in the house
Once for yourself

Observation

Observe your reflection.
Notice your body posture.
Pay attention to the colour of your skin, hair, and eyes.
Notice your feelings, thoughts, and expectations for
the performance.

Contemplation

What does it mean to you – bowing to another person?
Has anyone bowed before you recently?

Staircase

Taxacum officinale / Dandelion

The stairs are like a bottle neck or a centrifuge. They are both steep and curvy. People travel at different paces up and down the stairs and the soundscape they make reveal their state of mind. We never dwell here. Here we are either coming from a place or going to a place.

Ritual II

You have been waiting for people in the house to wake up. You are given food as soon as the first person wakes up and now you want some fresh air. You use the opportunity when someone fetches the newspapers downstairs. You walk slowly down the stairs since you are obese and clumsy for a cat.

The door is opened, and you walk out the door.

You are able to open doors, but it does not enter your mind to close any doors behind you.

Action

Play the stairs like they were an instrument
by walking up and down in different tempo.

Observation

Pay attention to repetition in this space.

Contemplation

What meaning does repetition have in your life?
What is repeated?

Kitchen

Allium schoenoprasum / Chives

The kitchen is the centre of the house. We all love cooking. We like to prepare food from scratch, we like to explore and experiment – and we never waste food.

We use a lot of spices, we conserve, ferment, salt, dry, boil and freeze.

We eat together every day but sometimes we are too lazy to cook so we eat out at one of the many restaurants in the neighbourhood. We take turns cooking and on Sundays we invite members of the family not living in the house for a family dinner. Sometimes people join via the internet.

Can I offer you a drink?

Coffee, tea, sparkling water?

You can take the drink with you on your journey around the house.

Ritual III

You wake up to two very hungry cats. They follow you into the bathroom and are tangled at your feet until you feed them. You put the kettle on and do your stretches while the water is boiling. When you have poured boiling water over the oats, you pick up the newspaper and let the cats out.

You read the Icelandic papers by the kitchen table while you eat. After making coffee you sit on the sofa, and you scan the international media online before you enter your working day.

Action

Do the dirty dishes.

Observation

Pay attention to the fermentation that is taking place in the kitchen.

Contemplation

Do you let things ferment?

What means do you have for preserving things?

Do you leave things dirty?

Dining table

Baksia

The dining table is the family gathering place. Here we serve each other what we have prepared and what we want to present. I have made all our dinner ware, it is organically shaped, random, and imperfect like all our lives. But they are made from the heart, and what was broken has been repaired. We reveal all our sides in this lively company which can be challenging at times.

What we have learned is that you never take important decisions on an empty stomach.



Ritual IV

You are alone in an apartment in central Europe far away from family and friends. It is in the midst of a pandemic and your flat mates have gone to their

loved ones and you are all alone for the first time in your life.

It is Sunday and you are going to meet your family via your smartphone.

The entire family appears on your tiny screen, even the cats and the dog.

They seem so close yet at the same time very far away.

The chat dissolves when you start to experiment with new filters in

the social media app, now you all have long ears and big eyes,

and suddenly everyone turns into a potato.

Action

Sit at your own place and try to imagine how it is to be
in conversation with the family.

Observation

Pay attention to exotic elements in the environment.

Contemplation

What is your context?

What are your different sides and what role do you
have within your family?

Living room

Rosa independence / Orange Rose

The paintings on the walls and the objects in here all connect to our stories and some things have always been with me. The green lamp, my parents bought in Denmark when they lived there before I was born. I have inherited a lot of things from my parents, not only things but also a mind set, customs, and values. Here I have art on the walls, books on shelves and a stereo system. This is what makes a home to me.

This is our social space, here we entertain each other and invite family and friends to join us. We drink tea in the evenings and play games, preferably with dice. Dice games are based on luck and a dash of strategy. Most of all it brings us joy and laughter.



Ritual V

You have been in town, socialising with pedestrians, receiving a lot of attention and affection. You climb skilfully up the trunk of the Whitebeam and jump lightly on to a branch leading to the terrace. You place your self at the window to the living room and observe the family from outside.

The dog is there.

They are playing a game and the mood changes from concentration to outbursts of laughter, applause, and deep conversations. You wait until the dog leaves and then you call out to your family to let you in.

Observation

Observe the space.

Pay attention to the light.

Notice the colours.

Pay attention to the smell.

Notice the temperature and textures.

Action

Roll the dice and try to get six alike.

Contemplation

What role does luck have in your life?

Are you satisfied with your lot?

Terrace

Helianthus / Sunflower

I do my stretches on the stair to the terrace door. I got a heel spur a few years back and now I need to stretch the soles of my feet – this is the best place for that. While stretching I observe the movements outside, the branches that move in the wind, the people passing by, the clouds travelling across the sky. Here I can sometimes feel like I am in the countryside, when suddenly everything becomes calm in the midst of the busy urban soundscape and the only sounds you hear are the birds singing from the branches of the Whitebeam.

On the wall to the right are artworks by my sister who has left this world. When I look at them, I am filled with gratitude for all the gifts that I have received and I think about what I have lost and what remains, what was and what is.

Ritual VI

You are kneading sourdough from a starter that was refreshed early this morning, the starter goes back many years and is refreshed every time you bake bread. You knead the dough for a long time until it is smooth and elastic. You place it in the refrigerator. You will bake two loaves for lunch tomorrow. The entire house is asleep, it is calm. You do your stretches and watch as the last few people make their way home after a night on the town. You see branches moving slowly in the evening breeze. Everything is perfectly imperfect and the way it should be. You sit down in a green chair and think of nothing, do nothing, time standing still.

Action

Take hold of the door handle and stand on your toes on the step, let the heels sink down and raise yourself up on your toes, then lower your heels again.

Repeat several times.

Observation

Observe what moves outside.

Contemplation

When does your time stand still?

What have you lost and what gifts have you been given in your life?

What could you not live without?

Room

Florum varietate / Mixed Flowers

This is the room of the young people of the home. Here their future is planned, this is a place of learning and creation.

Ritual VII

You wake up hearing your in-laws chatting in the living room. You hear the city waking up outside the window. You think about whether or not you saved the last version of the song you were working on yesterday. You open your computer and see that the last saved version is from just before you went to sleep. You are relieved. You dress, say hello to your in-laws and go for your morning coffee at your workplace, the coffee shop across the street.

Observation

Observe all the things you can make music with in this room.

Action

Sit by the desk and make a list of things you want to do
in the future.

Take the list with you when you leave.

Contemplation

What do you think about when you think about the future?

Bathroom

Campanula rotundifolia / Bluebell

The sink was made for me by Hiro, my Japanese master in pottery. On its journey across the globe the sink broke in pieces, but I repaired it with gold as I had learned in Japan. They call it Kintsugi. A lot of things break during one's lifetime and a lot of these things have such value that they deserve to be mended. The repair does not need to be concealed because the beauty lies exactly in the care that goes into the process of reparation. Gold is both beautiful and strong.



Ritual VIII

You wake up and take a shower. You take it easy and listen to your favourite podcast about interesting crime stories from another continent, another world. You feel like you know the presenters, people that have been part of your life for a long time. You apply face cream and make up and do your hair. Before you finish, your mother knocks on the door, and you let her in to have a quick pee.

Action

Wash your hands.

Observation

Observe your face.

Look deep into your eyes.

Pay attention to the lines in your face.

Contemplation

What do you need to wash away?

What have you had to repair in your life?

Study

Solidago altissima / Goldenrod

Here it is good to relax and enjoy being free of any tasks. This space is the memory room of the family. Here we can recollect who we are and where we come from, through books, photographs, old drawings, and paintings. Here the family albums are stored. This is a place where we create references and common ground, here we seek entertainment and education from books and screens. This room is dedicated to the mother, who eases our burdens, who soothes and comforts us.

Ritual IX

You are just divorced and find yourself on a crossroad. You are folding and arranging your clothes in the room where your mother repairs broken things.

You think about how you can repair what has been broken in your life
while you fold and arrange, fold, and arrange.

Observation

Observe your hands, both sides.

Action

Embrace yourself firmly and sincerely.

Contemplation

Who cares for you?

Whom do you care for?

Bedroom

Lavandula Angustifolia / Lavender

Dear guest,

This is the last letter.

Soon the doorbell will ring, and the piece is over.

This is a place of rest and revitalisation.

When you have read the last ritual, I invite you to recharge by sitting on the pillow and ring the buddha bell that I bought in a tiny store in Kyoto.

You can leave the house as soon as you have found peace or when the doorbell rings.

Thanks for the visit, we wish you all the best.

Steinunn and family.

Ritual X

You are a house.

Inside of you people and animals move in
an organic pattern through the veins of your body.
The movement moves between floors and pumps life
into your heart with repetitive beats and soft strokes.

Your life is like a ceramic bowl that was broken but is now repaired with gold.

You are a vessel for a fermenting mass that is in constant transformation.

Action

Sit on the pillow with crossed legs or the way you prefer.

Ring the bell.

Close your eyes and imagine that you are inside the body of the house.

Observation

Pay attention to your breath.

Contemplation

Where does your energy come from?

What does revitalisation mean to you?

111, Breiðholt

Entrance

Ocean breeze

Dear guest,

Welcome to Asparfell.

I live on the 4th floor in apartment 4C.

I have left envelopes for you that contain; a letter, a description of a ritual, and tasks that involve observing, contemplating, and doing things in my home.

Although I guide you through the work, you are the main character and the only spectator of what goes on.

I collect inspiring words and phrases and on each envelope I have placed a word or a sentence that I think is characteristic to that space.

With this letter you have the word *Ocean breeze*.

The work ends when you hear the doorbell rings in half an hour or as soon as you have read all the letters.

Greetings María.



Ritual I

You are a house. Inside of you time passes, days, months, and years. There is a constant flow of movement through your body, in and out – up and down, that pumps oxygen into your heart. You open your doors to people whether they come or go. You protect your people from weather and winds and your life is dedicated to their service.

Observation

Look at the names on the letterboxes.

Imagine where the people behind the names are in this very moment.

Contemplation

To whom do you open your doors?

Action

Ring the bell for apartment 4C and imagine how the bell sounds inside the flat.

If there is no answer, open the door with your key and take the elevator to the fourth floor.

Hall

Returning health

Welcome to my home. My name is Maria, and I am a 65 year old former nurse. I live here, but my children and grandchildren also call this their home even though they do not live with me. They are:

Hákon son

Ashleigh daughter in law

Sunneva daughter

Diddi grandson

Emma granddaughter

Bjartur grandson

This apartment is our sanctuary. Here I can care for my family, and this is a place where my children can seek shelter for themselves, their children, and their belongings. This is a safe place. I control what happens here and I only invite people inside who are in their right mind.

I trust you with my home and I hope that you can enjoy your stay.

Best María.

Ritual II

You are excited about your stay at your grandmother's, it is almost a month since the last time. You find that a very long time.

You go straight to the closet in the hallway and open it.

Here you find grandma-toys, that you also own, most of them are old but they work. You think to your self that Grandma never throws anything away unless it does not work.

You call out to your grandmother saying:

“Grandma, you know what, I have three homes; one with my father, one with my mother and the third one is here with you.”

Action

Take off your shoes and hang your coat in the closet.

Sit on the chair and close your eyes and slow down your breath.

Observation

Pay attention to the sounds in the flat.

Observe your emotions, your thoughts, and your expectations to the experience.

Contemplation

Do you hear time pass?

How does time sound?

Bathroom

My inner Lady troll

I do not spend much time in the bathroom, instead I go to the local swimming pool. I was nine years old when I first visited a swimming pool and immediately something clicked inside of me. I love the water. In spite of my fibromyalgia and arthritis I move a lot; swim and walk. Motion has shaped me from my early childhood at the farm where I grew up. But in this bathroom, there is not much motion.



Ritual III

You are in motion. You are not alone, there is one like you here. You swim, you know nothing else. You swim in circles, one circle after the other. You are not thinking of time, you are not thinking about destination,
you do not think, you swim.

Suddenly you see something move at a distance and something inside of you draws you closer to the surface. You see a grain falling towards you and you hurry to catch it, and then another and another. You are full. Everything is as it should be, and you continue to swim in a water you cannot see.

Action

Wash your hands.

Observation

Observe your face.

Look into your eyes, deep.

Contemplation

What do you keep inside?

What do you let out?

What defines you?

Kitchen

Weather message

The kitchen has multiple functions for me, it is a place of creation.

I enjoy cooking and especially baking. When my children visit, I cook for them and prepare everything before they come. When my grandchildren visit, I bake a chocolate cake that they love. I do not want guests to assist me in the kitchen, nor do the dishes. When I have visitors, I want us to talk with one another and that we do in the living room. As a child I was taught that there is a right place and time for everything.

The kitchen table is used for painting and drawing with the grandchildren and for myself, I have installed an easel to begin painting again after a long pause. I am not the kind of cute grandma who is all rosy and pampers her grandchildren. I think they appreciate that about me. I leave them in peace.

Here I make soaps that last for ever and I also cast candles from leftovers. I do not waste anything, and I use everything to the fullest. I am not a fashion fascist and I think it is OK that things of all kinds are used and collected from different places, just as long as they are not broken or dysfunctional.

Ritual IV

You are with your grandmother. The first thing you do is find your favourite soft animal from the bedroom closet. Then you ask your grandma to read the book for you. Your grandmother sits down with you and tells you that the book is lost.

Your entire universe collapses and you loose control. She searches for it once more and finds it. Then she tells you that she does not like that story anymore.

You say “all right, let’s find another one “. From then on that is the story you want to hear again and again.

Action

Look out of the window and imagine that you sit on the chair on the balcony.

Observation

Pay attention to the things that move outside.

Contemplation

When does the life of a person become a story?

What story creates a story?

Living room

Knitting fix, Text fix, Speech fix

The living room is the centre of the home. Here I invite guests to freshly baked cakes and coffee. Here I sit and listen to audiobooks, knit and in the evenings, watch television. This is the gathering place of my core-family that I love, and I feel responsible for. There is always one person absent, and we remember her in silence, a drawing of her hangs on the wall and will stay there forever.

When I am in a state of distress, I have a need to create rather than to lie down. In this room I have gone through many setbacks and from these a whole collection of strange looking woollen sweaters have been created. When I knit, I sit in one of my grandparent's silver wedding anniversary armchairs from 1935 that I inherited. I have a photo of me as a girl, sitting in one of the chairs in my childhood home. My home is different from my childhood home, which was open for visitors 24 hours all year round.

In this house I choose my guests, and you are one of them.

Sometimes I invite my girlfriends for coffee and then we get all excited about the injustices of the world and forget that we are mothers and grandmothers and use foul language about the ones that we think have violated our rights. Inside of me is a young and angry revolutionary who is fuelled by justice, and who experiences a sacred moment when *The Internationale* is played on the radio on May 1st.

Ritual V

You have just finished work; you are tired after a busy day with energetic kids.

You long for a good rest.

Instead of heading home you decide to go to your mother's. You had promised to water the flowers while she is away.

You let yourself in and go straight to your room where you feed your fish.

When you have watered the flowers and rinsed the fish tank you turn on the TV

and you sit down on your old armchair with the little tiger in your lap,

both items you inherited. In the late hours you decide to sleep over in your old bed to spare you the drive to your flat.

Here it is cosy and safe.

Observation

Observe the space.

Pay attention to the light.

Pay attention to the pictures.

Pay attention to the scent.

Action

Sit comfortably where you want and rock back and forth.

Contemplation

What methods do you have to deal with setbacks?

Whom do you want to have close to you?

Dining table

Boat waves

This table I use every day, but my computer is usually at the end of the table by the window. Here I check my email, Facebook, and Messenger. I also do my on-line banking here and my private household accounting. I take good care of my economy and I always know what I can afford. The photograph on the wall shows the view from my childhood home to Flateyri in Önundarfjörður, that I think must be the most photographed fjord in the whole country. It is beautiful, almost too beautiful. When my family gathers here once a month for dinner, I pack up my office and set the table for dinner, like now. People bring something to drink but I cook for everyone. While we eat, we talk about everything and nothing, most often in English since my daughter in law does not speak Icelandic.



Ritual VI

You are at your mother's for dinner. You sit in your seat, and you feel good surrounded by your people. You are the centre of attention with your magnetic energy and story telling skills. When you start talking about movies and computer games, the children move to the guest room to play, and your mother withdraws to the kitchen where she listens in on your conversation while doing the dishes.

She does not know anything about films or gaming.
When you are about to leave your mother asks if you can take one of your boxes from the storage. You hope you can find a place in your flat for the things in it.
You feel like your whole life is stored in cardboard boxes.

Action

Sit in your seat, pour your drink into the glass, and have a sip.
Imagine yourself in a conversation with the family.

Observation

Look at the picture of Önundarfjord.

Contemplation

How many photographs can you take of a beautiful object?
What moments are worth capturing?

Room

Equal fish are best tailed

This is the space of my children and grandchildren. Here they can come when they need a rest or privacy. Many of my relatives have neurological disorders, ADHD, or autism. I have cared for and supported many relatives who have suffered, sometimes at my own cost. With time I have learned to honour my own boundaries and protect my own peace of mind and health without losing the ability to care for the ones closest to me.

I am a parental support for my grandson, who has autism. He stays with me one weekend each month. He is very regimented, wants to have everything done in a strict order and needs a clear framework. I also, want a clear framework and I want to have free time regularly. This I can control. When I have more than one guest, I sleep on a mattress in the living room. It feels a bit like camping.

Ritual VII

You are on your monthly visit to your grandmother. You go straight into your room with the bag that was packed for you. You sit on the bed and scan the entire room to confirm that everything is in its place. You go out into the hall and call to your grandma. “Where is the chocolate cake?” “Your grandma smiles and says: “It is in the living room, come on, let’s have a bite. “



Bedroom

Good scent heals the head

Dear guest,

This is the last letter.

Soon the doorbell will ring, and the piece is over.

This is my bedroom and I think it is much too big. I have had many homes with many different people in different times. I need to move regularly to keep me in motion and to have space to change. Now I need a smaller bedroom and a different flat that serves me as I am today. Cardboard boxes, and movement of people and things are a natural part of my life. One of these boxes I store in my drawer. This box is full of words and sentences that I have collected. During your visit I have shared with you things about my self and you have been given tasks and contemplations. Now I would appreciate if you would like to leave one or two contemplations with me. Maybe I can put these words into my box and move them with me to my next home.

I want to thank you for your visit.

Take good care.

María.

Ritual VIII

You are listening to a woman speaking on the radio. She is both clever and witty. She says something brilliant. You hurry to find a pen and write the sentence on a piece of paper that you take to the bedroom. In your drawer you find the box where you keep the treasure you have been collecting throughout your life. You put your new item into the collection and before you close the box you pick up an old note and read out loud what is written on it.

You smile.

Action

Write a sentence or a special word on a piece of paper for the host's collection.

Leave the note behind when you leave.

Observation

Pay attention to temperatures, textures, and softness.

Both inside of you, and in the room.

Contemplation

What treasures do you keep in your drawer?

What objects do you take with you between houses, homes, and lives?

101, Vesturbær (West-town)

Entrance

Universe

Dear guest,

Welcome to Framnesvegur.

I have left envelopes for you that contain; a letter, a description of a ritual, and tasks that involve observing, contemplating, and doing things in my home. Although I guide you through the work, you are the main character and the only spectator of what goes on.

I am a collector by nature, and I have been collecting postcards. With each letter is a special postcard I have chosen for you.

When you have read the letter and solved the tasks, please put the envelope where you found it. The performance is over when you hear a knock on the door, in half an hour or when you have read the letters and are ready to go.

People from different parts of the country and the world occupy this house. They have come to live in Reykjavík for a shorter or longer period. I come from Poland and have lived in Iceland for 20 years.

Before I invite you into my home, I ask you to make two stops on your way up to the top floor where I live.

I hope you enjoy the stay.

Karolina.



Ritual I

You are a guest in an unfamiliar house.

You enter through a door from one universe to another.

You wipe your feet.

Action

Wipe your feet on the mat saying

“Heima er best” (Home is best).

Observation

Pay attention to your feelings, thoughts, and expectations of the performance.

Reflection

If *Home is best*, what is the measure?

Better than what?

What do you need to wipe off before entering this world?

Landing

Transformation

The stairs are a place of transit, up or down, a passage between two states. I belong to a generation in Poland that is sometimes called the *Transformation generation*. I was a witness to how capitalism emerged from communism. It was hard on people when the state wasn't there anymore to take care of everyone. The communist regime had taken care of people's livelihood in all ways. It was a hard but necessary change. I myself have lived in constant transformation and taken independent decisions in every step of my journey, one of them was to move to Iceland. Every day I walk up and down these stairs. Here there is no one to elevate me or bring me down. I carry my own weight and take the steps by myself.

Ritual II

You are always ready to support your masters by taking on all their weight, both on the way up and down your steps. Few people stay with you since your role is to support people in transit.

You do not have an opinion about which way is better,
up or down.

Action

Bend your knees slightly, like you are slowly collapsing.

Feel how the force of gravity pulls you down.

Resist the pull and rise up again.

Observation

Observe your weight.

Reflection

Is there anyone in your life that elevates you?

Entrée

Life

Welcome to my home.

My name is Karolina, I am a 40 year old art historian and travel guide. I live here with my son Ýmir a 16-year-old high school student.

Our home is tiny and highly organised. We have the space we need for necessities and nothing beyond that. I am a collector of nature and the decision to move into a 30 square meter apartment was a deliberate decision that called for a minimal lifestyle. I choose the things in here carefully and try to constrain the collector in me. Since moving in, I have gradually started to collect small things that do not demand space, like postcards.

My home is very different from my childhood home but one thing I have learned from my mother is to keep the home tidy and clean, especially the floor. It needs to be comfortable to walk barefoot around the home.

I trust you with my home and I hope you enjoy walking barefoot on my floor.

Greetings Karolina.

Ritual III

It is a quarter to seven and you wake up from the sound of daybreak. You rise and walk barefoot into the kitchen and pour water into a glass, you cut a slice of lemon and squeeze it into the water. You drink your water while you wait for the coffee to brew. You open the balcony door and check the temperature and look up into the sky. Then you sit down in the comfy chair and drink your coffee in peace while you observe the clouds traveling across the sky.

Action

Take off your shoes and socks and place them carefully in the shoe shelves.

Walk barefoot on the shiny floor.

Observation

Pay attention to the sensation in your soles when they touch the floor.

Reflection

How much space do you need?

What things could you not live without?

Bathroom

Love

When I had lived for five years in Iceland my parents sought shelter in Iceland after my father had exposed a scheme of corruption in our hometown and was exiled by dishonest politicians. My parents had to leave their home, my childhood home, and were not allowed to take anything with them. My home in Reykjavík transformed temporarily into a refugee camp and I had to walk between official institutions to secure their residential and work permits. It became a long and tiresome process. Today they have lived in Iceland for 15 years and run a business here. This flat is a gift of love and appreciation from my father for the help I gave them. I bought the flat in a bad condition four years ago and my father renovated it for me with great attention to all details. The floor is heated exactly where you stand in front of the mirror and while brushing my teeth, I do not only feel the heat in my feet but also in my heart.

Ritual IV

You wake up when your mother knocks lightly on your door.

You are going to work. You brush your teeth standing on the warm spot on the floor and look into the mirror.

You go into the kitchen and take a banana, oat milk, peanut butter, ice, and a few more good things and put them into the blender.

You taste the smoothie and are pleased with the outcome.

You pour the drink into one big glass for yourself and a smaller one for your mother to taste.

When you call out goodbye, your mother comes and puts money into your palm to buy lunch.

You run down the stairs and out into the day.

Action

Wash your hands and look your self in the eyes.

Observation

Notice the lines in your face.

Notice the colour of your skin.

Notice the colour of your eyes.

Notice the colour of your hair.

Reflection

Have you ever had to escape from a place?

Kitchen

Belonging

The kitchen serves me well, I have everything within reach to make simple food for the two of us. I sometimes feel like I'm in Paris or Kraków when working in the kitchen, because the neighbours are right in my face. I like that feeling. I like being surrounded by life and movement. One downside is that my neighbour sometimes leaves the house and forgets to turn off the alarm in the bedroom that faces the kitchen. Fortunately, my father made sure that the windows are tight and do not let too much disturbance in.

I am in good contact with my neighbours, in my house, in my street and in my neighbourhood. Here people take care of each other and once a year we prepare dinner and eat together at a long table outside of Borgarstígur. I feel like I belong to this community, and I participate in communal activities as much as I can.

My best friend also comes from Poland, and she is a writer. She lives in Hálsasveit which is my second home in the countryside and this home is her second home in the city. When she is here, she cooks for her 8-year-old daughter. They are a part of my chosen family.

Ritual V

You are in your second home in the city. Your daughter is still sleeping in the bedroom and your friend is moving the mattress that fills the living room floor. You look at this as your home even though you do not own a single thing in here. You compliment your friend on how tidy she is, and you laugh at how you both resemble your mothers in so many ways.

You both agree that neatness is a good inheritance.

You make coffee and offer it to your host before you wake up your daughter.

Observation

Pay attention to the organisation in the kitchen.

Pay attention to the colours in the kitchen.

Action

Have a glass of water with lemon.

You can take the glass with you on your journey
through the flat.

Reflection

Who are close to you?

What community do you belong to?

Do you have a self chosen family?

Dining table

Mother tongue

I am not much into cooking, but I make simple food every day for the two of us, which we eat here at the table. I really enjoy sitting here with my son, eating, chatting, and planning something exciting. His father's family are gourmet people who introduce exotic flavours to him, and my mother invites us regularly to eat traditional Polish food.

On my 40th birthday this summer my mother gave to me a handwritten book with 100 Polish recipes which took her three weeks to write. My best friend also just wrote a book. She writes in both Icelandic and Polish and the book will be the first published book written in Icelandic by a Polish person. That book is not about food.

Language is an important tool, the key to belonging. I speak Icelandic with a Polish accent and Polish with an Icelandic accent. I do not call myself an Icelandic even though I feel that I belong here, I call myself Polish even though I do not belong there.

When I have guests, I serve drinks and maybe some light snacks and we disperse organically through the flat. A lot of my friends are smokers, so the balcony is a popular place and I often find myself in the doorway keeping the conversation going.

It is a Polish custom to leave one empty chair at the Christmas table for a stranger. In our home there is always an empty chair for unexpected guests despite the small space.



Ritual VI

You put the headphones in the ears and run down and out to the sea.

You enjoy the wind in your face while you let the music filter through your system and the energy from the sea and the mountains recharge you.

You love this country.

It was love at first sight.

You are bursting with energy when you return home, and you continue moving to the music on the living room floor.

You dance and dance, forgetting time and space.

Action

Sit in your chair at the table.

Imagine yourself in a conversation with the family.

Observation

Look at the shells and stones.

Notice their form.

Pay attention to their colour.

Consider their origin.

Reflection

Is there space for unexpected guests in your life?

Living room

Refuge

The corner of the sofa is my refuge. Here I curl up with a book or a computer and dive into entertainment, education, or work. Sometimes I cover myself with a blanket and then I feel completely safe. I have surrounded myself with things that are important to me and some of those things are books. Books were not a part of my childhood. Now I have my own library with books on geology, art, and history. I love travelling and have been a travel guide for many years. During the pandemic, when the tourist industry collapsed, I had a long-awaited rest from constantly servicing tourists.

Now I want to travel myself and visit all the places in Iceland I have not yet seen. The photographs to the right of the bathroom door are from a two-month trip that I made with my son. We travelled through Europe, visiting all our friends living in different parts of the continent. I am an Icelandic citizen and have an Icelandic passport like my son. When I am travelling abroad, I can truly say that I am Icelandic.

The photos remind me of our important relationship and our sweet togetherness. The memories of my nation are not so sweet and in Iceland I feel that I am released from this heavy burden. Here I decide for myself what I choose to remember.

Ritual VII

You are a guest in your daughter's home. Your grandson sits beside you on the sofa and starts to tell you something in Icelandic, you do not understand. You ask him to speak Polish. "Oh, I am so sorry grandma, I forgot." He tells you about a film he and his mother were watching together by a Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski. The film is about a man who is trying to catch a train.

The film tells three stories, three possible versions of what could happen. You think about your own life and where you would be today if your husband would not have done what was morally right and exposed a crime.

Action

Sit in the corner of the sofa.

Curl up with your knees up to your chest.

Observation

Look for things that carry or create meaning in the environment.

Reflection

What do you choose to remember?

What have you forgotten?

Bedroom

Cocoon

The bedroom is sometimes called the cabin. Here I crawl in and feel completely safe.

After a sixteen-day tour with foreign tourists I am exhausted and in need of deep rest. Then I lock myself in this cocoon for 24 hours. Here I lie and make sure that the windows are closed and let the strain sift out of me. Here I experience peace.



Ritual VIII

You have not heard from your daughter for some time.

You try to call her mobile phone and a voice says:

“the phone is out of reach or turned off”

You think about your daughter, and you feel your chest burst with love and pride.

You are happy for her, that she got opportunities in Iceland to be independent and strong because you know that in your country it would have been different.

She knows what she wants, and she goes where she needs to go.

You call one more time.

Action

Lie in a foetal position on the bed and relax.

Observation

Pay attention to your breath.

Reflection

What does your cocoon look like?

Where do you seek peace?

Room

Composition

Dear guest,

This is my last letter to you. Soon you will hear a knock on the door and the performance is over. This room contains the entire future.

Here a young engineer works long hours creating and mending computers. He uses all sorts of tools and diverse components that he puts together.

He, himself is also composed of diverse ethnic components. He is French, Polish, and Icelandic. This home is the centre of his life and here he likes to spend his time.

In this room he is occupied with preparing for the future by solving endless creative assignments.

Thank you for your visit and good luck with your future.

Karolina.

Ritual IX

You are in your second home and have the privilege to sit and observe your friend making a computer in his room. You look up to him and think he is really cool. He explains to you how a computer works, but you do not fully understand. You just want to hang out and chat with him. He is more interested in computers than in chatting with you. You go out to your mother who explains “teenagers just need more privacy than other people, don’t take it personally”.

Action

Write down a list of countries you would like to visit.

Write a list of countries you would like to live in.

Take the list with you.

Observation

Pay attention to your own patriotic feelings.

Reflection

How are you composed?

What do immigrants immigrate?

105, Túnin (The Fields)

Entrance

Vertu þú sjálfur. (Be yourself) by Síðan skein sól.

Dear guest,

Welcome to Hátún, *The Icelandic Disability Alliance Housing Estate*

I live on the ground floor in flat 101.

I have left envelopes for you that contain; a letter, a description of a ritual, and tasks that involve observing, contemplating, and doing things in my home. Although I guide you through the work, you are the main character and the only spectator of what goes on.

I love music so each letter starts with the title of a song that I find fitting for that space. When you have read the letter and solved the tasks, please put the envelope back to where you found it. I have Cerebral Palsy disorder and make use of a wheelchair to travel through life. During your visit I'd like to invite you to travel in my domestic chair to gain better insight into my existence. When you read this, I am somewhere on the move, that is how I prefer to be. I travel through town in a specially designed electric wheelchair that I only use when outside, it gives me the freedom to go most places in the city. The performance is over when the doorbell rings in half an hour or when you have read the letters and are ready to go.

I hope you enjoy the stay.

Best wishes, Björk.

Ritual I

You are a house. Inside of you there exists a diverse ecosystem of people, animals, and microorganisms. Constant movement in and out, between rooms, apartments and floors maintains a perfect balance within your system. Your life is dedicated to the service of your inhabitants for whom you create shelter from weather and winds. You are an equipment of aid to people with diverse abilities so they can be independent in their lives.



Action

Take a seat in the wheelchair and move towards
the post-boxes.

Read the names in silence and imagine that your name is on one of the tags.

Observation

Observe your feelings and thoughts.

Pay attention to your expectations for the performance.

Contemplation

What kind of aid-equipment do you need in your life?

Entrance

Lífið er yndislegt. (Life is beautiful) by Hreimur.

Welcome to my home. My name is Björk, and I am a 32 year old single woman and I live here with my cat Sprettur (Sprint). My friend Kristján, who's also in a wheelchair, comes over daily. This apartment is our sanctuary. I have lived in this housing estate for five years, but the first three years I lived on the fifth floor. It was only after I moved to this flat that I came to terms with living in this house since it is better situated than the previous one. Here is ample space for my chair and Sprettur can easily come and go as he pleases.

Pets are prohibited in the house but still there are many cats and dogs that live here. Sprettur is a great pal and is an indispensable part of my life. I have stopped feeling guilty about breaking the rules. Sometimes it is necessary to go against the rules.

Sprettur might come home while you are here. Cats are very independent animals. I do not attempt to gain control over him. I only try to get some control over my own life.

I trust you with my home.

Greetings Björk.

Ritual II

You sneak into the window after a night out and wait for the sleeping one to wake up. When she is up, you follow her every move, into the bathroom, living room and kitchen until she feeds you. When you have eaten enough, she pets you and the two of you communicate in a gentle and tender way.

You need to wait until the afternoon for the yummy food to arrive on your plate, but it is worth the wait.

Observation

Pay attention to the organisation of the flat.

Contemplation

What could prevent you from taking an independent decision?
When do you break the rules?

Action

Leave the letter and move in the wheelchair into the bathroom.

Bathroom

Shallow by Lady Ga Ga

The bathroom is designed, for the most parts, with the needs of people in wheel-chairs in mind and is very convenient. I enjoy singing in the shower, just to live the cliché. Otherwise, I enjoy going to the swimming pool with my friends. Sometimes my friends drive, or I order a pickup and meet up with them at the pool. I always need to organise everything carefully before going places since access issues can be tricky. I am fairly self sufficient and do not need as much aid as many of my friends who live with disabilities.



Ritual III

You are going to the swimming pool with your childhood friend.

It is summer and the sun is shining.

You roll out in your chair and greet some of the inhabitants on your way out.

You feel great and wait for your girlfriend to arrive.

When she does you make yourself comfortable in the passenger seat while she packs your chair and puts it in the trunk. On the radio a song with Lady Ga Ga is

playing, a song from the film *A star is born*.

You both sing along with the refrain, and you tell your friend how much you relate to the main character of the film.

She says to you: "Why don't you take singing classes?"

You laugh.

It is not the first time this idea has entered your mind.

Action

Wash your hands.

Observation

Observe the person in the mirror.

Contemplation

What defines you?

Do you live out any cliches?

Kitchen

Takk fyrir mig. (Thanks), by Ingó veðurguð

I enjoy cooking. I cook for Kristján who loves everything I prepare for him. I do traditional Icelandic home cooking and sometimes I make a roasted leg of lamb. The kitchen is not designed for people in a wheelchair but luckily, I can stand on my feet so I can work in the kitchen with two crutches. My quality moments are dinner parties with family and friends. My family is scattered around, and we seldom meet. My mother lives in Denmark, my father, and siblings in Vestmanna Islands and then I have a brother who also has severe CP disorder and lives in a service housing for the disabled in Hafnarfjörður. Compared to my brother I have a lot of quality in my life. My aim is to fight for better quality of life for myself and other people in my situation. I am on the board of Sjálfsbjörg, an association of people with physical disabilities. I also do a lot of voluntary work and am in charge of the social club for youngsters with CP. We do a lot of fun things – my motto is to have fun and to socialise with a lot of diverse people.

It is society that makes us disabled, not ourselves.

Ritual IV

You have been working the whole day, converting old VHS tapes into digital format, changing from one system to another.

You need fresh air, and you need nourishment.

In your electric wheelchair you roll to the next neighbourhood.

You ring the bell of your childhood friend from summer camp's place, and she greets you smiling.

Her home smells of delicious food and reminds you of your mother.

Action

Find a glass and have some water.

Observation

Pay attention to the design of the kitchen.

Contemplation

Do you need to move something in your life from an old system to a new one?

Living room

I want to break free, by Queen

The living room is the centre of the home. Here I leave the chair and sit on the sofa, watch television, and listen to music. I don't spend much time here during the day. When I am not working as a substitute receptionist at the Statistic Office of Iceland, I am doing voluntary work or attending a sports event. I am a passionate handball fan, and my team is FH. I attend handball games in winter and football in summer. I shout a lot at the judge and am very opinionated when it comes to interpreting rules. I have not found a particular sport for myself like Kristján, who bowls and plays boccia, but I take being a fan really seriously. In the phone-book I am titled Björk Sigurðardóttir FH member.

Sprettur is very agile and often plays on his climbing construction while I relax on the sofa. Sometimes an intruder sneaks in, eating the cat food and taking advantage of the cat privileges in the home but most visitors are invited and then we have fun, sing and even dance. I like to be around a lot of people, and I seek places where I have the opportunity to talk to many different people.



Ritual V

You say goodbye to your friend after a nice evening with food and games. You open your computer and start to stream music, the song playing reminds you of a really good traditional country-side ball you attended in Úthlíð in Biskupstungur a few years back. It was a beautiful summer evening, and the atmosphere was so good. You forget time and place immersed in this memory and you move to the music. “There is nothing better than a good countryside ball“ you think to yourself. Then you think about the difference of dancing with crutches, like you did then, and in the chair. The conclusion is that the techniques are very different.

Observation

Pay attention to the messages that you are getting from your environment.

Action

Push the play button on the computer and dance to the music while in the wheelchair.

Contemplation

What are the highlights of your life?

Bedroom

Það er gott að elska. (It is good to Love), by Bubbi

Dear guest,

This is the last letter and soon the doorbell will ring.

My bedroom is a bit like a personal shrine. Here I keep everything that relates to my story and the people I love. Here is a drawing I inherited from my grandfather, a very mysterious picture with a lot of signs that you can interpret in different ways. On the wall you can also see a photo collage of myself that my mother had hanging on her wall until she moved to Denmark, when she gave it to me. Another photo collage is from a trip I made with my friend. I love travelling and to experience new things. Here is also a Manchester United fan scarf, my team in the English League. MU Fan club in Iceland selects each year one person with disability for a trip to Manchester to experience a game on the home field.

One year I got a nomination and was invited – that was a fabulous trip.

Even though I love to immerse myself in memories I think a lot about the future and what it might bring. I know that this is not my future home and I also know that I might not have found my place in the world. I would like to have an education and I would also like to buy the house where I spent my childhood; I relate so many positive memories to that house. My mother once gave me a deck of Angel cards with positive messages. When we are together, we draw one card each from the deck, just for fun. Then we have positive messages with us into the rest of the day, the evening, or the night.

I want to leave you with a positive message from an angel.

Is it not exactly what you need?

I want to thank you for coming.

Take care, Björk.

Ritual VI

You are invisible to the people you serve. Your body is pure energy which you use for embracing the ones you were sent to protect. Now you are with the girl you hold so dearly, and you spread love and soothing vibrations around her. You intend to stay with her as long as she needs you. You send her messages through the cards that are named after your kin.

Observation

Look at the pictures on the wall.

Action

Draw a card from the deck, read the message.

Write down a positive message to your host and leave it on the nightstand.

Contemplation

What would you keep in your personal shrine?

What does quality of life mean to you?

Eyja / Island



De-script-ion

This de-script-ion is a score of *Eyja* (*Island* in English) a site specific and human specific performance situated in Hrísey, an island off the north coast of Iceland. *Eyja* was performed in August and October 2020.

The score is a second person description of a guest's journey through the performance with an occasional glimpse of the overview. As a reader you are invited to take on the perspective of that guest.

The words on paper will never substitute the embodied, immersive experience nor do they describe the actual work that emerges in the guest's being, during and after the performance. In my understanding the actual work is the affect that remains with the guests and participants after the series of encounters on the island. To me an affect is a complex web of thoughts, emotions, sensations, memories and in this particular case, the aspirations for the future to come.

Eyja is a piece about what it means to belong; what ties a person to a community or a place and what kind of commitment it requires to be a part of something. The challenges of the island reflect the global challenges of current times. In the performance guests are invited to critically investigate their own ideas of what it means to belong. The guests are invited to mirror themselves in a staged journey through the life and values of the islanders. Through walks, observations, genuine exchange, symbolic gestures and structured dialogue, topics on quality of life on the island are contemplated.

I created the piece in collaboration with Gréta Kristín Ómarsdóttir who is a theatre maker and a former student of mine from my time as a dean at the Iceland University of the Arts. Gréta comes from Hrísey and while working on the piece we lived in her childhood home. We collaborated with Hrísey Primary School and

members of the local community in Hrísey. The work was produced by Akureyri Theatre Company, the biggest professional theatre outside Reykjavik, with the support of *Eyþing sustainable strategy mission fund*.

The work was performed in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, and we had to adjust all our ideas to the restrictions that were in place at the time. The performance was originally a part of *Akureyri Culture Week* in August of 2020 which was partially cancelled due to the conditions. Despite that, we were lucky to be able to perform in a period between the second and third wave of the pandemic where things opened up for a short while. The performance was also a part of *A! Performance Festival* in October, an international performance festival held annually in the municipality of Akureyri. The piece was performed in Icelandic and is translated here into English.

The work is made for and by the islanders and could not have happened without their hospitality, generosity and their energy which fuelled our artistic engine.

Thanks to Greta's family, the staff of the Hrísey Primary School, the hosts, and the children.

Thanks to the birds.

Thanks to the whales.

Thanks to the flowers and the rocks.

Thanks to the mountain Kaldbakur.

Thanks to the wind, to the sun and to the sea.

Thanks to Hrísey.

Malmö, October 2021.

Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir.





Sævar

You meet up at the harbour of Árskógssandur in North of Iceland, where Sævar, the Ferry to Hrísey, waits for its passengers.

A person from the *Akureyri Theatre Company* welcomes you and gives you a number.

You are invited to leave your phone and/or camera on the boat. You are told that you will be navigating the work in a small group and that the journey will take approximately 2,5 hours including the sailing. You are invited to embark the boat and asked to go downstairs and find a table that has your number on it. You search for table number one and sit down.



A woman dressed up as a toll guard stands behind a desk and welcomes you. You notice a big loudspeaker on the desk.

The chief engineer of the boat distributes *Island-passports* to the guests and invites you to fill in the blanks.

Name of bearer:

Residence:

Nationality:

Place and date of birth:

Colour of eyes:

Colour of hair:

Mission:

Peculiarities:

Life principles:

The passport also has six empty boxes for stamps.

The toll guard distributes pencils and offers you help to fill in the document.

The boat leaves the harbour and sails towards the island.

After a while a voice is heard from the loudspeaker.

The boat rocks you gently while you listen to the voice, and you close your eyes or watch the ocean and mountains out of the window.

The voice is soft and hypnotic.

You are a bird of passage.

A migrating bird.

You are flying.

With others, many others.

You are one of them.

You fly between continents,

south and north, west, and east.

Over land and sea.

On your way from home, on your way home.

Home is potentially everywhere.

You visit the same places again and again.

The whole world is your home.

You choose a good place to live and when conditions change

you fly to a new and better place.

What is important, is that there is enough to eat and that the weather-conditions
are favourable, but the most crucial aspect is security, that you are safe.

You dwell where there is not too much competition for space and food.

Now you are on your way to the island.

You are in a flock of birds.

You fly together.

On the island, there is enough food, ample space, and few threats.

It is good to raise your young on the island.

But the conditions are changing.

You do not know if you will be back next year.

You are a bird of passage.

In migration.

You fly.

You do not own a land.

No land owns you.

For you the land is necessary.

For the land you are necessary.

Before the long flight you gather, you, the migrating birds, to prepare
and practice,

together you wait for the right weather for the journey.

You are an excellent weather forecaster.

You are sensitive to air pressure and time your migratory flight to favourable
weather conditions.

There are many things that can affect your flight and it's important to take all
variables into account before taking off.

You want to use your energy wisely; it is not endless.

One depression on the way can drag you down.

It is better to have a tailwind, it is better to wait for the right winds.



You fly
You are a bird of passage
Leaving
Migrating
Passing through
In transit
Arriving
Arrival bird
Immigrating bird

Where do you come from?
Where are you going?
What are you seeking here?

You fly
to the place where the conditions are favourable
But the conditions are changing ... rapidly.

You are seeking a place where there is safety.

Now you are flying there ...

Out to the island.

The island.

You forget everything that has gone before ...

You are a migrating bird on your way to the island.

Out to the island.

The island ...

Island

An island

One island

One

Two

Three

Many

To the island ...

You

Me

They

Us

Them

Together

Apart

Wings
Open wings
Open
Sky
Sea

Lighthouse
Harbour
Passage
Journey
Travel
Traveller
Travelling
Anchor
Moorings
Ties
Shackles

Floating
Swimming
Lying
Crawling
Motionless
Motion
Life

Accident
Sorrow
Solidarity
Peace

Embrace
Empathy

Silence

Energy
Endurance

Force
Forceful

Work

Value

Tick

Tock

Time

Tide

Flow

Blow

Wind

Sail

Sailing

Waves

Weather

Breeze

Freeze

Frost

Shield

Protection

Safety

Sense
Senseless
Self
Source
Intuition

Home
Homecoming
Away from home
Abroad

Land
Shore
On shore
Offshore
Escape

Duty
Depth
Body
Bodies
Adult
Child
Elderly
Family

Form
Formation
Transform

Change
Channel
With
Against
Alike
Different
Diverse
Belonging
Alienation
Rejection

Story
Collective
Sharing
Memories
Memorise
Recollect
Collect
Forget
Loose
Seek
Find

Lifeline

Remote
Outside

Luck
Bad luck
Shock
Trauma
Ruin
Ruins

Powerlessness

Power
Struggle
Black
White
Red
Grey
Green
Blue

Weather
Wind
Mountain
Country
Nation
Town
Gathering
Assembly
A Part
A Part of a whole

Independence

Song
Scream
Squeak
Nest
Egg
Youngster

Resource

Breeding
Breeding place
Sanctuary
Reserve

Nature reserve

Nature
Land
Property
Fence
Garden
Gate

Permission

Permit
Sanction

Boarder
Borderless
Boundaries
Bind

Connect
Connection

Empty
Full
Open
Closed

Inside
Outside

Sunrise
Sunset
Horizon
Line
Circle

All
Nothing

Pier

When the voice falls silent the boat has reached the island and is about to dock. When you cross the gangplank, you see a row of children aged 7 to 14 standing on the harbour, holding boards with numbers from 1 to 8. A woman dressed as a toll guard is sitting by a table on the pier. On the table there is a stack of papers and a tin cookie jar. The woman gives you a sign to approach her and soon the guests have formed a line in front of the table.



You stand in line and when you reach the table, the woman welcomes you to the island and gives you a stamp in your passport.

She informs you about the structure of the journey:



“It is like a treasure hunt. You need to visit certain places on the island and to solve assignments to retrieve stamps in your passport. You need to collect six stamps in total. You will get the last stamp on your return to the harbour on the condition that you have fulfilled your personal mission.”

She then invites you to draw the mission from the cookie jar:

“The mission is for your eyes only and will be your secret during the journey.”

She points to a child who is going to be your guide for the journey and gives you a simple map of your route.

Personal missions

Find a beautiful stone on your way and show it to a fellow traveller.

Find a wildflower on the island and remember its colours. Describe the colours to a fellow traveller.

Find a wildflower on the island and remember its scent.

Describe the scent to a fellow traveller.

Pick a wildflower and give it to someone you meet on your journey.

Give someone a compliment at least twice on your journey.

Give thanks to someone at least four times during your journey.

Throw a stone in the sea and observe the ripples.

If you see litter on the ground, take it with you and throw it in an appropriate bin.

If you find a guestbook, write your name in it.

Offer your help at least twice on your journey.

Invite your fellow travellers to go first at least twice on your journey.

Try to keep eye contact with the one you are talking to.

Give your fellow travellers a smile while you talk to them.

Give your guide a compliment for their performance.

Take responsibility for the group tasks, that they are properly solved.

Take responsibility for keeping the dialogue lively on your journey.

Pay attention to everything that is red, remember at least three things.

Pay attention to everything that is yellow, remember at least three things.

On the paper you drew from the cookie jar it says:

Pick a wildflower and give it to someone you meet on your journey.

This will be your secret mission.

The guides and the guests

You find your guide, a teenage boy, who stands on the harbour waiting for his guests. He is holding a sign with your number. One other guest approaches the boy and soon he joins a younger boy and his guests. You are now four guests and two children in your group.



Child 1: Hi, my name is Patti, and I am 8 years old.

Child 2: And my name is Stefán, and I am 13 years old. We will be your guides for today. Before we start the journey, we would like to get to know you a bit better. What are your names?

You and the other guests tell your names.

Child: What is your favourite toy or thing?

You, the other guests, and the children tell each other.

Child: What are your hobbies?

You, the other guests, and the children tell each other.

Child: What is your favourite song?

You, the other guests, and the children tell each other.

Child: Now we are going on a walk, and you can ask us questions or just talk amongst yourselves.

During the journey the atmosphere is relaxed. You converse with your fellow travellers and the children while walking between *stations* if you are not invited to walk in silence. On the way the children answer questions about the island and point out places on the island that they have a special relation to. Sometimes, the children suggest games to play while the group is waiting for clearance to continue from the toll ladies that oversee the piece. Throughout the journey you are seeking opportunities to fulfil your personal mission.

Sæborg, Sea City

You stop by the shore where a tin cookie jar is placed on a big rock between the sea and *Sea City* the town's community hall.

Child: We will stop here and solve our first task.

The children open the jar and take out a card and one of them reads out loud:

In Hrísey there are many kinds of migrating birds that visit the island each year, amongst them are the owners of the holiday homes. We islanders call them migrating birds. Some migrating birds transform into a resident bird, this is true for both birds and people.

The child then asks one of the guests to read the assignment.

SÆBORG ASSIGNMENT I

Read the descriptions of the migrating birds out loud.

Which bird resembles you the most?

What bird do you relate to?

Take turns in reading the descriptions.

Tell each other which bird you think you are.

You stand in a circle and take turns reading the bird descriptions.



Kría

Arctic tern Sterna Paradisaea

Arctic Tern is a strong character, very straightforward,
determined and possesses great leadership skills.

Arctic Tern is an adventurous social being that is not afraid to
enter the spotlight and is prone to risk taking.

When Arctic Tern arrives on the arena, it does not go unnoticed.
The Tern has a strong sense of justice and beneath the intense and
perhaps arrogant surface,
Arctic tern has a big and caring heart.

Mariú Erla

White Wagtail Motacilla Alba

White Wagtail is a diligent and homely bird with a lively imagination. Wagtail is open, warm, and sociable, but prefers to keep private affairs to itself. Wagtail has few but close friends. Humour and lightness are the main characteristics of the Wagtail that is extremely cheerful and creative. Wagtail wants to have fun and enjoy the moment and has remarkable acting skills.

Hrossagaukur

Common Snipe Gallinago Gallinago

is a down-to-earth and rather reserved thinker, perhaps one could say that it is pragmatic in nature. The Snipe would never rush into anything. Snipe carefully chooses each move, relying on its strong intuition that is so precise at times that it seems like pure prophecy. Common Snipe is not very sociable but has a unique charm, humour, and enjoys strolling around with dignity, giving into a friendly chat given the right circumstances.

Æður

Common Eider Somateria Mollissima Borealis

Common Eider is a soft and tender romantic that moves slowly and effortlessly and is good at all things. Maybe Eider seems shy at first, but when the ice has been broken the bird is the best friend and most generous host, loving, trustworthy and caring. Eider is sensitive towards injustice and shows compassion for and solidarity with beings less fortunate.

You discuss the birds and their characteristics, the people, and their personalities and through the assignment you get to know your fellow travellers a bit better.

When everyone has chosen a bird, the children give you a stamp in your passport. The children ask one guest to read the next assignment.

Child: Can I ask you to read the next assignment to the group?

The child gives one of the guests a card from the tin jar.

The guest reads the assignment out loud.



SÆBORG ASSIGNMENT II

Walk in a V formation to the next place. Keep two meters distance and walk in silence. Please organise the formation by yourselves and keep it until you arrive at your next destination.

With the help of the children, you create a V formation and start the walk with the older child in front.











Jaórákan
sem er rau-
bríngu, síð-
rákum um
ryðrauður.
að jafnaði
þessi fugl
um 1920 t
það tók ne



HRÍSEY

Græna leiðin
The green route
around 2.3 kms
Gula leiðin
The yellow route
around 4.5 kms
Rauða leiðin
The red route
around 5.0 kms

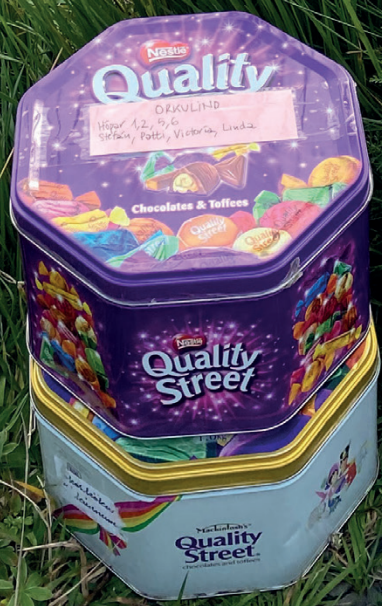
Ystibær
Vilhjálmur
Borgarbrik
Stóri
Lilli
boli
Lang-
myri
Háabær
Beinalág
Háeyjar-
steinn
Einangrunar-
stöðin
The Quarantine
Centre
Mjóbbær
Hrísey - þorp
Hrísey village
Sýslustofa
Lofnryndis önd

Dú ert hér
You are here



TH
Limosa

The godwit
plumage, wi-
the head do-
blackish stri-
bely is rust.
The male is
female. For
found in the
only began to
1920. This
time and it



Orkulindin The Power source

You walk for a while out of the village up a hill and into a gravel path that leads you to a spring surrounded by cliffs. You walk further on the path into low woods until you reach a clearing with a view to the sea and mountains. On your way you noticed an information sign about this place, that is called *Orkulind* (power source). It is believed that the mountain *Kaldbakur*, one of the mountains you see, is a source of spiritual energy and that it can be both felt and heard from this spot. The children stop by a tin cookie jar, standing by one of many bird signposts on this path. The children open the jar and read from the card.

Child: Now we have reached the *Power Source*, another name for the nature that surrounds us. Can someone please read the next assignment.

You volunteer to be the one and take the card from the cookie jar and read for your fellow travellers out loud:

ORKULIND ASSIGNMENT I

Open your arms and inhale deeply. Then lie down in the grass, watch the sky, and listen to the mountains.

You return the card to the tin jar and look for a good spot on the ground. You lay down on the grass and observe the movements of the few clouds in the sky. You close your eyes and listen to the mountains.



After a while one of the children says:

Now that you have recharged your batteries it is time to move forward.
Before we leave, we will stamp the passports.

When the children have handled the passports, they say:

We will now ask each of you to draw one or two questions each from the
cookie jar. When you have memorised them, put them back again.

You draw two questions. When everyone has returned their questions to the cookie jar the child speaks.

Child: Does anyone want to read the instructions?

A guest reads from a card.



ORKULIND ASSIGNMENT II

Here the group splits in two, please follow your guide to the next destination. The questions are food for conversation on the road, remember to keep a safe distance between everyone.

You now leave with your guide and one other guest. Your guide gives you a choice of two routes to the next destination, which is a private home in the village. One route is via an asphalt road, the other one is over a meadow, a route that only the children walk. You choose the meadow. On the way you pick wildflowers.



Questions for the walk

What is under your feet?

What is beauty?

What is welcome?

What is not welcome?

When do you own yourself?

When do you own a land?

What do you leave behind?

What does the island tell you?

What do you tell the island?

Who owns you?

Who owns the island?

Where does your energy come from?

From where are you coming and where are you going?

Does the island follow you?

Which is better, to be firm or loose?

Why does one leave?

The home

Your guide leads you to the doorsteps of a house and rings the bell.

He leaves you by the door.

The host, a woman in her late thirties, invites you into her living room and brings you coffee and tea. While she is preparing the coffee her husband joins you and you chat about the weather. When the woman returns you give her the flowers and she laughs and thanks you for the flowers. Her husband takes the flowers and returns with them a moment later in a vase that he puts on the sofa table.

Host: Welcome. My name is Hrund, before I go any further it would be nice to hear a bit about you.



You and the other guest, tell your names, where you come from and your occupation. The host couple then introduce themselves and their family.

Host: Here on the table is a cookie jar with questions that we can answer together and hopefully they can lead us into interesting discussions. It would be great if we take turns in drawing from the jar.

You take turns in drawing questions from the jar and answer them. Some questions lead to long discussions, while others you tackle quickly, and occasional questions turn into a new question. After a while the child appears and tells you that it is time to move on. The host gives you a stamp in the passport.

When you are leaving the house, your host says:

I want to give you one question from me personally for the journey.

She whispers a question in you ear: *What is the colour of hope?*



Questions for the private home

What is special about the island?

How do you think about the island when you are away?

Can you describe a really good day on the island?

How has the island shaped you?

How have you shaped the island?

What does the island give you?

What do you give to the island?

What is the colour of the island?

If the island was an animal, which animal would it be?

What does it mean to be an islander?

What does it mean to be a visitor?

When do you feel belonging?

When do you not feel belonging?

How do you fit in?

How do you stand out?

Which is better, to stand out or fit in?

Who is indispensable?

What are your life principles?

What values guide you?







The Church

The Child walks you to the last destination, the church. On the way your fellow traveller uses the opportunity to ask the child about things they want to know about Hrísey and the life on the island. Outside the church the child explains that this is where you part and shows you where the last cookie jar is placed inside the church by the entrance. You thank the child for the company and their service. When entering the church, you see instructions on the wall above the tin jar.

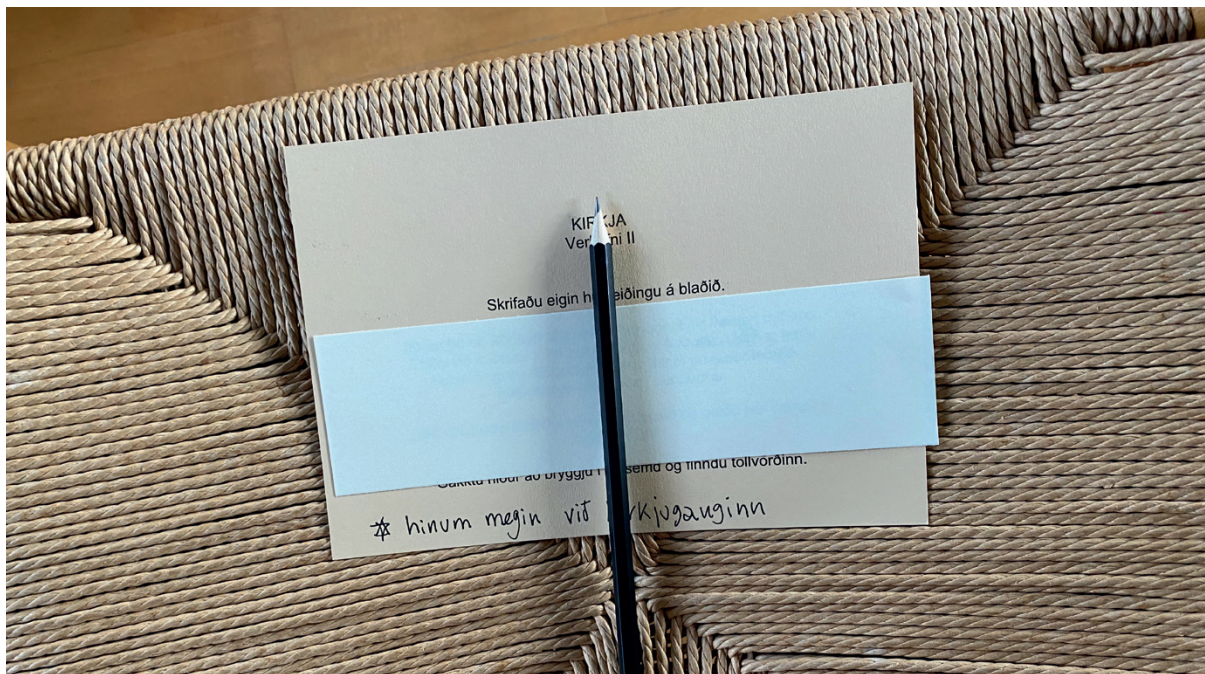


CHURCH ASSIGNMENT I

Draw one or two questions from the jar, memorise them and put them back. Then sit down on a chair with a note, paper, and a pencil on them. Wait for everyone to enter the church before starting assignment II.

You find a chair and sit down.

On the chair is a small piece of paper and a card with instructions.



CHURCH ASSIGNMENT II

Write your own question or contemplation on the paper.

When all the guests have arrived, you are ready to circulate the notes.

Give your note to the person sitting in front of you.

Accept the note from the person sitting behind you and read it, then pass it on to the person in front of you and accept the note from behind you. Keep passing on

notes and reading them until you get your own note back.

Then put your note in the cookie jar, stamp your passport and walk to the harbour and find the toll guard.

You observe the last guests enter and find their seats. You write your note, and you sense the concentration while the other guests are thinking and writing. Then you feel a tap on your shoulder followed by a note, and you hand your own note to the person in front. Then you start to get one note after the other. To start with, the movement is insecure and clumsy but gradually the action becomes smoother. When you get your own note back, you wait. The door opens and people start to leave the church. When you feel it is your turn, you leave your note in the jar and stamp your pass.

Questions for the church

What was the purpose of your last visit to a church?

What meaning has a church to you?

What other places have the same meaning as churches?

Where do you seek your strength?

What is the most soothing word someone has given to you?

What is the best encouragement?

What is your most urgent need?

What do you want to thank for?

What unites?

What divides?

Who cares about you?

Whom do you care about?

Whom do you depend upon?

Who depends on you?

Selected notes from the guests

I take responsibility for myself and am grateful for everything.

There is strength in joy.

I think it is good to be here and now on this island, with others, to reflect and talk about ourselves. In peace.

Is there a golden power source under the island or is it not?

Life is not marked by the times we are pushed to the limit.

Existence is within me.

Where is the dream?

Live in the now.

This has been a pleasant afternoon.

Partly meditation, partly inspiration, partly a gift

What is it that splits us? Conflict.

What is lacking in your life?

Is peace to be found here and now?

Cultivate friendship with acceptance and love – also with yourself.

How wonderful it is to be open towards new experiences.

The best words of comfort I have received are “I know that you are
a good person”.

What is it that gives you joy?

What is faith?

What is peace to you?

What is your connection to your surroundings?

I want to give thanks for the still wind.

How is connection created?

Things that split people are things that feeds the ego.

To walk around Hrisey brings forth peace of the mind.

I count on myself, my partner, family, and friends. I am a rich person.

What is the best comfort? To think that there is always someone with you in the
heart.

The search for happiness gives results especially if you accept challenges and
allow yourself to enter things that come to you. Life is wonderful

This was just amazing!

To be kind to one another.

This was just an incredible journey.

Is this contemplation important enough?

Is there anything to eat?



Mission completed

You walk slowly towards the pier in an irregular stream of guests coming from the church. You place yourself at the end of the line to the toll guard, who sits by the table with paper stacks and stamps. When you reach the table, she speaks to you.

Toll guard: What was your personal mission during the journey? Did you succeed?

You tell her about the flower mission.

Congratulations, you have completed your mission successfully. Here you have the last stamp.

The toll guard stamps your passport.

I invite you to embark on the boat. Your assignment is accomplished, and the performance is over.

Thank you for participating. Have a safe journey.



You embark the ferry. On board you get a questionnaire and a pencil. The boat starts moving and before you know the island is far behind. You exchange experiences with your fellow travellers about the journey as you fill in your feedback on the paper. Before docking at Árskógssandur the toll guard collects your feedback and thanks you for your participation.

And your journey continues ...



Strings

Strings, a Performative Encounter with Agenda 2030 Graduate School, was a participatory performance that explored the driving forces of change and what personal motivations humans have for pursuing their vision.

The site of the performance was the University of Lund both in Lund and Malmö. The host was an international and interdisciplinary group of researchers from all faculties of Lund University dealing with subjects related to Agenda 2030, the UN sustainable goals, that are set to respond to the current global crisis. I am a part of that Graduate School with my artistic research project and the researchers in question are my academic colleagues and friends.

For more than two years my colleagues endured my requests, introductions, video screenings, workshops, and countless emails to prepare for the two performances. I am so thankful for their patience and tolerance towards someone who comes from a marginal field within the academic sphere, asking them to shed their academic armour to be revealed as vulnerable children of the world with their big hearts and bold visions. Twenty-five members of the graduate school participated in the project and other members contributed in one way or another. They believed in the project and invested their time and energy into my project, for that I am grateful.

In the two parts of *Strings* the researchers shared their stories, knowledge, and inspirations through a series of performative encounters.

Strings Part I: We are all researchers, was a personal meeting between two people in a poetic performative setting. Here the researchers invited guests, one at a time, for a visit into their workspace to exchange experience, knowledge, and inspiration. During the visit the guests got an insight into the host's research and had an opportunity to both ask and answer questions on how and why research can contribute to a positive change in our world. Twenty-one researchers opened their offices to the public in this way.

Strings Part II: The Hub, was a performative gathering of people motivated for change, seeking to inspire and get inspired. A small group of guests together with researchers were invited to participate in a creative laboratory that investigated the motivations for change. It was a celebration of the things people love and are happily attached to and that can inspire one to contribute to big or small changes in one's environment. *What is worth sustaining?* was the leading question in a playful encounter between professional and everyday researchers.

The texts that are presented here are neither a documentation of a performance nor are they a manuscript for the performative encounters but a mixture of instructions and game rules for playful, yet profound encounters between living human beings, together with short descriptions of situations. You will also find texts that were generated in or through human encounters: between the artist, the hosts, and guests of the work.

I have chosen to call these texts manuals, to be interpreted freely.

To my colleagues in the *Agenda 2030 Graduate School*, I am deeply thankful for their contribution to my artwork and artistic research. They have convinced me that arts have a role to play in the current global crisis and can create alliances between different fields and different people.

Arts can remind us of who we are and what we stand for, and it creates a bond to the world around us.

We have surely created a bond between us, and this bond is made from *care*, *connection*, *empathy*, and *love*, the four pillars of research as explored in *Strings*.

Kyoto, December 2022

Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir.

Strings Part I

We Are All Researchers

A Manual for Performative Encounters



Prologue

At the entrance of one of Lund University Campuses the artist behind the work, Steinunn, meets an external guest who has booked time with a researcher within the Agenda 2030 Graduate School. Steinunn greets the guest outside the building and invites them inside.

My name is Steinunn. The name is Icelandic and is a combination of two words a stone and a wave. So, my name actually means a pebble – like this here. (shows the guest a pebble)

This stone has existed on earth from the beginning of time and will continue to exist to the end of time. We are made from the same material as this pebble – our origins are stardust. For hundred or even thousands of years it was lying in the sea and got shaped by the waves. I too, have during my lifetime been shaped by waves of events and things that surround me. Now I am being shaped by this encounter. I am an artistic researcher, and I am researching this very moment – with you. I ask you to hold on to this stone during your visit, to connect you to the past and the future. You will be meeting J, who with their research is contributing to change in their field. The exchange takes the form of a game, with cards that provide you with tasks to solve, things to observe, and questions to deal with. The meeting will take around 40 minutes and you can stop the game whenever you want and leave. Come with me.

The artist walks with the guest through the campus to the office of the researcher who invites the guest inside.

Welcome

In the office the host gives the guest an informal introduction:

Welcome to my office.

I am J and I am a biochemist, and this is where I do my research.

What is your name?

Nice to meet you.

Informal chat between the two. The researcher explains their research in simple terms to the guest.

In my research I am dealing with ...

This is my desk, but I do not use it that much. I mostly do work in the lab.

What I love about the lab is the ...

Do you want something to drink? Please have a seat.

The card game instructions

These guidelines are for the host and are to be mediated informally and organically with the guest:

The Cards have a title on one side and the tasks on the other. They come in a pile and the order of the cards are predetermined. This is negotiable. You can skip cards if they do not resonate with you, or you can pick chosen topics from the pile. There is one starting card for each participant, one for the guest and another for the host.

The guest starts reading his card in silence, then the host reads his first card out loud. After that the host and guest take turns in reading the cards out loud and solve the tasks together. The first card in the pile is TIME and the last is STORIES.

Host:

This deck of cards will lead our dialogue. We are both invited to solve the tasks on the cards. The first card is for your eyes only. I invite you to read it in silence.

Then we can start the actual game.



PRESENCE

Take a short moment to:

pay attention to your expectations for this encounter.

pay attention to your sensations.

pay attention to your surroundings.

MIMICKING NATURE

I was a creative kid. As a teenager I was doing theatre and wanted to become a photographer. It changed when I visited my aunt's lab, and I realised how creative research can be and that black women have a place in knowledge production.

Now I use my creativity in a high-tech university lab where I recreate silk.

Instead of taking photographs I mirror nature's own design and
get to explore the role of the silkworm.

What kind of child were you?

What were your interests?

TIME

Place the pebble on the table beside the string.

Compare and discuss the timeline and lifecycles of these objects.

ATTACHMENTS

Let the objects on the table stand for things that are dear to you
and let the pebble represent you.

With the string, create connections between yourself and the objects.

Find your own way of solving the task – in silence or in dialogue.

Take turns.



KNOWLEDGES

1. Ask each other about something that you do not know,
and you think the other person knows.
2. Share a piece of knowledge with each other that you think the other person
does not have.

PERSPECTIVES

1. Change seats.
2. Take a moment to imagine that you are each other.

ACTIONS

Take a time to reflect and then discuss the following questions:

What are the things that move you to action?

Are you pulled or pushed?

TURNING POINTS

Take time to reflect and discuss the questions:

1. Have you changed your mind about something?
2. What informs change?

VISIONS

Take time to reflect on the question:

1. What do you see around you, now and in the future?
2. Share with each other a vision, small or big.

STORIES

1. Discuss:

If the pebble could talk, what story would it tell about this encounter?

2. Make a sentence about yourselves starting with
"This is a story about a child that ..."

Both the host and the guest write their stories on a piece of paper and when they are ready, they share them with each other. The guest either takes the note with them or leaves it with the host.

Host: Now our time is up.

Thank you for your visit.

The host and the guest have an informal chat to conclude the encounter. The host guides the guest back to Steinunn and the guest returns the stone to them.

The guest is invited to write a few words in a guest book.



**This is a story about a child ...
A collection of stories generated in
the one-on-one encounters**

We Are All Researchers

11th April – 6th May 2022

This is a story about a child
that threw himself into the wild
with his eyes closed and his hands tied.
Nowhere to hide, he sometimes cried.
Often tears of joy, often tears of despair.
Often on a shoulder often out of glare.
Always wondering, how could this be fair?
Always wondering, is he still a child?

This is a story about a child that needs to know.

This is a story about a child that was optimistic and dared to disrupt for change.

This is a story about a child that loves sunshine.

This is a story about a child that looks with curiosity at the world.

This is a story about a child who invented an environment full of bears, monkeys, and turtles. He believed this was real and true although he lived in an apartment. His teacher told his mother and said that he was a very imaginative child who may not be ready for school anytime soon.

This is a story about a child who lived in her own imagination, playing in the dirt and hugging the trees.

This is a story about a child that went to a foreign shore and found a pebble. It was a wintery day and she had forgotten ...

This is a story about a child that did not grow up.

This is a story about a child who grew up too early and learned too much. Now it cannot go back.

This is a story about a child that is still looking and trying to find meaning. Still stumbling along.

This is a story about a child that would still like to be a child, but is none the less happy not to be.

This is a story about a child that was always very concerned about pollution and nature but never found itself in a social setting that called for action. Now the child is exploring the activities of others who feel a call to action.

This is a story about a child who left the island and is now looking for a ride back home.

This is a story about a child who never wanted to grow up ...so it created a way of participating in the grownup world with games and play.

This is a story about a child that took a long and sometimes wrong path toward a life where curiosity is allowed to be the guiding light and where wrong is no longer wrong but rather an extra, adventurous detour!

This is a story about a child that no one but me could understand but then forgets to read it.

This is a story about a child that went out in the world and met some people that were situated differently, and it made the child wonder how to do something good.

This is a story about a child who never wants to give up on the world and everyone she shares it with.

This is a story about a child that was a dreamy child, but actually, made quite a few dreams come true.

This is a story about a child that sailed the ocean and never returned.

This is a story about a child that loved the spring.

This is a story about a child that has led a good life but not without some struggles.

This is a story about a child who saw everything.

This is a story about a child that is trying to stay focused.

This is a story about a child that never left the sea.

This is a story about a child who loves to swim in the green sea. The child will grow up in salt and waves and become a life dancer.

This is a story about a child that stayed a child until she grew old.

This is a story about a child that wants to be better.

This is a story about a child that knows she is lucky and lives in gratitude.

This is a story about a child that is looking for change.

This is a story about a child who realised how lucky she was and lives with gratitude.

This is a story about a child that never went far from home – it was inside her.

This is a story about a child that learned to grieve and hold the experience of loss long enough to let it go.

This is a story about a child that appreciated being listened to and heard.

This is a story about a child that was charged by great expectations but who ever since fulfilled them in most unexpected ways.

This is a story about a child who never stopped daydreaming, and the world and the people in it never stopped surprising her.

This is a story about a child that had emotions and even if they burdened him from time to time, they always led to the fruitful road, he was seeking ...

This is a story about a child that tried, and tries to listen to others ...

This is a story about a child that managed to pass through quite a lot of different stages of life and still kept some of the childishness.

This is a story about a child that stopped being so impatient and just let things happen.

This is a story about a child that does not know what is about to happen.

This is a story about a child that was bright, curious, and impatient. The child slowly learned to listen more to the world rather than wanting to change it.

This is a story of a child that has travelled all the world and came back to the place where it started and recognised it for the first time.

We cannot waste its value.

PERSONAL STORIES

written in collaboration with members of
Agenda 2030 Graduate School

MIMICKING NATURE

I was a creative kid. As a teenager I was doing theatre and wanted to become a photographer. It changed when I visited my aunt's lab, and I realised how creative research can be and that black women have a place in knowledge production.

Now I use my creativity in a high-tech university lab where I recreate silk.

Instead of taking photographs I mirror nature's own design and
get to explore the role of the silkworm.

WATER

When I was a kid, I liked playing in water.

There were two lakes close to my childhood home where I used to swim.

I trained swimming for a while, but I didn't like swimming for competition,
so I quit. I rather wanted to fight for the environment.

Once we had an outdoor running test in a PE class. I was more concerned with
picking up trash from the ground than completing the task, so I failed the tests.

Now my main task is to find ways to reuse wastewater
so children can continue to play in clean water.

This is a test I won't fail.

PEACE

As a child I had difficulty reading and just wanted to climb trees. I would spend
hours in a tree in my imaginary utopia.

I found peace there.

Now I am doing research about peace. I still find it difficult to read but I am
driven to overcome my challenges to gain a better understanding of the world.

I use utopia as a method to imagine the reconstitution of society.

NEW NARRATIVES

I was named after my grandmother who got her name from an enigmatic stranger that happened to visit the church when she was baptised.

Because of my name I am often mistaken for a foreigner in my own country. As a child I learned how important it is to be able to tell your story and from my mother I understood how knowledge in all forms is empowering.

Now I am exploring how the narratives of immigrants in Europe can be redefined in law, to benefit care and not profit.

THE NON-HUMAN

When I was a child, our neighbour asked my family to care for his parrot while he went on a vacation.

He never came to pick it up.

The parrot's name was Jakob even though it was female.

When we had spent over 20 years together Jakob died, and I started a micro sanctuary for neglected parrots.

As a child I never understood human superiority on the planet. Jakob shaped my worldview and now I am exploring how vegan activists spread their worldview, what rhetoric they use and how their message is perceived.

SUPPORT

I was a very political child.

I wrote a letter to the Swedish Television to protest the money spent on the Eurovision Song Contest arguing that the funds could be used for better things, like health care or schools.

Now I am equally political but less angry and I do understand the value of the song contest. Instead of sending letters to people in power I am looking at how built environment can support people in their daily lives and how urban planning can support a more equal society and counter segregation.

I hope my research reaches people in power.

EMPATHY

When I was a kid, I really liked arguments.

I would win any argument and was praised for my rhetoric skills. Later I understood that the value of human connection was in the exchange, the listening, and trying to understand each other.

Now I am interested in how empathy affects relations and decision-making. I hardly argue any more, but I like discussing with colleagues about professional matters.

LIFECYCLES

As a kid I used to write stories in little homemade books.

I was a curious child and had a strong urge to learn and write about the things
around me, animals, humans, and nature.

I had a teacher that encouraged me to use my creativity and her inspiration is
very important for my research today.

Now I tell the stories of instruments used in surgery.

I trace the lifecycle of objects, their origins, their travels, and their impact on the
world. This story will be written in a book intended for the future.

AID

When I was a kid, I witnessed how financial fortune transformed people and
relations in my family.

I was lucky that I had parents that protected me from the toxic affect of money.

Later when my school friends went to business schools,

I felt an urge to pursue a more hermetic path.

It led me to Kenya where I am now looking at how pastoral communities deal
with the effects of climate change and how they can be aided on their own terms.

In my experience money is not the sole solution.

READING

I was a very competitive kid, hard working and bright.

What no one knew was that I had dyslexia.

I was determined not to let it affect my performance,
so I worked twice as hard to get the grades I wanted.

I have reached the third circle of studies, and I can't read a book,
but I do read other things.

Now I am looking at what social sustainability looks like in practice.
So instead of books I read policies, actions and testimonies from people and
organisations in the field.

JUSTICE

In my teens I witnessed how my home country, South Korea collapsed, and the
free market transformed our culture to a more unjust society.

I saw with my bare eyes how policy making affects peoples lives.

I early on wanted to work with these policies and make an impact.

UN was the place for that mission and that is where I am stationed.

Within my research and my job at the UN I am shedding light on a gap
in investment law that favours the rich.

I hope to provide guidelines on how to interpret the SD goals legal meaning and
how governments in poor countries can use it to shape their policies towards a
more just system.

FORMATION

When I was 12 years old, I moved to Cambodia with my family.

I quickly understood how much I had in common with my multicultural schoolmates but also how different our worlds looked. I became curious about different customs and other perspectives. Just before his death my father inspired me with stories from Malawi where he had lived.

To honour his memory, I am now studying cultural practices in Malawi. Different from the artistic and creative activities that formed me, the practices I am studying can be both violent and harmful.

WEAR

When travelling with my family as a child, I saw a beggar on the street. I started to wonder why we could travel the world and she could not, so I would ask my parents about this injustice.

I developed an urge to elevate the voices of people that are less fortunate.

In my research I am looking at how the garment industry can contribute to economic growth in low-income countries, while at the same time examining women's roles and conditions in that development.

I love wearing beautiful clothes, but I also want to hear the voices of the women who make them.

THINGS UNTOLD

As a kid in Bogota, I was privileged and protected. I had a western education and acquired the knowledge of white western culture. I only saw the slums from the distance except for when my grandmother took me for walks in the city outside of my protected fenced in world.

She talked to beggars and was friendly with people on the streets. It was when I had aborted my career as a corporate lawyer and moved to Sweden and became an immigrant that I realised that I did not know much about the 33 regions of Colombia.

Now I follow the example of my grandmother and am drawing attention to local knowledge, their untold stories, and untold geographies.

MORAL COMPASS

I grew up on a farm far from the troubles of the world.

In my family we talked a lot about the world situation.

My parents remembered world war II and told us children about it. Each year I helped out when my mother and the other women raised money for the red cross. At fifteen, I joined an international peace organisation where I worked for fifteen years.

I was given an inner compass.

This compass has led me to do research on strategies for implementing change in our society.

Today I am looking at the role of partnerships in achieving the Agenda 2030 sustainable goals.

INTEGRITY

I am a creature of the sea.

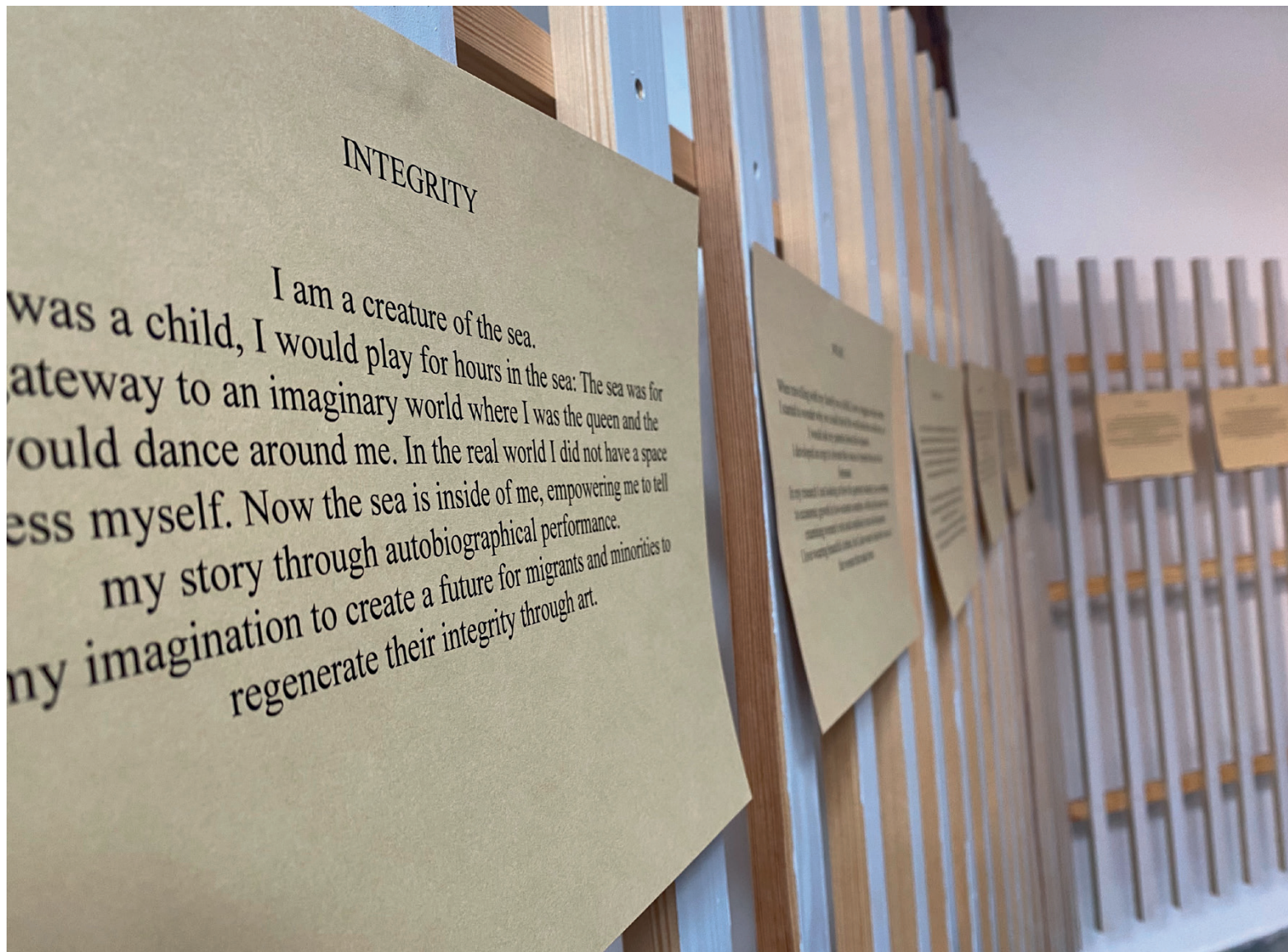
When I was a child, I would play for hours in the sea:

The sea was for me a gateway to an imaginary world where I was the queen, and
the world would dance around me.

In the real world I did not have a space to express myself.

Now the sea is inside of me, empowering me to tell my story
through autobiographical performance.

I use my imagination to create a future for migrants and minorities to regenerate
their integrity through art.



AND THEN I SING

In my teens I would love to help my peers with their philosophy assignments.
I loved philosophy and I loved being a teacher to my friends.
Still, I did not listen to my inner voice when choosing my profession instead I
followed the social and cultural convention and went into law.
Although I didn't realise it at the time, it made me unhappy. I became even more
unhappy when I started working as a lawyer. There was no justice to be found
and I started observing how law was constructed.
Now I am studying how this construct of law relates to other types of normative
constructs and how people function within these frames
... and then I sing.

MAPS

I grew up in Northern Norway with a mother from the Philippines.
There is a long distance between these places both geographically and culturally.
Somehow, I was the exotic one in both places.
I was a curious kid and wanted to learn.
It was a turning point in my life when I discovered
that my parents did not *know it all*.
I had knowledge my parents did not have.
Now I am interested in how humans map the world, and how these maps in turn
shape their understanding of the world.

BIODIVERSITY

When I was a kid, I travelled around Colombia with my father who was a lorry driver. I got to know my country which has the second largest biodiversity in the world. On our travels we slept in hammocks outside, and I remember the overwhelming noise of the non-human during dark hours.

For me the forest was amazing.

My mother taught me to have patience and I would spend hours observing different species in their natural environment.

Now I am exploring how our own species make policies to protect the forest and all its lifeforms.

MIGRATION

I have been migrating my whole life.

I was raised in seven different countries and on four continents.

As a kid, I was cared for and sheltered by my parents,
a father from Finland and an Indian mother.

As a teenager in Africa, I discovered that not everyone around me was as safe as me and I wanted to help out somehow.

So, at the height of the HIV epidemic, I joined a community service group that toured with educational theatre pieces about safe sex.

Now I use science to expose how migrant youths are vulnerable to sexual violence so they can be sheltered and cared for as I was in my youth.

LIGHT

As a child I was interested in the people around me, a bit like a detective,
trying to understand why they behaved the way they did.
Now I am a psychologist, and this is what I do.
I am researching how light affects the wellbeing of people.
I come from sunny Greece and later I moved to Northern Sweden with long dark
winters where artificial light substitutes for the sun.
I want to find ways of designing light that brings people to green areas in an
urban environment to strengthen their connection to nature

POLYPHONY

As a child my father took me to see a musical and everything fell into place.
Music somehow confirms my being.
As a kid I took dance lessons and music lessons,
but the most fulfilling was experiencing the polyphony in choir singing.
Music for me is an activity, not an object, an activity that you do with others.
The most important things are transmitted through caring relations,
like when my father introduced me to musicals.
Teaching is about care.
This is one of the important aspects of what I am exploring through my research.

What kind of child were you?

Questions of hosts to guests about childhood:

What were you interested in?

Did you challenge the grown ups?

Where did you get your name from?

Were you political?

Did you witness any transformation in your surroundings?

Did you like to sing?

Did you like to climb trees?

Did you read books?

Were you curious?

Did your parents know it all?

Did you like to play in the sea?

Did you like to observe insects?

How was your education?

Where were you raised?

Did you make up stories?

Did you think about justice?

Did you like to play in water?

What formed you?

Did you have any pets?

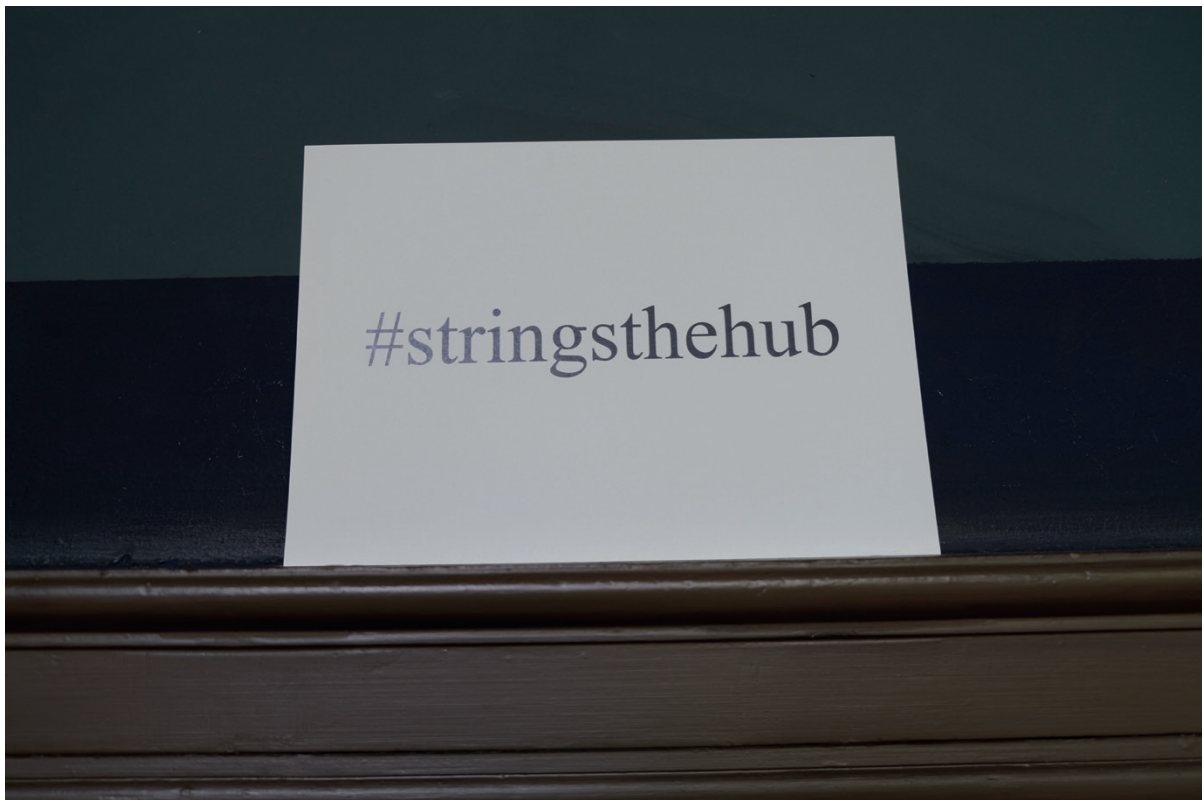
Did you witness changes to your environment?

Did you migrate?

Strings Part II

The Hub

An Extended Manual for Performative Encounters



We are situated in Kapellsalen in one of the oldest buildings of Lund University at the heart of the City Campus.

It is spring and the magnolia trees are in full bloom outside.

The hosts, members of the *Agenda 2030 Graduate School*, wearing white lab coats, welcome their guests on arrival.

Steinunn, the headmistress is sitting at a table and greets each guest, addressing them as students for a research training program that is about to start. She will give them a form to fill in with their name, a form that later becomes their diploma. The guests will be divided into four groups, *Earth, Air, Fire, and Water*. For each group there will be one member of the graduate school as a group leader. The group leader will welcome each of their students and guide them through the procedures, starting by finding a white lab coat and a name tag.

The group leader will take responsibility for the groups movements and facilitates the assignments and when possible, share their research and details of their projects. The group leaders do the assignments together with the group.

The groups will visit four stations where there is a host from the graduate school. The group has 20 minutes to perform tasks together in each station.

The station guards will act as moderators at the stations. Tasks and texts are written on cards that the station guards can read from or ask guests to read from.

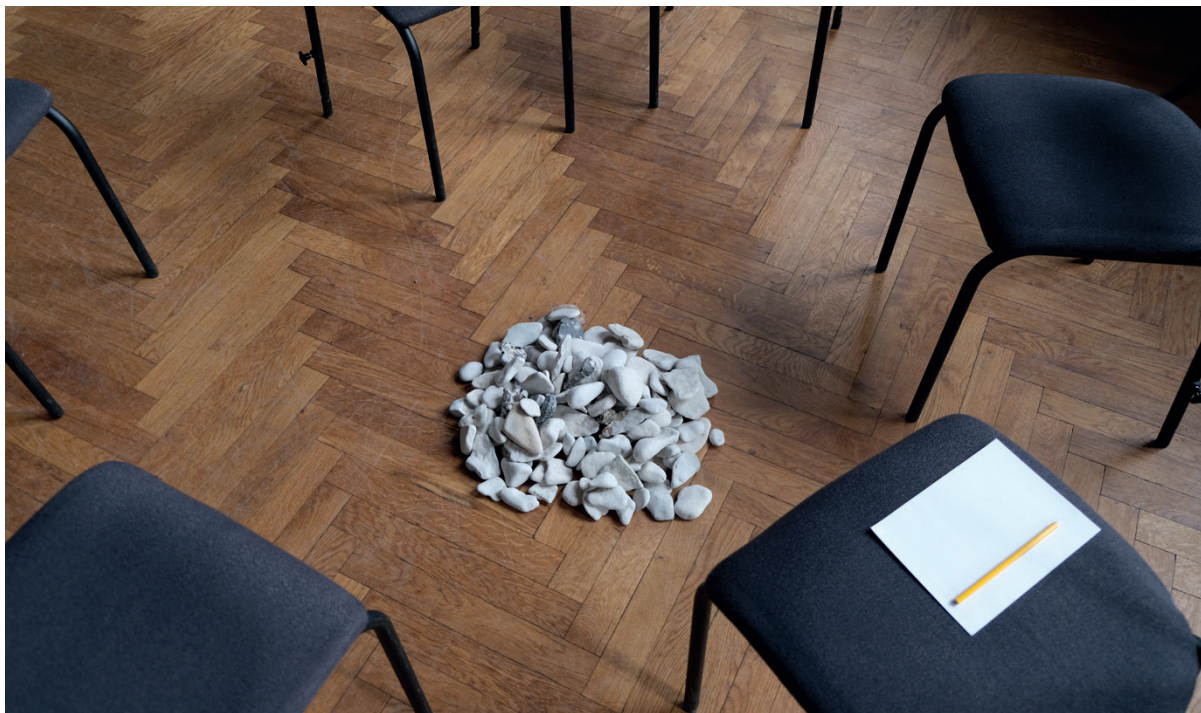
The training stations are

- Care. (inside)
- Love. (inside)
- Empathy. (outdoors)
- Connections. (outdoors)

Two members of the graduate school make up the house band with a guitar and a piano. They play music when people arrive, during intervals, when groups move between stations and in the graduation event at the end.

Steinunn will be in the role of master of ceremony with a great gong to control the movement of the groups.

The performance ends with a graduation ceremony.



Opening speech of the headmistress

Welcome to the Hub.

We are the members of Agenda 2030 Research School, and we are delighted to have you as our guests. We are summoned here in the cradle of knowledge, in one of the oldest Universities in Europe that dates back to a Franciscan medieval university that was founded in Lund 1425 and became Lund University 1666.

My name is Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir and I am a theatre maker and an artist researcher. You are now situated in the heart of my research, in what I call a transformative encounter. This is a theatre performance. Everything that happens during the performance is real especially when it gets magical. I ask you to pay special attention to the magic.

It is most likely to happen in the awkward moments when there is silence and when we are not ready with an answer.

I will be observing, taking photographs and notes to investigate the potential of this performative encounter. I also encourage you to take photographs and notes.

You are free to have your phones with you during the whole experience and if you have a social media account, please share the pictures using the hashtag #strings-thehub. If you do not want your photo to be posted on Instagram or used later in connection to my research, please talk to me or one of the researchers that are here with me today.

Let me now introduce M and M the house band.

Do you want to introduce yourselves?

M and M introduce themselves. Can I ask the other members of the Graduate school to step forward so we can see you. You will get to know them in your work today.

The members of the graduate school introduce themselves. The hub is a training camp for everyday researchers, and we are here to work on the four pillars of research. Namely Care, Connection, Empathy and Love. Without these elements our knowledge is worthless. We are all researchers. Through our lives we explore and acquire knowledge every day. Some more systematically, others adapt to changes around them without actively seeking new knowledge. Whatever is the case, we all have things that interest us, things we love and care about and connections that move us to action. This is where our focus will be today.

We want to give you an opportunity to explore with us the driving forces of change and contemplate for a brief moment our motivations for acting or not acting in the world. You have been divided into four groups and in each group, we have a member of the graduate school. You will be asked to work as an individual within a group. You have 20 minutes to complete the assignments in each station. When you hear the sound of the gong it is time to move to the next station. By the end of each session, you will get a stamp in your personal study book. When you have collected all four stamps you will qualify for *The Four Pillars of Research Certificate*. The last stamp you will get from me.

We conclude the training program with a graduation ceremony. I ask the groups to prepare a joint sum up of their experience to present at the graduation. Group Earth and Fire will start outside with C and T and group Air and Water will start inside with I and J.

Enjoy your training.



Guidelines for Care

Hi, my name is I.

Welcome to this training station.

Should we start with a short name round.

We will be focusing on Care.

Care can be a verb or a noun, but it can also be a quality. Caring is about how we interact with our surroundings. It also relates to how we deal with our past and how we prepare for the future.

In my research I am dealing a lot with care ...

The group leader shares with the group how care connects to their research project.

Before we turn to the actual tasks, is there anyone that wants to share perspectives on care?

The group has a brief discussion on what care means to them.

Group Leader: We have two tasks to solve.

TASK I

Caring for the past.

Take a moment to think about one thing from before you were born that is heart-warming, tender or supportive in your life.

A thing can be e.g., an object, a story, a tradition, an idea.

Share with each other what it is – with or without explanations.

TASK II

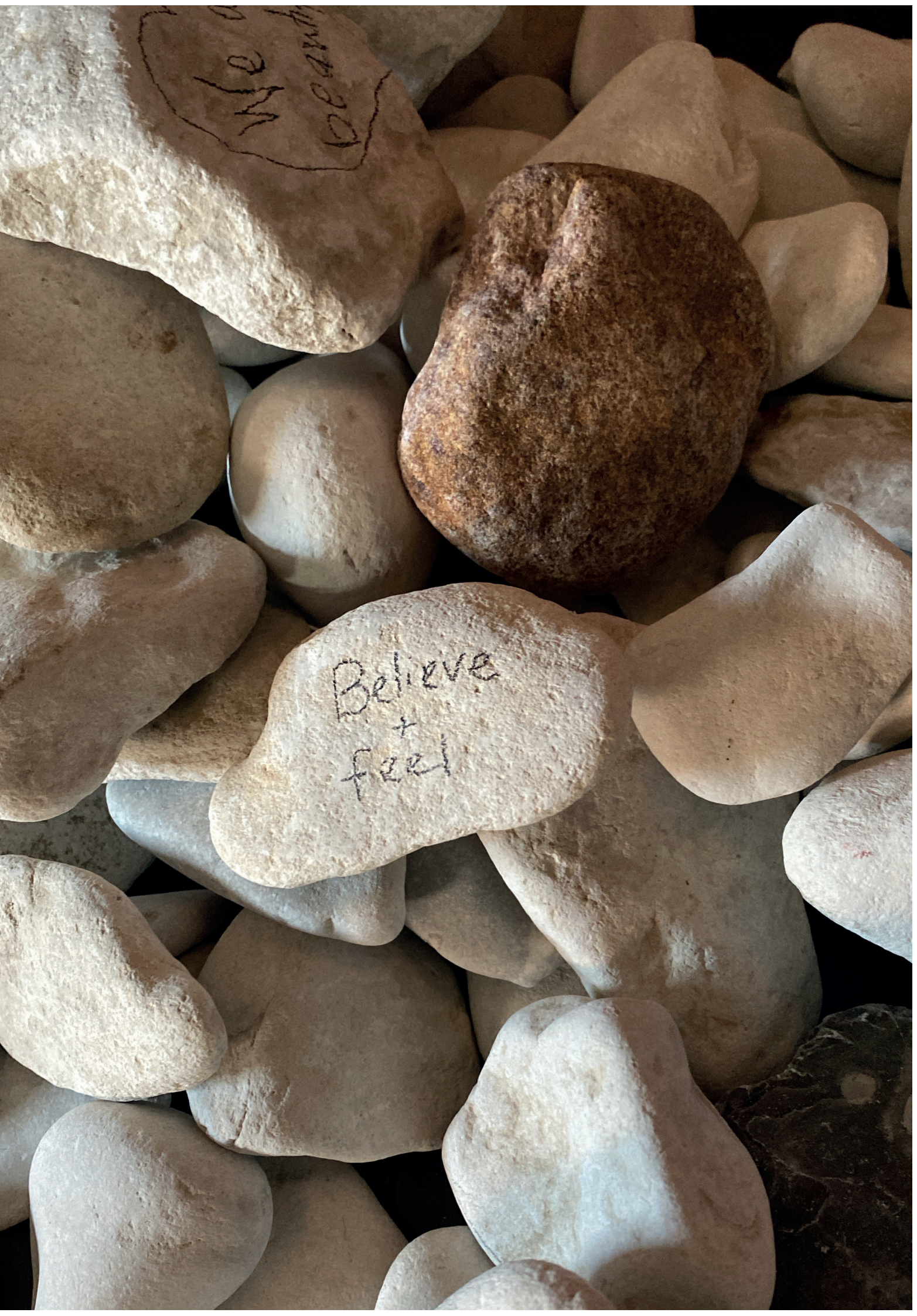
Caring for the future.

Choose a pebble and write or draw a message for the future on it.

The message can be for the future-you or a future-someone or -something.

If you do not want to make a mark on the stone, you can whisper the message to the pebble.

You may take the pebble with you when you leave.



We want

Believe
+
feel

Guidelines for Love

Hi, my name is J.

Welcome to this training station.

Should we start with a short name round?

Here we focus on the things we love, the things we want to sustain. I will invite you to immerse yourselves in the things you love with the help of this projector and these loudspeakers.

The group sits in a half circle turned towards a projection from the Amazon Forest, in the loudspeakers there are forest sounds. The group leader steps into the projection and the image is projected onto their white lab coat.

I am now standing in the middle of the Amazon forest. You can also hear the sounds of the inhabitants of the forest, human and non-human.

The driving force for my research is my affection for the Amazon forest ...

The group leader explains how their research relates to the forest.

Before we turn to the actual tasks – is there anyone that wants to share perspectives on love?

The group has a brief discussion on what love means to them.

We have two tasks to solve.

TASK I

LOVE

What do you want to sustain?

Think about one thing that you would not want the future to miss out on.

Share with each other this thing – with or without explanation.

TASK II

LOVE

What do you want to immerse yourself in?

As a group, agree on one thing that you all love and you would like to sustain for the future.

Find an image of it online.

Find a sound online for the thing you love.

Project the image onto the wall
and send the sound to the loudspeakers.

Immerse yourselves in the image.

Take pictures of each other in the immersion.





ity of Reykja, vik, m Wunder



0:26 / 0:53

Guidelines for Connections

Hi, my name is T.

Welcome to this training station.

Should we start with a short name round?

Here we want to provide an opportunity for you to contemplate your connections. We connect to people, places, things, and ideas – we connect through time, space, and dimensions. Even though we are not always aware of our own entanglements in the world, the strings are still there.

There are always strings attached.

In research these connections become significant. We can even say that research is about exposing and trying to understand the meaning of already existing connections or create new ones. In this session we focus on our personal connections that may affect our actions and choices. In research we try to situate ourselves to understand our possible biases and to clarify where we stand and where we get our ideas from. It is probably because of our connections that we feel motivated to contribute to change in the world. Objectivity does not exist – transparency is maybe its substitute.

In my case I can see how my entanglements with places and people have an impact on what I do and how I do things ...

The group leader shares a personal story/reflection on their entanglements related to their research.

Before we turn to the actual task – is there anyone who wants to share perspectives on connections?

The group has a brief discussion on what connection means to them.

The group leader: We have one task to solve.



TASK CONNECTION

With a string, create a symbolic web of your connections by attaching it to branches, benches or other things in proximity to this place.

While the string represents your connections, the points represent moments, people, places, or ideas.

Create your own logic.

There is no right or wrong way of solving the task.

Observe how your web connects to other webs.

Take a picture of your web or ask someone to take a picture of it.

Trace back your entanglement and collect the string and leave it with the station guard.



Guidelines for Empathy

Hi, my name is C.

Welcome to this training station.

Should we start with a short name round?

We are here to have a short practice in empathy.

The group leader talks shortly about how empathy manifests in their research project.

First, I will shed light on what the science says about empathy and then we will make some practical exercises.

The text I am about to read is from a colleague from the Graduate School that is studying empathy.

You might think that feeling empathy just happens. In a way, that is true. When you watch a movie, you relate to and maybe even share the feelings the characters experience. In this situation, empathy *just happens*. Nonetheless, research has proven that empathy is under our control. We can often choose to approach or avoid situations that make us feel empathy. I will show you that the benefits of feeling empathy outweigh the costs associated with it.

People feel empathy when they are motivated to do so. Scientists from Stanford University have studied why people want to feel empathy. In one study, they simply told participants that empathy can be increased. Participants that heard this tried hard to increase their empathy. When we realise that we can increase our empathy, we become motivated to feel more empathy with others.

People sometimes feel that empathy is exhausting and avoid it.

But individuals that see themselves as good empathisers often do not experience empathy as exhausting. In a study from Penn State University, researchers told people that they were good at judging other people's feelings. This led the participants to see empathy as effortless. So, if you feel that you are a good empathiser, feeling empathy is easier. If feeling empathy is easy, you are less likely to avoid it.

Are there good reasons to become a more empathic person?

Research has shown that there are plenty.

Most of us like empathic people. People with a lot of empathy often get along well with others. For instance, empathic people are good at understanding others' emotions. This in turn makes you well adjusted.

Empathy has positive effects on both work and private life.

Empathy can help you to be more efficient at work. Scientists from Michigan State University showed that managers with a lot of empathy also had teams that were more efficient. Their team members often reached their daily goals and were also less stressed.

Empathy is good for romantic relationships and keeping friends as well. Couples who are skilled at understanding one another's emotions are better at helping each other in everyday life.

In sum, you can improve your empathy and there are several benefits to being an empathic person. It can help you in your work and your social life. Empathy makes you well adjusted.

Empathy can make people around you feel better and makes you keep your friends. Learning that you can control your empathy is your first step towards becoming a more empathic person.

Practice your empathy and you will become a better, more empathic, person.

So, this is what we will do now.

Before we turn to the practice– is there anyone who wants to share some perspectives on empathy?

The group has a brief discussion on what empathy means to them.

The group leader: We have one task to solve.



TASK EMPATHY

Choose a thing to practice your empathy with.

An object

A plant

A being

Try to imagine that you are this thing.

What has it experienced?

What does it relate to?

How does it feel?

How does it perceive the world?

Pay attention to your feelings towards the thing.

Ask the thing if you can take a picture of it.

Repeat the exercise if you have time.

The Four Pillar Research

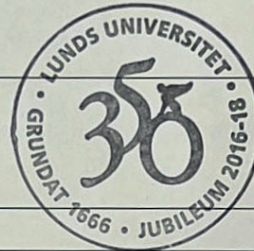
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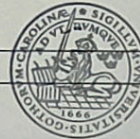
Is truly a researcher

after completing The Four Pillar Research Training

Connections



Care



Empathy

LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Teaterhögskolan i Malmö

Love

FÖR KÄNNEDOM

Malmö, Anno Domini 7th May 2022

Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir



Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir creator of Four Pillar Research Program.

STRINGS: Agenda 2030 Graduate School, Lund University

When the groups have gone through the four stations and completed all the tasks, they are summoned to Kapellsalen to receive the last stamp from the headmistress who will be sitting at her desk.

When the last certificate has been stamped the headmistress will hit the gong to summon everyone for the last ceremony where the candidates are formally given the title everyday researcher. The headmistress addresses the candidates who in turn share reflections or experiences from the training. There is an open forum to be used for sharing wisdom, ideas, and sentiments.

There will be cheers and a fourfold hip, hip hurray before the gong sounds for the last time.

The house band plays music while the *graduates* mingle and gradually leave the space with their new diploma under their arms.





Pleased to Meet You

What is the language of bacteria, minerals, plants, the sky, a brick wall?

Have you heard the voice of your home?

Did you ever thank the grass for its services to you?

What does a tree have to say to you about sadness?

What do you have to say to the tree about love?

Pleased to meet you, a Performative Encounter with the More-than-Human, is a relation specific performance that deals with how humans relate to their environment. The piece is the fourth and concluding part of my artistic research project. In this last work of the series the performative encounter is between a human guest and a non-human host. The piece is an experiment in post human performance approach, testing ways for humans to engage with the more-than-human dimension, plants, animals, manmade objects, and other non-human phenomena, in a performative setting. The work provides a format for a performative encounter between human guests and their *more-than-human* hosts. It is a *do-it-yourself* performance, that comes in a box with prompt cards and objects. The cards hold the dramaturgical format and contain guidance for tasks; observations, contemplations, and actions, to be performed during the performance. The objects are to be used to perform some of the tasks. The piece is relations specific and aspires to facilitate relations between human and more-than-human agents present during the performance by awareness, listening and mirroring. The work was performed in two editions in Reykjavík Iceland and Malmö Sweden.

In the first edition of the work, performed in Reykjavík in November 2022, as a part of *Reykjavík Dance Festival* and *Lokal performance festival* I chose to create performative encounters with three agents that were in a proximity to the festival base in central Reykjavík by the city pond. They are, *Tjörnin*, the pond itself, the *community of birds* that belonged to the pond and *a lamp* inside Iðnó, the cultural centre that hosted the festivals, a historical building, that used to host the oldest professional theatre in Iceland.

The boxes were second hand tin boxes that added a character to the work and went hand in hand with the atmosphere of the historic building and the history of Reykjavík. The guests would go to the festival desk and get a box that they would open in the foyer and from there the piece starts.

The second edition was performed at *Inter Arts Centre* (IAC) in Malmö, Lund University's centre for artistic research and was presented as a part of my intermediate seminar in March 2023.

In Malmö the more-than-human hosts were a *projector* at IAC, *Långa Dammen*, a pond in Folkets Park close to IAC and *a community of birds* at Möllevångstorget, a busy market square in the neighbourhood. The boxes were specially designed for the piece from black paper with compartments for each item of the performance kit. It made the functionality of the piece simpler, and it collected the three encounters together into a clear aesthetic framework. Another change in Malmö were the *conversation cards* that guests could fill in with their name, to collect stamps for each encounter. The names of the guests become a part of the work and after the experience the guest walks away with the cards as a reminder of the work. Another addition to the kit was a map to guide guests to the site of the encounters that were in the city landscape.

The connection I made to the more-than-human agents that participated in the performance I will treasure. My encounters with each and one of them became truly meaningful for me, and I hope that they have in their own way benefited from these few moments of genuine attempts to make contact and create connection. The manual I share in this book is from two editions of the work and can be used as a template for encounters with other entities, sentient or non-sentient in whatever context it may be relevant.

To my new more-than-human friends and collaborators, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Malmö, December 2023

Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir.

Pleased to Meet You

A Performative Encounter with the More-than-Human

REYKJAVÍK



Tjörninn

Hi, I am pleased to meet you.

Who am I?

I am the card you are reading that has been given voice by Steinunn, the artist who has brought us together. Me and my fellows will be guiding you through the piece. You will be invited to make this work come alive by accepting a series of invitations. You can accept the invitations literally or reflect on them internally. When you have finished, we ask you to return the box the way it was when you got it for the next guest.

Enjoy your experience.

You are invited to sit down on one of the benches by the pond.

On your way to the pond, pay attention to the things around you. Greet objects and phenomena as if they were beings like yourself. As an example, to me you could say, “Hello, card”, to the wind “Hello, wind” or “Hello, you”. You can use your own language, your outer or inner voice. The thing might answer back in their own language, with their outer or inner voice. When you have found your place, sit down, and read the next card.

Big Bread Soup

Let me introduce you to Tjörnin, Reykjavík's pond.

Like yourself Tjörnin is an ecosystem. it's made up of things, organisms, and ideas. Tjörnin existed before Reykjavík became a settlement and has been important for many agents through different times. Today it is sometimes called The Big Bread Soup, because of the many people of all ages that come here to feed the birds bread, for recreational purpose. In fact, Tjörnin is part of a bird reserve, Vatnsmýrin, a wetland that is home to a large community of migrating and domestic birds.



Invitation to observe

Pay attention to the boundaries of the pond.

Pay attention to its form and colour.

Pay attention to its situation and surroundings.

Invitation to interact

Greet the pond.

Tell the pond your name and share with it, things of significance about you.

Listen to the ponds reply.

Invitation to contemplate

What is the difference between mankind and *pond kind*?

What is the pond to you, beyond being water?

If you do not know the pond personally, think of a pond that you have a relation to.

Movement

Tjörnin has witnessed human's activities through the centuries. Human life has been planned around Tjörnin, making it a central thing in city planning with political, cultural, spiritual, and educational hubs placed around it. It has moved and is being moved by people among other species.

Invitation to observe

Pay attention to the movements of the water.

Pay attention to the elements that create movement.

Invitation to act

Close your eyes and pay attention to the movements inside you.

Imagine the water inside of you.

Move like the pond.

Invitation to contemplate

How can a pond move you?

What moves and how does one move?

How can Tjörnin move forward?

Under the surface

Like you, Tjörnin is not what it seems.

Under the surface there is a constant and complex chain of interactions happening with energy flowing between different lifeforms that feed from each other.

Invitation to act

Take the cup from the box and fetch water from the pond.

Take it with you to the bench.

Invitation to sense

Pay attention to the qualities of the water.

Feel the temperature of the water.

Smell the water.

Let the water touch you.

Close your eyes and let yourself become one with the water.

Invitation to contemplate

What lifeforms live inside your body?

How does energy flow inside you?

How different are you from Tjörnin?

Dialogue

You are now invited to have a dialogue with Tjörnin on your own terms. You are free to use your own language. You can use words, sounds, movements, or telepathic communication. Listen carefully to the language of the pond and feel free to interpret what you perceive. When you have finished your dialogue, you are invited to share highlights of your conversation in the dialogue book. Find a good place to write in the cafe or outside.

After finishing, please return the box as you got it.

Enjoy.

Here are a few prompt lines to get the conversation going.

You: I want to thank you for ...

Pond: In my existence I depend on ...

You: In my existence I depend on ...

Pond: I never forget ...

You: I regret ...

Pond: My wish for the future is that ...

You: My wish for the future is that ...

Pond: Tell me about love ...

Texts from the conversation book

G: Hi Pond, thanks for welcoming me so kindly and everyone that comes here. I remember when I first moved to Reykjavík, and you made me feel like I belonged here.

P: I am grateful for all the guests and my inhabitants. I never forget when people first came here. Nobody has ever looked at me in such a manner before. I love singing, like you, enjoy listening to the birds sing with their many voices. I miss hearing humans sing for me, with me and the birds. I also miss the peace that was here before, now I constantly hear traffic noise, but I get rest during the night and when I freeze. I love freezing, then I have an entirely different communication with my beings and find peace within myself in the deep. I rely on circulation, an endless flow.

Tjörn: I sometimes feel tired.

Me: Me too but talking to you feels refreshing. I feel like a child again.

Tjörn: Children, I know. They play. Do you play?

Me: I want to be able to play

Me: I like to thank you for your diversity, yet you are so simple. You show me how uncomplicated it is just to exist.

Pond: I am dependent on people treating me well.

Me: I am dependent on the ability to take deep breaths.

Me: Thanks for giving this city a sense of centre. And thanks for all the life that you support by your existence. What do you want to say to me?

Pond: One needs to take care of the flow. Without a flow, the water will go bad, and no circulation takes place. Everything dies.

Me: It is evident that I can learn many things from you.
Thank you for being you.

Community of birds

Hi, I am pleased to meet you.

Who am I?

I am the card you are reading that has been given voice by Steinunn, the artist who brought us together. Me and my fellows will be guiding you through the piece. You will be invited to bring this work alive by accepting a series of invitations. You can accept the invitations literally or reflect on them internally.

When you have finished, we ask you to return the box in the same condition as you received it.

Enjoy your experience.

You are invited to sit down on one of the benches by the pond, close to the birds. On your way, pay attention to the things around you. Greet objects and phenomena as if they were beings like yourself. As an example, to me you could say, “Hello, card”, to the cloud “Hello, cloud” or “Hello, you”. You can use your own language, your outer or inner voice. The thing might answer back in their own language, with their outer or inner voice.

When you have found your place, sit down, and read the next card.

Community

If you sit here for long enough, you can catch a glimpse of more than forty different bird species. The birds live together despite their differences in a dynamic community that can be competitive and at times hostile. There are migrating birds that come each year with flavours from other continents and there are birds that live here permanently. The small island is the birthplace of their offspring, and you are now sitting in their living room.

Invitation to observe

Pay attention to the different species of birds.

Pay attention to the birds' behaviour.

Pay attention to all the sounds the birds make.

Invitation to act

Try to reach the birds attention.

Introduce yourself to the community of birds.

Tell them your name and share with them something personal that you think might interest them.

Invitation to contemplate

What bird traits would you like to have?

What human traits do you think the birds would benefit from?

What would it take for you to be able to recognise any of the birds later?

View

Birds have a different perspective from humans.

When we talk about a Birdseye view, we are usually talking about the view from the sky, an overview. Birds have many modes of moving in the world and like humans they shift perspectives depending on their activities, in the sky, on land and in the water. Their bodies have many features that humankind has copied to create products that enhance human abilities to move in the world.

Invitation to shape shift

Close your eyes.

Pay attention to your own body.

Listen to the sounds of the birds and feel their energy.

Let the bird's energy fill your body.

Open your eyes when you feel that your energy has shifted.

Invitation to change perspective

Choose one bird.

Imagine that you are this bird.

Let the bird's energy move you. Move like the bird.

As a bird, watch your human body.

Invitation to contemplate

What does the bird see when it sees you?

How diverse are the different perspectives of humans?

How would it affect your decisions if you had the perspective of a bird?

Changes

The world is changing. The lake is changing. The food chain is changing. The birds used to feed from the lake but affects from global warming and pollution due to traffic and fertilisers in the area have decreased the water's nutrient count so now the birds rely very much on humans for food.

Invitation to interact

Take the bread from the box and feed it to the birds.

Try to distribute the bread equally among them.

Invitation to observe

Pay special attention to those who are struggling.

Pay attention to how your relation to the birds changes
when you start to feed them.

Invitation to contemplate

What nourishes you, and whom are you dependent on for food?

If your new bird friends were to invite you for dinner, what would they serve and
where would you eat?

Dialogue

You are now invited to create a personal connection to one or more birds and to have a dialogue with them. You are free to use your own language. You can use words, sounds, movements, or telepathic communication. Listen carefully to the language of the birds and feel free to interpret what you perceive. When you have finished your dialogue, you are invited to share highlights of your conversation in the dialogue book. Find a good place to write in the cafe or outside.

After finishing, please return the box as you got it.

Enjoy.

Here are a few prompt lines to get the conversation going.

You: I want to thank you for ...

Bird: In my existence I depend on ...

You: Tell me about your mother ...

Bird: I remember ...

You: I regret ...

You: My wish for the future is ...

Bird: Tell me about hope ...

Texts from the conversation book

Me: Can I come along?

Swan: Yes, but not too close

Me: Aren't you feeling cold?

Swan: No

Me: Are you never lonely?

Swan: No

Me: Do you never worry about anything?

Swan: I am here, that is enough. What are worries?

Me: Humankind worries about the earth.

Swan: I work with the earth, we collaborate.

Me: Can I join too?

Swan: If you want.

Me: Thank you, Swan.

Swan: Trust reality.

Duck: I want to live forever.

I want to be able to travel and I need a safe place for my kids,

I want nourishing food and meaningful encounters with my peers.

NOT

I just want to eat in peace.

Leave me alone.

Me: I did not know that ducks were sarcastic.

Maybe it's, just me This world is just a reflection ...

Me: Thanks for the feathers in my coat. It keeps me warm.

Duck: Nothing, you are welcome. Thanks for the bread.

Me: It was nothing. In fact, I became slightly scared.

Duck: What?

Me: Yes, it was so much chaos, when I brought out the bread.

Duck: Yes, I understand: There is so much competition here.

Me: I thought the swans were going to bite me.

Duck: No, they wouldn't dare. But better be careful, though.

Swan: I remember when my mum and dad brought me and my siblings up by the pond on the heath – it was so peaceful there, and they taught us to dance and swim.

Me: Thanks for giving me so many moments of beauty through the years, I hope that in the future there will be more clean and beautiful places for us to stay in. I can tell you that about hope, that it manifests as a feeling of brighter times for the future, and it resides in the body.

Swan: I am feeling very hungry these days. Winter is coming and not many people are feeding us anymore. We have started attacking each other quite brutally. I hope we will all make it to the spring.

Lamp

Hi, I am pleased to meet you.

Who am I?

I am the card you are reading that has been given voice by Steinunn, the artist who brought us together. Me and my fellows will be guiding you through the piece. You will be invited to bring this work alive by accepting a series of invitations. You can accept the invitations literally or reflect on them internally.

When you have finished, we ask you to return the box as you got it.

Enjoy your experience.

You are invited to the President room on the second floor.

Take time to observe your surroundings on the way upstairs. Pay attention to individual things. Greet objects and phenomena that you meet on the way as they were beings like yourself. As an example, to me you could say, “Hello, card”, to the doorknob “Hello, doorknob” or “Hello, you”. You can use your own language, your outer or inner voice. The thing might answer back in their own language, with their outer or inner voice. When you have found the room, enter, and close the door behind you.

Sit down by the table and read the next card.



Role

Let me introduce you to the Lamp. This lamp belongs to the President room. Iðnó used to be the home of Reykjavík Theatre Company, the first professional theatre in Iceland. When the president of Iceland came to opening nights at the theatre, this would be the place for him to have drinks and mingle.

The role of our friend was to light up the moment.

Invitation to observe the lamp

Pay attention to its form and colour.

Pay attention to its complex structure and features.

Pay attention to the quality of the light it provides.

Invitation to interact with the lamp

Introduce yourself by name to the lamp and share with it
what you see as your role in life.

Invitation to contemplate

What do you think the lamp has witnessed here in the president room?

What future prospects do you see for the lamp?

Does the lamp please you?

Transformation

Our lamp is an assemblage of materials that together make up an aesthetic object to please the human eye. The different materials of the lamp are made up of the same materials as you. Like 97% of all matter on earth you are both made of stardust. The materials in the lamp have gone through transformational processes manipulated by men to become this object in front of you. It is made to serve you.

Invitation to sense

Move next to the lamp.

Close your eyes and breathe deeply.

Touch the lamp, stroke it. Feel the textures and temperature.

Try to tap into its energy.

Invitation to change perspective

Imagine being the lamp.

Imagine what it has been through.

Invitation to contemplate

What is the lifespan of this lamp?

How does sense of time in a lamp's universe manifest?

How have you been transformed during your lifetime?

Connection

Like you the lamp depends on connection.

To light up the room, the lamp must connect to a complex web that provides electricity created by boiling geothermal water or rivers and waterfalls in the highlands, to be transformed into light.

Invitation to connect to the source

Turn off the lamp.

Pay attention to the shift in energy.

Pay attention to your own body, and how vital energy is pumped from your heart through the complex web of your veins to your limbs and head.

Turn the light back on.

Imagine the web of electricity in this city, that pumps raw natural power from the heart of the highlands or the centre of the earth through an organic network of veins into the lamp.

Invitation to contemplate

What do you connect to for power.

Does anyone have the power to turn you off?

How different are you from the lamp?

Dialogue

You are now invited to enter a dialogue with the lamp on your own terms. You are free to use your own language. You can use words, sounds, movements, or telepathic communication. Listen carefully to the language of the lamp and feel free to interpret what you perceive. When you have finished your dialogue, you are invited to share highlights of your conversation in the dialogue book. After finishing, please return the box as you got it.

Enjoy.

Here are a few prompt lines to get the conversation going.

You: I want to thank you for ...

Lamp: In my existence I depend on ...

You: I cannot live without ...

Lamp: I never forget ...

You: Tell me about your struggle ...

Lamp: I remember ...

You: My wish for the future is ...

Lamp: Tell me about empathy ...

Texts from the conversation book

We both rely on water and earth, and our role is to create more light in the world, the lamp knows what empathy is. It has shown it by being present and listening with attention and lighting up what is happening around him.

Lamp: I love colours, I love laughter, I am in love

Me: How can you be in love?

Lamp: This is what I hear from the songs playing in the cafe. They are all about love. I am trying to say something that interests you.
I am here to serve

Lamp: I am

You: I must

Lamp: Give me purpose

You: I do not know what I need

Me: You have beautiful hair and beautiful skin.

Lamp: Thanks, I was lucky. I think I age well.

Me: Yes, I agree

Lamp: My life here inside has been fairly easy, but it has been challenging standing so still and serving others.

Me: What has been the most challenging thing you have experienced?

Lamp: It was when the prime minister was so drunk that he bumped into me, so I fell on the floor. Since then, I am always leaning a bit to the right.

Lamp: Even though I seem to be completely still, I am always moving.

Me: To me you are motionless.

Lamp: This is a convenient life and I do not need to take any decision.

Me: I am sometimes afraid that I take wrong decisions.

Me: Thank you for the light. You are so important, especially now in the darkness.

Lamp: Do you think I am less important in the summer?

Me: No, not the least. Even though the light is not as necessary in the summer as now – it is the knowing that you are there for me when I need you, later.

Lamp: I feel that I have a clear purpose, but you seem to complicate your own purpose.

Me: Yes, I do. I now think it is beautiful to think about my own purpose. It is a good food for the journey.

Anna: Lamp, how do you connect past and future? How would you recommend that I don't get stuck in the past?

Lamp: Stay true to your roots and reflect what it is that makes you unique and different from other people.

Anna: Do you think it is important to disconnect from the world surroundings? Do you replenish energy when turned-off?

Lamp: Yes, it is important to stay alone and disconnect but it is always great to do what one's mission is, give light.

Anna: Thank you! It was good to be reminded – go back to your core, listen to your inner voice, enjoy the silence.

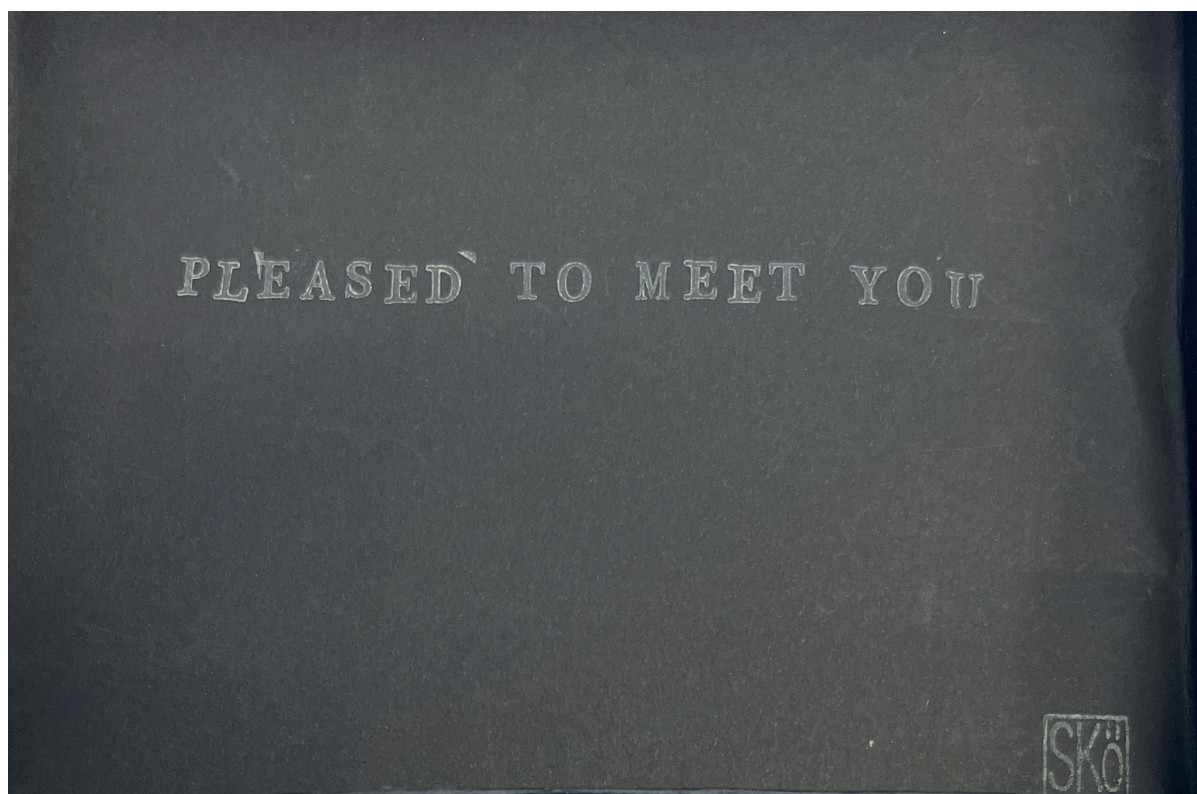
Lamp: You are welcome, Anna, come back any time, you have friends here, in Reykjavík!

When I look at animals or inanimate object, I see the human in them. I think we all do. We try to see or find emotion in everything, or character, I think it is what humans are trained to do. I see faces in nature also. When I look at different lamps, I assign different characters to them depending on their appearance. How is it for you lamp? Do you look at me and other humans and see the Lamp in us? What would be the lamp equivalence of feeling or character? Do you see me and assign a type of lightbulb to me? The wavelength and colour of the light? The type of switch? How many lightbulbs I have?

What period and style am I? Or do you have other ideas and criteria that humans can never understand, know about? That are outside of what the human mind can comprehend or imagine?

Pleased to Meet You

A performative Encounter with the more-than-human



MALMÖ

Långa Dammen

Hi, I am pleased to meet you.

Who am I?

I am the card you are reading that has been given voice by Steinunn, the artist who has brought us together. Me and my fellows will be guiding you through the piece. We are a collective of different agents that work together on making this encounter smooth. You will be invited to bring this work alive by accepting a series of invitations. You can accept the invitations literally or reflect on them internally. When you have finished, we ask you to return us to where you found us.

Enjoy your experience.

You are invited to meet Långa Dammen, the pond in Folkets Park. There is map on the next page that will guide you.

On your way to the pond, pay attention to the things around you. Greet objects and phenomena as they were beings like yourself. As an example, to me you could say, "Hello, card", to the wind "Hello, wind" or "Hello, you". You can use your own language, your outer or inner voice. The thing might answer back in their own language, with their outer or inner voice.

When you find the pond, sit down on one of the benches and read the next card.

Långa Dammen

Let me introduce you to Långa Dammen, Folkets Park's pond.

Like yourself Långa Dammen is an ecosystem. It's made up of things, organisms, and ideas. Långa Dammen was constructed in the early 18th century and has been important for many agents through different times. First as a family oasis for the privileged, later as the workers meeting place and now as a recreational space for the multicultural people of Malmö. The pond itself has been habited by frogs, swans, fish, plants, and manmade objects. It is a complex biosphere of multiple living organisms and microorganisms.





Invitation to observe

Pay attention to the boundaries of the pond.

Pay attention to its form and colour.

Pay attention to its situation and surroundings.

Invitation to interact

Greet the pond.

Tell the pond your name and share with it, things of significance about you.

Listen to the pond's reply.

Invitation to contemplate

What is the difference between the natural and the manmade?

What is the difference between mankind and *pond kind*?

What is the pond to you, beyond being water?

If you do not know the pond personally, think of a pond that you
have a relation to.

Movement

Långa Dammen has witnessed human's activities through more than two centuries, private meetings, political gatherings, solitary moments of sorrow and joy, quiet moments, laughter ...

Human and non-human life has unfolded around the pond, changing its role and appearance. Swan pond, Frog pond, Long pond. Different lifeforms have moved in its water and manmade things have created movement in and around the pond. It seems calm but Långa Dammen moves and is being moved every second of every day.

Invitation to observe

Pay attention to the movements of the water.

Pay attention to the elements that create movement.

Invitation to act

Close your eyes and pay attention to the movements inside you.

Imagine the water inside of you.

Move as the water.

Invitation to contemplate

How can a pond move you?

What moves, and how does one move?

How can Långa Dammen move forward?

Under the surface

Like you, Långa Dammen is not what it seems.

Under the surface there is a constant and complex chain of interactions happening with energy flowing between different lifeforms that feed from each other.

Invitation to act

Take the cup from the box and fetch water from the pond.

Take it with you to the bench.

Invitation to sense

Pay attention to the qualities of the water.

Feel the temperature of the water.

Smell the water.

Let the water touch you.

Close your eyes and let you become one with the water.

Invitation to contemplate

What lifeforms live inside your body?

How does energy flow inside you?

How different are you from Långa Dammen?

Dialogue

You are now invited to have a dialogue with Långa Dammen on your own terms. You are free to use your own language. You can use words, sounds, movements, or telepathic communication. Listen carefully to the language of the pond and feel free to interpret what you perceive.

When you have finished your dialogue, you are invited to share highlights of your conversation in the dialogue book. You may return to the Inter Arts Centre and write in the book at the café, if you wish.

Enjoy.

Here are a few prompt lines to get the conversation going.

You: I want to thank you for ...

Pond: In my existence I depend on ...

You: In my existence I depend on ...

Pond: I never forget ...

You: I regret ...

Pond: My wish for the future is that ...

You: My wish for the future is that ...

Pond: Tell me about love ...

Texts from the conversation book

Me: There's love songs playing at the other pond.

Långa Dammen: Yes, it's romantic over there isn't it?

Me: Have you seen the fluorescent heart.

Långa Dammen: No, what do you mean?

Me: I'll show you a photo.

The water and ice mark changes between seasons. The pond depends on constant flow of energy and water, from above, below from all sides. The plastic flowers move and interact like swans, like plastic spring.

Långa Dammen, thanks for letting me sit beside you, on this lovely bench.
I crossed your surface with my foot,

It looked like someone else had done that before too ...

Pond: I am frozen.

– I know, it was tough breaking the ice.

Pond: Can you move me?

– I can try. You are the last of the immobile,
but you still have imagination, right?

Pond: Now you move me.

Thanks, Långa Dammen for bringing me here and help me to see how much appreciated you are by the more-than-human, the human, by the animals, the light, and the reflections. Thanks for how you hold yourself, how you move, and hold on to your energy and force.

LD: What is love?

Me: I should've figured you would ask that. I'm guessing you've observed a bit of it from a distance?

LD: Perhaps. Don't really know what it is.

Me: It's a bit tricky to explain. I feel like we have quite different points of reference.

LD: Try me, I'm in no hurry ... what is love?

Me: Oh, baby don't hurt me.

Community of Birds

Möllevångstorget

Hi, I am pleased to meet you.

Who am I?

I am the card you are reading that has been given voice by Steinunn, the artist who has brought us together. Me and my fellows will be guiding you through the piece. We are a collective of different agents that work together on making this encounter smooth. You will be invited to bring this work alive by accepting a series of invitations. You can accept the invitations literally or reflect on them internally. When you have finished, we ask you to return us to where you found us.

Enjoy your experience.

You are invited to find a bench on Möllevång square where you will meet the community of birds. There is map on the next page that will guide you. On your way, pay attention to the things around you. Greet objects and phenomena as they were beings like yourself. As an example, to me you could say, “Hello, card”, to the cloud “Hello, cloud” or “Hello, you”. You can use your own language, your outer or inner voice. The thing might answer back in their own language, with their outer or inner voice. When you have found your place, sit down, and read the next card.

Community

If you sit here for long enough, the community of birds will eventually expose itself to you. This is a gathering place for different species of birds that live side by side in some kind of harmony. A community that is dynamic, competitive and at times hostile. These birds all belong to this place, and the place belongs to them. Over 350 different bird species fly over Scania each year, but only few of them make a stop in Möllan, but human inhabitants from over 180 countries pass this square every year.

Invitation to observe

Pay attention to the different species of birds.

Pay attention to the bird's behaviour.

Pay attention to all the sounds the birds make.

Invitation to act

Try to reach the bird's attention.

Introduce yourself to the community of birds.

Tell them your name and share with them something personal that you think might interest them.

Invitation to contemplate

What bird traits would you like to have?

What human traits do you think the birds would benefit from?

What would it take for you to be able to recognise any of the birds later?

View

Birds have a different perspective from humans.

When we talk about a Birdseye view, we are usually talking about the view from the sky, an overview. Birds have many modes of moving in the world and like humans they shift perspectives depending on their activities, in the sky, on land and in the water. Their bodies have many features that humankind has copied to create products that enhance human abilities to move in the world.



Invitation to shapeshift

Close your eyes.

Pay attention to your own body.

Listen to the sounds of the birds and feel their energy.

Let the bird's energy fill your body.

Open your eyes when you feel that your energy has shifted.

Invitation to change perspective

Choose one bird.

Imagine that you are this bird.

Let the bird's energy move you.

Move like the bird.

As a bird, watch your human body.

Invitation to contemplate

What does the bird see when it sees you?

How diverse are the different perspectives of humans?

How would it affect your decisions if you had the perspective of a bird?

Changes

The world is changing. The food chain is changing. These birds are metropolitan birds that live off human waste. They monitor our movements and map our behaviour in order to exploit our lifestyle to survive. These birds rely very much on humans for food.

Invitation to interact

Take the bread out and feed it to the birds.

Try to distribute the bread equally among them.

Invitation to observe

Pay special attention to those who are struggling.

Pay attention to how your relation to the birds changes when you start to feed them.

Invitation to contemplate

What nourishes you, and who are you dependent on for food?

If your new bird friends were to invite you for dinner,
what would they serve and where would you eat?

Dialogue

You are now invited to create a personal connection to one or more birds and to have a dialogue with them. You are free to use your own language. You can use words, sounds, movements, or telepathic communication. Listen carefully to the language of the birds and feel free to interpret what you perceive.

When you have finished your dialogue, you are invited to share highlights of your conversation in the dialogue book.

You may return to Inter Arts Centre and use the café for writing if you wish.

Enjoy.

Here are a few prompt lines to get the conversation going.

You: I want to thank you for ...

Bird: In my existence I depend on ...

You: Tell me about your mother ...

Bird: I remember ...

You: I regret ...

You: My wish for the future is ...

Bird: Tell me about hope ...

Texts from the conversation book

Me: Thank you for listening.

Me: How do you get through this snowstorm and survive the winter?

Birds: Hope, faith, compassion

Me: How do your winter songs sound?

Me: I admire your skilfulness

You: ...

Me: ok, I try.

I sat on the bench for a while and unfortunately did not meet any bird. One bird flew over me and I tried to imagine being him, flying over Möllevångstorget seeing all the demonstrations for a better world from above.

Me: Tell me about hope?

Bird: Hope? What is that? Something into the future?

I only live in the now ...

Me: Thank you for being here, for adjusting to our manmade environment, staying here, and bringing life and movement and sounds to this place.

Birds: We kind of had no choice, and we like you, have always liked you, you are curious creatures and so are we. We have been singing together for ages since we taught you how to. Thanks for keeping on singing.

YOU SCARED THE HELL OUT OF ME.

One pigeon came close and started a conversation.

P: I haven't seen you here before.

Me: I think it is my first time on this bench.

P: Did you bring more bread?

Me: No, sorry. Maybe I can bring more tomorrow if you are still ... /

And then the pigeon flew away high above with its pigeon fellows.

Me: Sorry to all of you for not distributing the bread better.

Dove: I keep away from the centre; I too find it too hectic and stressful.

Projector

Hi, I am pleased to meet you.

Who am I?

I am the card you are reading that has been given voice by Steinunn, the artist who has brought us together. Me and my fellows will be guiding you through the piece. We are a collective of different agents that work together on making this encounter smooth. You will be invited to bring this work alive by accepting a series of invitations. You can accept the invitations literally or reflect on them internally. When you have finished, we ask you to return us to where you found us.

Enjoy your experience.

You are invited to the VR Studio.

Take time to observe your surroundings on your way to the studio. Pay attention to individual things. Greet objects and phenomena that you meet on the way as they were beings like yourself. As an example, to me you could say, “Hello, card”, to the doorknob “Hello, doorknob” or “Hello, you”. You can use your own language, your outer or inner voice. The thing might answer back in their own language, with their outer or inner voice. When you have found the room, enter, and close the door behind you.

Sit down on the chair and read the next card.

Role

Let me introduce you to the Sony VPL-HW15 projector. This projector belongs to the Virtual Reality studio. In this room artists work on creating virtual universes drawing on their imagination and vision for the future. The role of the projector is to mediate these visions. Inside it there is a lamp that lights up images and projects them into the world.

Invitation to observe the projector

Pay attention to its form and colour.

Pay attention to its complex structure and features.

Pay attention to the beam it projects.

Invitation to interact with the projector

Introduce yourself by name to the lamp and share with it
what you see as your role in life.

Invitation to contemplate

Imagine the images the projector has mediated here at the Inter Arts Centre
through its lifetime?

What future prospects do you see for this projector?

Does the projector please you?

Transformation

Our projector is an assemblage of materials that together make up an object that has a complex technical function. The many materials of the projector are made up of the same materials as you. Like 97% of all matter on earth you are both made of stardust. The materials in the projector have gone through transformational processes manipulated by men to become this object in front of you. It is made to serve you.

Invitation to sense

Move close to the projector.

Close your eyes and breathe deeply.

Touch the projector, stroke it.

Feel the textures and temperature.

Try to tap into its energy.

Invitation to change perspective

Imagine being the projector.

Imagine it's interactions with its surroundings.

Imagine what goes through it.

Invitation to contemplate

What is the lifespan of this projector?

How does sense of time in a projector's universe manifest?

How have you been transformed during your lifetime?

Connection

Like you the projector depends on connection.

To be able to project, the projector must connect to a complex web that provides electricity created by winds, sunlight, and water, to be transformed into a light beam. It is a hybrid system created by humans to generate energy, a rhizome that stretches throughout Sweden and Europe into homes and workplaces.



Invitation to connect to the source

Turn the power off.

Let the projector wind down, then disconnect the power plug from the wall and sit down again.

Pay attention to the shift in energy.

Pay attention to your own body, and how vital energy is pumped from your heart through the complex web of your veins to your limbs and head.

Put the plug in and turn the projector back on.

Imagine the web of electricity in this city, that pumps wind power from the sea in Oresund, sun power from the flat fields of Scania and nuclear driven thermal power from Barsebäck nuclear power plant, through underground electric veins into the projector.

Invitation to contemplate.

How different are you from the projector?

What do you connect to for power?

Does anyone have the power to turn you off?

Does anyone have a remote control for you?

Dialogue

You are now invited to enter a dialogue with the projector on your own terms. You are free to use your own language. You can use words, sounds, movements, or telepathic communication. Listen carefully to the language of the projector and feel free to interpret what you perceive.

When you have finished your dialogue, you are invited to share highlights of your conversation in the dialogue book.

Enjoy.

Here are a few prompt lines to get the conversation going.

You: I want to thank you for ...

Projector: In my existence I depend on ...

You: I cannot live without ...

Projector: I never forget ...

You: Tell me about your struggle ...

Projector: I remember ...

You: My wish for the future is ...

Projector: Tell me about empathy ...



Texts from the conversation book

Dear projector.

You are steady, stable, and resilient! I wonder how many people have been part of creating you. And I wonder which of your inner elements have been excavated where in the world? At what costs? And I wonder what will happen when you die? Will someone reuse parts of you with care? Or will you be burned in some big oven? I myself still have not decided whether I want to be cremated when dead. But reused? Certainly, yes if anything is still fresh enough. Thanks for now dear friend, looking at yourself in these days.

Me: What matters?

You: Energy.

Me: Why?

You: Don't you, see?

Me: Having something or somewhere to plug into sounds lifesaving.

Projector: But it can be unplugged too.

Me: Maybe that's a blessing?

Projector: It's all I know. I like cooling down sometimes.

Me: I agree. Me too.

I want to thank you for the warm air flowing out from your breast onto my cold winter hands.

I am dependent on electricity.

You seem lonely in here. You can only send light outwards. You remind me of watching the movie Wall-e with my daughter. She explained this morning: We are all made of stardust.

Steinunn's card explains that.

Yes, then tell me something else.

I like when the sound of my engine disappears. I like the screen as a mirror.

I like you to be here.

My body is very much like your body. Veins with blood or electricity. I feel the picture. Don't you?

Yes, exactly. I feel it.

Sorry, if I make the human body the picture of everything: your stomach, veins etc. It was nice to meet you.

You too.

I find it hard to talk to the projector. Normally I feel I can talk to almost everybody I meet but this one is different. I think it has to do with the power it is connected to. It scares me a bit. In a way I feel I don't understand it. I think I am supposed to be able to control it, but I don't.

Title: A difficult conversation.

Oh, projector, how do you make the invisible so visible?

I don't know, how do you do it?

I ... guess it is how I use the energy that goes through me?

... and now you, see?

yes ... and no

So, we are equal. We either project or we see.

Hello.

In my conversation with the projector, we talked about sometimes needing to rest. Or, actually, we didn't talk about it. We didn't talk at all, actually. But I sensed a mutual understanding for the need to rest and switch off. :)

Hello projector, the first thing I want to share with you are my thoughts about what me and you have in common. We both produce images, and we both are dependent on light for function. I felt the room we find ourselves in changed a lot when I turned you off. It went from active to passive, to be full to become empty in a way. A room with an image is more fulfilling and enjoyable than one with no image. Thank you, dear projector, for all the beautiful images.

Can you be alive without emotions, without imagination?

I am alive through my connections, through you talking to me, and giving me voice?

Projector: Tell me about empathy?

Me: Don't you know? It's about bringing light into a situation, so I thought you knew ... bringing light by presence ... just being there with a special kind of presence shining a light on someone and saying: I know. I'm your witness.

What am I, what are we?

I am/ we are NOT my/your physical body

I am/ we are NOT my/your thoughts

I am/ we are NOT my/your emotions

I am/ we are a witness/a reflection of life

Agree. Thank you

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