

HYPHAE SOMA

Master in Contemporary Circus Practices
Stockholm University of the Arts

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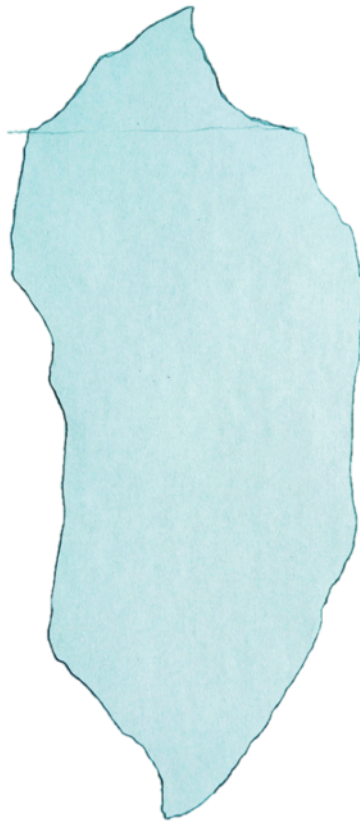
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HYPHAE SOMA

Creating immersive performance design using mycorrhizal structure methodology and iceberg theory in circus performance settings



What is immersive performance design and what role does it have in a performance-based setting and frame? Does it hold the possibility and capability of challenging the frame in which we normally perform?

The focus of my research is to explore the boundaries of how we approach devising performance with particular attention to the relationships in space and the proximity of objects and participants within this. I am to create a performance-based milieu in which spectators, practitioners, the space and objects are in *symbiosis*. A space of symbiosis where no one person has a different status from the other, but a space that allows for people holding different roles. The performer and the audience, the object and the body. My definition of symbiosis draws inspiration from the mycorrhizae fungi network as a starting point for me to mould a methodology adapted to a performative setting. To this milieu I incorporate other factors and concepts, such as the role of text, the dialogue of the still and quiet and how our senses-experience affect our perception. I attempt to weave these concerns into my circus practices.

To create an immersive experience, I have searched for different components to enhance a performative presentation. I combine elements such as installation, aerial circus equipment, ice and plastic sheets (among others) with text, the spectator's interaction with the space and each other to change how we experience a performance.

My work was led by following research questions:

- Does the materiality of my chosen elements hold the possibility of performing without the focus of the human body in it?
- Do we notice the life of the objects?
- How do we, as performer/audience, encounter materials and objects and how does our relationship change in relation to our proximity and knowledge about the material?
- How aware are we of the space we are in as audience members?
- Do we see each other?
- How do we see a performance, the space, the objects and the others when the light is dimmed to a bare minimum or darkness embraces the space?

Experimenting with the transformation of the objects and finding the dialogue

As an aerial circus artist, I am interested in any material I can hang from the ceiling and play with. Discovering my transparent water hoses many years ago I imagined a world of possibilities to be found in exploring them. I played with their capability of opening new techniques, a new language of movement and tricks. Adapting my already existing technique of silks and rope I found moves that interested me. I managed to open some doors, finding ways for them to hold me in ways neither the rope or the silks could. It often offered richer images to the tricks as the tubes were so many and could be wrapped around or stretched out to and around all my limbs. But soon, this material that I had discovered and converted into circus equipment that looked so stunning and mesmerising in stage light, quickly got me stuck which grew into *frustration*. For each new move I tried I would have to come down to undo the tangling at the bottom, which added to the *frustration*. *Frustration* of their never-ending tangling chaos that interrupted my circus technique. *Frustration* that the support I sometimes found in having them coiling around my body felt heavy and hard to control.

It became *frustratingly* hard to control them in the technique and the sticky but slippery, the heavy, curly and chaotic life they had about them.

And that was it.

I was trying to control them, putting my circus body as the focus when I climbed them.

When, in fact, they had this endlessly tangling chaotic life on their own.

I took a new approach by knotting them together while climbing them. I became my own architect of the chaotic space I built with them. For a while it sparked my interest in them again.

But it didn't take long for their tangling, yet again, to be too hard to control, for it to be anything but unstructured chaos and I would, physically and mentally, get stuck.

From there I tried only knotting them up and stretching them to the walls to visually mirror a network of roots.

I removed my body, the circus body, and allowed them to beautifully take a new form. I spent hours knotting, adding my body to the structure, and then removing my body.

Looking at images of mycorrhizal fungi network and the cellular network inside our bodies, I started to shape an installation. The installation-version had removed most of my frustration and served as a visual effect in my presentation in my first year on the master course. However, for the second, and final presentation, I started having doubts.

Structurally the water hoses were striking, but now they were static. Knowing that adding my body had only caused frustration previously I was tempted to subtract them from the presentation. The first week of my intense creative period for the project I tried to set them up as installation again. This time lower and less knotted, with the idea that the audience would be walking in and under them causing the movement to bring them life. The idea of them being moved by the audience and for the audience to be immersed in them was what I resonated with. But looking at the structure it had taken for this to happen made me feel unbalanced. In pure frustration I tore them down from their stretched-out points and had them all hanging from one point that was lowered to a hurdle of hoses on the floor. At this point I would have taken them away wasn't it for the persistence of my collaborators and mentor.

Feeling defeated and without any solution, I hoisted them up from their rigging point, allowing them to hang freely, as they were, from the ceiling to the floor where they naturally formed a chaotic jumble.

The image was striking: resembling a root network at the bottom, and possibly a waterfall at the top. I sat and looked at them for a long time. We all did. My musician, Love Kjellsson went off to the corner and started to play music. The rest of us, Karoline Aamås, Ilona Jäntti and I stayed sitting, watching them in silence.

With no words, no goal or idea I went to climb them. I placed myself near the top in a manner that allowed for me to manoeuvre between a couple of positions. I wrapped some of the hoses around myself and slowly pulled my body over to one side, the hoses heavy on my body, lifting slightly from the ground as I moved. Then I stayed. Very slowly I lifted some of the hoses, making the tangled and attached ones follow. Every now and again one would free its end from the group and swing slightly from the movement of the pull. When the weight of them pressing on my body was too heavy, I slowly shifted my position, causing slow, rippling movements in the jumble underneath me. Every now and again I would pull a few, place them over my foot, spreading them ever so slightly.

After a while, slowly descending into their jumble, I released myself from them and carefully stepped out. Another minute or so passed in silence before we agreed that this was how we wanted to use them. In their natural way, chaotic and striking, bringing the focus to the materiality and away from the circus technique and body, opening a conversation with the material. For me, as the performer, the relationship with the material had changed. I had moved them around slowly before, but my body was always, one way or another, in focus. Removing the focus from my body allowed me to listen more carefully to the material, see its life and simply help bring it to life by slowly stretching it out on my limbs and lifting them, opening the root-like image to expand and contract, allowing it to breathe.

What happens when we really stop to look, take in, listen and sense?

Finding silence and slowing down, I began to recognise the importance of 'the movement of the slow' in my practice. The slower I could move the material, the more breath-like, natural life they held. Focusing the light source only at the bottom allowed for the audience to see the materiality of the hoses, their strange plant-like movements. Observing the hoses move over time opened up for the audience a relationship

and dialogue with what they were watching, listening to their movements, anticipating their journey and visual image. Listening to the language of the material offers an inner dialogue with oneself, a connection that finds its strength in fragility and vulnerability.

Looking further at the movement of the slow I re-visited past images of mycorrhizae, roots and entanglement by freezing a rope. An old rope that had been in the garden of my colleague Karoline for years and years, coloured by the seasons, all brown-grey. I soaked it in water before tucking it into a compartment in the freezer. Even more so than the hoses, the frozen rope resembled a jumble of roots all coiled up in each other. Upon rigging it from the ceiling, my mentor, Ilona Jäntti, and I spent around two hours watching it. As it started to open it would crick crack in the beginning before starting to melt properly.

The dialogue in the anticipation in the waiting for the movement caught us a little off guard. We had set the day aside to try some things for the double rope sequence but found ourselves coming back to the frozen rope. For each move the rope made my body automatically did a sudden inward breath in ecstatic surprise and bliss. It was almost overwhelmingly satisfying to catch a movement, making it

hard to tear away from it to do anything else. As with the hoses, the natural life of the material was enough. Allowing the time for it to unfold on its own with no body to manipulate or control. The longer we sat in stillness and watched, the more we started to see the language of its movement. In longer moments seemingly, nothing happened but the slowly forming of drops. But watching the formation of drops from the melting of the rope, it became possible to anticipate when the next unfolding would happen; by noticing the nuances of the micro-movements.

Can the micro-movements of a slowly melting rope awake the same thrill and suspension of watching an acrobat fly through the air, or a balance on the tight wire just before the performers' next move?

If you have ever taken the time to watch a drop of water being formed, you see it slowly fill up till it is too heavy, almost wobbling the Nano-second before its release.

The melting of the rope, when taking the time to really observe it, has a similar non-verbal language. A conversation to partake in and listen to. When the unfolding and movement finally happens, it offers anticipated surprise and release in the same way the anticipation of the build up for a circus trick does. If you allow it.

I was both surprised and ecstatic by how this conversation with the material with no relation to a body managed to touch me.

From the frozen rope I moved on to the next material; a block of ice. Already in my application to the Master course I had written that I wanted to work with ice as a material to bring with me in the rope. I was interested in its unapologetic honesty, in its slowly dissolving nature and how that affected my relation and dialogue with it. The focus no longer being on the tricks in the rope, but on the relationship, balance and conversation between the melting ice and the body.

“Juggling the ice is more than a challenge; it is a dialogue with a material that transforms every moment. A frozen block that turns into a puddle, a journey that always ends up bringing you back to the parallel position of the floor.”

(<https://www.theatreonline.com/Spectacle/Phia-Menard-P-P-P-/48369>)

French born artist Phia Ménard from company Non Nova merges the fields of circus, theatre, dance and performance art. In her show P.P.P (Position Parallèle au Placher), Ménard works with the material of ice representing the rise of something new in the decay of the old, memories locked in

the ice slowly melt and evaporate; an ever-evolving journey of the dialogue between the body and the material.

(<https://www.theatreonline.com/Spectacle/Phia-Menard-P-P-P-/48369>)

(<http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13542/phia-menard>)

(<https://www.citizenkid.com/sortie/p-p-p-menard-cie-non-nova-a1016709>)

Previous to entering the Master course I had been working on a solo show where I explored the balance between life and death. I was interested in the state of limbo, the unknown and uncertain and the possible meeting with death. In coma dreams I was searching for the links between what appears bizarre, trailing it back to where it arose to find understanding of that bizarre. This had led me to take a step back to see exactly what about the state of uncertainty and of being close to death that really intrigued me: I found time, the lack of time, being frozen in time, emotions, senses, connection and moments. And so, it was with this in mind that I wanted to bring the ice with me in the rope. Finding ways of keeping it in balance on my body, exploring the effect of its temperature on my body. Holding on to the moment in which it would still be solid, before slowly decaying and disappearing, cutting our connection and leaving me. Leaving me how? Would it not just transform into something else? I wasn't sure what to find, but had a strong image in my mind of a block of ice

balancing on my head while I climbed the rope. It was a starting point.

What struck me about Phia Ménard's words besides the transformation and the journey, was the dialogue with the material along that journey of transformation.

Manipulating and juggling the ice until there is nothing left but puddles slowly evaporating gives a beautiful and strong image of change, decay, letting go and allowing for it to happen: To use the time during which the material is still solid to form a relationship and dialogue, only to see it slip away the moment the dialogue starts to really take form. During my first presentation in our first year, I managed to climb the rope balancing the ice on my head. With its piercing coldness and dripping water, I found it offered an interesting dialogue between the ice, the audience and myself.

What was in this dialogue and how could I evolve from what I had already done as I embarked on my second, and final, presentation?

I added the element of another body. Two bodies and the ice in the rope.

In the double rope (two bodies in the same rope), Karoline and I had already been searching for a language of movement

and moments between each other where as many as possible of the impressive tricks were scaled off. From years working together returning to the same conversations of what it means to show off tricks, and to be hired to do certain sets of tricks, we had a common need to explore the minimum and non-impressive. To find movements in which the focus became the conversation between us rather than the impressiveness of the tricks. This desire derived from a need of being seen as more than a "body of tricks" and our nearly four months working together in Nairobi, Kenya. Living, training and performing alongside a group of acrobats in Nairobi had left a shift in our priorities of what we wanted in our circus lives: In what we share and give, as opposed to wanting and reaching for status. Though enriched by our stay there, we got lost in the exposure to a different culture, different colours and smells and trying to differentiate the nuances of truth and hidden meaning around us. The only safe point we had to hold on to was each other. And from this point we started to build a language in the rope in which moments of silent communication and "no tricks" started to take form. So, when our two bodies were added to the equation of the ice and the rope, we kept the simplicity of what we already had found. And by adding the ice to be cared for and balanced this silent communication was magnified. Each micro-movement from one body instantly had a major effect on the ice and the body

balancing the ice, forcing us to really listen to each other's movement and communicate with extreme care for each other and the ice, all the while moving together, the ice melting and changing in dialogue with the temperature of our bodies.

Can the subtraction of the tricks and impressiveness still allow the audience to be attentive and connect?

Setting a frame in which I hoped for the audience to turn their attention to the movement and life of the material was scary. As circus performers our training is, more often than not, focused on the tricks and the technique: To push the boundaries of what you think your body is capable of, to reach newer heights, push the boundaries of the risk; awe the audience. Meanwhile, I was working on silence and stillness, connection, dialogue and sense. Even in the part where there would be bodies in the rope, the focus would be on the dialogue between the material and the bodies. Had I erased the thrill and excitement? Had I erased the circus from my circus? I don't believe so. In fact, I think I found more circus than I hoped for by listening to the inaudible dialogue in which, when truly paid attention to, speaks the clearest. When the attention is directed to the quiet and the stillness you learn to read the language and movements of the material,

waiting in suspension for its next move. The body is no longer in focus, but the thrill is there.

***Can the material thrill and impress?
What is its' next move and what does the suspension of the waiting for it do to us?***

If only for a fraction of a moment, I wanted that intuitive listening to ripple and weave into the awareness of not just the material, but also the others with whom we share a space and the experience. A performance format which allows for the moments of suspension through the micro-movements and the awareness of the space and the others to culminate in a shared sense of *communitas* and experience through immersive performance design. (Communitas: "The sense of sharing and intimacy that develops among persons who experience liminality as a group")

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/communitas?s=t>

To do so I have moulded two main methods to guide me through the building of the framework.

#1 The symbiosis between the mycorrhizal fungi structure as a structure for audience relationship and proximity

#2 Using iceberg theory to create shifts in awareness to enhance a shared experience

#1 To use the symbiosis that operates within the mycorrhizal fungi structure as a structure for audience relationship and proximity

Underneath the forest floor exists a highly complex fungi network where information has been flowing for millions of years. Mycorrhizae is a fungi network that colonise and form a close symbiotic relationship to plant roots. This type of fungi has existed for more than 450 million years, since the first plants appeared on dry land. Weaving its hyphae (fungal filaments) into the tips of the roots, fungi and plant form a structure of connection and communication that we call mycorrhizae (mycorrhizal in plural). This allows for a complex and collaborative underground hyphal network often referred to by scientists as the Wood Wide Web. This symbiotic relationship allows the plants to draw nutrition it would otherwise not access. In return the plants offer carbohydrates and other nutrition the fungi feed off. The relationship exceeds that of basic exchange of goods, however, with its possibility of complex communication. The hyphae network serves as an extension of the roots. An extension that

branches out, enabling the trees to communicate across vast areas of forest floor.

This wide stretched communication opens a stronger community among the trees as they send out signals of dangers such as insect attacks and drought. Thus, the parts of the forest suffering from drought are able to receive help from their neighbours both near and far and to warn the drought might spread. When one part of the forest is under damaging insect attacks they will pass the signal on, warning their community in time for them to better defend themselves.

Beyond the communication to its community, trees are found to recognize their own relatives. A mother tree recognizes her own seedlings and will tend to their needs before she tends to her neighbours. Seedlings in heavily shaded undergrounds communicate for help and receive the extra nutrition needed to grow through the network by their mother tree before their neighbours. Dying mother trees are found to share their stored goods and to pass on wisdom to their young. The largest portions of the goods are first sent to the closest relatives, before the rest is sent to their common neighbours.

(<http://www.mykepro.com/mycorrhizae-benefits-application-and-research.aspx>)

(<https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-secrets-of-the-wood-wide-web>)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=breDQqrkikM>)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVK9TCXZz6I>)

Even though fungi and roots move so slowly they appear to be still to the human eye, they are in fact full of life and movement. The littlest root and the most fragile fungi hyphae have the possibility to communicate the subtlest signals that will reach and travel across acres and acres, strengthening the existence and community of the forest. The tips of the roots have brain-like structures and receptors that allow for the uptake of nutrition and information, and through the interconnection of the fungi they pass on signals of communication similarly to the electrical signals in the human body. The electrical signals in our bodies send out information to our neurotransmitters, allowing us to take in information through every millimetre of the landscape that makes up our bodies. Like the trees can communicate and take in information across vast landscapes, the human body is one large sensory platform through which we are constantly fed information. In my methodologies I have found ways of directing the focus to the complex subtlety of the communication network, in nature, our bodies and our relationship to it.

(<https://io9.gizmodo.com/5877531/how-exactly-do-neurons-pass-signals-through-your-nervous-system>)

It is this relationship, their communication and enhancing of each other's existence in their seemingly silent communication that intrigued and resonated with me. For a long while I knew I was interested in the relationship but didn't quite understand why or what relevance it had to my work other than an aesthetic value and my need to explore the senses.

Finding the listening and attentiveness made me connect with the material and its language. Slowing down the pace then brought on the idea to build the same relationship and proximity with my audience. Allowing them to walk around the performance space (to be part of the space), finding their way of connecting with the materiality of the object also allowed my proximity and silent dialogue with the audience to form. Choosing dim light strengthened the attentiveness and searching for movement and connection in addition to sharpen our senses and intuitivism.

My first attempt to try to link my ideas and thinking to an already existing concept was sparked by conversations on identifying contracts. During my first year at the Master course Pernilla Glaser explained the concept *hacking the system* as a means to change a set "contract"

(<http://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system/>)

Through identifying set or unspoken rules of social contracts you can find ways of changing or hacking the system and thus change the outcome by altering the expectancy. To inhabit the understanding of this concept Pernilla took us to Kulturhuset in Stockholm, where we were to observe and identify social systems and hack them. We had been given large pieces of paper, yarn, coloured pens and a few other objects to help us. The first system my group and I identified were the chess tables upstairs that were open to the public. We then wrapped each of the chess pieces in the same coloured paper, so they were no longer distinguishable from one another. This being a public space where it is uncertain who is in charge and to know whether or not this was a part of the space's agenda, it would be up to the individual person seeking to use the chess pieces to decide a) to leave the pieces, not daring to use them b) to make up a new version of the game perhaps based on intuition c) to unwrap them and go about the game as normal d) other option.

Having done this exercise and had discussions on the subject I was curious to what this could be or mean in my own work. Identifying what the set contract of the standard circus performance was and what the expectations of the audience

were, was helpful and strengthened my will to research audience proximity further.

My design draws from the concept of *communitas* in order to link the ideas of silent communication and community from the fungi to the scale of human social behaviour.

What is *communitas*? *Communitas* is a term developed by anthropologist Victor Turner to define human activities (such as rituals, rites of passages, etc.) (Turner, 1974:231).

Communitas is a sense of connectivity and collective understanding of a plurality of people. It holds no status other than that of unity and sharing and to truly see each other, noticing the details and caring. It connects in oneness in surprise and readiness. Whereas community has different roles and statuses, *communitas* has no status, but sees the people for who they are, allowing them to be alive to the fullest. Allowing people to see each other in all their detailed richness they are composed of.

For me the 'anti-structure' (called "non-rational" by Turner) (Turner, 1974:57) aspects of *communitas* where the individuals enjoy a collective sense of creativity and flow outside of the constraints of social norms, echoed my interest in the

focussed silent 'unspoken' communication and community focus of the fungi colony. For me the spirit of *communitas* brought the 'togetherness' of the fungi to the level of the human. This helped me ground my understanding of the aims of my practice:

In concrete circumstances, *communitas* may be found when people engage in a collective task with full attention— often a matter of ordinary work. They may find themselves "in flow." That is, they experience a full merging of action and awareness, a crucial component of enjoyment. Once in flow, there is no need for conscious intervention on their part. In *communitas* there is a loss of ego. One's pride in oneself becomes irrelevant. In the group, all are in unity, seamless unity, so that even joshing is cause for delight and there is a lot of laughter. The benefits of *communitas* are quick understanding, easy mutual help, and long-term ties with others. (Turner, 1974:3)

The second concept I was inspired and influenced by was *experience design*, a concept introduced to us by Rolf Hughes. Rolf Hughes and Ron Jones define *experience design* as "the design of meaningful experience over time"
(Hughes and Jones, 2011, no page)

In conversations with Rolf he explained the concept further by giving me the example of Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project*. Olafur's installation consists of representations of the sun and the sky with mist floating in to build cloud like formations. You experience weather indoors with people coming and going over duration of time. "...Olafur Eliasson takes this ubiquitous subject as the basis for exploring ideas about experience, mediation and representation."

(<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series/unilever-series-olafur-eliasson-weather-project-0>)

In my research I am interested in translating the communicative-enhancing symbiotic relationship that the fungi-structure share with the plant roots. I translate it to my relationship and proximity with the people in the space in order to accumulate moments through the immersive that culminate in a sense of *communitas* – a shared experience.

I resonated with the shared experience and relationship with the material, but, to me, in my research for my project, I felt I had one foot in *experience design* and the other... well, I wasn't sure where it was half the time. It kept stepping in and out of a variety of things I found had relevance and interest to my work, but I couldn't quite grasp the core of it to pull it in to make sense of it. In the state of not quite knowing but

searching for a definition of my work and something to hold on to I turned my focus to the aspect of the *immersive*.

The symbiosis between the mycorrhizal and the plant roots holds no status, but is a free existence on equal, shared ground: An enhanced co-existence simply from each other's presence. To build a methodology, the concept of *communitas* allowed me to take the jump to build a bridge between the nature of the mycorrhizal, to human nature and social behaviour. To establish the methodology as sustainable in a circus performance setting, the next step from the social to the performative, was immersive design. From mycorrhizal fungi structure, to *communitas*, to immersive; all of which share aspects of each other.

The concept of 'experience design' made me consider a different kind of aesthetic and form for my work that would support my aim of bringing a symbiosis/*communitas*. The concept was a trigger not a concept fully addressed (as the term is connected to market forces which are contradictory to my research). However, the idea of 'immersion' became an important objective. By directing the focus of the audience to the moment they are in, the people whom they share the moment with and the space they are in I am hoping to bring

an awareness to that of being in the present, of being in the moment and thus being in the experience.

Immersive Theatre, is a term applied to diverse events that blend a variety of forms and seek to exploit all that is experiential in performance, placing the audience at the heart of the work".

(Machon, 2012:29).

Machon goes on to discuss immersive theatre work as that of being submerged in a medium where our senses are engaged and manipulated in a place outside our known environment. A realm where the audience are incorporated in concept and form. She further talks about distinct features defining the immersive experience, such as the event inhabiting a feeling of "...unique, 'in its own world'-ness (Ibid:31). This is the combination of, role and handling of "space, scenography, sound, duration and action" (Ibid, 2012:31), always with the body at the centre of the work; the body of the performer as well as the audience-participant.

Though I agree the body is central, its presence crucial for the experience and outcome of the performance, I also would like to voice that the absence of the body opens for a different kind of relationship to be experienced, and this is, perhaps, where my definition of immersive performance differs from

immersive theatre in its philosophy and aim. Although the body is present (the performer and audience) in my work, the focus is on the language of the material and the connections we make. In some parts more than others, yes, but I would hesitate to claim to put the body in focus as a statement. Instead, with roots in the changing of the contract and experience design, my definition of *Immersive Performance Design* holds aspects of *communitas* and immersive theatre as:

-A design where the culminations of multiple micro-moments create a sense of communitas and shared experience in a room of objects, sound and each other.

-A design in which the audience find themselves an extended part and immersed in the performance itself.

#2 Using iceberg theory to create shifts in awareness to enhance a shared experience

In order to create these moments of connectivity and awareness I turned my focus towards what it means to connect with a moment; to find a leap into that which I looked at in my previous work as a performer as well as that of being an audience member.

My project, *Hyphae Soma*, is in many ways a continuation of *Potatoes And Sauce*, a project in which I collected stories of coma dreams and conversations between people in which one part had passed away. In *Potatoes and Sauce* I was interested in where the bizarre images of the coma dreams came from as well as when the moment death actually occurred. I was drawn to the moments in which death occurred seemingly in the middle of living, expected and unexpected, in the middle of life itself. The stories I collected, both from books, the Internet and from my own family, moved me with a simple complexity I wished to share in my work. However, the most interesting part of my work happened in the Q&A's I held as part of show and tell. In these situations when the audience were more involved by either listening to the research behind my work or by asking me direct questions it became apparent that the sharing of the information of my research enhanced their experience of the performance.

At one show-and-tell in London I shared a mental image from a coma dream I had come across in which a lady was followed by a human-like monitor with a piece of wood for a head and unnatural long arms made of candy. The candy arms were sticky and kept reaching for her as she attempted to escape the building she was in. She kept opening door after door to find an exit, but each door just led to another while the sticky

arms of the monitor kept grabbing for her. In her dream she felt the stickiness cling to her skin making her try even harder to escape. When she emerged from her coma she found that her arms were indeed sticky, but from the tape the doctors had used to change her medicinal tubes. Still this bodily feeling had immersed in her dreams creating this surreal monitor chasing her.

I was interested in this sticky sensation and created a sequence where I walked barefoot on cling film I had taped to the floor. With a single stage light set from the side only illuminating me from my knees down I was able to focus the attention on the limbs and their behaviour in this corridor of light rather than on me as a full person. I shared the story with the audience generating the feedback that these pieces of information made them see that particular part very differently.

Though I love working with the abstractly I started to contemplate the possibility of telling clearer stories without it being theatrical; but a form of storytelling or sharing of information. This links to Turner's proposal that *communitas* is shared through stories. (Turner, 1974) This sharing of more-than-information of the research I had put in to my work made me reflect on how much of it the audience actually grasps. It

became evident for me that the clearest way of expressing this was by seeing it as *an iceberg*. The top of the iceberg, the ten percent, is what we present as our act/show/presentation, our polished result of our research. The remaining ninety percent representing the process and research itself. And yes, in the ten percent there will be evidence of the research, but will it necessarily be evident enough for the audience to grasp? Do they even need to grasp it? Normally I would say no, they do not need to grasp everything, they make their own perceptions and there is great value and beauty in that. But is there a way to merge the two? The sharing of information as we do in Q&A's but in the performance itself? What purpose does it really hold?

"Hemingway's biographer Carlos Baker believed that as a writer of short stories Hemingway learned "how to get the most from the least, how to prune language and avoid waste motion, how to multiply intensities, and how to tell nothing but the truth in a way that allowed for telling more than the truth." (Baker, 1972:117)

Trained in journalistic writing, Hemingway is to the point, sharp, often without the long-detailed background story. A style for which he is both celebrated and criticized. Nevertheless, his definition of *iceberg theory* in writing holds an interesting philosophy and methodology. If your story is

written clearly enough, and you, as the writer, know the full background of all the details belonging to the story that is not written, the reader should be able to “read between the lines” to get the richness of the story. This way, Hemingway formed a way of writing prose in the sharp and to the point-style of journalism but allowing the reader to still “read” the full story.

Hemingway said that only the tip of the iceberg showed in fiction—your reader will see only what is above the water—but the knowledge that you have about your character that never makes it into the story acts as the bulk of the iceberg. And that is what gives your story weight and gravitas.

(Blum, 2013).

Though his definition of the theory in many ways can be seen to have parallels with that of the process (knowing the background story) and what is displayed in a presentation (the tip of the iceberg), in my definition and use of the term I divert from his definition. By adding selected pieces of information directly from the thinking/findings of the process, the audience’s attention and focus will shift.

An example of how I used it in my work and the reflection on how it diverts from Hemingway’s use of it would be as follows.

Aiming for the audience and performers to reach a sense of *communitas* and shared experience I chose moments in which I made a shift in the focus. Upon entering the space, I welcomed the audience and told them that one of my interests and focuses in my research was how we are in a space with objects and the others. This was only a small piece of information – the planting of a seed. Later, during the presentation, I gathered the people in the space and told them that, one of my interests is how we perceive a space, the objects and each other. I wanted them to really see each other so I asked them to form a line according to the temperature of their hands. I asked them to do so by communicating with each other, without words, but by seeing each other and taking each other in. Further into the performance, while my colleague Karoline and I are in the rope, the attentiveness has been building as we attempt to be in the rope at the same time balancing a block of ice. Choosing minimal lighting has increased the attentiveness and intensesness when, in a moment, we drop the ice together. At this point there is no music playing. Stillness follows as I take breath and share a finding from my research: “When you watch a live performance with a group of people, regardless of knowing them or not, after a while, your hearts will start to beat in unison”.

(<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/news/2017/nov/audience-members-hearts-beat-together-theatre>)

The light goes out and the audience is left in the space with the knowledge of their hearts beating in unison lingering in the darkness.

By planting seeds along the way in a way of storytelling or giving information before giving them the scientific fact of their beating hearts has now made a shift in their awareness.

Whereas in writing, Hemingway suggests omitting information, I suggest bringing in selected pieces of information from the bulk of the iceberg to make a shift in awareness. I could also not do so, which would leave the audience to have only their own perceptions of what they experience. An approach I normally would go for as a believer in the abstract and beauty of not knowing everything but forming my own impressions when watching a performance. However, as the aim of the shared experience is an aspect and sense of *communitas* (although a wide term), I believe the sharing of information from the bulk of the iceberg directs the focus of the group as a whole, allowing the experience to be guided toward a shared one, in which awareness of the other is heightened.

There might be other ways of steering the focus of the group

in that direction, but as text and storytelling are mediums I like to work within, I chose the text as my iceberg format.

I also found other ways of using information to enhance an experience and relationship to the objects in the space. Again, prior to entering the space, part of the information I gave was that one of the installations was made only of water hoses. The kind of hoses you water your flowers with and know from your every day life. In other words, I gave them information that they would find a piece of installation made from material they would recognize. When entering the space however, they find the hoses to be transparent, not the green hoses they would normally keep in their gardens.

Nevertheless, they are garden hoses. Not knowing this, the majority of people think the hoses are special made circus equipment as they won't automatically link garden hoses to circus. By making the shift in their awareness and putting on their "garden hoses-glasses" they now see them as such and are, to my experience so far, always surprised by the look and the use of them in a performance setting. As subtle and insignificant as it might seem, this actually causes a moment of connection through realization by the information of the nature of the object. A connection that brings them closer to that particular piece of installation through a moment of,

"hmm, I would never have thought they were common garden hoses."

By sharing selected information at the right moment, the culmination of such moments are what ultimately brings the people closer to the objects, space and each other.

Thus, my definition of *Iceberg Theory* has come to be:

-Using Iceberg Theory in an immersive performance setting to enhance the sense of togetherness, connection and communitas in a shared experience by making shifts in the awareness of the plurality of a group.

-A sharing of information from the bulk of the iceberg to form closeness and a shared understanding and connections in and through the performance event.

To better understand how I could use the iceberg theory, I turned my attention to storytelling. E.g. what it means to share a story and information and the means to do so; 1) the importance it has had for the survival of the human kind and the extraordinary power it has to bring people together. 2) The role of courage, honesty and vulnerability plays in conversations and stories and 3) how some conversations are

at their most powerful when they are silent, and 4) where we go to reach them.

Around 70.000 years ago the cognitive revolution happened. From being able to warn each other of threats and dangers using simple language, sapiens acquired the ability to gossip, express and imagine fiction and stories.

Legends, myths, gods and religions appeared for the first time with the Cognitive Revolution. Many animals and human species could previously say, 'Careful! A lion!' Thanks to the Cognitive Revolution, Homo sapiens acquired the ability to say, 'The lion is the guardian spirit of our tribe.' This ability to speak about fictions is the most unique feature of Sapiens language." "Such myths give Sapiens the unprecedented ability to cooperate flexibly in large numbers.

(Harari, 2011:27).

The power of gossip, fiction and story is just as crucial in today's society. It is our ideas and stories and our belief in them that binds us to cooperate in large groups, but also to experience something collectively and connectively in large groups.

In his book, *TED Talks: the official TED guide to public speaking*, Chris Anderson speaks of exactly this, the importance of the evolution of storytelling, but beyond this, he gives inspiring examples and methods of how to use this as a tool to really capture the interest and connection with the audience. He further talks about the importance of body language, eye contact, vulnerability, sincerity, laughter etc. - all ingredients to make us relate and connect (Anderson, 2016). What Anderson so importantly adds is that in each story that is told, for all the facts and information to be presented and fed us, a key factor is to present your subject in the form of an idea with yourself as the tool or body of communication for that idea to come alive. "An issue says, 'Isn't this terrible?' An idea says, 'Isn't this interesting?'" (Anderson, 2016:59). Presenting something as an idea or inspiration or perhaps even a riddle, rather than posing your opinion and morals and ethics, however good they are - offers the audience a part. Inspiration offers a part in which they get to form their own impressions, ideas and experience and be curious. The tools suggested in Anderson's book are aimed at holding an ethic toward yourself and your audience. It suggests to, in each speech, to find an angle of connection that resonates with an emotion or relatable metaphor.

For the past two decades, research professor Brené Brown has been studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy in order to fathom connection. In her Ted-talk, *The Power of Vulnerability*, Brown takes us through some of the steps on the way. Upon starting her research, Brown says, "When you ask people about love, they tell you about heartbreak. When you ask people about belonging, they'll tell you their most excruciating experiences of being excluded. And when you ask people about connection, the stories they told me were about disconnection." (4:02). In collecting stories and data from lived experiences, Brown explains she quickly came to find this 'thing' that unravelled connection. This led her to take a step back in order to understand what this 'thing' was that caused the unravelling. And what unravels connections, she found, is shame. "Shame is really easily understood as the fear of disconnecting." (https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability#t-12309) (4:35) "Because shame ultimately is the belief that we're not worthy of love and connection." (<https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/brave-heart/>). At the core of shame and fear, Brown explains, you find excruciating vulnerability. To connect we need to allow ourselves to really be seen, truthfully and authentically, which is vulnerable. "Vulnerability is the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness, but it appears it is also the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of love" (https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability#t-12309) (12:32)

To grasp her findings, Brown divided her data of people with a strong sense of worthiness from those who did not. Focusing on the group with a strong sense of worthiness and belonging, Brown found common factors and patterns.

The courage to fully embrace *vulnerability* - Living as wholehearted people with a deep sense of worthiness, they all shared the same belief that vulnerability was simply a necessity. They perceived their vulnerabilities as what made them beautiful, a part of what made up their whole person. A shared sense of courage; the courage to embrace their vulnerability - the core of shame and fear. In embracing vulnerability, they shared a fundamental belief in willingness and care for themselves and others; in being vulnerable to themselves and others. "A willingness to say 'I love you' first. The willingness to do something where there are no guarantees." They shared a common fundamental courage and belief in willingness to entering situations where their vulnerabilities were exposed.

(https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability#t-12309) (10:15)

Furthermore, they all had *connection* as a result of authenticity. They had the courage of letting go of who they thought they *should* be to be in order to be who they *really* were. (https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability#t-12309)

(9:20) "Brown says that recognizing and accepting our own vulnerabilities is key because giving voice to our greatest fears takes the power (shame) right out of them. The real kicker is that taking a risk to be seen for who we are helps us to connect to our most creative selves and engage more fully with others. Brown calls this process "Daring Greatly."" (https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-parenting/post/brene-brown-be-the-adult-you-want-your-children-to-be/2012/10/04/b5bdbd9c-0ca6-11e2-a310-2363842b7057_blog.html?utm_term=.7f31a3608e1b)

In separating courage and bravery, Brown shares the original definition of courage when it first came into the English language from the Latin word 'cor', meaning heart. "To tell the story of who you are with your whole heart." (https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability#t-12309) (8:52)

In her work, *The Artist is Present*, Marina Abramović portrays the power of performance art by being present in silence. Over the duration of three months she was sat on a chair by a small table facing the sitters in mutual gaze and silence. Surprised by the amount of people and their willingness, or perhaps need of connecting, Abramović shared moments of silence and connection with complete strangers. In the short video, Marina Abramović on performing *The Artist is Present*, directed and edited by Milicia Sec, Abramović reflects on the

experience of sharing a gaze. "I'm looking at you, you are photographed, you are filmed, you are observed by everybody else in this atrium. So, there is nowhere to go but into yourself." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Qj__s8mNU) (1:31)

She further reflects on the moment of going into oneself to be a moment in touch with one's emotions, that leaves a profound imprint.

When you have nowhere to go but inside yourself you face the vulnerability and courage to connect with yourself. Considering moments of connection through vulnerability has played a major role in my method and approach to design the performance space and to form relationship, and proximity to the objects and the audience. Furthermore, it became crucial in my writing practice to consider vulnerability to be able to connect in the sharing of the information and meeting the audience. All the moments in my performance in which I was talking directly to the audience were my most nervous. Working with text has been part of my interest and practice for years, however, I have always chosen to record the text and use it as voice-over in combination with music. Talking in front of people can make me nervous but is still something I have done a lot and feel comfortable doing. But choosing considered parts to share from my bulk of the iceberg in order

to make a shift in the awareness, and how to deliver the information without it feeling forced or out of place made me a different kind of nervous. I knew I needed to be calm and to know my information well enough to make it sound natural. But for the text to serve as a shift in awareness and feel authentic I knew I needed to be vulnerable. Like Andersson suggested, I found it crucial for the information to be portrayed in a way to feel inspiring for the audience to find their own connection to it without me forcing it on them. To steer them by shifting the focus and enlighten them but leave enough room for *them* to find their place in it. Which was terrifying.

Ultimately it was my ideas and thinking delivered naked. Or so it felt.

Trusting the power of vulnerability and having gained new tools in meeting people through speech, it is now something I would like to let grow and evolve. Searching for ways of combining the essence of Q&A's and performance through the techniques of Andersson, iceberg theory portrayed with authenticity and vulnerability. The culmination of moments of connectivity in text and silent dialogue with the material to create a sense of *communitas*.

A poetic reflection of the final work - a glimpse below the tip of the iceberg

Since many years I have been using text as a central medium in my work. Storytelling holds a great power in connecting a plurality of people and allows for a common journey and understanding. Developing my writing skills, I took on a writing practice I call *Object Writing*. The name isn't significant or particularly correct to its practice, but nonetheless it reminded me of what its practice is about. Object Writing was a task for me to put myself in the perspective of an object, or another person (hence the misleading-ness about the name). To be able to create a setting in which the audience was immersed and finding ways of connecting in stillness and quiet, I needed to imagine their journey through my presentation. Before doing so I created a practice out of noticing my habits, finding an object in that habit and write its observations of me as I went about with whatever it was I was doing. For instance, I walk the same paths each morning on my way to school. It is close to a forest area and so I picked a tree to observe me and reflect on my doings and thoughts as I passed it each day. This went on to letting a row of icicles write about me as I spent four days in their presence filming, dancing, shuffling

snow and so forth. The interesting part about the icicles was that they obviously would disappear and possibly reappear. And had they met me somewhere else in the world before as they evaporated and flew off somewhere else? Maybe, maybe not. But as a writing practice it opened up for a different way of seeing other things' and people's observations and reflections, which was what I was interested in. Through this writing practice I connected with objects around me and with my imagined audience. Allowing myself to write about my own audience and jumping between their most inner thoughts and mine felt both intimate and true and forced me to acknowledge certain parts of what my presentation could possibly awake.

Going 'out of myself' in this sense became part of shaping the space. As a circus practitioner in creation mode it is easy to get lost in your own work, assuming people will see it or feel it my way, when in fact I am the only one in my own mind and body. I am the only one with all my thinking and journey of the process going into this presentation. How would I assume people to understand it the way I do? It is probably not necessary for everyone to do so, in fact, it is probably healthier if they don't. Nevertheless, the writing practice helped me map the points in the presentation where something might feel confusing or scary. An emotional risk-assessment, you might say.

To use the writing practice in this way also provided a means for me to turn the focus on the part below the iceberg possibly more so than in the presentation itself. This, itself, leading me to see possibilities of changes and evolvment to experiment with in the future to further develop a writing in which the silent communication offers reflection and seeing the other.

I want you to imagine this...

You are welcomed at the entrance of a space. I tell you that some of the things I am interested in in my work is how we take in and sense things. How we experience a space and a performance with our bodies and our minds. I ask you to take off your socks, to have your feet ready as sensory fields. I explain to you that the space is set similar to that of an installation space. You are welcome to walk around freely, to touch the installation. For your and my safety I ask you not to pull or climb the installation. There will be people climbing the installations. You can still come as close as you feel like, but I ask you to allow for the performers to move freely.

I let you know that one of the installations is completely made up of water hoses. You probably know them from your garden if you have one or have ever visited one. In fact, all the

materials in the space are material you will recognise from your daily lives. Besides one rope. That one rope is purposefully made for circus. I ask you, when you enter the space, to one by one crawl in on your bellies or your backs, to come close to the floor. You might feel a little alarmed by this but you hopefully feel calmer when I follow that by telling you I have a helper to go in first, to lead the first step and show you what I mean. We move closer to the door of the space, I open the door and at first what you notice is the music that floods out. The music has a sense of open monotony about it. No real beginning, build up or end, but it fills the space you are about to enter. It fills you.

I turn on a fan.

My colleague and I are holding the end of what you now see is a large sheet of plastic. The wind of the fan makes the plastic dance in wave-shaped patterns. It is covering the entrance of the space. It is through this you are about to crawl. The person to lead the way goes first. She dives under and slowly moves on her back and belly through the plastic. It is your turn. It didn't look so scary. You dive in under the dancing sheet and surrender to a tunnel of life around you. You are inside and under a sea in which you find a pathway

created by the wind. The waves cocoon you for a moment only to open the cocoon giving you free way of passage. Another person enters the sea behind you. You are sharing a space. You are sharing a womb. You continue your journey crawling, rolling, responding to your new surroundings; responding to your body, its curiosity and wants.

As you emerge out of the sea you find yourself in a dimly lit space. There are things hanging from the ceiling. Someone is standing on a large piece of plastic that is stretched to a low point in the ceiling. She is just standing there. Walking closer to the walls you notice that they are not completely dark as you initially thought. There are words written on them. *“Zielschmerz - the dread of getting what you want”, “Ilinx – The strange excitement of destruction. The delirium that comes with minor acts of chaos”, Yú yí – the longing to feel intensely again”, “Jouska – the hypothetical conversations you compulsively play out in your head”*. You recognise and resonate with the feelings on the wall. You have had them all; you just never had a word for it. Perhaps it makes you smile. Perhaps it takes you back to a memory or reminds you to pursue that dream despite your dread of actually realising it and all that it implies. Perhaps you turn to see that the person next to you is smiling. They have also recognised themselves in these feelings. Your eyes meet. You both recognise that you

have recognised yourselves in there – you are sharing an experience, a moment, for a moment. You look around, seeing more and more people entering through the oceanic sea where you just came from. You watch them for a while. Watch them find their path through the plastic, watch the waves of the fan surrounding them. You might perhaps notice that, despite of the objects in the space mostly being plastic or otherwise artificial, they all seem to replicate or mirror nature.

There are other things in the space as well. You see a bunch of transparent plastic tubes hanging from the ceiling, lit only at the bottom. They look like a jumble of roots or tentacles. They are curved and tangled up in each other, leaving the light to look as streaks of gold where it hits its curves in their otherwise bluish, eerie look. Perhaps they look like seaweed, or something underwater-like. They are quite mesmerising just hanging there. There are so many of them. That’s when you remember being told about the garden hoses. It must be them. You probably wouldn’t have thought of them being garden hoses had you just seen them hanging there. You touch and observe. They are indeed water hoses, but they look different from the ones in your garden. For sure you do not use your garden hoses like this normally. But you see it. They are, in fact, just garden hoses. The music is calming. Or is it the sound of the fan that is actually calming? Either way it

is pleasant. Even though it is quite dark in here. Your eyes are starting to adapt. You see more details. For one you notice the person that was stood on the plastic sheet that reaches toward the ceiling is now walking slowly on it. She walks to where it stretches upwards, slowly takes a hold of it and lifts her weight from the ground. Her feet are sort of walking up the wall that is created by the sheet stretching from the ground toward the ceiling before they curve underneath her body and she hangs like a small ball only by her hands. Her body keeps the same position, but she is sliding on the plastic, slowly until her body meets the ground. When she stands up and slowly walks around on the plastic, you notice that it gets stuck to the sole of her feet. As if it finds comfort there and doesn't really want to let go. She continues back to lift her body off the ground. You walk around. Perhaps you are starting to get a feel of the room. What feeling? In the corner, where the music is coming from, is a musician on the floor. His monotonous singing is really quite impressive and beautiful. He is holding something up to the microphone. A piece of paper. It makes a slight cracking or dripping sound. It reminds you a bit of rain. Is it spring rain or summer rain? Your foot has noticed something. There is water on the ground. You look up to see a dark mass hanging slightly in front of you. Now when you've seen it you can sense a wave of cold coming from it. Is it a frozen rope that is slowly melting and coming undone?

You touch it. It is a frozen rope. It is quite dark where it is hanging. You wouldn't have seen it if it wasn't for your foot meeting with its melting water. For some reason you become a little more aware of the temperature difference between the floor and the cold water. At least slightly more aware than you would have been stepping in water on a normal day. Without really looking around you notice that the room seems to have come to stillness. The music is still playing but the room seems very still. You become very aware of yourself among the others who now seem to have settled sitting on the floor watching the plastic from which you all entered. It is no longer moving. The fan is off. This one subtraction of sound has really brought the space to a common stillness. Everyone seems to have quietly responded to it. From under the plastic you see me. Not very clearly, but if you look closely you will notice my movements and the opening and closing of my eyes and the effect it has in the dim light. But I understand if you don't notice this. You would really have to look for the details to notice. Do you? I am inside a slowly rising and falling bubble of air. The plastic breathing around me I can barely see you on the other side. When I really focus I see you there. I sometimes let my hand move in front of the light that hits the plastic just so I can get a glimpse of you. Strangely the more I know you watch me the more I want to go inside myself to find the connection to what I am doing so I can, in the littlest

movements, project all my energy to you. All I receive from you I want to magnify in its simplicity and send vibrating back. It is warm in here and the closer the plastic comes to my face to suffocate me, the calmer I feel. I put my face as close as possible to the thin veil that is about to drape me completely. As it sinks toward me I follow its movements, never really allowing the meeting between face and plastic. Just before it is about to I allow my hands to push it up, recreating a cave of air around me. I am on my back slowly moving in the space created by the air around me. I am close to the edge of the sheet. As it once again descends toward my face I lift it, but this time I allow the edge of the plastic to come off the floor in the lift. When the first air from the space finds its way into my soon to be destroyed bubble, it feels cold. I know it isn't, but the difference in temperature becomes imminent and welcomed. I find my way out of the plastic sheet, bundling it up in my knee before I slowly make my last move to escape it. Now I see you. It is dim, but I see you. I see you have come to rest sitting down spread out in the room. You have no idea how beautiful an image of hyphae you are. But I know, and my heart is raising its tempo ever so slightly. Is yours? You sit really close to the water hoses as I approach, I don't look directly at you but I see you clearly. You don't move as I start to climb them, you just stay, very close, watching them, watching me. I climb upward disappearing out of the light,

your eyes rest on me until I find a position of stillness. As I move the hoses I am nervous. Your focus is on their tangled life being slowly starched out, lifted and let go off. The only thing I do is moving the hoses as slow as I can, putting some of them on my one foot and moving my body to stretch them out. The less I do the more nervous I become, and the more nervous I become the more I force myself to slow down. To not stress, to not break the beauty of the materiality by forcing my body into focus. But rather listening to the hoses, look for each one's individuality and to bring it to life. As I start to descend into them I see my colleague, Karoline, in the corner of my eye. She has been rolling herself into the hanging plastic sheet, forcing it to break and form a cocoon around her. As I near the floor in a bed of root-like water hoses I find they have tangled themselves around me. Holding my weight in a webbed cradle allowing me to sway only a few centimetres above the ground. I attempt to crawl out, twisting my body to free my foot that is still being held tightly by the hoses. Your focus is on the three-ply rope. Karoline has finally emerged from her cocoon after a long time of stillness. I know she has been enjoying this part particularly. She was tired this morning, and to have the luxury to be totally and completely embraced in stillness has allowed her to find her breath calm in it. We talked about allowing ourselves to sink in to our energy this morning. To not stress but acknowledge where we

are in our energy and flow with it rather than work against it. Her favourite moment is approaching. You watch her as she walks to the hanging three-ply rope. This used to be her least favourite moment, where she would be exposed to the stillness of the space. The moment where everything seems to be standing still and she would have to carry the full attention. But now it is her favourite moment. Allowing yourself full attention in doing nothing is incredibly intimidating and vulnerable. Everything is at a hold, watching her twisting the rope. Nothing else. She takes her time, gives into the silent dialogue between herself, the rope and all of us watching her. Are you watching her? Do you hear all the words that are not being said? I find it powerful too. She is standing still, only holding on to the rope, soaking in the conversation before she finally let go and the moment of most explosive energy strikes the room in a vortex, a tornado. She watches the rope unravel all the way till it is still, then she watches it hanging still. Is it really still? Everyone is still in the echo of the tornado. That is when you see me walk into the space. Calm anticipation blankets the space as the music comes to stillness. Is the music over? Love, the musician has made me consider music differently. In his ever-changing chart of music score on the white board during the creation I kept referring to quiet and no sound. But Love drew lines indicating sound even when I thought it was quiet. He reminded me to

consider the sounds of the space, the sound of the fan, the objects and all of us. The sounds in the moments of stillness and the sounds of anticipation are now present to me. I break the "silence" by asking you to come to one side of the room and stand up. I've been dreading this moment. How do you all of a sudden speak into the silent communication we have built up? In the back of my mind I am reminded of the words of Chris Andersson, of how to present an idea to inform and inspire, to open up for possibilities and new ways of seeing something.

I tell you how, as I mentioned before you entered the space, that I am interested in how we perceive a space, the objects and each other in the space. I am looking at how to find moments to share and see each other. To *really* see each other through silent communication. As an audience, as performers, I look for ways of mirroring the relationships found in nature.

And so, I ask you to form a line, as in the next part I would like you to sit on one side of the space where it is safer. And to form that line to sit down I ask you to touch each person's hands and to form a line from the warmest to the coldest temperature of your hands. I ask you to really pay attention to the nuances, the slight difference in temperature between you to find your place. And I ask you to do so by communicating

without words. At this point you might feel a little uncomfortable. There are so many people in here that you do not know. Isn't it easier to just sit down? Aren't we just going to watch the circus, finally? I might be wrong; you might be very excited and not anxious at all. I am an anxious person, but that doesn't mean everyone in the room is. If I am lucky you are very much not like me. Then you are curious and excited to see the people you are sharing this space with. I urge you to really take notice of the most Nano-nuances of temperatures while touching each person's hands to find where in the line you belong. With no words you communicate with your eyes, touch, intuition and social understand and tactility. Only taking each other in and wordlessly communicate where each person belongs. I join you; I feel all of your hands and find that mine are on the colder side of the scale. Yours are warm. As you touch the hands of the people around you it might feel a little strange at first, a little awkward. But soon you start to notice not only the difference in temperature in each person, but also each person. You look them in the eyes or give them a touch of direction to communicate where to go next. It takes a few minutes. There are some beautiful awkward laughs and equally beautiful smiles shared. You all see each other.

As you sit down next to people you probably don't know, I walk over to turn off one of the lights. Only a single beam of light now hits the black climbing rope. You see a little more than half of it. I walk up to one of you. You. And give you a small flashlight. I show you how to turn it on and ask if you will please help me. I want you to turn it on when I am ready, and to then follow the block of ice that will be balanced on my head. I tell you that, should the ice and I separate, you follow the ice. I will tell you when to turn it off, but until then, just follow the ice. You seem both excited and nervous when you nod. I smile at you and thank you. As the only light source is slowly dimmed out I get nervous. I am about to balance a block of ice on my head and then attempt to ascend the rope. I am very nervous. It might not be the best idea, and I decide to tell you this out loud. As you sit in the darkness, next to people you don't know, you start to hear my breathing as I tell you. Earlier today I dropped the ice and it has planted a seed of nervousness in me. I have finally settled a bit and ask you to turn on the flashlight.

You hear the instruction, turn on the flashlight and find me. You see a rather large block of ice balancing on my head. I walk towards the rope. You follow the ice and thus illuminate my path. I reach for the rope. You see me grab the rope and find my position right underneath it. No swinging. Stillness. I

slowly lift my weight off the ground, you see that this is a hard task for me; you are making sure I find my way. As I climb higher, slowly, but steadily, you hear my breathing increasing in volume and rhythm. I am nervous. I think you might be a bit nervous too. Are you nervous for me? For you? The ice? As I near the top of the rope you see that I am starting to shake ever so slightly. If you look really carefully you see that the ice is starting to melt. I feel a stingy coldness piercing one point of my head. It is both numb and extremely sensor-active. It is hard to explain, and you might find it hard to relate because, let's be honest, how often do you climb a rope balancing ice on your head or otherwise spend time with a block of ice slowly melting on one part of your body? I assume not very often but would be delighted to be wrong. It is cold now. I am mildly scared it will make me pass out. You are doing a good job at keeping the light steady on the ice.

As I have reached the top and placed myself there, you see, in the corner of your eye, Karoline is approaching the rope. Carefully she places her hands on it after having checked that I feel steady. I do. She lifts her weight off the floor and slowly ascends the rope till she is underneath me. She places herself steadily, makes sure her grip is nice and tight. You steadily illuminate the ice. Do you trust me to keep the ice balanced? I've taken my hands off the rope, trusting Karoline's weight to

keep my body safe in the friction created between us in the rope. I've started to shake ever so slightly. You seem doubtful, or possibly worrisome. You might be right. I am not sure at this point. As Karoline nears me, she gives me the slightest touch on my foot to let me know her proximity. I place my hands on the rope and let my feet hang free. Very carefully Karoline manoeuvres her body further up the rope into my space. She is right in front of me, her hands where mine are. I wrap my legs around her body, trusting she has a firm grip with her feet. I tell her to let go of her hands slowly. The tiniest movement from her body will now project to mine and directly affect the balance of the ice. She lets go of her hands. I let go of mine. She balances us both, the ice and me. I see her breathing is synched with mine as we smile at each other. I love being in the rope with her. I have known her for a long time and this is the moment I know I have chosen the right person to work with. I trust her; I know her physical strength and her technical abilities as well as her ability to listen to another body.

We both grab the rope, her hands up high, mine low. I hold my weight, slowly lowering it before telling her, "Ok". She lifts herself upside down. This moment and the next is the most crucial and we both know it. We have failed this moment plenty of times before. As she is steady in her position, I take

off one of my hands to show her I am ready. That is when she lowers her body in a small roll to come hanging right in front of me, both facing the same direction. Her body is dangling only held by her hands. One arm at the time I embrace her body in a tight hug. When she feels the pressure of our bodies toward the rope she slowly lets go with her hands. She is floating in an embrace, all our weight on my two feet, the friction between us keeping us balanced and together. Her hands reach for the ice. She takes it and brings it in front of herself where you now see me holding her, holding the ice. You follow steadily with the light. It is dripping, melting ever faster. She places it in one hand and lets the other take hold of the rope. I do the same and allow for space for her to sit on my knee. I bring my free hand to hers and the ice where we let it roll and melt even more before we press our hands firmly toward each other causing the ice between our hands to escape its embrace. It falls to the ground and shatters. Is there relief in the room? Satisfaction? Release of tension? The light is on the floor on the remains of the ice. You are doing a great job with the light, illuminating the it as Karoline drops to hang underneath me and I come to standing in the rope. I have done very little physically, but I am out of breath from the tension and suspension of balancing the ice in the rope in proximity and connection to Karoline's body. I take a moment to collect myself. At this point I am feeling relief for the ice,

suspension for my next moment to come. As I stand in the rope in mostly darkness I tell you that,

“When you watch a live performance with a group of people, regardless of knowing them or not, after a while, your hearts will start to beat in unison”.

Attentive silence. I ask you to turn off the flashlight. You do, and the resonance of our heartbeats blankets us as the space goes dark. The only slight light is that coming from the corner where Love is sitting, ready to start the music again. But it is not yet. In the darkness I take the tale of the rope with me and climb to the tope. I place myself in a safe position and put a bit of tension on the tail of the rope. As Karoline feels the tension she releases her body into the loop created around her. I pull her up. You hear me breath heavily, you hear her body against the rope. You try to decipher the image to accompany the sounds. Do you see us in your inner mind? Then it is silent; for a long time. Or at least it seems like a long time. How long has it been? I feel my legs shaking when I hear the music start quietly. A slight beam of light to reveal the space between Karoline and I in the rope follows slightly after the music. She is sitting, wrapped in the rope, looking up. I am hanging up side down, looking down. She makes me smile. I slide toward her. The rope burning my feet and thighs.

I don't mind the pain. Our faces come within an inch of each other before she lets her body hang back and down. I follow closely until we are in an up side down embrace. I feel her pressing her hands on my back, then releasing her grip and re-place it slightly further down on my back. I hold her tightly as I release my legs to come away from the rope in a balance. I feel her heart and rhythm as her breath increases. I place my leg back on, free the embrace and come to sit in her knee. She pulls her upper body up. We are facing the same way in one last embrace before she undoes her wrapping and comes to the floor leaving me in the rope. I climb to the top. As I climb I try to stay calm. I focus on what I need to do to get the next part right. I create a large loop in which I sit, making sure the rope behind me is exactly on my spine, or slightly to the left of it. Karoline climbs the tail, all the way up and joins me. She lifts herself into the loop onto my lap. It kills my knee every time, but the moment of her sitting there looking at me is too good to ask her to rush it. She curls up and places her body as a ball around mine on my lap. She is not holding on to anything but my body at this point.

A while ago I made a joke about wanting to try this roll as double. And here we are, a couple of weeks later after a million fiascos on the way, no mat underneath us, a dimly lit room full of people watching. It sounds just about what

Karoline and I would get ourselves into. As I bend my one leg to start rolling my heart is racing. I stroke Karoline on the back to let her know I am about to start and that I am scared. She knows what that touch says. All the nuances of my worries and joy of getting to do this with her, in this space, with all of you. As I start to roll I lean my neck against the rope in front of me to keep connection, leaving the rope behind me to create a gap between it and my back. This gap holds all of my fears. Any movement from Karoline is enough to make me lose my balance. If I fall, she falls and the loop will contract around my neck and head. We went through some epic fails in training for this. There is no graceful way out of this, should it fail. Each millimetre of the roll is a millimetre of micro-communication between the rope, Karoline and I. You might feel my relief as we come to the floor. I smile at Karoline, mostly out of sheer letting go of tension. I leave her standing by the rope as I pick up its tail and walk toward you. The music is building filling the space as we are on the ground. I make a pathway where you are sitting, before asking you to help me hold on to the tail of the rope with me. I whisper that we need to pull the rope firmly but gently. Karoline is holding on to it, and the pull will lift her diagonally from off the ground. The music is starting to really take off. As we hold the tail of the rope stretched out diagonally through the audience she starts to climb, spinning her way to the top in a fast pace. At the top

she comes to a rest in what is called a front balance. We are holding her, together. The music takes a final leap before it ends at the top of its crescendo, leaving an echo resonating for a moment. When it is gone, I turn to you and ask if you are ready. You look excited, very ready. You nod. I turn to Karoline, and as the silent anticipation is building I tell her, "Ok". She lets go and slides down the rope, whooshing through the pathway between the people before we catch her and help her to stand at our end of the rope. I thank you before I go to meet both Karoline and Love in front of you. We thank you for sharing the space and this moment with us. I appreciate your applause, and I applaud you back. You have been equally a part of this as much as we have. Before you leave, I ask you to take a moment to notice what you are feeling in this moment right now. Then look for the chalks along the wall and leave a word, a sentence or a drawing on the walls. I want you to leave an imprint as you have all imprinted on this shared experience.

Final reflections

Looking at what I presented, what I experienced in the process leading to the presentation, I went back to read my initial project description in my application for the Master course. Thinking I had changed focus and evolved so much in my thinking and ways of approaching my work, I was stunned

to find so much of it still present. Changes and evolvment has of course taken their turn, but the essence present still. An extract of the original project description describes:

"Time standing still/suspension of time

To be frozen in time

Time passing by

Time flying by

These are words we commonly use to describe when something inside us has been moved in a certain way although in reality time keeps passing by as usual. Oftentimes, when I truly get into my own performance, let's say whilst doing my routine in the rope, I have this feeling. The feeling that time is suspended, on hold, and though I very much feel like I am alone and so much in myself in the rope, those are the moments I feel the most connected to the spectators around me.

And so this is what I ultimately seek; a feeling of connection to myself, my thoughts, my senses and emotions in order to share a sincere moment in time with those around me.

I want to find out how I visually and physically can explore this by using ice as my main object to represent time in

combination with my rope and plastic water hoses as my circus equipment.

How can I explore and research what it is like to be frozen in time? How do I combine actual ice or to feel frozen with suspension? Can I at all? How do I challenge my relationship with the audience to make it evolve and be part of something bigger than my performance/presentation? I am not entirely sure how to link it all yet, but this is why I wish to take part of the Masters Program.

I want to explore and push the way a performance or presentation can be taken in by finding ways to involve multiple senses. I think it is something that is important to explore to further develop circus as an art field and platform of research as much as a field of entertainment. This again, I hope will be a way to be a part of challenging the circus milieu as well as society in the sense that it will broaden the spectators experience and view on how a performance can be laid out.

Oftentimes we hear the stereotypes when people talk about circus; the traditional circus clowns and ringmaster and so on. Even when going to a contemporary performance there is an expectation of being entertained and amazed. I do not want

to take away either the entertainment or the amazement, but rather change the format of how it is given or presented.

I think it highly interesting and important to broaden the variety of performances as well as the knowledge of such for the spectators. As a contemporary circus practitioner, I want to be a part of that evolution and development.”

Upon entering the master course, I didn't dwell so much on my application and description of my thoughts. All my attention was focus on the new things to learn. Concepts, ideas, thinking and approaches. Most of my first year I felt as though all my ideas and thinking were scattered, blown up and lashed out in all directions. Chaos and unclear paths with bits and pieces flying around me was how I came to feel about it. Completely inspired but equally overwhelmed by all the input from our lecturers had put me majorly off balance as to where I was going and what to hold on to. Or so I thought it was. Similarly, to the chaos in the water hoses, not being able to control them, I felt lost not being able to control the shattered state of thinking and seeing my pathway. It is hard to say what changed it. A culmination of moments of being reminded that 'not knowing' is one of the best places to be, until that knowledge somehow inhabited itself in me. Not knowing is, perhaps, like theatre's version of neutral (state of

emotions). Open, ready, mildly alert, attentive, waiting. During my intense creation period for my final presentation I enjoyed this state. Not knowing opened for possibilities, ideas and certain mental images of what I wanted became the guidelines. After having spent most of my time in school not knowing and feeling lost, I now trusted the openness of possibilities it held. I wasn't unprepared, of course I wasn't. I had plenty of ideas and things I wanted to try, things I had already tried and wanted to further evolve or otherwise experiment with. Merely I was not stressed, nor did I feel blocked or under major pressure. Trusting that my two years (and my experience from prior to entering the master course) had prepared me, trusting in my own ideas. But mostly allowing for the unknown to be positive. Living with anxiety and OCD makes that particularly hard at times. But, like with everything I have created so far, this too was initially a piece coming from a need within myself. A need to reconnect and listen to myself, allowing the voice of the anxiety to be present, but to not be *in* that emotion. Thus, a grounded and calm trust in the unknown and my own abilities shaped what I finally presented. Perhaps had I finally started to listen to the silent dialogue within myself?

Earlier I asked whether I had *taken the circus out of my circus*, and then answering my own question by saying I had

probably found more circus than I had hoped for. But what is it about the slow, the removal of the light, of the body and the micro-details and the seemingly silent communication that is so important? Why do all this research with the material and our relation to it and each other? What role does research of the life of the material really hold in the development of the field of circus? Circus is developing more and more, branching out and merging with other fields and meeting the platform of the academic. As a circus artist I have seen an increase in the research around new props and equipment, merging of fields, expression and even waves of new technique that has established itself in the field. But it is all relatively new still if we look at the history of the development of dance or theatre - two of our nearest fields. One example of the development of technique is in my own discipline, aerial rope, which has truly rocketed particularly in the last decade. Just when I was about to graduate in 2009, the more dynamic, gymnastics-based technique established itself within the world of aerial rope, adding room for speed, risk and amazement to the discipline. As I was not originally trained in this dynamic, gymnastic based technique I struggled for a while to identify myself as part of the new growing rope world. Originally, I was trained in aerial silks, rope (but an older technique) and double rope, which for me meant I had an embedded history and interest in the slow and the beauty often connected to

the silks and the relationship to another body in the double rope. In the middle of my struggle to find my identity in the rope world, watching so many around me doing the high-risk tricks (where you release your whole body from the rope before you catch it again), I had a realisation. Yes, all the tricks were amazing and highly impressive but now everyone were doing them and it all started to become increasingly predictable and similar to one another. Perhaps is the predictability more visible for the trained eye, the circus audience, but nonetheless predictability has a key role here. Circus is still stereotypically predicting in its form, its use of tricks and skills to amaze and awe. Whereas circus with a focus on the slow, the micro-details, the relationship and dialogue, is less predictable in its nature due to being less researched and developed.

Why change the format in which speed, thrill and awe has worked for so long? *Can the material really thrill? What happens when we slow the pace and really listen and see each other? What are the implications of this kind of research in circus?*

Research widens and expands the borders of what circus is and can be. It opens for the inclusive and merging of fields and thus the expansion of the form and its expression.

Research *challenges* the existing form and the expression and allows circus a platform in the academic world where it has recently grown and found interest from the practitioners in the field. The Master in Contemporary Circus Practices is one outcome of what I perceive as a need for and sincere interest in merging academic and circus for further development of the field. As for my research, its value and contribution to this development, ***I believe contrast and variety strengthens the already existing field – the contrast to the high speed and risk through tuning in on the micro-details and the life of the material rather than on the focus on the body, speed and tricks.*** Can I prove its value? I was recently reminded that what I am looking for is not proof but evidence. Finding proof indicates it is final and I can stop searching, stop researching, whereas finding evidence strengthens my thinking and ideas and encourages to search further still.

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-scientific-fundamentalist/200811/common-misconceptions-about-science-i-scientific-proof>)

If anything, it is the constant search that research opens for that will continue to develop and expand the field. The variations of forms, what is to be found in the meeting and merging of the practical and thinking from different fields will only strengthen the existing and future possibilities that the field of circus holds. The clearest evidence of what the value in my research is, I found in the imprints left on the walls by the

audience after seeing and being part of my performance.
Here is a selection of the imprinted evidence.

"Speechless and connected"

"Showing the invisible"

"This felt true. I want to experience more"

"Cold, pain, beauty"

"To move. To be moved. Connection"

"Movement level 2"

"Break it, share it"

"You've made magic happen!"

"In absence of everything, anything existing becomes
wonderful"

"We all need a bit of narrativium. Cos it is only so much you
can express with 26 letters"

"Icy material, darkness, shining"

"Refilled"

"Contact, humanity, cooperation, sustainable"

"Kindness and love"

"The space between the cracks... the infinite un/known -
that's where you are"

To me, this speaks of the importance of research; of that of continuing to search, continue to explore and expand, to trust the evidence but still continue that search. To be reminded that as long as we don't take the evidence for proof the field will continue to evolve. For my work, this means to recognise that my final presentation was in fact not final at all, but a presentation of where I had come to at that particular point in my research. I might not ever have to have that evidence change, but the beauty of research in circus, just like in science or any other field, is in the unknown and trusting that the unknown (read: vulnerability) is the birthplace of creativity, growth and expansion.



Love Kjellsson

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