

# **Alter Ego: Training the sense of your other selves**

**29 November 2024**

**Marres, Maastricht.**

**Artists: Ina Darakchieva, Philippine Hoegen, Sohrab Kashani, Nika van Woenzel**

A workshop on Alter Ego's.

An alter ego is another version of you—someone you sometimes want to be. This version might look, talk, and act differently, but it's still you! It's like trying on a new character to see the world in a new way. Many artists, like Beyoncé and the writer Elena Ferrante, use, or are, alter egos. We are four performance artists who explore this idea in different ways: as social commentary, creative expression, coping strategies, art therapy, research, or political refuge. We've had amazing experiences with our alter egos and find that they help us understand things better.

In the upcoming evening event, we're excited to share this technique with anyone interested—no art experience is necessary! We'll create a safe and welcoming space where we'll guide you through finding and practicing your own alter ego.

## *Research Note*

The research question connects to my 1<sup>st</sup> initial PD research question which is asking how tools, strategies and concepts from performance practice can contribute to issues of a societal scope, namely the problem of work. We will be sharing with non-artists or other-than-artists (ok that's funny) the concept of an alter ego, as a strategy, or how to access this concept. (Concept as tool).

Sub questions are: 1. If this indeed can be understood as a shareable tool and 2. How the format we came up with, this workshop, is effective in sharing it.

It also addresses the larger, underlying question, that's perhaps too implicit as yet, which is basically asking what good work is and how we can claim and practice it. Because the collective research question with the group could be something like: "How might we claim and practice good work, and can an Alter Ego help us do that?" (It would be good if I can condense all this into a couple of questions so as to make it part of my introduction.)

Then the part about: what do the participants take away? In the first place, hopefully, they take away an experience and a taste of what an alter ego is, what it can do for them and how they can access it. But in order to tend to my own earlier conclusions about 'how to support the work of the spectator (participant or not)', there should also be some tangible take-aways.

1. The text we use for the guided meditation should be made available in the moment.

2. Maybe also Ina's research into A. E's.

3. How about we share the report that we'll make of the event with all the participants? Including any pictures taken? I think that would be quite a nice idea.

# Report

## Reflection

December 10th, Brussels

Dear Nika, Sohrab and Ina, dear Rosa and Valentijn, also dear collaborators or 'participants' in the workshop and dear alter ego's... or am I getting a bit too expansive here? Dear all!

On November 29th a workshop, or participative performative event, took place at Marres, Maastricht. I was one of the co-conceivers, together with Nika, Sohrab and Ina, with support and advice from Valentijn, Rosa and other people at Marres. (I first wrote co-creators, but then I realised that the 'creation' also contains the actual doing, the execution, and in that, besides the people who worked on the preparations, the people who were actually present in the workshop are equally co-creators. So I was also one of the co-creators, but our list of co-creators is quite a bit longer.) In this letter I would like to reflect on what we did, what went well and where there's room for improvement.

We started with introductions to ourselves and to the programme of the evening, and also how we had prepared the event, as in, what we were sharing and what people could take home. (The programme, including the whole guided meditation with which we started and the research that Ina had done on Alter Ego's, were printed out for people to take home.) Then we did a round of names and a check-in with everyone present, asking them to describe their mood or state of mind in one word.

The process of supporting people in finding an Alter Ego for themselves started after that with a guided body scan, to help everyone relax and arrive in the space, and then to begin to imagine their bodies as different. After that they were invited to open their eyes and begin to move and 'fill' this new and different body.

In a next step they were invited into a room full of clothes, objects and accessories of all shapes and sizes, and asked to choose a maximum of three. Then, in an in-between space, we began moving and voicing.

Finally they were brought to a last space where, through some assignments, they began to speak amongst each other and get to know one another's Alter Ego's. Finally we all went upstairs, leaving our A. E's at the bottom of the stairs, for a round of reflections, feedback and a check-out.

While the feedback was mostly positive – many people had surprised themselves, some said they had been relieved that the process was more playful than they had anticipated, others that they enjoyed how fully engaged they became, most people had indeed discovered something new about themselves, and about the 'tool' or concept of an alter ego – there was also some useful feedback on things to reconsider or improve..

1. A few people felt the moving and voicing part could have been longer, so in this case the transition between room 2 and 3 in the Wintergarden. They also needed more physical room to move around in.
2. People felt that more assignments would have been helpful. Or a trajectory with choices, to help them get closer to their A. E's. For example: "Are you talkative or rather quiet?", "do you depend on certain objects or can you do without?" So questions that help people, through their own answers, to get to know their A. E.
3. For some the last 2 assignments were too long. They would have liked to have more support in the form of more assignments or things to do. Nika came up with the idea of speed dating as an assignment, so that everyone can speak one on one to everybody else and experience different facets of their alter ego, brought out by different people, while also discovering these other alter ego's, in a relatively intimate setting. I could imagine that we could offer pre-prepared questions for them to use if they want.
4. Some would have liked more time and space to be by themselves, so as to 'feel' themselves. On the other hand, some enjoyed socializing. Perhaps there could be a question like: "Would you like to meet some of the other A.

E's, if yes go to room 4, if not go upstairs and take a walk by yourself".  
Something like that.

5. We should have another good look at the guided meditation. Some people found it confusing to first be brought into their own bodies, and then become someone different. But not everyone agreed. Something to think about.

6. Then there was the question of humor. While some enjoyed the playful atmosphere, others found themselves being jokey out of a kind of default reaction, whilst actually wanting to be more serious. Or more meditative, or thoughtful.

7. My own observation is that there were too many accessories. I think it would be stronger if people had to make some very well considered choices there, perhaps even having to negotiate with each other about who takes what.

A last thing to note is that we only took recognisable photos of people who indicated they wanted pictures of themselves. Those left us their email addresses and we sent them their photos afterwards.

All in all I think the event went really well. We were lucky with a great turn out (15 participants? More?) and a real engagement from everyone. I'm also very grateful for the well articulated feedback they gave us, that will serve us well. A nice note to close on is that we will probably be invited to do a next edition in Rotterdam in September... to be continued!

With love,

Philippine

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## *FULL SCRIPT TTS ALTER EGOS*

Marres, 29 November 2024

NOTES ON THE SPACES:

Room 1: warm, comfortable, yoga mats, blankets, water...

Room 2: paper along the walls, pins, pencils, markers, crayons, charcoal.

AND accessories: cardboard, scissors, tape, empty bottles, foam, string, bubble wrap, wire, wigs, hats, jewellery, body and face paint, items of clothing, materials/fabrics, crepe paper, kitchen roll, (ask Marres if they have stuff lying around?) sticks, stones, water, masks? white masks from Solow. Styrofoam. Mirror. (Team offers assistance with f.e. face paint.) They will choose max 3 accessories for their alter ego so it's not about a 'full make-over'.

Room 3: An empty space which they might leave.

Room 4: Can be the same space as Room 1.

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### 18.00 INTRODUCTIONS:

Introduction to Marres), followed by introductions by the team, sharing briefly what our experiences with alter egos are, how we practice them, and why we want to share this 'tool'.

Nika adds to her intro that she is the support person, if it gets too much for anyone if they need a break, need to talk, etc. She's also NL-speaking.

Then with everyone: Check-ins, names and pronouns. Check-in question: in one sentence, how do you feel / what's your state of mind right now?

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### 18.15 Room 1:

**\*\* Step 1: Body Scan Exercise\*\***

We're in space 1, which is comfortable and warm, with yoga mats, and blankets. People can lie down or sit.

### GUIDED MEDITATION:

Take the next few moments to settle into your body. Settle into your space. Becoming aware of your surroundings. Of your environment.

Tuning into any sounds around you.

Notice what is present in the current moment.

Know that sensations, thoughts and feelings will arise during this meditation. And try to simply notice without the need to attach or become involved.

Become the observer by staying present. And letting these things come and go

Relax your body and focus your mind

Start to bring awareness to your physical body

Notice the weight and density

Feeling the support of the grounds beneath you

...

And then shift your awareness to the natural flow of your breath

Without changing anything, just simply noticing how it feels to breathe in and out

With every inhale notice your stomach rising

And with every exhale feel the stomach contract

And with your next inhale begin to follow the full path of your breath, as it comes in through the nostrils

Through the back of your throat

To the lungs

And to the stomach

Notice the pause between the inhale and exhale

...

Simply observing

If the mind begins to wander bring your attention back to your breath

...

Beginning the body scan at the crown of the head

Noticing any sensations, any tingling, heat, coolness or pulsing

Again not trying to change or fix anything, just becoming more aware

...

And shifting your attention to your forehead

The space between the eyebrows

Becoming aware of your eyes

Cheeks.... Jaw.... Mouth... Throat.... Neck....

... releasing any tension in these areas

...

Bringing your attention to your shoulders

Feeling the weight of your shoulder blades down your back or against the ground, notice any feelings that arrive

And allow your shoulders to melt and soften down

...

Now bringing your attention to your arms, your hands

Noticing any sensations in the fingers, and the tips of the fingers

Bringing awareness to the front of the body, the chest, the ribcage

The lungs and abdomen

Sensing your own heartbeat

And notice the rise and the fall of your breath

...

And shifting your attention to the back of the body

The spine, the middle of the back

And the lower back

...

Noticing the hips.... The waist.... The pelvis.... The legs..... And thighs....

The hamstrings

Down to your knees

Feeling your legs become heavy

Melting toward the ground

Noticing the calves, the shins

The feet, the arches and the heels of the feet

Notice the feeling against the floor

Noticing the toes, the sensations, any tingling

...

And now bring your attention to your entire body as a whole system

Noticing the temperature

The weight of your clothes against your skin, your body

Feeling fully present, fully aware

Allow yourself to feel relaxed

Allow your body to soften

...

Now bringing your awareness back to your breath

Focusing on the inhales

And exhales  
(10 mins)

#### 18.25 **\*\* Step 2: Connecting with another you\*\***

We take a small break but stay concentrated: If you want you can change your position, sit or lie in a different position, or stand up if you prefer. Take your time. Open your eyes if you want to.

1. **\*\*Visualise yourself as other....\*\***: When you're ready: Close your eyes again. Concentrate on your body again. Imagine something in your body is beginning to change. Where in your body do you feel a difference, are your feet becoming different, longer, shorter? Or is it your hands, wider, claw-like, or thin?

Could your belly or your butt have a different shape or size? Or would the difference be in your face? Your head? Smaller? or larger? rounder or thinner?

Or would you have a different prominent feature?

Are you dressed differently? You can pick anything you want.

2. **\*\*Shape Their Form\*\***: Focus on yourself in this new shape. Imagine yourself as your new you, standing in front of a mirror. In your mind's eye, take on your posture, facial expression, and overall demeanour. Pay attention to some details—clothing, accessories, and even how you hold yourself.

3. **\*\*Physical Embodiment\*\***: Feel this image in your body. Feel your body accepting this new posture. Think ahead, when you sit up, and stand up, in a few minutes, how will you be standing, moving, looking? Breathe like they breathe: slow, fast, deep, shallow?

4. **\*\*Soundscape\*\***: What is the soundscape that fits your new you? Is it nature, city, club, silence, beach...

Inside a house, or a castle, or a cave?

Do you hear water, or stones, or metal, or sand, or music or pipes leaking, or the hum of a fridge or.....

#### **\*\*Step 3: Choose a mantra\*\***

5. **\*\*Affirmations through mantra\*\***: Which word or phrase or sound do you think your new you would like to make? How can they make themselves known? How can they affirm their presence? Think about it.

When you have an idea, silently or out loud, try it out. When it feels right, repeat to affirm what resonates with your alter ego's mindset.

6. **\*\*Emotional Resonance\*\***: Allow yourself to feel the emotions associated with your alter ego— is it happiness or melancholy, strength or weakness or calm or nervousness or something completely different? Let these feelings fill your entire body.

#### **\*\*Step 4: Physical / Mental Warm-Up and Integration\*\***

7. **\*\*Body Movement\*\***: Begin to gently move your body to fully integrate the energy of your alter ego. Roll your shoulders, stretch your arms, or even stand up and shake out any lingering tension. Feel the energy of your alter ego flowing through every movement.

8. **\*\*Physical Posture Practice\*\***: Stand up completely now. Keep your eyes closed. Take on your new posture, and their facial expression, feeling your physical body align with your new state of mind.

9. **\*\*Mental Practice\*\***: Begin to prepare for the next phase: Your New Perspective. When you open your eyes in a few minutes, you are looking at the world through the eyes of your new you. The world will look a little different. Be alert, this is the moment you can learn some new things about the world. Remember to take note of the things you are going to experience.

Open your eyes.

#### **\*\*Step 5: Final Visualisation and Activation\*\***

14. **\*\*Anchor with a Gesture\*\***: Choose a small physical gesture to anchor this state of being, such as clenching your fist, tapping your chest, or foot, shaking your head, etc.. This gesture will serve as a quick reminder of your alter ego whenever you need it.

(15 mins)

18.40 Move to Room 2:

*Paper along the walls, pins, pencils, markers, crayons, charcoal.*

*Accessories: cardboard, scissors, tape, empty bottles, foam, string, bubble wrap, wire, wigs, hats, jewellery, body and face paint, items of clothing, materials/fabrics, crepe paper, kitchen roll, sticks, stones, water, masks? white masks from Solow. Styrofoam. Mirror. (Team offers assistance with f.e. face paint.)*

Choose or make a maximum of 3 accessories that fit with your new you, your alter ego. You have 20 minutes.

If you want, you can make a sketch of yourself, you can draw it on the paper on the wall, or on a smaller piece of paper that you can carry with you, to remind yourself of the image of your alter ego.

Take a moment to get to know yourself, perform yourself, how do move, walk? Look through your new eyes, what does the world look like? Look for your voice, what sounds do you make? Do you speak, gurgle, clap, click your tongue....?

You have 20 minutes.

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19.00 Move to Room 3:

*The space is completely empty.*

You're entering a café. Look around you. Where is the counter, are there tables, is there a bar?

Who else is there?

Assignment 1: you're meeting friends here (1 or more, you can choose).

Find them, and pay them a compliment. It can be anything. Then have a conversation about what your plans are together this evening, and what you want to do together.

(The idea is that people begin to talk to each other here. The team is available as potential friends.)

You have 15 mins. (We set a timer).

Assignment 2: Execute your plans. Stay in the building, the building can be anything you need.

You have 20 mins. (We set a timer).

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19.35 Room 4 (*which can be the same as Room 1*): Reflection and feedback:

We invite you back into Room 1, saying: "As you enter the door, you will step out of your alter ego."

Group feedback

Question 1: some examples: who were you, what kind of alter ego did you become?

question 2: who were your friends? What did you do together? Where did you go? Who did you meet? Were there any problems or obstacles? Did you get along?

question 3: how are you now, and how are you going to leave this workshop?

Question 4: did the world look different from this new perspective? What was different? Did you learn something new? What do you take away from this experience?

CHECK-OUT AND FINISH

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