

Description of current artistic practice, 2023

Dear reader,

As you read, I request that you please keep in mind the still fluid and ungraspable maze of attentions that are on display. Putting words to it all seems both holy and ridiculous at the same time. Holy because it represents a spiritual and psychological journey. Ridiculous because it's still in its infant phase and in many respects almost unrealised yet.

Since the last attempt at describing my practice and starting at the NPP program not much has changed in terms of how I view life and humanity. Perhaps this view has even solidified, confirmed itself. Relationality and randomness still play their game with an ensuing array of tragic to elating events and a full spectrum of multifaceted iterations and echos throughout the worlds existing all around. Perhaps there is some self-critique toward the often anthropocentric nature of the perspectives offered or noticed. Pause. Enter Identity and Change.

I am human. I chose this identity aware of its inscription on this body already from birth. On the basis of being human, it's hardly surprising that perception occurs through this very human body I am made of, with all its limitations and possibilities. This doesn't by any means preclude striving toward a widening of the horizons of perception / understanding in-relation-to (to borrow some to me yet obscure Harawayan concepts). In any case, and at the very least, life in this human-identified existence is a constant reckoning with change. I cannot thank Afrofuturist sci-fi writer Octavia Butler enough for bringing so clearly my attention to the psychological importance of the relation to change in her "Parable of the Sower" series¹. While I do not deify change as Olamina does in the story, I do recognise its pervasive presence in everything that exists. For without change perhaps there would be no life, no motion, no time or space, and possibly no relation².

Pause.

Maybe you're wondering: how is all this translated in artistic practice? The answer is many-fold and stretches across a variety of questions and musings, the main instigation of which is a very large-scale change in my personal and artistic life.

Mid-October 2021 I officially resigned from the dance company where I had been working as a dancer for 18 years. As I began full-time studies with the NPP Master program in choreography at SKH, one of the questions floating between my ears and fluttering down to the chest-belly was (and still is): how does art-making, more precisely my art-making, produce change in society?

Pause. Enter Complicated. This is an entirely relational question. It implies me, my role, my actions, and an intended or observed outcome toward the outer world, people and other-than-people alike. This in turn affects their potential relation to themselves and their surroundings.

Pause. Enter Scale. During this brief period at SKH what has surfaced is a need to think in terms of scale and attentions. What do I need to do and in what order? Where do I focus? There is

¹ In Laurence Olamina's words:

"All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
is Change.

God is Change"

Laurence is the main character in Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower", published in 1993.

² This is what I understand relationalism theories to purport, but I want to put my hands forward and clarify that I'm in no particular way attached to this theory nor do I have enough philosophical knowledge for my claim. In fact there's a lot that on the surface makes sense in the opposite theory, substantialism, whereby time and space exist independently from matter and events. In the moment of venturing my theory on time's existence I felt a pang of doubt and had a little look around on the subject. See <https://iep.utm.edu/time/#H6>. Read on the 4 January 2023.

certainly a sense of urgency in affecting the course humanity is embarked on in its rush toward survival, all too often leaving out thriving and justice until it's too late. Yet there's so much I still don't know, and in order to up the odds of success (social change / influence), certain steps need to be taken inward. Pause. Enter Yoga³.

Yoga asana practice is the physical practice of choice for me, indeed has been so for many years, preferred to dance classes in preparing the mind-body for dancing/performing/existing. I believe it has added many years to my company-dancer career. Yet for some reason I had left it backstage, humming its little tune for itself, waiting. Practicing yoga asana and considering some of yoga's underpinning philosophy is part of what I do. Almost every day. This is my personal practice and preparation. Yoga needed an official introduction. Pause. Enter Movement.

In the effort to expand and challenge how the human body is thought of and perceived and its relation to an outer reality, I have been practicing different ways of interrupting this preconception by playing with ideas of ownership / directorship / responsibility in relation to movement itself. I have done this by looking closer at and developing the physical practice from 2021⁴. Enter Pain, briefly, although it is ever-present. As I grow older the body is less capable of moving in the ways most exciting and familiar to me, provoking long-lasting pain. Enter Giorgos.

Because I wish to practice transmitting my physical practice to others and exploring it with them (and in part due to back-pain issues), I have had a few meetings with my colleague Giorgos. Giorgos has taken time off from Skånes Dansteater (where we worked several years together) and expressed a desire to help me out while also exploring something new to him. I was nervous for not being able to offer money in exchange but we mutually needed this for our own reasons, so it felt like a fair exchange. These encounters, few but very meaningful, have greatly contributed to developing the practice, based on somatic principles of generating movement. With Octavia Butler's help it has taken a turn toward science fiction, inspired by the "Patternmaster" series (1976 onward) in which a group of mutated humans called Clayarks appears. Clayarks are mutated because they are hosts to an alien organism. Pause. Enter Spinoff and Imagination. What remains is the idea of a microorganism living within the envelope of the skin. It's a community of individuals: each organism is capable of acting individually but is dependent on the community. These communities of individuals (from now on "coi") can concentrate or stray toward different areas of the human body, inhabiting and moving within the boundaries of the skin. This is an experiment to see if it's possible to get away from naming the body as bones and muscle, while also offering the opportunity to challenge the constraint of the bones themselves. The individuals in the coi can interact with each other or act as a group, as well as able to connect to other cois in other bodies. They react to outer stimuli and are linked almost telepathically. The cois can have a wide radius of sensitivity, depending on where their attention is focused. Some individuals might react to other stimuli than the collective, creating tensions, interruptions, or sudden changes. There's a clearly virtuosistic aspect to this practice, as it pushes the body's limits and requires a constant effort of attention to one's own desires/reactions and the ones of the cois. Furthermore, coi practice attempts to assign the origin of movement to something else than the perceived self. Of course this is but an illusion, a trick to tap into some hidden recess of our consciousness. Enter Psychoanalysis and the Blurriness of the boundaries between reality and fiction.

Human psyche, in what I believe to be a psychoanalytical model of the mind, is constantly grappling between perception and reality, between deeply layered and sometimes hidden from the conscious-self desires and outer iterations. I believe these aspects of the human psyche flow

³ Drawing from my basic knowledge of the eight limbs of yoga, let's zoom in to the first two, the Yamas and Nyamas. Each comprises a set of five ethical and moral guidelines or concepts, respectively revolving around one's relation to the outer world and one's relation to one's self. Putting aside what these guidelines are in and of themselves, the broad distinction between relation to the outer world and to the self being in focus here. As time has progressed within the NPP program I have faced a few moments where these two areas have met and diverged, which is why this is relevant at this point.

⁴ From my previous description of artistic practice in January 2021, for reference and comparison: "I tend to prefer imagery-based explorations: small spheres or bubbles traveling through the body in different sizes and weights, or magnetic powder clustered under the skin in random patterns while there's a place in space with the same magnetic polarization to create friction of intent or the opposite polarization that creates a pull, the blood in the blood vessels going through a process of rarification seeping out in gas form, and other such kinds of guided imagery experiments"

into each other, blend into one another and form the entire and complex beings that we are: they are not dichotomies. Pause. Enter NVC (Nonviolent Communication)⁵.

The basic tenet of NVC is that all human endeavours are an individual's attempt to meet/satisfy some need of theirs. These needs are common to all (human) beings⁶. In NVC, these common / universal human needs may not be readily knowable to us unless we take the time to inquire and reflect onto them, or travel somatically toward them (albeit similar to the idea of an unconscious that can be tapped into). Everything I will ever do in this profession, in this life, will be in interdependence and in relation to other(s) and myself. NVC allows for contemplation through the body-mind which can then be carried on to the work with others, which is always relational. I dedicate a lot of time to practicing NVC, taking courses and meeting with empathy buddies and practice groups. I don't make work that actively tackles the core concepts of NVC or with a pedagogical aim of spreading NVC, but hopefully the practice of empathic and aware presence spills out, flows into all relations (a glimpse of Scale again) including those with colleague performers⁷.

Enter a bunch of Words. Yoga reappears.

The way NVC thinks is through language⁸. The way knowledge is transmitted from human to human happens a lot through language too. Language is usually words. Yoga is taught mostly in words, often the teacher does not demonstrate. From the onset, working with Giorgos, I was aware of my language skills not entirely sufficing to transmit the work efficiently. On a hunch I turned to yoga and took a yoga teacher training. This has very much improved my dexterity (albeit still at the practice stage) to use what I call "words that move". Having been first and foremost a dancer, I have had few chances to practice and consider the more pedagogical aspect of transmitting movement. This is an area that I choose to give attention to, in order to meet my need for feeling confident and more at ease in the rehearsal room. Pause. Enter another hunch. Enter Clown.

Elective course fall 2022: mask and clown technique. Only one month long, too brief a time to acquire much mastery of such an ancient discipline, but definitely a piece of my artistic practice puzzle. I know it now. The clown, as practiced with Per Sörberg, encompasses so many of the themes I've been interested in. The clown is an in-between, beautiful, awkward, naively participating yet commenting, genuinely and fully immersed in the now, with a multi-layered attention to itself and the outside, always reacting with as much availability as possible to the happenings of the moment, relatable and yet distant. A very strict technical practice in terms of form and use of voice and body, coupled with text work (if one is so inclined) and a high degree of spontaneity and absurdity. This discipline exemplifies human existence as being governed by free will and randomness alike, the beauty of belonging and the horror of schisms, some of the themes underlying how I see life and art. Pause. Backtrack. Enter Authorship. Enter Giorgos again.

Questions of authorship and collaboration inevitably resurface while working with Giorgos, such as: How do I present an idea to someone? Why is this idea worth presenting? Why would the other wish to develop this idea and how do we deal with the blend of responsibilities that ensues, both during the rehearsal and outwardly, to a wider public? One of the ways I have come to consider authorship is by spelling collaboration with others (i.e. when taking the choreographer's

⁵ Developed by Marshall Rosenberg, NVC can be described as a model of communication based on empathic, compassionate presence and fostering connection to ourselves and others.

⁶ Note that I find this akin to the psychoanalytic proposition that all actions are driven by an individual's conscious or subconscious desires, be them of any nature.

⁷ I wish to precise that NVC is not a method of work. It is rather a choice of life and a striving-toward, which in my view constitutes something different from a method, or a tool. A method implies something consciously utilised to a certain goal, while this is more akin to a life-choice, is internal, not goal-oriented, except for curiosity towards connecting to self and others. With a byproduct of creative thriving and potential social and personal change for a more constructive relationality.

⁸ Rosenberg highlighted through a series of more or less dichotomies how western English speaking society (along with other capitalistic, highly individualistic societies) uses language in a violent way to reflect on what language one would rather use instead, or how one would rather think-do around it.

role) as “*working with others as the bodies of an idea*”⁹. This way of looking at the issue brings me comfort and confidence. It aligns with some of my core values by giving the dancer/performer substance and addressing the integral part played by them in both the development and presentation of the work, while giving me the permission to present an idea that we can stretch and pull at together. Pause. Enter Conclusions.

We are reaching the end of this paper. You have been introduced to the actors, ideas, dreams and facts tethered to each other in this shaky web of artistic practice I’ve endeavoured to present. Pause. Enter all that’s not here. There is more brewing, but that will have to be for another time. Enter the reader, you who are here. Pause.

Thank you for your presence.

Until next time. Goodbye.

Exit the writer,

Sarah Bellugi Klima
/SBK

⁹ I wish I knew if anybody else had already expressed it this way. As far as I know this is my own musing though. I expect somebody out there has already expressed it similarly, but it’s beyond my knowledge for now.