

Episode 6 with Liv Kristin Holmberg

Existential dialogue

Introduction

In this episode of Transformative Encounters, we are in Berlin. I am on a private writing retreat hosted by my colleague Liv Kristin Holmberg, an artistic researcher based in Berlin. Liv is a performance artist with a background in music. Her research is in church music, and she is working with Christian liturgy as a format for immersive performances and is looking at the potential of performance and the connection between religion and the arts. Liv is Norwegian and has her main working base in Norway, but her work is presented in Scandinavia, Germany and beyond. Let's hear what Liv has to say about her practice and how she understands performative encounters.

Summary

It was lovely to hear Liv's detailed account of her practice. I would call her work relation specific performances, and, in my view, she is practicing performative encounters. So, to hear her talk about her practise is like listening to myself talk about my work.

The first and most important thing is the existential aspect of her work, how she creates a situation where individuals encounter themselves, their own existential contemplations, fears, and longings. She makes the guest the protagonist. She emphasises the embodied experience, working with stimulation of the senses together with the text. Her work with the senses involves cutting out one sense by blindfolding her guests, enhancing the other senses, and directing the attention to the inward gaze.

She talks a lot about connection, that the work creates relations, with inner and outer things. She provides a porous structure that the guest inhabits with their own experiences, values, and worldviews.

People will bring a lot of things into the performances and the surroundings; the site, the light, the weather, the time, all the different live and unpredictable elements of the precarious situation will create a unique experience for each guest. These are elements I am also working with in my performances.

From the artist perspective, Liv portrays the process as an existentially precarious situation, when she describes the agony that comes with being an independent artist taking on all the roles herself. But this feeling is weighed up by her sense of meaningfulness in the moment of performance. This is one of the things that I am looking into in my research and is related to the existential sustainability of the artists.

In my view, existential sustainability is a theme that is strong throughout her work as an address to her guests, questions on meaning and purpose.

Yet again in these series do we discuss the safe space and how we care for our participants. Liv creates a personal bond to each of her guests, to make them feel safe and insists on that clarity and stability is vital for the guest to surrender to a work that is in its nature unpredictable and demanding for the participant.

My performative encounter with Liv Kristin Holmberg was moving, heart-warming and affirmative. I got an opportunity to mirror the most important aspects of my own work with her practice; to create a space for existential contemplations, to place the guest as the protagonist, to work with values, to apply porous dramaturgy, to work relations specific, and the inwards gaze. In my view these elements are created by means of a performative encounter that lie at the core of the practice, and even though the encounter is staged it is still genuine and personal. In my view these things combined have a transformational potential.