

## Episode 8 with Sima Wolgast

*You are doing psychology.*

### Introduction

In this podcast series I have been dealing with performative encounters, that are potentially transformative. Transformation is a psychological process and in order to create a performative encounter I need to be able to predict or at least understand how my guests react and respond. I have been seeking inspiration and knowledge in psychology and therapeutic practices like ecopsychology, nature therapy and social psychology.

To understand how psychology creates framework around professional encounters and processes I have invited Sima Nurali Wolgast, a senior lecturer at the Department of Psychology here at Lund University. Sima is a social psychologist and has strong views on societal influence on mental health. Together with a colleague here at the Theatre Academy, Jörgen Dahlquist, she is in the forefront of the Story Lab Project, a cross disciplinary research project that is developing methods of storytelling as a tool for social engagement. In this intersection between arts, science and society Sima has been exploring how she can use language and stories as a vehicle for her practice of making structural changes.

### Summary

You are dealing with psychology says Sima about the arts. Yes, this is what I have been realising more and more. Within both fields we aim at creating an impact, new perspectives, and what Sima and I are both interested in are societal changes - but through individual processing. Sima talks about how in psychotherapy the patient knows what to do but the process is there to help the patient seeing things clearer and finding their own path – this is exactly how I experience my own work. It is not about preaching but providing an arena where people connect to their values, a place for contemplation and mirroring in a safe space.

Sima also explains how in psychotherapy, any idea can be put together with any idea to change the patient's perspective on illusionary ideas. This method is what we in the arts call juxtaposition or contrasting and is a well-known dramaturgical tool that creates framework for new perspectives. All in all, what Sima shared about her practice, resonated with me, there are many resemblances between our practices. I think this may have been the reciprocal illumination that Maaïke Bleeker talked about in the first episode, referring to the study of Roger Kneebone in connection to expertise. The example she took to explain the concept was an encounter between an embroidery person and a surgeon. Here I have been listening to a person that is a specialist in psychology and like Maaïke explained, I became illuminated by her testimony. How Sima describes her methods and motives makes me understand my motivations, intentions, and methods better. But I need to stress that the performing arts as an artform is not therapy even though it is dealing with psychology and has transformational potential. The contracts we make with our clients are also different in nature, but both practices can have a ripple effect through individual transformation into the social fabric and potentially contribute to structural changes. With this reciprocal illumination, introduced in my first conversation with dramaturge Maaïke Bleeker, I am closing the circle. Through these nine *performative encounters*, I have discovered new things about myself and my practice, and I can certainly say that I have been transformed.