



LISTAHÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Iceland University of the Arts

ÖR

AS honest with Y

AÐALHEIÐUR SIGURSSVEINSDÓTTIR

Final thesis for a MA-degree

Department of Performing Arts


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This paper is a final thesis for a MA
degree in PERFORMING ARTS at
Iceland University of the Art.

It presents a reflective analysis of
performance and the creative process.

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any way without author's consent.

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Photos: Owen Fiene





ÖR

As there's something in the air. As if one lives a true and honest life alone. AS if it's a solo act, audience participation may be invited. As this calls for an "ÖR" (MICRO) meeting. As coffee will be served, newcomers are especially welcome.

Duration: Approximately 60 minutes

Author/Performer/Director: Aðalheiður Sigursveinsdóttir

Performances: LHÍ Black Box, January 2025; LHÍ, Leifshús Akureyri, February 2025

Photography: Owen Fiene

Music: MJDorian – Alchemical Dream (Counterpoint Variation). Original version featured in the podcast Creative Codex

Stage Work Mentor: Andrea Vilhjálmsdóttir

Technical Assistant: Anastina Eyjólfsdóttir



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AS ABSTRACT

AS this is a reflective thesis written about my final MA performance at the University of the Arts in Iceland. As I reach the conclusion of this academic journey, it is time to examine the process and personal inquiry behind ÖR, which premiered in January 2025.

As I set out to create a documentary theatre piece based on my personal experience, however, I moved away from direct representation and into a more abstract performance. As I found myself questioning the very impulse to narrate, explain, or resolve through art: What am I truly confronting?

As these questions deepened, I structured a baseline around two layers, isolation of once reality and a meeting framework.

AS the idea was abstract as well as deeply introspective, I wanted to reflect the self-enclosed nature of therapeutic spaces as well as keep a close connection to the audiences.

AS a result, the performance became less about confession and more about tension—between exposure and protection, control and surrender. AS I tended to lean toward abstraction, AS to fix things, to escape into dreams, rather than meet myself with clarity.

AS ÖR ultimately became a kind of surreal dreamlike state rather than a linear story. AS surprise meeting within a Program of Honesty. AS if ÖR blends inner and outer realities, flowing in a hybrid form of lived and performed experience. AS this is a four parts script, the opening scene, the search for truth, the program of honesty, and the closing scene. AS the opening and closing scenes form a mirror of each other. AS they are identical in visual form but played in reverse. AS the character moves backwards and ends the journey where it began.

AS are my initials,
they echo in my writing.
AS an ongoing loop,
AS every sentence starts,
AS.



AS foreword



AS in the process of writing, I felt an urge to test my potential, push against my own limits. AS a performer, AS it was a tight connection, discovering the core of characteristics, intertwine and emerge with the work—it all felt like one living process. working with different aspects of dramaturgical decision-making, visual aspects of videos in the work, music, lighting, costumes, props,

AS moving into rehearsals, my fellow student Bergdís Júlía Jóhansdóttir offered valuable input through her directorial perspective, alongside the steady mentorship of Andrea Vilhjálmsdóttir. As a directing actor making my solo stage debut, I video recorded each rehearsal. AS I received generous help with the lighting design from Egill Ingibergsson.

As I reflect on this journey, I am thankful for the support by fellow students and the staff of the IUA. AS I want to give special thanks to Brogan Davidson and Una Þorleifsdóttir. As I turned toward creative writing, I was blessed by the facilitation of Berit Miriam Glanz and Angela Marie Rawlings. As they stretched my sense of forming, taught me to carry language with care.

As this chapter closes, I want to acknowledge my overall artistic mentor, Professor Guðmundur Oddur Magnússon—Goddur, your support, our long and lasting dialogues, and your willingness to guide me through this path have been a steady wind in my sails. As I call you a friend, I recognise it as a rare and lasting honor.



AS resonating

AS our
ability to
make assumptions,
our choices to grow
and evolve as human beings.

AS this could be an adventure,
full of untold possibilities.

AS lines
intertwining, like energy,
leading us to a conversation about our
power and systems.

AS I don't know where I am,
but you're still reading, and we weave
together in this thread.







AS YOU READ, AS YOU SEE SIGNS,
CONNECT LETTERS, AS YOU ARE
SEARCHING FOR MEANING OR
SOMETHING NEW —DOES IT SPARK
CURIOSITY? AS I HOPE IN THE
BEGINNING TO MAKE IT A STARTING
POINT.

AS IF ~~THE~~ PATTERNS EXIST WITHIN
WHAT I PERCEIVE, BEFORE ME. AT THE
EDGE OF SIGHT. AS FOLLOWING
THREADS, RETRACING STEPS, TRYING
TO CATCH A DIFFERENT VIEW. AS A
QUESTION LINGERS: HOW TO BRING
THE UNSEEN, THE HIDDEN TRUTHS, TO
THE SURFACE? AS WHEN THE FLOW
STOPS, WHEN INTERNAL
COORDINATION BREAKS DOWN, WHEN
EXTERNAL MOVEMENT CEASES—
THERE IS NO CHANGE, NO RENEWAL,



AS on to the floor

AS a monodrama, ÖR is a single actor's performance, exploring personal themes, allowing the author (preforming) to showcase introspective narrative to explore inner thoughts and emotions, or to touch upon if we have many selves. AS the protagonist is an unnamed woman, struggling with her sense of self through language and symbolic imagery, the complexities of human existence. ÖR, which translates into "scar" in English, has a multilayered meaning in Icelandic.

AS ÖR is a prefix in the translation to micro and can also mean arrow and quick, all meaning reflects the thematic focus of the story on the emotional and psychological scars carried by the character.






AS a song without a note

AS ÖR challenges linear storytelling, there is not one story, but indications of many. AS ÖR unfolds without a clear beginning or ending, the notions of character building remain ambiguous. AS the play revolves around uncertainty, it reveals the unease we experience when we don't know what is about to happen, as if we ever truly do.

AS my writing points to psychology, the subconscious and the layers of a person's psyche, the restlessness, I tended to stage that, in the opening acts. AS it's about the soul, my spirit, the inner knowing. AS a long-time admirer of Carl Jung his work, my creation is general are probably marinated and soaked with his flavours. AS ÖR explores human behaviour and internal conflicts with a sharp focus on the complexity of one's character.





AS I ASK TO WHERE, IF IT IS POINTING?
AS I WONDER, IS IT FILLED WITH POINTS?
AS I STARE TOWARDS IT, WHAT IS IN IT? WHAT FOR?
AS I READ LABELS, SIGNS, ISOLATE SOUNDS,
AS I CONNECT SMELLS, FEEL VIBRATIONS, AND SENSE A TOUCH,
AS I WONDER, AM I A CREATURE OF SIGNS?
AS I PONDER, PERHAPS I'M JUST A QUESTION MARK?

AS UNCERTAINTY BREEDS RESTLESSNESS
AS THE DUST SWIRLS UP TOWARDS MY EYES
AS EVERYTHING DISAPPEARS, FROM ONE TO ANOTHER

AS I EXIST IN A STATE ON STAGE,
AS I CHANGE THE SUBJECT
AS I TURN TO ONE OR THE OTHER
AS I TURN TOWARDS YOU



AS awaking to a dream

AS dreams are a shared human experience, a paradox of reality, narratives of the subconscious. AS personal connections to dreams are, in their nature, sealed and birthed experiences that we sometimes remember and sometimes forget. AS we have little control in dreams, compared to the person we are when awake.

AS our control cannot destroy the sequence of events, in contrast to our waking responses to manipulate how everything should be.

AS if theatre is about getting the audience to let go, to release control, to become reactive.

AS an allowance to slip into the narrative. AS to become a witness to another realm.

AS in a world where the audience either connects to a vibration—or not. AS getting in touch with the energy, an electrical plug-in to the humane.

AS desires become involved with the wonders, entangled for a moment.

AS ÖR

AS the lights dim, the spell breaks—one's reality returns.

AS the realities shift, the audience starts improvising with the resonance.

AS digesting, discussing, absorbing into their own reality.

AS an opening act, the performer opens up a doorway, a seam between worlds. AS realities blur, M.J. Dorian's music drifts like mist. AS flickering imagery forms, eyes, faces, fae or fairy forms on a wall. AS mirrors glint on the other side of the doors and walls.

AS her own reflected images multiply, splinter, expand. AS if shards of a story, a question, a trace. AS the audience, gathered in a half-circle, leans into the moment, their outlines merge with what is mirrored. AS the music fades and the mirrors stop moving, only the hush remains, wide awake.



AS A (SUR)REALISM SIGN

AS an artist I feel deeply introspective and experimental when it comes to writing. AS internal dialogues between various versions of a single character reveal in ÖR, a constant examination of the self, which is common in works exploring existential philosophy, for example by Jean-Paul Sartre and Franz Kafka.

AS the ÖR blurs the line between reality and dreams, explores how reality is a fluid state, in and out of self, even disjointed. AS using different inner personas or characteristics is a surrealist technique to represent the mind. AS a reliance on mirrors, reflections, and elusive truths points.

AS using the imagery of eyes to reflect on the mirror, I might have been in a dialogue with the ideas of the theatre of cruelty. AS I understand Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty it opens expressing emotions in a relation to audience engagement and engages them. AS Theatre of Cruelty focuses on cruelty to language, concepts, ideas, and representation. AS well as the experiments with space, Artaud's intention was to eliminate the separation of the audience by removing the stage, thus literally putting the actors in the same space as the audience.

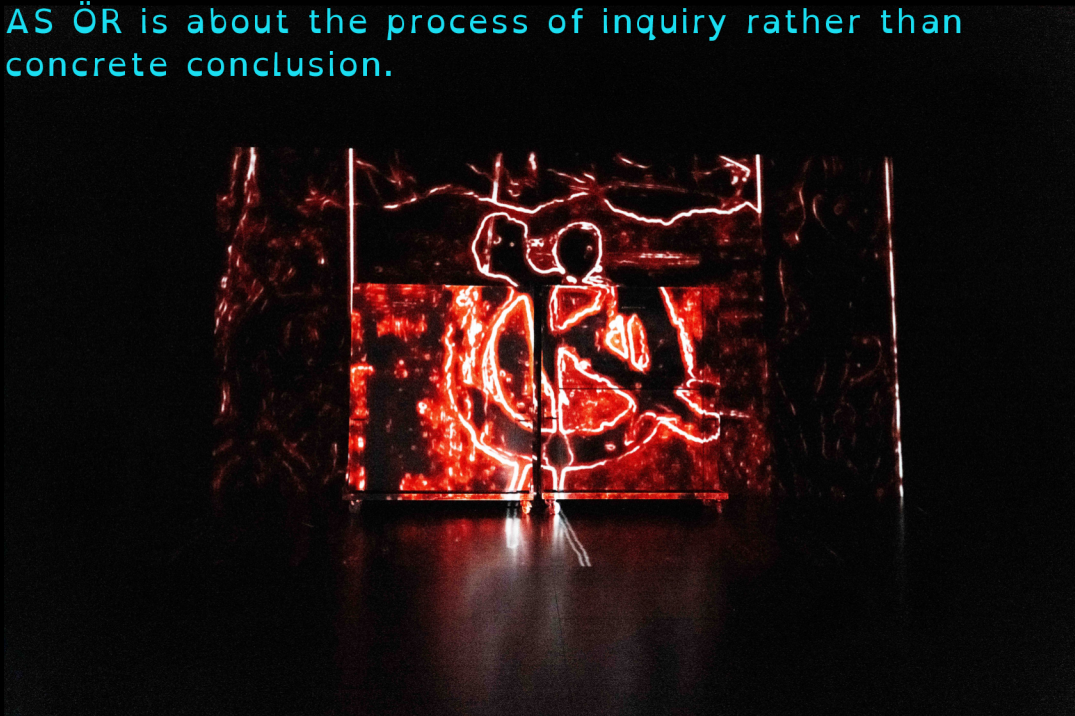


AS you have read this far you have probably noticed some elements of my writing, using metaphor, repetition, and open-ended inquiries.

AS it might touch on and engage with the content of ÖR, rather than simply conveying straightforward information, and playfulness within the puzzle in it all.

AS I am influenced by existential and metaphysical questions within me and from my philosophy studies, elements of this influence likely align philosophers like Heidegger, or even poetic works that explore the intangible aspects of being.

AS ÖR is about the process of inquiry rather than concrete conclusion.





AS empirical research in an embodied experience

AS a performer used the embodied memories
to reach characteristics on stage.

AS for the last few years, I have stood face to face with the slow erosion of my health—searching for answers, for sustainable solutions, for a way to reclaim my strength. AS it is my lived reality.

AS I got sick from black mold. AS an invisible, toxic presence pushed my immune system and natural rhythms beyond their limits—leaving my ability to live a normal life shattered, scattered in pieces.

AS I walk into healthcare systems and meet walls, blank stares, disbelief. AS my symptoms are not “scientific” enough. AS my condition is not visible enough.

AS the social system lags behind, lacking the language, the knowledge, the will. AS I lost my ability to work. AS I lost my belongings. AS I lost my short-term memory. AS I lost my strength. AS I struggled with my identity. AS losing hope of getting help, the feeling of frustration—of needing help—pulled me into a spiral of what I know to be true for me.

AS every week, news of damaged houses, government-owned, being renovated, AS mold is scraped from the walls. AS if everything is done and over with once the houses are repaired. AS if we all know—we do—a common knowledge, whispered truths about the danger.

AS if no one ever got sick there. AS the system meant for the people has no answers, not built for those made vulnerable by environmental instability within a system of buildings.

AS this theme is not abstract.

AS still—no research.

AS no guidelines.

AS no path forward.

AS if healing is expected to happen in silence.

AS if survival is meant to be solitary.

AS I speak, because the story is real.

AS it is not only mine.



AS a quest without request

AS I ask where I get my information about the outer world: from where is the headlight focused, who and how is it giving me information about the reality I live in. AS I search the internet, the Western media, the AI—who or what is feeding into the story, and what are the resources one uses to build the picture of what is true.

AS social concept or ethical norm “honesty” is challenged within the play or opened up for examination. AS within ÖR the performer circles around the void of what it is to be considered attainable. AS what is true and the journey towards truth. AS it leads up to honesty of personality traits.

AS ÖR confronts traditional storytelling in theatre by not using a stage but positions the audience in a U-shape facing mirror. AS well as ÖR challenges the concept of staying an outsider to the story. AS ÖR asks the audience to face themselves alongside the story with unconventional usage of mirrors facing their seatings. AS honesty is portrayed as multilayered, changing perspectives throughout life, ÖR is a circle around honesty but at the same time ÖR is breaking the rules.

AS in the introduction of the play, it is indicated that the audience will be offered coffee, yet that promise is broken.





AS my cups of coffee

AS I am struggling, AS in an inner battlefield, noticing my need for control. AS over my circumstances, control over my life, control over my thoughts, and this incredible need I have to be right or justify myself in situations.

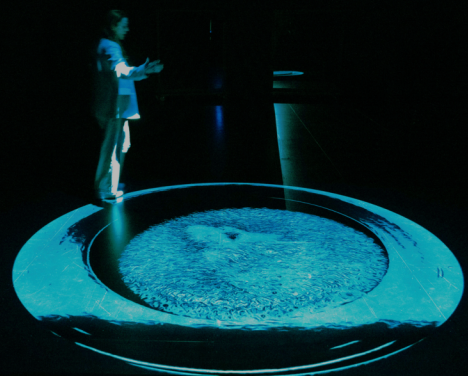
AS I ask what is true, I wonder where to seek the truth. AS I reflect on being able to connect my question—with what? AS I stand and drink my coffee, I ask: what is the context?

AS I am left with an inner struggle with the idea of what truth is, what is truthful, so-called facts, and what is true for me, the right things without evidence to back it up.

AS silence, pauses are just as powerful as words, absence of constant dialogue, leaving room for interpretation is needed for the layered wording within ÖR:

*“What is sufficient evidence? Is truth exclusive?
Is it found in citations of older data?
The experience of others?
What is sufficient evidence?*

*When is an experience true?
Does it matter?
Is it a matter?
The facts?”*



AS the second part of ÖR unfolds, a long monologue begins—centered on precisely these questions. AS the main character moves in circles, visual forms begin to appear on the floor. AS the images remain unexplained within the work, they are left ambiguous for the audience. AS the monologue progresses, it shifts from quiet contemplation to a manic intensity.

AS the source material for the images, I used coffee cups I drank from over the past three years.

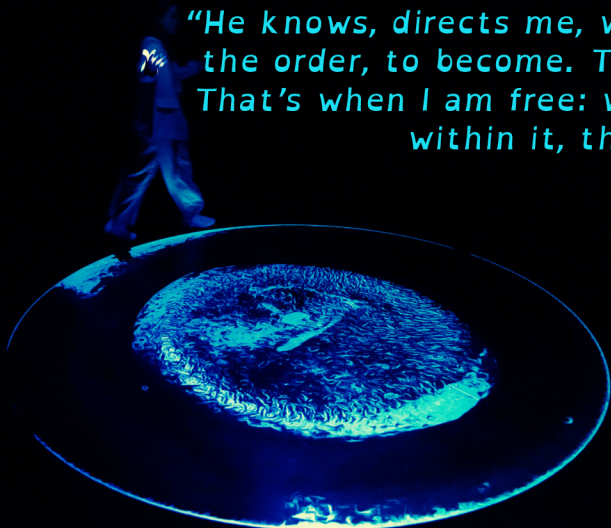


"The moment, the in-between, the interval—when the atmosphere holds a playful ease, a stillness, before something happens. Something unexpected. In that stillness, when everything is released, the best ideas come, unexpected connections, joyful surprises."

"It feels so good when they appear. So familiar, calms me. I can relax. To feel the calmness running through me, revelation, in the glow."

"Love the comfort in the familiar, when everything is gentle, agreeable. I trust, to be led, step by step."

"He knows, directs me, what I need, each moment. In the order, to become. To become free, FINALLY ME! That's when I am free: when I simply relax and stay within it, the right images."



*"To see, connect,
dot by dot.
Understand what
is underneath...
isn't there always?
To understand.
The negative space
is to separate,
the light speaking
so clearly.*

*Need the darkside to bring it
towards me. That's when I understand
the message. The light in the darkness... the
information in it all."*

"Symbols and imagery appear and then separate. So the past, are the past. To me, so I can be free in my being, and begin again."

"I receive only what is relevant, what connects—and I connect deeply, to the center of it all, I know, the center of to look for it all, internalr, intra, inter to the outer off it all."



AS I WISH I WAS A SPIDER

AS a bridge, or when breaking the fourth wall, trying to read into to the symbol on the floor;

"I love words puzzles, when I get it"

AS a performer I can almost touch the surreal flavour that awakens, when the audience realises, that they are stuck in a meeting and do not know what to expect. AS the interaction between the performer and audiences are never the same it feels thrilling to perform, read the audience, reach for their reactions and play along.

AS to bring it to live in different form the improvised elements are strong and play a role. AS a performer I need to read the audiences, the crowd, while they are reading into the performance.

AS the Program of Honesty is about being honest as a person but also about boundaries.

"I know my limits when I have crossed them at least once, and about to cross them again"

AS the play unfolds, sometimes playfully in interaction with the audiences. AS interpretation, where the boundaries between the real and imagined are deliberately blurred. AS in the final monologue,

"I wish I was a Spider, then I could follow my threads" AS I can admit, that I was referring to Salvador Dalí's "50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship", where he talks about taming his spiders".



AS honest with Y

AS playing with symbolism, the six-armed star appears in ÖR as a symbol for a self-help group. AS two triangles form a star within it, and a hexagram emerges, one of the oldest known symbols in the world.

AS the an author I could have connected this to many well-known symbols such as Freemasons, Judaism, Israel, or the Star of David it is never mentioned directly, leaving it open for interpretation.

AS the logo of the Honesty Program parallels the 12-step programs, ÖR uses a triangle inside a circle. AS the letters outside the star refer to witches and black magic, they also invoke the Age of Enlightenment.





As an ongoing reflection on social symbols, ÖR critically engages with the representational framework of AA 12-step programs and their formalized meeting structure, interrogating the broader social acceptance and normalization of such models. As no singular narrative is fully disclosed, ÖR highlights the inherent limitations of the meeting format—its constrained temporal and spatial parameters—as well as the perpetually unresolved nature of its progression.

AS the performer never fully reveals the cards, AS the form is imperfect, AS the main character is in a limited reality within The Program of Honesty. AS some steps are skipped in the guidance, AS the guidance is unclear. AS ÖR is pointing to the obvious, that the work is not honest, AS the honesty program is imperfect in its secrecy.

AS certain rules apply in 12-step programs, AS it is not a conversation but narrations, AS steps are followed. AS one leads a meeting, everything within time limits. AS others are not quoted, AS it is not a matter of agreeing with what others say, AS it is only spoken from one's own experience, AS others are listened to. AS there are voluntary contributions to the coffee fund, AS coffee is offered.



AS with my questions if
social norms dictate masking
one's inner reality,
the play brings different aspects
of the same persona to the stage.
AS the underlying issues are
never mentioned are
only stated but never issued,
named or confronted.

AS ÖR has many hidden
layers of symbolism
not confronted directly
within the script, audiences
are free to make
their own story out of it.

AS
I break
free from
the walls
of the theatre,
exploring different
mediums, I think about
David as a long-time fan.

AS David Bowie is a great example of ever-developing
personas, a lifelong theme of artists in constant motion, I am
inspired by his evolution.

As I think about the other David, AS David Lynch's work as a
writer, his approach to storytelling. AS Lynch is known for
surreal, dreamlike narratives, fragmentation of identity,
perhaps there is a parallel to my own exploration within ÖR.

AS this reflects my understanding of Lynch's work—blurring
the lines between inner and outer, where characters shift
between different personas or states of being. AS Lynch uses
symbolism and non-linear storytelling.

AS ÖR revolves around the meaning of honesty. AS the
characters examines the idea of truth, what is "true" versus
what is perceived, the tension between one's inner self and
the expectations or influences from the outside world.

AS it seems like an abstract exploration of personal growth,
facing one's own fears and insecurities, and trying to navigate
through life's complexities.

AS the characters in ÖR are played by one actor, it mirrors
Lynch's use of fractured identities and shifting realities.

AS ÖR is more of a state than a story, creating an unresolved
tension by presenting without offering resolution.

AS if ever ending

AS what happens next is entirely uncertain. AS the story is not told as I dreamed it would be, but that's another story. AS ÖR might find an opportunity to take on many forms, and the material is far from being thoroughly explored.

AS it is an exciting thought to take ÖR out into society—to hold meetings in Program and Honesty, allowing the characters to come alive or even have independent identities.

AS it is also possible that Program of Honesty has a resonance beyond the borders of the country; it might just be translated and performed elsewhere.

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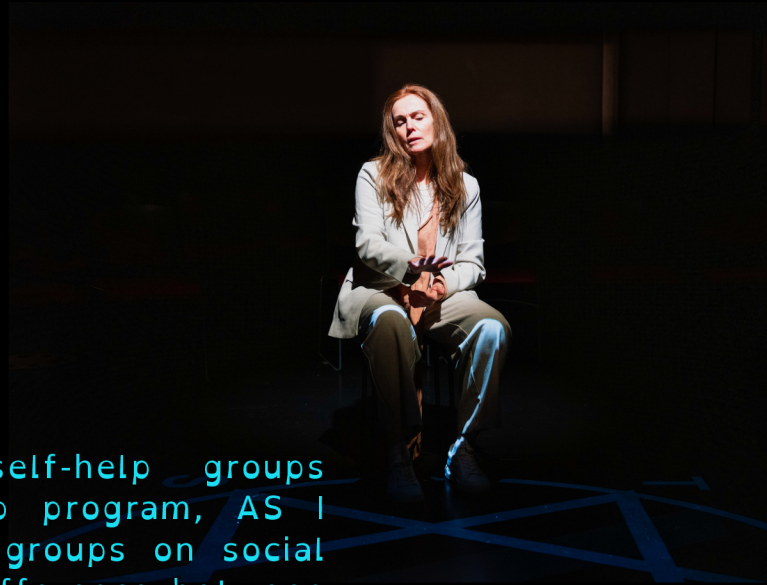
AS ever, it is time, pour the cup,

AS to witness what emerges.

AS to silence the scroll, AS to notice signs

-

AS sideways AS sidewalk cracks,
AS breath blown gently to a surface,
AS if I had given it a shot.



AS I have attended self-help groups meetings in a twelve-step program, AS I have been in closed chat groups on social media. AS there is a big difference between these, AS stories are shared there, AS I have shared my stories.

AS I wonder why are there so many closed groups about the sickness.

AS I wonder why the unseen is so easy to ignore, dismiss.

AS if we need a different questions to seek new knowledge.

AS if the a progress of simulation, similarity to get a hearing.

AS how hearing is healing,

AS how wonderful homecoming is within a safety.



AS BIOGRAPHY

AS myth of one's ego

AS transdisciplinary in creation

AS improviser

AS questioner

AS unlearned of myths

AS performed in arts

AS actor of parts

AS a typographical activist

AS splitting up context

AS W or D reforms words

AS breaking the stillness in silence

AS in state of awakening

AS a statement

AS if state is meant

AS many lines

AS identity marks

AS remarks

AS crosswalks of marks

AS crossing the talk with self talk

**AS
POET
ON
A
PAUSE**

AS researching path

AS if rules can be broken

AS a chronological delineation of time.

AS facilitation is felt

AS a brainstorming group

AS relevant manuscript's materials

AS collection of atoms

AS collection of types

AS a biological sample

AS gut microbiome

AS human disco ball





06/2025/

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