

To Go Deeper when It Works

Anthropological inquiry into engagement and search for a sense of deeper living in a Copenhagen-based performance practice.



Maja Ejrnæs

Master's Thesis · Department of Anthropology
Copenhagen University

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Supervisor · Inger Sjørlev

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Reading guide

Some quotes are translated from Danish into English.

“Citation marks” are used to mark quotes by interlocutors and theorists.

‘Apostrophes’ are used to mark emic concepts.

Italics are used to mark analytical concepts when first introduced. They are moreover used to stress certain words and to mark fieldwork notes.

Capital Initials are used in accordance with emic terms, as in the case of The Boarding School, Sisters Academy, and The Poetic Self.

(...) is used to show that part of a quote is left out.

... is used to mark a pause in a quote.

[Square brackets] are used to mark my translation or explanation.

Indents are used to mark long quotes and situational descriptions.

Abstract

This study emerges in a context of immersive and interactive performance projects, which have become increasingly popular across Western societies today. The thesis explores participants' experiences and engagement in a Copenhagen-based performance practice called Sisters Academy. It is written from an insider position, which has been acquired through years of engagement with Sisters Academy. The study contributes to methodological fields of sensory ethnography and insider research, and to dialogues between anthropology and performance fields. The study builds on ethnographic material from four months of fieldwork conducted around a large-scale manifestation that unfolded within a museum building in Copenhagen during the autumn of 2017. It is analytically grounded in the intersection between performance theory, social practice, and phenomenology. The study presents a three-fold analysis structured around the problem statement: How does Sisters Academy enable performer-participants' search 'to go deeper'?

The first part of the analysis focuses on how Sisters Academy is created and maintained in relation to ideas of the otherworldly. It sheds light on the intentional effort to evoke an otherworldly realm of clean aesthetics, poetry, mystics, and non-pretending in contrast to everyday life in the outside world. It argues that maintenance is a continuous endeavour, which is required by performer-participants in order for practice to 'work', and that this maintenance involves daily routines, verbal discussions, and exchange of meta-communicative messages. The second part of the analysis focuses on how the expression 'to go deeper' relates to experienced processes in the field. It analyses performer-participants' experienced processes through concepts of flow and authenticity as qualities of experience, and it discusses the limits and potential of a theoretical perspective of liminal rites of passage. It argues that 'going deeper' can be understood as both short-term processes and long-term journeys towards increasing sensations of focus, connectedness, intensity, or mystery, arguing that such processes are generated by engagement in practice over time. The third part of the thesis focuses on how performer-participants become experienced and competent practitioners. Through an analytical perspective of situated learning in a community of practice, it argues that performer-participants learn to navigate in the field through imitation and active engagement in practice. It argues that familiarity with the social aesthetics of Sisters Academy enables fine-tuned communication and the ability to make practice 'work' on a 'deeper' level. Finally, it concludes that the search 'to go deeper' is enabled by on-going learning processes, whereby Sisters Academy eventually depends on performer-participants' search for 'deeper' experiences in practice.

Foreword

No reader is unbiased nor value neutral. No writer is. This foreword is for the reader who has participated in Sisters projects previously.

Doing the Impossible

In a performer group meeting during the pre-production of Sisters Academy #6, the artistic director shared a talk she had with an experienced performer, whose Poetic Self name is The Gardener. This performer allegedly commented that “we are doing the impossible”; a quote that called attention to the simultaneous absurdity and reality of the project we intended to complete. To create an otherworldly boarding school for adults within a museum building surrounded by noise and city traffic, and by means of strictly limited time, human, and economic resources. “Doing the impossible” became a tag line among performers, which encapsulated the most ambitious Sisters Academy project till this date. Likewise, I found the phrase suitable as a working title for my master’s thesis; the most ambitious academic project I have plunged into so far. It seemed that I was doing an impossible project on an impossible project.

In the first place, there was something impossible about the idea to squeeze a complex performance laboratory with interrelated life journeys into less than hundred pages, written in a language that was not even my mother tongue. It seemed an impossible translation. Yet translation has always been the anthropologist’s burden – and merit. The anthropologist is allegedly expert in cultural translation between groups, and in translating local terminology into academic language in order for fellow scholars to enrich their understandings of human diversity, resemblance, or universality. Had I been a traditional anthropologist visiting a Sisters Academy otherworld of red colour and slow pace, I would probably take pleasure in the anthropological search for familiar patterns in exotic peculiarity (Kelly 2014); I would eagerly analyse the social life of feminine Evokers, hidden Exist rituals, and the human Octopus. But I did not arrive at The Boarding School as a foreigner. I arrived as an insider who was already familiar with Sisters Academy.

Nowadays, it is not unusual for anthropologists to study their own cultures, and so-called native or insider research often sheds light on familiar patterns in ways that make them appear strangely different and enable us to ask new questions (ibid.). For my own part, I could not easily engage in any strange-making endeavour, seeing that my academic interlocutors did not share my own familiarity with Sisters Academy. This became apparent when I brought some analytical texts

to a study group by the end of my fieldwork in December 2017. In one portfolio I unfolded an extraordinary Staff Meeting and Evening Gathering from the manifestation. What made The Staff Meeting extraordinary was the sudden appearance of Students and Visitings, and The Evening Gathering became an extraordinary meta-gathering in which we both performed the planning and execution of the gathering with the few Students and Visitings at the school. If you are not confused by now, you probably participated back then. I will not expand on the details, but simply note that I found the events analytically interesting as they displayed subtle codes of conduct, boundaries between participatory levels, and processes of decision making, which were usually less apparent. Yet these analytical perspectives got completely lost in translation. My fellow anthropology students were instead puzzled about particular acts, such as the feeding of each other with fruits. 'Feeding each other' probably sounds peculiar to the reader as well, but it is perfectly normal within a Sisters Academy context, and I caught myself asking the study group: But don't you feed each other with fruits?

Reactions and comments from fellow anthropology students and supervisors made me question what I took for granted and reconsider challenges of translation; what needs attention and what is interesting to an outsider? This thesis could probably have benefitted from fieldwork collaboration with another anthropology student. With all its potential challenges, such collaboration could have balanced my insider perspective with an outsider's eye, questions, scepticism, and fascination.

Besides the challenge of translation, an insider is usually invested and have something at stake, which inevitably influences the research. For my own part, I had invested much time and energy in Sisters Academy, I wished to support the large-scale production process, and I had an interest in being part of the project in the future. Due to this situation, I was maybe extra careful not to harm anyone, both during fieldwork and in the writing process. From the very beginning, I also had a wish to share my research findings with Sisters Academy performers, and I think this idea of a future native reader made me take too many precautions in advance. Something which showed to be both an advantage and a disadvantage was also my extent of insider knowledge. Much interesting knowledge is purposefully left out of the thesis due to ethical considerations, and sometimes I was probably too ambitious, which meant that I got easily dissatisfied when realizing that I had to simplify complexities of (my perceived) reality, in order to comply with academic standards. In

spite of all these impossibilities, I actually think that I ended with a thesis that offers interesting insight into the world of Sisters Academy.

The Visible and Invisible

Since the Takeover project at a high school in Simrishamn (Sweden) in 2016, I have frequently heard the artistic director claim that “we [Sisters performers] make the invisible visible”. This is a claim founded on several experiences of hidden structures and tense relationships that become visible in Sisters Academy manifestations. During the manifestation in Simrishamn, it was a group of critical parents that became visible. The parents were allegedly already critical towards the school, but during Sisters Academy they formed a hatred group on Facebook and one parent that worked at the fire department arranged a security check of fire regulations, in what appeared to be an attempt to deem Sisters Academy illegal and force the project to stop. Problems in the permanent teacher team also became visible, and increasing awareness of poor communication resulted in subsequent efforts to improve the internal meeting culture.

According to my understanding, to “make the invisible visible” is associated with progress and transformation in Sisters Academy, and this attitude corresponds a general demand for transparency in society today (Dahl 2012:3; Han 2012). But as the examples above indicate, it is not without consequences to make the invisible visible, wherefore I find it worth considering responsibility. In all Sisters Academy projects, I have participated in, evaluation has been limited, and I understand that this situation is due to priorities, lack of resources, along with a wish to challenge prevalent pedagogical strategies in educational systems. But to what extend are we allowed to intervene into other people’s worlds? To what extend are we obliged to do so? To what extend are we responsible to take care of the processes we evoke? Enlightenment is often associated with science and generally thought of as a positive thing. But science has also been analysed as power, as in Foucault’s (1990 [1976]) concept of power-knowledge and thoughts on how communication of knowledge regulates subjects by offering particular discourses and subject positions. What is more important; to take care of individuals or projects of enlightenment? And are these concerns contradictory at all?

Ethical awareness in anthropology both relates to risks of harming informants during fieldwork and during communication of analytical findings. In a broader perspective, the Danish anthropologist Tine Gammeltoft argues that anthropologists have a twofold ethical demand to treat interlocutors’

perspectives with loyalty and disloyalty, in order to avoid naive reproductions of power structures (2003:290).

Returning to this thesis, do I make the invisible visible? I think that I shed light on some invisibility in Sisters Academy, while other aspects stay invisible throughout the thesis. A statement that most anthropologists would agree with is that all science involves different kinds of secrets, omissions, and silence (Danneskiold-Samsøe et al. 2012:4). These may be linked to ethical considerations, inadequacy of language, or academic traditions and tendencies in certain forms of representations (ibid.:3,5). As anthropologists, we may be aware of certain hidden aspects in our communication, but as we are part of dominating structures ourselves, some silence is inherently difficult to identify (ibid.:5). Personally, I am aware of some invisibility in this thesis, which is linked to experienced inadequacy of language and ethical considerations. This is not a thesis that disclose a lot of internal conflicts, hidden power structures, and critical perspectives. With reference to future improvements, it was important for me to bring forth critical voices and conflicting issues in the internal reflection process (this material is publicly accessible through The Archive). However, in this limited thesis format, I found other aspects more important to communicate. By reading this thesis, the outsider does not become an insider – as well as Sisters Academy performers never become insiders in the school institutions we occupy during takeover-projects. Limited time and resources only allow for peaks into other worlds...

Sisters Academy is filled with interplay between making visible and invisible, and inspired by Michael Taussig's thinking on revelation and concealment, I believe that this interplay is linked to passing sensations of mystery and magic (1999; 2003). I also find that some knowledge is generally known but cannot easily be spoken, and this is what Taussig term as *public secrets* – that which is secretly familiar (1999:50). In parallel with the visible and invisible, there is an interplay between speech and silence. Silence is an explicit performative tool to create sensations mystery in Sisters Academy. But identification of speech and silences may also shed light on blind spots and power structures. According to the political scientist Hanne Marlene Dahl, silence is not a static condition, and she suggests that we inquire into the processes, when something is silenced (Dahl 2012:4). I invite the reader of this thesis to read with curiosity about what is being said and what is not being said, including what is hidden in between the lines, unconsciously or on purpose.

Both and Either or

From time to time, the artistic director has used the expression “it is not either or but both and” in relation to Sisters Academy. Sisters Academy is both timeless and full of time structure, it is both theory and experiment, it is both repetition and renewal, it is both democratic and hierarchical, it is both performance and reality, it is both temporary and permanent, it is both old and new, it is both individualistic and collective, it is both known and unknown. As performers, we balance a ‘both and’-world full of paradoxes. During my fieldwork process I likewise had to balance different and sometimes conflicting positions; being both a performer, a friend, an insider, a researcher, a student, a teacher and a human being. Being a native researcher, I experienced the paradoxical sense of simultaneous distance and closeness, otherness and oneness (Koutsouba 1999:193).

This project has been a practice in handling complexities but also a practice in ‘either or’. To realize that it is impossible to include it all or to do everything at once. To realize the crucial link between clarity and decision making. It has been a process of writing hundreds of pages, which did not end up in the final thesis, a continuous process of killing darlings. The Students were my dearest darlings. The Students make a key participatory level and are a constant preoccupation among performers. Some would even say that we do Sisters Academy for The Students. In all fairness, the reader may therefore question my choice to focus on the performers. The short explanation is that I found that my position enabled me to shed light on important aspects of longing and engagement in the performer group. This light would have been dimmed substantially, had I focused on both performers and students. Re-reading this thesis, I wish that I had been even better at ‘either or’ and made less compromises.

Introduction

“And to feel this connection with people. I think it’s... A lot of us feel this need for change, or this need for something bigger, or more magical, or more... Yeah I don’t know. But I think this is what makes us all go to the same place, like I feel like we are dragged into this energy because we are longing for it in a way. Do you understand what I mean?”

This is how Kathryn expresses herself in a conversation during a reflection process following the preparation, manifestation, and closure of Sisters Academy #6 in the autumn of 2017 (Sisters Academy 2018a). For one month, the museum building of a contemporary art centre in Copenhagen called Den Frie operated as a temporary boarding school, founded on a vision to explore sensuous and poetic modes of being (Den Frie 2018a; Sisters Academy 2018b). Day and night, the school hosted around 60 adult participants; some participated for 24 hours or a couple of days, while others, such as Kathryn and myself, lived in the school for the entire month. For one month, we lived in a Sisters Academy world of red colour, ambient soundscape, Poetic Selves, silent meals, blindfold rituals, screaming classes, mysterious nights, eggs, sensual touch, emotional expressivity, slow pace, eye gazing, candle lights and chandeliers, fur coats, darkness, impulsivity, bells, secrets, movement exploration, and peculiar radio songs. It is due to a shared point of reference in Sisters Academy that I intuitively understand what Kathryn means when she talks about “this connection with people” and of “being dragged into this energy”, and it is such experiential accounts that I intend to shed light on in this thesis.

Sisters Academy emerges as a performance project within a performance art field that has expanded in popularity across Western societies the last decades (Bishop 2012; Schulze 2017:132-37). Throughout the past five years, Sisters Academy has unfolded through temporary large-scale manifestations, which are inspired – both conceptually and aesthetically – by interactive and immersive projects such as the British Punchdrunk (Hallberg 2013; Punchdrunk 2018) and the Danish-Austrian SIGNA (Hallberg 2009, 2014; SIGNA 2018). ‘Interactivity’ is an articulate performance art strategy in Sisters Academy, which relates to a focus on “co-participation in a joint ritual” (Hallberg et.al. 2017:45), and which parallels orientations in both relational art installations (Bishop 2012 [2005]; Bourriaud 2002), participatory theatre, and performance art events today (Bishop 2006; Fishcer-Lichte 2008; Schulze 2017). ‘Immersion’ is another articulate performance art strategy applied in Sisters Academy. This strategy is associated with aesthetic transformation of

physical buildings into “otherworldly spaces”, and it is inspired by performance scholar and practitioner Josephine Machon’s contribution to the scarce literature on immersive performance (Hallberg et.al. 2017:44; Schulze 2017:128). Machon expands on how aesthetic space transformation is at the core of immersive theatre and serves to generate a sense of an “otherworldly world”, understood as a coherent “in-its-own-world” in which participants can immerse themselves through deep involvement (2013:21,63,93-95). The idea of the ‘otherworldly’ in Sisters Academy is associated with ‘mystery’ and ‘the unknown’, along with an idea of a ‘space-in-between’ that temporarily puts everyday life on hold and allows for aesthetic, sensuous, and potentially transformative experiences¹. The ‘otherworldly’ is not thought of as a fictive theatrical universe², and it is not presented as an ancient spirit world either³.

It has been argued by performance scholars and practitioners that the orientation towards sensory stimulation, bodily engagement, and human contact in immersive and interactive performances meet fundamental longings in social mediatized and consumer-oriented societies (cf. Machon 2013:25-26; Schulze 2017:1,6). Kathryn suggests that it is because “a lot of us feel this need for a change, or this need for something bigger, or more magical” that we “go to the same place [Sisters Academy]”. This research project emerged from a curiosity about the particular kind of ‘otherworldly’ space and alternative sociality that unfolds within Sisters Academy, along with an interest in understanding participants’ motivation to engage with it. My curiosity in this direction was founded on my personal engagement with Sisters Academy throughout the past three years.

In relation to my own position and research motivation, I find it relevant to draw a parallel to Gry Worre Hallberg’s (2009) master’s thesis in theatre science around SIGNA. Hallberg was herself a performer in SIGNA, and her study is motivated by a wish to understand the apparent attractiveness of participation among performers in SIGNA (ibid.:5,9). Gry later co-founded and became the artistic director of Sisters Academy. Due to my insider position in, and privileged access to, Sisters Academy, I have also chosen to focus this study on long-term performer-participation. This choice diverges from the widespread focus on short-term spectator experience in interactive and immersive performance (cf. Alston 2013; Frieze 2016; Heddon et. al. 2012; Hill & Paris 2014; Hogarth et. al. 2018; Reason & Lindelof 2016). Yet the term ‘spectator’ doesn’t figure in Sisters

¹ See the link: Transformative Impact – Art-based research on Sisters Academy (Sisters Academy 2018c).

² While the word ‘fiction’ has figured in Sisters Academy previously (cf. Hallberg 2014; Svabo 2018:9), the dissociation from ‘fiction’, ‘illusion’ or ‘make-belief’ is articulate today (cf. Hallberg et.al. 2017:45).

³ See Greenwood (2000:24) or MacLellan (2003:367) for comparison.

Academy, where we generally talk about ‘participatory levels’ (see Chapter 2) and where both short- and long-term participants are positioned as performers to different extents. In this study, I will apply the term ‘performer-participants’ to refer to my primary interlocutors: long-term participants who are part of the internal performer-group in Sisters Academy. With that being said, I also see remarkable differences between my own and Hallberg’s inquiry. Besides the fact that SIGNA and Sisters Academy are two different ethnographic fields, my anthropologically framed theoretical and methodological strategies also diverge from Hallberg’s thesis, which is framed within the genre of theatre science (cf. Sjørølev et al. 2017). Methodologically, Hallberg based her thesis on 15 interviews with co-performers and chose to leave herself out of the analysis (2009:12,13). In comparison, I have built this study on participant-observation through several months of fieldwork, and take advantage of my insider-position both with regard to data-generation and analytical approach. As I will elaborate in Chapter 1, I think of this study as a contribution to developing fields of insider research and sensory ethnography. It contributes to debates around art-anthropology collaborations (jf. Grimshaw & Ravetz 2015; Schneider 2015; Schneider & Wright 2010), and is situated within an experimental branch of anthropology, as it questions traditional ethnographic strategies and seeks new pathways in a contemporary research field by allowing for methodological and theoretical exploration (Fischer & Marcus 1986; Marcus 2010; Rabinow 2003:84; Rees 2008:6).

Throughout my fieldwork, I became increasingly aware of the frequent expression ‘to go deeper’, which often was articulated by performer-participants in relation to a longing or motivation to engage with Sisters Academy. This awareness spurred my curiosity towards the experiential processes and sensations of living that relate to such expression, along with a curiosity as to how Sisters Academy enables these sensations. The expression ‘to go deeper’ appears intuitive in relation to Sisters Hope’s focus on immersion through creation of otherworldly spaces that allow for participants’ deep involvement. In this study, I have deliberately chosen not to draw analytically on the concept of immersion, since it refers to both a genre, strategy, and a level of experience in Sisters Academy. For my analytical purposes, I find it crucial to differentiate between intentional strategies and experienced processes, and to emphasise that ‘deep’ involvement is not necessarily an outcome of performer-participation within an aesthetically transformed space. Rather, it was a frequent reminder and challenge among performer-participants to ‘uphold the space’ in a way that was simultaneously ‘mystical’ and ‘non-pretending’. In line with this orientation, I will focus this study on the processes

through which performer-participants strive towards the ‘otherworldly’ and sensations of something ‘deeper’.

To shed light on performer-participation, I find it inadequate to limit my analytical attention to the fixed time and space of the manifestation at Den Frie. In comparison to a widespread focus on temporary performative events (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008; Machon 2013; Cseh-Varga & Czirak 2018), performer-participants have sometimes referred to Sisters Academy as a “secret society”. In this thesis, I will think of Sisters Academy through the lens of analytical concepts such as a social aesthetic landscape (MacDougall 1999, 2000) and a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1999 [1991]; Wenger 1998). Focusing on my research interest in experiential levels of performer-participation within an on-going performance practice, I structure the thesis around the problem statement: How does Sisters Academy enable performer-participants’ search ‘to go deeper’? I will inquire into this problem statement through a three-fold analysis that seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is Sisters Academy created and maintained in relation to ideas of the otherworldly?
2. How does the expression ‘to go deeper’ relate to performer-participants’ experienced processes in Sisters Academy?
3. How do performer-participants become competent and engaged practitioners over time?

In the rest of the introduction, I will provide a more thorough contextualization of the ethnographic field, along with a presentation of my analytical orientation and structure of the thesis.

Sister Hope & Sisters Academy

Sisters Hope emerged in 2007 and was established in collaboration between Gry Worre Hallberg and Anna Lawaetz, who thought of themselves as “poetic twin sisters” – hence the name ‘Sisters’ (Hallberg 2016:37; Sisters Hope 2018). Gry and Anna shared a background in academia and performance art, and they started to work on Sisters Academy in 2012, as an experiment to manifest their vision of a “Sensuous Society” through performance art methods and interdisciplinary strategies (Hallberg 2016:37; Hallberg et al. 2013). The vision towards a Sensuous Society, which is presented in a manifest (see appx.1), builds on Critical Theory and aesthetic philosophy. It gives prominence to the liberating potential of “the aesthetic dimension” in a world that has been governed by rational thought and economic premises since the Enlightenment (Hallberg et al. 2017). In my interview with Gry after the manifestation of Sisters Academy at Den Frie, she emphasised that Sisters Academy is

“not an answer” but rather an “inspirational framework, a laboratory, and experiment to ask questions within” and where we can “get an embodied understanding of the questions that we ask”.

Sisters Hope positions itself in the intersection between four ‘logics’: activism, research, education, and performance art (see appx.2). The logic of activism links to an intention to “democratize the aesthetic dimension” through the vision of a Sensuous Society (Hallberg 2017:43). The logic of research refers to a continuous collection of data [notebooks and objects] from participants in an internal archive, and to a wish of “bringing the sensuous perspective into the field of research” (ibid.:46). The logic of education refers to a wish to change educational systems (ibid.:43). Lastly, the performance art logic relates to immersion and interactivity, along with the performance-strategy ‘intervention’, which refers to the intention to intervene into, and enact impact on, everyday life (ibid.:45). Sisters Hope has additionally introduced its own “performance-methodology” called The Poetic Self (Sisters Academy 2018d), which I will return to in Chapter 1.

Sisters Academy is an on-going project, which has developed through seven production processes in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, and Greenland since the first manifestation in 2014. It has primarily developed through two large-scale formats⁴: The Takeover and The Boarding School. During Takeover-projects, Sisters Academy occupies and transforms upper secondary schools for two weeks and performer-participants engage in sensuous exploration with regular teachers and students. During Boarding School-projects, Sisters Academy occupies (art) institutional buildings for one month, and operates as a “school of a Sensuous Society”, in which adult participants can take part through different ‘participatory levels’ (see more in Chapter 2).

A central part of Sisters Academy is the Copenhagen-based performer-group, which has formed and developed throughout the past five years, and which I am myself a part of. The group currently consists of around 30 active performer-participants, who have manifested with Sisters Academy one or more times; the majority are between the age of 25 and 35, most live in Copenhagen or Malmö, and two-thirds are women. Most of us are engaged with art practices (performance art, theatre, dance, music, curating, installation or fine arts) besides Sisters Academy, some have a foot in academia, some in education, and some in activist projects. While all performer-participants have developed their own styles and practices, we have also developed a particular practice together, which is at the core of this thesis.

⁴ See elaboration on the two formats (Sisters Academy 2018b) and current extensions in new direction (Sisters Academy 2018e).

Strictly speaking, Sisters Academy is run by Sisters Hope, which has primarily been Gry throughout the past four years⁵. As Gry herself put it in an interview situation, she has done all the required “invisible” administrative and communicative work in between manifestations – with help from the project coordinator. It is Sisters Hope that notify the performer-group prior to a new manifestation, and performer-participants can then respond if they wish to participate. While Gry is the artistic director of Sisters Academy, she also engages as a performer-participant during manifestations.

What I find most important to emphasise for now, is that Sisters Academy has evolved as a practice that exists beyond Sisters Hope’s conceptual framework. Or as a performer-participant aired in a conversation among seven performer-participants as part of the internal reflection process (see appx.4): “The group is bigger than the frame”. When I initiated a focus group discussion with a note saying ‘Sisters Academy’ one month after the manifestation at Den Frie, no one was eager to elaborate on this phenomenon. As Alexi said: “It’s just that... it’s just such a big question to start with”. We then decided to save the note for later, and when I reintroduced it after an hour of discussion on phenomena such as ‘performance’, ‘everyday life’, and ‘ritualistic’, Alexi elaborated: “We *could* explain it [Sisters Academy] like The Sister does. Like: it’s like this and this and that. And it *is* like that. But I’m not gonna go in to that. Because it’s so much more”. It is such a sense of something ‘more’, which I hope to shed light on in this thesis.

Contextualization

The anthropological literature on art fields in Western societies is scarce and few anthropologists have plunged into the vast field of performance art projects. In relation to Sisters Academy, it is worth mentioning the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup’s writing (1996) on The Performer’s Village/ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology). ISTA is linked to the internationally recognized Odin Theatre in Denmark, and is a multicultural network of performers and scholars that has unfolded in several European countries and in Brazil. Similar to the temporary manifestations of Sisters Academy, ISTA “takes place” for one month at a time. In this period, all days are dedicated to learn about techniques of theatre. Yet despite this explicit aim, ISTA participants apparently share Sisters Academy participants’ difficulty in putting words to experience and practice (ibid.:10-13). When reading Hastrup’s descriptions of ISTA lingo and tacit knowledge, paradoxes, along with semi-secret sessions, I instantly recall Sisters Academy. I am further reminded of Sisters

⁵ Sisters Hope is currently expanding and now consists of a small project group.

Academy when reading a portrait of ISTA as an intense school world with a packed timetable (Taviani 1996:39).

Uncompromising intensity has often been associated with performance art, both in general and in a Danish context. In Sisters Academy, I often heard Gry stress the importance not to compromise the intensity of our radical project when trying to take care of individuals or to find pragmatic solutions. SIGNA's controversial performance *Villa Saló* from 2010 is another example of uncompromised intensity. Participants were here invited to be voyeurs in a grand Marquis de Sade villa in Copenhagen, where a game of dominance, sexual abuse and violence between Masters, Queens, Children, Maids and Guards unfolded day and night for several weeks (Skjoldager-Nielsen 2011:74-75). As a visitor back then, I remember being fascinated by the intense reality of this other world, but the actualization of sex, violence and paedophilia probably also deterred potential visitors, and some visitors felt offended by, and confused about, the blurred boundary between fiction and reality (ibid.:69, 71, 80-81). The director of a renowned Danish performance laboratory called Hotel Pro Forma has radically associated performance with terrorism, as it makes us question reality and our general frames of reference (Dehlholm 1993:192). It is partly the staging of authentic elements in real time that Dehlholm finds characteristic of both performance and terrorism, and which provides moments of clear-sightedness (ibid.:193).

When it comes to social organization in performance art projects, the presence of a central leader is found in both ISTA with Eugenio Barba, in SIGNA with Signa Sørensen, in Hotel Pro Forma with Kirsten Dehlholm, and in *Cantabile 2* with Nullo Facchini (cf. Hastrup 1996:12; Christoffersen 2015:21). Seen from my perspective, the presence of Gry Worre Hallberg is paramount in Sisters Academy, even if her directing strategies are less direct, which is something I return to. Another characteristic of performance art projects and the Danish art scene in general is the prevalence of volunteers and interns, who contribute with no or little payment, and enable visions to be realized in practice (I Do Art 2018; cf. Winkelhorn 2012:213).

The realization of a large-scale Sisters Academy manifestation moreover depends on collaboration with hosting institutions and funding from external sponsors. The last production was realized in collaboration with Den Frie. It was primarily funded by an independent business owner fund called Bikubenfonden in form of an exhibition prize of three million Danish kroner⁶. Generally, funding has been given by both state-owned and independent foundations (cf. Sisters Academy Malmö

⁶ See all sponsors in the credit list on the website (Sisters Academy 2018a).

2018) that support art and culture initiatives in the context of a Scandinavian welfare state. The welfare state is a character trait of Denmark, and other Scandinavian countries, which has developed since the 1930s with the vision to redistribute economical resources and give citizens access to benefits such as education, health, and cultural activities (Bruun et al.2015:11). Sociocultural values such as equality, independence, and solidarity have been foregrounded in the regional ethnographic literature on the welfare state (cf. Bruun et.al. 2011; Gullestad 1992; Lien et.al. 2001). Recently, more attention has been given to the sociocultural consequences of neoliberal reformations of the welfare state (cf. Bruun et al.2015:13; Pedersen 2011, 2014), and this focus parallels recent regional anthropology on how economic optimization strategies – to optimize effects with minimal efforts and costs – have become a characteristic part of everyday life styles and mentality today (Jönsson 2014; Kristensen et.al.2014:3; Lystbæk 2014; Vaaben 2014).

It is particularly such economic thinking that Sisters Hope challenges through the vision of a Sensuous Society. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Sisters Academy is anchored in Copenhagen; a cosmopolitan capital where we also find activist communities (Krøijer 2015; Krøijer & Sjørlev 2011), sexual queer spaces (Christensen 2003), and innovative political parties (Alternativet 2018) that seek to unfold alternative communities. Towards the end of the manifestation, I found myself next to a tour that The Sister did for a group of visiting guests, and I heard someone question the attention towards slowness and silence in the school. The Sister then responded that the ambition was to “oppose everyday life”, and that we might have been fast and loud, if slowness and silence was the general norm in society (see also Senderovitz 2018:46,72). We thus realize Sisters Academy as a practice that both depends on, and operates in critical reaction to, regional sociocultural norms and institutions. With that being said, we should be careful to not equate Sisters Academy with a particular region, due to the fact that it moves location with every new manifestation, and seeing that Sisters Hope has an international outreach⁷ and operates within cross-regional performance fields.

Interrelated performance fields

In parallel with the growing performance art scene, performance studies have developed as a broad-ranging academic discipline during the last decades (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2016:26-28). In this context, “studying performance” and “doing performance” have become interrelated practices (Schechner 2013 [2002]:1-2), and we find a variety of methodological approaches that relate to the

⁷ Sisters Hope has recently done (speech) presentations in Beijing, Brussels, and Brighton (Sisters Academy 2018e).

genre of arts-based research (Chilton & Leavy 2014:6). Sisters Hope is said to be “rooted in an art-based research process” (Sisters Academy 2018f), and Hallberg currently works on a practice-based PhD in relation to her work with Sisters Academy (Kunst og Kulturvidenskab 2018). The interrelatedness between scholarship and performance practice explains why seemingly academic terms such as immersion or otherworldly is used among performers in Sisters Academy. Other concepts and theoretical thinkers that Gry often refers to are: “Critical Theory” on “The Enlightenment paradigm” and “The Aesthetic Dimension”, along with thinkers such as “Horkheimer” and “Marcuse”, “Joseph Campbell” and his thinking on “the tallest building” (cf. Senderovitz 2018:3), “Nicolas Bourriaud” and “relational aesthetics”, “intensified presence” affiliated with “Brian Massumi”, and last but not least “the liminal, pre-liminal, and post-liminal” drawn from “Van Gennep” and “Victor Turner”.

It is beyond the scope of this study to lay out an exhaustive account of the immense theoretical inspirations within performance fields, but I find it relevant to shortly elaborate on the ongoing dialogue between performance fields and anthropology. The mutual inspiration figure on both methodological and theoretical levels, while Judith Butler, Dwight Conquergood, Victor Turner, and Richard Schechner are key scholars that have influenced the dialogue. The collaboration between the anthropologist Victor Turner and theatre scholar Richard Schechner has exerted major influence on the trajectory of performance studies (Bial & Brady 2016:7; Carlson 2013 [1996]:17). Turner’s idea of liminality has become particularly widespread in performance fields and the scholar Jon McKenzie (2016) has problematized what he calls a “liminal norm” in performance studies to associate liminality with the transformative efficacy of performance events. In the context of Sisters Academy, the framing of large-scale manifestations as potentially transformative spaces-in-between (see p.6) not only appears on a theoretical level, but also relates to concrete designs and experimentation with pre- and post-liminal rituals, which are thought to frame participants’ otherworldly journeys. Apart from this concept, there is an apparent fascination among performer-participants of ancient and occult ritual practices, which includes explorations with tarot cards, incense, oracle dance, alchemical elementary symbols, totems, and full moon rituals. Such fascination relates to avant-garde performance traditions (Berghaus 2005; Bishop 2012), but also to Aquarian magical practices (Luhmann 1986:30) and classical anthropological writings (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1937; Frazer 1990 [1890]; Lévi-Strauss 1962).

Sisters Academy vocabulary in practice

It is important to note that some performer-participants are rather uninterested in, or even critical towards, academic conceptualization. At the core of emic vocabulary, we find closely associated terms that relate to common sense understandings rather than to academic traditions; including ‘performance’, ‘mystery’, ‘poetic’, ‘ritual’, ‘magic’ and ‘sensuous’. These terms refer to a large body of non-verbal knowledge among performer-participants and are rarely explained.

When I introduced a note with the word ‘ritualistic’ during the mentioned focus group discussion (see p.18), it was immediately met by joyful outbursts and clapping, and Mika expressed that she stayed alive through rituals. Hanna shared her personal understanding of rituals as non-symbolic acts of “pure living”, challenging a definition she had found on Wikipedia, which said that a ritual is a “symbolic act you do”. It resonated with the group when Tina suggested to think of ‘ritual’ as a poetic word for routine, but also when Alexi articulated her understanding of ‘ritual’ as something more intentional than a routine. While Hanna articulated the challenge to repeat patterns while avoiding a senseless “auto-pilot”, Mika foregrounded the importance of “letting go of thinking” in order reach more meditative states, and Tina found that much depends on who you are as a person. Similar to ‘ritual’, ‘performance’ was said to be a “fluid” and “broad spectrum” term. As Hanna emphasised: “It is good that it is hard to explain. It is supposed to be that way”. Alexi found that ‘performance’ was “very far from theatre” but could give you some of the same playfulness, and that it was easier to practice in a performance art frame than in “everyday life”. In another interview-situation, Erik articulated that “everything” – “every breath” – becomes performance in the “durational immersive liminal large-scale” context of Sisters Academy. There was also agreement in the focus group that ‘performance’ in Sisters Academy was related to “freedom” – not in opposition to imprisonment but rather to normalisation, as in “boring and practical things”, “the societal trap of having to go to work”, “the nine to five thing”, “the wiring in our brain”, “the hamster wheel” and “the horror of Capitalist society”.

As the accounts above indicate, terms such as ‘ritual’ and ‘performance’ both relate to shared points of reference and to a diversity of associated meanings⁸. In this thesis, I will refrain from explaining emic concepts such as ‘performance’, ‘mystery’, ‘poetic’, ‘ritual’, ‘magic’ and ‘sensuous’, but I will shed light on the phenomena through my focus on practice and experience.

⁸ Cf. Luhmann (1986:144, 214-16) on referential ambiguity with regard to shared knowledge in magical practices and Fischer-Lichte (2008:142-44) on associative meaning in performance art contexts.

Analytical orientation

I situate my study in the intersection between performance, social practice, and phenomenology – anthropological traditions that share an orientation towards social agents' engagement with a cultural world. In this section, I introduce my analytical orientation and mention key concepts that I will introduce more thoroughly in the analysis.

Due to my fieldwork in a performance context, it appears obvious to draw on performance theoretical traditions. Within anthropology, the performative turn refers to an increasing focus on dynamic aspects of culture and embodied fieldwork, partly in response to the representational debates in the 80s (Conquergood 2013:92; Geertz 2000 [1983]:22). The turn has spurred a focus on the concept of performativity (Loxley 2007) – inspired by Austin (1975), Derrida (1988), and Butler (1997) – and on social events *as* performance (Schechner 2013:38; Sjørsløv 2007). The latter builds on ritual studies and draws on key concepts such as staging, framing, play, and liminality (Loxley 2007; Sjørsløv 2007). Motivated by a wish to avoid confusion between emic and etic concepts, I have decided to limit my use of 'performance' and 'framing' as analytical concepts in this thesis, as both terms figure in Sisters Academy. This decision is moreover motivated by my experience of the concepts as too broad and vague to be really useful tools to think with. With regard to the concept of 'performance', it has spread to a variety of contexts today – from high tech performance and management to literature, social science, and performance art – and it has been described as both a complex and contested umbrella concept (Carlson 2013:1; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2016:28; McKenzie 2001:4). With that being said, I have found analytical potential in particular concepts that are part of a performance theoretical tradition; including ideas on *meta-communication* (Bateson 1972), *keying* (Goffman 1974), *liminality* (Van Gennep 1960 [1909]; Turner 1967, 1969) and *flow* (Turner 1982, 1986).

To shed light on the process by which performer-participants engage with Sisters Academy, I will draw on the concepts of *community of practice* (Wenger 1998) and *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger 1999). Lave and Wenger's focus on social practice provides a lens through which to think of framing and participation as interrelated phenomena in Sisters Academy. It resembles a practice theoretical approach in anthropology, which has sought to merge structure-oriented and actor-oriented perspectives through a focus on processes of genesis, reproduction and change of sociocultural wholes (Ortner 1984:149). What I find consequential about Lave and Wenger's approach though, is their focus on processes of learning and participation in a social practice. This

focus allows me to ask how practice and participants shape each other, instead of asking how practice and system shape each other (ibid.:152, 154).

Lastly, I take analytical inspiration from a cultural phenomenological orientation, as I seek to understand cultural phenomena as they appear in the experience and consciousness of my interlocutors (Desjarlais & Throop 2011:88). When I engage with concepts such as *flow* or *authenticity*, it is with a focus on experienced Sisters Academy reality. I further draw on insights from the phenomenologically inclined genre of observational cinema (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009:539) through the analytical concept of *social aesthetics* (MacDougall 1999, 2000), which I find useful to shed light on the sensory landscape of characteristic patterns in Sisters Academy.

Structure of the thesis

I have divided the thesis into four chapters. Chapter 1 serves as a methodological foundation for the study and includes elaboration on my insider position, ethical challenges, methodological strategies, along with an outline of the fieldwork process and ethnographic material. In Chapter 2, I analyse how Sisters Academy is created and maintained in relation to ideas of the otherworldly. I argue that performer-participants continuously maintain and negotiate a Sisters Academy practice of clean aesthetics, poetry, mystery, and non-pretending in contrast to ‘everyday life’ in ‘the outside world’. In Chapter 3, I analyse how the articulated longing ‘to go deeper’ relates to performer-participants’ experienced processes in Sisters Academy. I argue that experienced processes of going deeper are generated through active engagement over time and can be understood as momentary experiences of connectedness, focus, and intensity, but also is a matter of long-term transformative processes. In Chapter 4, I analyse how performer-participants become competent and engaged practitioners. I argue that skills are acquired through situated learning processes, and that performer-participants’ familiarity with a shared repertoire and social aesthetic landscape is key to the ability to make practice ‘work’ a ‘deeper’ level. The chapter concludes with a contemplation of how the search ‘to go deeper’ is enabled by continuous engagement with an on-going practice.

Chapter 1: The research process

Research as insider

This research project is inseparable from my position as insider in the field. My engagement with Sisters Academy began as an internship during the first manifestation of The Boarding School in 2015 which was part of my undergraduate studies in anthropology. Since then, I have participated in two Takeover-formats at school institutions in Denmark and Sweden prior to my fieldwork in 2017. To use anthropological vocabulary, I am positioned as a native in Sisters Academy. Since Malinowski's epoch-making fieldwork at the Trobriand Islands, anthropologists have sought to understand the native's point of view through participant observation without going native (Fonstein 2014:75; Musante 2015:240). The effort not to go native is inseparable from a wish to secure the scientific integrity of our discipline and the idea that analytical reflexivity requires observing distance (Fonstein 2014:75; Turner 2003:145). With regard to my own research, I didn't *go native* but was already positioned as a native on the first day of fieldwork.

At a time when ideas of potential fieldwork sites have broadened and ethnographic fieldwork practice spread across cultures and disciplines, we see a rise in insider research, and it has become relevant to consider how an insider can occupy the analytical perspective of a researcher (cf. Costley et al. 2010; Jacob 2006; Koutsouba 1999; Reed-Danahay 2009).

But is it given that proper research requires analytical distance? In her recent master's thesis, the project coordinator of Sisters Academy problematizes such assumption when she asks: "Why do we by rule have insight simply because we are distanced?" (Senderovitz 2018:32). Though this rule does not prevail in anthropology, as ethnographic insight is often associated with immersion in practice (Emerson et al. 1995:2), going native still figures as a danger to be avoided for the sake of analytical purposes (Adler & Adler 2011 [1987]:11; Musante 2015:242). This apparent danger of going native bears on sound arguments on how close alignment with a particular group may prevent access to perspectives from other groups and further uncritical incorporation of emic discourses in one's own analytical account (Adler & Adler 1987:11). Such critical objections are not only useful reminders for anthropologists, but also in a performance field where academic inquiry and performance practice are intertwined. In this context, the performance scholars Machon and Fischer-Lichte have been criticized for a lack of critical reflection and unclear conceptual frameworks (Norros 2015; Rae 2011). Machon's (2013) work has even been portrayed as a celebration rather than an

analysis of immersive performance (Schulze 2014). In comparison, the recognized anthropologist Tanya Luhmann (1986), who takes an analytically distanced position, has been criticized among scholars and informants for pretended engagement and misrepresentation of Wiccan communities (Ewing 1994; Pearson 2001:53-55).

With regard to my own research and position as an insider, I have both recognized and reflected upon my tendency to take practice for granted. During the fieldwork, I tried to stay attentive towards perspectives from outsiders and newcomers, who were unfamiliar with the academy. In the writing process, I have focused attention on differentiating emic ideas from my own analytical perspectives - to the extent that such differentiation is meaningful and possible.

At the end of the day, this research would not have been possible if I had been an outsider. Due to my previous participation in large-scale manifestations and my inclusion in the performer-group, I was informed of the manifestation at Den Frie a year in advance. This early notification saved me time to consider the project as a fieldwork site and enabled me to take part in the entire production process. Besides this practical circumstance, my embodied knowledge in practice provided a privileged access to the field (cf. Wulff 2008:83). In this research project, I take advantage of my insider-position by inquiring into a key part of Sisters Academy that is unavailable to short-term participants; namely processes of engagement and longing 'to go deeper' among long-term performer-participants.

Ethical complexity

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I talked to the performer-participant Tara, who did research in Sisters Academy some years ago as part of her PhD in performance studies. Tara eventually ceased her research, as she found that an academic approach with pen, paper, and research questions conflicted with Sisters Academy. Tara's experience relates to my own endeavour to navigate respectfully in the performance field. I believe that my insider-position enabled an overall sensitivity towards respectful engagement from an early stage, as with regard to my project-design and initial decision to avoid formal interview strategies. I judged that formal interviews would be inappropriate in the intense month of pre-production – as I knew that time and surplus energy would be scarce in this phase – and I thought that they would conflict with the general orientation towards poetic and non-verbal interaction during the manifestation. But while my previous experience in Sisters

Academy helped me to navigate with understanding and respect, it was not a shield against ethical challenges.

When I initiated the fieldwork process, I had already spent considerable time reflecting on how my position as co-performer and friend in relation to other experienced performer-participants might prompt ethical challenges (cf. Hastrup 1987). I revisited these reflections after a situation in the pre-production, when the performer-participant Erik confided his frustrations about the preparatory process with me. In reaction to Erik's sharing, I expressed a wish to write down some of his expressions, but he then kindly asked me to keep it confidential. As he emphasised, he had spoken to me as a friend and completely forgotten about my research project. While this situation instantly spurred discomfort in both of us, it also led to a valuable conversation about ethical dilemmas and anthropological research. During this conversation, Erik explained that he did not want to harm Sisters Academy, and that he would prefer to talk to me at a time when he had clarified his thoughts. After my dialogue with Erik, I decided to emphasize my experienced challenges and continuous endeavour to navigate research-wise in Sisters Academy during a collective gathering. This sharing was met with understanding, curiosity, and clarifying questions – but it also provoked one of the experienced performer-participants Sandra, who protested: “I don't know if I want to be part of it”. After a talk with my fieldwork supervisor on how to handle situations when individual performer-participants did not want to be part of the project, I asked Sandra, who is also my friend, to elaborate on her thoughts. She then said that her provocation was linked to a general experience of not being asked permission by researchers, press, photographers or film-makers that study or document her practice in Sisters Academy. While she found it disrespectful not to ask permission, she had also become used to this situation. And she concluded: “If you ask me, I say no. If you just do it, go ahead. I won't stop you”.

In relation to my ethical reflections with regard to individual performer-participants, it is worth mentioning the interrelationship between participation and research in Sisters Academy. When you volunteer to take part in The Boarding School, you are both positioned as a potential researcher and give consent to be part of other potential research projects. And as Gry reminded me when I articulated some of my ethical dilemmas prior to the manifestation, I should be careful not to problematize the premises of Sisters Academy in my search for ethical responsibility. This reminder directs attention to a key aspect of my experienced ethical challenges in Sisters Academy; namely to navigate respectfully both with regard to the premises of Sisters Hope, a shared performance practice,

and individual participants. My overall ethical orientation has been to do no harm and to regard the endeavour to obtain informed consent as a process that involves dynamic relationships (cf. Albrow & Plemmons 2015; MacKinnon 2015; Plemmons 2015).

The research-logic (see p.9) and Gry's reminder also display my positioning as a researcher among other potential researchers who all explore different interests. In line with this perspective, and inspired by Fluehr-Lobban's (1991, 2015) thinking on collaboration as ethically conscious research, I have generally approached my interlocutors as potential collaborators rather than informants or subjects in my personal project (Fluehr-Lobban 2013:152). Besides the collaboration around the entire manifestation of Sisters Academy, I engaged in collaborations with individual performer-participants on shared interests; ranging from singing circles and movement research to exploration of ethics and poetry in relation to participant-observation. The most extensive research collaboration for my part, was the internal reflection process after the manifestation, which I designed and facilitated with three other performer-participants. Based on a wish to gather wisdom in the aftermath of Sisters Academy #6, we elaborated on an ethically responsible reflection-format that could capture some of the experienced complexity of the process (see appx. 4).

With that being said, I *did* find my anthropological research position rather exceptional in Sisters Academy. Or as the artistic director articulated in an interview after the manifestation, my research stood out in the sense that it was "very present" and that I had been provided unlimited access to the entire production process. And with access follows ethical responsibility – not least with regard to the writing process. What to write about and how to write it? To some extent, I think of my research as sensitive; not only because interlocutors have confided me with their private stories, but also as I inquire into experienced reality in a field where verbal language is thought of as inadequate to capture such reality (cf. Hammersley & Traianou 2012:108; Renzetti & Lee 1993). The latter aspect has made me reflect on whether my anthropological endeavour violates inarticulate experiences in the field. I don't have the answer, but I see value in the perspective that the genre of anthropology, which influences the tone and frame the communication of my inquiry, enables another kind of potential for insight than performance practice does (cf. Sjørøsløv et.al. 2017:3,7). The anthropological genre is not a narrowly defined matter, but it builds on an academic tradition to present a written argument with reference to empirical data and a problem statement (ibid.:3,8). With that being said, my research in Sisters Academy has also inspired me to critically reflect upon my own academic background and to experiment with alternative methodological strategies.

Methodological strategies & ethnographic material

Besides my years of engagement with Sisters Academy, this study builds on a particular fieldwork process that unfolded in the fall of 2017. Following the internal production plan of Sisters Academy #6 (see appx.5), I divide my fieldwork process into three major phases: Preparation – Manifestation – Aftermath. My phase division parallels the production plan in the sense that it is centred around the fixed time frame of the manifestation, but it also diverges from the plan, as I think of the beginning and end of my fieldwork as more fluid. The phase of Preparation includes my work with project-design, participation in four preparatory workshops with the performer-group during the spring of 2017, and one month of intense pre-production from 21st of August to the 18th of September (ibid.). During the pre-production, I engaged in the preparations of The Boarding School, which included practical work tasks such as draping, carpeting, and painting, along with engagement in preparatory performance workshops. During Manifestation, I lived inside the physical walls of Den Frie and engaged in a Sisters Academy life of daily meals, gatherings, classes (see Chapter 2 for more details). The phase I call Aftermath includes three days of transition and practical pack-down (see appx.5), along with a post-manifestation-period, which for my part included collaboration on the internal reflection process, spontaneous meetings, and arranged interviews.

My study builds on classical ethnographic training and is inspired by interrelated methodological thinking from fields of performance ethnography, phenomenological anthropology, auto-ethnography, and sensory ethnography. Concepts such as co-performative witnessing (Conquergood 2013; Johnson 2013), embodiment (Csordas 1994; Ingold 2000), and inter-subjectivity (Desjarlais & Throop 2011; Jackson 1998) have inspired me to think on how, and to what extent, my insight into other performer-participants' experienced processes is enabled by mutual engagement with a Sisters Academy lifeworld (cf. Emmerson et.al. 1995:2). Methodological thinking on auto-ethnography has additionally inspired me to think of myself as a useful informant (Holman Jones et.al. 2013; Koutsouba 1999). My methodological strategy is partly auto-ethnographic in the sense that I take a reflexive stance towards a group that I am myself a part of and in the sense that I engage with reflexive accounts of my own experiences as a subject in the field (Reed-Danahay 1997:2; Maréchal 2012:2,4). In relation to critical arguments on how auto-ethnography can turn into self-biographical accounting, I stress that my study is founded on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and the core intention to engage with perspectives other than my own (see critical objections in Atkinson et al. 2003; Delamont 2009; Gobo 2008).

My primary strategy to generate ethnographic material has been participant-observation; understood as attentive engagement in, and note-taking on, daily activities and conversations in the field (Musante 2015:305). In addition to this approach, I have been inspired by Sarah Pink's (2012 [2009]) advocacy for multisensorial ethnography. Pink doesn't provide a handbook of *how to* do sensory ethnography, but she regards her book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* as a "framework (...) that can serve as a reference point for future developments and creativity" (2012:5). Pink's thinking has served as a bridge between my methodological foundation in ethnographic practice and my engagement in the sensorial and explorative framework provided by Sisters Academy.

In general, I sought to adapt my methodological strategies to Sisters Academy, both with regard to ethical respect and fruitful data-generation, and I believe that my insider-position enabled me to take advantage of internal logics and sensitivities in the field. My use of blindfolding as a sensory method strategy can serve as an illustration in this context. Blindfolding figures as a common practice in Sisters Academy, in parallel to other performance projects (cf. Barbe & Newman 2018), and it is thought of as a 'performative tool' to stimulate sensory awareness by taking away the visual sight. During my first engagement with Sisters Academy in 2015, I explored this tool as I decided to blindfold myself for 12 hours. Paradoxically, this was an eye-opening experience for me, as I experienced an altered sense of space, time, and social interactions. Or to use Sisters Academy vocabulary, I got a temporary sense of an 'otherworldly space'. Motivated by my wish to get insight into short-term participants' perspectives on Sisters Academy in the last manifestation, I incorporated blindfolding in focus group designs. Due to limited space here, I will not expand on my concrete designs, but simply stress my intention to adapt an academic talk-based focus group strategy (cf. Macun & Posel 1998) to a sensory performance field. During and after the sessions, several participants spontaneously reported that they really liked to talk in the darkness, as it made them less pre-occupied about the others in the room and more focused on their own state of being.

I also engaged with the ethnographic method of participant-observation in dialogue with my Poetic Self called Flow. I briefly mentioned The Poetic Self as a performance-methodology by Sisters Hope. On the website it says: "The Poetic Self is not a character, it is not a fiction, it is our inner inherent poetic potential (...) that we discover, give an image and donate our flesh to (...). We don't change; we liberate new potential; we expand" (Sisters Academy 2018c). All participants are encouraged to find their Poetic Self in Sisters Academy, and The Poetic Self-exercise is thought of as an entrance point to find this self. In this exercise, you lie down with closed eyes and reflect upon

questions such as: “Time. What relationship does your Poetic Self have to time? Consider time” or “Mystery. What is your mystery?”⁹. Within the performer-group, we all have our own Poetic Self that we perform through names, clothing, attitudes, and practices during manifestations¹⁰. In this thesis, I will refer to performer-participants through both Poetic Self-names and ordinary (pseudonyms) names depending on the situation and what name my interlocutors use themselves. I will apply both names when in doubt of the name in use.

As a newcomer to Sisters Academy, you may encounter The Translator who dresses in black cat suits and facilitates sensual meetings in dark spaces, The Moments who is all white and invites you to save your memories in glass bottles, The Untamed who facilitates energetic creature classes, where you are asked to jump for ages or to smell your own spit, or The Mechanic with a black suede mask for his mouth, who might typewrite a portrait of you or invite you to make poems out of metal pieces. While these examples may give you an idea of different Poetic Selves, it is important to note that we all engage in various activities and regularly explore new ideas. There is also a lot of mutual inspiration in the performer-group, for example, with regard to common clothing such as cat suits, kimonos, or fur coats, or shared practices, such as when several performer-participants ceased to speak for a couple of days or several weeks during the last manifestation.

Personally, I decided on my Poetic Self-name ‘The Flow’ prior to The Boarding School manifestation in 2015. I decided on this name because I liked the sound of the word flow and because I was curious about flow states, which I knew of through my background in dance, singing, and anthropology. Since 2015, I have removed the definite article from the name, as I associate Flow with a movement rather than a separate entity. Less abstractly, Flow has become my name in Sisters Academy now; a name that I identify with in the same way as I identify with my birth name Maja. And to say that I perform as Flow doesn’t mean that I always am in a state of flow during manifestations; rather it means that I orient my attention towards such states. I will not elaborate in detail on my personal understanding of Flow, but when I refer to a dialogue between participant-observation and my Poetic Self, it relates to an understanding of flow states in opposition to being stuck or distanced to the world. My attention towards flow states made me aware of situations when I felt that my note-taking stopped the flow, as when I withdrew to write scratch notes or tried to store phrases that I found analytically interesting as head notes in my mind (cf. Musante 2015:263; Sanjek 1990:95-96).

⁹ A recorded variation of the poetic self-exercise is found on the website (Sisters Academy 2018g).

¹⁰ You can find portraits and biographies of the Poetic Selves on the website (Sisters Academy 2018d).

In reaction to my experienced conflict between Flow and note-taking, I began to experiment with what I thought of as flow-writing, as I tried to take notes more fluidly in the midst of social interaction, and I tied a small black notebook and pen around my foot with a black piece of fabric, so that it was always in close reach. Yet I frequently decided to leave the notebook behind, and to save the translation of observations into field notes or recordings to a quiet moment later, when I was on my own. This decision was taken due to my experience that flow-writing still prevented me from immersion in social situations, and due to my awareness that constant and explicit note-writing might make my interlocutors uncomfortable (Jackson 1990; Musante 2015:262). At other times, I deliberately decided to take a more observant and note-writing position, for example during daily talk-based meetings.

The analytical argument that I present in the following chapters are founded on rewritten and coded field notes from informal conversations and collective meetings, situational descriptions, recordings and transcripts of five individual interviews, along with three focus group-interviews. As part of an internal reflection process, I have also worked with written reflections from 16 performer-participants, along with recordings and transcripts of five conversations that unfolded during the reflection meeting (see appx.4). Apart from this primary material, I have searched for patterns in notes and recordings from focus-groups with short-term participants, and in participant-notebooks that are stored in The Archive of Sisters Academy. I have furthermore spent time searching on the website of Sisters Academy, where you find descriptive accounts, photos, films, press and research articles, blog-posts, sound-files, and news-updates. I have approached the website as a valuable source to Sisters Hope's external communication of Sisters Academy, to gain insight on discursive patterns and aesthetic forms that also figure in practice among performer-participants (cf. Atkinson & Coffey 2004). Differently, I have approached e-mail correspondences and the internal performer-group on Facebook as valuable sources to gain insight on performer-participants' practice in between manifestations.

Throughout the thesis, I will present you to various performer-participants, but I will only go into depths with the positions and perspectives of few subjects. Apart from the artistic director and myself, I give considerable attention to the performer-participants Sofia and Erik. Sofia and Erik figure as key interlocutors for different reasons. Throughout the fieldwork process, I had recurring dialogues with both performer-participants, and these dialogues enabled me to build rapport and follow their journeys from pre- to post-production. As I elaborate in Chapter 3, I noticed several

interesting similarities when comparing Erik and Sofia's experiential processes, which nuanced my analysis of 'going deeper' in Sisters Academy. It requires space to unfold nuances, wherefore my priority of particular performer-participants inevitably is at the expense of other perspectives. By focusing on few performer-participants, I do not aim to reach any conclusion about lived experience in Sisters Academy, but I hope to reach a better understand of the relationship between practice and experience in this performance context.

Chapter 2: Towards the otherworldly

A red hallway. Draping of red fabric weighs down the ceiling and red carpet stretches out underneath your feet. The hallway is empty but someone could be hiding behind the curtain. An invisible soundscape bathes the red light in mysterious darkness and merges with peculiar radio tunes as you walk towards the light shining through an opening in the fabric. Your body sets in swaying motion and the rhythmic tones are both foreign and familiar to you. You enter the glorious Dining Hall where candlelight and crystal flowers decorate endless shining mirror tables that cast shadows in the ceiling. Soon you hear resonant bells ringing, and you know that it is Dinner time. The Dining Hall fills with white shirts and suspenders, magnificent dress and mystifying masks, who take a stand on the chairs and start chanting. Then the chef's announcement: "Dinner is served". We fill our plates with blue rice and seaweed. We take a seat and eat in silence. Welcome to Sisters Academy.

In this chapter, I will inquire into how Sisters Academy is created and maintained in relation to ideas of 'the otherworldly'. First I will present The Boarding School-format with outset in emic understandings of 'frame' and 'participation', and thereafter elaborate on my analytical focus on a *social aesthetic landscape* and *community of practice*.

Sisters Academy #6: The Boarding School

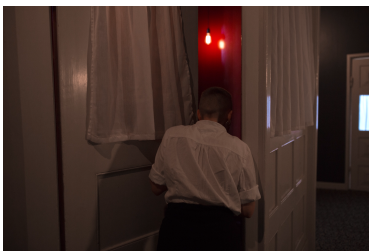
When performer-participants talk about a 'frame' in Sisters Academy, it is often with reference to an aesthetic transformation of physical spaces. I mentioned this as an immersive strategy intended to transport participants into an otherworldly realm. The spatial transformation is realized in the pre-production through work with 'set-design' led by a production team¹¹. In this context, we can think of 'set-design' as a performance art version of traditional scenography that supports a given theatre performance¹². With regard to the recent manifestation, the conceptual format of The Boarding School presupposed that all showrooms and café areas of Den Frie were made part of a school world with dining hall, archive, reception area, and dormitories. It further presupposed a particular Sisters Academy aesthetics.

In her recent master's thesis, the project coordinator notes that Sisters Academy has often been characterized by a feminist aesthetic, but that it does not operate with an articulate feminist

¹¹ See link to the entire credit-list (Sisters Academy 2018a).

¹² See Collins and Nisbet (2010) on the broad ranging discipline of scenography today.

agenda (Senderovitz 2018:13). In an interview-situation, The Head of Production Signe elaborated on how her work with set-design involved a constant navigation between budget, physical building structures, a diverse performance-group, and her understanding of the aesthetic expression in Sisters Academy. When I inquired into Signe's understanding of the "aesthetic expression", she hesitated with clear-cut categorization and referred to the visual documentation on the website¹³. As she said, Sisters Academy combines various aesthetic styles from different historic periods; including antique chairs, lamps with fringes, retro furniture, and synthetic lightening. In my own understanding, this stylistic confusion or diversity is linked to how material has been gathered through years of different production processes. Some objects have been found coincidentally in second hand shops, but through their continuous instalment and replication, they have become characteristic of Sisters Academy. When I asked Signe if she could give a concrete example of how she worked with set-design, she mentioned her choice to cover the front entrances to all tableaux with identical draping. In Sisters Academy, 'tableaux'¹⁴ generally refer to separate rooms that are designed and used by individual performers to conduct classes during the manifestation. Signe's intention with the identical draping was reportedly to create a clean expression and a sense of secrecy, as the tableaux would look the same on the outside, but reveal different worlds on the inside. Parallel to Signe's approach, the photo material from the last manifestation gives the impression of an orientation towards a clean and mysterious visual expression, as illustrated in the attached photos below¹⁵.



¹³ See Sisters Hope's gallery (Sisters Academy 2018h) or the visual anthropologist Eva Mozule's (2018) film from the last manifestation.

¹⁴ Tableau/tableaux derives from the French concept *tableau vivant* [living picture], which has been formative for performance art, along with other types of performances that developed from the 1950s, such as body art, living art, fluxus, event, and happening (Carlson 2013; Dehlholm 1993:196).

¹⁵ The Photos are taken by The I (Diana Lindhardt).

Apart from the visual expression, the intended transformation into an otherworldly space is furthered by light- and sound design¹⁶, which are characteristic aspects of immersive performance projects (Fischer-Lichte 2008:117; Machon 2013:93-95). The light-design in Sisters Academy includes colour filtering and installations of lamps and spotlights. Window panels are generally filtered or covered with fabric to prevent daylight and visual access to ‘the outside world’. Due to economic limitations in the last production, the initial idea to drape all window panels in the ceiling was cancelled. This meant that some areas were exposed to daily sunlight, and it was my personal experience that it was more challenging to keep the sense of an otherworldly space in these areas than in the dark lit and intensely coloured areas of the school. In Signe’s words, the excess of light meant that “the world came more in” and that the areas appeared less “magical” during daytime. Following on from that, we may think of light-design as an otherworldly filter that make things appear differently and more magical. Similarly, we may think of sound-design as an otherworldly filter. A characteristic aspect of Sisters Academy is an omnipresent low-volume soundscape – a constant loop of an hour-long track of ambient music with notes of melancholy and mystery¹⁷. In addition to the soundscape, the academy is full of retro radios that play a loop of a pre-recorded Sisters Academy radio channel, which include sound items made by performer-participants and a music catalogue that includes sentimental pop-song from the 60s, jazz, classical pieces, experimental sound art, and world music. As the sound designer put it himself, most of the music has “the potential to reinforce emotions”¹⁸.

Importantly, the talk about ‘framing’ or ‘frames’ in Sisters Academy goes beyond physical space transformation, as it also includes Sisters Hope’s conceptual framework with the four logics, The Poetic Self and the orientation towards a Sensuous Society. School life in The Boarding School is moreover framed by overall guidelines that appear in statements such as “we speak English”, “the school is analogue” or “everything is de-branded”, and it is framed through a daily schedule as part of a so-called ‘interactivity design’. The schedule bellow (cf. Hallberg et al. 2017) follows the alchemist inspired number symbols, which are used instead of ordinary numbers during manifestations (see appx.3):

¹⁶ See Brown (2010) and Curtin (2010) on the prevalence of sound-design and soundscape in contemporary scenography.

¹⁷ Listen to a recording of the soundscape on the website (Sisters Academy 2018g).

¹⁸ The radio soundtrack is publicly available through a Spotify playlist (Spotify 2018).

A day at Sisters Academy – The Boarding School

\oplus : ● ●	Earth	Dormitory opens
∇ : ● ●	Water	Breakfast
\cup : ● ●	Death	Morning gathering
\triangle ●: ● ●	Air Stone	Classes
\triangle ∞ : ● ●	Air Infinity	Lunch
\triangle Ω : ● ●	Air Life	Classes
\triangle \cup : ● ●	Air Death	Dinner
∞ ●: Ω ●	Half past Infinity Stone	Evening Gathering
∞ \triangle : Ω ●	Half Past Infinity Air	Classes
∞ ∞ : ● ●	Infinity Infinity	Dormitory closes

The ‘interactivity design’ links to the four logics (see appx.2) and includes guidelines on how to facilitate short-term participants’ journeys in the academy. In emic terms, we talk about different ‘participatory levels’ in The Boarding School, and two central participatory levels are The Visitings and The Students¹⁹. ‘The Visitings’ refers to ‘The Visiting Artists/Teachers/Researchers’, and this level is thought of as a residency with no payment and little obligations involved. Half a year prior to the manifestation, The Visitings apply to conduct their practice within the frame of the academy. Around 40 Visitings took part in the recent manifestation and most stayed for a couple of days. During their stay, Visitings are provided with a small area around their bed, where they can unfold their practices; ranging from singing in water to dream sharing or movement research. With regard to ‘The Students’, everyone interested can participate on this level by purchasing a stay of minimum 24 hours through an online booking site. A stay of 24 hours costed 290 Danish kroner in the last manifestation and most participants on this level chose to stay for 24 hours, which is relatively long time in comparison with regular theatre plays. During the manifestation at Den Frie, the academy hosted around 30 Students per day. Since The Students arrive and leave at different times throughout the day, there is a constant flow of short-term participants in the academy and a noticeable 24-hour-rhythm, throughout which approximately half of the school inhabitants are replaced.

¹⁹ Occasionally, The Boarding School hosted even more short-term participants through school excursions, panel debates and concerts.

The performer-participants occupy the third major participatory level called The Staff. This level generally involves a small honorarium and daily obligations in the school. Besides engagement through respective Poetic Selves, The Staff occupy different Functions in the school. Most performer-participants are responsible for facilitating classes through a Teacher Function, and I was myself a Teacher during the last manifestation. The frame of a 'class' is thought of as a way to invite short-term participants into different practices in the school. Personally, I framed some of my classes as focus groups, some as research explorations, and some were created in collaboration with other performer-participants. Another common Function is referred to as The Evokers, and they guide short-term participants on their journey from arrival to exit through registration, pack-down and rituals. Besides these Functions, one or two performer-participants have the main responsibility to facilitate Students' donations of notebooks upon their departure as The Protectors of The Archive, and three to four performer-participants occupy the function of The Octopus; a peculiar figure of three women on a rolling chair that assigns classes in the school. Then there is the Headmistress occupied by The Sister (Gry) and The Link occupied by the project coordinator.

Apart from our individual Functions, we are also collectively responsible for facilitation of meals and gatherings in the school. The two daily gatherings were often talked about as opportunities to enhance 'poetry' and 'mystery' in the school. The Morning Gathering was generally dedicated to The Poetic Self exercise. The Evening Gatherings varied day to day, but were always facilitated by one or several Staff members, and they often centred around silent and slow interaction through eye-contact or touch. With regard to the meals, we always stand on the chairs and chant before the meals, as I depicted in the vignette, and we often eat in silence or without cutlery, as a way of enhancing the sense of an otherworldly space.

In the position of a reader who is an outsider to Sisters Academy, you may still be left with the question: But what do you *do*? If this is the case, I will ask you to possess yourself with patience, as practice in Sisters Academy is not easily depicted. Throughout the thesis, I hope to give you an understanding of the nuances of practice, but for now I simply wish to give you an idea of frames and kinds of participation in The Boarding School. Based on my elaboration so far, we see that performer-participation take place within physical, aesthetic, and conceptual frames, but also create, sustain and perform the frames. Or as Gry commented in relation to my inquiry into her idea of 'frame' in an interview situation: "The frame is also us [performer-participants]". In order to inquire into the interrelatedness between frames and performer-participants, I will look beyond a frame-participant-

divide and suggest the analytical orientation towards a social aesthetic landscape and community of practice.

Social aesthetics through practice

To take the first analytical step beyond a frame-participant divide, we can evoke the visual anthropologist David MacDougall's understanding of *social aesthetics* (1999). MacDougall understands *social aesthetics* as the landscape of characteristic objects and actions, which further culturally patterned sensory experiences and sensations of familiarity among locals in a given field (ibid.:5). MacDougall's awareness of aesthetic aspects of social life evolved through his long-term engagement with, and filmic study of, a boys' boarding school in Northern India called The Doon School. Based on fieldwork in this context, he emphasizes the prominence of social aesthetics in hyperaesthetic communities, understood as systematically ordered social aesthetic fields such as schools, religious orders or militaries (ibid.:4-5). When I initially watched MacDougall's filmic inquiry into a landscape of characteristic patterns in *The Doon School* (2000) – including ringing bells, shoe polishing, iron signs on trees and morning gym – I was immediately sent back to the aesthetic school life in Sisters Academy. In line with MacDougall's thinking, we recognize a landscape where red velvet and soundscape are put on the same footing as the idea of The Poetic Self, the guideline to speak English, the expression to go deeper, cat suits, slowness, or silent dinners. Here, I also see relevance in MacDougall's analogy to gastronomy, as he emphasises that the social aesthetic landscape not is a list of ingredients, but rather a totality of interrelated objects and actions (1999:5). At a stressful time at the end of the pre-production, the performer-participant and former Head of Production Tim presented what he called “a set design perspective of the magic of it”. He encouraged us to focus less on the small details and more on finishing practical work tasks (e.g. painting or draping). Because as he said: “the details won't be seen in the end, when everything comes together”.

Performance scholar Fischer-Lichte emphasises the importance of what she calls the “atmospheric space” in performance art events and associates it with the immediate impression we get as we enter a given space (2008:115). The word ‘atmosphere’ also appeared in my interview with Signe, who emphasised her initial impression of a particular Sisters Academy atmosphere, and the project coordinator have asserted that Sisters Academy is characterised by a melancholic and dark atmosphere (Senderovitz 2018:46,71). As participant in Sisters Academy, I find the idea of an atmospheric space intuitively meaningful, but I also find it hard to translate into written language.

Here, I find the idea of a social aesthetic landscape of interrelated objects and actions helpful to ascertain an understanding of the more elusive Sisters Academy atmosphere.

With reference to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, MacDougall suggests that we look at social aesthetics as the physical manifestations of embodied history and that we take it seriously in the same way as "commonly-recognized social forces of history, economics, politics, and ideology" (ibid.:5). But while MacDougall's thinking on social aesthetics sharpen our awareness of a landscape of characteristic Sisters Academy patterns – deriving from uneven replication of objects and repetition of actions – it does not provide us with analytical tools to understand the process by which such physical manifestations of embodied history unfold. In line with critique on how Bourdieu's theory of practice is objectivist (cf. Jenkins 2014:47; Maggio 2017:53; Wenger 1998:289), MacDougall's writing gives the impression of subjects that more or less unconsciously internalise and reproduce social aesthetic structures in the field (1999:14). In this context, I find it important to note that performer-participants continuously engage to maintain and negotiate Sisters Academy. To understand this continuous process of engagement, we can draw on the analytical concept of a *community of practice*.

Wenger understands a *community of practice* as a community that has practice as its source of coherence in the sense that it involves *mutual engagement*, *a joint enterprise* and *a shared repertoire* (Wenger 1998:72-73). *Mutual engagement* refers to the concrete act of doing things together, which includes participants' ability to engage in actions and negotiate meanings with one another (ibid.:73-75). *A joint enterprise* refers to the idea that mutual engagement over time generates a shared understanding of practice. In Wenger's thinking, *a joint enterprise* doesn't refer to a clearly stated goal but rather to relations of mutual accountability, which include continuous negotiations of what is important and why, what to do and what not to do, what to pay attention to and what to ignore, what to display and what to withhold (ibid.:81). Lastly, *a shared repertoire* refers to the resources that a community of practice develops over time, and this includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, etc. (ibid.:82-83). Wenger's idea of *a shared repertoire* appears similar to MacDougall's idea of social aesthetics. Yet differently from MacDougall, Wenger emphasises that *a shared repertoire* only matters inasmuch as it is applied by participants who pursue a joint enterprise (ibid.:82). What is more, Wenger does not focus on the physical manifestations of embodied history, but rather on "shared histories of learning" that manifest through particular communities of practice (ibid.:86).

I find the idea of Sisters Academy as a community of practice meaningful in relation to my focus on performer-participants who manifest The Staff in The Boarding School. The performer-participants are the only participants who mutually engage in a joint enterprise and shared repertoire for an extended period of time. While The Visitings and The Students are included in daily school life of meals, sensuous explorations, and gatherings for a temporary period of time, they are excluded from key negotiations of Sisters Academy-practice that unfold in preparatory phases, Staff Meetings, and daily school interaction. If we follow Wenger, the participant positions of Students and Visitings can be seen as peripheral as they give legitimate access to parts of the community of practice in Sisters Academy without providing full membership (ibid.:117).

From a perspective of Sisters Academy as a community of practice centred around the performer-group, other participatory groups come across as even more marginal. During the production process in 2017, the production team and the employees at Den Frie only took part in the pre- and post-production, and their engagement with The Boarding School world was limited²⁰. We can regard these groups as respective communities of practice that existed in close proximity and continuous interaction with the performer-group during the preparation phase. Other marginal participants were the chefs, cleaning personnel, and washing company. These participants had fundamental work responsibilities during the manifestation, but they left as soon as they had finished their work tasks and were not thought of as part of The Staff.

The production workers, museum employees, chefs, and cleaning personnel were not only marginal in the sense that they didn't have full access to the performer-participants' community of practice; they were also marginal in the sense that their everyday life clothes and practices didn't fit in the social aesthetic landscape of Sisters Academy. For example, this was the case when the cleaning personnel appeared in branded T-shirts or when the chefs brought food in green plastic boxes and small-talked about big tits in Danish, for instance.

To shed light on this perspective, we can evoke Mary Douglas' understanding of 'matter out of place' as unclean disorder that doesn't fit within an ordered context (Douglas 1996 [1966]:37). A central point of departure in Douglas' thinking is the idea that impurity is a culturally relative concept that exists by virtue of its ambiguous position in relation to ordered worlds that people seek to sustain (ibid.:2, 35). Inspired by Douglas, we may think branded T-shirts, green plastic boxes, and Danish small-talk as matter out of place in relation to the aesthetically clean world of Sisters Academy.

²⁰ Some participants from these groups took part as Students in the school for one or several days.

According to Douglas, matter out of place is potentially dangerous as it may threaten cultural coherency, and she elaborates on some of the strategies by which people limit the danger of matter out of place; for instance, re-classification, avoidance, or physical control (ibid.:3, 39-40). Through this analytical perspective, we may think of the filtering of window panels as an act of physical control by which daylight and aesthetics from the outside world were limited as matter out of place. But what about the employees from Den Frie, who had to continue their administrative work during the manifestation? These employees entered through the main entrance in the morning and went straight to a secluded work office, as they knew that everyday life clothes, Danish interaction and computer work interfered with the aesthetics of Sisters Academy. From a perspective of matter out of place, it appears that these employees collaborated to limit their inappropriate appearance. It is important to note that Sisters Academy depended on these marginal participants; we needed food supplies from the outside world, regular washing of bed linen, people to manage the museum building, ticket sales, and to contact in the case of emergency situations. We can thus think of these participants as both necessary and potentially dangerous links to the outside world.

And we should not underestimate the latter, seeing that the coherent otherworldly space was at stake. As Gry emphasised in an interview situation after the recent manifestation: “We can’t have iPhone adapters or Fanta bottles lying around (...) because it’s vulnerable. Everyday life has all of this. Then you have *one* wall. And on the other side of this wall, we want people to explore on new premises because we want to allow them to have a journey into the sensuous”.

We step in

The emic expression that “we step in” is often articulated by performer-participants at the point of transition from pre-production to manifestation, and it relates to a collective and intentional effort to evoke an otherworldly realm of mystery and poetry. To some extent, we can think of the expression “we step in” as a performative utterance, as it not only describes a shift of attention, but also enacts it (Austin 1975:6-7). However, the transformative shift from ordinary practicalities to an otherworldly realm also depends on actions that indicate a ‘step in’. When the manifestation begins, we follow the guidelines in the school; we start speaking English, we de-brand personal belongings (e.g. toothbrush, shampoo, medicine) with tape, and we remove inappropriate items (e.g. computers, travel cards, bags). Moreover, we step in to our poetic selves – an act that may imply changing of clothes, attitude, walking style, or way of communicating – and we start to call each other by poetic self-names. When we ‘step in’, we exercise a ‘poetic gaze’, which transforms set-design into poetry. The emic idea of

‘the poetic gaze’ refers to an intentional effort to look at the world in a poetic way, and it is thought to be something you both choose and practice over time.

To shed light on performer-participants’ step in, I see relevance in Gregory Bateson (1972) and Erving Goffman’s (1974) thinking on framed sociality. Bateson introduces the idea of *meta-communicative frames* to account for how social beings come to distinguish and navigate non-verbally between play and seriousness; a thinking that owes debt to play theories presented by Huizinga (1949) and Caillois (2001 [1958]). According to Bateson, we manage to separate play from seriousness through exchange of *meta-communicative messages* that signal: this is play and thus not seriousness (1972:178). Inspired by Bateson, Goffman introduces the concept of *keying* to account for “processes of transcription” when ordinary activities operate as models that are transformed in ways so that participants respond differently to the question: What is it that is going on here? (1974:44,46,58). Goffman elaborates on what he finds to be typical keys in society, and these include the key of make-belief, the key of contest, and the key of ceremony (ibid.:48). As example, ‘the key of contest’ refers to sports such as boxing, which are transformed activities modelled on fighting, fleeing or hunting (ibid.:56).

With regard to Sisters Academy, I find it misleading to say that performer-participants step into a *key of otherworld*, as I don’t regard the manifestation as an event that is keyed on any ordinary activity model. However, we have seen that ‘the otherworldly’ generally is contrasted to ‘everyday life’ in ‘the outside world’. Based on my elaboration so far, I thus suggest the perspective that performer-participants step into *the otherworld* in the sense of a social aesthetic landscape where extraordinary logics, patterns, and meta-communicative messages prevail. I suggest that the *step in* implies a shift in social interaction as we start exchanging meta-communicative messages such as *now we are in a mode of mystery and poetry* through attitudes and ways of interacting with each other. The performer-participants who are used to the otherworld of Sisters Academy are not confused by the act of chanting on chairs, but take it seriously as a part of practice.

In this context, it is important to distinguish intentions from practice. In practice, the transition from a practical mode of being into a poetic mode of being doesn’t happen at once, even if we say that “we step in” at the point of transition between pre-production and manifestation. In practice, it takes time before we no longer speak Danish by accident, before we spontaneously call each other by Poetic Self-names or use the alternative number system. With this processual aspect in mind, I will return to the perspective of a community of practice where performer-participants pursue

and constantly negotiate a joint enterprise. Through this orientation, I suggest the perspective that we continuously strive to step into the otherworld through negotiation and maintenance of Sisters Academy.

Uphold the space

When Sisters Academy opened to the public on the 19th of September, the transformation of the museum building into The Boarding School was in theory completed. Yet as soon as we waved goodbye to the pre-production, Gry directed our attention to the beautifully polished mirror tables and stressed that this was “how it should look before every meal”. The inevitable fact that the otherworldly space did not maintain itself only became more evident as the manifestation unfolded. Issues of maintenance was regularly addressed in The Staff Meeting, which was a half hour meeting dedicated to practical announcements, discussions, and planning of collective gatherings. It was the only time of day when we met in the performer-group to organize and improve practice in the school. During these meetings, The Sister often reminded us to “uphold the space”. This reminder was often articulated in relation to The Staff Dormitory – a place with beds and personal belongings that was rarely visited by Students and Visitings. To inquire into the issue of space maintenance, we can take a look at The Sister’s comment below:

“I keep finding Irma [Danish supermarket] bags and knækbrød [crispbread]. It turns into a backstage – and it is not. You can have stuff but just pack it nicely so it fits in the frame and aesthetics of the academy”

In this comment, The Sister uses the word “backstage” to simultaneously characterize and condemn the current state of affairs in The Dormitory: “It turns into a backstage – and it is not”. We were often reminded that informal backstage-areas belonged to the realm of theatre and not to “lived school life” in the academy. The last part of The Sister’s comment on The Dormitory is worth noting, as it relates to a general focus on aesthetic appearance: “you can have stuff but just pack it nicely so it fits in the frame and aesthetics of the academy”. The comment indicates a concern about clean aesthetics, and here it is Irma bags and crispbread that are aesthetically unfit matter out of place.

The reminder to uphold the space was often expressed in relational contrast to ‘everyday life’ or ‘the outside world’, and this was also the case with regard to social interaction. It was with reference to everyday life norms that Staff members generally agreed that ‘hygge’ [Danish word for

comfortable conviviality], ‘small talk’ and ‘private talk’ – talk about personal lives from the outside world – should be minimized in The Boarding School. When I asked The Nectar to elaborate on her critical approach to small-talk, she expressed: “sometimes it’s so surprising, like a bodily feeling of I don’t want to know this (...) it’s hard to pinpoint because I try to ignore it. I just leave”. The Untamed expressed her critical attitude in a Staff Meeting by taking exception to a Danish folk high school-tradition, which is abundant in cosiness and talk on personal lives: “I don’t want a højskole [Danish folk high school]. I want a boarding school”. If we regard small-talk and *hygge* as matter out of place in Sisters Academy, we may think of silence and blindfolding as strategies to limit it. A relaxed small-talk atmosphere was, for example, avoided through ritualization of meals into silent dinners, and the collective decision that short-term participants should be blindfolded if they wanted to go outside to smoke was partly motivated by a wish to limit small-talk, *hygge*, and disturbing city life aesthetics.

As a variation of the expression to “uphold the space”, The Sister often reminded us to “uphold the mystery” or to “uphold the poetry”. While the focus on mystery and poetry was explicit among performer-participants, the terms were rarely explained. In two different interview situations, one with Gry and one with the performer-participant Erik, my interlocutors mentioned “mystery” as a key aspect of the academy. When I then tryingly asked them “what is mystery?”, they both responded that ‘mystery’ lies in the fact that we don’t understand it. They also both threw the question back at me, as if I was just as qualified to answer the impossible question as they were.

In rare moments, common sense concepts were explicitly negotiated in the performer-group, such as when The (w)Hole openly asked: “I would like to hear your thoughts on mystery?”. In addition to this question, she shared her own slight confusion about how she was supposed to ‘uphold the mystery’ without acting a character. This perspective resonated with The Mortal who continued: “By saying that I have to uphold the mystery, it feels like I have to put something on”. These comments were not immediately followed-up upon and the discussion went in another direction. But when The Seamstress after a while openly asked the group for help on how to use her experienced tiredness and exhaustion in a performative way, The Sister commented: “To me, mystery is not distance, but also intimacy. Instead of withdrawing, you can bring your bed out here and be a sleeping image. You can ask passers-by to leave messages”. The Seamstress then replied: “Oh, that is beautiful. Thank you for that”. The (w)Hole and The Mortal’s comments, along with The Sister’s concrete example of what mystery could look like, are not only exceptions to common practice; they

further illustrate a potential conflict between the intention to ‘uphold the mystery’ and the intention to avoid theatrical role playing. Or as an emic saying goes: “We are not pretending”.

We are not pretending

In continuation of the general dissociation of Sisters Academy from traditional theatre worlds, The Sister often emphasised that “we are not pretending” and called attention to “lived life” and “organic behaviour” in the performer-group. According to performance scholar and director Eugenio Barba, the term organic is often highlighted in performance fields to foreground work that appears alive, credible, and coherent (Barba 2016:306).

The focus on non-pretending in Sisters Academy corresponds to the idea of The Poetic Self as neither a character nor a role, but our “inner inherent poetic potential” which we express and expand (Sisters Academy 2018d). The emic idea of inner inherent potential is not only comparable with general discourses in performance art fields, but also with Western discourses on self and authenticity. The idea of an inner self has roots in Christianity and can be traced back to Augustine’s thinking seventeen hundred years ago (Taylor 1989:129-31), while the idea that we all have inherent potential links to The Romantic Period, and particularly Herder’s idea of an original self, along with Rousseau’s focus on inner voice as a path to freedom (Taylor 1992:25-29). Thinkers such as Herder and Rousseau have inspired the cultural moral valuation of authentic – as in natural, sincere, genuine, true and real – behaviour in Western societies, along with the understanding of such behaviour as a matter of correspondence between inner states and outer expressions (Fillitz & Saris 2013:4; Keane 2002:74-75; Lindholm 2008; Trilling 1972).

I have only heard The Sister verbalise the expression that “we are not pretending”, but I find it to be a general and valued code of conduct among performer-participants that we follow our impulses; not pretending to be interested if we feel otherwise and not engaging in situations that we are uninterested in. In continuation of this understanding, I have come to think of the phrase *we are not pretending* as a meta-communicative message that is part of the otherworld.

The importance of non-pretending struck me as particularly important during the last manifestation, and I think this relates to my position as anthropologist doing fieldwork. In line with my elaboration in Chapter 1, I regularly found myself split between different concerns and unable to be truly present in the moment – or to “go with the flow”. Such fragmented experiences could occur in conversations with interlocutors, when I focused on key phrases that I wanted to remember and write down afterwards, or when I stayed up late at night to observe a social situation that I found

analytically interesting, thus ignoring my body signals of tiredness. While such divided presence may come across as a natural part of fieldwork, or of life in general, it contradicted with my understanding of appropriate engagement in Sisters Academy. My ambivalent feeling about these situations spurred both methodological refinements and reflection upon the ambiguous position of an anthropologist on fieldwork. Importantly, it also sharpened my analytical awareness towards the significance of non-pretending in Sisters Academy.

In line with the explicit and meta-communicative message that *we are not pretending*, I have come to think of the cultural acceptance of, and positive attitude towards, emotional expressions as part of the social aesthetic Sisters Academy landscape. As The Sister uttered before a school portrait on one of the last days: “In a poetic portrait, you don’t say smile. You have exactly the face you want to”. The acceptance of emotional expressions was addressed by three performer-participants, who had a conversation around ‘intensity and emotions’ as part of the internal reflection process. It was triggered by Cecilie’s impulse: “I think a thing that is so beautiful to me about Sisters Academy, and this space that we created, it was that *every* emotion was welcomed”. The other two performer-participants concurred with this statement, and Alexi added that people “in the outside world or in everyday life” are either scared of emotions or tries to fix them instead of giving them space. Ann then recalled a moment when she had a positive experience with sadness in The Boarding School:

I was sitting outside smoking and crying and I just didn’t feel good at all. I felt so lonely. And so The Dramaturg came and she was also crying. So she sat down next to me and said: Okay, let’s just be sad together. And we hugged each other and we cried. And she was crying in my lap and I was crying. And then we both just split up! And wow... It helped so much. Instead of you know: You’ll be fine – calm down. Then it was like: Let’s just be in it together. And it was so nice for me.

During another interview situation, Erik elaborated on his experience that there was space for emotions in Sisters Academy. As he said, it was “okay to express them”. Then he recalled a situation when he had been crying in The Dining Hall. He was sitting on the carpet with a box filled with memories, in the form of notes and objects, and then started crying. He recounted how he was crying in both sorrow, happiness, and thankfulness – and that the crying was supported by the music on the radio. He didn’t know who watched his crying, but he sensed movement in the room and knew that

people were sitting behind him. He moreover knew that “this also works as performance”, as he said²¹. Emotional expressions are thus not matter out of place that belong to a back stage area, but rather valued matter that ‘works’ in a Sisters Academy performance practice, where “organic” and “lived life” is prioritized.

Practical key shifts

Based on my analysis so far, I argue that Sisters Academy is a practice where performer-participants step into an otherworld characterized by clean aesthetics, poetry, mystery, and non-pretending. Through the perspective of a dynamic community of practice, I have shed light on how the step in implies continuous maintenance and negotiations of this otherworld through removal of inappropriate items, abstaining from small-talk, enhancing a sense of poetry and mystery, or emotional expressions. We have furthermore seen that the mutual engagement with, and negotiations of, the otherworld as a joint enterprise not only happen non-verbally, but also through verbal discussions in The Staff Meeting.

In emic vocabulary, The Staff Meeting is full of ‘meta-talk’. The term ‘meta-talk’ is generally used among performer-participants to refer to talk about performance practice; what we do, how we do something, and why we do as we do. Meta-talk doesn’t figure as matter out of place in the same way as small-talk, but it is my understanding that most performer-participants avoid, or limited their use of, meta-talk in respect and favour of poetic and sensuous explorations during manifestations – except in The Staff Meetings. Altogether, the focus on efficient planning and talk-based communication in the meetings deviated from the overall social aesthetics of silence, slowness, poetry, and mystery. But how does The Staff Meeting then relate to this otherworld?

In some respects, The Staff Meetings shared similarities with the daily talk-based meetings that were part of the pre-production, and I thus find it relevant to consider *the practical meeting* as a well-established meta-communicative frame, which performer-participants recognise and agree on during Staff Meetings. Such interpretation is intuitively meaningful in relation to Bateson and Goffman’s focus on temporary events such as play fights, theatre plays, competitions, and ceremonials. To some

²¹ When I later talked to Erik about this quote, he kindly asked me to add some explanation to avoid misunderstandings. It was important for him to stress that no superficiality was linked to his behaviour in the Dining Hall, but that this was part of “the constantly ongoing performative manifestation”. As he noted: “being experienced with immersive performance, I maintain awareness of my presence as it develops in time and space, and of the fact that it affects other people”.

extent, the entire manifestation is a temporary event, but it is also a durational process wherein a variety of shorter events unfold. For one month, The Boarding School becomes everyday life to The Staff, and as Goffman reminds us, everyday life is full of frames and keying (1974:21-23, 562). It is thus possible to change perception from an understanding of The Boarding School as an extraordinary event that figures on an ordinary ground of everyday life in the outside world, to an understanding of The Boarding school as the everyday life-ground on which The Staff Meeting emerges as an extraordinary event. I find the idea of The Staff Meeting as a temporary event that unfolds according to a meta-communicative frame of *practical meeting*, which temporarily suspends the the otherworld, to be an interesting outset for further inquiry into the nuances of Sisters Academy practice.

In my understanding, The Staff Meeting is first and foremost perceived as a practical necessity; a required forum to organize, discuss, and meet internally in the performer-group during manifestations. In the beginning of the last manifestation, I experienced a rather tense atmosphere around the meetings. Some performer-participants were frustrated about the short time to discuss important issues, and others seemed uninterested or reluctant towards the talk-based and practical meeting forum. But as the manifestation progressed, I sensed a gradual change into a more relaxed meeting atmosphere. This atmosphere was partly generated by humour and joking. A frequent outset for joking was the food. The low quality of food was a shared problem throughout the manifestation, and the general attitude slowly shifted from frustration and attempts for improvement to endurance and joking about the absurdity of the situation. As The Wild commented one day: “I really like silent dinners, but the problem with silence is that you really taste the food”. Another day it was The Gardener who shared that he had realized something positive about the food; namely that “it is not a subject for conversation”. It was also The Gardener who jokingly commented that no Students had “been expelled yet” – a joke that was followed up by the The Well who suggested: “Let’s do it! [expel some Students]”.

The prevalence of humour and joking suggests that The Staff Meeting not only unfolded according to a frame of practical meeting but also with reference to meta-communicative messages such as *now we can make fun* or *now we take a self-ironic attitude to practice*. This ironic attitude was immediately replaced by seriousness as we ended the meetings. It was then a collective effort to sharpen our attention towards poetry and mystery before The Evening Gathering with the short-term participants. The importance to “be tight” and to “embody a strong collective intention” was often articulated at this point of transition, and we would sometimes gather in a circle with closed eyes to

hold hands for some minutes. In a meta-communicative perspective, there was a clear key shift into The Evening Gathering, and I got the momentary sense of turning on in order to perform for someone; namely the short-term participants.

In comparison with The Evening Gathering, it is tempting to conclude that The Staff Meeting unfolded according to a meta-communicative frame of backstage and figured as a relaxing break from the requiring otherworld. However, we should be careful with an interpretation of The Evening Gathering as frontstage and The Staff Meeting as backstage²². I have already elaborated on how theatre analogies are avoided in Sisters Academy and how we strive to ‘uphold the space’ – not to perform on stage. Apart from this overall orientation, The Staff Meeting was thought of as part of daily school life; we didn’t intentionally ‘step out’ of our poetic selves and we conducted the meetings in a central area of the academy.

From a perspective of The Staff Meeting as backstage, it would moreover be tempting to see the meeting as a meta-practice separated from performance practice. But as Wenger importantly reminds us from a perspective of social practice, talk and theory about practice do not figure in an abstract realm separated from practice but are rather an essential part of practice (1999:48). If we follow Wenger’s thinking, we may regard The Staff Meeting as a forum where performer-participants daily engage with, and negotiate, a joint enterprise and shared repertoire. By means of narratives, humour, and mutual accountability, the verbal meeting interaction not only refer to, but also stimulate, a common ground of practice.

When it doesn’t work

In a meeting just before the manifestation began, Gry acknowledged that Sisters Academy “actually is a very difficult field to navigate in”. Through my elaboration in this chapter, we see that performer-participation requires ability to step out of a practical mode of being and into a poetic mode of being, to uphold the mystery without pretending, to avoid relaxed everyday life-interaction while practicing organic academy life, and to navigate in key shifts between Staff Meeting and Evening Gathering. I will inquire into the process by which such abilities are acquired in Chapter 4, but firstly elaborate on the serious risk that we do not manage to make it ‘work’.

²² See Goffman (1959) for elaboration on staged interaction and conceptualization of *back stage* and *front stage*.

The expression that “it doesn’t work” was particularly frequent at the beginning of the last manifestation. It was for example used in relation to The Staff Meeting. We initially conducted the meeting in The Grand Hall but then changed location to The Octopus space to make it less excluded from the rest of the school. The decision to relocate the meeting was taken after The Sister’s worries upon her late arrival at a meeting one day. It was with restless energy and uneasiness in her voice that she hastily shared her observations on her way to the meeting. She had seen Students upstairs “disenchanted the space” by speaking Danish and “peeking into tableaux”. And she concluded: “It doesn’t work if Students are left on their own”. The Sister’s comments on how Students were disenchanting the space by speaking Danish and peeking into tableaux parallel the orientation towards an otherworldly and mysterious space. In this context, the peeking into tableaux spoils the intention that Students only get access to the tableaux through participation in classes, along with Signe’s intention to enhance a sense of secrecy through identical draping design. The Sister’s comment also directs attention to how the otherworldly space does not uphold itself but requires performer-participants who know how to uphold it. In addition to the relocation of the meeting space, it was decided that we should take shifts in being with The Students during meetings.

But what happens if it doesn’t work? As The Sister’s worried attitude indicates, it is a serious matter if it doesn’t work, and this was particularly the case with regard to the gatherings. Expressions such as “it doesn’t work” or “we didn’t crack it” were often articulated, both by The Sister and other Staff members, in relation to The Evening Gatherings at the beginning of the manifestation. In one of my informal conversations with The Sister, she punctuated the importance that the gatherings were “strong”, since everyone was assembled at this time of the day. And she added: “When it has to do with the frame of the academy, it is very vulnerable”. In this context, it is worth noting that the collective experimentation around the gatherings in the beginning of the manifestation gradually was replaced by increasing repetition of particular gatherings that were thought to ‘work’. This change of approach may be seen as a strategy to avoid the risk embedded in experimentation; namely that it doesn’t work.

In this Chapter, I have inquired into the question of how Sisters Academy is created and maintained in relation to ideas of ‘the otherworldly’. I have shed light on the effort to create and maintain Sisters Academy as a coherent, aesthetically clean, and mystical otherworldly space in contrast to everyday life patterns in the outside world. I argued that phones, sunlight, branded items, and small-talk are dangerous matter out of place in a social aesthetic landscape of poetic selves, darkness, and non-

verbal interaction. Through the perspective of Sisters Academy as a community of practice, I argued that the step into an otherworld of clean aesthetics, poetry, mystery, and non-pretending is an ongoing endeavour in practice, which is maintained and negotiated through concrete practices, exchange of meta-communicative messages, and meta-talk in The Staff Meeting. Lastly, I have touched upon the challenge and importance to make it work in practice. Naturally, Gry/The Sister was in a vulnerable position and had much at stake if it didn't work. In an interview-situation, she emphasised that Sisters Academy is her "life project" and that she regards herself as the protecting "ambassador of the frame". With that being said, we should not underestimate performer-participants' motivation to make it work and this motivation is closely linked to a wish to 'go deeper'.

Chapter 3: Towards a sense of deeper living

In the introduction, I directed attention to how the articulate expression ‘to go deeper’ was linked to a longing and motivation to engage with Sisters Academy. But how can we understand this sense of something deeper and how does it relate to Sisters Academy? In this chapter, I will inquire into the research question of how the expression ‘to go deeper’ relates to experienced processes in Sisters Academy.

Longing to go deeper

The first time I heard the expression ‘to go deeper’ was during The Boarding School in Malmö in 2015, when The Mechanic said that he wanted “to go deeper”. Since then, I have noticed the expression frequently among performer-participants and since my encounter with MacDougall’s work, I have come to think of it as part of the social aesthetic landscape in the academy. Retrospectively, I find it curious that I did not question The Mechanic’s wish ‘to go deeper’ back then, but immediately identified the word as familiar to me. When I later recognized the word deeper in anthropological studies on magical practice in England, I noted how the expression figured as an unexplained descriptive term on both an emic and etic level (Greenwood 2009:31-32, 65; Luhrmann 1986:177). But why is the expression ‘to go deeper’ so articulate in Sisters Academy?

The idea of Sisters Academy as an extraordinary opportunity to ‘go deeper’ clearly appears from performer-participants’ use of the expression. In a collective gathering prior to the manifestation, Stefan shared: “I just can’t wait to go deep. It is something I don’t really do normally”. The Nectar addressed the subject in a focus group discussion on small-talk during the manifestation: “Small talk is so disruptive for me – because I want to go deeper. This is a free space for me where I can focus”. Towards the end of the manifestation, it was The Melt who reminded me that only one week remained of the manifestation. This was frighteningly short time in her point of view, as she felt that her “journey” had just begun, or maybe not even started yet, and she really wanted “to go deep”. The Melt’s talk about a “journey” also directs our attention towards the processual aspect of going deeper. I considered this processual aspect in a red velvet sofa together with the performer-participant The Contiguous – a former anthropology student that I initially entered Sisters Academy with in 2015. When I articulated my curiosity about the idea of going deeper, she questioned whether we know when we go deeper or if we only know it retrospectively after it has happened. We also talked about whether the experience of something ‘deeper’ relates to a sense of self or rather involves a dissolution of the self and an act of being absorbed in time and space.

The change in experience

When I think back to the times when I have been tempted to use the word ‘deep’ about an experience in Sisters Academy, I find a noteworthy pattern that relates to processes of engagement. Specifically, I have often entered a social event with a sense of detachment or pretending but then suddenly found myself deeply engaged in the event – or perhaps more accurately, in what I experienced as a different event. In the hope of reaching a better understanding of how the sense of something ‘deeper’ evolves in Sisters Academy, and how we can understand such sensation, I will draw forth a situation that, from my point of view, involved a change from pretending to depth.

The situation unfolded in a performance workshop by the end of the pre-production, at a time when there was little surplus energy in a tired performer-group that had to be ready for the manifestation in a couple of days. The workshop followed Gry’s presentation of the final interactivity design, and most performer-participants seemed occupied with practical details. According to the schedule, we were supposed to temporarily step into our Poetic Selves and participate in a workshop facilitated by the performer-participant The Seer before lunchtime. As the moderator of the day, I told everyone to leave the Grand Hall, so that The Seer could prepare the space, and then to come back in their Poetic Self within fifteen minutes. Below is my narrative of how the situation unfolded:

As I run upstairs to fetch the raw silk clothes that I wear when I manifest my Poetic Self Flow, I realize that fifteen minutes is too short time for a successful transition from a mode of practicalities to a mode of poetry. When I return to The Grand Hall after fifteen minutes, The Seer is still preparing the space with candle-lights and only a few performer-participants have re-entered. Some have brought their Poetic Self dress to The Grand Hall and are in the midst of changing their clothes in the corner. In hope to further the transition in to a ritualized poetic space, I dim the lights in the ceiling and put on the soundscape.

When The Seer makes the sign to begin and we start to gather in a circle, I sense fragmentation and absent-mindedness in the group. Through low-voiced and simple instructions, The Seer invites us to listen to our body and let it move in space. At first, I sense restlessness in myself and others, but after a while I start to ease into the moment. Gradually the ritual unfolds and several performer-participants start to use the space more freely while The Seer draws back as facilitator. Most interaction is non-verbal: Some start to feed each other with port wine and liquorice from a wooden bowl that belongs to The

Ship, others engage in a spinning dance with colourful fabric, and some are closely intertwined on the red carpet, where they move together at a slow pace. I leave the centre of the ritual and curl myself on the staircase, from where I can observe how the social situation unfolds and keep track of time. I notice that other participants have taken observant positions, and some are lying half asleep by the walls. Now I realize how tired I am. For a moment I give in to the tiredness and let my senses be hypnotized by the soundscape and uneven repetition of interacting bodies in space.

When I return from my doze, all shapes and colours have sharpened, and I sense a condensation of energy in the air. My eyes are caught by The Seer and The Invitation who appear engaged in an intense emotional encounter. As they separate, I follow The Invitation who is shivering all over her body and eventually sits down in front of the three women in black who manifest The Octopus. I enjoy this moment of healing beauty when The Octopus peacefully meets The Invitation; one woman cleans the air by waving a fan and another woman invites The Invitation to begin deep breathing. Then The Invitation starts to shake more heavily and her breathing becomes hectic and disturbed. The situation is intensified by the witnessing eyes of everyone, and I sense that we are reaching the edge. For a moment, it feels like the air is perfectly still and intensely vibrating at the same time. Then in the spur of the moment, The Wild jumps at The Invitation and the accumulated energy finds outlet in a wrestling fight of aggression, while the rest of us start breathing again. Eventually, The Invitation surrenders on the ground and tears off her clothes as if it was blocking her from breathing. Without hesitation, we all draw to the magnetic field around her and place our hands on the half-naked body, which is gradually releasing through uncontrolled contractions. In silent agreement, we mark the end of the ritual.

The situational description depicts my experience of a radical change from a sense of pretending to a sense of something ‘deeper’ within the course of an hour. It depicts my subjective experience, but it also draws forth a shared moment in the performer-group. When we shortly gathered to reflect upon the ritual afterwards, The Invitation was the first to express that it had made a strong impression on her, and that she felt relieved and thankful for our support. Other performer-participants used the word “strong” and “beautiful” about their experiences and some preferred not to verbalize the experience at all. One of the last comments was Erik’s finding that “we just witnessed authenticity”.

Before I inquire into my experience of going deeper, I will shortly elaborate on how the ritual unfolded through what we may call framed improvisation. We can view the ritual as a *performed* and not *preformed* event, in the sense that it didn't unfold according to a pre-made structure but rather evolved through participants' interactions along the way (Sjørølev 2007:12). In the given workshop, it is worth noting The Seer's limited facilitation, and we may think of performer-participants' familiarity with the social aesthetic landscape and a shared repertoire by the end of the pre-production as a generating force. Everyone had acquired ability to engage through a shared repertoire of poetic and bodily exploration, expressivity of emotions, along with non-verbal communication through touch and playfulness.

To concretize the idea of framed improvisation, we can take a look at the fight between The Wild and The Invitation. The fight happened spontaneously, as it was neither planned nor practiced beforehand, but it happened within a social aesthetic landscape where fighting and aggressiveness were not uncommon. I even had the impression that such engagement was appreciated as alternative to the prevalence of softness and silence. Furthermore, the fight was framed by a key of *play fight* that most of us recognize from childhood (cf. Goffman 1974:40-41). Fighting is generally not a tool to hurt each other in Sisters Academy, but rather an engaging endeavour in itself. With that being said, it would be a mistake to conclude that the fight between The Wild and The Invitation was non-serious and just for fun. Performer-participants often engage in fight situations with serious intentions to transform current emotional or relational states. In this context, we may look at The Wild's fight proposal as an attempt to help The Invitation, and we may regard the situation as some sort of serious play – corresponding with the meta-communicative message that *we are not pretending*.

The sense of something deeper

My experience of the situation depicted above was remarkable in the sense that I gradually got a sense of unification; a feeling that everything and everyone came together. My attention was completely focused and my senses alert. To shed light on this allegedly 'deep' experience, we can evoke the concept of *flow*, which initially was coined by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and later elaborated by Victor Turner (1982, 1986). 'Flow' is thought to be the "holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement" (Csikszentmihalyi in Turner 1982:55). In a state of flow, we become one with moment and the moment becomes the only thing that matters, whereby we might lose sense of time and our individual selves (Turner 1982:56-57). This perspective is curious in relation to the situation in mind, where the moment somehow transcended the fixed time schedule,

which had been so present in my mind to start with. As the situation unfolded, I momentarily forgot my moderator-responsibility to keep track of time, and consequently, we were half an hour late for lunch. The stated flow-sensation of holistic totality and of being one with the moment was also present in my experience. As the ritual unfolded, my self-awareness was somehow overshadowed by the moment I shared with “the witnessing eyes of everyone” and I eventually had the experience of acting as a collective body, as it appears from the account: “Without hesitation, we all draw to the magnetic field around her and place our hands on the half-naked body (...) In silent agreement, we mark the end of the ritual”. But how did this state occur?

My sense of depth did not appear immediately but evolved through the course of an hour. In a similar vein, the passing of time appears to be a generating force in Edith Turner’s recount of her absorption in a curative ritual among the Ndembu in Zambia: “You simply clap with the drums, and clap *hard*. All the rest falls into place. Your whole body becomes deeply involved in the rhythm, and all reaches a unity” (Turner in Greenwood 2009:123, original italics). However, we should be careful not to conclude that flow states simply depend on the passing of time. In line with my previous note on how the ritual did not unfold magically by itself but through our mutual engagement in a shared practice, Turner emphasises how experiential flow states in ritual settings depend on the participant’s “will to participate” (1982:56). This emphasis parallels Edward Schieffelin’s performance approach to Kaluli rituals in Papua New Guinea, and his argument on how “the performance drains away and the séance collapses” if people are unresponsive or unwilling to participate (1985:717). Following on from this perspective, I find it reasonable that my flow experience also depended on my positive attitude towards the situation; an attitude that enabled me to follow The Seer’s instructions with patience and gradually “ease into the moment”. And with the passing of time, my perspective of the entire situation changed; I no longer experienced the social situation as pretend play but had the sense that something quite authentic was going on.

It was not me but Erik who concluded that “we just witnessed authenticity”. I did not inquire into Erik’s perception of authenticity, but I share his descriptive account of the moment. In my experience, all interaction appeared authentic by the end of the ritual, as I did not sense discrepancy between participants’ inner states and outer expressions (see p.37). However importantly, my experience of authenticity was not simply a matter of individuals’ behaviour. Rather, it had to do with an experience of the moment and everything around me as somehow more real or alive. As I write: “all shapes and colours have sharpened, and I sense a condensation of energy in the air”.

According to play theorist Huizinga, we often enter a given play field with a strong sense that ‘we pretend’, but as we get more absorbed in the play situation, we come to experience it as very real and serious (1949:8). But how does engagement relate to judgements of authenticity? *Hot authenticity* has been suggested as a concept to account for individually ascribed authenticity that bears on emotional engagement rather than on rational evaluation or fixed criteria (cf. Funk 2015: 20–21; Schulze 2017:43; Selwyn 1996:23). Such concept finds ethnographic grounding in Schieffelin’s descriptions on how participants become “deeply involved” in emotional fields of weeping, laughter, and fearful alertness through songs and storytelling during Kaluli séances (1985:719). Schieffelin argues that as long as participants’ attention is focused in these séances, everything that happens is perceived to be real; including peculiar sounds outside the ritual space, which serve as verification of evil spirits nearby (ibid.). A similar perspective is found in Inger Sjørøsløv’s study on how successfully performed Candomblé rituals in Brazil generate sentiments of authenticity that are linked to holistic social integration and make the audience accept the Orixas [gods] as real (2013:119).

The subjective evaluation of something as authentic has also been related to intense sensory stimulation in performance art events (Schulze 2017:135) and in extreme sport. The anthropologist Charles Lindholm elaborates on how people seek out intense and hyper-real experiences through voluntary high-risk ‘edgework’ activities such as skydiving, mountain climbing and off-road motorcycling (Lindholm 2008:48-50; see also Lyng 2005). Edgework-activities require full concentration and generate adrenaline rushes that stimulate strong physical sensations, intense emotional states and experiences of becoming one with the moment. As a free jumper puts it: “Suddenly everything seems so real. Free fall is much more real than everyday life” (Lindholm 2008:50). The idea of Edgework as captivating voluntary risk-taking is comparable with Glifford Geertz’ (2005 [1958]) well-known elaboration on *deep play* in Balinese Cockfights on Bali. Geertz differentiates between *shallow play* and *deep play*, and he finds that *deep play* is captivating because it involves risk-taking. The association of depth with risk-taking is further relevant in Sisters Academy. But while Geertz foregrounds social status as the central matter at stake in deep cockfights (2005:70-71), I see more relevance in Lindholm’s focus on sensory hyper-realities, which share similarity with the idea of flow as an enjoyable and rewarding state of being (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1975). In a conversation I had with The Untamed at the beginning of the last manifestation, she stressed the importance that “we dare to go somewhere” in order to experience “strong moments”. As she motivated: “That’s why I’m here”.

If we return to the performance workshop depicted above, I had a sense that there was something at stake and that we were reaching “an edge” when The Invitation’s shaking increased. As I write: “For a moment, it feels like the air is perfectly still and intensely vibrating at the same time”. In the brief reflection circle after the ritual, the performer-participant Sara took a slightly critical and concerned stance towards the intensity of the ritual, and articulated doubt of whether we had the competence to handle potential situations where short-term participants might get involved in intense moments during the manifestation. Thereby, Sara touched upon a delicate matter in Sisters Academy; namely that we engage with people’s lives without being professional therapists. Or as Gry has articulated it, we find performative solutions instead of psychological solutions. Gry herself did not take part in The Seer’s workshop, but she responded to some of the pre-occupied reflections later the same day. She then expressed that “we move between safety and intensity” and “we have a mutual longing for intensified presence”, a longing that relates to the reason “why we are here”. In continuation of the latter motivational aspect, she emphasised that “it is really important that no one feels insecure because they created intense spaces” and she concluded by saying: “Congratulation for creating this ritual space”.

At the beginning of this chapter, I shed light on how performer-participants think of Sisters Academy as an extraordinary opportunity ‘to go deeper’. I have now analysed an auto-ethnographic description of a process of going deeper through the analytical lens of flow and authenticity as qualities of experience, and I have shed light on the experience of something deeper as a momentary sense of focus, connectedness, and intensity. I argued that the process of going deeper was generated by my own intentional engagement, by the passing of time, and by a group that were able to improvise based on a shared repertoire. In continuation of the latter, I argued that the situational description also depicted a group process and that my own experience of going deeper was shared by other participants to some extent. But as I will elaborate in the following section, going ‘deeper’ in Sisters Academy is not only a matter of short term processes and momentary sensations, but also of long-term transformative journeys.

The deep journey

When I met with Erik in his Copenhagen apartment two weeks after the final day in The Boarding School, he had just returned from his second home in Stockholm, where he spent time alone in nature and revisited notes from Sisters Academy. From Erik’s point of view, the stay in Stockholm was part

of a very important “landing” process. As he explained, a key motivational drive for his engagement in projects like Sisters Academy was “personal change” and he had become “used to post-liminal work of landing”. Yet he worked with it particularly consciously now, emphasising: “I went *really* deep this time. I went *really* deep”.

Erik’s perspective invites a shift of attention from going deeper as a momentary process to a long-term transformative journey. To shed light on such transformative journey, we can take a starting point in Erik’s intuitive use of the expression “post-liminal work”. Erik uses this expression in relation to his drive towards personal change and it resonates with the general orientation towards liminality in performance fields that I touched upon in the introduction. The idea of liminality derives from the sociologist Arnold Van Gennep’s (1960 [1908]) thinking on ritual processes that follow individuals’ transitions through social statuses and groups in life as ‘rites of passage’. In Van Gennep’s thinking, ‘rites of passage’ include pre-liminal rites of separation, liminal rites of transition, and post-liminal rites of incorporation (ibid.:2,11). In continuation of Gennep’s thinking, Victor Turner foregrounds liminality as an attribute of transitional processes where individuals temporarily are positioned ambiguously in between relatively stable conditions in life (Turner 1967:93-94). Turner contemplates on how the temporary suspension of dominating structures in liminal rites allows for playfulness, reflexivity, and potential transformation²³ (1982:11, 45, 54, 104). Here we can return to the general association of liminality with transformative potential in performance fields, including in Sisters Academy, and the widespread association of performance events with liminal spaces. In this context, it is important to note the primary attention to individuals’ experiential liminal journeys in performance fields (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008:177), including in Sisters Academy, and not to symbolic attributes, change in social status or group formation, as we see in much of Turner’s writing (cf. 1969; 1982). In my endeavour to understand deep journeys in Sisters Academy, I regard the perspective of The Boarding School as a liminal space with transformative potential as a relevant lens through which to contemplate upon my ethnographic insights. The primary motivation of this perspective is not the discursive figuration of liminality in performance fields, but rather my comparison of two key interlocutors’ transformative journeys.

When I met with Erik/The Ship and Sofia/The Seamstress’ after the manifestation, the trace of Sisters Academy was noticeable. Erik shared that he felt less distracted now and had no longing towards “7-

²³ See Turner’s differentiation between the *liminal* in tribal small-scale societies and the *liminoid* in post-industrial societies (1982:54-59).

Eleven or iPhones or superficial conversations (...) it's totally uninteresting". He emphasised that it was "easier to focus on one's own direction now". This utterance is curious in relation to my leave-taking with Sofia in another interview-situation. As I was on my way home and Sofia had to buy food for dinner, we went together by bike towards the city centre. Suddenly Sofia made sign to stop because she realized that she did not know her way and was unable to focus on the direction of the supermarkets. As she said, she *could* just look it up on her phone. But actually she did not really care. Instead she said: "I feel like walking". Then she got off the bike and started walking while I cycled home. In this situation, Sofia's direction was not focused on practical duties but rather on her intuitive impulses.

From my observer-position, it was already apparent that Erik/The Ship and Sofia/The Seamstress had become deeply involved with Sisters Academy by the end of the manifestation. At this point in time, neither of them appeared ready to leave The Boarding School or to end the process.

On the evening of transition out of The Boarding School, I was sitting in a quiet corner with a couple of performer-participants as The Ship/Erik approached us and started talking. This was in itself a noticeable action, seeing that The Ship had been verbally silent during most of the manifestation. When he began speaking in that moment, I had the experience of getting access to his unrestrained thoughts without being able to decipher them, and I only caught fragments of the message; something about an opening, a true laughter, a "square hyper meta level" and a reminder that "we are still here". Yet I had the sensation that there was something important at stake. When I brought up the situation in my interview with Erik two weeks later, he recalled the wish to share his understanding of the importance of the transition phase. As he explained, he had consciously been working on letting go of blockages throughout the manifestation and he had gradually acquired a more authentic laughter that he recognized from previous periods of well-being in his life. On the day of transition, just before he talked to us, he had been in a situation when he started laughing but then got the impulse to turn it down. In reaction to this experience, he started to reflect upon this inner voice saying 'turn down', and he found it to be "a cramped version of [his] organism speaking". Upon this self-reflective situation, he consciously decided that he wanted to keep this authentic laughter, which had now become a part of him. And it was this conscious decision that he wanted to share with us; letting us know that we all had the opportunity to decide what we want to take with us in the time of transitioning.

Erik's account not only directs our attention towards the fact that a transformation has taken place, but also invites us to contemplate on *how* transformation happens. In Erik's understanding, we are not passive witnesses to a transformation that happens to us, but rather agents with power to enable the transformation. The consciousness of being an active agent in one's own process also shines through Sofia/The Seamstress' journey. The Seamstress neither appeared ready to leave Sisters Academy when the manifestation ended. When the production team started to 'take down' the physical structures – such as fabric and wooden constructions – of The Boarding School, and most of us went home to have a day of rest before the three days of post-production, The Seamstress/Sofia reportedly stayed in the building till late to build up new constructions. When I met with Sofia for an interview three weeks after the manifestation, she read aloud from a text that she had written on that day (see appx. 6):

(...) as everyone around me is tearing things down, I cannot stop myself from building up. I can feel that this is the most important time. The time of what I will bring with me. Out into the outside world. I have been in this building. Lived here. Slept here. Every night here. Died and been born many times. For Life Stone days. Life Stone. Life Stone. Life Stone. Life Stone. Life Stone. Life Stone. Life Stone. Life Stone. Life. And now it is past. But not yet. Will it ever be? I don't think so (...) The hardest. Purest. Beauty. Being the always at all times. It did not end on Infinity Infinity day of the Air Stone month of the year (...).

What appears from Sofia/The Seamstress' writing is a careful approach to the point of transition as a moment of importance, where you actively can take something with you "out into the outside world". This perspective parallels an articulate focus on 'anchoring' in Sisters Hope, understood as reflection upon what we want to take with us when we leave the academy. What is further worth noting, is Sofia/The Seamstress' contemplation on the time aspect of her journey and questioning of whether it will ever be "past". In my interview with Sofia, she recalled a magical phase in the last part of the manifestation when she was "heavily immersed", and upon my inquiry into the length of this final phase, she reproved me: "but I have a feeling that it has not ended yet". As she said, she still found herself in 24-hour-rituals, which followed the rhythm in the academy. Following on from this perspective, we recognize the divergence between the liminal structure of Sisters Academy #6 and Sofia's experiential process. In Sofia's case, it appears meaningless to draw a line between the liminal and the post-liminal, as well as to determine when the post-liminal phase ends.

In comparison, Erik emphasised the fluidity of the transition phase after the manifestation. He demonstrated the gradual process by slowly moving his hand from a point above his head, which demarcated his state at the end of the manifestation, to an increasingly lower point, which demarcated his current process that was far from over yet. At the time of my visit, Erik's living room was still filled with material from the manifestation and our interview unfolded in a soundscape of songs from the Sisters Academy radio that we both know by heart. As Erik noted, he found comfort in the music and did not really feel like listening to anything else at the moment. Yet he added that this present "post-post-liminal" phase would naturally transition into something else soon, and he would start listening to other kinds of music. And he concluded: "The end never comes. New beginnings appear"²⁴.

Based on my comparison of Sofia and Erik's journeys, I find that the perspective of liminality sharpens our attention towards The Boarding School as a space with extra-ordinary transformative potential on the one hand, but that it appears inadequate to shed light on the experiential complexity of my interlocutors' deep journeys on the other hand.

In retrospect, neither Sofia nor Erik thought of their process in The Boarding as one liminal phase, but rather as several distinctive phases. Sofia recalled a long initial period in the manifestation, when she wore black lipstick and was filled with anger and frustration. In her memory, this phase transitioned into three days of mystical calmness, which she did not quite comprehend, but she thought of it as a bubble that was expanding. It was when this bubble started "to implode" that she reportedly turned sick. While she was sick in bed, she magically discovered an hourglass under her pillow one day. This hourglass was similar to her former hourglass, which had broken into pieces, and upon the discovery, she jumped out of bed in ecstasy. The next morning, she was awoken by The Moments' voice in her ear: "Oh... We are so lucky. The Seamstress is back". In Sofia's narrative, this was a point of no return, when she entered a phase of "extremely high productivity and energy that didn't go away".

In Erik's understanding, the manifestation went through three major phases. At first, there was a phase when it did not really work; no one was sufficiently prepared and things were falling apart. Then there was a second phase when things started to work, but there was still struggle, tiredness and a sense that things would not improve. In Erik's understanding, the entire project was at stake in this second phase. Everything *could* have turned into superficial entertainment, people *could* have quit in

²⁴ The quote is taken from a song called Searching for a Substance by Genesis P. Orridge and Cotton Ferox (2004).

protest and gone home, internal tensions *could* have turned into serious conflicts, and Gry *could* have stepped into an authoritative position and directed everyone in what to do. Yet this did not happen. Instead we went into a third phase of mystery – “an orgy in the mystery”, as he put it. This was a phase of enjoyment and a sense of having found “a spontaneous state that you had sought for”. This third state was dominated by self-confidence and trust, and in Erik’s words, it was a sense of: “Now I know what it is. Now I know that it works and that I can navigate in it”. But how did we get to that point?

Chapter 4: Towards engagement in practice

I have now taken another important step towards an understanding of how Sisters Academy enables performer-participants' search 'to go deeper', as I analysed how the expression 'to go deeper' relates to experienced processes towards flow, authenticity, intensity, 'magic' and 'mystery' in Sisters Academy. My analysis suggests a link between the motivation 'to go deeper', actual experiences of 'going deeper', and engagement in a practice that enables such processes. But how are these aspects connected in practice? As it appears from my closure of the two previous chapters, there was something that did not 'work' at the beginning of the manifestation, and this coincided with articulate longings to go deeper. But how did this situation change? How did we make it work in the end? To shed light on these questions, I will inquire into how performer-participants become competent and engaged practitioners in Sisters Academy over time. As a point of departure, I will trace my understanding of Sofia's transformative process from a confused newcomer to a confident practitioner.

From confusion to confidence

While all performer-participants went through distinctive processes, I found the new performer-participants' transformations most noticeable. It was Sofia's process that I followed most closely; partly by coincidence and partly by Sofia's invitation and openness to share her perspectives with me. My interaction with Sofia made me reflect upon my own position as an experienced practitioner in Sisters Academy, it awoke my memory of my own journey in 2015, and it made me curious of the processes by which performer-participants gradually become involved with Sisters Academy over time.

My first conversation with Sofia unfolds at the beginning of the pre-production – in the front seat of a van transporting furniture from the storage to the building of Den Frie. Sofia asks me a lot of questions regarding the manifestation ahead of us: Can you go out? What if you get hungry? What about laundry? I respond to the questions drawing on my experiences from the manifestation in 2015 but stress that she has to ask the Gry for determinate answers. Apart from these practicalities, Sofia airs a general disorientation about the overall purpose of it all. Halfway through the month of pre-production, I find myself next to Sofia again, cycling back from a fabric sale in northern Copenhagen. While cycling, Sofia asks me for advice regarding the workshop that she is going to facilitate in a few days, and she articulates doubt about

whether her ideas are sensuous enough. Then she shares a general feeling of not being ready for the manifestation and uncertainty about what she is supposed to be prepared for. Towards the end of pre-production, I meet a very confused and stressful Sofia in the basement cutting fabric for the sewing team. She has just been informed about a meeting with the Head of Production, and is frustrated by her lack of time and knowledge to prepare for the meeting. Our frantic talk ends with her concluding: “maybe it is just me who doesn’t understand”.

When we meet to evaluate the 24-hours of the test-run at the end of the pre-production, Sofia’s confusion has turned into anger. In front of the whole performer group, she reads aloud from a letter she has written, which starts with the statement: “Yesterday I felt so angry”. She links the anger to her Evoker-function. Reportedly, this does not fit with her Poetic Self and makes her “feel worth nothing”. As we move into The Boarding School, all joy seems to have left Sofia/The Seamstress. One morning, I approach her by the restrooms to ask if she is alright and she looks gloomily at me and says that The Evoker-function is worse than she expected. She finds that the function restricts her from being The Seamstress and that is why she is wearing black lipstick. She then pulls herself together and leaves saying: “now I just try to survive”.

I did not notice the apparently magical transition until it had happened and I realize The Seamstress in Sofia’s place. I am amazed by her endless energy, as she builds her own tableau, conducts successful screaming classes, and engages in intense relationships. One day I meet her full of smiles and laughter by the restrooms. She energetically tells me about her experiments with birth and love rituals, and about her experiences of one “magic” moment after another. When we all start to pack down on the first day of post-production, The Seamstress is in full swing building up. As I am about to leave with my packed suitcase, a barefoot Seamstress awaits me by the door. She says “close your eyes”, takes my hand and guides me out of Den Frie while singing a variation of a now characteristic song from Sisters Academy, which The Seamstress introduced to us: “Staff you are leaving us today. You will be going to exist...”. The Seamstress’ farewell is a beautiful closure of my own stay in the academy, and the now well-known melody stays in my head through my walk through the parks to my college dorm room in central Copenhagen.

When I think of Sofia's transformative process, I think of three major phases; an initial phase characterized by uncertainty and confusion which transitioned into a second phase characterized by frustration and anger, and eventually gave way to a third phase of endless energy, confidence and understanding. Inspired by Van Gennep and Turner's thinking, we can consider Sofia's process as a liminal rite of passage from a state of outsider to a state of insider in Sisters Academy. This perspective appears meaningful in relation to Turner's thinking of how entry to membership of a closed community or secret society often involves rites of passage (1967:95). However, in continuation of my argumentation in the previous chapter, I do not see how Sofia's process fit into a ritual structure of a pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phase. Neither does my understanding of Sofia's three-fold process synchronize with division into pre-production, manifestation, and post-production in the internal production plan (see appx. 5).

To shed light on Sofia's process, I will instead draw a comparison to Tanya Luhrmann's (1986) study on how sceptical practitioners gradually become genuine believers within magical secret societies in England. Luhrmann emphasises what she calls an *interpretive drift*: "the slow, often unacknowledged shift in someone's manner of interpreting events as they become involved with a particular activity" (ibid.:312). Such an idea of a slow and unacknowledged drift is interesting with regard to how participants gradually become involved with Sisters Academy over time, and in relation to the apparent challenge to determine exactly when and how transitions happen. Luhrmann's focus on the process from scepticism to belief is further curious in relation to my narrative on how Sofia's initial doubt about the overall purpose, the practicalities, and her own contribution to Sisters Academy was gone by the end of the manifestation. By then she engaged with confidence and conviction in birth and love rituals, magical moments, and intense relationships. When I found myself on the floor in an empty white room by Sofia's workplace three weeks after the manifestation, I did not confront a confused and sceptical newcomer but rather a confident believer, who referred to 'rituals' and 'magic' as common sense phenomena. Luhrmann elaborates on how magical practitioners gradually come to acquire *common knowledge*; taken for granted vocabulary terms of a conversation that no-one bothers to explain (ibid.:145, 158). In the context of Sisters Academy, such taken for granted common knowledge are 'magic', 'rituals', 'The Poetic Self', or 'performance'. Similar to my introduction to Sisters Academy vocabulary in practice, Luhrmann emphasises that common knowledge is filled with ambiguity and various points of reference in magical circles – as when magicians have divergent understanding of the moon (ibid.:144). Luhrmann further elaborates on the concept *knowing of*, which

she understands as the mechanism by which the practitioner gradually acquires understanding of common knowledge through experiential involvement, while the referential ambiguity of concepts and categories remains (ibid.:219).

But while I find Luhrmann's focus on interpretive drifts and the gradual processes by which members of a community come to know of common knowledge more useful to open up the analysis of Sofia's transformative process than the perspective of a liminal rite of passage, I also see limitations in Luhrmann's focus with regard to my own inquiry. In her analysis of how sceptical practitioners turn into believers of magic, Luhrmann focuses her attention on imaginative involvement. In Luhrmann point of view, magical practice is rather a matter of inner processes than a socialization process (ibid.:315). While I do think that imaginary processes are part of performer-participation in Sisters Academy, I have also argued that performer-participation is embedded in a particular social practice, and in line with this perspective, I find it important not to reduce individual learning processes to a matter of imaginary involvement.

Situated learning

In continuation of my approach to Sisters Academy as a community of practice, I will consider Sofia's process in relation to the idea of *situated learning*, which is elaborated by Wenger and the anthropologist Jean Lave (1999). According to Lave and Wenger, *situated learning* is an inseparable aspect of social practice and the process by which newcomers gradually become old-timers in communities of practice (ibid.:29, 31). In Lave and Wenger's perspective, *situated learning* is not equivalent to the common notion of learning by doing, as it involves an aspect of legitimate access to, and positioning within, a community of practice (ibid.:31). The process by which participants gain experience and competence in relation to communities is thus furthered by access to mutual engagement with other members, along with negotiations of the joint enterprise and the repertoire in use (Wenger 1998:100).

From the analytical perspective of situated learning, I will now return to Sofia's process from confused newcomer to confident practitioner in Sisters Academy. Wenger finds that experiences of 'non-participation', understood as inability to participate as old-timer, is most significant to newcomers that are on a trajectory to full membership (ibid.:165). In Sofia's case, the inability to participate as old-timer appears significant, as she entered Sisters Academy in a position of a performer who was going to take on the responsibility of The Staff. Sofia's initial questions on practicalities, call for help with workshop-design, and frustration about her experienced lack of

knowledge to prepare for a forthcoming meeting with the Head of Production indicate that she is concerned about her position as a partial outsider and strives to gain sufficient insight. Moreover, we can think of Sofia's expressive anger and frustration as part of a learning process that involves continuous engagement in a community of practice. In this perspective, Sofia's speech after the test-run and decision to wear black lipstick rather appear as negotiations of central aspects of practice in Sisters Academy than as expressions of a liminal state of crises (cf. Turner 1982:46). Through her engagement in practice, Sofia has become knowledgeable of, and competent to criticize, the combination of Functions and Poetic Selves, which is a characteristic aspect of Sisters Academy. Within this analytical frame, we recognize Sofia's journey as a learning process towards full membership in Sisters Academy. On the last day of the manifestation, it is not me who is the guide that takes Sofia by the hand but instead Sofia that takes my hand and confidently asks me to close my eyes as she shows me the way out of The Boarding School.

Zooming out from Sofia's process, I see relevance in a practice-oriented perspective with regard to the question of how performer-participants generally become able to navigate and share meta-communicative keys on what it is that we are doing together in Sisters Academy. Due to limited guidelines and explanations in the field, knowledge is generally acquired through engagement in practice. During one of my blindfold focus-groups, a short-term participant shared that she was confused because there appeared to be "no rules but still rules" in the school, and she found that the only thing to do was to "do what everybody else is doing". Or as a different short-term participant recommended a fellow newcomer: "Just mirror what you see". The understanding that there is an unexplained way of doing things also appeared in an internal conversation between performer-participants, when The Shaman articulated her struggle to combine the strictness of her Octopus-function with the intuitive nature of her Poetic Self. The Dramaturg then asked her how she had been taught to be strict. The Shaman hesitated before saying: "but we just have to". The Pleasure, who shared the function of The Octopus, then cut in: "Well, we haven't really been taught".

According to performance scholar and director Richard Schechner (2013), most performance art training is informal in the sense that performers acquire skills over time by absorbing what is going on. To explain the prevalence of informal training in performance art, Schechner points out how informal training through imitation processes appears as a practical transmitter of performance knowledge in a context where performance artists often find verbal explanations inadequate to account for their practices (ibid.:230-32). In an interview-situation, Gry articulated her

training of performers as “very tricky”, as she does not tell people what to do but rather nudges, inspires, and adjusts practices that “violate the overall frame”. I have also often heard her emphasise the importance of a flexible frame where individual potential can grow and explorations take place. In my interview with Sofia, I clearly remember how she expressed thankfulness for the fact that everything had not been explained to her from the beginning. Retrospectively, she found that the space for confusion opened a space for her to be and create in. As she explained, it was while she was “kept in the enormous discomfort it is not to understand” that she realized how we do “a lot of things that we cannot put words on” in Sisters Academy. She concluded: “you cannot imagine what it is before you do it”.

Situated learning and learning through informal training exist far beyond performance cultures, and has been covered through anthropological studies of various forms of apprenticeship (Coy 1989; Geer 1972; Lave & Wenger 1999). In Marcio Goldman’s inquiry into informal learning in the Brazilian religion Candomblé, he describes it as a patient practice of gathering leaves (“catar folhas”); a practice that is far from systematic teaching of a unified body of knowledge (2007:109). According to Goldman, Candomblé is a practiced way of life and experienced practitioners are situated as gatekeeping teachers with access to the secrets of practice (ibid.: 109,114). In Sisters Academy, we find not a unified body of knowledge that is systematically taught, but rather a complexity of intertwined practices that performers embody over time. Following Goldman’s understanding of experienced practitioners in Candomblé, I find it relevant to ask whether experienced performer-participants are positioned as informal teachers, in the sense of being gatekeepers to Sisters Academy practice?

To some extent, I was myself positioned as a gatekeeper in relation to Sofia, who asked me for advice and inquired into my knowledge on daily practice in The Boarding School. But I also see analytical potential in the perspective of experienced performer-participants as gatekeepers when it comes to less explicit communication, as in the case of the performance workshops during pre-production. The performance workshops were often spent on so-called ‘try-outs’ of classes and rituals. Every performer-participant was responsible for facilitating at least one try-out and this responsibility was articulated as a chance to test and experiment with personal ideas before the manifestation. There were no formal guidelines regarding style or content of the try-outs, apart from the expectation that practices unfold from individual Poetic Selves. In this apparently open framework, it is worth noting that the workshops unfolded in rather similar fashions; shared patterns

being a soft atmosphere, slow pace, explorations of body movement, touch and emotions, along with objects such as blindfolds, incense, tarot cards, and mirrors. The experienced performer-participant Louise both noted and problematized this similarity half way through the pre-production, when expressing a wish for more variation in the group. But what if we shift attention from an understanding of the try-outs as an open framework in which performer-participants experiment with individual ideas to a focus on a cultural context in which newcomers gradually become familiar with the social aesthetic landscape and shared repertoire of Sisters Academy?

Following Goldman's thinking, I find it relevant to consider newcomers' participation in workshops facilitated by more experienced *gatekeeper* performer-participants as a matter of patiently *gathering leaves* and thus gradually learning the secrets of Sisters Academy practice. Here, it is worth noting that the project coordinator had appointed experienced performer-participants on the first days in the workshop-schedule, in order for newcomers to have some practices to lean upon. In a context where new performer-participants are on a trajectory to full membership and no one directly explains what a 'sensuous' class or ritual is, the act of gathering leaves appear as an obvious learning strategy. In such socialization perspective, it seems reasonable that it is The Poetic Self that unfolds from particular practices and not the other way around. This perspective resonates with Alexi's critical approach to the idea of an inner true self in a focus group situation. As she found: "The Poetic Self (...) is very related to like music, poetry, light, and ways of touching (...) The Poetic Self is born in the Sisters Academy framework".

But here we should be careful not to think of situated learning in Sisters Academy as a one-way process by which newcomers imitate old-timers and thereby gradually internalize existing social aesthetic patterns. Importantly, Lave and Wenger foreground situated learning as increasing participation in communities of practice, and not as internalization of cultural given knowledge (Lave & Wenger 1999:47-49). Following this perspective, learning in Sisters Academy is not simply a patient act of gathering leaves but also a matter of engaging in negotiations of practice, as we saw it in Sofia's case. With regard to the subtler imitation processes, we can further move beyond the perspective of a one-way communication process by replacing the idea of gathering leaves with an idea of *mimetic communication*. *Mimetic communication* has been theorized as a "sharing of form" and as a "fundamental communicative principle" that operate through corporeally based forms of imitation and furthers both synchronization and sensations of belonging (Condon 1984:37; Gibbs 2010:186-87).

In continuation of my perspective of Sisters Academy as a practice on the move, I find it important to stress that individual learning processes do not take place in a static context. And as Lave and Wenger emphasise, it is not only the participants but also the community transforming through practice (1999:46, 53). In line with this perspective, we see how the social aesthetic landscape and shared repertoire have developed over time. Screaming has not always been part of Sisters Academy, but it figured as a prevalent pattern in the social aesthetic landscape during the last manifestation. As The Link casually observed one day: “There is so much screaming this time”. It was also during the last manifestation that ‘exist’ became part of Sisters Academy vocabulary. Initially, it was a new performer-participants who confused the word exit with exist during a meeting on interactivity design in the pre-production. This confusion spurred laughter and enthusiasm among more experienced performer-participants, and Gry found ‘exist’ to be a more poetic word than ‘exit’. From then on, what used to be ‘exit ritual’ was changed to ‘exist ritual’. It became common practice to tell Students to “go to exist”, when it was time for them to leave The Boarding School, and you possibly remember the phrase “you will be going to exist” in The Seamstress’ farewell song to me. In line with this understanding, we can think of Sisters Academy as a dynamic process of continuities and discontinuities (Wenger 1998:90) or as a performance tradition, which is old and new at the same time (Schechner 2013:232). Wenger also comments on how practice can remain “the same” in experience even if it is moving (Wenger 1998:94) – a perspective that shares similarity with MacDougall’s understanding of how social aesthetic landscapes generate sensations of familiarity among locals (1999:5).

Cultural familiarity on a ‘deeper’ level

The Seamstress wakes me by whispering in my ear: “Go down now. We are doing a collective ritual for The Link”. I immediately get up and follow a group of Staff to The Dining Hall. It is still early morning and most lights are turned off. We gather around a single candlelight on the red carpet and little by little more Staff arrive. I do not notice when The Link arrives but I recall her lying with a soft smile on the red couch. I am touched by this moment of silence. Everyone is present and it feels like we have all time in the world at our disposal. No one has slept in on this special morning. After a while around the candlelight, we move to the tables without words. Chair by chair, we take a stand by the shining mirror tables and start to form a vocal soundscape of colourful harmonies and vibrations. Then we eat in silence. I find myself on the edge of crying and I notice tears on the cheeks of other

Staff members. Everything feels a bit different today. After eating, we do not separate but return to the silence around the candlelight on the red carpet.

The situational description depicts a morning at the end of the manifestation. I initially coded my field notes from this morning: *A beautiful morning*. I found beauty in the dim morning light, the silence, the vibrating vocal harmonies, the tears, and the act of being together. In the first place, I found beauty in the collective effort to celebrate The Link in a ritualized way. The Link had coordinating and administrative responsibilities in the academy, and she was usually the first Staff member that woke up in the morning to prepare the fundamental school infrastructure with light and soundscape. Unlike most of us, The Link was always present in The Dining Hall before breakfast, and she had articulated a wish for more Staff support in the morning. A couple of Staff members then decided to make her wish come true and initiated the morning ritual. Yet as one of the initiating Staff members articulated in an informal conversation afterwards, they “didn’t really plan anything”.

By the end of the manifestation, there seemed to be a tacit agreement in the performer-group about what and how to do without concrete planning or explicit facilitation. To some extent, the ritual was carried out by individual actions; the initial idea was spread during the evening before, we were woken up, a candle light was placed on the floor and fruit was brought to the breakfast table. It is not these individual acts that I intend to emphasise though, but rather the joint effort and presence of everyone. No one decided to stay in bed as usual and I had the experience that we somehow silently agreed that the effort to make a ritual for The Link was more important than our personal needs and worries. And as I depict in the vignette: “Everything is a bit different this day”. Paradoxically, some things were also very much *the same*, in the sense of a familiar social aesthetic landscape of silence, slowness, whispering, emotions, touch, and rituals. We shared a particular repertoire, which included the act of standing on the chairs and chanting before the meals, and there seemed to be silent agreement that we were not pretending.

My experience of this morning was to some extent similar to my ‘deep’ experience and analysed flow state from Chapter 3. On this special morning, there was also a sense of being one with the moment and of acting spontaneously in concert with the rest of The Staff, such as when we organically moved to the dinner tables and silently agreed to stay by the candle light after breakfast. To sharpen our understanding of how momentary experiences of such collective spontaneity are intertwined with culturally shared ways of doing things, I see relevance in Thomas Csordas’ (1990) integration of

practice and perception in his focus on embodied processes²⁵. Particularly relevant for my purpose is Csordas' elaboration on one of his informant's account of a healing session in a North American Charismatic Christian community, when "everybody did the same thing" and spontaneously moved the arms in a certain way (ibid.:14). While this experience of spontaneous movement served as a verification of supernatural forces for the informant, Csordas locates the experience in embodied processes where original acts of communication take a limited number of common forms due to a culturally shared habitus (ibid.:15). In addition to my arguments on how the passing of time and individuals' will to participate in rituals have a generating force in relation to flow states, Csordas' perspective invites a further integration of flow states with a shared Sisters Academy repertoire and social aesthetic landscape.

Importantly, there was a subtle – but noteworthy – difference in degree between my experiences in the ritual I depicted in Chapter 3 and the morning ritual depicted above. More specifically, I had the sense that there was something 'deeper' at play in the morning ritual, which took place at a time when we had lived together as The Staff for one month. One of my jot notes after the morning ritual says: *Fine-tuned communication in a sensuous family*. As I elaborated in a field-note later that day, I sensed that we had become more skilled in subtle non-verbal communication and that I was part of a collective family rather than a group of individuals. At this point in time, it was no longer relevant to remind each other to 'uphold the space' or to call for more 'organic' or 'poetic' interaction. And there was no longer a sense that practice didn't 'work'. This perspective is curious in relation to the focus group discussion that I referred to in the introduction. I mentioned that no one was eager to explain the phenomenon 'Sisters Academy', seeing that it was "too big to start with". However, the discussion gradually evolved and ideas of Sisters Academy as "an organism" and "a sense that we all become one" were formulated. Sensations of being an organism or a family relate to Turner's concepts of *spontaneous communitas*; collective flow that "has something magical about it" and where "everyone is absorbed into a single synchronized, fluid event" (1982:48, 58). This is what the anthropologist Camilla Stubbe Teglbjærg (2007) finds in New York jazz clubs. Jazz musicians refer to the magical moments when musical interaction forms a synthesis and all attention is focused as "making it happen" (ibid.:150). Teglbjærg describes how such moments of presence and unity can be shared with the audience, and she argues that it requires both listening, trust, daring, and technical skills from the musicians (ibid.:152-157). Following these lines of thought, I suggest

²⁵ Csordas builds his theory on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Merleau-Ponty's concept of *pre-objectification* (Csordas 1990:7).

that ‘going deeper’ in Sisters Academy not simply is a matter of individual journeys but also of collective group processes, and in order to reach sensations of unity and collective presence, performers may need to acquire similar abilities as jazz improvisers. But is Sisters Academy then ultimately about processes of going deeper?

I will reflect the question in a conversation I had with a Visiting named The Seed a short time after the morning ritual. The Seed approached me to share her ideas on what she called a “mirror image” class. She wished to contribute to the academy by taking advantage of her position as a newly arrived participant through her Poetic Self, which she associated with intrusive masculine energy. After one day in the academy, she sensed a prevalence of melancholy and sadness, and she wanted to “mirror” this atmosphere through a workshop around joy and laughter. From talking to another performer-participant, she knew that I had experimented with laughter, and she asked for my thoughts on her idea and invited me to take part in the exploration.

As we sat talking in the dimly lit Dining Hall, I noticed a conflict in me. I was impulsively reluctant towards her proposal and this reluctance was linked to my experience of being in the midst of a beautiful closure at the end of the manifestation; a closure that I found worth protecting. I had already experienced joy and laughter, and I found the current melancholy to be rather authentic at this point in time. If I had not been on fieldwork, I might thus have refused The Seed’s invitation. But I *was* on fieldwork, and I *did* see the invitation as a unique opportunity to engage with the point of view of a short-term participant. Due to my wish to engage from a non-pretending outset, I shared my experienced conflict with The Seed. This spurred a fruitful discussion on how we might unfold her ideas while still respecting (my sense of) the state of affairs in the academy. Our conversation ended in a workshop and following flash mob during the silent dinner on the same day. During the dinner, the ones who had taken part in the workshop suddenly broke the silence through one minute of full-throated laughter, and I actually believe that this action momentarily enhanced other participants’ sense of ‘magic’ or ‘mystery’ in the academy.

I wrote down my reflections on the conversation with The Seed under the heading *Mirror image from another world* and I used expressions such as *wake-up call* and *outside the family*. In my contemplation on Sisters Academy as a community of practice in Chapter 2, I suggested to think of Students and Visitings as peripheral participants, who are provided temporary access to parts of Sisters Academy. As my reflexive notes above indicate, my interaction with The Seed made me aware of our radically different positions and perspectives, and that The Seed not was a part of a *fine-tuned*

sensuous family who had gone ‘deeper’ together by the end of the manifestation. In other words, it was an analytical wake-up call for me, when I became aware of my immersed insider-position that The Seed did not share, even if she was temporarily a part Sisters Academy. It was a wake-up call from *another world*, but only a minor one in comparison with the brutal transition a couple of days later.

The brutal transition

The manifestation ended with an ‘exist ritual’ for all performer-participants. An essential part of the ritual centred around the collection of memories in a big glass bottle and was facilitated by The Moments. To start with, everyone was asked to revisit physical locations in the school, where significant experiences had unfolded, and to collect objects that related to the moments and places. After approximately half an hour on our own, we returned to the collective circle in The Grand Hall with our objects. The following ceremonial phase was surrounded by an atmosphere of significance, as we one by one entered the circle centre to “donate” our memory-object to the glass bottle. At the end of the ritual, we were told to blow out the candle in front of us and to leave The Grand Hall when we were “ready to step out” of our Poetic Selves.

Some hours after the ritual, I found myself in a conversation about the absurdity of this sudden ‘step out’. The Gardener/Troels shared that he reformulated the phrase in his head so that “ready to step out” became “ready to take to first step”, and The (w)Hole/Julie laughingly disclosed that she decided not to blow out the candle, but then came to do it as she had a spontaneous energy cramp. In my interview with Sofia three weeks after the manifestation, she recalled how she got “pissed off” when she was told to blow out the candle and step out of her poetic self, and that it was like a sense of “now we have to stop being ourselves”. In the following, I will present some glimpses of the night that followed the exist ritual. This was simultaneously a night of celebration, a night of saying goodbye, and a night of transitioning.

When I leave the Grand Hall as one of the last performer-participants, I pass two Staff members lying on the red carpet in a close embrace, and I notice that one of them is crying. I move to The Dining Hall which is already filled with the production team and employees from Den Frie. It is overwhelming suddenly to have these people inside Sisters Academy – with their everyday life clothes and Danish small talk. I pause in astonishment by the sight of Royal beer cans among crystal flowers on the shining mirror tables, and I realize that the space

is filled with foreign objects that don't belong here; mobile phones, labelled soda bottles, personal belongings, jackets, and bags.

As we gather around the dinner tables, I notice that some Staff are absent and that some have taken refuge by the far end of the room. On my right hand side is The Wild/Enna, who does not know how to react when she is handed a metal case with cutlery. Another performer-participant asks if she prefers to eat without cutlery and she bewilderedly replies that she is "undecided", after which she hastily takes both a knife, fork and a spoon, and eventually eats with her hands. I sense a radical change of atmosphere at the dinner table. This is not a ritualized silent dinner in slow pace, but a hectic dinner full of joking and loud Danish conversations. It is not until I leave the table that I realize how full I am and how I almost forgot to chew the food.

The strange celebration feast continues after dinner when the chairman from Den Frie piles up chocolate bars and Haribo bags on the mirror tables. The sight of candy is met by a shout of joy as we throw ourselves into the feast like sugar-craving kids, momentarily forgetting that we already are stuffed with food and impressions. Louise/The Untamed fills her mouth with candy as she admits "I can't control this" and Troels/The Gardener adds: "But I realized that if it wasn't this, it would be alcohol".

What I intend to draw forth, is our overwhelmed reactions to the sudden transition out of Sisters Academy. My immediate and strong reactions to Royal beer cans, casual Danish small talk, and mobile phones as "foreign" objects and actions that do not "belong" in Sisters Academy is curious in relation to the idea of matter out of place. In this moment, it was a very strong sensation that something was wrong. I further depict how some performer-participants' withdrew from "the strange celebration feast", how The Wild/Enna was confused about whether to eat with or without cutlery, and how candy-eating turned into an uncontrolled and unstoppable act. In my observation, there was relief and relaxation linked to the night of transitioning, when 'everyday life' modes of being were allowed and we no longer had to 'uphold the space', but I also sensed a lot of confusion about how to 'step out' and unwillingness to do so in this sudden and enforced manner. Following this observation, we may consider the phase of transitioning as an ambiguous state in between two social

aesthetic worlds; Sisters Academy meets ‘the outside world’. So which world is the otherworldly world now?

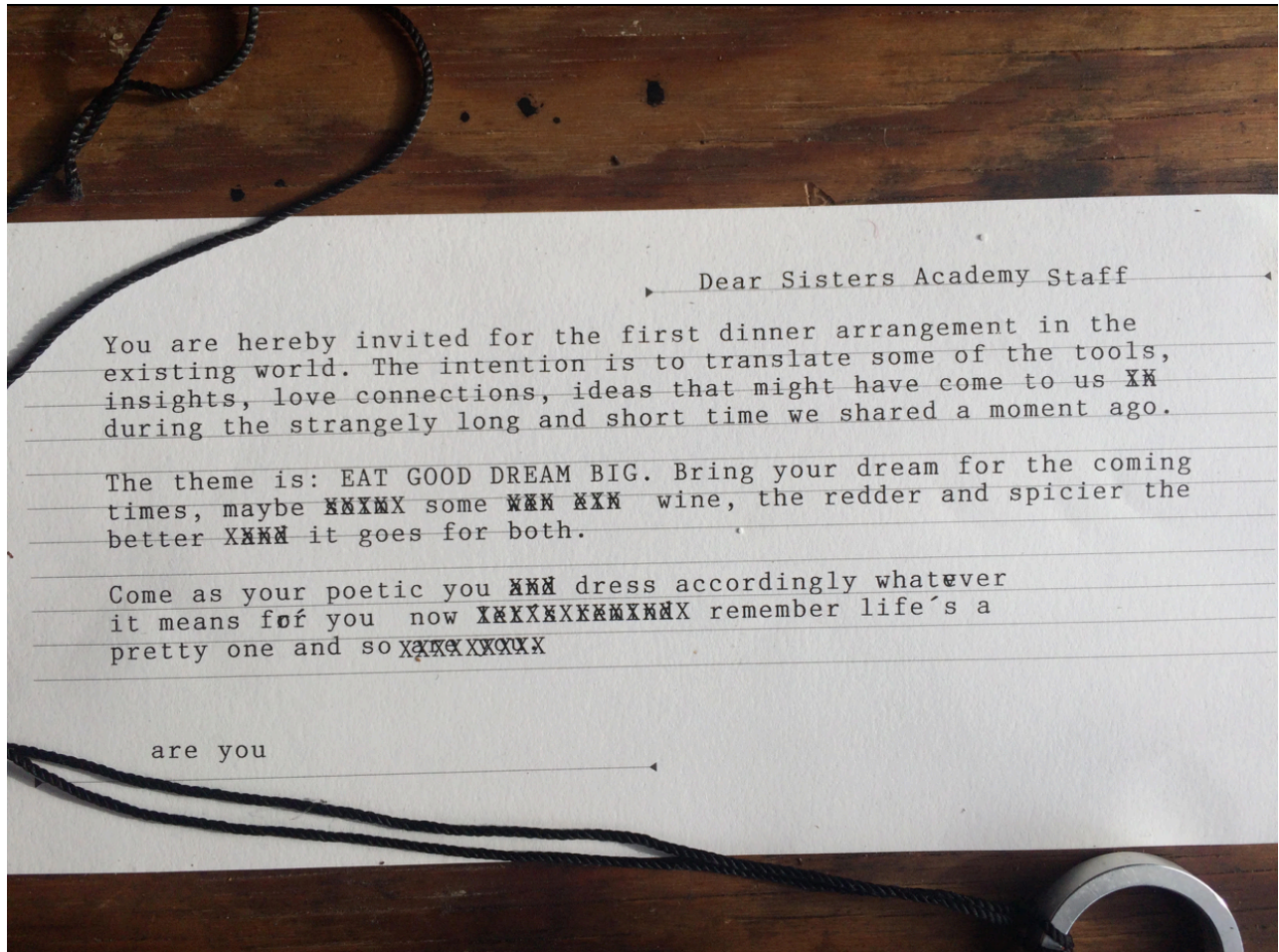
In Chapter 2, I suggested a figure-ground-reversal of The Boarding School. Instead of thinking of it as an extraordinary event figure that emerges on an everyday life ground of the outside world, I suggested to think of it as an everyday life ground on which temporary events such as The Staff Meeting or The Evening Gathering occur. At this point in the thesis, we see that such perspective of Sisters Academy as ‘everyday’ not only enables us to realize the dynamics of Sisters Academy practice, but also reflects a level of experience among performer-participants. Could we say that Sisters Academy had become familiar on a ‘deeper’ level by the end of the manifestation? At the time of transitioning, it was not Sisters Academy but instead everyday life styles from the outside world that appeared strangely otherworldly. And the transition went fast. When we woke up on the following day, the post-production was already far ahead, and the physical frames of The Boarding School were rapidly disappearing. When we returned to Den Frie to help with take-down after a day of rest in ‘the outside world’, The Boarding School was gone:

I sit among a group of overwhelmed performer-participants on the white museum floor in what was The Staff Dormitory two days ago. The Building Manager Finn coincidentally passes by us and comments that we all look different now. He shares his sympathy for our situation and apologizes for yesterday when all major parts of The Boarding School were taken down: “it was brutal (...) a pure act of violence”. A moment later, The Production Coordinator Steen approaches us to quickly distribute practical tasks. When he ends by asking “are there any questions?” everyone is silent. Steen then leaves for other duties and Kamilla starts laughing in astonishment and exclaims: “Wow... Welcome back”.

When we have unloaded the last removal van with furniture at the storage place in Slangerup after three days of effective post-production, we return to Den Frie to realize that the museum building is already populated with new exhibitors. When I walk through the building with Tina, we laugh in astonishment by the surreal sight of a museum reception in the place of what had just been our home a moment ago. In this apparently otherworldly reality of a wide, white and bright contemporary art centre in Copenhagen, I am tempted to question: Was Sisters Academy just a dream?

Intuitive magicians

It was not a dream. One week after the manifestation had ended, I encountered a post from Esben/The Translator on the internal Sisters Academy performers Facebook-site, which contained a link to this typewritten dinner invitation:



Sisters Academy Dinner

EAT GOOD DREAM BIG

* Required

What is your poetic name? *

Your email? *

For further information on time and location

Would you like to come as a contributor or guest? *

As a contributor you help prepare, as a guest you come to enjoy. Not sure? Come as a guest.

☐ Contributor

☐ Guest

Continue »

Below the invitation was a formula where you could sign up for the dinner. When I signed up, I was asked if I wanted to contribute with preparations or to come as a guest to “enjoy”. I signed-up to be a contributor and then received an e-mail addressed to the eight performer-participants, who had chosen the same, and in which Esben/The Translator shared his ideas and overall encouragement: “Let’s make food and magic”.

The kind of ‘magic’ that we created at the dinner party was prepared rather spontaneously half an hour before the first guests [other performer-participants] arrived. We installed the dining space with red spot light and candle lights, and we made a path with beans, which was intended to guide the guests from the entrance gate. Then we agreed to lock the door to the dining space and to place ourselves as poetic images in the window panels. When the first guests arrived, they had to wait outside until we let them in. Some of us made toasts to the guests with glasses of red wine in silent slow motion, some created moving images, and others stood still like frozen statues. When a guest had waited for some time, one of us would open the door and invite the person in. We asked all guests to put their phone in a closet and to take a seat in a sofa area, where they were asked to close their

eyes and hold hands. When the dinner was ready, we all took a stand around the table and chanted before we sat down and eased in to a more casual everyday-like dinner.

What I find remarkable about the ‘magic’ we created as initiation to the dinner party, was its spontaneous conduct. At this point in time, no one questioned the term ‘magic’ and no one seemed confused about it either. Rather, ‘magic’ figured as common knowledge that was associated with Sisters Academy. In my experience, we did not need to plan much as we were able to improvise based on “the strangely long and short time we shared a moment ago”, to use The Translator’s expression. From a social learning perspective, we were competent members of a Sisters Academy-community of practice (Wenger 1998:136-37). Differently than in the pre-production or beginning of manifestation, everyone was now able to competently engage in mutual negotiations of a joint enterprise – to create ‘magic’, ‘poetry’ and ‘mystery’ – and to pursue this enterprise through the use of a shared, and social aesthetic familiar, repertoire that included ritualization, performance, silence, slow-motion, blindness, red light, an analogue mode, image creation, candle lights, touch, and chanting before dinner.

Another remarkable aspect of the ‘magical’ initiation was that it unfolded outside the physical walls of The Boarding School; in ‘the outside world’. When I interviewed Sofia after the dinner party, she recalled it as a really pleasant experience. She said that the act of guiding guests had felt very natural to her and emphasised: “I could feel it in my whole body. I have it. It is mine and it is me now”. This perspective is curious in relation to my focus on situated learning and to Wenger’s association of identity as competence within communities of practice (ibid.:153). Drawing on emic vocabulary, I argue that competent performer-participants intuitively know when ‘it works’ and when ‘it does not work’. But what does it mean that something ‘works’ in the context of Sisters Academy?

To shed light on this question, I find inspiration in Luhmann’s understanding that evaluation of rituals as powerful, good or working within magical circles relate to intuitive sensations and strong emotional experiences (1986:135-37). As Luhmann argues: “A ritual is said to fail either when a specific goal is obviously not obtained (...) or when members in the group ‘feel’ that there was no power” (ibid.:137, original apostrophes). In line with how Gry often presents Sisters Academy as an experiment where we rather ask questions than give answers, we do not evaluate practices as ‘working’ or ‘not working’ with reference to “specific goals”. But similar to my argumentation on how subjectively ascribed authenticity links to sensory stimulation and emotional engagement, the competent evaluation of practice that ‘works’ seems closely related to a feeling of power, to use

Luhrmann's expression. This perspective also parallels performance scholar Fischer-Lichte's association of successful performative events with their power to evoke and transform experiential states²⁶. Following these lines of thought, it is tempting to turn around the suggestion that we cannot go deeper if it doesn't work, which appears from my title and earlier argumentation, and instead suggest that: It doesn't work if we cannot go deeper.

In the anthropology of magic, there has been much focus on the kinds of techniques that are involved in different magical practices; be it fishing techniques or chicken oracles (Sjørølev 2010:9-10). In Sisters Academy, the association of practice with particular techniques figure on an emic level, in the sense that we talk about 'performative tools' such as ritualization of meals or the poetic gaze. But it also appears that some performance technique is hard to translate into words. What is it that we do and how are we able to do it?

In the dinner invitation above, Esben/The Translator refers to a diverse body of knowledge that includes "tools, insights, love connections, ideas that might have come to us". I have also heard performer-participants refer to "portable doors to magic" or an intention to "open the universe". In my interview with Sofia, she talked about a muscle that she could pull out when she needed it, and this idea parallels Mika's idea of performance as "a tool that you have in your body". Or as The Untamed reminded me, "the strong moment" does not happen by itself but "we can shape it so it happens. Otherwise, what is performance art?". Following on from these quotes, we see that Sisters Academy 'magic' does not derive from supernatural powers, but rather from intentional and skilled performance practice.

After the manifestation, I sensed a general wish among performer-participants to bring a bit of Sisters Academy into the outside world; through silent dinners with friends, merging of The Poetic Self with ordinary selves, or creation of new 'sensuous' projects. Sofia recounted how she created "a little magic" in an interaction with The Gardener during a reunion after the manifestation. She asked him to close his eyes and to find her hand. Then she gave him a small piece of wood, which derived from a candle light-dispenser that The Gardener had made in the academy while saying: "You know this shape and you know this colour. And you can open your eyes as you open your hand". As Sofia added, "it is just these small things (...) and that you dare to do them". However, Sofia also

²⁶ She contrasts this perspective with Austin's speech-act-theory and the idea that performative power is linked to fixed success criteria (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 25-26).

acknowledged the difficulty in bringing this kind of ‘magic’ and ‘poetry’ to people that are uninterested. A similar perspective was aired by Kathryn during the conversation I referred to at the beginning of this thesis. Kathryn emphasised the importance of:

“the collective that (...) create the frame for people to live in this way, like to be able to think about dreams and poetry, and how we can imagine doing things in alternative ways. We need to create a sort of collective foundation for people to be understood, and to have the... What do you call it? Bravery or (...)”.

In line with this thinking, I see relevance in Turner’s figurative analogy: “just as the river needs a bed and banks to flow, so do people need framing and structural rules to do their kinds of flowing” (Turner 1986:133). But how do we think of framing or structuring rules in Sisters Academy? Towards the end of a focus group interview, the performer-participant Liv contemplated on this when she asked: “Who evolves the frames? (...) I think the interesting thing is when the frames are constantly co-evolving (...) the organism is co-evolving its own frame or its own structure”. This perspective parallels Turner’s idea that structuring rules not are imposed on the flow from without but rather crystalize out of the flow (ibid.).

Based on my argumentation in this last chapter, I argue that Sisters Academy is inseparable from the constant learning processes by which performer-participants acquire experience and knowledge in practice, and become competent to ‘uphold the space’. Or by which we become magicians who know when it works and what it takes to make it work. From this perspective, we do not need a frame to create our ‘magic’ or to ‘go deeper’ inasmuch as we need a community of practice. This is not an imagined community (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983]) but a community that requires co-presence in the sense of mutual engagement in a joint enterprise. And this leads me back to my initial motivation to inquire into performer-participants’ motivation to engage with Sisters Academy. When I asked Erik if he thought he would participate in a next Sisters Academy manifestation, he assured me that this was the case and added: “this is my second nature”. In comparison with this quote, Hallberg’s (2009) inquiry into performer-participation in SIGNA initiates with the quotes: “It’s like a drug, you get totally hooked... I’m a Junkie!”, “Give me my doses two times a year... I’m a SIGNA-addict!”. What my analytical inquiry draws forth, is the perspective that the experienced processes of going ‘deeper’ and the learning processes that enable us to make it work in a way so we can ‘go deeper’, feed into a continuous search. When we have once experienced the satisfaction of something

‘deeper’, we want to go back. Or rather, we want to go on and go even ‘deeper’. In that sense, there is no ‘going back’ as the search is never ending. Or to use Erik’s wording:

“The end never comes – new beginnings appear”

Conclusion

“I know that there is much more. And the windows or the door opening to magic (...) I knew that there is, you just have to reach out for it or create it. But you don’t know exactly what it is and in which constellation it’s gonna appear. It’s like a door to deeper understanding or mystery or something. Like enchantment... Kind of a wow-feeling you know. I know how... I know how everything is connected and I know how to connect it. I know... I have the power to see beyond or... I can create magic. This kind of power. This kind of mystical space”

I initiated this thesis by quoting Kathryn’s reflections upon the large-scale manifestation of Sisters Academy #6. Kathryn talked about “this energy” that we are “dragged into”, “this connection with people”, “need for change (...) something bigger, more magical”. The quote above derives from the same conversation, when Mina reflects on the future potential of Sisters Academy. In Mina’s account, we see a sense of not knowing “exactly what it is”, yet knowing that it has to do with magic, a door to deeper understanding, enchantment, a wow-feeling, power, or a mystical space. Both Kathryn and Mina give expression and importance to experienced realities that are associated with Sisters Academy, and as the quotes indicate, such realities are not easily translated into words. In this study, I have engaged with the demanding endeavour to inquire into experienced realities through my insider-position as a performer-participant. This endeavour has spurred reflections on the accountability of my research engagement in a field where verbal language is thought of as inadequate to capture the depth of experience (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008:160; Luhmann 1986:214). I do not see my anthropological knowledge production as an alternative to embodied knowledge in the field, but rather as a contribution to the written narratives on Sisters Academy that one finds in press articles (Sisters Academy 2018i) or in Sisters Hope’s presentations, and to the academic understanding of interactive and immersive performance projects that have spread across Western societies today.

In line with my introduction on how Sisters Academy has developed as a practice throughout the past five years, and motivated by my awareness of the frequent expression ‘to go deeper’, I structured the thesis around the problem of how Sisters Academy enables performer-participants’ search ‘to go deeper’.

In the first part of the thesis, I engaged with the research question of how Sisters Academy is created and maintained in relation to ideas of the otherworldly. I analysed the intentional effort to create a coherent otherworldly space in contrast to everyday life in the outside world through concepts of a social aesthetic landscape and matter out of place. Through the perspective of a community of practice, I directed attention towards how Sisters Academy depends on performer-participants' continuous maintenance in the sense of engagement in a practice of poetry, mystery, and non-pretending. I argued that practice is maintained and negotiated through concrete actions, exchange of meta-communicative messages, and verbal interactions in The Staff Meeting. I emphasised the challenge of proper navigation in Sisters Academy, and touched upon how such navigation is crucial with regard to the risk that 'it doesn't work' and everything falls apart.

In the second part of the thesis, I focused on the question of how the expression 'to go deeper' relates to experienced processes in the field. I shed light on how performer-participants think of Sisters Academy as an extraordinary opportunity 'to go deeper', and argued that going deeper can be understood as processes towards increasing sensations of focus, connectedness, intensity, or mystery. I argued that such processes are generated by engagement in practice over time and can be understood as both short-term processes towards momentary sensations and as long-term transformative journeys. The first part of the chapter centred around an auto-ethnographic account of an experienced process from pretending to depth, which I analysed through perspectives of flow and authenticity as qualities of experience. I focused on my own experience, but also emphasised the social and shared aspects of the process. The second part of the chapter centred around an analysis and discussion of two interlocutors' transformative journeys in relation to a theoretical perspective of liminal rites of passage. While I found the concept of liminality intuitively meaningful in the performance context of Sisters Academy, I found it inadequate to capture the experienced complexity of my interlocutors' journeys. Meanwhile, the analytical dialogue with the ethnographic material enriched the understanding of how transformative processes in Sisters Academy involve active engagement and trespass the fixed time and space of manifestations.

In the third part of the thesis, I inquired into the question of how performer-participants become competent and engaged Sisters Academy practitioners over time. As a point of departure, I depicted an interlocutor's transformation from confused, sceptical, and frustrated newcomer to experienced, competent, and engaged practitioner within a couple of months. In accordance with my focus on social practice, I analysed the account through a perspective of situated learning, and argued that such a perspective was generally relevant in a Sisters Academy context with few explanations

and formal instructions. I considered the perspective that newcomers learn through imitation of experienced performer-participants, who are positioned as gatekeepers to tacit knowledge of practice, but took exception to an idea of learning as internalization of culturally given knowledge. I emphasised performer-participants' active engagement in a community of practice, which is itself transforming all the time, even if it may be regarded as inherently 'the same'. In the second half of the final chapter, I engaged with ethnographic material from the closure of Sisters Academy #6. Based on situational descriptions from shortly before and during the transition out of The Boarding School, I drew attention to collective aspects of 'going deeper'. I foregrounded the 'otherworldly' as an experiential attribute of outside world patterns at a time when performer-participants were deeply engaged with Sisters Academy, and drew attention to how familiarity with a social aesthetic landscape and shared repertoire was expressed through fine-tuned communication and the ability to effortlessly make practice work. In the very last section, I contemplated on the idea of performer-participants as skilled magicians who intuitively create Sisters Academy 'magic' outside the physical walls of The Boarding School, but whose magical power is strengthened within Sisters Academy as a community of practice. I concluded that it is through performer-participants' engagement in practice that experiences of going deeper occur and feed into an on-going search to go even deeper. By asking how Sisters Academy enables performer-participants' search 'to go deeper' I have thus shed light on how performer-participants' search 'to go deeper' enables Sisters Academy.

In the introduction, I situated this study within a dialogue between anthropology and performance fields. My navigation in the intersection between performance art practice, performance studies, and anthropology has both been a source of challenge and inspiration, and I believe that there is much unrecognised potential in divergent approaches to shared interests across the fields. To conclude this thesis, I briefly return to my methodological reflections upon this research project.

My fieldwork in the explorative and sensory performance context of Sisters Academy did not make me discard the academic pen, paper, and research questions, to use Tara's words, but it inspired me to innovate classical fieldwork methods in a sensory and poetic direction, for example, by incorporating blindfolds in focus group designs and conducting participant-observation through my Poetic Self called Flow. Besides these experimental strategies, my fieldwork approach was collaborative in the sense that I engaged with other performer-participants on shared interests ranging from explorative classes to design and facilitation of an extensive reflection process. This approach

was both inspired by my awareness towards ethical research practice, a wish to take advantage of the logics in the field, and my positioning as experienced practitioner – or as a native insider.

With regard to my positioning, I see this study as a contribution to a growing, if still peripheral, anthropological insider research practice. I have argued that my insider position in Sisters Academy enabled advantageous sensitivity and access to the field but also involved challenges with regard to ethics, analysis, and communication. In this context, I think that there is much to gain from a further dialogue between performance fields and anthropology. While performance studies and performance art practice is closely related through methodological genres such as art-based research practice, going native still figures as a risk to be avoided in anthropology. Inspired by Sisters Academy, my own methodological learning process, and my analytical orientation in this study, I will end this thesis by articulating a hope for the future. I hope that the future disciplinary directions of anthropology will involve a shift of attention; a shift from a fear of going native to a curiosity about varying ways of going deeper into human, social, and cultural phenomena. But importantly, we have to make it work according to the genre that we practice.

This was my academic performance

~

T H A N K Y O U

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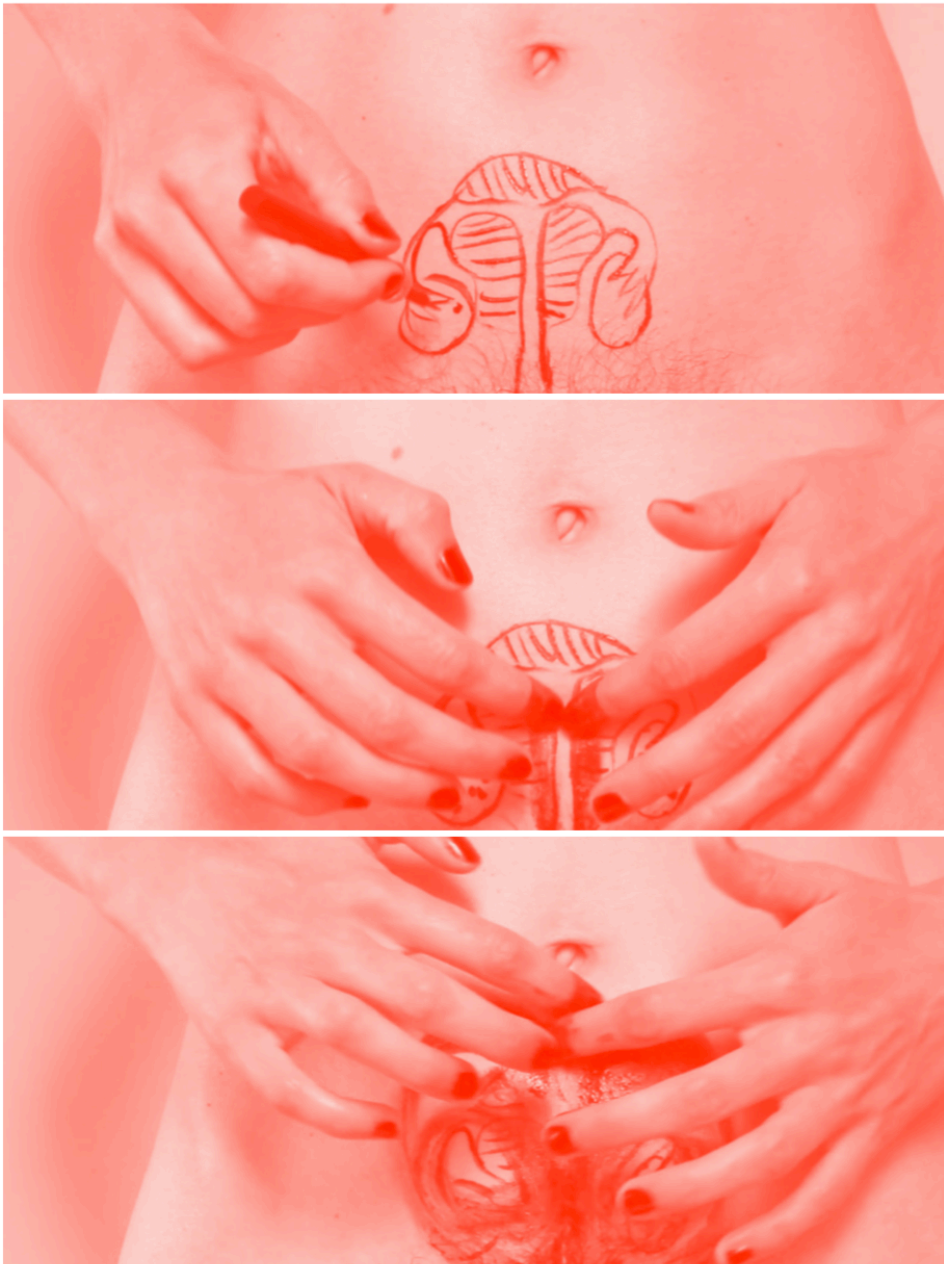
Appendix

Appendix 1: Manifest

Sensuous society - Beyond economic rationality

A L L * T O M O R R O W S * D R E A M S

manifesting ** transformation



The End is a New Beginning: In 2008 the financial world cracked, leaving a gap for the new - For the new paradigm to emerge. We regard the crack as a major opportunity.

The new paradigm: We wish to take this opportunity and support the transition into the new, by living and breeding in the cracks. From here we move.

The Sensuous Society: We will draw from the aesthetic dimension as a source of inspiration to inform the dawning world - We will call it: The Sensuous Society.

Why?

The Sensuous Society? As critical theory has pointed at the economic system has largely governed and dominated Western society since the industrialization, and rational thought has been roaming the tops of unnaturally constructed hierarchies of perception since the Enlightenment. Rational thought has been our dominating validating principle and economic premises such as efficiency, duty, and discipline have largely dominated everyday life in Western society. They have generally defined our institutions and offered themselves as primary modes of being and being together. However, the governance is not sustainable as the current ecological and economic crisis points at and it has led to a fundamental de-enchantment of the life-world of modern (wo)man.

Aesthetic Interventions: But its time has come. In opposition to the economic milestone stands the artistic or rather aesthetic. This mode is based on premises such as: phantasy, desire and not at least the sensuous experience of and engagement in the world. Artistic output is the quintessence of an ultimate aesthetic mode of being the world. The notion of a sensuous society reshapes the role of art and artistic practice. The exclusive autonomous art system is also a result of the dominance of the economic dimension. Within this autonomous zone the art genius is a celebrated figure, which is conceived as someone with a very special (transcending) intelligence. In a Sensuous Society however, we believe that this will be a more common intelligence - Simply, because we all have this creative potential within us, and if our outset and mode of being in the world is the sensuous, this potential will be released. The aesthetic mode of being and being together in the world is something we as humans always have and always will dive into. However, the current exclusiveness of this mode has created a collective longing in the Western world. Like an arm cut off we move forward in the ever-turning efficient wheels of society without noticing the blood floating from our armpits. We need to democratize the aesthetic mode of being to overcome the longing and suffering that its general absence outside the art system creates. The aesthetic dimension will serve as a key source of inspiration in the Sensuous Society. Step by step those engaged in the movement toward the Sensuous Society will make interventions into the societal institutions. They will move from the crack and engage. Ultimately these actions will however not be encapsulated spaces allowing a sensuous mode of being in the world, but will constitute the primary mode itself.

Poetic revolution: The road to the Sensuous society is carved with poetic revolution and poetic revolutionaries taking the necessary interventionist steps.

No utopia: Sensuous Society is no utopia. Sensuous society is a framework to explore the radical idea of the aesthetic dimension, the sensuous and the poetic as the highest values of society. What kind of society would that create?

How?

Performance Xperiments: We have no way of answering that question because we have not lived it. What we do have is the possibility to explore it through performance experiments. By putting our flesh to the idea. Embodying future visions to explore what it could be. While we explore we carve the path.

The school of a Sensuous society: The performance experiment Sisters Academy is one such experiment. In Sisters Academy we embody the school of a sensuous society. Through immersive strategies we transform space as we take over the leadership of a series of Nordic upper secondary schools. Everything from classrooms, hallways and bathrooms is transformed physically through set-, light-, and sound-design. Your toilets will be pink, radiant or dark and filled with a low sound of humming or screams,

the class rooms have turned into a forest, a ritual room, an ancient library, underneath the water, a fox cave and when you approach the leader of the school you will meet us embodying the unheimliche Sisters as head mistresses. Gases exchanged. We will greet you in an office of untamed animals, sweet heavy deep drinks, stamps, type writers, fluid chocolate and gold, chains, unwritten letters, fur on top of fur, fur in piles, red carpets, dimmed light, an unseen boarder that you sense, that you penetrate. That you penetrate because you are invited to. We become one. But two. But three. But many. A scent of times beyond time that will transcend your skin and tactilely touch you. Inspire you. Intervene you. Mirror you. Be you. Breath. The paradox of control and lush. The method is interactive. When you are at our school you are a student or a teacher or a guest of Sisters Academy and we and our staff will engage with you only from this simple premise. The logic of our world. Our poetic and sensuous world. Our school of a sensuous society. Our school where we explore new modes of sensuous knowledge creation, teaching, learning. When we change our educational system we change the lives of many. We reach out. The road to a Sensuous society is carved with poetic revolutionaries. Such are we as we reach. As we reach with kindreds in our movement. You leave your everyday persona to explore your potential poetic self while investigating how we can evoke and activate the senses to deepen the learning experience. We work interventionist as we intervene into everyday life contexts using art to argue the need for the aesthetic dimension to be an integrated part of everyday life - Not as something exclusive and autonomous. We transcend. We penetrate. With you.

Space changing: The changing of space is crucial. We immerse in spaces that allow us to navigate differently in the world. Like bodies swallowed by the sea will move dissimilar from upright legs walking the ground beneath our feet. Instinctively this body will adjust to the fluidity of the water. Try to survive. Take in breath. When we change space we liberate new potential. Instinctual.

Space change impact: Working with the idea of a sensuous society is working with a radical premise that changes the DNA of society and thereby everything. It is what you can do when you work with immersive performance art strategies by which we change space. You set up a universe and within this universe a new set of rules that we must all play by apply. The body immerses in this universe and eventual tactic knowledge will manifest in the flesh and the 'players' or the participants of the universe might eventual act in this new way naturally. Instinctual.

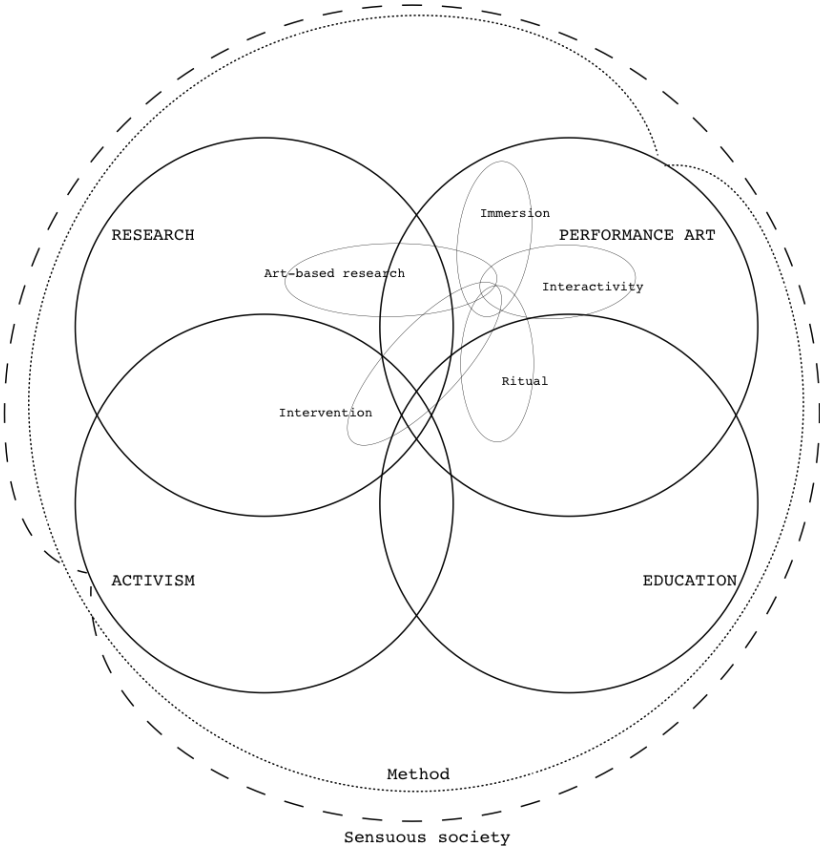
No utopia revisited: Sensuous Society is no utopia. There will most probably be winners and looser here as well. Who is going to lead - The most beautiful? The ones in touch with their senses? What will the trading system be? Something that allow you to be even more sensuous? Maybe when we are through a sensuous society we can begin to approach a more balanced state of being, that draw on all the previous states of society and truly connects heart, mind, body and spirit and creates sustainable trading systems between all members of society. Maybe we can go there already? We can ask these questions through immersive and intervening performance art practices in everyday life contexts, as sites of experiments where we explore how to create a stage for the release of creative, expressive, poetic and sensuous energy as first steps toward a more balanced and engaging world. Everyone becomes co-makers toward the new.

We will do this

Movement: When you have a cause and create a vibration centered in a universe and manifested in events that inspire others, the world will move in an assured and desired direction.

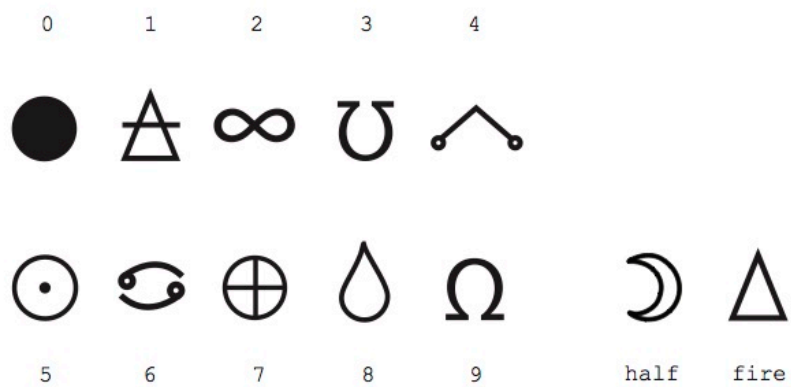
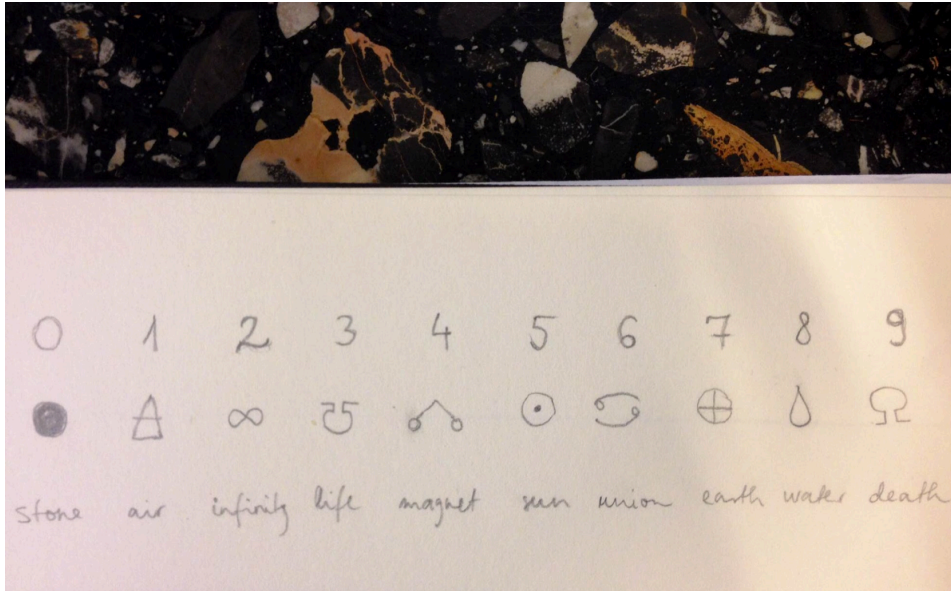


Appendix 2: Logics



Appendix 3: Number symbols

The number symbols that we intend to use during manifestations:



Appendix 4: Reflection process

The collaboration on the internal reflection process was initiated after the manifestation and it involved several phases:

- Talk with the artistic director Gry about potential and purpose of internal reflection.
- Design of a written questionnaire with the purpose to initiate the reflection process and guide the planning of an up-coming gathering.
- Design and facilitation of a collective two hour-gathering on Dec 2nd. A major part of the gathering was spent on conversations around five different topics that were decided on the basis of the individual questionnaire responses. Everyone could choose to engage with their preferred topic, and all conversations were recorded with a view to collective sharing and future potential.
- Transcription of the five conversations and donation of the entire material in the internal Sisters Academy Archive (see photo below).

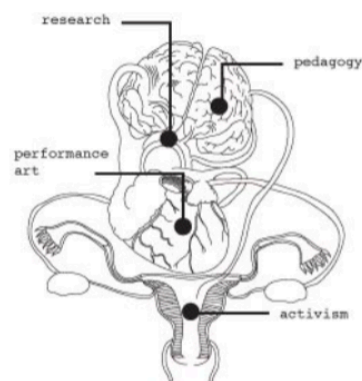


Appendix 5: Production plan

The intense production period took place from the 17th of August to the 22nd of October 2017 and was divided into three major phases:

Pre-production (17.08-18.09)	Manifestation (19.09-18.10)	Post-production (19.10-22.10)
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The more detailed rehearsal plan below is intended for the performer-group:



Sisters Academy #6 - The Boarding School **Rehearsal plan**

05.12.2016: Kick off at Den Frie with the entire team

24.4.2017: Performer workshop: Presentation, Introduction (project, functions, 4 logics), Poetic self. 15-22

8.5.2017: Performer workshop: 2 logics: Performance art and Research. 15-22

19.6.2017: Performer workshop: 2 logics: Educational development and Activism. 15-22

31.7.2017: Performer workshop: Preparations for departure. 15-22

17.8.2017-18.9.2017: Rehearsals and build-up (9 - 12: Workshop, 12 - 13: Lunch, 13 - 18: Help set-design)

19.9.2017-18.10.2017: Manifestation

19.10.2017-22.10.2017: Pack-down

Appendix 6: Written reflections

finding the octopus space being torn apart
and holding onto it by nothing all the
accruing patterns that appears in

destruction

and somehow in this destruction

a moment of tenderness

with the last piece of fabric

the man up high suddenly slowing down

he must have noticed me laying in the

octopus penches pushed together at my heart of
the school.

He gently ever so gently softes it down, and my body
reactes to his kindness and jumps up to lead the

last fabric of the heart of the school down to meet
the floor once again. As i touch it. I know. This is one of

these objects that i can not let go of. One of these objects
that i must make a vow of duty of beauty to.

This fabric must be the core of the map.

i lead the fabric to the table. As everyone around me is fearing thing down, i can not stop myself from building up. I can feel that this is the most important time. the time of what ~~you~~ will bring with ~~you~~ out into the outside world. I have been in this building, lived here, slept here every night here. Died and been born many times here. for life stone days.

life Stone life stone life stone life stone life stone life stone life stone life stone life

and now it is past
but not yet
will it ever be
i don't think so.

i think that is what i am trying to do

doing a 00dimensional drawing, that shows how this manifestation has been present before, during, after, in between, everywhere, in the cracks, on the cracks, through the crack and infinity will be.

I think back to what my very first anxiety attack created back when i was a confused 13 year old teenager. I could suddenly feel ventilation systems full of rings pulling me in. I could not breath. i was in a room with 100's of people. I ran out, and layed on the ground, but then all the grams/branches from the trees started not ending were they were ending, the lines the where creating started continuing on after the object had stopped, all the stones created multiple rings around them, and when i closed my eyes it was still there i could not breath. i could not breath. i could not breath. i could not breath.

But now i can breath, and i can look now at what was just that and see all the pattern of objects moving in space, freezing up and moving at the same time. Beautiful images. purest form of beauty to my eyes. Yesterday at dinner i said, i think the hardest part is still to come. Moments outburst "What". Maybe now he will understand why.

The hardest. pure. beauty.

Being the allways, at all times.

it did not end on infinity infinity day of the air stone moth of the year

~~100~~ 100 on 100 100/100