The Inner Gaze in Artistic Practice
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“A finger pointing at the moon is not the moon…”
-Buddhist Quote

“…but it can point you in the right direction.”
-Charles Tart, American psychologist

Introduction

In this Master’s Thesis I will be presenting the idea of an Inner Gaze as an inherent witnessing system used in artistic practice. I will be mirroring my own practice as a Musician/Artist/Sound-Designer in the teachings of Hypnosis and The Science of Consciousness. Further I will share and analyze the collected data gathered from interviews with artists from different artistic fields, in order to gain a better understanding of how they experience their creative and performing minds. Is there any coherence in how we experience creativity? How common are the sensations of altered states of consciousness among artists? Can other artists relate to the idea of an inner gaze? Is this something we long to further explore and develop and would such a concept be beneficial for the artist and its works?

As children most of us naturally used our imaginative powers daily. We could create parallel worlds and entities to interact with and the lines between dreams and reality could easily seem undefined and shifting. Some of us became so captivated by these experiences that we kept on to them and refused the conditioning of adulthood. We created practices and methods in order to keep these inner worlds alive. Music became my practice and creating songs, soundscapes and performing them my methods. Almost 25 years has passed since I first started performing my own songs using my voice and guitar. I can still vividly recall the sensation I had as a teenager entering the world of music, creativity and live-performance. I started performing at home, mostly in the living-room for family and friends. Sometimes I would come out from my room with a freshly written song asking my family members to listen to it. Other times we would have guests over and someone would ask me if I would go grab my guitar and sing a few tunes. Either way, the experience of performing my music live, introduced a new sensation I hadn’t felt before, the feeling of a building momentum, presence and unity. When I was asked to perform I would first feel quite nervous and shy. Then as I would reach for the guitar to tune it and go over the chords, I remember it as if a very focused energy would take over me. When I finally would start playing, I would experience an extreme sensation of vibrance and presence. I remember it as if my eye-sight would become more narrow and focused, while a new sensation of seeing would open up.
I recall describing it in those days as the sensation of being able to “read between the lines”. (Today I would describe the same phenomena as having a double vision or using my the inner gaze.) It was like if a new dimension would open up during the performance. I experienced it as if I for a short moment could see beyond our names, personalities, social-roles and catch a glimpse of our greater selves. At that time I was very fascinated by the phenomenon but had not so many ways of expressing it. Neither did I have enough life-experience to know if this was a characteristic state for everyone playing live music or not? For me this elevated sensation seemed to be a natural part of musicianship and was probably the reason why I decided to study to become a composer/artist.

Every song I wrote had a clear message, a message of healing and peace. As a teenager I had started to become more aware of how unfair and cruel the world could be and I started writing songs as a means to channelize this existential pain and frustration. The first song I wrote was called “Many Questions” and I remember how I wanted to name my first album “Message to The World”. I usually wrote the lyrics first. Then I would strum my 12 stringed guitar until finding the right chords and melodies to merge with it. So right from the start there was a clear intention behind my compositions. The intense feelings I felt during performing the songs and the response I got from others, which to some point confirmed my experiences, made me feel more significant as a person. Suddenly I wasn’t just a dreary teenager, I was something greater than so. I was connected to others, a part of the world and it seemed like my music, words and actions actually could matter.

Ten years, one music-high school degree and an Andalusian Flamenco adventure later, I started the band ABJEEZ! (Persian slang for sisters) together with my older sister Melody. Melody and I had been writing songs with Farsi lyrics since my early teens. She is nine years older than me and for us this was a fun creative way to hang out and have a laugh. She wrote the (often humorous and social-critical) lyrics and I accompanied them with my (fusion-like, latin/rock/reggae inspired) music.

After a few years of Flamenco guitar studies in Seville, Spain, I came to the conclusion that practicing guitar several hours a day wasn’t my calling. I longed for being creative again, writing and communicating my music with an audience. I longed for the interaction. Even though studying a new culture and sharpening guitar techniques had been very exciting and enriching for two years, I felt like something I was used to and had found very meaningful was missing. So I called up Melody who had moved to USA and said, “I am ready if you are?”

Never had we an idea of what an impact this step would have on our Persian culture nor in our personal lives. During the teenage years many Iranians had told us how original they found our music. That they had never heard anything like it before and family and friends were constantly asking us to record and document our songs.

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1 www.abjeez.com
2 www.flamencoheeren.net
Surprisingly our initiative to finally start the ABJEEZ project and the beginning of the “The third digital revolution…” coincided and our music was quickly spread to Iranians around the globe. We became known as the first band playing Persian Ska/Reggae music and we were one of the first Persian alternative bands after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Being female front-figures, feminists and sisters made our project even more radical and appealing to many people.

We had a very immediate start to our ABJEEZ career and many productive, intense and educative years followed, touring the world, producing new music and making our popular homemade videos. However looking back on it today, I notice how green we were and remember how challenging it was for me as a young musician to direct a seven membered band through an unknown territory. Since everything we did was so contemporary and cross-cultured, we realized very soon that we had to keep being a DIY band in order to avoid compromising our creativity and sincere expression. Every member in the band helped shaping it in different ways and since our brother Sufi also was a member, we really became an ABJEEZ family.

The intense years working solely with the band and all the new performing experiences brought with it, kept feeding my curiosity about the elevated states of awareness I so often experienced in the creative processes and on stage. Although now the sensation of an altered state of awareness during the performance had more layers to it. Suddenly the stages, hence the physical spaces were bigger. The technique got more advanced and required more attention. The smaller gatherings of audience turned into crowds and the communication and interaction was not solely happening between me and the audience but it was an advanced collective work happening between me, the band, between the band members themselves, us as a unity and the public.

Every time I went up on the stage it was like if the time and space dimensions shifted. A few seconds could feel like several minutes while an hour could feel like 20 min. I could experience at least three layers of communication happening within myself and two layers of interaction with each band-member. Then I had one layer of communication with the music as an entity and another with the audience as one body.

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3 www.steigmancommunications.com/4th-digital-revolution-coming/

4 “Do it yourself” (‘DIY’)

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1.1 ME - THE BANDLEADER & ARTIST: My role is to make sure we as a band keep our agreement with the audience by authentically delivering what they have come to experience/take part in.
1.2 MY BODY: - Doing the action of singing, playing and moving. Using it muscular memory, still being very attentive and present to any necessary adaptations.
1.3 MY HIGHER SELF: - The part of me recognizing energies & sensations of love, transcendence and unity. The disassociated perspective.

I started to see the music and the communication between me and the others as energy. As if I as a bandleader would be a director of energies. Every move, action and expression had direct consequences on all relations. My role as the front-figure of the band was to set the tone for our communication and make everyone feel comfortable in order to help bring forth the best in us all.

The curiosity about these metaphysical experiences in my practice led me to taking the question about an inner seeing more seriously. What was this inner realm? How did it operate and to what extend could I influence it?
The Inquiry

Is there an Inner Gaze?

In this Masters Program I have been studying that which I used to refer to as existing “between the lines” as a teenager. That which I experience as a double vision today. Something intangible still extremely present. A state of mind very connected to my creativity with a notable healing aspect to it.

We usually refer to the inner/outer concepts of the self when wanting to express something happening to us internally mentally/emotionally vs. externally physically. My research topic isn’t something I am able to touch or physically identify, so it is definitely something happening to me mentally/emotionally hence I choose the word “inner” to start with.

In my artistic practice I often experience a sensation of a double vision. While I can see with my eyes, I can also experience a second seeing. There is a coherence between the seeing I experience in my creative process or on stage and the seeing I experience when for example reading a book or daydreaming. An inner seeing strongly connected to my imagination. However not being the imagination but that which is observing my imagination. Even though I believe this phenomena is much vaster then one isolated sense, the seeing is the closest I come to describing it. I recognized that a gaze is a steady and kinder way of observing, maybe a more intuitive way of looking. Therefore I choose to call it; “The Inner Gaze”.

A great part of my research has been to gain a better understanding of how other artists can relate to such an idea and if it could be a beneficial terminology for us to use in our practices. In order to make the concept more available and relatable for anyone to access, it has been important for me to release the concept from any potential religious, political or spiritual weight. The idea of inner worlds, visions and elevated sensations are often associated with religion or spiritualism. Mediums e.g. often talk about a second seeing when channeling spirits and we have all heard the stories about people seeing angles, the appearance of Jesus or other supernatural entities. Of course we can also see many parallels between creativity and spirituality in the art context. In the beginning of the 20th century many western artists like Hilma af Klint or Wassily Kandinsky to mention a few, made direct connections between their artistic practices and spirituality. Hilma af Klint making her abstract art through spiritual channeling and Kandinsky writing about music and painting, connecting the artistic work to a spiritual realm existing beyond our materialistic world and constantly referring to the artist’s soul. In his book “On the Spiritual in Art” Kandinsky (1946) written in 1912, he ponders on the inner and outer experiences of art and its effects on our lives. He writes about the physical vs. the emotional experiences of colors, shapes and sounds and I do find a coherence in our curiosity and urge to try describing these elevated sensations we experience in our practices.
After having studied some of these artist's works and lives, I have found something in common in the ways we as artists, cross centuries, experience our creative processes and art in general. We are all trying to define our inner realities through our artistic expressions. Maybe that which our inner gaze is witnessing.

In order to better understand my inner gaze I had to start asking myself some fundamental questions. I started with the physical eyes and my eye-sight; I asked myself; 
-To whom does these eyes belong?
I responded: -They belong to a female named Safoura. Her brain is interpreting what she sees so that she can make sense of her reality.
-What is this second vision experienced?
-Since I don’t have any internal “eye organ”, it must be my mind activating the same parts of my brain that the eye-sight does when experiencing something, consequently giving me the impression of a second seeing.
-So what or who is this mind?
-A human being named Safoura.
-Very well, but who is it that has the capacity to dissociate with this idea of Safoura and ask these questions? Actually...who are you? Reading this paper right now? How can you even answer that question without being able to disassociate from “yourself”?

Documentation 1 : Notes about The Self

Writing in my mother-tounge Farsi in order to get an alternative perspective on my thoughts.
Trying to figure out who I am and who/what is observing that which I am.
Is there something observing that which is observing?
Documentation 2: Sketching the inner & the outer senses

Mirroring my physical senses with the internal equivalents of them.

Exploring eye-sight vs. visualization, hearing with the ears vs. hearing imaginative sounds, tasting with my taste-buds vs. imagining a taste like e.g. the taste of a lemon and feeling a texture of an object vs. feeling a sensation like loneliness. Mirroring physical activity vs. thinking/imagination/dreaming.

In order to better understand how to study something so subjective and intangible as I was doing, I looked into the field of Parapsychology. The field which examines that which exists beyond or alongside the logic and the soul. The study of Parapsychology is the study of the strange phenomenas balancing on the limit of the rational and the spiritual (Castellan, 2001). Religions and other spiritual movements have tried to explain phenomenas such as the experiences of other entities or realms through their own cultural and historical perspectives. One could say that Parapsychology is the scientific step towards the examination of the senses beyond the five scientifically proven ones. Bringing the concepts of ESP (Extrasensory Perception) and PK (Psycho Kinesis) into the laboratory.

Professor Martin Johnson (Johnson, 1980) explains how one of the biggest problems with Parapsychology is that the study of unique individuals can’t reach results which can be evaluated in a strictly scientific manner. Since each laboratory experiment is made on specific individuals, the results will always be unique to a great sense, which makes them difficult to evaluate in a desired scientific way. He also explains how it traditionally is claimed that psychological factors play a big part in the induction of paranormal phenomenas. Because of this, laboratory investigations are especially difficult in the field. Also he explains how restrictive and special requirements needed in a laboratory experiment probably reduces the likelihood for something paranormal to occur.

I actually see many similarities between the fields of Parapsychology and Artistic Research. Both areas are trying to grasp and identify an extrasensory experience.
I did an intuitive chart over my life, dividing it into chapters from when I was born, until my current age. I was curious to see how music and sound had interacted with me in the different phases of my life. I did this in order to try to find a deeper understanding of art’s function in my life. What I noticed was that I could detect a connection between challenging life experiences and the blossoming of my imagination, creativity and artistic expression. Doing this chart made me see how the most challenging periods of my life coincided with my strongest spiritual and creative experiences. This made me see parallels between pain, creativity and spirituality. I started to remember all the cliches I had heard all my life stating that “a really good artist is a suffering one” that “art is pain” and so on. I thought of Beethoven who gradually lost his hearing, Van Gogh losing his mind, Frida Kahlo suffering chronic pain and how Hilma af Klint started to engage in paranormal activities and spiritual paintings, first when facing the death of her dear sister Hermina (Dryschka, 2019).

It seems like there is an intensification in creativity in moments of suffering. As if experiences of pain encourage our imagination to expand. I wonder if random challenges in life push us out into the unknown, activating creative parts of our brains as a survival instinct? Whichever the case, there seems to be something witnessing all these inner processes. Like an inner seeing, maybe an inner gaze.
Theoretical Framing

The Science of Consciousness

The philosophical ideas about the body and mind relation have been pondered upon since ancient times. What are humans made of? Do we have a soul? In the study of consciousness there are many theories trying to answer these questions. However they all have their roots in one of the two main concepts Dualism or Monism. Dualistic theories argue that the universe is made out of two different entities or subjects, the physical and the mental or non-physical. Monistic theories argue that consciousness and physical matter are basically the same thing. (Revonsuo, 2010, p.4)

Phenomenal consciousness is a term used in consciousness science to describe the subjective qualitative experience of the self. The feeling of the self. What makes phenomenal-consciousness so tricky is that it ultimately is a subjective experience. Even though several philosophical theories try to solve the problem of consciousness, scientists still don’t know how any physical system could give rise to any subjective qualitative experiences, there are still no signs of how any neural activities could do this. Neuroscientists can objectively study the brain and state how neurons fire at certain frequencies in the brain. This can objectively be studied and examined in different ways. However, there is still no brain scanning technology which can mirror a persons qualitative experience, e.g. feeling excitement, body-pain or the sensation of awe when listening to a beautiful piece of music. Brain scans can show how different parts of the brain get activated during these experiences but the experience itself can only be identified through a first-person perspective, in that specific person’s subjective psychological reality. (Revonsuo, 2010, p.39-41)

The idea of an inner gaze is hence strongly related to a phenomenal state of consciousness. But in what way can it be beneficial to contextualize such a concept in an artistic context?

In Philosophy we speculate about the big and small questions of life. In Science we use systematic, objective examinations in order to describe our reality; hence we find the answers. In Art, however, we use our creative skills in order to communicate, express and share our subjective realities. Art could be explained as the doing we express through our skills and actions. What is so fantastic about artistic performance is that it can provide us with the necessary distance needed, in order for us to be able to put our cultural practices and beliefs on display and (re-)evaluate them. In the Art Society Context course tutored by Jon Refsdal Moe at SKH we often discussed how performance puts art on display and opens up a negotiation place. We stage our political, spiritual and cultural believes and look at them from afar. By doing so we have the necessary distance in order to

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6 Stockholms Konstnärliga Högskola/Stockholm University of the Arts
process and meditate about them. Hence new belief-systems can arise. Isn’t this negotiation place essential in order for philosophy and science to take place? In a Youtube Video Neuroscientist Dr. V.S. Ramachandran talks about consciousness, explaining the concept of *Qualia*. He says that philosophers describe *qualia* (*singular quale*) as the sensations you are conscious of. Different qualia create different emotions or moods and since qualia are subjective they can only be *communicated*. And how do we communicate? Through writing, speaking, telling stories, playing music, dancing, acting, building sculptures, painting, with other words through “practical skills”. In short through art.

So I would like to describe the inner gaze as the part of the self which witnesses qualia. When I tell you a story I use my imagination and creativity in order to visualize that which is being communicated to you. Hence my inner gaze is *witnessing* the spectacular work of my imagination. The inner gaze is witnessing how my imagination brings forth memories, experiences and sensations of many sorts, intertwining them in creative and meaningful ways, in order to make them interesting, meaningful and understandable when communicating them to you.

You, as the listener, can choose to join me, using *your inner gaze* in order to witness the *qualia* of the drama being communicated to you. Hence your inner gaze witnesses the use of your imagination, experiences and creativity, visualizing that which is being communicated to you, making it present and meaningful. You can also choose not to follow. Consequently your inner gaze is focused on other qualitative experiences more interesting for you and all you hear is just words coming out of my mouth, not the actual story.

So the word *focus* also seems to be a key concept when describing this witnessing source. *How does focus affect phenomenal consciousness?* For me focus is very connected to the idea of energy. When I focus on something I use energy to sharpen my attention in order to project it on the focus point. By doing so I consequently leave out other surrounding information on behalf of the gained concentration on the focus point.

In the previous example of the different layers of awareness/communication happening on stage (*Figure.1*), I explained how I experienced my role as a bandleader as a director of energies. When I’m on stage with the band, I am rapidly changing the focus of my attention between my mental state, my performance, the band members, the music and the audience. This rapid shifting of attention happens in the *Reflective Consciousness*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTWmTJALe1w>
Reflective Consciousness could be described as the spotlight of attention which give rise to high cognitive processing. The processing which the inner gaze might be witnessing.

“In reflective consciousness, cognitive operations are carried out that take the images in the centre of phenomenal consciousness as input and allow them to access a wide variety of other cognitive mechanisms.” (Revonsuo, 2010, p.77)

“…the content selected by the spotlight of attention typically form the clearest experiences in the centre of consciousness and the objects of further processing in reflective consciousness…” (Revonsuo, 2010, p.77)

As a phenomenally conscious human being, my inner gaze, the witnessing part of the qualia of my experiences, observes how my reflective consciousness classifies my experiences into different communication channels in order to handle the complex activity of the simultaneous giving, receiving and creating process that happens when I am on stage. When my focus is strong enough and the band members and audience choose to use their consciousness processing in similar ways, we emotionally connect, our energies fuse and we may join in a strong sensation of unity and flow.

In philosophy some might call what I suggest being an inner gaze to be the pre-reflective self-consciousness.

“Despite important disagreement on crucial questions about whether there is an ego or self, phenomenologists are in close agreement about the idea that the experiential dimension always involves this kind of implicit, pre-reflective self-awareness. One can get a bearing on the phenomenological notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness by contrasting it with the notion defended by Brentano. According to Brentano (1874/1973), when I perceive a cat, I am aware that I am perceiving a cat. Importantly, he acknowledges that I do not have here two distinct mental states, but one single mental phenomenon: my consciousness of the cat is one and the same as my awareness of perceiving it. But by means of this unified mental state, I have an awareness of two objects: the cat and my perceptual experience.” (Ciaunica, 2015)

So the inner gaze could be equivalent to the concept of the pre-reflective self-consciousness. However I still choose to call it an inner gaze since the term better resonates with my earlier descriptions of the phenomena as a sensation of a double vision. One witnessing source being my eyes, sending information to my brain creating phenomenal conscious experiences for me. Another seeing being my inner gaze, witnessing how my reflective consciousness treats/evaluates the qualia of my phenomenally conscious experiences.
1. Light hit my eyes, transforms to signals to brain.
2. Brain translating signals to quail in phenomenal consciousness defining a color
3. Reflective consciousness evaluating the color
4. Inner gaze witnessing the process

Going back to my earliest experiences of performing music as a teenager, I explained before how the altered sensation I experienced got activated as soon as I grabbed my instrument and started tuning it and how it intensified and became present as a double vision when I started interacting with the audience during the performance. I described how I felt an altered sensation of unity in the room and that it was like if the music and the performance gave me a glimpse of who we were beyond our names and personalities. In the science of consciousness this is relatable to the study of Altered States and Higher States of Consciousness.
Professor Antti Revonsuo explains in his book “Consciousness The Science of Subjectivity” (Revonsuo, 2010), how the concepts of Altered States of Consciousness (ASC) and Higher States of Consciousness (HSC) are related and quite difficult to define.

The ASC could be described as the unusual or diverse experiences temporarily affecting the more ordinary ongoing stream of consciousness. The subjective experience briefly changes and differs from how it usually is.

“...an ASC is a temporary, reversible state of consciousness that significantly differs from the baseline state and typically lasts from a few minutes to at most a few hours.” (Revonsuo, 2010, p. 230)

“The subject having the ASC must feel or recognize that his or her experience is remarkably different from the normal state.” (Revonsuo, 2010, p. 231)

On the other hand Higher States of Consciousness have a more meaningful or satisfying feel to them and are seemingly more difficult to reach and maintain.

“In higher states of consciousness our mind literally gets into a “high”. (Revonsuo, 2010, p. 264)

In order to better understand what potentially could make a state of consciousness higher than our normal states, Revonsuo states three main aspects which all seem to play a significant role in HSC.

During HSC the:

**attention** becomes very focused and stable under effortless voluntary control. We access a very narrow one-pointedness of mind while at the same time having access to a wide scope of sensory-perceptual awareness. We can control what to keep in the center of our phenomenal consciousness and experience it very intensely. By being absorbed by what is being focused upon, the reflective consciousness some how becomes more silent and there is a strong sensation of presence. Hence there is a higher attentional state keeping us very absorbed and present in the here and now.

**emotion**s become altered in the sense that they typically involve strong positive feelings of well-being. The inner emotional experience are typically characterized by by the presence of positive emotions such as compassion, joy and pure happiness in the absence of any negative affect.

**cognition** becomes altered in the sense that a deeper sense of understanding seems to arise. Higher cognitive states may involve sensations of a higher knowing or a sensation of an ultimate truth or an insight to the nature of things, cosmos, God or other spiritual entities or orders.
“The attentional, emotional and cognitive elements of higher states of consciousness may appear separately or in various combinations in different ASCs.” (Revonsuo, 2010, p. 264)

One of the classified branches of Higher States of Consciousness is the so-called Mystical Experiences. These are known to be, temporal, intense, highly positive and often spiritual and meaningful experiences with long lasting effects on the beholder’s life. They are often difficult to describe in words and have a feeling of a deeper existential understanding to them. Perceptually these states can involve unusual visions or have a sensation of a clearer or brighter seeing to them. (Revonsuo, 2010, p. 276)

Flow Experiences, defined and popularized by the positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is another known classification of an HSC. Flow Experiences are actually very related to artistic practice since they often appear in creative work. This state is characterized by a single-mindedness and an extreme focus on the task at hand. An elevated sensation of joy and control in the present doing, dismissing any discomfort or sensation of e.g., hunger or tiredness. The flow state is also very present in sports and may arise in other physical activities. (Moore, 2021)

All these experiences are very real to the subjective mind but extremely difficult to study from a scientific perspective. However, there is growing evidence that several Altered States of Consciousness states such as dreaming, out of body experiences, hallucination, meditation and hypnosis to mention a few, are measurable phenomena since they have specific, objectively detectable neural correlates in the brain. (Revonsuo, 2010, p. 278)

So that mental condition which I have been pondering since my teens is actually an Altered States of Consciousness. Whenever I create or perform, I enter an ASC where I access a higher mental perspective, a sensation of a double vision, an inner gaze. Many times, this ASC leads me to a sensation of Flow and occasionally it can also lead to an almost Mystical Experience reaching a euphoric sensation of a broader understanding, love and unity. This is probably why I have always connected music to healing. This might be why pain is so connected to art. In moments of great challenges, artistic practice can bring us to Higher States of Consciousness which can provide us with momentary relief and comfort and sometimes with even life lasting effects.

Understanding the Altered States of Consciousness better, I notice how related the idea of an inner gaze can be to the states of Flow and even Mystical Experiences. However, I still perceive the inner gaze as a witnessing system which is present before and after these HSC states come and go. During a Flow Experience the double vision is there but not as relevant since the elevated states are dominating the moment. Maybe the inner gaze can activate these HSC’s by bringing a deeper awareness to the doing and by expanding the seeing in order for them to a-raise?
Many years ago I wrote a short manifesto in order to concretize and express the intentions behind my artistic practice.

**MUSIC CAN HEAL - MUSIC CAN INSPIRE - MUSIC CAN CHANGE - MUSIC HAS POWER**

Music actually healed me, every time I broke. All my dramatic childhood memories of being a five year old refugee fleeing war, embraced this magical world made of complex rhythms, harmonies, melodies and tales. I was inspired to sing and express myself instead of keeping it all inside. Because of this, I got to feel special, instead of feeling weird or “different” when growing up in an environment so unlike that which I was used to. So I followed my passion and it took me to many exciting places, made me get to know people and personalities of a vast variety. This made me understand, that I am a part of everything and everything is a part of me. I learned that change is continuous... That life is forever unfolding. This knowledge infused me with so much love and gratitude that I finally have attained the power to take responsibility for my life and shape it the way I wish.

**Hypnosis**

In the fall of 2020 I came in contact with the study of hypnosis and chose to take a closer look at this topic in relation to my artistic practice and research question. During my hypnosis studies I have constantly been struck by the resemblance between hypnotherapeutic work and artistic practice. I see how the hypnotherapist and the artist both work with the client’s/audience’s attention and energy in order to create the focus needed for an Altered/Higher State of Consciousness experience to arise. Both fields use words/music as tools and act as inspirational forces inducing the client’s/audience’s creativity and imagination skills. Both hypnotherapist and artist have the extremely delicate task of receiving/keeping the client’s/audience’s attention and trust in order to elevate the consciousness and reach sensations of unlocking and bliss. In both fields, dramaturgy and storytelling are essential; both therapist and artist must always be attentive on the client/audience in order to be ready to improvise if unexpected situations occur.

There are many misassumptions regarding hypnosis and the term could actually be described as a label used for a wide range of trancelike experiences brought about by inductions (relaxation/going into trance) and suggestions (verbal guidance of clients emotions and thoughts ).

Hypnosis as we know it today in a western context is usually traced back to the Austrian doctor Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815). He had a great interest for astronomy and had a theory about how the planets influenced the human body. He called his theory “animal magnetism” and the treatments involved metals bods put in a pool filled with water, glass and iron filings.
According to Mesmer the pool got activated by magnetism which then was transferred to the patients body through the metal bods they would hold in their hands. During the treatments Mesmer would also walk around in the room, stroking the patient’s and talking to them in a positive suggestible way. Mesmer’s animal magnetism methods gained great renown and he moved to Paris, there he was strongly questioned by other scientists and colleagues. A committee was assigned to examine Mesmer’s methods and a strongly critical report led to Mesmer’s downfall. (Wormnes, Hillestad & Wikström, 2000, p. 41)

However Mesmer’s methods were already well spread and the Scottish surgeon James Braid (1785-1860) defined Mesmerism in a new scientifically acceptable way and called the phenomenon hypnosis, the Greek word for sleep. He soon realized that the name was misleading since the hypnotic state differs from the state of sleep, but it was too late to change it. Even though he tried, the name hypnosis was already acknowledged and established in the field. (Wormnes, Hillestad & Wikström, 2000, p. 42)

So one could say that a hypnotic state is similar to an Altered States of Consciousness in the sense that it is temporary, focused and unlike the ordinary stream of consciousness. However there seems to be some controversy in the field of science of consciousness whether hypnosis involves an ASC or not.

“The changes in experiences due to suggestion may be due to strong expectations, mental imagery and playing along with the hypnotist. Increasing evidence, however, shows that at least some highly suggestible persons do experience drastic changes in their perception, sensation and cognition due to hypnotic suggestions, and that such changes are accompanied by objective changes in brain activity.” (Revonsuo, 2010, p. 260) By using EEG (Electroencephalogram) technology the electric activity of the brain can be measured.

Whether hypnosis can be scientifically proven or not, my hypnotherapist teachers Jörgen Sundvall and Maria Sundkvist don’t spend too much time dwelling on it. For them hypnosis works and they prefer investing their time helping clients, freeing them from different traumas, addictions and other unwanted emotional wight. Jörgen has been working with hypnosis since the 1990’s and he also uses past live regression therapy in his work. He founded the school of SSEAH in 1997 and has educated many successful hypnotherapists since then. Maria Sundkvist is a former student of the school and has worked as a hypnotherapist for the last 15 years. She has been my teacher for three of the four course modules I have undertaken during the spring of 2021.

“A hypnotic state is a state of simultaneous relaxation and sharpened concentration, empathy and increased consciousness induced by suggestions.” Own translation, (OT) (Sundvall, 2001)

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8 Svenska Skolan för Etisk och Analytisk Hypnos (SSEAH) <https://sseah.se/om-oss/>
“Hypnosis is largely about your willingness to receive and respond, i.e., live yourself into different ideas and to let them work in your inner being. We call these ideas suggestions.” (OT) (Sundvall, 2001)

A great part of what we know as hypnosis consists of suggestions. Suggestions are verbal guidance which the hypnotherapist gives to the client while the client is relaxed in a trance state. The trance state which we call hypnosis is very similar to a deep meditative state. I have joined all the courses SSEAH has to offer in order to really understand and get a feel for hypnosis. The course modules being, Hypnosis Basic Theory & Practical Corse 1, Additional Methods & Practice, Advanced Hypnotherapy 2 and the Past Life Regression course. During my studies I have both been hypnotized many times and also practiced my own hypnotizing skills. As a client I have experienced deep hypnosis, both having the sensation of re-visiting conscious and subconscious childhood memories and memories/experiences of several past lives. An inner gaze is extremely present in the hypnotic intervention. From a client perspective I have noticed that it becomes increasingly easier to get into hypnotic trance (both through self-hypnosis and by therapist) the more I do it and that the “depth” of the trance state can vary quite a lot from time to time. Personally I would definitely characterize hypnosis as an ASC since attention, emotion and cognition alters and the state is temporal and differs from the ordinary stream of consciousness.

From a hypnotherapeutic perspective I believe the act of hypnotizing is very easy and very hard at the same time. It’s easy in the sense that basically anyone can read inductions and lead a client through the required steps to turn within and probably reach some hypnotic state, even if it might be a lighter trance state. However hypnotism is, in my opinion, a skill that needs time in order to mature within the therapist. A lot of practice is needed in order to develop the right skills to become a professional and responsible hypnotherapist. Hypnotizing is a lot about trust. Since the hypnotist uses her/his voice as the main tool in the procedure, it is extremely important to be calm, balanced and impartial in order for the client to feel safe enough to relax and trust the process. It is ultimately the client who does the work so to say. It is definitely important to be able to use one’s imagination in order to reach a successful hypnotic experiences. However what is exciting is that, by reaching a trance state, a lot of the effort in the doing disappears. The inner images and emotions just emerge and actually many times surprise the client. One gets access to qualities, emotions, information and skills not always so present in an ordinary state of consciousness.

In consciousness science the parts of our mind being temporarily absent from consciousness are called the unconscious. (Revonsuo, 2011, p. 89) In hypnotherapy they are labelled as subconscious. This originates from the Freudian and Jungian theories about how our memories and past experiences are stored within the human consciousness, under the conscious mind. In a hypnotherapeutic session the sensation is that, through deep relaxation, one digs deeper and reaches below the conscious mind, hence reaches the sub-consciousness. Reaching qualitative experiences of the past, future or what one thought was unknown.
Methods

Introduction
My main intention was to finalize these Master’s studies by creating a performance/concert inspired by hypnotherapeutic methods unpacking the work in writing and underpinning the research with consciousness science theory. However I had to change my plans since the Covid19 restrictions limited my ability to collaborate with others and perform live for an audience.

Reseaching such an abstract concept such as an inner gaze, I decided to try to approach the subject from different angles in order to get a better understanding of it. Therefore I chose these three paths:

1. Use my gained hypnosis skills on three (Corona safe?) TV performances I had during the spring of 2021. The idea was to see how deliberate hypnotherapeutic methods would affect the viewer’s and my experiences of the performances.
2. Run a statistical anonymous questionnaire aimed at artists in different artistic fields in order to see how they relate to the idea of an inner gaze.
3. Do four in-depth interviews with different artistic practitioners in order to get some more personal view-points on the research question.

\* Covid19 tests were taken every day on the set.
Methods for The Hypnotic Performances
In the spring of 2021 I had three TV Performances, performing as SAFOURA.
I hadn’t been performing on a big stage since the beginning of January 2019 and besides
not feeling so fit, I knew that these performances would be rather challenging in many
ways. So I thought that this would be the perfect opportunity to put my new hypnotic
skills to work in order to see how they would affect my performances in relation to my
research topic. As a method I have been using different induction and suggestion therapy
template from SSEAH’s course literature and practiced and used them in relation to these
performances.

The Questionnaire
I wanted to create a questionnaire which would be easy and fun to fill in. I wanted it to be
anonymous in order for the artist to be free in her/his reflections. One of my first personal
challenges when formulation the questions was whether to give an explanation about my
idea of an inner gaze or not? I knew that I wanted to start the questionnaire by asking if
the interviewee could relate to the idea of an inner gaze, but I didn’t know how specific I
should be. If I would start the questionnaire describing my idea of an inner gaze and the
research, I was afraid I would influence the interviewee too much. Actually it was more
interesting for me to know how the interviewee would spontaneously react to such a
concept as an inner gaze.

After consulting this with a few friends and classmates I decided to write a very short
introduction to the survey in order to guide the interviewee in the right direction, my train
of thought, without influencing her/him too much with my personal ideas about the
phenomenon. So this is how I stated the invitation letter which was sent out to
practitioners in different artistic fields being my Facebook contacts, colleagues and
Uniarts students and professors.

“Hi there!
I am about to complete my Master’s Studies in Performing Arts at Stockholm University of
the Arts. My research topic is “The Inner Gaze in Artistic Practice”.

My goal is to gain a better understanding of the extent to which we use our conscious
and subconscious mind in our different artistic practices. Do we use an inner seeing when
we create and perform? Can I see even when I close my eyes? How-come I can imagine
an orange on my desk right now and to some extent even see it, smell it, while knowing
it’s not physically there? We know it has been scientifically proven that humans have five
senses. But do we also have an inner gaze? An inner hearing? Are there other inner
senses we could explore?

I would like to know what you think!
Therefore I have created a questionnaire on this topic which will take 5-10 min to answer,
so that we together can contribute to the science of consciousness by sharing our unique
and valuable experiences and perspectives as artists.
Please use the following link to come to the questionnaire:
https://forms.gle/YRuJYZkGb9aV4z3w9

It’s easy to fill in and anonymous so please join the research! <3 Thank you!
Sincerely,
Safoura Safavi”

In an email conversation with my external supervisor Professor Antti Revonsuo I asked him to kindly provide feedback on my interview questions and he gave me some good suggestions in how to formulate the questionnaire;

“Dear Safoura,
Thanks for sending the interview questions. From the perspective of psychological research, it would be interesting to relate the concept of “Inner Gaze” to some other, more familiar concepts. This is always done in questionnaire studies in psychology, to know if the new concept overlaps with other, familiar ones, and how much. Thus, I would suggest to add to your methods a brief questionnaire about how people understand the concept of “Inner Gaze”. In that way you can also find out if they understand it the same way, or if everyone has their own interpretation of it.
It could be something along the following lines:

In my understanding “Inner Gaze” is related to the following concepts: (I just made up here a few concepts that would be interesting, but there could be others):

Concept
1= not at all related 2=a little similar 3= somewhat similar 4=closely similar 5= practically the same concept

Intuition
Inspiration
Insight
Altered state
Higher consciousness
Spiritual experience
Psychedelic experience
Dreamlike experience
Imagination
Mental imagery
Daydreaming
Stream of consciousness
Flow experience
Total immersion
Alternative reality
Virtual reality
Oneness, Unity
Disappearance of Self (Ego)

This kind of data would be very interesting, to see if everyone has similar interpretations and experiences of their Inner Gaze. But it is of course up to you (and your main supervisor) if you wish to include something along these lines to your study.
Best wishes,
- Antti”

Next I searched for an adequate online survey application in order to easily make it accessible for the interviewees. I found a useful survey application on google docs and inspired by Professor Revonsuo’s feedback I started creating the form.
Link to the survey: https://forms.gle/YRuJYZkGb9aV4z3w9

When the survey was ready, revised and I was happy with it I started to send it out to artists in different fields. Mainly artists in my own circle of acquaintances but also through the network of SKH.

The In-depth Interviews
Since the anonymous survey would mainly provide statistical information about the artist’s thoughts and practices, I decided to do additional personal audio recorded interviews with four different artists in order to get a better feel and understanding for how different artists relate to and resonate about the idea of an inner gaze.

The interviewees did not have any previous information about the topic but where spontaneously confronted with the questions and what you hear in the audio documentations are their first reactions to the questions asked. Below you will find the questions and my reason for asking them in italic underneath.

1. Would you say you have an inner gaze?
By asking this question I get their spontaneous reaction to the expression “inner gaze”. How does the person interpret the words and does it make sense to them?

2. When and how would you say you use it?
I get a deeper understanding of their interpretation and relation to the concept and the words.

3. Are you consciously aware of your inner gaze? Do you reflect on it or is it just there? Here I’m trying to figure out how they relate to an inner seeing. Are they aware of such a mental process?
4. How would you describe it to someone else?
Asking this question in order to get them to further explain their interpretation/understanding of an inner seeing.

5. Could you explain how you use it in your own practice?
Here I learn more about how their artistic practice correlate with an inner gaze and how conscious they are of this eventual process.

6. Are you aware of using it, when using it in your practice?
Here they will potentially give examples of how they work artistically and which role an inner gaze might have in their practice.

7. Can you imagine your practice without using this skill?
I believe this question can open up further discussions about what art can be and its agency.

8. If you can experience an inner seeing, can you also experience an inner hearing? - An inner touch? - An inner scent? - Taste?
Opening up for an inner being, an inner reflection of the physical self.

9. Can you combine several of these inner senses?
Asking this inner self to become more dominant for a moment.

   - Giving a suggestion to inspire. For example handing over an imaginary rose and ask if he/she can smell it?

10. Now you are deliberately having this experience of the rose. Can you remember when you have experienced something similar before?
I’m trying to figure out how much they have thought about a similar concept before and what their experiences might look like.

11. Do you believe this inner experience can or does affect your so called outer experience in any way?
Trying to figure out how they use an inner gaze in their personal life or what their life philosophy/ideology is?

12. Do you think your outer experiences affect your inner senses?
This question might highlight how sensitive/influential the inner self might be or not be.

13a. Do you believe there are limits to your physical reality?
How does the person see the “reality”?
13b. Do you think there are limits to your inner reality?
Interesting to see how they perceive their level of emancipation in the physical world vs. the inner/mental world.

14. Do you see it as inner and outer concept or in other way?
I have led them to talk about an inner vs. and outer reality/dimension. Here they have the opportunity to see it or express if they experience it differently.

15. Do you think or feel that these questions have affected your perception about an inner gaze in any way?
Interesting to know if they experience any change in awareness around this topic by focusing on it.

-I would like to give you .. (an imaginary personal gift, to each person.) I hand it over and thank them for their contribution.

The Investigations

Conclusions About The Hypnotic Performances
The first performance was recorded at a castle near Stockholm called Engsholms Slott. I participated in the second episode of the MBC Persia\textsuperscript{10} produced the entertainment program Replay. The program idea is that there are two hosts (well-known male & female artists) who invite an honorary guest to the show (one honorary musician for each episode) and a few other artists to join. They all sit by a table, chat and perform a few songs for each other.

Because of the Covid19 Restrictions there had been many insecurities about the possibility to produce the show or not, and the producers had received their permission to proceed with the production just two weeks prior to the recording of the show, which made the initial planning of the program rather uncertain. Persian artists were supposed to travel to Sweden from USA, Canada and around Europe to join.

I was asked to be a surprise guest in episode 2 covering one of the honorary guests songs. The honorary guest of that episode was Mohsen Namjoo\textsuperscript{11}, a well known Persian folk/rock musician whom I knew since back in 2008 when we had performed in the same festival in Rotterdam together and later from the Persian alternative music/artist community I naturally was a part of. Even though Mohsen and I are very different in many ways, I did see a coherence in our artistic practices, both always being eager to challenge musical norms, mixing styles and being innovative in our performances, so I thought this

\textsuperscript{10} \<https://www.mbc.net/en/corporate/channels/mbc-persia.html> \\
\textsuperscript{11} \<https://www.mohsennamjoo.com>
was a good match. I accepted and I chose his tune Jabr-e Joghraafiai (Geographical Determinism) a song about the misfortune of being born in the middle east and not accepted anywhere, to cover and perform. Since I was known from Abjeez which is dominantly related to the genre of reggae, I decided to do a reggae inspired version of his song. I made the demo and sent it to the house band of the show, consisting of some of Sweden’s top studio musicians.

I soon understood that there was a lot of controversy happening around Mohsen Namjoo. He had apparently been accused of sexual assault and the Persian Me Too movement was aggressively criticizing him on social media. I asked around about this among my contacts and since I had a brief idea of who Mohsen was as a person (very controversial, provocative, drug liberal and creative) I could see that the accusations against him could have more layers to them, so I decided to proceed with the performance.

The Persian culture is extremely male dominated; as a female artist I want to use every good opportunity I have to claim space and make myself seen and heard in an artistic way in order to contribute to a more gender balanced culture. I understood that this performance would be more challenging than usual since I would be alone at the recording scene (usually I am at these kind of events with my sister and we have created a very nice symbiosis when it comes to handling tricky situations).

**Documentation 5: Video Clip, SAFOURA Replay Episode 2 (www.safoura.com/documentations)**

The recording would take place during one day but due to rehearsals and corona restrictions I was supposed to be at the set from Feb 22nd to Feb 27th. So I had approx. one week to prepare myself for the event. I practiced my version of the song and started planning what to wear and how to express the song. This was the first time I was going to perform as SAFOURA in such a big event (millions of Iranians around the world would watch this program) and I knew I wanted to bring forth my alter ego.

My alter ego is based on the character of a snake-woman from the Indian movie NAGINA which was the first great movie experience I had as a child in the cinema in India. I like the idea of the snake as an ancient sign for transformation, passion, healing and creativity. Somehow the sign of the snake goes very well with my manifesto stated on page 17 in this essay.

I rather intuitively (as I usually do creative work) proceeded with the preparation for the performance but very deliberately decided to use some methods from hypnosis in order to mentally prepare myself for the event.

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12 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnuFJ6qO6Z8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnuFJ6qO6Z8)

As I have explained in previous parts of this essay I usually enter some kind of ASC when I start singing/acting on stage. The sensation of a layered communication within myself and others appear and the double vision, my inner gaze becomes stronger or more present. One of the challenges which may occur in the performing situation is that the “reasoning mind”, the chatter, the monkey\textsuperscript{14} starts taking over during a performance infusing the moment with self-doubt and anxiety, a state which easily disturbs the potential of HSC to occur.

I decided to use self hypnosis in order to prepare my conscious and unconscious mind to deal with any potential situation which could appear on stage. I had already tried different hypnosis induction methods through my ongoing hypnosis studies and this allowed me to much easier access to the hypnotic state during self-hypnosis. One faster induction method I had started to use rather often was a method from Fredrik Praesto’s book “The Secrets of The Hypnotist”\textsuperscript{15} (OT).

By doing the induction I would enter a deeper state of consciousness/trance and while being in that state I would give myself hypnotic suggestions. In preparation for this performance at the castle I did the induction and suggested to my subconscious mind that every time I would look at my thumb nails (my both thumbs from above) I would be in direct contact with my higher self hence having greater awareness helping me handling each situation in the best way possible. So in a way I would activate or use my inner gaze in a more deliberate way, accessing a clearer sensation of the double vision each time I would look at my thumb nails.

Another exercise I did in preparation for the event was the “Swish Method”. One of the many methods I had learned during my studies at SSEAH. The swish method can be done by a therapist or by one-self through self hypnosis. It is basically a visualization method one uses in order to reprogram the mind to release any anxious thoughts about an upcoming situation or event and change them with positive desirable expectations of the event. I would put myself in hypnotic trance through one of the many inductions I know by now and I would do the Swish Method at least once a day until the actual performance changing out any undesirable fearful thoughts with positive desirable ones.

Besides these hypnosis methods I practiced vocals and the specific song I had arranged to perform as much as I could, in order to trust that my body knew what to do in the moment of the act.

At the castle I had one musical rehearsal with the band and also one camera rehearsal without with full costume without any audience on the stage. I felt happy about the preparations and ready for the big day to come.

\textsuperscript{14} Buddhist expression for the distracted mind. \texttt{<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monkey\_mind>}

\textsuperscript{15} Hypnotisörens Hemligheter, please see reference list.
Mohsen Namjoo and I had socialized behind the scene but since all the episodes of the show were being recorded simultaneously he didn’t know I was going to surprise him in his episode.

My personal tasks for this performance were the following;
1. Singing well, merging musically with the band.
2. Having a present and genuine performance interacting with the other artists sitting in the room.
3. Interacting and reaching out through the cameras in order to connect with the viewers around the world. I wanted my act to be healing and inspiring to positive change in a powerful way.

Just before entering the room I looked at my thumbs and even though I felt excitement, I felt calmer and more focused than I had ever done earlier before entering a stage.
I heard my cue to enter the stage and as soon as I walked in to the room I was in this sensation I recognized from so many times before, the ASC. The double vision was activated and my awareness/focus was split between an inner and an outer gaze. As if I could see equally inwards as outwards. The performance was very emotional and I did sense a small distraction in my focus when I saw Mohsen crying during my singing. However I felt it was unusually easy to get back into my zone again.

The performance was a success and it is until today the second most viewed performance of the Replay show on Instagram\(^\text{16}\), after Mohsen Namjoo’s own performance in the same episode. I definitely felt like the hypnosis methods had helped me sharpen my focus and add richness to the performing situation.

In the same program I was also supposed to do an unplugged Abjeez song performance together with a guitarist in the library of the castle. However it became very clear to me during the stay at the castle that the female artists were very underrepresented in the show and that we got less TV time than the male artists, I talked about this with some of the organizers and the female host and artist Rana Mansour and I were asked to perform a song together in the library. We both thought this was a good idea and since she was extremely busy recording all the episodes I was scheduled to come back and the record the song with her two days after having left the castle.

Rana suggested a song she already knew on piano by the Persian female singer Ramesh\(^\text{17}\) (1950-2020) and I agreed. I thought that was a beautiful way for us as female artists to honor a well known female singer who recently had passed away.

\(^{16}\) <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CNdLR64l_8m/?utm_medium=copy_link>

\(^{17}\) <https://women.ncr-iran.org/2020/12/01/renowned-iranian-singer-ramesh-passed-away-in-los-angeles-california/>
Rana was supposed to send me the chords for the song so I could practice it on guitar and singing but the sheet never came. I didn’t get the chords until 30min prior to the arrival of the taxi which was supposed to drive me back to the castle. I was terrified, I was going to perform a song I had never heard before, together with an artist I had never collaborated with before in front of several cameras on a very intimate stage. It almost felt like a nightmare and I was thinking about cancelling the recording until the last hour before the taxi came to pick me up. But somewhere inside I felt that I had to do it. It was so extremely important for us as female artists to do this performance. The show needed it, and the little girls and boys around the world watching the show needed it.

So I arrived at the castle again, had make up and costume change going over the chords and lyrics waiting for Rana to come and practice the song with me just before going on the set with it. We rehearsed our own arrangement of the song and I was very happy that we musically felt connected and synchronized. However I had troubles remembering one part of the lyrics I was supposed to sing alone and this worried me a bit.

We went on set and started playing/recording the song. When we arrived to the section where I was supposed to sing solo I forgot the lyrics. We started over, I told myself; come on Safoura you’ve got this! But when we came to the same part again, I forgot the lyrics again. I felt the pressure building up inside.

At that moment the male host unexpectedly just entered the room in a very unpleasant way telling Rana to hurry up, we have to record the other scenes he said harshly and left the room. He addressed her (since I guess he doesn’t dare to talk to me in that way) and I got very irritated at him. I saw how Rana became tense and I just said to myself, “dear subconscious, I now leave this to you, just make it happen.”

I looked at my thumb nails (this has been captured on camera behind the scene, please see documentation 13) and we started recording the song for the third time. When we came to my solo part I just sang it, the words just came out of my mouth and I didn’t even know what I had sung, if it was correct lyrics or not, but since no-one reacted I just continued. Afterwords I was rather chocked. My subconscious self had helped me. I had activated a higher part of my consciousness deliberately by preparing my mind and self for it beforehand.

Documentation 6: Behind the scenes
Documentation 7: SAFOURA & RANA singing RAMESH (www.safoura.com/documentation)

Also this performance felt very special and had a strong blissful aspect to it. Rana sent me a voice message that same night explaining how uplifted she had felt by our performance and what a healing influence it had had on her. I was now becoming more and more convinced of the positive aspects the hypnotic methods were having on my performances.
Approx. two weeks later I had yet another opportunity to reach out to a great audience through the Eldfesten 2021\textsuperscript{18} festival broadcasted live from Skansen Stockholm.

In preparation for this event I did the Swish method again and my biggest challenge for this event was that it was going to be broadcast live from a big stage with no audience (due to Covid19 restrictions). So I had to;

1. Sing well and do a genuine and professional performance using backtracks for one song and communicating with the band for the second song.
2. Dance while singing and being in tune with my dancers and all performers on stage.
3. Reach out through the cameras since the audience were out there somewhere watching simultaneously.

For this performance we had very little preparation time and our soundcheck on stage was at the same day as the performance. Since I now had had some experience from the previous sessions using hypnotic methods in the performance, I trusted the process more. I practiced as much as I could prior to the act and I made sure to rest a lot backstage before the performance. Right before entering the stage I just clicked in to my ASC, this time more confidently than ever and just went out and did my performance. This performance was broadcast prior to the castle performances since it was a live event.

\textbf{Document 8: SAFOURA Eldfesten 2021 (www.safoura.com/documentation)}

\textbf{Analyzing the questionnaire:}
72 artists from 22 different artistic fields showed their interest in the research and filled in the survey. Now a days it is not easy to get people to voluntarily spend 5-10 min of their time to fill in a questionnaire, so I am extremely grateful to all artists who decided to contribute.

Now let’s look at the results, how do artists actually relate to this research question and will there be any interesting findings by summarizing 72 artist’s personal experiences and thoughts?

The first question was if the interviewee could relate to an idea of an inner seeing or an inner gaze? Beside a YES and a NO option I wanted to give the opportunity to give an individual answer to this essential question. By doing so I believe the YES/NO has more weight to it.

\textsuperscript{18} Eldfesten (The Fire Party) is a Persian New Years event originally called “Charshanbeh Souri” where people jump over fires cleaning beings in preparation for the year to come. <https://www.riksteatern.se/eldsten-2021-stream/>
As we can see 86.1% can relate to the concept of an inner gaze which shows that it is a phenomena the majority can connect to rather than being something totally absent. Only 6.9% can’t relate to it. The remaining 1.4% seem to be unsure about what the inner gaze means or is aiming at.

In my conversations with Professor Revonsuo he confirmed that this were very good results, since this indicates that the research question is relatable and that the idea about an inner gaze in artistic practice is relevant to explore.

The second question was about how the artist related the concept of an inner gaze to other psychological concepts. The numbers to the left indicates the number of people and by looking at the colored staples BLUE being “not related at all” and PURPLE being “practically the same concept” we can read the relations.
In my understanding an “inner gaze” is related to the following concepts:

- Higher consciousness
- Spiritual experience
- Psychedelic experience
- Dreamlike experience

- Imagination
- Mental imagery
- Daydreaming
- Stream of consciousness

- Flow experience
- Total immersion
- Alternative reality
- Virtual reality

- Oneness, Unity
- Disappearance of Self (Ego)
- Other dimensions
- Creativity
- Presence
By reading the diagram it becomes clear that the majority of artists relate the idea of an inner gaze to Imagination, Mental imagery, Presence, Creativity, Flow experience, Higher consciousness and Intuition. What is also interesting is to read which concepts the artists don’t relate to the inner gaze. Other dimensions, Virtual reality, Alternative reality, Psychedelic experience and Dreamlike experience are concepts not as much associated to the idea of an inner gaze.

I believe this supports my description of the phenomenon as a double vision. Professor Revonsuo confirms this by explaining how dream researchers have characterized the dream state as being “single minded” in the sense that we in the dream state are immersed in one situation, usually out of control, which we don’t choose in any way. (Except from lucid dreaming experiences of course.)

The results show that the majority of the artists experience the inner gaze as a conscious parallel function happening inside the mind rather than stepping into a completely different universe. It’s also interesting to see how related the sensations of Flow and Presence are to the Inner Gaze and it would be very interesting to further look into how they correlate and influence each other.

Next I wanted to know if the interviewee could localize the inner versions of the five physical senses. The reason for this was because I wanted to explore how much the inner gaze was associated with the act of visualization vs. an overall inner experience of qualia, in other words the inner qualitative experiences.

By reading this diagram we can see how the inner seeing and the inner hearing are the most dominant inner sense we are conscious about. Next up is the inner sensing/touch, followed by inner tasting and lastly the inner scent. Although still very diffuse, this information is interesting in the sense that we get an idea of how our different inner worlds operate and which senses are dominating and where we have our focus points as artists.
The following question about whether the artist uses an inner gaze in her/his artistic practice shows that 80.5% of the participants believe they often or always do, while 22.2% believe they occasionally/sometimes do and 4.2% believe they never use and inner gaze in their practices. So we can read that basically the same percentage which could relate to an inner gaze also believe they use it in their practice. This shows that in this research the phenomenon is a major experience shared by most artists in their creative work.

I asked the question whether the artist believed her/his practice could be conducted without an inner gaze in order to get an understanding of how relevant an inner gaze is to artistic practice. As we see in the diagram 62.5% believe it is essential to their creative practice while 31.9% believe they can work creatively without it and 1.4% still seem to be a bit confused about the definition of an inner gaze and what it could imply.
I wanted to know how the interviewee related the concept of the inner gaze to the idea of imagination. This was a very important question for me to ask since I noticed early on in my research that these concepts could easily get mixed up. What I was trying to express with the inner gaze was a witnessing system while the act of imagination is more of a creative performance.

The number 1 in the diagram indicates “not similar” and the number 5 states “practically the same concept”.

I find it extremely interesting that only 19.4% do find the inner gaze and imagination to be the same concept. As we see 34.7% believe the concepts are closely related however not the same and one could say that (again) 80.6% of the artists do believe that the inner gaze and imagination are different concepts.

In the beginning of my research I faced strong feelings of self-doubt asking myself whether it would be somehow destructive for me to analyze and unpack my creativity? Would I somehow ruin something very sacred by starting to describe my creativity and labelling it with words? As I explained earlier, my curiosity and strong intuitive feeling to proceed with the research eventually made my doubts fade away. However now I had to take the opportunity to ask my fellow artist colleagues how they experienced talking about the undefinable in their practices. Was it easy or difficult to do? Is it desirable or not? Therefore I needed to ask if they experienced it easy to talk about different states of consciousness and “inner senses” experienced in their artistic practices?
Number 1 in the diagram stands for “not easy at all to talk about” and number 5 “very easy to talk about”.

As we can read the majority of the artists believe it’s somehow easy to talk about it but the diagram still shows an uncertainty about what this actually can mean. I had a relating question in order to give the participants an opportunity to further explain how they though about this. Below you can read how a few of the artists elaborated on this;

“Retired. But this was seldom discussed amongst my music teacher colleagues”

“Difficult to explain”

“If the discussion goes on for too long it tends to numb the energy in a room.”

“Depends greatly on who I work with at the moment. Some are very easy to talk to about this and some are completely locked up…..”

“It’s easier talking to others in the same specific field and with same/similar education/experience.”

“On different levels depending on the colleague, although all seem to be receptive to the concept”

“Depends on the person I am talking to, some are clueless and some are open to new ideas”

“It is always hard to talk about sound”

“I feel weird mentioning it since it’s connected to mental health and “unhealth” sometimes. But sometimes with someone I know better it’s easier.”
“I only can do it with a couple of people”

“Inner Gaze is very private and I do not talk about it with anyone.”

“It’s my own personal subjective experience, and I’m not sure if it’s relevant to someone else.”

By reading the comments we can see that an inner gaze is something difficult to talk about, although it is a present concept among many artists. A few commented that they preferred not talking about it but most of the comments indicate that conversations about how the inner realms operate in artistic practice are relevant and desirable among artists even though it can be very challenging to put words on such multidimensional concepts, thoughts, emotions and ideas.

In the end of the survey I gave the interviewees the opportunity to freely elaborate on the idea of an inner gaze in artistic practice. I have chosen a few interesting comments. These are reported in italics below:

“I believe that the inner gaze is one of the two perspectives involved in artistic practice. The other being the surrounding world - culture, zeitgeist, inspiration, setting and obviously audience.”

It’s interesting that this artist mentions two perspectives involved in artistic practice since this correlates to my definition of a double vision.

“I may not think I’m so aware of this yet, even though I use it. I probably call it my artistic soul.”

This artist seems to express how he/she has a sense for an inner gaze, as if it is a part of her/him that the artist uses, however not totally consciously and how he/she believe it can become more conscious.

“Very interesting and would like to know and talk more about.”

In my opinion this comment expresses what I have experienced a lot during this research, that there is a great interest and thirst to further explore such topics in the artistic field.

“I feel like I lost my inner gaze for many years becoming more competitive and obsessed with perfect technique.”

“I want to think about this one for a while! But openness and a truthfulness are concepts that first come to mind when using “the inner sight”, as well as wanting well.

These two comments are interesting in the sense that the artists seem to connect their inner gazes with a more genuine or true part of themselves. I also relate this to the sensations of unity and euphoria that Higher States of Consciousness can give rise to.
“When I am working as a director it is vital to see the project ahead of crew so I can have a better way directing them and find solution on stage. That why I always see my projects ahead of time. In general any form of art I create I see it first then try to make that in the physical world”

The skill of visualizing is highly relevant to artistic practice and is directly connected to the idea of the inner gaze since the gaze observes the visualization.

By the results of this survey we can see that the idea of an inner gaze does have an overall resonance with most of the artistic practitioners who have participated in the research. Approx. 80% of the participants do relate to the idea and many artists do describe it as a double vision of some sort. We can also read that there is an over all desire to further explore the inner realms in relation to artistic practice.

Summarizing the In-depth Interviews
These interviews were between 30-50min long and have been rather heavily edited into shorter monologues in order to get a feel for each artist’s approach to the subject.

The interviewees have been very generous with their thoughts and time and I am extremely thankful to them for doing this in their second language, English, letting me share their voices, reflections, experiences and identities in this research project.

All segments are available on: www.safoura.com/documentation

Below I will present each interviewee by name, profession, photography and a quote from their interview.

Nils-Petter Ankarblom - Conductor/Arranger/Composer/Musician

 Documentation 9: Audio - Nils-Petter Ankarblom

“I would say I use my inner vision or my inner gaze anytime I have to have a full understanding of what’s needed from me as a music making person.”
Negar Zarassi - Opera singer/Actress

*Documentation 10: Audio - Negar Zarassi*

“It’s not always very clear to me what kind of picture it is but I know it’s different from what I see in front of my eye.”

Adam Gardelin - Screenwriter/Dramaturge/Director

*Documentation 11: Audio - Adam Gardelin*

“I would more describe my inner gaze as something I hear.”

Johanna Ställberg - TV Producer/Filmmaker/Film Director/Artist

*Documentation 12: Audio - Johanna Ställberg*

“…that would be the part of me that I’m maybe not showing anyone else.”
Reflections on The In-depth Interviews

When listening to the interviews it becomes clear to me how each artist has her/his personal way of relating to the idea of an inner gaze. For N. Ankarblom e.g. the initial idea of an inner gaze strongly relates to his ability to visualize in order to prepare for his artistic practice. While it for N. Zarassi strongly relates to the moment of her artistic performance and interaction with other artists or an audience. A. Gardelin explains how his inner gaze is more related to an inner hearing while J. Ställberg finds the concepts more difficult to describe, but describes it as the part of herself that others don’t see or have access to.

Reflection & Summary

Looking back at the performances I had in the spring of 2021, with the hypnosis methods and research question in mind, I can definitely see how my research has had a positive effect on my overall performing skills as an artist. Of course there are many factors to take in consideration when analyzing these performances but I believe the awareness I gained about the inner states of the mind, consciousness and the deliberate investigation about the Altered States of Consciousness happening in my creative processes, has given me more confidence in communicating my artistic intentions. I am also very eager to start writing my own hypnotic suggestions, creating unique hypnotic templates for musical, artistic and creative work.

In this research I have used the previous experiences I’ve had, the sensation of a double vision, and labeled it as an inner gaze. I’ve tried to get a better understanding of the phenomenon by relating it to the study of hypnosis, consciousness science and maybe most importantly of all, the experiences of other artistic practitioners. I believe Johanna Ställberg expressed it very well in her interview when she said that the inner gaze is the part of herself that no-one else can see. We all carry our inner worlds which seem to be vividly experienced through our emotions and our minds. How aware are we of these inner universes? Do we take them for granted?

There are so many exciting metaphysical processes happening inside. Scientists and philosophers are tirelessly working on better understanding and defining them, while we as artists are using many of them daily in our work. I believe we can play a big role in this exploration of the self and human consciousness by sharing our artistic experiences. I think we can be an inspiring force in consciousness research by sharing more of our creative processes. But in order to do so, maybe we need to become better at defining them to ourselves first?

Living in a very market driven capitalist society, we need to find forums free from political (and religious) agendas where we can explore and express ourselves as evolving human beings without the interference of strong influencing or marketing forces. Bringing forth the concept of an inner gaze in artistic practice could be a way to shed more light on the fact that art actually provides us with this space and that it is our creativity which forms and shapes our reality.
The qualitative experiences we as artists express through our art activate multidimensional qualitative experiences in the receivers. The more aware we are of these mental and emotional processes, the more quality, meaning and value we can bring to our everyday lives.

As philosopher Yuval Noah Harari so often states in his lectures and speeches\(^1\), in a computer generated world and with the fast development of Artificial Intelligence, it is more important than ever to follow the ancient Greek advice; *know thyself*. Know thyself, before the algorithms and AI does.

By defining the inner gaze as a second witnessing system, it might become easier for us to talk about how we are experiencing and using our different inner creative processes. Maybe the idea of an inner gaze in artistic practice can bring more awareness and focus to the intentional parts of our practices and help us communicate and express our art in more powerful and inspiring ways?

I believe every human is a creator, possessing a creative force. But not all people are aware of this beautiful inherent power. When some of us decide to dedicate most of our time and energy to art and become artists, we spend more time than the average person to reflect and experiment with our creativity.

As an artist I strengthen my imaginary qualities and I get more opportunities to experience Altered and Higher States of Consciousness through my practice. These states are unique in the sense that they carry the powerful sensations of universal love and unity within them. These are not some random ordinary feelings. These are the powerful emotions which make life worth living. These sensations make us want to create a better world. These are the states of minds which help us release fear in order to bring more joy and creativity to our activities hence become the masters of our own lives.

In a digitalized world where the art of communication is drastically changing shape I believe it’s more important than ever to look deeper into our creative selves and ask how we want to form our future. Maybe we can better do so by focusing one gaze outwards and another gaze inwards in order to get a complete sense of who we are? I believe this study has expanded my understanding of the inner processes being such a great part of my artistic practice.

In addition to this essay I have created a unique website www.safoura.com/innergaze where I will continue exploring the inner gaze in artistic practice and presenting actual workshops in order to further discover new ways of approaching the science of consciousness from an artistic perspective.

\(^1\) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSUtn0as6fQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSUtn0as6fQ) One of many interesting interviews with Harari on Youtube.
Acknowledgments & Gratitude

There is an endless list of people who have, in one or another way, helped me to be where I am at today. My infinite gratitude to all of you who have inspired and helped me along my life.

I feel a great gratitude to SKH and all the people who make the school the entity it is: an institution which has given me the opportunity to learn and grow within its frames.
I want to thank my tutors Vanja Hamidi Isacson and Antti Revonsuo for inspirational talks and their support in writing this thesis. I want to thank all my tutors at the MAPA program for teaching me about artistic research and deepening my understanding about Performing Arts. Synne K. Behrndt, Jon Refsdal Moe, Gunilla Pettersson, Stacey Sacks and Camilla Damkjaer among many others. My class mates Majula Drammeh, Siri Bertling Vik, Sonja Kessner and Jonas Georgsson for challenging me and supporting my research by asking interesting questions and sharing their perspectives on the topic.

I thank my dear friend Bonnie Milani for helping me with the orthography. My friends and colleagues Negar Zarassi, Nils-Petter Ankarblom, Adam Gardelin and Johanna Ställberg for partaking in the in-depth interviews. My friend Johan Moberg for taking photos and filming videos related to my research and my dear mother Mahin Hormozi and my companion and friend David Douhan for inspirational conversations and their tireless support in my research process from day one.
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Film
Halina Dryschka: “Beyond The Visible - Hilma af Klint”, (2019), Zeitgeist Films, Germany

Documentation
All Video & Audio Documentation can be found on www.safoura.com/documentation

Documentation 1: Photo - Notes about The Self
Documentation 2: Photo - Sketching the inner & the outer senses
Documentation 3: Photo - A chart over my life identifying major changes
Documentation 4: Photo - A sketch trying to figure out the function of the inner gaze
Documentation 5: VIDEO - SAFOURA Replay Episode 2
Documentation 6: VIDEO - Behind the scenes
Documentation 7: VIDEO - SAFOURA & RANA singing RAMESH
Documentation 8: VIDEO - SAFOURA Eldfesten 2021
Documentation 9: Audio - Nils-Petter Ankarblom
Documentation 10: Audio - Negar Zarrassi
Documentation 11: Audio - Adam Gardelin
Documentation 12: Audio - Johanna Ställberg