Kehrä/Kehrae

- a moment in between

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# Table of contents

Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering the process</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whirling in time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HerStory</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rituals</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liminality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communitas</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope calling, who’s there?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R)evolution</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-orienting</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Mandala to Traces of being, Oops wrong way</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catwalk of life</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmologies of play</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrets of the Tea Bag</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations of play and communitas</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of perspective</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rope species</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spectacle (n.)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope Sensei</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nature (n.)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterbreath</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello Tree, Hello Lake!</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restart - a meditative space for rest and art</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kehrä</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The space</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The movement</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking humans down from (circus) stage of the universe.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inevitable death</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Birth</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Entering the process

My first memories of coming together with the circus are from childhood when my grandfather took me into a Finnish tent circus called "Sirkus Finlandia", which is still touring. I guess it did not impress me as much that time since I have no clear memories of the show. Approximately twenty years later I was dragged into a circus course, where I fell in love with the physicality of aerials in the circus. From there I have traveled a long journey as part of the circus family all the way today. The Bachelor's degree from a circus school concentrated on the techniques of the disciplines. In the media circus equals chaos. "So, you are a clown." is the usual response when I tell that I work as a circus artist. Technique, risk, danger, and spectacle, is the usual answer among my fellow circus artists when asked what is circus, and that was my answer as well for a long time. If that is the case, horrific things happening in Ukraine at this moment could be seen as circus, there are disciplined bodies with a high level of technique risking their lives, and living in constant danger and the media makes it a spectacle.

However, when given an option to start from the beginning, We took it. It meant active and conscious forgetting of everything I had learned about circus or aerial acrobatics until now to make space for something else. Of course, it is impossible to forget, but to question every(fucking)thing at least with why was the way to go.

My research is not only my research but our research since it has been done with my art companion Marjut Hernesniemi which I refer to as big M or M in this text. We have been diving together into the same topics with two perspectives that weave together one way or another. It reviews the myth of circus beyond the western modern circus, not as an entertainment but as a ritual that has the potential for transformation. The research relates to circus from an animistic perspective, where instead of objects, things are seen as a material that is always becoming and in relation to something. Research suggests taking the (hu)man down from the stage of the universe and putting it among all the other living things as equal to find a regenerative and renewable circus practice.
Besides my art companion M, my research has been affected by all the living entities that I have come together with during the journey through these two years. By living I mean life as in animistic ontology where it is a generation of being, always coming and not the same anymore as it was a moment ago and “… forever on the verge of the actual where one is continually present as a witness to that moment …” (Ingold 2006, p.12.)

My research would not be the same if I had chosen to not move to Sweden or made the daily choices that I made. It was all part of the transformation of my circus and myself as an artist that works towards a more sustainable and regenerative practice and future. The research and its results are the results of constant liminal phases inside of a liminal phase where the separation point has been the circus I have known until then. During the liminal state, my focus has been widening my perspective by questioning the ways of the western contemporary circus as the only way of the circus. Looking for the opposites of the western modern circus to find a more balanced way? The thought behind this has been global warming and climate change? The worry of humans destroying the planet by using all the matter/material for its selfish meanings. To find coexistence with the materials, the responsibility of the ways we work. Liminality has been the perfect method for ludic play while mapping the possibilities of what circus or life could be.

Circus as life, life as circus from the animistic perspective.

**Whirling in time**

Universe, milky way, hurricanes, and romanesco broccoli are all bound together by a spiral. As such, spiral represents eternity, life, or the cycle of life repeating the same pattern always becoming but never the same again. The years and days of the entities on this planet are repetitive, always becoming and never the same again. Planets are touring the sun and our beloved Tellus is spinning around itself. Shamans in Korea whirl while they try to get to a trance-like state to connect with the spirits (Miettinen 2018). Whirling Sufis in their Sema ritual turn towards the truth, grow through love to transcend the ego, meet the
truth, and arrive at perfection. Everything is involved in the revolutionary movement of life, life is a revolution.

Tim Ingold describes what it means to Sami people to know things. "To know things, you have to grow into them, and let them grow in you so that they become who you are" (Ingold 2013, p1).

We started whirling and walking in circles to know.

Anti-clockwise.

We spent hours whirling, in different spaces, at different times. Some days it was twenty minutes, others forty-five or just a little twirl in between transitions. In the beginning, it felt important to move your hands and body, to express yourself, and find things that look good on camera and maybe later on stage. We kept on whirling while the days went by. Old things started to get a different meaning while new things appeared in the daily cycle.
Preparing the morning coffee became a meditation. Grinding the coffee beans by hand with circular movement. Pouring the hot water on them by hand in spiral shapes before the sensational moment of smelling and tasting the gift of mother earth.

Morning swims started when the trees were preparing to go to sleep. The wind was dancing together with the fallen leaves in circular shapes. Water was "fucking!" cold or around thirteen degrees.

We kept on whirling. The days got shorter and darker, the air and water colder as the months went by while Tellus was circling the sun. The earlier need for expressing yourself lost its meaning. Whirling became a moment with the universe. A space where I did not need to perform, just be.

We kept on whirling. You would think we would have gotten lost, but can you if you don’t know where you are going. Luckily, we came together with a witch and a shaman. With their guidance, we could take the last step to disconnection.

\[ \text{to become something, you have to be nothing} - m \]

From the nothingness first appeared the relation to the ground and the grass, then the nearby trees with birds. Next the whole forest with its lively entities. Then the lake with its inhabitants. It kept on expanding until I had met the whole universe. That’s when I knew, there is no I, only I in relation to something and I will never be alone because of that.

Instead of watching the world, we had landed in it.

We kept on whirling. Turning towards the truth beyond western modern circus.

**HerStory**

Most historical analyses of the circus offer the same narrative. Modern (western) circus was born in London during the 1760s and 1770s by plebeian equestrians performing their exceptional riding skills. (Kwint 2016, p. 331). Therefore most studies date the birth of the
modern circus to the year 1768 in London, Southside of London (Arrighi, Davis 2021, p.1) with Philip Astley in his cavalry uniform and his horse Billy, who used rope to separate a circular-shaped piece of land as an arena (Purovaara 2005, p.44 – 45). Since then the western modern circus has given birth to the traditional circus with its traveling tents and wild animal acts. Followed by Circus Nouveau, which followed the debates of its time. The discussions of the relationship between humans and animals led to the removal of wild animals from the stage. With the catchy phrase 'circus for every-body' the transmission of circus skills was shifted from the traditional circus families into public schools. (Lavers, Leroux, Burt 2020, p.58 -60.) *This innovation leads us to ‘contemporary circus’: an increasingly hybrid art form, where circus skills are melding with diverse disciplines from opera, to dance, post-dramatic theatre, physical theatre* (Lavers, Leroux, Burt 2020, p.1).

However, there is another hidden narrative, the Story of Sucric, the mythic mother of the modern circus, who has been here as long as there have been rituals. She was born from the need to sustain, renew, preserve and bring back the balance between personal, communal, cosmic, and the circle of life. (Vanhapiha) Sucric has made appearances in different kinds of social events known as rituals around the world. In Japan Sucric might appear in an event called Kagura and "reside in the objects held in the hand (torimono) of the shaman: Sakaki tree branches, paper pendants, pine branches, bamboo, sword, halberd, willow, and bow and arrow, among others...(Ortolani p.14) ". Once Sucric arrives, entertaining the beloved guest becomes most important. In the second part, the Kagura becomes the environment or an occasion for performances. Anything that people or the priests consider appropriate to entertain the certain kami attendance, and the audience. (Ortolani p.14) Although Sucric was not as picky about content for her, the preparations of the place were more important. The first part of Kagura is strictly ritualistic and includes the ceremonies of purification of the place(za) for the Gods(kami) temporarily reside(kamiza), which can be an object or a person (Ortolani 1995, p.14). Another description of her appearance is from China states:

*The imperial carriages have arrived in Pingle, and feather-decorated tents are set up… (First there are opening pieces.) Like the legendary Wuhuo, a man of incredible strength lifts up a heavy cooking vessel. Like the tree-swinging folks from Dulu, performers climb up high poles… Jugglers, fencers, and tightrope walkers all show off their skills… the performers impersonate supernatural beings and*
animals... A bear and a tiger get in a fight while apes and monkeys swing high... A big fish transforms into a slithering dragon. The puffing mythical beast hanli turns into a flower-covered fairy carriage pulled by four deer. A toad plays with a turtle, while a snake charmer mesmerizes a snake. How fantastic are all the changes in appearance and shape " (Fei 2002, p.24-25.)"

However, the myth of the Sucric is not real. The first part is from the description of Kagura, a traditional Japanese ritual where the Kami(god) is being manifested into the purified kamiza. Through this prayer, the prolongation and rejuvenation of life are supposed to have the desired result. (Ortolani 1995, p.14.) Kagura has been involved in the development of many art forms popular in Japan(including daikagura, the Japanese street art.). The Earliest writings from Kagura are dated 800 B.C.E. It has been suggested that Kagura comes from the word Kamigari meaning divine inspiration, divine possession, or the person who is possessed by the god. It stresses the nature of the primitive kagura as shamanistic, their connection with trances and ability to communicate with the spirits of the dead, and possession by the deity, while the dancer becomes the speaker of the possessing spirit(kami) to the audience. The second text is a description of Baixi or a hundred entertainments from China between 78 – 139 C.E. Even though it does not have a clear ritualistic part it has the elements of a ritual including the link to transcendent other.

Aren’t these happenings previously discussed not circus? Isn’t the shaman being possessed by the bamboo stick, not an object manipulator, or the people impersonating monkeys while swinging high aerialists? What are these actions, where do they come and why are they performed?

According to Boussiac (2010), the building blocks of the circus are a set of typical actions that can be assumed to have been essential for human survival in the deep time of the species when extreme situations offered constant challenges. These situations are modeled in the circus ring in the form of apparatuses such as trapezes, high wires, and fixed bars by acrobats demonstrating survival from the dangers through appropriate actions. He offers six core actions for the circus that were once survival skills: Balancing and progressing on narrow surfaces; grasping hanging supports that prevent deadly falls; clearing obstacles by jumping and climbing; throwing or catching objects in a way that allows a person to reach targets.
or keep a number of valuable items intact; controlling animals both to exploit the resources afforded by some and neutralize the aggression of predators; no less important for a social species negotiating social situations (Boussiac 2010, p.177.)

We kept on whirling,
step by step,
we realized that it is a ritual, a whirling ritual.

**Rituals**

*Performances in performing arts consists of ritualized gestures and sounds. Even when we think we’re are being spontaneous and original, most of what we do and utter has been done before. Performing arts frame and mark their presentations, underlining the fact that artistic behavior is "not for the first time" but enacted by trained persons who take the time to prepare and rehearse. (Schechner 2006, p.52–59.)*

The main focus of me and my art companion's practice had been in the studio practice. Where the repetition of the learned techniques played a major role. Day after day, hours after hours, in the studio, repeating the same. Searching and finding solutions to organize the techniques in a new order.

There was a point in my life when I decided to run away with the circus. The decision meant that I spent most of my the circus halls, climbing rope, conditioning, and training. Sometimes I was so tired that I had to take a power nap before going home. Circus became my life, literally. I had become a circus junkie. My head was like a traditional circus tent, where the audience was requesting more yelling with their fists up:

> Life is circus! Life is circus!

However, now the circus, or how we knew it, had started to feel like a prison and the vertical rope a cage. With pale faces, we looked up, and we saw the last rays of the sun
drawing figures on the studio wall and floor. What would it be like to be out there, could we find a way to combine circus with the outside world?

Rituals have been traveling with us for ages and they have evolved from genetically fixed rituals with insects, through human primate social rituals to human ritualization (Schechner 2006, p.52) From the perspective of Finnish shaman Miika Vanhapiha (2020) the meaning of ritual is to sustain and renew, preserve or bring back the balance between psyche, body, social, cosmic and circle of life. (Vanhapiha 2020) Moreover, rituals are needed to form or maintain a community. It is a way for people to connect to a collective, to construct and remember a mythic past and build solidarity. Some rituals that exist between or outside daily social life are called liminal; others are knitted into daily living. The ritual performances with the liminal phase produce communitas. During communitas, the participants feel that they are part of something greater than or outside their individual selves. (Schechner 2006, p.52)

We were clearly in a need of ritual…

We kept on whirling…
Liminality

While whirling, we tried to whirl together, then separate and go back together. When it could happen seems to be more interesting.

Video: https://youtu.be/7qq6aPX4CHk
Could it be made longer?

Once it was Victor Turner[ed] out, the answer was yes.

The in-between that seemed more interesting is known as liminality, the middle phase of the rite of passage. It is a complex in-between space that ritual subjects must go through when there is a need for a transition in place, state, social position, or age (Turner 1969, p. 94). It turned out that our ritual process had been going on for a while. The change of place when moving to Stockholm, the state of the world because of the global pandemic and social position from the artist back to a student. The layers of different rituals started piling on top of each other. We sat on the studio floor as ritual subjects in ritual processes inside ritual processes with the possibility to improvise and learn. It felt like we had gotten the instruction manual with a grow kit for a bonsai tree, but it was in a foreign language.

Life is circus! Life is circus!

echoed...

through our empty minds, looking for answers.

"The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (" threshold people ") are necessarily ambiguous since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions." (Turner 1969, p. 95.)
Liminality opened us a playground beyond the western modern circus. Liminality is also known as anti-structure, which is the opposite of a structured society. However, it means that they are two poles of the same thing, not opposites. For one to exist the other one has to exist. Imagine that structure and anti-structure are playing on a scale. Both of them are needed for the play, when the structure goes down, anti-structure goes up into the air and is highlighted, and vice versa. That is the far end of both of them. Moreover, when the movement on the scale gets smaller, it becomes a play of finding a balance.

To understand Anti-structure more practically we can think of the earlier description of The Chinese baixi, hundred games of entertainment. It had the elements of circus and a reckless festival. Later there was a letter sent to the Chinese authorities that clearly expresses the nature of the happening as anti-structure involving another characteristic of liminality called communitas.

Your humble servant has learned that the great wise kings in the past instructed their people and ruled their lands in accordance with the law and proper rituals and ceremonies. Unlawful or improper ways were prohibited. There were various specific ways of behavior for men and women, preventing them from going astray. But nowadays, around the capital and also in the provinces, streets at night are crowded with all sorts of people watching theatrical performances on every first full moon of the lunar calendar. Amid deafening drums and burning torches, human don animal masks, men wear women’s clothes, actors, and acrobats assume the most outlandish and bizarre expressions and postures. Obscenity and vulgarity are taken as entertainment and amusement. Huge banners flutter above the clouds. You also see everywhere: dazzling garments, beautiful ornaments, delicious foods, crafts of silk and bamboo, and carriages and horses that cause traffic. People spend all they have as if there were no time left. Whole households show up, and there is no distinction between men and women, or between monks and laymen. In such an environment indecent acts, theft, and robbery all get started. And before anyone knows it they become prevalent. These theatrical activities do not teach good morals but only bring harm to the people. Please officially prohibit all of them immediately.”(Fei 2002, p.27.)
The text reveals two things that can happen during the liminal phase of a ritual. One is the Anti-structure and the other one is a special human bond between people what Victor Turner calls Communitas

... emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.” (Turner 1969, p.96.)

In this happening can be found two different types of communitas. Normative communitas: Influenced by time and the need for social control, the communitas has formed a social system to be able to mobilize and organize the resources and members of the group to reach common goals. The normative communitas is between the group organizing the happening. However in the happening itself, between the people appears spontaneous communitas, where there is no distinction between the people of high or low rank. It is an immediate, direct confrontation of human identities, a model of society that is driven by unity, special human bond, and anti-structure. (Turner 1969, p.132.)

Our first thought was to leave risk, danger, spectacle, and technique, outside the door with our shoes? It led to questions of what is a technique, what is the scale of risk, danger, and spectacle? The second one was to leave our apparatus outside, but our bodies yearned for them. Thirdly we buried circus in a box under the autumn leaves in the studio, but it appeared in the school lobby, in a conversation, on a book page, in the supermarket, in the forest, while cooking, in the middle of meditation and even in the sauna. In the end, we gave up. We gave up on knowing what circus is and tuned ourselves into a state of not knowing because closure can not be found in an ever-changing world of becoming (Ingold 2006, p.18).

Moreover, Liminality is a temporal interface whose properties partially invert those of the already consolidated order which constitutes any specific cultural "cosmos." (Turner 1974, p.73) As such liminality creates a possibility for a dialogue between the past, what is now and what could be. It is a space for play.
PLAY

The first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Play is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration. This is the third main characteristic of play: its secludedness, its limitedness. It is "played out" within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning. Play begins, and then at a certain moment it is "over". It plays itself to an end (Huizinga 1949, p.8-9.)

If we think about circus through these three characteristics, circus belongs to the category of play. When a person enters the world of circus they temporarily step out of the ordinary life, questioning the normal ways of inhabiting space, by creatively creating disorder while testing and challenging their own capabilities. A vertical rope artist plays with gravity by hanging, swinging, and climbing a rope. Spaces, where circus happens, are various, such as training spaces, theaters, and traditional circus tents, and in each of them, it begins before it is over. As such, circus is free and voluntary. Rather than competitive artwork, circus is a pattern of engagement with the world where players act but also react with that world. (Hendricks 2012, p.25)

Another way of approaching play is through the play spirit. According to Huizinga "to dare, to take risks, to bear uncertainty, to endure tension-these are the essence of the play spirit."(Huizinga 1949, p.51). In circus this element is fairly recognizable, since for the spectators, in many cases circus appears as technique, risk, and danger. From this point of view, it is also played with the spectators. When people witness acrobatic performances, they live the experience with their whole body with the performers, because of mirror neurons, that is, motor neurons. (Boussiac 2012, p.202 – 203). As circus artists, we know that techniques presented on stage even though dangerous would not be presented on stage if they were not safe. This element of play only comes true, when there are spectators present and they choose to play to believe that the things that are happening are true. The excitement in the spectators is sensible and it is a live experience together
with the artists, which calls for communitas. In the name of Huizinga’s play spirit, circus artists are very spiritual players. But is all the circus play? Do the mirror neurons apply to other happenings on stage as well?

According to Huizinga (1949) all play is voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it (p.7.) From my perspective the heart of circus is play since circus is questioning the rational “real” world through physical actions. But is it play that is the driving force behind the circus representations? For sure it is that for the audience but what about the artists? I can see the relation to the game of chance in the early ages of humanity. The relation to the superstition; “If I stand on my hands, maybe it will rain”. However, in my circus, an order had appeared. It was defined by the western modern circus industry, its relation to the school system, social media, and myself. The first time I realized this was in a rope meeting while watching the evening gala show where everybody did the same techniques in a different order with a bit different style. Rather than being out of the ordinary, for me, it seemed like ordinary life, my ordinary life, but I was watching it from inside the vertical rope community. Something was off for me.

To draw a line between circus and circus industry I would separate play and game. Game here represents a contest that has all the formal and most of the functional features of a game. The outcome of game is only interesting to the people involved in the game either as spectators or as players and accept its rules. Except for the games played for money and profit. (Huizinga 1949, p.48 – 49.) In this game, the artists, players of the circus play against each other either as a group or as individuals. The rules are set by the circus industry, which is looking to make a profit from the best players. When these players win their prizes, they become performers for the instance, they lose their position as a player and become employees of the industry. That is the moment when the play becomes a work, as we do not play for wages, we work for them. (Huizinga 1949, p.51.) Although performances performed by the employees are still a play with the audience. Ironically, many of the spaces are being owned or managed by the people who probably have gone through the same journey that I am going through now. In their own time, they have formed communitas searching for circus through the play as freedom from the structures. It answered the challenges of their time. However, communitas can not survive as such for long. In time it starts to develop structure and the free relationships become norm-governed relationships between social personae (Turner 1969, p.132.) Their
communitas has become institutionalized and part of the structure, a part of everyday life. As such the rules of their circus play now apply to the market and it is played in their special playgrounds.

As mentioned by Boussiac before, the actions that are presented in circus evolved as a response to extreme situations that offered constant challenges in the deep time of species. Play was involved in the development of those skills or actually behind those skills. As mentioned in the ritual chapter, the life of a human consists of rituals

*Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play... We have to conclude, therefore, that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises in and as play, and never leaves it. (Huizinga 1949, p.173)*

However, humans have changed the rules of the game of life and as a result, climate change has brought us new challenges. Could it be that the play of being a god is over? I think there is no question of how could we survive these new challenges because, *play is undeniable, non-materialistic by nature and all play means something. Play transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action.* (Huizinga 1949, p.1-3.) It seems that we would be in a need of more play, but the question would be what kind of play? What kind of rules would we need this time?

According to Hendricks(2015): *"When we play, we assume a distinctive stance toward the world’s patterns and processes. We move forward and watch as the world responds to our movements. The world moves in its own ways and we respond in turn. "* (p. 25.) If the circus is mostly about technique, risk, and dangers, are we actually leveling with the world? Risk and danger suggest a certain way of reacting toward the world. Are we actually hearing the world? Moreover, if players *"itch to see what can be done with the world, or more to the point, to see what they can do with it.”* (Hendricks 2015, p.47). Considering the ecological situation of the world getting destroyed by our doings, maybe we should move to the latter one, what we can do with it?

To break the old habits we set up rules for our own play. Not knowing what we are doing became a play of meeting the rope for the first time, over and over again. The rule of the play was simple and elegant: we do not know how to climb a rope. Or even more, we don’t
even know what the word climb means, who or what is this entity we are working with? Liminality became a space of possibilities guided by play. Besides the space of possibilities, it became a space of resistance where we could rebel against the structures of western modern circus industry, or how we knew it. Moreover, turning the things upside down opened the door outside the studio, and to our artistic research where the art practice is not just the subject matter and the motivating factor of research, but central to the research process itself. (Borgdorff 2011, p.44) Meaning that our circus practice would work as a tool for the upcoming topics.

We kept on whirling

**Communitas**

*Communitas-what it is? Trying to answer is like trying to locate and hold down an electron. It cannot be done. Communitas is activity, not an object or state. Therefore, the only way to catch these "electrons" in the middle of their elusive activity, in process, is to go along with them in the very rush of their impossible energy, “kissing the winged joy as it flies.”* (Turner 2012, p.220)

However I am trying to catch some aspects of communitas, to give a hinch of what it could be. According to Edith Turner(2012)

> In concrete circumstances, communitas may be found when people engage in a collective task with full attention—often a matter of ordinary work. They may find themselves “in flow.” That is, they experience a full merging of action and awareness, a crucial component of enjoyment. Once in flow, there is no need for conscious intervention on their part. In communitas there is a loss of ego. One’s pride in oneself becomes irrelevant. In the group, all are in unity, seamless unity, so that even joshing is cause for delight and there is a lot of laughter. The benefits of communitas are quick understanding, easy mutual help, and long-term ties with others. (p.3)

From my experience, this could be a description of a collective circus performance come true. In the first part the artists have formed a normative communitas to be able mobilize and organize the group that is working together towards the same purpose, for the performance to come true. Everyone is contributing time and their special skills for the
common task. The task is to come up with the rules of the play to be able to play it for the audience. There is a sense of unity through collaboration. Moreover, when the audience steps in, starts the spontaneous communitas, where the audience is an as important part of the play as the performers. The task of the audience is to play along. If there is no audience, the play will not come true. The spontaneous communitas ends when the performance is over, but the normative communitas will probably carry on for the next spontaneous communitas.

If the above is communitas, How does it differ from play?

_There is a difference in the pattern of engagement between communitas and play. Where play is being contestive, “communitas is considered to be integrative, where participants feel themselves to exist in shared circumstances; ideas of “we” are prevalent. This emphasis is in contrast with play’s feisty spirit, which dwells on tensions and oppositions._ (Hendricks 2015, p.43).

When we work towards making the performance, we have a common purpose, to reach a point where the performance is ready. However, when each of them is contributing to the same purpose they play themselves and together. In communitas are the people working for the same cause. They are not playing against each other, they are playing as a group. Play here happens between individuals and the cosmos. Rather than competitive play, contestive here means questioning how things are and how they could be.

While play is all around us, communitas lives in the liminality. Besides the rite of passage communitas breaks into the society from the margins on the side and from the bottom by inferior and the powers of the weak. It lives in the cracks of society, where people are betwixed and in between the stages of life. (Turner 2012, p.183). As artists, me and my art companion belong to the group of margins. However, working as an artist does not automatically set you to the margins. It is a matter of choice to play outside the structures which at least in our case makes us belong to the third group of inferior as the poor. Moreover,

_The unpredictable recrudescence of communitas teaches us the powers of the weak, powers countervailing against structural power, fostering continuity, with a vision of the wholeness of the total community whose units are total human_
beings... The very existence of the weak can remind humankind that in spirituality there is no ranking; there are no peripheries to humanity. (Turner 2012, p.183 – 184.)

As said, we were inside of ritual processes inside ritual processes. In the bigger picture, our beloved classmates were with us in “digital” communitas, bound by studies, and the same purpose of trying to do and learn artistic research in the field of circus. Moreover, me and my art companion big M were bound by the relationship of working together and sharing the same spaces and time. As nature can not so much speak for itself, we agreed that with us, in communitas, would be the materials that we work with and nature. Together we would try to figure out what this was all about. However, communitas can not survive as such for long. In time it starts to develop structure and the free relationships become norm-governed relationships between social personae. (Turner 1969, p.132.)

Not knowing what we are doing we separated ourselves every day in the studio trying to figure out, what is behind spiral, ritual, liminality, communitas and what is their relation to our practice and nature. The repetitive four-hour studio moments were their own moments of rituals with separation, liminality, and aggregation, while the longer liminal space appeared to be the time between presentations, that we did together with the other students through a virtual space. These occasions could be said to be normative communitas.

The normative communitas has been with me and my art companion as long as we have been working together. However, taking nature with us to the liminality opened us the way to spontaneous communitas that could be triggered by anything sensible in nature. It would create an immediate separation into a moment in-between time, together with nature, in relation to everything that was nearby. These moments and relations would travel with us to the studio space and practice.

As said before, The universe appears in spirals and many plants grow in spirals in relation to their surroundings. There are several ways that we can create spirals into space. The size of the spiral in space is in relation to time and materials that are working with us. A Rope can be in a spiral shape on the floor and some of the rope bodies have become a spiral form. We can create spirals into space with our bodies. Draw a spiral with our bums into space. Do a spiral whirl with the whole body like a hurricane, while our pinky casts
another teeny tiny spiral secretly at the same time. If the spirals can be present in so many ways, how can I be sure that it is me, who is casting the spirals into space? Could it be that they exist in space prior to our movements, which makes them visible? If they do exist in the space prior to my movement making them visible then it would mean that I am not casting the circus into the space but it already exists in the space.

Video:

Researching communitas, liminality, and spirals come together in a ritual play in space and time.

**Rope calling, who’s there?**

In the last decades, the world has gone through some serious changes. Besides the sensational real world, we are balancing between the virtual and the real world. Looking at these worlds today through the lens of Boussiacs six core actions, makes you wonder, how and what would be the actions today to bring back the balance to the world.

‘(1)Balancing and progressing on narrow surfaces’, are we not balancing on a narrow surface with global warming and the progress should be steadily walking back with the consumption.

‘(2) grasping hanging supports that prevent deadly falls;’ are we not holding tight from the problematic way of living, grasping so hard your luxury that the whole planet will fall.

‘(3) clearing obstacles by jumping and climbing’ jumping over each other, clearing them away to reach for the high positions.
‘(4) throwing or catching objects in a way that allows a person to reach targets or keep a number of valuable items intact;’ buying more and more objects and throwing away perfectly usable things as waste and valuing ourselves with the amount and price of the objects.

‘(5) controlling animals both to exploit the resources afforded by some and neutralize the aggression of predators;’ controlling humans to exploit the resources afforded by some and trying to neutralize the aggression of some individual predators while others have the support of the whole nation.

(6) no less important for a social species, negotiating social situations;’ Shouldn’t we expand the negotiations to other than humans as well?

If Boussiac(2010) is right that basis of circus are a set of typical actions that can be assumed to have been essential for human survival in the deep time of the species when extreme situations offered constant challenges (p.177) What would be the actions, forms, or devices we need to demonstrate today to survive these ecological and sociopolitical crises? Could we make use of the circus ring as a cognitive structure that can generate sense in the form of meaningful actions and interactions? (Boussiac 2010, p.18)

If we consider Boussiacs six core actions as circus, it is not something that belongs only to humans. The actions of survival are an ongoing process. There is a constant struggle going on deep in nature. The real-life circus happens out there every day. For example, while nature is playing its symphony, a squirrel is performing every day. Running, progressing, and balancing on branches. Jumping or flying from a branch and landing on another. Hanging with her claws from the tree trunk. Climbing up and down and manipulating the cones while eating. Boussiacs circus is not something that happens inside of circus tent, nor on the stage. It is a real-life and deadly struggle that happens out there as we speak.

Moreover, aren’t these core actions aimed at the survival of individuals? Is there still a need for these kinds of survival skills for us humans in the modern world? How many times have you had a need to run away from something, to climb into a tree and hang there to be safe from something? Even the wars between humans are going through a change. The more developed countries have drones to do the dirty work for them and a big part
plays the virtual information wars over the internet. Climate change is knocking on our front door. Rather than "negotiating" with power for the survival of individuals or countries, aren't we in a need of different ways to negotiate? What would be the actions for survival of life with its diversity? Could it be that we are ready for communitas, which "occurs through the readiness of the people – perhaps from necessity – to rid themselves of their concern for status and dependence on structures, and see their fellows as they are (Turner 2012, p.1 -2)." Moreover because "communitas does not merge identities; the gifts of each and every person are alive to the fullest. It remains a spring of pure possibility, and it finds oneness, in surprise (Turner 2012, p.3.)"

If circus ring is representative of the cycle of life, what would be our fellows in life? According to Agamben, the concept of life never gets defined in western culture. Instead, understanding what it is to live means separating one from the others and seeking which living belongs to this being. (Agamben 2013, p.13) In the animistic ontology: "The animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or agency into materiality, but rather ontologically prior to their differentiation. (Ingold 2006, p.10)" To find ways to survive, don't we need to let go of the sectored reality and open our hearts and circus to life and live our practice outside of the studios as well. According to Ingold (2013) to learn what life is, happens through the process of self-discovery that is followed by the process of active following. By paying attention to our senses to what the world has to tell us. Moreover, "To know things, you have to grow into them, and let term grow in you so that they become who you are." (p.1.)

What if it is not me who wants to play with the rope? What if it is rope calling for us to play? We just don't understand and not not understand. How could we if we have never tried? We lowered the rope down to the ground. We sat down with her and tuned ourselves into a rope state.
Communitas is exciting; it makes people able to organize and work together. With this power, they will eventually develop organizational habits, structures, rules of behavior, and ranks and positions. These often work well, if they remain on the human level; yet if they become overly law-bound, communitas will bubble up again from below and question the old system. (Turner 2012, p.4)

Technical prowess has once again become of paramount importance for graduating students, who are expected to display exceptional technical skill levels in a unique act be presented at graduation. (Lavers, Leroux, Burt 2020, p.104) The driving force behind this lies in both the market and in the circus schools which want to answer market needs by equipping students with acts that demonstrate the physical prowess of the artists. (Lavers, Leroux, Burt 2020, p.112) However,
"When the circus gestures are being captured as commodities, circus art's subversive potential gets neutralised. The circus act gets normalised and standardised; a product consumed rather than a poetic, diverting, provoking, and useful tool". (Robitaille 2021)

I was drawn to the circus because of its physicality, at that time I wanted to work with my body and where else could you combine art and physicality than in circus. I was, still am, an obedient apprentice, who trusts in the repetition of the techniques that my teachers have taught me. When asked why I have to do it like this, the answer was, because it has always been done like that. Of course, I was not satisfied with the answer.

According to Bauke Lievens, as long as we continue to replicate the model of the past, we will fail to connect our craft to the underlying questions — of what we're doing, why we're doing it, and how we do it — and we will keep on communicating exactly that: craft (Lievens 2015). But doesn't the past have the answer to questions of what are we doing and why we're doing it? How we do it, is the question of how the tradition has been handed over to you and how you make use of it in this time. What is the story, ontology, or experience behind the skill? Isn't communicating craft the result of forgetting the radical roots of circus as ritual and liminal space? A space that keeps questioning the structured society and turning it upside down. To understand, we have to travel into the past beyond the birth of the western modern circus, to the fountain of archaic rituals. Maybe the question would then be: are we here to entertain or, as Robitaille (2021) says, "re-engaging circus gestures as a poetic act of resistance (p.25)" because skillful forms of the circus are expressions of a very particular way of seeing and experiencing the world (Lievens 2015).

For most of its time, circus has been the art form of people thinking differently, the marginals as in communitas. It has been the art of the oppressed people wandering around without a permanent home trying to survive. The acts and techniques made a way in the families from one generation to another as a way of survival. At the same time, it made visible another side of society. A way of life that was not necessarily chosen by the participants. Today circus stands as one of the high-class arts, at least in the Scandinavian countries meaning mostly white privileged people perform for white privileged audiences. So how did we get here from threatening nomad weirdos taking their space and expressing bizarre and vulgar gestures?
Could it be that the essence of circus lives in liminality? Maybe circus is in a need of change, transformation, or a ritual process? To be able to bring back the balance, maybe it needs to go out from tents and the theaters? Maybe the state of the circus as high art is not the place to be? Could circus become folk art once again and take over the public space temporarily? Show people the way to nature to learn more understanding and responsible ways of living? Could we find communitas with more than humans?

That is why rather than closure, we should be seeking openness because closure can not be found in an ever-changing world of becoming (Ingold 2013, p.18). To get out of this loop of mechanical repetition of technical skills, circus itself needs a radical change. "It is crucial that we start experimenting with different relationships to our apparatuses, techniques and/or objects (Lievens 2015)" According to Thomas P. Kasulis, the cultural difference does not come from the differences in fundamental forms of thinking. Instead, it is in the cultural tradition that it tends to emphasize, enhance and preserve as central (1998, p.20).

Re-orienting

Western modern society is mostly integrity orientated, where identity communicates with fixed boundaries of the ego. Discovering myself happens independently of external factors. Self is autonomous and as such has control over relationships that I have chosen to be connected to (Kasulis 1998, p.61.) In an integrity orientation, the whole is constructed from parts, entities in external relationships, where things are understood in relation to what it is not. In integrity, the world is seen as external that has to be managed with knowledge. (Kasulis 1998, p.99 -102)

An alternative to the western modern worldview is intimacy orientation. According to Kasulis(1998) intimacy orientation favors, interdependence and identity happen through realizing how I am interconnected with and interdependent with many other entities (p.61). In intimacy orientation, reality is assumed to be an ongoing process in which we live. The reality is a differentiated one, where things only exist in relation to other things. (p.100 -101)

There is a difference in perspectives in these orientations, and how they experience the world. Again, they are not opposites but far ends of the same thing.
Considering Boussiac's six core actions through intimacy orientation, don't the meaningful actions for survival lose something when they are separated from their natural environment? Doesn't something important disappear when these skills are presented on the stage without the relation to nature that originally provided the playground? Isn't there a contradiction to take down the original teacher and playground, forests, to tour around the planet with circus that is about skills of (human) survival?

Once we take a closer look at Boussiac's 6th core action, negotiating social situations, through the lens of intimacy, shouldn't it be expanded to the non-human as well? Have we not come to be the predators of the world? We are in a living with relation with the world. This means that we are involved in constant negotiations and processes with the world, an active world that has meaning and power as well (De la Bellacas 2017, p.74). Considering the fact that Earth Overshoot Day was last year July 29, 2021 (EarthOvershootDay),

Earth Overshoot Day = (Earth’s Biocapacity / Humanity’s Ecological Footprint) x 365

Is that negotiating or a robbery? Negotiations are supposed to end in beneficial relations for both participants. Don’t you have to give to get?

"Through a meditative artistic praxis, the artist softens the hard shell of the ego and opens oneself to the world until one’s identity is enchanted by the overlap with the world. The artist, by being in touch with the world, is also touched by it. Reality expresses itself through the artist. ”(Kasulis 1998, p.111)

Our practice in the studio expanded from a sitting meditation to negotiating with the rope. From mostly listening to each other to an interaction. Could we approach the rope non violently? Could we find communitas with rope?
Trying to find a task together

Joy of communitas

It is a complex thing to hear what the rope is trying to tell you. It is a never-ending process that we are still learning. Why is it so hard to let go of the rope once you have grabbed it? Is it the feeling of power and control that wants to take over? How should we treat relations?

From Mandala to Traces of being, Oops wrong way

Whirling was one way of approaching meditation. We tried another by creating Mandalas.

"mandala, (Sanskrit: “circle”) in Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism, a symbolic diagram used in the performance of sacred rites and as an instrument of meditation. The mandala is basically a representation of the universe, a consecrated area that serves as a receptacle for the gods and as a collection point of universal forces. Man (the microcosm), by mentally “entering” the mandala and “proceeding” toward its centre, is by analogy guided through the cosmic processes of disintegration and reintegration.”(Britannica)

We started with drawing mandalas on paper, some we made from the autumn leaves on paper, and some with steps into the snow. In the studio, we created mandalas with movement and they were part of the score of the ritual exposition. Could we create mandalas with the help of rope in space?
We thought of creating a pendulum out of rope, and a container filled with sand, salt, or rice. The rope pendulum would draw while the sand would float to the studio floor leaving a trace of the movement. We started with a mini model.

Video:

![Pendulum testing](image)

However, there is a big difference between what I want to do and what I am doing.

“Just as in many other academic research studies, it involves doing unpredictable things, and this implies intuition and some measure of randomness. Research is more like exploration than like following a firm path (Borgdorff 2011, p.57)”

Rather than running into the hardware store to get the necessary equipment we ended up in the studio empty-handed. We found a solution from a bicycle lamp and a mobile phone with a light painting application. Since the idea was to make the movement pattern of the rope visible, we attached the light to the rope, turned off the lights from the room, and started taking pictures with the light painting application.
Seeing the pictures got us thinking about the traces that we leave behind and the effect on the spaces that we inhabit. What is left behind from the massive shows inside the stages? The amount of natural resources we are using to shed light on the tents and stages? How much natural resources are spent on the touring? What is the price that the next generations have to pay for the traces we leave? Instead of continuing with the light painting, we decided to minimize our traces and abandon the idea and walk back to the point where we got lost. Moreover from the traces arising the question of what else is there that we don’t notice?
You could say that the exploration of light painting was a detour, even though we did not carry on with the actual method. It shed some light on understanding the difference between anti-structure and structure. Light and shadows. It was not the only time we got lost or sideways. Lost is a great place to be, you always find something interesting and in the best case, it will contribute to your journey or future adventures.

**Catwalk of life**

Our play in the studio with big M led from chaos to a structured play called catwalk. We walked front and back, dressing the rope in different ways. As we would do while climbing the rope. It led to the question of what are we presenting? Is it my body or the rope body? My body and the rope body together?

Link to the video: [https://youtu.be/bcXNQth6IXU](https://youtu.be/bcXNQth6IXU)

**Cosmologies of play**

Sutton smith offers two different cosmological approaches to play. In the western world, play is situated at the bottom. Play is seen as the negation, subversive, and resisting to the order of things and it is perceived as unserious, imaginative, and a passing activity. From the other perspective, the world is at play and it resonates throughout the whole. Dreaming and playfulness are treated as forms of reality and are considered primacy as forms of knowing. Play is integrated into the operation of the cosmos. (Sutton-Smith 2001, p.55.)

If we take a look at the play of catwalk through the lens of these two different perceptions. I could say that from the western perception we were resisting norms of aerial acrobatics by not climbing the rope and presenting similar things on the floor. Questioning what is being displayed? Me, or the rope or both of us together? The play comes from transposing a rational fashion show into a figurative one with the rope. A Play with the idea of how the spectator would perceive things.

From the other perspective, you could see different possibilities for relations between humans and other entities. A figurative play of life on this planet and in relation to each other. The habit of humans to either dominate, submit or live together with other entities but also questioning the responsibility of the human in these relations. As such play seems
to share things with communitas. Rather than the same, there are fundamental differences between communitas and play that would affect the journey and the result.

Secrets of the Tea Bag

“The erratic nature of creative discovery – of which unsystematic drifting, serendipity, chance inspirations and clues form an integral part – is such that a methodological justification is not easy to codify.” (Borgdorff 2018, p

It was a normal morning in Kaggeholm. The detective duo m&M had been up for while watching the surveillance tapes from the last few weeks. Troubled by the idea of not knowing what they were looking for, little m decided to make them some tea. When little m was pouring hot water into the white teacups with black animal shapes on the sides big M said laughing: You know little m, these Yogi tea bags come with a pearl of ancient wisdom from great Yogis. Maybe we should ask for advice from a teabag?

Yeah right. Little m said and opened his teabag. His eyes popped open as he had just seen a ghost. He started laughing: You were right, we’ve been looking at this the wrong way.

Regulations of play and communitas

Play is considered to be self-regulated. It describes the way how the action is developed, monitored, and sustained. Although play might have its rules and leaders, in the best play case these arise from negotiations of the participants themselves. (Hendricks 2015, p.45
In contrast, communitas is other-regulated, even though the people contribute to the event in question the major shape of the event is determined largely by the form itself and by the inputs of the collectivity as a whole (Hendricks 2015, p.60). Why is the rope always on the stage rigged up on stage waiting for us to play with it? What about sunrise or the wind? What about foxes, sloths, and ants? Or the mountains, rivers, and oak trees? Are they here only for our use? What if we take humans down from the stage of the universe? What if we take humans down from the stage of circus?

Change of perspective

According to Tomi Purovaara, the origins of the circus are in those ceremonies and rituals that humans did to be safe from the supremacy of nature. Songs, dances, and bodily skills were ways for primitive communities to appease the destructive power of the supernatural power hidden in natural phenomena (p.29.) Moreover, in the traditional circus, the mastering of physically demanding, dangerous techniques and the taming of wild animals can be seen as expressions of a belief in the supremacy of humankind over nature and over natural forces such as gravity. (Lievens 2015) However looking at the world today, human supremacy is an illusion that has led to the destruction of natural resources and has awakened a greater threat in form of climate change.

According to Tim Ingold (2006, p.10), the animistic world should not be seen as primitive belief systems that project soul into non-living entities but as an ontology where people relate to the world as an interwoven tissue of relations. If we take another look at Purovaara's definition of the origin of the circus from Ingold’s perspective, is there a need to be safe from the supremacy of nature? It is more about understanding, honoring, and thanking relations. It is a mother-child relationship that is a communitas of two.

The mother – child relationship has a time dimension, due to the slow development of the infant, and there is no closer relationship. It becomes stacked and packed with memories, the source of billions of little family stories all over the planet, fond looks, shared consciousness, laughter over some ridiculous misdoing. (Turner 2012, 184.)
In this manner, humanity and circus artists seem like teenagers, having a generations-long rebellion against the one entity that gave life to them. Probably everyone has yelled as a child to their mom, look at me, look at me to get their attention. Maybe it is time for us to grow, stop rebelling against, and start to perform with care with our beloved mother.

We took ourselves down from the stage of the universe and circus stage to give rope and her fellow rigging gear a chance to shine. She did quite well with the minimalistic support that we provided.

Video:

Rope loop dancing

**Rope species**

Rope species are one of a kind. It has helped humans to build things, hold things together, climb a mountain, and more. It appears in different colors, shapes, thicknesses, and stretches. The power of the rope lives in the materials that come together as rope. A rope is a collection of strings that can be twisted or braided, born from natural fibers or different kinds of chemical combinations. All of the ropes are unique and with unique abilities. Ropes are born to connect.

In the beginning, there was rope
in the studio
waiting for me
my humble servant.

Even though it has been my humble servant, it has been waiting for me in the training spaces and on stages. The traces of the ways and our time together have been shaping my body. She has been keeping me safe, carrying me and my art companions' weight, and catching me and her whenever needed. Not even once have I asked from our rope, what would you like to do? How are you? What do you do? The way I have cared for it has been for my safety, to see every once in a while, are you ok, can you still handle this. It has been mine to use, for my purposes, for me to shine whenever I want. My precious, my precious.

Play is considered to be transformative towards the world of objects because during play they impose their will on external circumstances. Players do this in order to expand, test, and solidify their own powers. This is in contradiction with communitas, where the relationship would be conforming. (Hendricks 2015, p.43.) Plays way is an example of hylomorphism, where practitioners impose a form from the mind on the material world. However, if we would like to approach the world from the perspective of communitas, how could we do it? Ingold suggests making as a process of growth. This way maker is placed together with the world of active materials. There is a two-way highway between the object and images of it in mind, and during the process, a new entity takes shape reciprocally. The object becomes a result of working together with the flows of consciousness and materials. Instead of imposing one's own designs on the ready-made world, one can mostly intervene in the processes that are already going on by adding one's own impetus to the energies and forces that give form to the living world we sense around us. (Ingold 2013, p.20-21.)

**spectacle (n.)**

*mid-14c., "specially prepared or arranged display," from Old French spectacle "sight, spectacle, Roman games" (13c.), from Latin spectaculum "a public show, spectacle, place from which shows are seen," from spectare "to view, watch, behold," frequentative form of specere "to look at" (from PIE root *spek-, "to observe"). (etymonline)*
Meaning it is related to the ability of sight. The other end of sight would be blindness and the far end, limited sight.

The world unfolded differently through limited sight. Naturally, it made us aware of the other senses and changed our movement to be more careful. The changes in temperature and the wind could be felt on the skin, the sounds of the birds and wind in the trees, and you could feel the waves hitting the rocks close to the strand. Could circus be something else than a visual spectacle? What does circus taste like? Popcorn? What does it smell like? How does it feel?

Took rope out on date, out of the environment we usually interact in. To get to know each other. To understand the language she speaks. Sensible shared moment.

Our continuous negotiations with rope had gone forward. Instead, as a static object rope had started to show its true nature as a collection of active materials that are becoming. The relationship had grown more mutual, where rope started to suggest things and we could think together.

Video:

In between us and rope
Thinking with non-human entities is more than coexisting, tolerating, or accommodating the world in different ways. Instead, it should be a living-with relation, where seeking a significant otherness transforms those involved in the relation and the worlds we live in while being aware of the troubling relations (De La Bellacasa 2017, p.83.)

**Rope Sensei**

If you know how to perform all the rope techniques in the world does that make you a rope master? Let’s play a bit with the thought of how to become a rope master or have a holistic rope practice. We heard a story that to become a construction worker in Japan, you start with cleaning the house. That you do for years because by cleaning the house you learn to know every corner and every detail of the house. Once you have learned your teacher permits you to go to the next step.

We know how to control and manipulate the rope for our needs, but what do we know about the rope? It came in a box from the UK, I am not entirely sure if it was made by a person that I later learned to know or his partner. I know the materials, but I do not know where the materials came from. Because the rope is a cotton rope, I do know that it was once a plant or a collection of plants. What I don’t know is how many toxic substances were used to grow the plant, and how much effect those substances have on the people working there and on the soil on the site where the cotton is growing.

According to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa(2017), caring is a condition, not a contract, moral order, or necessarily a rewarding obligation. For life to exist, it needs to be fostered in one way or another. Care includes everything that we do to repair, save and maintain the diversity of the world (p.70).

For the cotton to become a rope, somebody somewhere needs to first take care of the plant, and make the living conditions possible, until it is time for the harvest. Somebody somewhere was already taking care of our circus practice by fostering the cotton plants to become rope. However, because the doing is in the very nature of care (Bellacasa 2017, p.70), We planted seeds to grow chili plants and began to study care with a sourdough bread starter.
The process of growing chilies was interesting. We started the process inside the house in January to get some harvest in the summer. Some died accidentally from too much water. When it started to get closer to the summer we took them out too early. Some of them started blooming when there was not enough sunlight. Moreover, at beginning of the summer, we had to leave our little babies in the care of our roommates. They did a good job, but because the lack of our instructions and our mistakes the chilies started to bloom again so late that there was not enough sunlight. After nine months we had three chili plants that gave three chili paprikas. Oh boy, they were good. Needles to say, we did not do enough. Because of the lack of time and attention for them, it turned out like this. This year we may succeed.

Breathing

Breath in breath out
breath in, breath out
breath in, breath out
breath in, breath out
repeat
nature (n.)

late 13c., "restorative powers of the body, bodily processes; powers of growth;" from Old French nature "nature, being, principle of life; character, essence," from Latin natura "course of things; natural character, constitution, quality; the universe," literally "birth," from natus "born," past participle of nasci "to be born," from PIE root *gene- "give birth, beget." (etymonline 2022;)

When we moved to Sweden, we thought we are moving from a small city into a big city. Instead, we ended up in the last house next to a forest on the small island of Helgö. To get to the studio space, we had to travel for one hour and forty-five minutes. Rather than being annoyed by the travel time, we fell in love with living close to nature. To go to a forest sounds always so tempting, but if you have to travel over an hour to get there, you rarely do it. Instead, if you live close to nature, you will anyway travel to "work".

Moreover, artistic practices do not stand on their own; they are always situated and embedded. Artworks and artistic actions acquire their meaning in interchange with relevant environments. Research in the arts will remain naïve unless it acknowledges and confronts this embeddedness and situatedness in history, in culture (society, economy, everyday life) as well as in the discourse on art; herein lies the merit of relational aesthetics and of all constructivist approaches in artistic research (Borgdorff 2011, p.56).

Nature became a big part of our research. Our research has been mostly affected by the nearby nature of Kaggeholm, Ekerö, Sweden, but some of the research has been done in Finland in various places while camping throughout the summer. The approach has been learning the learning, which according to Ingold (2013) does not so much provide facts about the world but enables us to be taught by it. The world becomes a university where we learn from those with whom and which we study. Learning to learn is to "convert every certainty into a question, whose answer is to be found by attending to what lies before us, in the world, not by looking it up at the back of the book." (p.2.)

The walks in the forests became time spent with the forest and the lake, a meditative practice. Meanwhile, the studio had stayed seemingly the same, empty, although some days you could smell the previous visitors or see some traces on the dance mat from the day's activity. Still, it seemed like an empty space.
empty space is just another word for space filled with possibilities – m -

When I was a kid I wanted to join the choir, but I was told that there is no musical talent in our family. The forest does not judge. That is why I love spending time with the forest, you don’t have to be anything but what you are. It was another day of picking up mushrooms, after an hour we had not found any. We stopped for a moment and started to sing, not with words but humming. The singing showed us the way to the mushrooms. Since then we have been singing when picking up mushrooms. Never have we come back empty-handed.

There is a Finnish ancient tradition called "lyyliminen", which we learned about while taking part in a "bear day" ritual in Finland. Practically "lyyliä" means that when you get something (a gift) from nature, be it an animal, berries, or anything, you have to give something back. To recognize and respect the relation between you and the forest (Vanhapiha 2021.) It is the idea of a gift economy that is common for many animistic cultures. Moreover,

![Image of a hand holding a piece of wood with berries and flowers]

Lyyli. Thank you forest, for the berries.

*From the viewpoint of a private property economy, the “gift” is deemed to be “free” because we obtain it free of charge, at no cost. But in the gift economy, gifts are not free. The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships. The currency of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity. In Western thinking, private land is*
understood to be a "bundle of rights," whereas in a gift economy property has a “bundle of responsibilities” attached (Wall Kimmerer 2020, p.28.)

As the forest was feeding us. Besides the singing, we started collecting the trash the people had thrown into or forgotten in the forest. These were just minor things while walking in the forest. Could there be something else we could do? Could we use our circus practice to cherish our relationship with the forest and make people realize how important is to us, how important forests and trees are to all of us?

Counterbreath

According to Marner, the way we are now dealing with the vegetal world will lead to a disaster. Because by harming the environment, we hurt the lungs of the planet that produce air, eventually we will run out of fresh air at some point. Marner points out that the breathing of the vegetal world is the opposite of human breathing. As plants reprocess the carbon dioxide, we breathe out into the oxygen we inhale. Besides the lung, people also breathe through the pores in our skin, making us quite similar to trees whose breathing happens mainly outside, on the surface of the leaves that are exposed to the outside. (Marner 2016) How and what could we do to make nature present in the studio? We started with the breath, concentrating on the breathing and where it would take us?
The breath helped us to connect our bodies and mind as it was directing the movements as well, however even though the action between us was a reciprocal, our way of treating the rope seemed something else for us. As the breathing started to produce sounds we realized that singing is a way of breathing. As we sang the same way and kind of the same songs that we were used to while picking up mushrooms, it reminded us of the relation between us and mother nature. How could we show our thankfulness to the rope and how could we show care to the rope?
Hello Tree, Hello Lake!

Our communitas in the studio had grown with different types of ropes and strings. Our negotiations with these materials had been going on for quite a while now. Together we had been wondering, could we find a way to bring nature to the studio without harming it? The ropes had been mostly listening to our stories about the forest and its trees that always seemed to amaze us, and the lake that took care of us with its cold hugs. We came to the conclusion that we would try. We took a picture of one of the trees with...
that we had a special relationship and took it with us into a studio.

In the studio, we taped the picture into ladders to be able to work with both hands. With the help of the strings and the ropes that had joined our communitas, we started to transpose the picture into the studio space. We attached one string at a time first to the picture and then pulled the string to the space. To be able to attach it to a point in space we lifted up a truss in the air. From the truss we started crocheting rope to create a matching existing structure of the tree in the studio space. Once the tree was ready, we realized that it was missing “sunlight” so we made imaginary rays of sun coming from one perspective and reflecting from the leaves to the ground.

In the end, like the picture, the tree was more two-dimensional, and the rays of the sun added a more three-dimensional effect to the space. Next with the same method, we tried to transpose the pier that we walked every morning to our morning swims. Because it was created from the perspective of the human eye the structure in a way automatically got more three-dimensional structure. However, we felt that the structures won’t become
complete if we don’t inhabit them somehow. Because we were quite happy how things turned out and we decided to have a little celebration with them.

Celebration video: [https://youtu.be/SnQ1xTvDfbY](https://youtu.be/SnQ1xTvDfbY)

**Restart - a meditative space for rest and art**

Restart is a meditative space for rest and art. It was inspired by the Finnish sauna and “löyly” which in the old Finnish language means spirit of life. The purpose was to transpose our experiences with nature into a studio space. To share our relation, our communitas with nature. For us, nature was a meditative space with all its wonders. Besides nature, the thought was to share our relation with rope as circus artists. However, as the limited sight opened the world to other senses as well, we thought of making more than a visual space, a space to be experienced with the body.

Restart in May 2021 at Stockholm University of Arts consisted of a three-day durational installation. Each day had a different installation piece of art that the audience could interact with. Besides the ready-made installations, it was possible for the audience to see
the making and unmaking of the space. This was done partly to show the labor behind the ready-made spaces. Partly it was made for the visitors to understand that the installations are not static objects, instead, they are temporary forms of active materials, that during the time will become something else.

The installations came true in real-time, in real space, in communitas, as a collaboration between entities working towards the task of making these things temporarily visible. It was a process of "thinking through making is to put your body into work with the fluxes and flows of the materials you work with. It is a reciprocal practice where these materials think through us as we think through them." (Ingold 2013, p.6-7) Because of the limited time, of course, we had been practicing these things. But since we had no fixed picture of form, everything happened reciprocally. The soundscape of the spaces were sounds recorded from nature and then modified to apply to the space.

Day one was called the tree of life. As an inspiration was "maailmanpuu" from the Finnish mythology, a tree of life. However, because death is part of life, it needs to be cut down every year so that the sun does not get jammed into the top branches around Christmas. (Vanhapiha 2021). Since it is a mythical tree, me and my art companion had different ideas about what it looks like. Bound by the same task we started making it. The interaction with this was meant to be on the ground(because of rigging points).

Video: https://youtu.be/GHlF1YsCaqU

Day two was called S(n)ailing. This one was our relation to the nearby lake. How it, as mother nature was taking care of us by lulling us while swimming. It was to create a womb-like feeling while inside the installation. Again we were working together with ropes towards an abstract idea. However rope does not have the consistency of water, as a result, it became a boat that could be swung and lulled like the waves. For this one to come true we needed help from mother nature. However, we did not want to cut any trees to be able to get the shape of the boat. In the end, we were lucky, because some company was cutting trees from nearby our house to make a disc golf field. We thought to make use of the trees that otherwise would have been going to the middle summer bonfire. You could say that we gave a new life for trees as material. The leftover rope we used for decoration to create waves.
Video: https://youtu.be/OlXH3MsnoI4

The last day was Creatures ne(s)t, which was made to make visible our relation to the ropes and ropes as a living material. It took the shape of a creature with a net that people could inhabit. While inhabiting you could choose if you wanted to lay quietly or play with the possibilities without as much physical strength as needed. Besides the playing, you could feel the creatures touch on your skin.

Video: https://youtu.be/88hoSWawfsg

Sadly because of the pandemic, almost no one was allowed to come into the space. However, for us, it was a meditative experience. Rest is not only about sleeping or staying still. For us crocheting the pieces was restful. Once you get into a repetitive doing it is somehow calming and meditative. In the end, we got the experience and the understanding of creating these things in space.

Moreover, Restart continues to travel. The S(n)ailing part was part of a big immersive theater piece “Huoneiden kirja” in Finland. The nature of the boat changed in that space as it grew from a plant that was taking over the space. Besides making the boat, we could expand the world to the space around it. Our original idea was to combine the tree and to boat in that space, but the ropes we were working with suggested vines instead of a tree.
Later Restart was part of a contemporary circus festival in Tampere, Finland as a three day installation. There it spread more widely and had new forms.

Making and unmaking of Restart. Pictures: Mikko Vares

**Kehrä**

*Kehrae / Kehrä* is a performance, dance, trance, meditation. It is a Finnish word for round things like sun and moon, the verb *kehrätä* means to spin as making yarn.

Shamans in Korea and Japan use the revolving movement to achieve trance. The whirling Sufis in the Middle East are practicing their meditational whirling ritual to transcend the ego, and consciously participate in the shared revolution of other beings.

Life is spinning, whirling, revolving from the smallest cells to the stars of the firmament. Life is a revolution.

Welcome to the ritual of entangled life!

In the beginning, whirling was for us a play and a physical activity, an aesthetic movement in a studio, which had the potential to become a performance once we had cracked the code of what kind of movements would look good for the audience. However, in time, whirling turned out to be a ritual, a meditation, a vehicle to travel in time from one concept
to another. Some days it worked as a separation from the ordinary world into the liminal space, while others it was the liminal space. Instead of cracking the code of the body positions while whirling, we were shown the secrets of the universe as a revolving movement that is always becoming and never the same again. Kehrä is a revolving celebration of the cycle of life.

**Life**

When the audience enters the space, they enter into another world or universe that is already on. The ground is filled with leaves like it is in the autumn. Two entities are whirling on the ground in the middle of the space dressed in skirts with autumn colors, almost like they were part of the ground. With these entities, there are two white rope loops that are connected to the space above the ground. The rope loops are decorated with colorful strings hanging toward the ground like long leaves of a plant in the evening. Around the space, there are ropes and the same kind of colorful strings that the rope loops have. The strings and the ropes make visible the different relations of the space forming different space/spaces. On the other side of the space is a big window that lets in the natural light. On the ground, there are few theater lights painting shadows on the walls with color. Somewhere between the leaves are pillows crocheted from rope.

After the audience has sat down a meditation bell breaks the silence followed by a percussion drumming. The entities in the middle start to slowly whirl faster and faster, and as the movement gets faster there appear more elements to the music and it gets louder. As they start to whirl faster the leaves on the ground start to move. Somewhere in between the entities start to lift themselves up in the air with the help of the rope loops always returning to the ground. Sometimes the entities work synchronized and other times they do different things. Then comes the breathing, both of them start to breathe out loud first slowly and then heavily, the breathing comes into the movement giving it a different rhythm, as the breathing continues heavier and heavier it seems like they might lose control. The breathing calms down with the movement. The whirling has not stopped, as they continue drawing as big circles as the rope loops let them with their movement on to the ground. As the circles get smaller they whirl faster and faster. This happens repeatedly. The entities return to the middle and start whirling with one leg the same way they did in the beginning before the first time they started lifting themselves up from the ground with
the help of rope loops. The movement gets faster and faster, finally at the same time when the drums in the music start they lift themselves up in the air. This time the movement is more free, the entities play with the rhythm of the whirling. They play with the idea of being on the ground or up in the air. While they play, they hit the strings in the space with rope, making the vibrate. They play until they are totally exhausted and still continue playing like they are being possessed by the rope or the whirling movement. Suddenly the music stops, all that is left is the echo while the entities slowly return to the slow revolving movement that was already going on when the audience entered. You can hear them breathing life in, while they slow down.

While in the beginning whirling was a way to travel in time and space into different things, in Kehrä the revolving movement is the one entangling everything together. It is a representation of a two year journey, our communitas with ropes and the cosmos. As in the beginning, we were searching for the opposite of the western modern circus, maybe it needs a bit of unfolding to see how it turned out.

“\textit{You can watch it forever. It starts doing things in me, and then I see what it does to you.. because it’s so constant it’s like one thing. But wait, there’s two people who are doing this and what is happening to this whole, there is this relation. You get lost in the thing and then it drives you back. It feels like there is something in you like you are calling to something ancient, ancientness for your location, somehow..}”

-witness

\textbf{Time}

The duration of the performance was 22 and fifteen seconds. In those minutes was compressed the whole two-year journey of looking for answers beyond the western modern circus. Moreover, as we traveled in time all the way to archaic rituals trying to find the essence of circus the time expanded beyond human life. However, because of the liminality, communitas, and the whirling movement, Kehrä was leaning towards eternity.

\textbf{The space}

Western modern circus is usually played in circus tents or theater spaces, basically, black boxes, that allow the use of artificial lights to be able to manipulate the atmosphere of the performance. However, there is a huge difference already between these two spaces. One
is a structure built for the performing arts. The other, you have to first find a public/private space where to set up the temporary structure. For aerialists in circus, the space is problematic regarding the riggings, because the space needs to have a safe rigging point. However, these rigging points are available in some public and private areas in the urban area and of course in the forests. Rather than building a fixed structure or buying a circus tent as a temporary structure, we thought that we could use existing structures to create a temporary world. By making visible the relations of the space with the strings we can create another space inside of a space. Besides marking out the space with the strings they can help create an atmosphere without artificial lights.

The movement

Instead of technical prowess, movement in Kehrä concentrated on the whirling movement. It was a triumph to the cosmos, one revolution after another. However, it set us certain limitations. First of all, to be able to maintain the movement we had to be able to connect to the ground when needed. Secondly, everybody knows that whirling causes dizziness, more whirling causes more dizziness so we should be aware of that. Even more whirling may take you to a trance. After all, whirling was a technique, a technique to get into a trance, flow state, or communitas with the rope. You literally lose understanding of the normal space. It becomes another space, where with you in the movement is the rope, but at the same time, you could sense the other one doing the same. This we noticed while watching the videos of us training in the same space. Even if you don't really see what is happening next to you, you pick up things or you flow in the same energies from time to time. This causes occasional synchronized movement. Based on this, we decided to let Kehrä flow through the space with a score directing it towards the end of the play instead of hard fixed choreography.

“It’s amazing how you can be part of the rope, like become the rope. I was thinking all the time that you are the rope. This is what makes you high, I have this sense of.. feeling, like I’m witnessing it, but I’m part of it, you become part of it. ‘Cause, you are watching it, watching it, and you are like: what is happening to me. You know, it's like, there is a ton of energy here, and the repetition and the elements, it’s like calling something bigger...” -witness
Taking humans down from (circus) stage of the universe.

This happened partly through the continuous movement of whirling which set the limitations and helped us to get into the task of doing things together. However, the other part was to make more visible the movement of the rope loops and our connection to the ground. We dressed in a skirt that had similar colors to the autumn leaves we spread to the ground. If we dress ourselves up, why wouldn’t we give the ropes a celebration dress as well? The rope loops were partly dressed with bright colored strings, the same strings that were shaping the space up in the air. While whirling the skirt would float like waves in circles and the strings in the rope loops would become alive. Sometimes the strings seemed even to be growing from the borderlines of us and the rope. Other times hiding our faces to make us disappear inside them. Because of the movement and the colors, these worked well as our purpose was to show the diversity of each inside of our communitas, but also to merge into the space.

Inevitable death

The leaves that covered the ground were a way of bringing the important part of our research, nature, into space without damaging it. They were helping us to make visible the relation of our actions to the surroundings as the wind from the skirts was moving them. On the other hand leaves made visible the cycle of life and the fact that while we celebrate life by taking advantage of it, nature is slowly dying because of our actions.

Kehrä/Kehrae February 2022

Video: https://vimeo.com/user43864432
Re-Birth

“When inner impulses are compelling, one finds words; when (written) words alone are not enough, one recites them with an expressive cadence; when this is not enough, one sings with all his heart; when singing is not enough, one finds his hands and feet dancing by themselves.” From the preface to Mao’s Poetry with notes and commentaries during West Han Dynasty 206-8 B.C.E. (Fei 2002, p. 22.) when dancing is not enough, circus happens…

Circus is a complex thing, where we relate, not with objects but with materials of life that are always becoming. Moreover, how circus turns out is affected by the ontologies behind it, and how we relate to the cosmos. According to Agamben, life in western culture does not get defined, for this reason, it must be articulated and divided ceaselessly. (Agamben 2013, p.13). That might explain why the western modern circus gets mostly defined by technique, risk, and danger, elements that are often part of circus. However, looking at the circus from an animistic perspective, where life is seen as movement, that is always becoming, circus is life and life is circus. It makes it hard to understand why human is presented as a hero/heroine that dominates, control, and manipulates besides itself the resources around them. From the perspective of life, heroes/heroines are the entities that foster, nurture and take care of the relations to maintain the diversity of life.

Human life consists of rituals, and performing arts consist of ritual gestures, underlining the fact that it is “not done for the first time”. (Schecner 2006, p.52 -59) However, as the world is offering us a new challenge in the form of climate change, if we want humans to survive we are in a need of a change in those rituals. If performances in circus consist of ritualized gestures that show the relationship between us and the cosmos, we need to rethink what are we presenting. For change to happen, we need liminality, communitas, and play. Liminality opens up a playground outside of the structured society. Communitas to form a special bond between the players, speak for the weak and to work for the same cause, and play to come up with solutions to these challenges.
To bring back the balance, we suggest; stopping for a moment to think instead of progressing; grasping on the multitude of life threats to save the diversity; repairing and taking better care of the obstacles to be able to play with them by climbing and jumping in the future; throwing and catching ideas to reach for the continuity of life; controlling yourself with the natural resources to find a sustainable practice; opening the door to the communitas for non–human negotiations.

Kehrä was our attempt to approach circus from this perspective. As such it shed some light on the possibilities of another kind of circus. It takes time and effort. However, most of us have at some point in our lives done something to save time. We suggest that today is a good moment to make a withdrawal and start spending time instead of natural resources.
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