

“The way you do anything, is the way you do everything”

~ thoughts about performance art, practices, cycles,
sustainability, life, death, (re)birth...

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Photo: Jere J. Aalto (a picture of Mathilda Muk and Sara Rantanen from *Valgie verevä* (2025))

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TITLE OF THE WRITTEN COMPONENT/THESIS <i>"The way you do anything, is the way you do everything"</i> ~ thoughts about performance art, practices, cycles, sustainability, life, death, (re)birth	NUMBER OF PAGES IN THE WRITTEN COMPONENT 44 pages
TITLE OF THE ARTISTIC WORK <i>The Last Rite of Spring</i> premiered 10 th of December 2024 in Theatre Academy Theatre Hall, Uniarts Helsinki (choreography by Renan Martins, performed by TADaC Theatre Academy Dance Collective). The artistic work is produced by the Theatre Academy. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The artistic work is not produced by the Theatre Academy (copyright matters have been agreed upon). <input type="checkbox"/> There is no recording available for the artistic work. <input type="checkbox"/>	
<p>This document is a written component of my artistic thesis work for Dance Performance Master's Studies in Theatre Academy, University of the Arts Uniarts Helsinki. It is a reflection of my two-year MA studies about perspectives on making performance art and its sustainability, everyday practices that can work as a foundation for artistic practices, cycle conscious living creating and big questions of life, death and (re)birth. The work has a red thread that it follows ~ the cyclicity of the female hormonal cycle and its connection to the seasons in nature.</p> <p>The work has three introductions: <i>Introduction 1</i> ~ "Welcome, my name is Mathilda" that works as an introduction to the themes of the work and how I perceive life and art at the moment, <i>Introduction 2</i> ~ <i>This thesis, the basics</i> that gives the reader the practical information about the thesis and on how to read this work and <i>Introduction 3</i> ~ <i>Cycles, practices</i> that works as a background information for the chosen perspectives of the work like cycle consciousness, cyclical living and everyday practices that blend with artistic practices.</p> <p>After the introductions the work has four main chapters ~ Phase I, II, III and IV, that represent the phases of a biological woman's hormonal cycles when unaltered by pharmaceutical drugs or hormonal contraception and they are paired connected with different elements and seasons that work as a catalyst on reflecting the studies.</p> <p>In the first main chapters <i>Phase I</i> ~ <i>winter, water, new moon, night</i> I continue opening the knowledge of the first phase of the female hormonal cycle, the menstruation, also known as "<i>the inner winter</i>". In this chapter I reflect on my MA solo <i>From Source and Deep cleansing to Rebirth</i> (2023) and the importance of water and research in my practice.</p> <p>In the second chapter <i>Phase II</i> ~ <i>spring, air, sunrise</i> I give an introduction for the next phase of the menstrual cycle ~ "<i>the inner spring</i>", unwrap ACO: <i>boxytocin</i> (by Avgoustina Triarou, 2024) and my artistic thesis <i>The Last Rite of Spring</i> (by Renan Martins, 2024) projects and expand the importance of quantum biological practices in my everyday life and artistic work.</p> <p>In the third chapter <i>Phase III</i> ~ <i>summer, earth, full moon, day</i> I continue with an introduction of the third phase of the moon cycle ~ "<i>the inner summer</i>", reflect on nora chipaumire's wisdom, talk about my perspectives and importances of sustainable working and thoughts about freedom and captivity.</p> <p>In the fourth chapter <i>Phase IV</i> ~ <i>autumn, fire, sunset</i> I talk about the last phase of the menstrual cycle ~ "<i>the inner autumn</i>", walk through <i>Valgie verevä</i> (2025) project and share my thoughts about audience engagement and rituals.</p> <p>Thesis ends with a <i>Conclusions</i> chapter that sums up thoughts about writing the thesis, studying in Theatre Academy, what happens next and who I want to thank and acknowledge regarding my MA studies and this thesis.</p>	
KEYWORDS Performance practices cycles cyclicity menstrual cycle moon cycle birth life death rebirth unlearning relearning research creativity research sustainability freedom captivity perspective circadian rhythm grounding quantum biology audience audience engagement ritual elements water	

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1. INTRODUCTION 1 ~ “WELCOME, MY NAME IS MATHILDA”

In Spring 2023 I found the world of quantum biology ~ *“the intersection of quantum physics and the biological realm, that unravels the peculiarities of life at the quantum level”* (Satsangi, n.d.). I delved in theories of circadian and infradian rhythms, emf radiations, intelligence of water and got fascinated about grounding | earthing | geolocating. My mind made connections as by body | corporeal connected in frequencies of the earth while my photoreceptors bathed in the red spectrums of the morning UVAs. Sun was between 10–30° and I had already seen the sunrise prior.

It was and still is a search for health ~ *personal and communal*. Investigation for the **s u s t a i n a b l e**, since the practices I found myself entangled with were not conscious or considered. I was and still am a product of my time ~ of my environments and programmings I was put through since the egg chose the sperm cell it fancied, and I was created. Or did “I” exist before that as well?

Many illnesses led me to investigate health. As a dance artist, I slowly understood some things that were essential to me. I understood that without health (mostly mental) I am incapable of doing art, especially in a sustainable way. Feelings of not wanting to exist anymore truly override any creative desires, at least in my case. So... If I want to make art and make it so that it is sustainable for **me** and **we** on all levels, how should I proceed? And so started this very nonlinear and still very much ongoing journey I’m currently on.

“The way you do anything, is the way you do everything.”

~ Harv Eker, Martha Beck and many others

If this is true, I understood I really need to consider kind of... everything. If the way I do anything is the way I do everything, the way I take a dump is the way I create a solo piece, right? To get on the other side of consciousness I need to utilize different tools. Firstly: What do I do just because of the programmings | choreographies | circulations I have been affected by? Very hard question indeed. This includes deconstructing my

daily activities and thoughts. Like Frederick Matthias Alexander, the founder of Alexander technique, I started to use inhibition. As deconstructing my life, I quite quickly understood that a lot of things we do are not done inherently for ourselves ~ they are for others. Now we could go quite deeply into psychology, but in this introduction we ain't got time for that.

In this process I slowly found that a great tool to test my motivations was considering to whom I am working and creating for. To really, deeply evaluate my motivations to work, study, practice, create and live has been a foundational compass on the path of quite constant confusion, that is present most of the time.

As you ~ dear reader ~ start to dive into my thesis work, I invite you to attune in how you read it and what arise in you in the process. From which medium you read? In what kind of space you read? What kind of surface(/s) ~ physical | spiritual | emotional ~ touch your existence | body | corporeal during the reading?

If the way you do anything is the way you do everything ~ how the way you spend time with this work reflect on who you are as a being?



11.4.2025 6:56 Kalasatama | Helsinki | Finland

~ I took this picture during my sunrise exposure before writing this thesis

2. INTRODUCTION 2 ~ THIS THESIS, THE BASICS

This thesis is a reflection of my two years Dance performance master studies in Theatre Academy, University of the Arts (Uniarts) Helsinki. In this thesis I reflect the most influential and meaningful experiences* ~ courses, projects and moments that I have lived during these almost two years. Mostly, this thesis is a stream of thoughts about life | birth | death | practices and their connections to my artistic work.

My two years studies consisted of many great courses and the most influential for me that I am going to reflect more deeply in this work was nora chipaumire's workshop. I also got to be a part of many great projects such as my MA solo *From Source and Deep cleansing to Rebirth (2023)*, *ACO: boxytocin* by Avgoustina Triarou (2024), TADaC: *The Last Rite of Spring* by Renan Martins (2024) and *Valgie verevä* by Oskari Kaarne (2024–25).

As in my life, this written component has a red thread that it follows throughout the work ~ the cyclicity of nature. And since I am and identify as a woman, it follows the cycles of the female body's "natural" hormonal shifts. In this work the "natural" refers to that the hormonal cycles are not manipulated with pharmaceutical drugs or hormonal contraception etc. The umbrella term for this way of viewing female cycle could be for example *cycle consciousness (kiertotietoisuus)* ~ to be eager | interested | aware | conscious to learn and study about the cyclicity of the female body.

I will open the principals of this cyclicity in the following pages. As I go through the phases of the moon | menstrual cycle (and its connections to nature as well), I reflect the courses and works in my studies that feel intuitively the most connected to the phase which I am opening about. The work follows the four main phases that are present in the moon cycle as well as in nature. The decision to follow these phases and have it as a foundation and a **red thread** in this written thesis arises from the fact that since these

*As worth mentioning, this thesis was written while I was in amidst of a huge transformation process in my personal | social | physical | emotional | spiritual life where all the structures in my life exploded quite drastically. This transformation has held the most intense happiness, love and light as well as the deepest and darkest of the shadows. Even though I'm not going to dive deeply into this process and how it has affected me as a person and as an artist in this work, I want to share that it has had a huge impact in me on every level and affected on how I was able to make this written component especially in relation to the plans I had made prior the writing process.

phases have developed to be one of the main compasses in my personal life, they also move through my artist self, affecting what kind of art I make and how I create it.

In the first chapter – *Phase I ~ winter, water, new moon, night* I unfold my MA solo process, the meanings of water and the importance of (artistic) research in my work. In *Phase II ~ spring, air, sunrise* I unwrap ACO and my artistic thesis projects and expand the importance of quantum biological practices in my work. In *Phase III ~ summer, earth, full moon, day* I reflect on nora chipaumire's wisdom, talk about my perspectives and importances of sustainable working and thoughts about freedom and captivity. And in *Phase IV ~ autumn, fire, sunset* I walk through one of the most influential projects I have got to be a part of *Valgie verevä* and thoughts about audience engagement and rituals. This thesis ends with a *Conclusions* chapter, where I aim to summarize my thoughts, give thanks | acknowledgements and symbolically bow to these MA studies and to you, dear reader.

Within the scope of this work, I have excluded multiple things that have moved and interested me during my MA studies and have felt meaningful for my growth as an artist such as: courses | workshops (especially Elina Pirinen's and Karolina Ginman's), diving into ecosomatics, Jungian Archetypes and multiple perspectives on quantum biology and cyclicity. This thesis works also as an introduction to reflections and themes that have felt meaningful and interesting during my MA studies and in my personal life, so I recognize that I am able to only touch the surface level on many of the topics.

With this thesis I have a hope that it could make some positive change into direction of more sustainable. There is a lot of talking, reflecting and hoping to change the structures of the ways we work in the world | in the performing arts field and especially in schools | institutes, but myself I feel that there isn't a lot of action to make a change or that it takes so long. **So let this work be a little action towards change.**

3. INTRODUCTION 3 ~ CYCLES, PRACTICES

My **menstrual | moon cycle**, that can be also considered as one of the infradian rhythms, has become one of the foundations of my life. It is a monthly rhythm that is deeply connected to the natural cycles of the moon and the seasons. In this work, I approach the menstrual cycle from the perspective of a biological woman, which is how I identify. This perspective also centers on a cycle that is unaltered by pharmaceutical drugs or hormonal contraception. I acknowledge that this view does not represent the experience of all women, and it is not intended to speak for every body or every cycle.

The female biology | cyclicity has always fascinated me. Especially birth started to interest me more and more after I turned 20 years old and I started to familiarise myself with thought leaders' perspectives in the physiological | self-sovereign birth space like Emilee Saldaya (the founder of Free Birth Society) and Yolande Norris-Clark among multiple others. Looking into the world of physiological birth I found interesting connections also to the moon cycle, since the hormonal blueprints of these occurrences feel so huge and life altering for many.

Since 2018 I started to dive even more deep into the topic of female reproductive health and holistic practices, when I started to research | study Justisse Method collected by Geraldine Matus (1989) that guides women how to read their fertility status by observing and charting their menstrual cycle. Especially the presence of the cervical mucus and fluctuations of the basal body temperature are some of the key metrics to analyse one's current fertility status and getting experience in charting those and understanding how my body and cycle functions from this detailed lense gave me so much powerment (I prefer to use *powerment* instead of *empowerment* since I believe we have the power already). It also made me question why this knowledge is not considered as "basic" and taught in every school's biology or health education classes.

Emilia Vasko-Kujala and Noora Mustajoki (2023) state in their book *Naisen sykliä* (*Woman's Cycles*) that writing about how cyclicity occurs in "women" generally is a paradox, since every woman's cycle ~ and how the changes of cyclicity occur ~ is personal and unique. Women's cyclicity is impossible to control, and only by

surrendering to the changing rhythm can we harness its power. Surrendering to these feminine waves increases our connection to life itself. Knowing one's bodily rhythms forms the foundation for *self-care*. (Mustajoki & Vasko-Kujala, 2023, pp. 13–15.)

The moon cycle lasts about 29.5 days, which closely mirrors the average female menstrual cycle of approximately 28 days. The menstrual cycle begins on the first day of bleeding (cycle day 1) and ends on the day before the next period starts. Many ancient wisdom traditions and modern holistic health movements ~ like Ayurveda, recognize the connection between women's cycles and the rhythms of the moon and nature. For example, the menstrual phase is often referred to as "inner winter".

After menstruation | "the inner winter" ~ comes the follicular phase, when estrogen begins to rise. This marks the transition into "the inner spring" and "summer" phases. "Summer", associated with ovulation or the time just after ovulation, is the peak of hormonal activity and energy. After ovulation, we move into the luteal phase, or "autumn," when progesterone becomes the dominant hormone. As our hormonal cycles shift, they echo the natural flow of the seasons ~ one phase gently giving way to the next. Miranda Gray, author of *Red Moon* (1994), is one of the modern women's health educators who has written extensively about these connections.

For comparison, while female hormone cycle is 28 days on average and controlled by estrogen and progesterone, biological male's cycle is every 24 hours, and it is mostly about testosterone production. Testosterone levels keep rising during the night, peak in the morning around 8 o'clock and then slowly decrease during the day reaching the lowest point in the evening. This cycle is convenient for 9 to 5 working life, since it is aligned with regular day and night patterns, and it could be considered as advantage in our current societal structures that are mostly build on around 9 to 5 work. (Guudwoman, n.d.)

Understanding my cycle, its connection to nature and all the surroundings has had a huge impact on understanding myself, the way I work, my energy levels and actually everything that happens in my life. As it impacts and guides my day-to-day life, so it affects also the way I create and who I am as a creative person ~ dancer | performer |

dance artist | dance teacher. That is why following and understanding it is so crucial in my artistic practice as well.

With years of studying the moon | menstrual cycle, it naturally happened that I became curious about the sun's cycle as well ~ the circadian rhythm. The circadian rhythm is the ~24-hour cycle we live by each day. The term comes from the Latin words "circa" meaning "approximately," and "diem" meaning "day," and was coined by chronobiologist Franz Halberg (1959). It refers to the body's internal clock that governs daily rhythms such as sleep, energy levels, and hormone production (ScienceDirect, n.d.). One of the most influential practitioners in the quantum and circadian health space is neurosurgeon and health educator Dr. Jack Kruse, whose work and thoughts especially about circadian rhythm I have followed through many years.

As part of my practices, I began to become more conscious of this rhythm as well and started shifting my life to honour the cycle of the day. These practices, inspired by suggestions from various quantum biology practitioners, include:

- ~Waking up to witness the sunrise
- ~Spending as much time as possible outdoors or in natural light ~ often meaning I work mostly outside
- ~Watching the sunset in the evening
- ~Honouring the darkness when the sun is down by minimizing exposure to artificial light.

Grounding ~ also known as earthing or geolocating ~ has also become essential part of my life and work. It is a technique where you are connected to earth's electromagnetic field either with a direct skin contact to the soil or by using technology like grounding mats to create the grounding effect (Lockett, n.d.). For me it looks like moving | dancing | working | living barefoot outside whenever possible.

Being mindful of the presence of harmful electric and magnetic fields ~ EMF radiations, such as from phones and other digital devices has also become one of the practices I am involved in. The US National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

(n.d.) explains EMFs like this: "*EMFs are invisible areas of energy, often called radiation, that are associated with the use of electrical power and various forms of natural and man-made lighting*". Limiting the use of electronics has a big impact on my daily choices and also how I decide to create. It has looked like for example choosing to use analogue camera, keeping my phone off or in the airplane mode whenever possible, and using paper and pen for writing etc.

Since being committed to these practices in my everyday life I started to notice more and more how our society's practices are quite opposite of how I had started to live. It made me question how we do everything ~ from the most basic stuff to the larger things like creating a performance. Our "9 to 5" oriented society started to feel even more exclusive while I gained knowledge about female cyclicity and started to notice the conflicts that were present in relation to the mainstream | patriarchal structures | status quo. Thoughts about that is this society built on only one gender in mind started to arise and are still on my mind on a regular basis.

There was a big hope in me to write this thesis in complete self-sovereignty, especially honouring my everyday life practices mentioned above. My plan was to write this work between sunrise and sunset, outside, grounded and so that it honours also the phases of my menstrual cycle, which means cycling the amount of writing to match the phase I am by working more during the "energetic" phases of the cycle and less during period | "*inner winter*" etc. when more rest is needed.

I feel important to note that the physical act of writing with a pen and especially on computer has always felt very unpleasant and uninviting for me. Sitting down and trying to maintain a specific and hopefully ergonomic position for long periods of time feels very restrictive for me, for most of the times. When focusing on (working with) an object (computer) for long periods of time I find it hard to stay connected to the bodily sensations and feelings, so I find myself easily neglecting my needs to have breaks etc. Also, the notion of using mostly mind | thinking parts of the brain and the hands while writing has always been hard for me for since its monotony qualities feel very uninspiring. Maybe that is also one of the reasons I sought to work in a profession that has one of the largest spectrums | possibilities to use our bodies | corporealities.

Due to the life circumstances and weather conditions this action plan to write the thesis in full integrity was not able to be fully realized. I wrote this work between the sunrise and sunset, sometimes outside and connected to the earth's magnetism, but there was also a lot of writing that happened indoors and especially towards the end of the writing process I had to work more than my body would have wanted to.



15.5.2023 13:34 Lauttasaari | Helsinki | Finland

~ I took this picture after one of the entrance examination days that was on Zoom while applying to study in this MA programme. Already then, I was working as much outside | in nature as possible.

4. PHASE I ~ WINTER, WATER, NEW MOON, NIGHT

As described previously, the menstrual | moon cycle starts with the first day of the bleed, from phase I ~ the inner winter. In an approximately month-long cycle, each phase lasts around one week. During this first phase themes like rest, self-care, turning inwards, letting go, passivity, wisdom and intuition are more heightened. If the woman has not gotten pregnant the uterine lining will shed out as blood. This phase can also be considered as a possibility to be reborn. (Mustajoki & Vasko-Kujala, 2023, pp. 85–86.)

The bleeding is a clear sign for one to rest and there might be strong signs for the need to stay cozy and in peace during this phase. It does not mean being completely passive but making sure that for example moving one's body is self-paced and listens to each individual needs. Following the first couple of days of the cycle which are for retreating and high intuitivity ~ the estrogen hormone starts to slowly rise and there might come some excitement and energy. Studies have found that in this phase the ability for spatial perception is exceptionally great and verbal skills, memory and learning can be heightened. (Mustajoki & Vasko-Kujala, 2023, pp. 85–86.)

For me this phase ~ "the inner winter" ~ is one of the hardest to work in structures that are strict, commanding and highly outside driven. I especially feel the need to do mostly self-paced and self-originated movement, since only then I can make sure that I have enough of space to hear the messages | urges | desires my body tells me and do not override my needs. I also like to keep my calendar quite empty in this phase of the cycle to honour the rest. Like winter as a season, *this liquidy phase calls me to hibernate through the long nights ~ to honour the sleep and rest.*

In this first chapter and around the *Phase I* have collected and connected different elements ~ winter, water, new moon, night ~ that I personally feel are connected to this phase. These elements and seasons will work also as catalysts to share about the master studies and the projects and interests I have had during these years in Theatre Academy. This chapter includes my MA solo process, thoughts about importance of water and (artistic) research in my practice.

4.1. Birth, rebirth, unlearn, relearn ~ *MA Solo*

My master's studies solo *From Source and Deep cleansing to Rebirth* was made in autumn 2023 and it premiered in December 2023 in Theatre Academy, Studio3. It was a ~20-minute performance where my main question was that is it possible to use a performance as a ritual for a personal | artistic rebirth. In one grant application I described my solo like this:

"From Source and Deep cleansing to Rebirth is an exploration of transformation through the body, where the dance becomes both ritual and release. This solo invites the audience into an intimate, shared space of vulnerability and renewal, dissolving the boundaries between performer, spectator and stage. Rooted in a deep curiosity about human connection, it questions how artistic practices can be harnessed to unlearn, to shed, and to unearth new beginnings. Each performance is a process of energetic cleansing—an unfolding that releases old patterns, forging a continuous cycle of rebirth."



Mathilda Muk: *From Source and Deep cleansing to Rebirth*
~ Photo: Sanni Siira

It was the third part of the trilogy of the solos I have made in my dance studies during the years. My first solo *Lähde (Source)* happened 2016 in the first year of my Dance

teacher bachelor studies in Arts Academy, Turku (University of Applied Sciences Turku) and my second solo *Syväpuhdistus (Deep cleansing)* was my artistic thesis of these same studies that premiered in the spring of 2019.

Doing this MA solo felt meaningful in the beginning of the master's studies for the sake of reviewing who am I as an artist and what kind of performance art I actually feel like and have predisposition of doing. Although I have a strong interest of working in the outside spaces, I decided to make this solo in a traditional black box space to challenge myself and take the rare opportunity to use the free theatre space. In the solo I wanted to expand | extend my limits as a dance artist so I made a list of things that I'm interested of exploring. What happened was that all the things which I am interested are also things I am scared of doing. This list was a long one and it consisted for example:

- ~Participatory and immersive, connecting with audience in different ways
- ~Singing and taking the audience to sing with me
- ~Speaking, sharing and telling stories
- ~Building a character, practicing using props, objects and materials
- ~Going through a vulnerable transformation process in front of the audience
- ~Investigating if a ritual can be a performance and performance a ritual.

The solo started outside of the theatre space Studio3, in the Theatre Academy lobby. I welcomed the audience in by telling who I am and giving some general information how audience should proceed with practical matters like shoes. After having the audience inside the black box space in a one-sided rising audience seating that consisted approximately 30 seats, I said that this will be my solo which duration will be maximum 20 minutes and that I will put a timer on in my phone, so I make sure that it won't exceed the time limit that the school has given me. After that I put on some background music on from my phone and started to prepare the space: undressed into my underwear, put on my performance wig as one audience members helped to hold a small mirror for me, put on the lighting situation from the technical tables behind the audience and dressed into a beige long dress. All of this happened while also chitchatting and connecting with the audience at the same time.

I called the character that formed in the solo as "Venus". I remember seeing the Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1484–1486) when I was just a kid and fell in love and

got fascinated with the painting and the Greek mythology immediately. The Venus fascination followed by through my teenage years when the aesthetic was also trending a lot in the popular culture, for example Lady Gaga using it in her art. The Venus character was present quite early on in my master studies, when I build demos around it on different courses and so it developed to be one of the foundations in my solo creation process as well.

After doing the preparation in the beginning of the solo I "started the actual solo" in the solo by sitting amongst the audience eyes closed like starting a meditation ~ taking deep breaths and feeling myself descending onto the surface. From there I started the "dance | ritual" of the solo ~ an improvisational, yet scored, part of the piece where I went through a birth portal in the center stage. The "birth" evolved into a chanting of the word "release" that developed into a sing-along with the audience.

During my MA studies I have been thinking a lot when the **o u t s i d e** adds value and when it distracts from the art. With outside I think of in nature or natural lighting, but also social spaces | surroundings | environments that can be considered not so traditional spaces, like black box. For me this line is an interesting ongoing investigation, since the nature and outside can be ~ and mostly at least for me is ~ an astounding environment full of different kinds of stimulus. Nature itself can be an ever-changing work of art if one's perspective lets you view it as such. So how I position myself in an already existing art is a question I find myself asking all the time when creating outside.

In my solo I created a space and experience where I aimed to birth myself anew as an artist. By viewing the ways I had worked and performances I had made before I tried to keep the "sustainable" in mind ~ *how I do anything is the way I do everything*. To unlearn old patterns that no longer serve and relearn new ones as I get to be reborn ~ facilitating a ritual for myself that it is also a performance for audience to experience. In the process I tried to honour my everyday practices and cyclicity of my being with building an experience that felt as aligned as possible and even though I encountered frictions, this solo was my first artistic outcome where I really felt I was on to something ~ building an unique practice | method from my interests as an artist and a performance based on that.

4.1.1. “You birth (and die) the way you live”

~ Yolande Norris-Clark and Sister MorningStar (among others)

My birth can be considered very *normal* | *regular*.

*Under the fluorescent lights,
in a white sterile room,
among strangers,
far from home,*

assumably male (assumption) obstetrician thought that I was too comfortable in my mother’s womb, and he decided to proceed my outcoming by sticking his fingers inside my mother to sweep her membranes. Mum said it hurt like hell; she wanted to kick him. No consent for this procedure was asked. I was born the same day.

My birthing process began in violation. Some could consider that I was birthed **in captivity**. If I was birthed in captivity, was I born to captivity as well? If we proceed with the thought of everything kind of mattering, how does my birth experience affect my whole life, including the art I now create?

Let's think of a scenario for a moment where we would treat birthing cats the way we treat birthing women. Let’s imagine *a birthing cat, under the fluorescent lights, in a white sterile room, among strangers, far from home, maybe even strapped in a cat bed, also strapped in medical tubes (and therefore unable to move), fingers stuck in their most private (and holy) parts, asked not to eat, drink or even use the bathroom. Strangers would come and go and change, some of them would tell instructions for the cat how to use their body...* We would never treat cats like this, and if we would, I suppose we would totally understand if they were a bit fucked up and traumatized by the experience. No... we leave cats to be ~ birth in their own nests and homes, uninterrupted. If only we could treat all mammals equal.

Why birth (and death) fascinate me so much, I do not know. Maybe it has something to do with me as a person who likes to question many things ~ go into the deepest waters. And what there is more profound than birth and death? Maybe life itself. For me birth and death are both huge initiations, rite of passages. Maybe as subjects they are the

deepest realms there is and that is why I carry them both close to me in my artistic work and thinking as well. To birth an idea | creation usually means also death of something. Death of past *mes*, identities, ways of working | being | creating. As a woman I die and reborn every month. That is the cyclical nature of my design and the nature reflects it back to me with its ever-changing seasons. For me, acknowledging this cycle is a foundational base for all life and since life and art are completely connect to me, it is the foundation for all (artistic and performative) creations as well.

4.2. Water ~ water ~ water

Water has been a big part of my artistic practice since my bachelor studies in Arts Academy. I have been interested in studying especially the work of water researcher and artist Veda Austin, who is the author of the book *The Secret Intelligence of Water* (2021) and has a practice in photographing water in its different states. The work has led her to believe that water is responsive to consciousness.

”Woman’s writing... draws its corporeal fluidity from images of water...

This keeping-alive and life-giving water exists simultaneously as the writer’s ink, the mother’s milk, the woman’s blood and menstruation.”

~ Trinh T. Minh-ha

The interest in water and studying in Theatre Academy led me to hydrofeminism. Astrida Neimanis text *Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water* (2012) has been a resource I have returned to every once in a while, especially when working with water as a material | element | object | being.

Water has been present in all the solos I have done, and I have researched it in many of my demos as well during my MA studies. Water had a big role also in *Valgie verevä* (2025), a project I was a part of as a performer during my second MA year. For me, to acknowledge the *waterness* of our bodies ~ the hydrofeministic perspective ~ that we are all bodies of water connected to each other and other than human as well, is a big part of my artistic thinking. Taking water to the stage in its different forms feels

everything and *nothing* at the same time. It feels like the most mundane and rebellious act. It is a delicious paradox as most of the things are that I am interested in. Maybe that is why I am also interested in themes around audience engagement ~ since we are all connected by the water ~ performers ~ spectators. Even by breathing in the same space we exchange waters. *What else can we exchange?*

Like Veda Austin has researched what are healthy and what are sick waters ~ I have been also interested about that but thinking it more from the perspectives of polluted waters and grounds. As a person who likes to walk and work as much barefoot as possible and since I have needed to stay mindful of in what kind of waters | grounds I want to be connected to ~ I have acknowledged how much polluted grounds we have all around us. During my first MA year I desired to work in an empty plot that is next to the Theatre Academy building, but due to restrictions in bureaucracy I could not execute this idea. I find studying in an institution as a huge privilege and feel like there are lot of resources for the students to take advantage of, but there can come also many restrictions to creativity especially when it comes to organic materials like water or soil. It has been still very encouraging to witness that with careful planning and relentless work it is also possible to find solutions to actualize ideas as I saw happening in *Valgie verevã* ~ a performance that had fire, water and charcoal successfully on stage.

We are made and connected by water from the moment our existence begins in the uterus till we rot in the ground. American psychiatrist Stanislav Grof's (2019, p. 150) perspective in his birth matrices that we are first *aquatic creatures* addresses beautifully how we actually begin our lives in and from the water. It is so fascinating how water is so connected to birth and they both interest me so much ~ even though it can sometimes feel like the things I am interested in are very far from each other and it feels hard to find connections ~ with research it can quickly come visible that actually things are connected, and many have had similar thought patterns before as well. My interest and research around water has only just begun, but I am excited to be able to dive deeper in the magnificence of it in my future artistic works.

4.3. The Research

For me, everything starts with the research. As a Manifesting Generator energy type in Human Design* ~ I am a classic multi-hyphenate person who is interested in many things that can seem to be very unrelated to each other, but in my mind, they make somehow connections and sense. Whether the research is more academic, scientific or artistic, I tend to follow what excites me in the moment and dive into topics as deep as I can. Sometimes I struggle with the difficulty that I have so many interests that it feels hard to just focus on one and that is why I also like to describe myself as a *multi-passionate* dancer | artist, since there is not just one interest or practice that I am interested in doing.

According to Laura Gröndahl (2023) there has been an increase in requirements for research in Finnish artist education for past decades. Also, students' interest for doctoral studies has increased. There are many ways to connect research and art ~ *to research for art* ~ *research in/as/through art* ~ *art as research* ~ *art about research* and it has been a conscious decision to maintain a multidisciplinary and diverse framework where no one person has the exclusive right to determine acceptable practices on how and with what kind of means artist-researcher can execute their work. (Gröndahl, 2023.)

Foundations for artistic research lay in the practice(/s) of the artist and that is why the approaches, content and methods of individual research projects vary greatly depending on both the artistic field and personal views of the researcher. Artistic research is subjective, and it does not aim for similar generalizability as scientific research. (Gröndahl, 2023.)

How I approach research at this moment feels still very unclear and hazy. There feels to be this kind of elevation that comes up when speaking about research with my colleagues that we all have difficulties to understand what artistic research actually is and who is eligible enough for doing it. As a dancer ~ I have been thinking about that

*Human Design is a holistic self-knowledge system that provides insights into individuals' unique energy types and decision-making strategies. It combines for example elements like astrology, Vedic philosophy, Kabbalah, the I Ching and modern physics. It was founded 1987 by Ra Uru Hu (born Robert Allan Krakower). (Wikipedia, n.d.)

could research be also a perspective? *How my body wants to move now? What kind of things arise from the moving? How I materialize them in the setting of a performance etc.?*

Like Laura Gröndahl (2023) writes about artistic research, one could think that making art turns toward research when the artist consciously pauses to reflect on the understanding embedded in their own process, rather than solely focusing on completing the work for conventional reception. Many times, I have found myself being more interested on the ways of working and deepening my thoughts and understanding of life rather than the performance itself. For me, life feels like a marvellous research laboratory full of fascinating happenings | occurrences and I like living this life with the “the researcher” lenses on ~ all the time interested and curious of the vastness on perspectives in everything.

4.3.1. Creativity research

My interest in creativity research started during my Dance pedagogy bachelor studies in Arts Academy, Turku, when I started to think what creativity actually even is, where does it come from and what kind of environment is the most optimal for it. I have always been fascinated to ponder the sources of the creativities in the world and if they have similarities to each other.

At this moment, I have come to some kind of conclusions that the ideas | perspectives | works | performances that I make are a part of something bigger and more important than me | myself | I. In many of my projects and in my life as well ~ I feel that I am some kind of vessel | portal which through channels what this world might need at this very moment. Being some kind of co-creator and acknowledging that there might be forces outside of me that impact things I create ~ whether I’m conscious or unconscious of them. This feeling and thought has helped me especially in the hard and shadowy

parts of processes where my ego | mind can feel exposed and vulnerable ~ perspective that this could be bigger than me.

My most influential reference for creativity research has been Rick Rubin's *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* (2023) that I directly quote on this thesis multiple times, which is an easily understandable and ingestible book about perspectives of creating art. What resonates for me is how Rubin writes comprehensively about creativity being a natural state of being ~ a way of engaging with the world. I share thoughts and opinions with Rubin and *The Creative Act* has been a great reminder on what is actually important in creative processes, and it also works as a toolbox on ways of working. Always when I'm in doubt while creating, I return to this book.



Avgoustina Triarou: *boxytocin*

~ Photo: Daniel Motola (Mathilda Muk, Gabija Misevičiūtė, Matilda Edlund, Matti Palviainen & Inka Auvinen in the picture)

5. PHASE II ~ SPRING, AIR, SUNRISE

The phase II (cycle day ~8–14) is the follicular phase of the menstrual cycle that mirrors the season of spring in nature. It is usually active and creative time where estrogen levels start to rise and also testosterone is at its highest. Usually this time of the cycle is a positive stage, where there can be more energy, patience and optimism compared to the previous phases. Studies in psychology have found that estrogen can make women more brave which means that self-confidence, ability to concentrate and willingness to take chances can be increased. Also, coordination, learning, memory and communication skills are in their peak. (Mustajoki & Vasko-Kujala, 2023, pp. 87–90.)

Higher estrogen levels affect positively to hormones that are connected to feeling good and dampening pain which makes this phase of the cycle to be one where it is easier to train harder and endure physical discomfort. Estrogen affects also the way we move and dance and one might get feedback also from the outside for having radiance. Though it is important to remember that a certain level of estrogen and testosterone can mean totally different things to different women and even one woman's cycles can be very different to previous ones, which makes it hard to study female hormonal cycle medically and a lot of the knowledge will stay with each individual's ability to recognize their own cycles and how hormones affect them. (Mustajoki & Vasko-Kujala, 2023, pp. 87–90.)

My experience with this phase of the cycle is usually as described above. I tend to start new projects, get a lot of ideas, connect and network with people, take risks, have meetings, train harder, longer and with more intensity and endure a lot more physical pain and discomfort. In this phase I feel like I can give a lot from myself to projects and have energy for repetition and longer working hours. Since there is this burst of energy that increasing estrogen and testosterone can offer, I find myself to have also a lot more self-confidence and the positive feedback I have gotten from choreographers and teachers has usually come during this phase. *It sometimes feels like the air and wind are helping me ~ there is this light flow that breezes | breathes energy towards action.*

During "inner spring" I try to use the energy it offers for example to film audition materials, and network and experience performances, since this phase I tend to feel the easiest to socialize and be out and open to the world. I have also noticed that I tend to go more often to professional morning classes and workshops during this phase.

In this second chapter and around the *Phase II* have collected and connected different elements ~ spring, air, sunrise ~ that I personally feel are connected to this phase. These elements and seasons will work also as catalysts to share about the master studies and the projects and interests I have had during these years in Theatre Academy. This chapter includes my artistic thesis project TADaC: *The Last Rite of Spring* and ACO project: *boxytocin*.

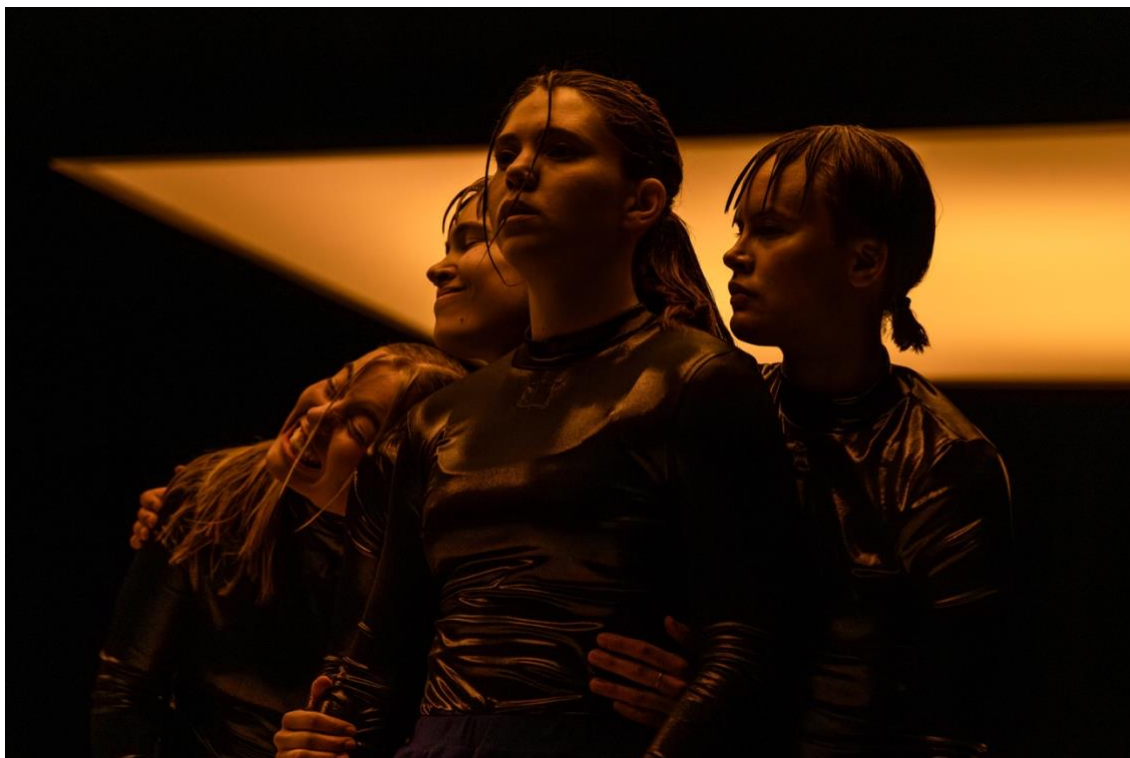
Why I chose these projects was that they both had a big influence on me in the investigation of combining my everyday practices with artistic practices. With these projects I had the most friction and conflicts, and they served interesting grounds to explore the ways of working. Also, *boxytocin* was made during spring and *The Last Rite of Spring* even has the word "spring" in its name, so it just made sense to write about them under this phase of the cycle.



Renan Martins: *The Last Rite of Spring*

~ Photo: Jussi Ulkuniemi (Inka Auvinen, Sointu Saraste, Joma Richter, Saila Pönkä, Marjukka Savolainen & Mathilda Muk in the picture)

5.1. ACO: *boxytocin*



Avgoustina Triarou: *boxytocin*

~ Photo: Daniel Motola (Mathilda Muk, Inka Auvinen, Gabija Misevičiūtė & Matilda Edlund in the picture)

Choreography: Avgoustina Triarou (Master's Programme in Choreography)

Performed and co-created with: Matilda Edlund, Gabija Misevičiūtė & Matti Palviainen (Degree Programme in Dance), Inka Auvinen & Mathilda Muk (Master's Programme in Dance Performance)

Dramaturg: Juti Saari (Master's Programme in Dramaturgy and Playwriting)

Sound design: Tuukka Haapakorpi (Master's Programme in Sound Design)

Light design: Siri Haapanen (Master's Programme in Light Design)

Costume design: Malgorzata Kubiak (Aalto ARTS)

Premiere: 25th of May 2024, Theatre Academy Studio3

In the spring 2024 I participated in Choreography MA student Avgoustina Triarou's piece *boxytocin* that was part of my optional studies and ACO (Artistic Collaboration) project, where students from different degree programmes get together in a collaborative and multidisciplinary manner.

The piece premiered 25th of May 2024 in Theatre Academy Studio3. In the piece we researched different physicalities ~ hugs, wrestling, images, faces, staccato... We did

different qualities and intensities. As a dancer this work felt like *labour* ~ very tangible and concrete work where I had a clear and quite traditional position as a dancer and a performer. The choreographer gave clear instructions on with what we work on | with and I was present to deliver material and explore the tasks with my totality, experience and perspective especially as a mover. This project was an interesting opportunity to deeply focus on physicality and work with quite strict tasks.

I have noticed that in this kind of strongly physical dancer's work where days are quite similar to each other and I get to work with a lot of athleticism ~ muscle power, ranges in the body | mobility, speed, agility... I tend to have different kind of approach than compared to projects that embody also more the spiritual side of being a human.

In these kind of works I feel even more the need to stay grounded in my everyday practices and the importance of them heightens. That is for the sake of recovering, but also to have grasp on who I am as a person | maker and what is important for me. In projects where the focus is especially on one feature of dancer's work ~ like physicality, I feel a need to remind myself that there is a vast ocean of different ways of working and not all of the projects will fulfil all my thirsts in dance making.

I have found that the "inner spring" and "inner summer" phases of the cycle are great to work in environments that demand highly physical performance. These phases are great for testing my limits as a dancer, stretch boundaries and see how far I can take myself in movement explorations. At the same time this is the type of work I usually struggle with during the "inner autumn" and "inner winter" phases, if the working days are very monotonous and similar to each other and I do not have a lot of say how the days are structured. These phases are great to focus on listening my body, setting boundaries, adjusting the ways of working, voicing my needs, practicing compassion towards myself and others and overall being an agile and protean artist.

During this project spring was in full bloom and summer was knocking around the corner, so I was able to spend all my free time outside ~ swimming, walking, enjoying the light and connecting to the earth's magnetism. During this time of the year when the days get longer and weather gets warmer, it feels easier to commit with the practices in

experiencing the sunrise and sunset, and grounding and the positive effects on these practices definitely helped me to stay in my power even though most of the days were spent in black box space that had artificial lighting. Also, lunch time walks became a habit of mine during my MA studies and I went outside on every pause whenever it was possible.

5.2. TADaC: The Last Rite of Spring

Choreographer: Renan Martins (guest)

Performers: Inka Auvinen, Altinay Kapsiz, Saila Pönkä, Joma Richter, Sointu Saraste, Marjukka Savolainen & Mathilda Muk (Master's Programme in Dance Performance)

Choreography and dance assistant: Anette Toiviainen

Sound designer: Renan Martins (guest)

Light designer: June White-Horton (guest)

Stylist: Claudia Cifu (guest)

Sound operator: Mikael Rantanen (guest)

Premiere: 10th of December 2024, Theatre Academy Theatre hall

In the autumn 2024 me and my MA cohort (TADaC: The Theatre Academy Dance Collective) started our artistic thesis work *The Last Rite of Spring* that was choreographed by Renan Martins. The piece premiered 10th of December 2024 in Theatre Academy Theatre Hall and it has its tour in the spring and summer 2025 in Jyväskylä (FI), Tampere (FI), Tallinn (EE) and Malmö (SE).

I have paired *The Last Rite of Spring* in the same chapter with *boxytocin*, since the experience and the work felt quite similar with emphasis being on the physicality and physical explorations. *TADaC* happened in the end of the year compared to *ACO* which was a big difference though and brought different kind of frictions that I will open up more in the following paragraphs.

During this project the days got shorter every day and the darkest day of the year ~ the winter solstice ~ was approaching. I was able to perform well and deliver during the “inner spring” and “inner summer” phases of my cycle, but in other phases, especially during menstruation it felt almost impossible to work in a black box, under fluorescent

lights a full day. Especially since the work happened inside during the only hours there were natural light visible outside.



Renan Martins: *The Last Rite of Spring*

~ Photo: Jussi Ulkuniemi (Mathilda Muk & Marjukka Savolainen in the picture)

This time of the year I try to honour the darkness of the winter, and it feels almost impossible if committed to studying in an institution that does not change its practices even though the nature changes drastically. The days right before Christmas holidays usually look completely similar or even more intense compared to for example the school days in the beginning of autumn, since usually there are a lot of deadlines right before the holidays start. This was a friction that we also talked about a lot with the members of the working group. It felt like we all had a need to rest more, honour the darkness and adjust to the changing season, but the strict structures were not enabling that.

When thinking about this friction I cannot help but wonder that we do not really have examples on taking seasonal and cyclical changes in consideration when planning any type of schedules or projects, not that I know of. Of course there must be multiple freelancers, entrepreneurs and artists who consider this, but to have it in a bigger scale, in schools, institutions and structures, at least I have not found examples or pioneers working on this.

Maybe the question is: *How to make impressive performance art that also honours the cyclicity?* If our values are based and beliefs are bound to the amount that we are working calculated in time, maybe it will only take us further to the *performance-oriented black hole*. Many times I think about the effectiveness | impressivity of the work and how it compares to the actual work | labour that has been put in the piece. In my own experience a performance that has taken a lot of time, energy and work does not always compare to the impressivity of it and vice versa. Should we then think about the effectiveness like in the business world? To make the best version with the least energy possible?

In *The Last Rite of Spring*, I found myself very exhausted of these frictions, that it was hard to stay in my power and to keep up with my everyday practices. I felt that it was quite visible that others struggled as well and there were some injuries, long-lasting sicknesses and overall hardship in thriving or having even a neutral experience. I have noticed that in phases like this where you have too much to do with too little resources, the first thing that starts to disappear is joy. Things get more mundane, and processes

can start to feel hard, like every day is just an act of survival. I feel like we have normalized exhaustion and tiredness in our culture, sometimes even to an extent that it could be like a badge of honour to be so worn out of work that you can only keep up with the work, and all the other | social | personal life is at bay. But hey, at least it means that we are productive, right?

During this process I was able to contemplate these frictions, but it was also an interesting opportunity to work together with my MA cohort and with the choreographer Renan Martins. We got to work with Igor Stravinsky's iconic music ~ *The Rite of Spring* and got to be a part of this version that will live amongst all the other versions. It felt meaningful to be able to be a part of this kind of historical continuum and it gave me some kind of sense of belonging, like now I would be more part of this field, since most of the dancers I know have done some kind of a version of *The Rite of Spring*, at least once in their career.

Martins' version gave us dancers an opportunity to practice working literally closely to each other by pushing, pulling, supporting, being held and holding. In the work I got to explore my boundaries, expand them, find new ways of working, practice voicing my needs, listening | caring | giving space to others, playing with physicalities and repertoires I have not visited before and most importantly I was able to reflect and view all of this in correlation to my own practices. *What have I learned? What do I want to carry with me forward?* This project made me a more versatile dancer and a gift | learning I will especially cherish was that I will face all situations with calmness | peace and speak my truth. That is also my responsibility ~ to be authentically me, and to give space for others to do that as well.

6. PHASE III ~ SUMMER, EARTH, FULL MOON, DAY

The phase III (cycle day ~15–21) starts the luteal phase of the cycle that is time for harvesting. There might arise a need to evaluate and challenge, sense and maybe even be a bit more passive. Since the luteal phase of the cycle starts after the ovulation has happened, the progesterone hormone starts to rise, and estrogen and testosterone hormones starts to decline. Progesterone has a calming effect and there might arise a need for spend more time alone and focus on oneself ~ also emotions like sadness might be more present during this time. (Mustajoki & Vasko-Kujala, 2023, p. 91.)

My experience with this phase of the cycle is usually quite neutral. I tend *to feel grounded ~ connected to the earth* and start to slowly think about the next phases and how I am going to finish up with tasks that I have started prior. For me the "inner summer" is usually still quite positive phase with steady energy. This phase feels like *a daytime* ~ there is this quite steady but slowly decreasing energy where you still feel like working, but you know that the evening is shortly here, so you must start to think wrapping up before the sun sets.

In this third chapter and around the *Phase III* I have collected and connected different elements ~ summer, earth, full moon, day ~ that I personally feel are connected to this phase. These elements and seasons will work also as catalysts to share about the master studies and the projects and interests I have had during these years in Theatre Academy. This chapter includes reflections of nora chipaumire's workshop and thoughts about sustainability, freedom and captivism.

6.1. Sustainability ~ *Locus amoenus, captivism and freedom*

“Captivism is anti-nature.”

~ nora chipaumire (2024)

In the spring 2024 I had the honour to participate in nora chipaumire’s workshop organized by my school, Uniarts Helsinki. In nora’s workshop we practiced nora’s practice *nhaka* ~ “beautiful science” as nora liked to call it. nora’s perspectives of colonialism, captivism, freedom and war touched my soul. If captivism is anti-nature and since my current result of my “health studies” showed that the way towards health is with | through | connecting to nature, isn’t all forms of captivisms anti-nature then? What is captivism then?

To think about what captivism is, we could be thinking about what true freedom is. For me, true freedom is to be able to make conscious decisions for myself about myself. True freedom would be to wake up in the morning, tune into the body~**mind**~**soul** and from there on to follow the urges, desires and needs that come up. To first honour, love and respect oneself to then do the same for others. In this fast-paced world, I think collectively slowing down so that we could hear ourselves better would really serve us all.

In my one woman's “health studies” I have come to conclusion that freedom is (connected | linked to) nature and nature has its rhythms. As a woman my main rhythm is the monthly rhythm, but it feels that the capitalist and patriarchal society we live in recognizes only the cycle of the sun (24 hours). The default practices that are exercised daily in our institutions already exclude so many from thriving. As a tool for myself I created this sustainability indicator with what you can evaluate your quality of living | doing | creating and it looks like this:

“**surviving** ————— **neutral** ————— **thriving**”

~ Mathilda Muk (2022)

By looking at this scale and positioning yourself, collective, ways of working etc. on it can help to demonstrate quite clearly of how we are doing at the moment and from what kind of place we are creating from. Rubin states in his book (2023, p. 141) that creating an environment where one could feel free to express especially the things that they are afraid to express is an ideal space for creation. In my own practice, I have been thinking a lot about the “*locus amoenus*” ~ the pleasant, safe and comfortable space as a starting point in a creative process. If everything matters, then the surroundings matter especially and it is absolutely inevitable that all of this affect the art we make.

As a great example of surroundings working as an inspiration and a catalyst for artistic work is my thesis supervisor Simo Kellokumpu’s work “*Topographic wanderings: A guest*” that is a part of Kellokumpu’s doctoral research *Choreography as Reading Practice* (2019, n.d.). Kellokumpu describes the work to be a “*choreo-photographic installation project based on the series of photographs from encounters with various physical settings*”. The main methodological line of Kellokumpu’s project was to not decide or plan beforehand where the engagement with the surrounding material happens. (Kellokumpu, 2019.)

Practically the “*locus amoenus*” thinking has looked like questioning the defaults. **Where** do I practice (studio, black box, outside etc.), **with whom** do I practice, **how** I practice, **what** I practice, **when** I practice, **why** I practice? To consciously evaluate all of these factors, investigate how they impact the art we make and to position ourselves in the world as a makers | creators. For me to strive to work in sustainable ways is to aim for neutral or even better to *thriving* scapes.

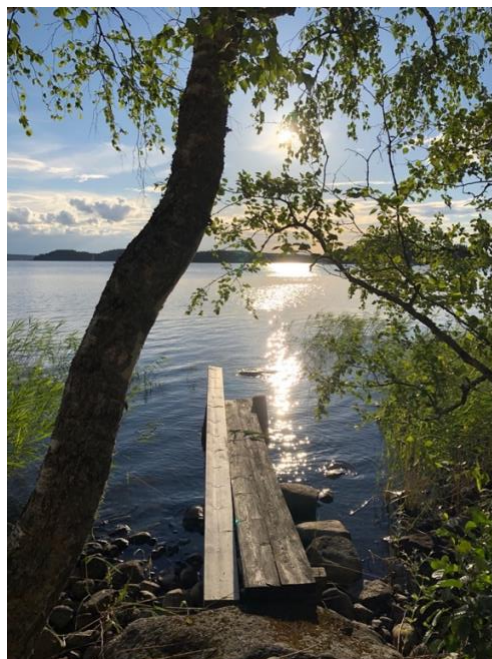
“Freedom is never free. You must take it.

***If it’s given to you,
it can be taken from you.”***

~ nora chipaumire (2024)

I live in Finland, the world's happiest country (World's Happiness Report, 2024). Pure water, hundreds of thousands of lakes, green forests, free education, Santa Claus... I would consider myself privileged in multiple ways. But if freedom is actually never free, how am I paying for all this freedom? Am I free? There are many constructions and constitutions in power, but under whose power we informedly consent to be? Freedom and captivity are relative | parallel | paradoxical. We can be the most captivated in the most privileged positions, most free in the most captivated situations. Maybe like many things, are these also states of minds. And of course there is also maybe luck, coincidence and fate involved.

In nora's workshop I got very inspired of the energy of *radical self-responsibility*. As nora told about nora's background, about Zimbabwe, its revolution for independence and about perspectives of life | dance | art, it reminded me about the very dear theme of mine ~ self-responsibility and why it touches me so deeply. As a human and a maker the question of agency and authority is very important to me. To create in sovereignty is one of the foundations for sustainability. Our society has a noble attempt to take care of the sickest, weakest and most unfortunate, but every day I see the society to miserably fail in its mission. That's why I have come into conclusion that there is no one to save us ~ we need to save ourselves.



2.7.2020 20:15 Lapinsaari | Taipalsaari | Finland
~ One of my *Locus amoenus* places in physical

7. PHASE IV ~ AUTUMN, FIRE, SUNSET

The phase IV (cycle day ~22–28) ~ the "inner autumn" ~ is a time where a big shift happens in the hormones ~ estrogen decreases rapidly. This time is the preparation for the bleed, and it can be surrounded by themes like finding endings, surrendering, releasing emotions. There might be increase in pessimism, criticality, cynicism and worry. Since estrogen regulates also serotonin ~ the hormone of happiness, one might feel a need to find enjoyment from sweets or other sources that can offer speedy pleasure. Severe menstrual pains that prevent doing tasks that require normal performance, complete lack of initiative or feeling life completely meaningless, uncontrolled crying and | or furious defence are signs disorder that deserves treatment. (Mustajoki & Vasko-Kujala, 2023, pp. 92–93.)

As many as 3 of every 4 menstruating women have experienced premenstrual syndrome ~ PMS ~ that can be present during this phase of the cycle. PMS includes a wide variety of emotional | behavioural | physical signs and symptoms like fatigue, depression, irritability, mood swings, appetite changes and food cravings, different kinds of pain like headache or tenderness in breasts. For some these can be severe enough to affect their daily life or even disable for the days experiencing the symptoms. The more severe form of PMS is called premenstrual dysphoric disorder ~ PMDD. (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2023.)

My experience with this phase of the cycle has been usually quite intense. During this phase I can feel all the emotions I have repressed during the other phases. This is the stage where I can very vividly and comprehensively feel all the times, I have overridden my body and its needs with irritation, anger and sorrow etc. During this phase I get to look over my shoulder and see where I overstepped my boundary. "Autumn" is a great time to reflect ~ if I am feeling great, it usually means that I have been able to live in self-sovereignty and alignment, if not, it is a clear sign for me to change something for the next cycle.

Going through this phase usually means also facing feelings of inadequacy, since I am not able to operate with same kind of energy than during for example the "inner spring".

Even though I consider myself quite aware and conscious of this moon cyclicity, I still get surprised almost every month of this big shift in hormones and its huge effect on life in its all levels. *As the leaves start to fall and the ground rotten, so am I ~ starting to enter the death process of an old me. Like a fire, it shows all that I've been trying to hide and starts to burn the layers that serve no more. While sun sets and paints the sky flaming red, I bask in these spectrums and wait for the night.*

In this fourth chapter and around the *Phase IV* I have collected and connected different elements ~ autumn, fire, sunset ~ that I personally feel are connected to this phase. These elements and seasons will work also as catalysts to share about the master studies and the projects and interests I have had during these years in Theatre Academy. In this chapter we walk through one of the most influential projects I have been a part of ~ *Valgie verevää*, and I share thoughts about audience engagement.

7.1. Death (self) ~ *Valgie verevää*

Valgie verevää

Directing & light design: Oskari Kaarne (artistic thesis)

Set design: Anna Papinsaari (artistic thesis)

Sound design: Sarah Kivi

Costume & make-up design: Salla Oinas

Performers: Riina Hosio, Katriina Loisa, Kerttu Luotamo, Mathilda Muk, Heikki Nousiainen, Sara Rantanen & Sointu Saraste

Premiere: 1st of February 2025, Theatre Academy Studio4

In the beginning of the year 2024 I was asked to join the Light designer MA student Oskari Kaarne's artistic thesis project *Valgie verevää ~ "a ritualistic contemporary performance rooted in the Finno-Ugric wisdom tradition, animistic worldview and ritual poetry"* as described in the description of the piece (Uniarts Helsinki, 2025).

Valgie verevää is Oskari Kaarne's (MA Programme in Light Design) and Anna Papinsaari's (MA Programme in Set Design) artistic thesis project.

The process started with the working group in autumn 2024 with sauna sessions in Sipoonjoki's traditional sauna where we had sauna rituals facilitated by Oskari himself. During these sessions we gathered around the campfire, had conversations, worked in



Oskari Kaarne: *Valgie Verevü*

~ Photo: Jere J. Aalto (Mathilda Muk, Sara Rantanen, Katriina Loisa & Kerttu Luotamo in the picture)

the woods and had sauna rituals. These sessions served as a preliminary work for the project. The production slot started in the beginning of January 2025 and the piece itself premiered 1st of February in Studio4, Theatre Academy.

As the performance that got its inspirations from rituals ~ to being a ritualistic performance, I was very fascinated to experience *the ritual* the working group had built in every run through and performance. As a person and artist interested in different rituals and how they affect us it felt important to approach every show from a state of clearness | openness ~ *I will now enter this space | ritual | performance and I do not know how it will turn out, what things will arise and how it affects me, but I am curious to enter it with open mind | body | soul, to trust and surrender to whatever unfolds.*

The beginning structure of *Valgie verevü* was roughly that first the audience was welcomed in in the Theatre Academy lobby, then they travelled to the performance space through the backstage and outside alley, where they were given a stone by a performer to hold on during the performance, then to enter another corridor to the actual

stage that was a big “Sauna” built in a shape of hexagon. The audience seating was created on four pedestals mimicking sauna benches.



Oskari Kaarne: *Valgie Verevä*

~ Photo: Jere J. Aalto (Riina Hosio, Sointu Saraste, Heikki Nousiainen, Sara Rantanen, Mathilda Muk, Katriina Loisa & Kerttu Luotamo in the picture)

The performance then “started” | continued with spoken text, dance | movement, singing, playing ~ jouhikko played by Kerttu Luotamo and kantele by Katriina Loisa with the sound design made by Sarah Kivi. As the performance travelled through the scenes of different parts of the ritual ~ the birth, death etc. I got to live them through as a performer and also as a person. The lines between me as an individual and a person and me as a performer started to feel blurred and sometimes even non-existent ~ as there had happened an emerging of those and my personal self was able to experience the performance with my artist self. Even though I had had experiences where these kinds of lines feel totally blurred, the intensity of this experience was unlike any other I had encountered.

The performance had elements and scenes about birth, death, rebirth... and performing it felt like I did some kind of quantum leaps during the scenes where it felt like I was

performing a task and piece to the audience, but at the same time I was actually living the moment and the experience also personally on some kind of other timeline, like I was practicing dying, while performing it ~ sometimes even having feelings of remembering how dying feels like from the past (or present, or future).

Since I tend to experience art ~ especially if performing it myself, on quite a transformational level and I keep an openness towards it, it also happens that the art can fundamentally transform me. *Valgie verevã* worked as a catalyst | spark in speeding up my personal growth as a person and an artist, with facilitating a space to die in every performance. That has had a huge impact on why I now almost three months later feel like I died ~ at least I entered a death process of my old identities, beliefs and ego.

I think there is a huge potential to use art as a force for transformation, since the creative space is so rich in its aliveness. When I see performances myself, the most influential and impressive works are the ones where the performers live through a journey. I remember seeing Petri Kekoni's *Teon Teesejä* piece in Helsinki 2017 and had my first experience of truly feeling like the performers lived the piece through. They were not just moving, or dancing, they were living the material.

Other example of this kind of experience was Harald Beharie's *Undersang* that I saw in Bergen, Norway in autumn 2024 as a part of Oktoberdans festival. *Undersang* is a ritualistic piece taken place in the woods (in Kanadaskogen at that time) and I was fascinated how the piece was built to serve as a ritualistic journey for the performers and the spectators to go through. Like in *Valgie verevã*, *Undersang* started with a transition (forest hike) that had the potential to take audience member into the performance on a deeper level, since the audience was more involved in making the ritual and performance possible by giving their own effort to it, in this case the walk to the performance spot.

In *Valgie verevã* elements like water and fire were in a big role and it felt significant to have the opportunity to work with especially the water in a project after I had explored working with it in my own work as well. In *Valgie verevã* the water served purpose in a cleansing ritual, where the performers were able to wash out the all the dirt and charcoal

that had accumulated on their bodies. For me, participating in these kinds of rituals as a performer in a performance can enhance the feeling of togetherness ~ something as mundane as bathing in a sauna and washing each other's bodies can also hold so much magic, especially when done intentionally in a performance.

7.2. Audience engagement ~ rituals

I have found that for me the most important | impressive | impactful performances to perform in and to witness are the ones where audience has been taking into consideration in all the steps of the way. As I have written about in the previous chapters I am interested in making and being a part of participatory and immersive performances where the audience engagement is in the fore front or at least carefully considered.

Maybe it has something to do with consciousness ~ since the audience is there and we are conscious about them, why not to take time to also think about their experience. I remember writing in my entrance examination essay when applying to study at Teak that I am interested in doing multisensory performance art ~ art that can touch all our senses. During my studies I was able to investigate this in some of my demos especially with water and in *Valgie verevä* with also scents and touch. To build and be a part of performances that can penetrate deep into the audience members being and maybe with a touch, scent and different elements to broaden the experience further and exploring where the boundaries lie in this regard.

That is why I am also interested in ritual, since I have found that usually ritualistic performances tend to have intentions in engaging the audience. Rituals can be quite powerful, so maybe that is also a reason that in ritualistic performances the audience work needs to be a priority ~ *What kind of ritual I am a part of? What kind of powers I am involved in?*

The characteristics of a ritualistic performance are shared experience and collective participation, spatial and temporal boundaries that set rituals apart from everyday life,

potential to transform individuals and communities and symbolic objects and gestures that represent deeper meanings amongst many other things. What also differs rituals from everyday actions is the intentionality and heightened awareness. There is a shared understanding and communal engagement, and rituals can invoke a sense of sacred in us. (Fiveable, n.d.)

If we return to one of the main perspectives of this thesis that ~ *“The way you do anything is the way you do everything”*, could it be possible to practice the daily life and the work of an artist with so deeply rooted intention that everything we do could become sacred and a part of the ritual of life? And, to see the artistic potential in our maybe more unconscious daily rituals we take a part? These kind of patterns of thoughts are definitely something I am interested in investigating in the future.



Mathilda Muk: *From Source and Deep cleansing to Rebirth*
~ Photo: Sanni Siira

8. CONCLUSIONS ~ ”THANK U, THANK U, THANK U” (AND THEN SHE BOWS)

*“The ability to look deeply
is the root of creativity.
To see past the ordinary and mundane
and get to what might otherwise be invisible.”*

~ Rick Rubin (2023)

Like Rubin, I see that the work of an artist is to look deeply – see layers invisible to others, express the dark spots and hidden corners. Maybe bring them into light, sound, canvas, movement or expression. To immerse oneself in scapes, ride the waves of processes, maybe serve something *greater*. In this thesis I have tried to open up my thinking in the best of my abilities. This could be a starting point or a tiny step on my artistic path.

As I wrote this thesis ~ many of the thoughts I previously had started to become clearer and stronger. As I knew before ~ the physical act of writing ~ especially on computer is something I do not enjoy, either in my everyday life or in my artistic practices | work. Even though I tried to make it as sustainable and pleasurable as possible with setting quite strict boundaries on *how*, *when* and *where* I write, I felt that I could not build a writing practice that felt pleasant. In the future I would like to come up with even more ideas on how to make this act of writing to be in line of the highest integrity ~ such that it would not take me out of my body and its sensations like it now did by me forgetting to use the bathroom when needed etc.

This thesis project emphasized the importance of living in integrity and self-sovereignty which for me means living mostly honouring the cyclicalities. It also showed so many moments of friction and confirmed more and more that I am the only authority in my life, fully responsible of how I create my life in each present moment and *how* I face the hardships, conflicts and frictions ~ is where my power lies.

In this thesis project I also found many connections between the most meaningful projects I have been a part of, and these notions made me understand myself better as an artist ~ in what kind of aesthetics I am fond of and in which directions I gravitate towards in this dance | performance | art field.

Writing this thesis was also a bit distressing, since I do not have a lot of artistic repertoire of using these practices in my artistic works. Even though these practices and perspectives have carried me through my master studies, I am still eagerly waiting for the opportunity to really do work that sprouts from and is aligned with these practices. In that sense this thesis project has laid foundations for the future, and I am excited to get to dive into these topics even more and see what kind of performance art births from them.

In the spring of 2025 I will start a project called *MeTässä* (by Sari Palmgren) with Routa Company where there are possibilities in using these knowledges I have gathered also in the *MeTässä* project and in the self-designated artistic work, which is an employment model that Routa Company uses that supports artists' development also after graduating and working in the field.

As how my thinking and this writing is connected to my artistic practice is very clear and unclear at the same time. It is everything and at the same time it is nothing. Birth, death, life, freedom, captivity, sustainability, quantum realms, rhythms | cycles, nature and maybe even love are some of the keywords that move, shake, sooth and push me on my always evolving, ever changing, path of making creative things.

Now while writing on this conclusion chapter ~ on the verge of returning this thesis, I have been given an opportunity once again to let go and surrender ~ to unlearn old patterns of perfectionism, parts of me that would still want to continue and perfect this written component to its highest potential. To relearn a more sustainable ways of working, accepting that my time in these MA studies have come to an end and it is time for a new chapter in life to start. Even though I refer myself as an (dance) artist in this work, life has remembered me that the only constant thing is a change. I am an ebbing and flowing being ~ a soul living a human experience ~ and there is no need to attach to

human made identities that the realities we are a part of can sometimes quite firmly push us to perform. What the next chapter holds, I do not know yet. But I will (try to) enter every lived moment and opportunity with gratitude, openness and trust ~ *since the water in me is immortal. It will change its shape and form ~ but it will always keep on living.*

As I end this written component of my MA thesis, **I want to thank and acknowledge** all the Teak staff, especially Simo Kellokumpu (my supervisor for this written component) and Eeva Muilu (the head of the Dance MA programme and supervisor for my artistic thesis). Big thanks to also my examiners Maria Saivosalmi and Sari Palmgren. My dearest classmates ~ Inka Auvinen, Sointu Saraste, Altinay Kapsiz, Joma Richter, Saila Pönkä, Marjukka Savolainen and Anette Toiviainen ~ this ride would have not been this fun without you ~ love you forever! Thank you also to all the fellow students from dance BA and different study programmes. Thanks to also all the teachers I got to learn from and choreographers I got to work with these past years. Thank you, my family and friends ~ your support means the world to me! <3

Studying in Teak was a big dream of mine for many years and now ending this chapter of my life feels quite bittersweet. I have had a blast, most importantly ~ thank you God(dess)!

Now, I would like to end this thesis with Rubin's quote:

***“Do what you can
with what you have.
Nothing more is needed.”***

~ Rick Rubin (2023)

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