Do I make sense?

A creative process of healing stories, long pains

and journeys of understanding the self

Contextual essay to accompany a video performance

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to those who struggle to be seen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Acknowledgements	p.4
1.	Introductory terms	p. 8
2.	Introduction to the project	p. 12
3.	Behind the scenes – the process of creating	p. 19
4.	The video – the materiality of the process	p. 28
5.	Do I make sense?	p. 43
6.	Conclusion	p. 47
7.	Bibliography	p. 51

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4

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The basic idea is that identity is a momentary process, and the way you identify yourself in the moment is a "primary process" that changes all the time. (Mindell, 1993, p. 27)

The notion of this Other in the self, as it were, implies that the self/Other distinction is not primarily external; the self is from the start radically implicated in the "Other". (Butler, 1993, p. 316)

It all started when I turned my head up and greeted the world.

It was I and it was the world as well.

Each breathing through the other.

1. Introductory terms

This is a project about healing. It is an exploration and deepening in my path towards embracing my own healing powers. It is constituted by a 26 minutes performance video and this accompanying essay. The video performance attempts to express and communicate my experience in an affective and non-verbal manner. It is experimental and invites interaction in a synesthetic level. This essay is structured based on thinking processes, theory and clarifications. The project is an experiential one. It describes and reflects on personal observations, from the unique perspective of my own experience and it is informed by process work theory and practice. Quite specifically, I used my personal journey, transitioning from agony and pain to healing and towards a deep sense of self-value. I wanted to communicate with the world how process work theory and practice guided me in that journey, and offered me the opportunity to develop my ability to fully experience the pain and through that process heal it. It also offered me tools to enrich my creative process, as well.

I will give some process work definitions before starting to unfold the details of my work and journey.

First of all, process work attempts to understand the experiences we have in this world, in three different levels; the *consensus reality level*, the *dreamland* and the *essence level*.

Consensus reality refers to everyday reality that most people consent upon, the doings of our world, the agreed upon names of objects, etc. Dreamland includes dreamlike experiences, figures and images from our dreams, as well as subjective experiences. The essence realm is a nonconsensual level of experience. It is a realm of subtle tendencies that occur before they can be verbalized. Experiences that are subtle and fleeting. (Mindell Amy, 2005, p. 20)

Consensus reality is what we understand as "objective" and measurable. It's a level we consent upon with other people. In this level we understand, define and claim our identity. Process work suggests that the process and behavior that someone identifies with is their primary process. What "I am". These processes are closer to our awareness. On the other hand, what "I am not" defines the secondary process. Secondary is the process we don't identify with. It is further from our awareness and we experience it as troubling or as "not me". In the consensus reality level, primary and secondary processes are distinct and can be in conflict. They are perceived and experienced as polarities. This polarity in process work terminology is understood structurally by the term *edge*. Edge is the function that separates the primary process from the secondary one.

Dreamland is the subjective level of the dreaming aspects of experiencing consensus reality. It is the realm of dream figures, body symptoms, projections and signals. In dreamland there are polarities, but we have awareness of the secondary aspect of our experience.

The essence level is the realm of wholeness. In the essence level we don't experience ourselves through the polarities of "I am" and "I am not". In the essence level, primary and secondary processes are fluid and the one is embedded in the other. It is a feelings state, where tendencies arise, with processes deriving from these tendencies. Process work is a practice of gaining awareness of the process, in all these levels. To achieve that, process work has developed technics for accessing dreamland and essence level. Accessing these levels and experiencing the polarity with awareness is the way to move towards wholeness. Wholeness is the ability to be fluid with all our parts. This is how healing is attained.

This project is an applied demonstration of process work theory and technics in my own healing journey.

On another manner, my project is also a *worldwork* project. Worldwork is a term used in process work practice to describe how it can be applied on social issues and communities of people. Social issues and mainstream society structures define in many ways the social experiences of our bodies and selves. Pain is a personal experience, but also a social phenomenon. Healing is never just a personal challenge and experience. In worldwork, groups of people are striving for healing and wholeness. Process work suggests the idea of deep democracy as the tool towards a world where all aspects of experience are valued and appreciated. In the world field, levels of reality are applied and also primary and secondary identities exist. Again, some identities and experiences are centered and some are marginalized. Deep democracy is an attitude towards the polarities, an attitude committed to creating space for all voices and providing deep appreciation of each one.

My project is aiming to interact with the world about a social issue that I am personally experiencing. "Deeper democracy requires educating ourselves to notice all our inner experiences while dealing with the outer world, holding an awareness in a given moment of feelings, dreaming and social power". (Mindell, 2202b, p14)

In the project I would exercise extended noticing of my inner experiences while dealing with the outer world, as Mindell suggests in the above quote.

For the creation of the performance piece, I used the method of *innerwork*. Innerwork is a technique developed by process work, with which someone can work on themselves alone and explore aspects of their experience. It concerns self-guided exercises that can help us access dreamland and essence level gaining awareness around experiences happening in the moment. I used the material of innerwork exercises to produce my creative piece.

2. Introduction to the project

Process oriented psychology comprehends life as an adventure towards becoming whole, by accessing all parts of ourselves, and this is a view on life and human beings that deeply touches me. In a world with so much wrong, so much suffering and trauma, perceiving human experience as a movement towards wholeness creates a sense of hope and meaning in my heart. Each person's life myth and path are a rebellious flow towards one's own truth, and it shapes the world when we interact with each other. Additionally, process work proposes a view regarding the relationship between individual and universal, similar pairing with the personal and the political scheme in the feminist tradition that I am coming from. Arnold Mindell proposes to "switch our perspective and no longer consider the individual and her dream as the center of the universe, but the universe's process as the central phenomenon organizing the behavior of its individual parts" (Mindell, 1985, p. 46). This perspective helps us move our attention from the individual to the universal and vice versa in a way that maintains significance for both without marginalizing or prioritizing the one over the other. In a way, this perspective moves above the dualism and creates a connection among the processes. "All that we experience is part of the community" (Mindell, 2014, p. 255) and it is both individual and universal, personal and political.

I will start from my personal experience and life myth, as this project begun and I will then connect it to the world.

In process work we treat early childhood dreams or memories as strong signals of every person's fundamental life myth and process. Carl Jung first centered "childhood dreams that have been remembered by adults" (Jung 2008, p. 379) in his analysis. Jung argued that "if it still persists in memory the dream touched something that one perhaps still hasn't understood yet" ((Jung 2008, p. 379). Building on that idea, in process-oriented psychology we understand childhood dreams as signals offering pattern information about the structure of someone's process, as well as main challenges that will emerge in life, and most importantly essential strengths and gifts that each of us bring in the world. "Dreams prioritize the patterns of processes which are trying to happen" (Mindell, 2002a, p. 110) and in that sense childhood dreams as an ally and a guide.

I had a dream when I was around 5 years old. In the dream: *I am in my mother's car, with my younger sister, both sitting in the back seat. It is night and my mother goes out of the car to pick up something. I and my sister are in the car alone. The car starts rolling down the road. I jump in the driver's seat and try to steer the car so that we don't crash. I am waking up while the car is rolling down the road, me on the drivers' sheet and the agony of crashing still present.* Part of what I am *here* to do is learn to fail and enjoy the crashes, meaning to find the wisdom that experiences of failure bring, reveal the hidden gifts of what conventionally is considered a disaster or a failure. This process can also be described as healing. My life myth is to heal disasters or to find meaning in them.

So, in this project I am focusing in my own personal and individual process around a "disaster" I am experiencing and the process of finding its meaning. I focused on my process of being in a marginalised position into the general hegemonic power structures, and in the process of dealing with the misuse of those in the higher levels in the systemic ranking, whose actions are making me suffer. My focus is particularly on the aspects of devaluation that comes with the

experience of being marginalised. In systems of power, individuals who are marked in the lower rank positions are systemically considered as having less value. There is a great violence in the process of being perceived as not important and significant. This is a process that is taking place externally but also internally, by internalizing the external devaluating voices. My project is about encountering the devaluing (external and internal) voices. This is a healing process because with it I try to articulate an unspeakable social experience. What is attempted here is healing through internal work aiming to access a feeling space in which I value myself, a space where I feel that I matter. It is a process of dealing with things without having control in the consensus reality level, and striving to gain control over my own reactions.

In the midst of writing my proposal for this project I had a dream: *I was in a city where war was happening all around. I was in semi-open space, nighttime, with houses around me, a bomb had just dropped. Bricks were flying around, there was smoke and dust everywhere. I took a videocamera and I started recording the image. It was all so beautiful I wanted to capture it.* I woke up and realized that the creative part of my project would be a video. I would capture on film my journey through the pain and around the ruins.

This dream is connected with my childhood dream in the sense that it is also connecting something terrible and hurtful to something beautiful and meaningful. This dream places my life myth in the world channel. The healing practice of finding meaning in the disasters is my personal life journey but it is important and crucial to the world. This dream indicates that this project is a world work project as is my life.

When there is ruin there is hope for treasure $(Rumi)^1$

Starting this project, I did not know what the treasure would be. Sarah Ahmed writes "an arrival takes time, and the time that it takes shapes 'what' it is that arrives" (Ahmed, 2016, p. 40). Even though I did not know what the treasure would be, I knew that my journey would shape the "what" and I was certain there was a treasure to be found. This certainty derives from a teleological approach that process work supports. Teleology understands the world as holding meaning in the purpose, rather than the cause of each experience. In that sense all experiences have a purpose and a meaning. For process work the therapeutic process is the one of gaining awareness of the meaning and message each process that emerges brings. This is how we are growing and learning through challenges, and moving towards fluidity. This is how we gain agency over our lives and move away from the identity of the victim. In times of extreme pain, what keeps me connected to life and to light is the belief that a deeper purpose is organizing my process and experience. The awareness of this purpose is the treasure I will find.

On the other hand, process work is a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline that is studying how we notice/experience things and how personal experience signifies the world around us. Phenomenology is noticing and is describing, rather than explaining, interpreting and evaluating. Phenomenology maintains an intentional openness to reality in order to understand the field of significance. "Process work does not focus on who you are or might become, but on what you notice" (Mindell, Ar. 2002a, p.35). This approach ignites a shift towards noticing reality (in all levels: consensus reality, dreamland, essence) and leads to becoming aware of the usefulness and meaningfulness of each aspect of reality. When I

¹ https://freeenglishmaterialsforyou.com/2015/04/08/where-there-is-ruin-there-is-hope-for-a-treasure-rumi/

say reality, I mean processes that emerge. Holding the camera in the dream I saw before I began this project and filming the disaster, put me in the position of actively noticing.

The camera would be focused on my experience of being marginalized. Before going on to discuss marginalization, I want to contemplate the term *experience*. "Experience is a distinctly social phenomenon, rather than merely the private world of sensation, perception and judgment" (Goodbread, 2009, p.). This statement once again connects the private with the social, the individual with the collective. While focusing on my experience I will be examining a social phenomenon, hoping to push the edges of what is relatable and understandable. To be marginalized means to be marked as impossible, unthinkable, unintelligible. Claiming my experience is claiming existence, and this exceeds the personal and private. When I use the word "marginalization" I signify the experience of belonging in a social group that is out of the mainstream and is deprived of rights. The experiences of marginalized people and specifically their pain is silenced, and a harm that is hidden and not heard is part of the general violence as well. "Marginalization of experience leads to social marginalization of individuals for whom that experience is inescapable" (Goodbread, 2009, p. 100). What is inescapable is the fact that I lack social and systemic power. This prevents me from being able to change the conditions that are creating the pain and the hurt here and now, in the consensus reality level. On the other hand, "to the degree we have access to our inalienable sense of power, we are immune from a crucial ingredient of marginalization. [...] We needn't put anyone down to stay in touch with our strength" (Goodbread, 2009, p. 129). This inalienable sense of power was what I was aiming to connect with. I then create anchors so that this power could be accessible for me to feel and use it. This power is what we call *psychological power*, coming from an inner strength. In other words, I was growing to be resilient¹ in the face of injustice. "Personal power is an inner feeling

of power that reverberates regardless of what happens to us" (Diamond, 2016, p. 64). I can use this personal power to fight for changes in the consensus reality level.

Neither here nor in the video I produced I discuss the details or the specifics of my experience. I want to acknowledge and address the lack of specifics this essay will have. I made this choice for reasons of safety, both mine and of others that are involved in this personal story. This choice was a hard one to make, because I had an inner dialogue of two sides. The one side would stand by the belief that, apart from individuals, we also represent roles in the wider social field, so my story belongs to the field as well as it belongs to me. This viewpoint also points out that when we share our pain and our marginalized experience, we create a possibility for shift and change. We create a space for something marginal, so we center it. Another part of me is afraid of being hurt and hurting others again. Also does not trust I have the necessary eldership to hold a safe space for all participating sides, all the roles in the field. I choose to stand for all my parts. For the one that wants today to focus on my experience and the healing journey around it and radiate to the world a strong signal, and for the other one which is caring for all sides and understands I need more work to be able to facilitate publicly and safely this process. I am naming and taking the responsibility to be here today. "Taking responsibility means accepting everything you say, feel, hear, write, see and communicate as part of you. Accepting your accidents and your lies is an act of compassion" (Mindell, 1993, p.52). With compassion, I hold myself in this edge and I know I will be working on it again and again. This is my life's path, inescapable and unavoidable and meaningful.

So, here I am setting off for a creative journey, using process work which is a "method of allowing dreaming or implicit order to unravel itself through the awareness, discipline and courageousness of the observer" (Mindell, 1985, p. 33). My study is experiential, so I need to be

disciplined and courageous in observing my own process. I would need to hold myself in the uncomfortable. I am once again in the center of my life myth; I am searching for meaning in a hurtful and challenging experience. I am aiming for change, both in my personal reality and in the universal field, change in how I am experiencing marginalization. But, "Change creates momentary suffering. Hence, you need an inner discipline and courage to keep your mind on eternity while caring for the pain of the moment" (Mindell, 1993, p. 142). As a social activist since my late teens, I am very much familiarized with holding the world's pain. But this time, through my process work studies I would try and do it in a different way, with awareness and care and commitment to giving space to all sides, seeking awareness as a healing process and treating healing as social activism.

3. Behind the scenes – the process of creating

3.1. The form

I decided to do a creative project out of the need to connect the two *becoming* processes I went through the last years. Becoming a process worker and becoming a performer. Six years ago, I started studying process work, which meant a massive transformation in my identity. What occurred was the dismantling of the way I was understanding the world and myself until then, a change in my vocabulary, a new sense of feeling myself and others, a growing interest and compassion for all the things I dislike, in me and in others. What happened was that, for a period of time, I marginalized my thinking mind, focused on feeling the reactions and the interactions. I learned to value, include and support my inner feeling life. Later bringing back my thinking mind, I learned to value it as well, being able to combine both of them in harmony.

At the same time, I was becoming a performer. My relationship with the performative arena started in the early 2000's. Back then, I was member of the first queer group in Greece. The group was named QV (Queericulum Vitae)² and we were publishing a zine with collective texts. The aim of the zine was to investigate the political aspects of our personal lives and transform the world through that. We were creating a queer space where there was none. I was a committed queer activist. All these happened during a period when queer groups were also created in other neighboring countries, doing similar work. I travelled a lot and made connections with those groups. One of them was Queer Beograd. During their festival, it was the first time I saw queer performances, at their show "Borders Fuckers Cabaret". I was mesmerized by the experience and I was deeply touched. It was such a powerful way to center queer bodies

² The website of the group is www.qvzine.net. Mostly in Greek, with a few texts translated in English.

and stories. The performances were about queer experience and created a space where this experience could exist and be heard. Before my eyes lay all the transformative potential of a queer performance. It was a different way to do politics. I admired the people who could do that and felt I would very much like to participate in something like that, but I thought I could not bring myself to. But the seed was planted. Luckily the important detail was that most of the people performing at the cabaret were not trained in theatre or performance. They were activists like me, so they became an example for me.

Since then, years passed, I did perform sporadically. But it was after I stopped participating in QV that performance art became a way for me to metabolize my experiences and express myself. Through queer and feminist activism, I was using my experiences to change the inequalities and brutalities of this world. I believed strongly that there is social power that can bring change in forming groups, in being together, in sitting in front of the fire with others. Then at some point, the high dream of togetherness was crashed inside of me. There was a moment when the group, I was working with, could not hold my feelings and experiences. Most importantly I was not able to show my own vulnerability to the group. I was failing myself and my beliefs. It was a strong crash. It was another moment in my path that I encountered failure. In those ruins, the treasure that I found was performance art. That was the way for me to cross my edge and be vulnerable in front of others. Performance art was my way of remaining connected with my dream of using my personal experiences to change the world. Because I am now choosing a more personal and individual path to creation, I need to cross the edge and claim that my experiences matter to me as well as they matter to others. I still believe that when we communicate our truth, our vulnerability, our pain, we are transforming the field and are inviting others to change, to lessen the pain.

My journey towards becoming a performer started a little before I began studying process work. Gradually I developed the performer in me. Her name is Prokne. This is my stage name. Prokne is a *dreamfigure* of mine. "A dreamfigure is a personification of dreaming tendencies, which coalesce momentarily into a role character" (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p.86). I am shapeshifting to this figure when I perform on stage, when I do video performances, when I write poems, when I read poems in slams. She is a housewife; she amplifies everyday life experiences, instances and rituals in search of a deeper understanding of her/our humanity. Prokne's art is always produced out of the experiences I have. She is something like a thyroid that metabolizes what has been difficult and hurtful, so that I can safely access it, feel it, expose it and transform it.

Prokne's name comes from *Procne*, who is a minor figure in Greek mythology. Procne's myth is not well known. She was the daughter of Pandion, king of Athens and Pandion's mother was Praxithea. He won a war with the help of king Tereus, so Pandion offered Procne to Tereus as a present, to keep her as his wife. They had a son together, named Itys. Procne had a dear sister, Philomela. She was visiting Procne in her new home when Tereus raped her. In order for Philomela to not accuse him of the act, he cut her tongue and imprisoned her in a cave. Philomela wove a tapestry narrating the whole story and gave it to Procne as a present. Once Procne found out whar happened, in order to take revenge for her sister, she killed her son, cooked him and prepared a meal with his meat for Tereus to eat. Procne and Philomela escaped and Tereus chased after them. While he was approaching, a god appeared and transformed all of them into birds. Procne turned into a nightingale, Philomela turned into a swallow and Tereus turned into a hoopoe. The myth is the only one in Greek mythology that prioritizes sisters' love

and bond over marriage and motherhood. Also, it is a myth of women's alliance, in the face of male privilege, power and abuse.

My stage name was inspired by this myth, but it has been transcribed in the present and in the queer community of Athens. I have changed the spelling, using a K instead of a C, to signify that Prokne is a contemporary figure, living her dramatic stories in the present and finding unconventional ways to stand for her own self.

It was a challenge, since I was growing as a performer and a process worker, to embrace both identities and realities. There was an edge inside, as well as outside of me, in the world, that a process worker who works therapeutically with people cannot be on stage, exposed, personal and vulnerable. For some time I was keeping the two realities and those identities separate. But this created internal tension for me. I wanted to be myself, I wanted to be whole without judgment; without the one part of me to undermine the other part of me. Actually, I really wanted for the one to strengthen the other. I began to notice and realize the therapeutic aspects of performing, of being vulnerable and exposed on stage, by choice. "The therapist is an awareness facilitator who helps bring attention to the details of nature's flow" (Mindell,2006, p.8). This quality I find common between being the therapist *and* the performer.

Following this inner process, I decided for my final project to be a creative piece. I decided Prokne had to be present on video, to take part in the creation, and I needed to put the process work tools to work systematically in making the performance piece. In the beginning of this project I did not know if I was going to be able to bring these two seemingly disparate parts together, but I knew I wanted to use my psychology training in the creation of the video performance.

3.2. The content

The next challenge was to choose "what" this project would be. The project would be the Final Project, written with capital letters. I don't like capital letters. They imply epic-ness, a notion/quality that is completely secondary to me. Still, the nature of the project requires a somewhat bigger scale, larger than the one I find myself comfortable in. And this is another edge to cross. All of my works until now are short. This time I need to create a more extended mythology. "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to supp

ort the weight of a civilization" (Fanon, 1952, ch. 1).

My creative process always derives from my experiences. This is what I need to do again. I need to go where it hurt the most, where I struggle the most and where I find ways to support myself through the hardship. I need to focus on something that I hadn't before, in my art. I had a big edge to "talk" about this struggle, enlarged by a bigger scale. My struggle was and still is around my queer family and about me being a non-biological queer parent, in a culture that does not support queer existence, and queer parenthood; that renders non biological parents legal strangers to their children. Non-biological parenthood is socially perceived as inferior to biological parenthood. This struggle is taking place at all levels. In the world level, in the relationship level among the family members and in the personal level, my inner experience. This is the major challenge of my life and through this challenge I learn so many things. I find ways to value myself and I want to share this with the world. It might be helpful or inspiring to someone who is also in a process of healing. To describe it in another way, in this area of my life I am experiencing a crash. The process of "enjoying my crashes" that creates meaning out of the disaster and heals the pain was once more emerging strongly. My life myth is demonstrated here; my purpose in life lies in this process.

My personal process is connected with the world as well. "When we heal our own trauma, individually and collectively, we don't just heal our bodies. By refusing to pass on the trauma we inherited, we help heal the world" (Menakem, 2017, p. 83). Part of my purpose is to contribute healing to the world, as well as the documentation of an attempt to do so. Healing from this understanding is worldwork and political activism.

This project is a healing contribution. In the video performance I am using my experience. I chose this medium to speak. "Performance can function as a necessary site of repetition, recognition, and reparation—an embodied methodology for "claiming" experience" (Pryor, 2017, p.25). Healing starts from this claiming. I claim my experience of marginalization. I create space for myself and my experience. Claiming space as a marginalised subject, subverts the social paradigm. I chose performance, because as a means it "offers the minoritarian subject a space to situate itself in history and thus seize social change" (Munoz, 1999, p. 1).

My challenge is that I am a non-biological queer parent to a child, with whom I have no legal rights. In the video performance I am narrating the process of *becoming*. On one level the narration is the process of becoming a non-biological parent starting from the moment of decision and the commitment, to the everyday care that builds the connection and reaffirms the condition, and even further to the unbreakable bond with the child, to the essence level of love that has a certainty and an inevitability. On another reading of the video, the narration is about the process of working on the experience of having my parental identity questioned and denied. In that level, the process outlined in the video is the process of working on the external and internal voices that are marginalizing my existence. It is about the painstaking work of holding

the dreaming, of standing up to the inner and outer devaluing voices, of accessing a space among the ruins where I value myself and give myself the credit I am being denied in the consensus reality level. The greatest lesson, the greatest gift I earned through this process, the gift of this disaster, is that I recognized and appreciated the dreaming power against the systemic power. In situations where systemic power is so strong and being used abusively, people in low rank cannot control the conditions. What they can control is their reaction to the devaluation and the abuse. What I learned from this process is that when I was internalizing the devaluating voices I was living in despair. I worked and worked and worked on these voices, I picked up the energy of the "devaluator" and used this energy to defend myself. The "devaluator" being a secondary figure for me, had the hidden qualities that I needed. By identifying with these qualities, I managed to strengthen my certainty, my confidence, my congruency and the fundamentality of my truth. This was my healing path. The pain was there, but its effect on me had been altered. I was finding my personal power. "Power is the ability to change ourselves and to get along with even impossible situations" (Diamond, 2016, p. 65). When connected to my personal power I can fight to change the world and its abusive pain. My personal power is what makes me able to do this project, write about my experience, stand for myself, stand against a system that dismisses non-biological parents and is not recognizing and respecting the love and bond of such a parentchild relationship.

> To survive the deathwalk, you must be both vulnerable and invisible. First you must cry for yourself, as the victim of your own and other's unconsciousness. Then you must stand strongly and congruently for yourself against opponents. Finally, you must drop your personal history and smile.

> > (Mindell, 1993, p. 205)

I chose my performance piece to be abstract and symbolic rather than specific and literal. I am working on an experience of marginalization and the suffering of being in a low rank position in a system and experience higher rank's misuse of power, which is causing tremendous pain. I have experienced life as a white, non-immigrant, western(y) greek, thin, cis body, meaning to have privileges in all these social identities. I could not ever imagine I would experience such strong pain due to being marginalized. Being aware of the different power structures and systems of domination, I know that our experiences and social identities are complex. We are conditioned in many paradigms of hierarchy and my experience has a complexity of its own.

In this creative project I experimented with focusing on the process and its structure, wanting to unfold the mythical part of this painful journey. I wanted to create my own mythology. "I believe in the power of storytelling for its mythical and not its explanatory qualities" (Winterson, 2005, p. 19). By accessing the mythical stripped from consensus reality, I wanted to create a connection with other experiences of suffering, of abuse and of misuse of systemic power, thus highlighting a common structure common to all systems of power in which we are struggling. This includes race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, body image. I assumed that by speaking the mythical language a common structure would be unveiled, one that would give us an awareness about abuse of power, suffering and resilience³ and one that would strengthen the inner voices that say "you matter, everybody matters". Not focusing on the specific details of a story and moving towards the depth of experiences and the understanding of the structure of processes we produce something that derives from the personal, and it is

³ Resilience: Overcoming adversity, whilst also potentially changing, or even dramatically transforming, (aspects of) that adversity, Hart, A. et al (2016): Uniting Resilience Research and Practice with and Inequalities Approach. Sage Open.

universal. It matters to us and it matters to others. "When a process is unfolded to its core, what we see is both utterly personal and touches the universal" (Audergon, 1995, p. 63). My creative piece is doing exactly that.

In the performance, I am using my body to claim that I matter. I want to acknowledge here that there are certain bodies that occupy the universality of experience with convenience and others not. As a woman I know that my body is socially understood as *other*, in relation to the bearer of human experience that cis men have. On the other hand, my body is white and thin and this is factual, categorizing me in those bodies that matter within racist, transphobic and fatphobic cultures. While performing I am using my body with the awareness that it, being thin and white, is a body that has privileges. There is a complexity with which we exist within systems of domination. In this project I am focusing on my experience of being marginalized, but there are aspects of my life that I belong to the mainstream. I aspire to use my privileges to stand together with all those who struggle to be seen and to be valued in extremely dehumanizing cultures.

On another level, "We are so hypnotized by the apparent meaning of what someone else is saying that we never notice how upset we become by the posture, tone of voice or hand motions" (Mindell, 2002a, p 55). By creating a performance, I wanted to avoid such hypnosis. I wanted to create something that would open up space for the viewer to feel, interact and flirt with the movement and the images, the sound, the body and the landscape, the clothes, the altered state of the performer which shaped the energy of the field. I am proposing that a synesthetic experience between the viewer and the performance video is happening, which could be informative and transformative for them; an act of engagement that produces awareness. This synesthetic interaction aims at the transformation of the perception and the experience.

4. The video – the materiality of the process

For bodies to arrive in spaces where they are not already at home, where they are not "in place" involves hard work; indeed, it involves painstaking labor for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 62)

The video performance is a record of this painstaking labor Ahmed describes: to inhabit a space. Specifically, the video consists of three different performances taking place in three different *earth-spots*. For process work earth-spots are special place on earth that can be used as dream-doors to the essence level. Feeling into earth-spots that are significant to us, we are creating a sentient experience by connecting to the special energies in that space on earth, creating meaning and making sense of a person's process. For my video, as said, I performed at three different earth-spots. I am alone in all of the locations, with solely the landscape surrounding me. I inhabit the space with my performing body. All performances had their own outline, but they were mostly improvised on site. Actions of entering and exiting the spaces are the acts of the video, posing as rituals of transitioning between states and meta-positions.

4.1 Act one

As described above, in the video I focus on my experience of marginalization and how I worked on an inner level, meaning how I worked on my internalized marginalization. Being marginalized means that the world around you is not recognizing your existence, importance and

value. Internalizing the marginalizing voices means to have an inner process of subordination. My journey, for its bigger part, is a lonely path of deconstructing those inner voices. In the video I wanted to share this journey.

I noticed that during my struggle to bring my parental identity to the realm of social intelligibility despite the lack of official documents I was constantly trying to make arguments to support my side. One of the things that came to mind was the sentence "*that day we went to the beach and we agreed*...". It was a story that kept coming up. I was repeating it and repeating it to myself. Amy Mindell, in her book Alternative to Therapy⁴, proposes an exercise for the stories that repeat. This exercise helped me understand why the story was incomplete and what I was trying to fulfill while repeating the sentence. To narrate the story in its full form, I needed to say "*a day at the beach I committed to be your parent*". This is the first act of parenting; the moment of conscious decision and commitment. The first performance takes place in that beach. It would be an act to portray the process of committing, as I experienced it in the consensus reality level.

Working deeper in the idea of commitment, trying to explore the meaning of the word, I did another exercise. I wondered what other words humans have to communicate and explain this act. I focused on them since it's the words that are producing the acts of speech. I went through different dictionaries to find synonyms for commitment. I wrote down all the words. Looking at them I realized that there are official ways to establish a commitment and I was lacking such ways. Even if I was committed, I had no proof of that, other than my dreaming process. Then I wondered what the words we are missing are. What is the *Other* in this process?

⁴ Exercise in Mindell, Amy. (2006). Alternative to therapy: A creative lecture series on process work. Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, page 36.

Using process work terminology, I was looking for the secondary process to include in my research. I wrote down some of the missing words. Now my performance was slowly moving from the consensus reality level to dreamland.

To further amplify the process and gain more awareness, I decided to visit that beach. I went there, sat on the sand, I was looking at the sand, feeling it under my body, touching it with my hands. I consetrated in the feeling of my body. The sand was holding me. The sand, the earth, the world was holding my words, my commitment. I had a strange feeling that all those years later it was the same sand I was sitting on and it understands and it remembers me. My "official" papers existed inside this sand. I had a vision: I am digging a hole in the sand and I am finding the "proof". Finding the proof there means there is something there to be found. Something was buried there so I can find it now. I decided for my performance to bury papers in the sand, with all the words I had gathered from my previous innerwork. The sand would again bear witness to my official declaration.

I decided to go deeper into the need I have for a witness and for an official declaration, I did another innerwork exercise. It was a rehearsal; I wanted to physically perform the act which was previously formed as an idea and explore my experience in the moment of rehearsing. I wrote the words on small, post-it papers and I buried them in the sand. As I was doing the action I was noticing my body posture, my inner atmosphere. There was calmness. I felt my body steady on the ground. My hands were moving slowly and certain. Each time I put one paper in the sand it felt like I was making an offering. I followed my hands' movement, allowed them to offer whatever needed to be offered. I ended up with my hands open above the sand. Two words came up: *I am.* I added the paper with these two words to also bury in the sand. This would be the first act of my video. Through these series of innerwork exercises I came to a conclusion. I

understood why the sentence "that day we went to the beach and we agreed..." was persistent and what was trying to come to my awareness. It was the plain and undeniable fact of *being*, regardless if the outer social circumstances that dispute it.

The day of our shooting on the beach, a synchronicity⁵ occurred. While we were getting ready to shoot the performance of burying the post-it papers in the sand, an earthquake happened. We were on a small break, sitting on the sand and the earth started moving underneath us. It was an amazing synchronicity. Something had to literally move in order for my offering to be accepted. A marginalized experience does not obtain space. For it to obtain space, this space must be created first. The tectonic plates that shape the culturally intelligible must move for the new possibilities to occur. This idea brings me back again to my childhood dream. A disaster, such as an earthquake, is also something that creates new possibilities and creates space for the marginal to extend.

⁵ Process work understands synchronicity events as signals of the world channel that are paths to awareness for the person or the group that is experiencing the synchronicity process.



4.2 Act two

In the second act I wanted to focus on the process of becoming a parent. The first act included contemplation around a decision, now I wanted to investigate the process of materializing that decision. I wanted to depict the journey that started with ambiguity and ended at the point of "being". How do we form an identity? What is the lived materiality of identity formation? Is there continuity? What was here before me? What is my ancestry?

In order to investigate the process of becoming, I raised the above questions. Since becoming is a journey, I was looking at ancestry as a starting point. I did an exercise on my own ancestry. I live in Greece and part of the dominant national narrative is that our ancestors are people who lived in ancient Athens, built the Acropolis, invented democracy. I never felt this connection to my core. I always felt I arrived here later. This intense national narrative does not resonate with me. On the other hand, when I was 18 years old and was reading the books of Anja Meulenbelt⁶, she was describing the feminist communities of the 70's and I immediately felt that I was a part of them. I was not alive at that time, but what she was describing was very familiar. I was coming from that description. The same intensity, a connection that I call ancestry, I have with the gay men who lived during the AIDS pandemic in the late '80's and the early '90's. That feeling of connection is a reflex inside me. I belong there, with them. I am them. I am the ones that died and the ones who survived. Lastly, I feel that the lesbian experimental filmmakers of the late 70's, such as Su Friedrich and Barbara Hammer, are my grandmothers. I understand their

⁶ The book I read first was The shame is over: A political life story. I found it in my mother's library.

work as a legacy left for me. I am so grateful to them for shaping the world and introducing new cinematic narration tools, which have a strong impact on the audience.

Feminist communities, people who died of AIDS, experimental filmmakers, all of them are my ancestors. I noticed that these roots are not connected with biology. Resma Menaken in his book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, gives an account on how racialized trauma is generationally inherited. This made me wonder: what about my biological ancestry? Am I coming from it as well? The question lead my attention to my grandmother. She was a housewife and as many women in her generation she crocheted. She would make beautiful curtains and tapestry. I have one big table cloth of hers in my house. Crochet was never considered art, because it was done by women and because its use is domestic; another historical act of women's systemic devaluation. Going deeper into my grandmother's dream figure and what she represents, I started telling her story:

My grandmother was born on october 12, 1921 –it was a Wednesday– in a small village on the island of Lesbos. Lesbos was then newly attached to the Greek state. She was born to a low rank family, went to primary school and learned how to read and write. She later married my grandfather, who came from a higher rank family in the village. My grandfather was the last-born child in his family and was an orphan in his first years. Because of this he had the lowest rank in his family. Also my grandfather's masculinity was tender and low-key, not much appreciated and valued then – or even today. Low and high rank dynamics shaped the family life. For the most part my grandfather's siblings arranged important decisions regarding work, housing, migration. The wealthier siblings would give money to the family and in return they would use my grandparents' house for

various family related issues. my grandmother would have guests in her house all year round, being responsible to cook for them, clean for them, wash clothes, give her bed to them while she slept on the floor. During a family dinner table a few years before she died, my father said: "the siblings of my father paid for me to go to university. I am very grateful to them". My grandmother replied in a dead serious tone: "Is that so? and who cooked and cleaned and worked for all those guests so many years? I am the one who paid for your studies." And then there was silence. You could feel the awe in the room breathing through all the air and silence. My grandmother never read Sylvia Federici or any other feminist theory about production and reproduction. She had the strength to value herself, to value the work she was doing in a social paradigm that completely disregarded her. She is my role model.⁷

My grandmother was an example for me in the sense that, even though she lacked the social and the structural power, she had immense psychological power that allowed her to value herself and claim her value in front of others. I realized that to become, is to recognize myself, embrace my inner process, value my story and value my contribution to the world. Just like my grandmother's act of keeping her house affairs in order. She would do it, repeatedly and with great commitment, and that would produce a sense of self and value. Similar to the act of crocheting, a slow performance of repetition produces a whole image. I would portray the journey of becoming, with a performative repetition of a task.

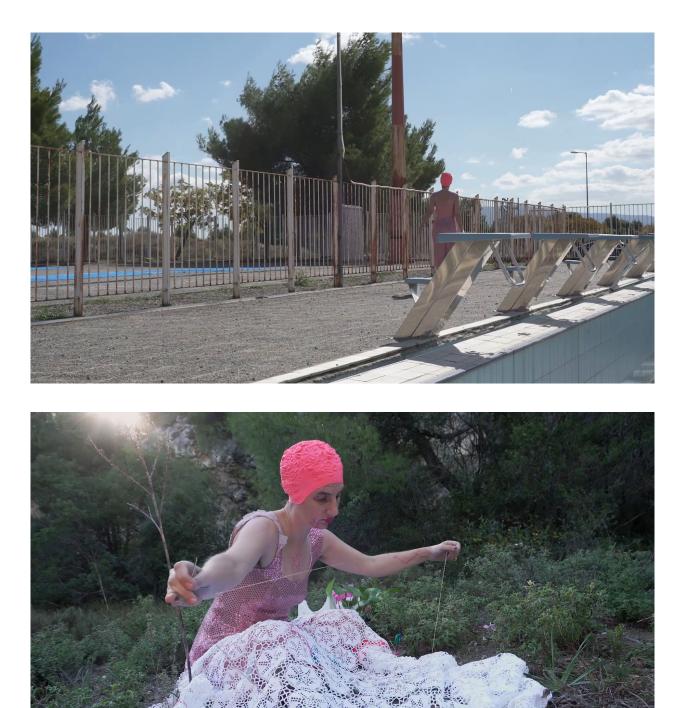
I decided to use my grandmother's cloth. Like my grandmother I would crochet. I would take her cloth, all the wisdom and power I inherited from her, all the strength she gifted me by

⁷ Exerpt from Prokne (2021), Floor Tiles of the Nation, digital collage, exhibited in "200 Years of Suffocation", online exhibition, curated by FYTA, March 2021.

being a role model, and put my colors on it and I would make it mine. The cloth would also symbolize the wisdom and the power I inherited from my non-biological ancestors as well. Identity is materialized by repetition. Just like parenthood is materialized by the constant caring, the everyday labor of upbringing, the action of holding your young at every moment. Materialization happens through repeated performative acts of naming and signifying. By knitting colorful threads in my grandmother's cloth I was producing my own significance, building on what I have inherited.

A synchronicity happened on the day of this shooting as well. I had planned to do this performance in an empty swimming pool. A pool is a confined space filled with water. It has borders and has fluidity. As an earth spot the pool has for me a sense of womb. My womb would be a different kind than the biological one. It would be a queer womb, the space I am coming from. An empty pool shares the qualities of my queer womb. It is a confined/safe space yet open to possibilities. At the end of the performance I wanted the camera to leave me in the pool and go up to the sky, leaving me down there, looking at me as I become smaller and smaller, leaving me inside the pool/womb. I wanted the becoming to take place in the womb. With the help of friends, I found a swimming pool at the abandoned facilities of the Olympic Games of 2004. We started the shootings and just before we would film the scene where I sit in the pool crocheting, a member of the committee responsible for guarding and maintaining the facilities came on and told us we had to wrap it up and leave immediately since we had no permission to shoot a video there. We did not have a contract. It was true. Once again, what for me was enough of a contract, an abandoned building and a couple of adults wanting to temporarily use it taking safety measures and being responsible for themselves, was not enough for the system. An official document was missing. We had to improvise in order to continue the shooting that day. It was

impossible to reschedule. Would I find another womb, anywhere, to become myself? Driving to the nearby mountain, we entered a side road as a final attempt to set our stage. And there it was: a small open space surrounded by trees. The mountain welcomed me to be. My childhood dream was again with me. A temporary disaster, the damage of losing our shooting space, had occurred. A new space, suitable for the shooting, was just a few miles away and we have found it by chance. A temporary healing arrived, almost as quickly as the disaster had previously. We felt it once we learned there was this side road, a road right off the main one, a road outside of the hegemony, a small path into an unknown site, which we could use as a stage for the marginalized existence. This experience leads to healing, in the sense that it created hope right in the face of harm.



4.3 Act three

In the third act I wanted to depict the feeling of being, the deeper sense of self that I experience when I access the essence level. Right there I am certain, I value myself, I am in harmony with everything that surrounds me. It is me and the world, me in the world, the world in me. This is wholeness. I wanted to portray the congruency I experience in the moments I access this feeling state. Everything around is all hurt and pain, inequality and ruins, and there is me in the middle valuing and loving myself. This is an act of inner parenting. How could this be visualized? The landscape of such feeling is similar to the dream I had when I was starting this project: a city of ruins. This would be my palace, an unconventional setting, a space where no meaning or beauty is expected to be found, a place that is considered broken by society. I needed a space like that to celebrate myself. I found an abandoned building somewhere near Athens. It reminded me of a song that is important to me and the lyrics say: *There is an old enchanted castle and the princess there is me. Decked out like a Christmas tree.*⁸. This song describes with its own words my childhood dream. The enchanted castle is a failure, a disaster, a crash. The princess is the healing, the appreciation, the treasure.

I had my palace. Now I needed to settle in it. What would I wear? First, I thought of a gown dress I have. I had used it in another performance and I have painted it white so it was like a wedding dress. In that performance I was discussing marriage, relationships, normativity and failure⁹. So, I "put on my costume, my nicest clothes, to leave one part and become another part of myself" (Mindell, 1993, p. 217). The garment was appropriate for a queen in her palace, but it was still marked by the syntax of normativity. If I needed to put on my nicest clothes to become

⁸ From the song Long Forgotten Fairytale, by Magnetic Fields

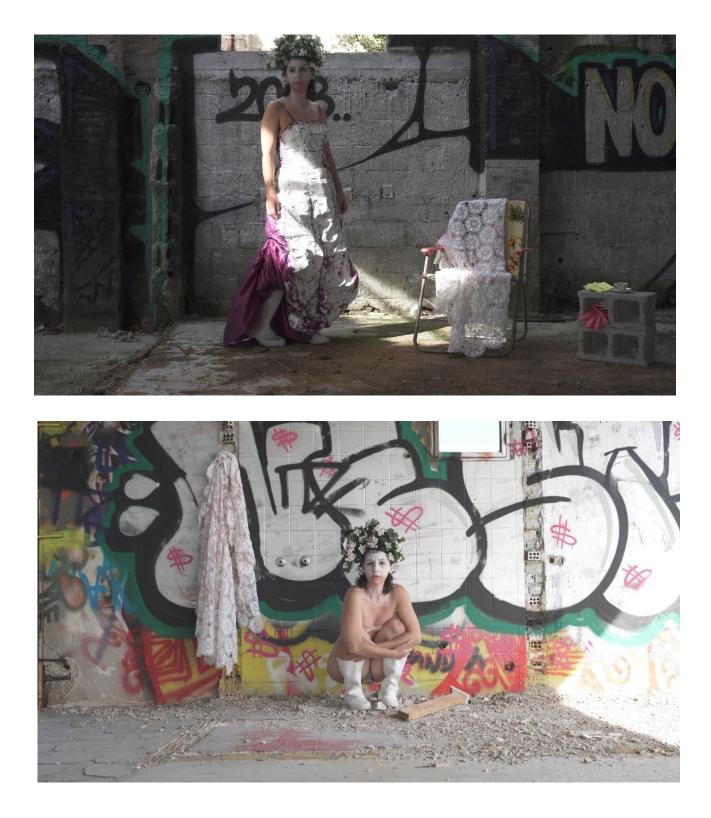
⁹ The performance is called "I Will Paint My Wedding Dress On My Own" with a mashup of Rihanna's song s&m and Jack Halberstam's interview about the concept of Queer Art of Failure. It was presented at the Hot Topic party (SchwuZ, Berlin, 2/2019) & ASFA BBQ (Athens School of Fine Arts, 9/2019).

myself. I realized that I should also wear my grandmother's cloth, using it as a cape. This cloth was created during the second act of the video, when I crocheted my own colors into the cloth and made it mine. This was now a cape of strength that I inherited and it became a sign of resilience on which I could build. I decided that in the first part of the third act I was going to be dressed in the nicest clothes/cape/resilience. The costume was ready. Now I wanted to "claim a space, take up that space with what one does with one's body" (Ahmed, 2006, p.11). But I did not know how to performatively embody this process. That was the most difficult part of the performance to conceptualize. I had the space. I was in the middle of my myth. "When we begin to live closer to our myths, we experience timeless immortality and freedom". (Mindell, 2009, p 95) I realized I needed a performative action of claiming the space, filling the space with my existence, making it mine. I had an idea, to put the post-it papers in action again, and write on them the words that resonated with that experience. Going deeper in that plan, I realized I didn't need any words. The papers should be blank. In the essence level significance happens in the absence of words. The idea was ready; I was going to fill the space with blank papers and spread my existence and my detachment to the field. "The term process refers to the flow of experience". (Mindell, 2006, p. 52) I wanted to portray the flow with the floating papers, with my moving body in the space. I had arrived.

Then I needed a closing. "When ending, the central question to ask yourself is "Why did I begin?"" (Mindell, 2002b, p90). In the beginning I asked this question to myself.

It all started when I turned my head upand greeted the world. It was I and I the world as well. I needed to go there. My final act should be me posing. I am posing for the world to see me, as I am looking back to the world. While I was performing this piece I felt I was giving birth to myself. I had become the parent I set out to be.

Dawn Menken writes: "Mother carries us even when the people around us are not able to. No baby is ever born without a mother; she is always there – always has been, always will be. Each birth is complete; mother and child emerge together as a whole, each new life mothered implicitly. For who gives us the faith to breathe our first breaths?" (Menken, 2001, p. 165). This was the treasure I found in the ruins. Fighting to be recognized as a non-biological parent, I had become a parent to myself.



5. Do I make sense?

The central question of my creative journey was, Do I make sense? I will now unpack this question. To raise a question as the title of my project as well the central axis around which my project is built, is an unconventional choice. As a culture we value answers, certainties and scientific proof. Science is organized in accordance to race, class and gender hierarchies that promote their own worldview. Radical theories, such as queer theory and race theory, pose questions in order to question certainties and challenge the perceived authority. In doing so, they serve the interest of marginalized subjects. I consider the question in my title "Do I make sense?" as part of this tradition. Rather than asking and expecting back an answer from someone placed outside of me, I am raising the question to highlight that making sense is a privilege. To make sense is to be rendered visible. To be visible is an action in the personal, the interpersonal and the field level. It is a relationship between the self and the other. To be visible is a moment of recognition. Marginalized subjectivities do not enjoy the privilege of making sense because they are seen outside the boundaries of the social body. In this project I use process work and queer performance to portray a situation where a marginalized body claims visibility and as a result claims making sense.

It is important to me, in order to make sense and to be seen in my wholeness, to be understood when I express myself. In this project I am sharing a specific moment of my path. That is my healing, which derives from valuing my own self and is an ongoing process. I am constantly moving and shifting. When the dominant consensus reality paradigm is controlling us, as Butler explains, "Coherence and continuity of the person are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility." (Butler, 1990, p. 23). Making sense is a radical act for the marginalized role. What I have done is to share myself with compassion, using the greatest amount of awareness I could have in the specific moment. There was a voice inside me in the beginning of the creating process that was demanding of me to be completely healed in order to share. Healing for me was to value myself. And to value myself in the moment was to start creating from the place I was and not from where I was supposed to be. Also, going deeper in the voice that demanded healing, I found that experiencing agony is a necessity for the world to be healed, for traumas to be processed, for people to feel safe and valued. Understanding this side, and this eagerness for healing, I also realized that healing is a universal challenge, not an individual. I cannot be healed on my own. In world issues we cannot achieve individual healing, we need collective work for social issues to be processed and transformed. What I can do, walking towards that direction, is to share my pain and struggle and this way I will give and get back support. And this is what I ultimately did. Being true and supporting ourselves in the moment builds resilience. Resilience is power, in the sense that "Power is our capacity to impact and influence our environment". (Diamond, 2016, p. 3) Resilience has the power to bring awareness and awareness has the power to transform the lived experience.

Experimental filmmaking was the vehicle for my expression. To experiment is for me "To do something that's never been done before means thinking outside the frontiers of social convention" (Diamond, 2016, p. 35). Thinking outside the frontiers of intelligible and representable is to open space for the magic every single existence brings to the world. This is why experimental filmmaking touches me deeply and this is how I find myself in it.

Going back to my agony for making sense I revisit the search for the treasure in the ruins. There I understand that if I investigate this agony from a teleological perspective, if I focus on the purpose of my process, I end up finding the treasure that is the ability to be a parent; the ability to parent myself. I understand the process of performing as a similar act. During a performance we – as performers – are parenting ourselves. We are parenting the audience too. We hold them. We hold ourselves. Once the performance is over, we let them go and we have taught them – maybe– how to do it for themselves, even a little. It is a parenting process, so we can all learn, slowly how to parent ourselves.

In writing this essay I had to go back and rethink my whole journey. I visited all moments and focused on them again. Having done the video and having materialized the mythological extent of my process, I could observe now with more compassion, I could hold the pain without drowning in it. I was courageous enough to look back and look inside. The process of creating was a healing process. It is magical what we can do with our bodies. A quote by Arnold Mindell has stayed with me since I read it: "It is a challenge, a mythical challenge, a proprioceptive pain to be a human being" (Mindell, 2002a., p. 53). This sentence is so powerful! My quest is to allow myself to experience this pain fully and find all the treasures in it.

In the last part of the video, a poem appears on the screen.

In the deep end I am open and in contact I am floating in a certainty of self I am safe – not from harm but – From despair In the deep end I is another sense I is a matter of fact Is a matter of brain and flesh Is a matter of sense

I matter

Look at me

I wrote this poem, as I was trying to find words to describe and understand the altered state I was in while performing the last part of the video performance. I was in my wrecked palace, in front of a damaged wall and was moving slowly changing postures. I was performing from a deep essence state. The poem talks about the experience of the essence level. The agony of making sense does not exist there. I write "*I is another sense*". This sentence implies that there is another possible way for a subject to make sense. This other way is unique for each and every one of us and this is how each of us makes sense.

In the end, the poem invites the viewer to look at me. It is an invitation to orient one's gaze towards a space that usually remains unseen, a background space. I am suggesting the viewer follow a queer line to meet me. I am also suggesting to look towards the essence level, a level with which we are not very often in contact. Sara Ahmed defines "queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy" (Ahmed 2006 :107). I suggest that the last part of the video invites the viewer to such a queer orientation, both towards an embodied experience that is usually kept out of site, and to a feeling experience of wholeness, which is offered by the essence level of our existence.

6. Conclusion

The creation of this project itself is exhibiting the radical valuing of my experience as a marginalized role in the field of parenting. And I used my process work skills and metaskills to provide my contribution to the process work knowledge base. Innerwork exercises helped me unfold "crashing and failure". By unfolding these experiences, I could access a deeper state from which I could offer myself; I was contributing myself to the world. This feeling of valuing my self is a global/public contribution. This is the reparations for the marginalization and devaluation I have suffered. Similar to that process, when I started to organize my thinking around what the contribution of this project would be, I was suffering from an inner critic. It was once again the same process of valuing myself and my work and considering it important for the world. I did an innerwork exercise to work on this disturbance. I used the last part of my video as a dream-door to the essence level of self-value and appreciation. As the poem in my video says, "I am open and in contact. I matter". From this state I can say that what I contribute to the knowledge base of process work is my unique experience and understanding. The project being experiential is extending this procedure. I used my personal experience to create new awareness and understanding for the world. I connected my personal life myth around healing with a collective dreaming using process work theory and practice. Speaking from a marginalized position and making sense of myself is a powerful action. It is changing the world by questioning the established authority of the dominant paradigm. My project, in this sense, is changing the world.

This project also proposes a world view where personal healing, social activism and creativity intersect. There are concrete ideas in this world that artistic practices, social activism and practices of psychotherapy are separate and serve different needs. My project uses the theory and the practices of all those fields, combines them and shows how embedded each is to the others. My project is providing awareness on this intersection and is building towards a culture of relationship and exchange between these worlds that are considered and experienced as separate. This contribution is being done again through me and my experience. Social activism, creativity and process work are assembled in me, and the project is an assemblage as well.

In my project I manifest how process work tools are used in a creative process, how deeply we can go when using these tools, and how transformative – personally and collectively – this deepening can be. Further to that, I demonstrate how process work is a paradigm that provides means to work on ourselves and the world and provides personal and collective healing. Overall, it is a project that demonstrates the applicability of process work on a personal level, on a creative and artistic level and on a world level.

My contribution is the radical reimagining of the marginalized role's ability to make sense. It is also the deep exploration of performing as an act of parenting, in the sense of nurturing, supporting and appreciating the whole path of the process.

Writing this essay, I reached an understanding around the common space that process work and queer theory share. Queer theory is constantly calling for our gaze and understanding to orient queerly, to focus on experiences that are socially marginalized and hidden. On the other hand, process work is giving attention to secondary processes, experiences that are in the margins of our awareness. Focusing on secondary process can be understood as a queer orientation. Both paradigms are committed to expanding the realms of important, meaningful and valuable. And that is what I share with both of these paradigms, exactly where my life myth meets them. My myth is to give meaning to failures, crashing and to disaster.

Now, where shall we look?

THE END

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