

The Phoenix Experience

Reykjavik Art Festival, May-June 2016

STUDY AND REFLECTIONS BY HAUKUR INGI JONASSON, REYKJAVIK UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

This report sums up conclusions drawn from a two weeks artistic research project that was an interactive theatre experience, Phoenix, which took place in Reykjavik (Iceland) from May 19th to June 15th 2016. The project was organized by Mette Aakjær (b. 1973), who is the creative director of Wunderland, and joined by eleven other performers and artists. Approximately 70 participants participated in the experiments during the period.

The Wunderland group puts on projects that are in the interactive theatre, that aim to create a sensorial and intimate, and hence also a rather challenging, encounters between the participant (audience) and the performers. The encounters are designed as to interfere, spark and enhance the participants perception, imagination and state of consciousness. The work is “site-specific” and fictional surroundings are used to facilitate a transformative experience instigating a heightened awareness within the participant.



The Phoenix that was performed at the Reykjavik Art Festival in 2016 was along these lines an experimental project with an agenda portrayed in the following research questions:

- How can artistic experience be made as to enable the participant (audience) face his/her personal fears (or in other terms to meet his/her shadow)?
- How to make an artistic experience that makes the participants feel truly alert and alive?
- What kind of challenges and opportunities does this raise for further development of the experiment?

The performance took form as a walk on the harbour. The individual experience of each participant was designed as a one hour long journey. The participant got a brief introduction at a container and was given a headset connected to an audio device with a route is going to be at the harbor, where there are fish stores, sheds, empty houses and wooden boats.

This report describes the Phoenix project, the method used to learn from it, results from interviews with artists and participants as well as from an online survey that was sent out to participants few days after they had gone through the experiment, a discussion and the main

conclusions. The main findings are that the Phoenix experience had a significant to a profound impact on participants' self-experience on all the four different dimensions of human experience under investigation (1) the interpersonal dimension (the human environment), (2) the intrapersonal dimension (the experience of self), (3) the supra-personal dimension (the experience of non-human phenomena), and (4) the transpersonal dimension (the universal/existential). The study also indicated that a framework based on these four different, however, inter-related dimension is well suited as to study the artistic experience.

The Phoenix Experiment took place at the Snarfari Harbor in Reykjavik, a small harbor for sailing boats in Reykjavik city. The harbor is beautifully located on a landfill where the Salmon Ellidaár river reaches the shore deep within the Faxaflói Bay. All around there are small trees. The group of artists worked on preparing the venue in May 2016 and the performances took place on May 19th to June 15th 2016.

Artists: Cindy Rudel (Germany) performer, Nina Matthis (Sweden/Serbia) performer, Mette Aakjær (Denmark) performer, Thoranna Bjornsdottir (Iceland) composer, Sigrid Astrup (Norway) visual consultant, Sigrid C. Moses-Jakob (Denmark), Rune Brink (Denmark) technical innovation, Sonja Thomsen (Denmark) writer, Helga Rosenfeldt-Olsen (Denmark) performer, Karin Bergstrand (Sweden) performer. Gunnar Hansson ...

The project was Part of Reykjavik Arts Festival, supported by Reykjavik University and funded by The Danish Arts Foundation, Nordic Culture Fund and Nordic Culture Point, Notours.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method consisted of four main components: (1) Participatory observation by the researcher, followed by (2) interviews with the performers as a group, (3) Six one-on-one interviews with participants (audience) and (4) an online survey that was sent out to all participants few days after they had participated.

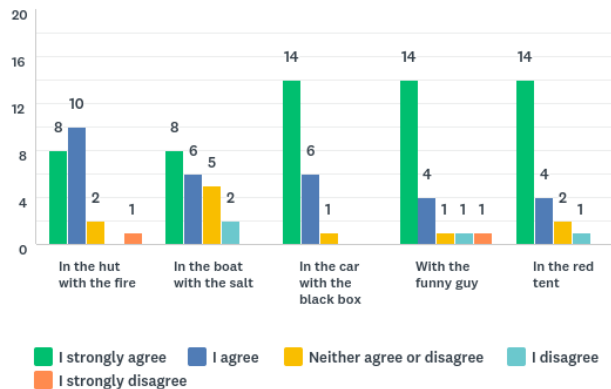
The overall aim of the research was to apply a framework designed by Haukur Ingi Jonasson (Jonasson, 2005) at Reykjavik University for investigating the subjective human experience from four different angles to catch the artistic experience taking place in the Phoenix experiment. The dimensions used as a frame in the research were (1) the interpersonal dimension (the human environment), (2) the intrapersonal dimension (the experience of self), (3) the supra-personal dimension (the experience of non-human phenomena), and (4) the transpersonal dimension (the universal). The underlying research question was: Can this four-dimensional model be used to assess artistic experience?

The researcher (Haukur Ingi Jonasson) after having experienced the Phoenix experience himself and after having interviewed the artists created the following survey statements (see answers in Appendix):

QUESTIONS ON THE INTERPERSONAL EXPERIENCE:

Q1: I felt deeply connected to the performer.

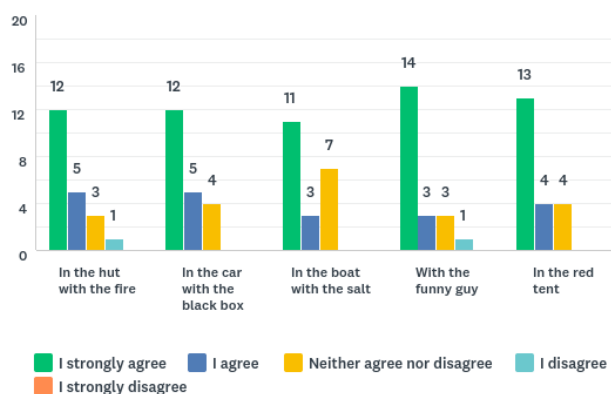
Q1 I felt deeply connected to the performer.



- *I think the darkness and the very close touch and breath made a difference*
- *All of them drew me completely in to the experience, and it felt far more complex than a "performance." I felt like I was taking part in a major event of my life.*
- *In the hut, i didn't know what to expect. So I was really nervous. In the car I was little bit less nervous. But after that I was able to relax and enjoy.*
- *Maybe part of it was a progression for me, becoming more comfortable as I understood better. I questioned myself and my actions too much in the hut and the black box. I engaged with the performers in the boatyard and the red tent.*
- *In the boat with the salt I connected more with the story than the performer.*

Q2: I felt appreciated by the performer.

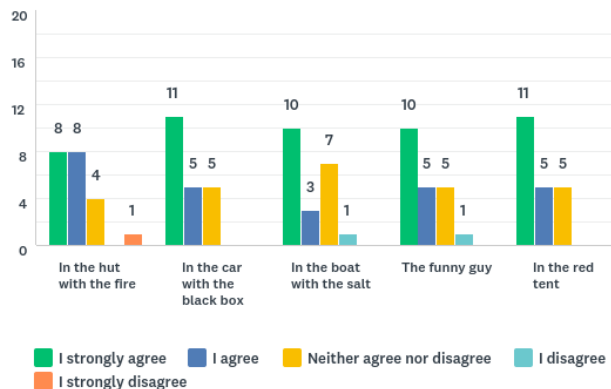
Q2 I felt appreciated by the performer.



- *They were all intensively involved*
- *Maybe it was the amount of eye-contact, maybe the way they looked at me, but definitely believed myself recognized throughout the entire experience.*
- *In all of the experiences I felt like the performers worked within what they felt was my comfort zone, not pushing but working around it and helping me along in the experience.*

Q3: I felt deep sense of love and compassion coming from the performer.

Q3 I felt deep sense of love and compassion coming from the performer.



- *I don't know where these people came from, but they seemed to know something about life that reassured me in a way that I haven't felt since I was a child.*
- *Maybe not a "deep" sense, but I could see that each performer was taking care of me and was genuine in caring how I was experiencing each moment.*
- *In the hut with the fire I felt very afraid of the performer.*

Q4: I felt something contagious was coming from the performer.

- *In the hut with the fire*
- *In the car with the black box*
- *In the boat with the salt*
- *With the funny guy.*
- *In the red tent.*

Q5: I felt I was co-creating something meaningful with the performer.

- *In the hut with the fire*
- *In the car with the black box*
- *In the boat with the salt*
- *The funny guy*
- *In the red tent*

Q6: I felt I gave the performer something.

- *In the hut with the fire*
- *In the car with the black box*
- *In the boat with the salt*
- *The funny guy*
- *In the red tent*

QUESTIONS ON INTRAPERSONAL DIMENSION

Q7: The experiment really got me in touch with myself?

- *I felt energies within my that I usually do not sense.*
- *I felt different in my body than I usually do.*

- *The experience enabled me to get deeply in touch with myself.*
- *I paid attention to my body.*
- *I paid attention to my inner life.*
- *I paid attention to my thoughts.*
- *I paid attention to my feelings.*
- *I felt emotional.*
- *The experiment sparked my imagination.*
- *I felt that my soul was touched in the experiment.*

QUESTIONS ON THE SUPRA-PERSONAL EXPERIENCE:

Q8: In the experiment, what impact had the non-human environment on you?

- *I paid attention to the external environment.*
- *I saw things differently than I usually do.*
- *I listened to the sounds in the non-human environment.*
- *I paid attention to the smell of the non-human environment.*
- *I felt that I was exploring the non-human environment.*
- *I felt connected to the non-human environment.*
- *I was at ease with the non-human environment.*

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SACRED

Q9: In the experiment, I felt I got in touch with something sublime/sacred?

- *I felt that I was enabled to get in touch with something universal/sacred.*
- *I felt that I encountered something dark within.*
- *I felt that I was faced with something demonic.*
- *I was able to get in touch with something specific/particular.*
- *I was able to reach far into my soul.*
- *I felt oneness with all.*
- *I felt harmony and beauty.*
- *I felt love and compassion.*

As said before the theoretical foundation that the research was based in is a four-dimensional model of the human experience developed by Haukur Ingi Jonasson b his book *In a Land of a Living God, The Healing Imagination and the Icelandic Heritage* (Jonasson, 2005)

As supplementary material is (1) the project description (appendix a), (2) research questions asked by Mette Aakjær when the project was being designed (appendix b) and, (3) the result of a survey sent to all participants (audience) who participated in the Phoenix Experience at the Reykjavik Art Festival 2017.

RESULTS

Results 1: Researchers Personal Experience of Going through the Phoenix Experience

The following description of the Phoenix experience is based on the researchers own experience of going through it on May 25th 2016.

Beginning: The participant starts the journey in a shipping container where an assistant gives him/her headphones with a GPS linked audio. The participant is then lead (via audio description) along a path in between trees.

The Boat with the Nest: The first station was a wood boat filled with cut trees and leaves and a cozy center where the participant could lay down and listen to the following text:

*On a windy savannah
life creeps up with difficulty*

*The ground is moving in deep waves
I see footprints in the trees*

*giants shaped by air
are walking the wind
to rest on mountain shoulders*

*the sky is blinking
sky
no sky
sky*

The hut with the fire: Then the participant stood up and kept going to a hut where s/he was invited to take off the shoes and enter upon an invitation. Inside a fire was burning and masked performer took the hand of the participant and invited him/her to touch the sand on the ground. Then the performer leads the participant further into the hut and invited him/her to stick his/her hand into an earth-hole. After that the performer washed the feet of the participant and invited him/her out of the hut. During this walk the text in the audio was:

I am loosing territory,

I thought I had no end

*That I was larger
than my own skin,*



*a hungry void
bedded with seaweed
is opening
beneath me*

my wings burn

time falls quickly

like a bird's drop from the sky

*only deadly wounded
I land at your feet*

The Truck with the black box

The participant is now advised to go into to the next station. A truck-wreck where he/she finds a string that leads from the drivers cabin back along the truck into, up few steps and into the back of a black container behind the driver's cabin. Once inside the total darkness the sting leads the participant to another performer who was dressed in a somewhat hairy material. In the total darkness, the two would breath together. The scene ended with the performer inviting the participant to leave the black box. During this walk the text in the audio was:



*sea shell cracked open
I stumbled out*

*exposed to an army of dreams
thirsty arrows
pointing at me*

Svala,

Stina,

Dagny,

Dragonfly,

Lisa,

Trausti,

waiting for a ride

pages start turning inside me

*a book
made of water*

The Woman in White in the Boat

In this station, a woman all dressed in white invited me into a boat and to take a seat against her in the boat's cabin. Between us hangs a leveling weight measuring device with salt on it. The performer engaged gazes at the participant and tells a story:



How to begin?

A world made by water.

In this world of waterthere are living two creatures. One is the creature of the east. And one the creature of the west.

They are going to meet.

They are walking over a bridge made of light.

And here, here.... they meet.

Those creatures / they put their heads together. They are looking into each others eyes.

And by concentration, they begin ... to create ...a bird.

The heart of the bird is made of ash. The bones of the bird are created from the salt.

And the eyes.... the eyes... are looking for land!

He wants to build a nest. But wherever he looks, underneath its open wings, water, only water. There is no beginning and there is no end.

The bird grows heavy . Heavier. He cannot hold the egg any longer inside himself.

He cries. This bird cries. And then he calls. He calls! For the land.

Until he realizes: water. There is only water. And he sits down on the water, and relaxes.

And here he begins to build a nest; but from his own body, his feathers. A small nest. In the size of a hand. Maybe your hand.... floating in the water.

And the bird comes flying and sits down inside his nest. And now. It is now, that he gives birth to his egg.

There is one more thing to know!

Inside the egg, there is the land! There is the land, he had been looking for. All the land. And all its creations.

At the end, she smiles and invites me to leave the boat.

On the way to the next station there was just sound compositions.

The Joyful Guy: The path leads to a funny red bearded guy who was waiting outside and somewhat introduces himself by sitting next to the participant. He is relaxed and smiling and would laugh instantly with almost every move the participant would make. Then he began to move in a teasing manner and then run around and invite the participant to join in a kind of a hide and seek, and catch-me-if-you can, fashion. Now the joyful guy indicates that our time is over and he leaves. The participant is now guided towards a boat in the harbor.



On the way to the next station there was just sound compositions.

The Light Installation in the Boat: The next stop was a rather large wood boat that had been placed on dry land. The participant is invited to enter the boat and through a kind of a tunnel where and then lay down on a bed surrounded with lights that felt alive and moving.

Sound composition and text while laying there. The text was:



*I am the mumbling in all things,
the bacteria in the petri dish, the vibrations of your eyes*

*I am the wine in the bottle, totally silent, but opening towards itself
molecules turning without stirring the surface
no new air is added
no new ingredient
the wine changes its persona*

*dancing from one end of the room to the other
my dress goes from short and orange
to heavy dark red*

*Like wine, like cheese
shark shaped shadows stroke the glass*

*a heavy breath,
falling coins*

After having been in the context for a while the participant was expected to stand up and leave the boat. On the way to the next station the audio text was:

*All the untaken paths
and the taken ones
forming a sphere*

*the unhappened,
happened*

*what happened,
didn't yet take place*

*Each step
between the stones*

each stone in itself

*each space
between each stone*

new to me

*old
to the world*

*I am walking towards the place
I just came from*

but will I be the same?

In the **Red Tent with the Sand** the participant was invited to take off his/her shoes and walk up steps into a red tent and then down again down to the tent's floor. On the tent's floor there was pile of sand on the floor and the performer was dressed in a red dress and with both her hair and half of the face covered. I also got a mask so my mouth got covered. Then the performer invited me to play with the sand with his/her hand and then engage in whatever kind of a play/dance with the sand; throwing it, smearing it, rolling in it, etc. After a while the performer hugged the participant and was lead out of the tent.



On the way to the last station the text in the audio was:

*The sea is pointing at me
with a giant, sparkling blade*

a sword of the open

call for a final submission

*the view
so generous in liquid molecules*

*throws splashes of water
inside my chest*

I dissolve slowly

*this sore ground
this warm organ*

The participant now walked quite a distance, over a bridge and towards a small tower-like hut; a kind of a booth where he/she could alone look through a glassless window out towards the ocean and the bay and the Esja Mountain. Here you could also write your own reflections on the wall of the hut and read the reflections of others. In the audio you heard the text:

*The seas mercury skin is expanding in every direction
oily waves caress the keels
corridors connecting underwater rooms*

in every doorway there's a silhouette

*down my neck
I sense your wet mermaid breath*

lead me through

let me pass

I'll draw fastest path between us

***(instruction: when you are ready,
you can take your headphones off,
and walk back)***

After a while you would turn around, leave this scene and walk back to the shipping container where the journey had begun.

Results 2: Interviews with Participants (Audience) Right After Having Gone Through the Phoenix Experience

What kind of experience was the Phoenix Experience for you?

Participant 1 (woman 43 yrs., educational counselor) “I felt comfortable, and very touched. I felt I was able to connect with the people that I do not know on a deeper level than with people I do not know. I felt very good, I was able to relax a forget about all the conventional day-to-day stuff. I felt very receptive and lit-up. I felt I was given energy — positive life-energy. I felt mesmerized being touched by people [the performers] whom I do not know. I was in an unknown territory, where I felt I needed to surrender. I felt they were very calm and safe. I myself work on many difficult cases with students. I learned many things about trust and compassion. This touching is not so common, it is magnificent.”

Participant 2 (woman 39 yrs., head of customer services at bank, wanted to become and actress, went to “lyðhaskoli” in Denmark). “I did not know anything before I came here.

Participant 3 (woman 25 yrs., studying literature, from Finland). “This was really powerful, lots of different emotions, ranging from fear, gladness, to sad.”

Participant 4 (woman 48 yrs., much experience with experimental theatre). “I am not sure if much happened. Touched me a little bit. The sound was good, fun to stand in front of a closed door — but that is just me.”

Participant 5 (woman, 39 yrs. news reporter). “I have never tried this before. It was a very special experience, sparked many emotions and thoughts. Fears, some sadness, joy. I was very conscious of trying to be receptive and allow myself to participate. This makes me think of human relations, communication, touch and how important it is and natural ... it is seldom that an unknown person looks into the eyes of another unknown person. It was difficult not to speak, unusual not being asked to explain. I felt like jumping from sadness and then all of a sudden, I was smiling. I was very conscious of the environment and wanted to be a part of the play. This was a not a play, and not totally real either.

Participant 6 (woman, 39 yrs., banker). This was totally out of the box. Like to explore a wonderland but very comfortable. Strange but great fun. Very spiffy, especially when the funny boy ran. I felt a little strange in the beginning with the touch but then I began to relax.”

What impact had the experience on each station on you?

The Boat Nest

P1 “I began immediately to enjoy, the smell, it felt like I was in the yoga.”

P2 “This felt great.”

P3 “I went to my own world and I felt strong closeness to nature.”

P4 “No comment.”

P5 “I felt really great there, and very relaxed.”

P6 “It was fascinating to lay in the boat.”

The Hut with The Fire

P1 “I asked myself ‘what is happening?’ There was also a very calm atmosphere and I felt very much connected to the Earth.”

P2 “This was a little embarrassing and I was shy, but I trusted the performer and was able to let go and allow myself to receive all.”

P3 “This was really weird and a bit uncomfortable. So, intimate, which was ok, but very unusual, I did not know this was possible.”

P4 “No comment.”

P5 “This was very uncomfortable and spooky. I expected a surprise and I felt that the being in there was somewhat sexual in its presence — unusual from a woman.”

The Truck with a Dark Container

P1 “Here I got scared. I held onto the robe and entered the container and I thought, O my God there is someone else in here. We were breathing in the same rhythm and she made me trust her.

P2 “I was really scared, the darkness and someone ... very uncomfortable I felt that I was feeling small hears on the face of the person. I felt this was an evil man like a boogie-man in a horror movie. I am usually not afraid of the dark.”

P3 Really scary — but also my favorite ... as it was so intimate because of the darkness. Really emotional, first scary and then feeling good.”

P4 “No comment.”

P5 “I was afraid and almost did not dare to enter. The performer said sssssuuuuu to invite me in.

The Boat with the Woman in White

P1 “Here something very beautiful happened. Fun surroundings and I was not concerned at all with the performer. She was like and elf.”

P2 "Very strange. It took me some time to understand, but then I began to play with my imagination. I felt very sad that the bird was not able to ..."

P3 "Really interesting story. The eye contact was very powerful. She was not acting. Just the story was real. Something magical about her."

The Joyful Red-Bearded Guy

P1 "It felt like meeting an old friend. I hugged him. He, like all the others pulled me in.

P2 "He was fun, I had a good time and ran. I was very happy."

P3 "That was funny, a comic relief. He was acting."

The Closed Boat Where You Where Alone

P1 "Missed this part."

P2 "I was breathing and I was afraid to enter as I was certain that someone would come. Then I laid down and relaxed and almost fell asleep. All the time I imagined myself to be alone, it is strange, as I was in a city — and all this was a set-up. I had a very strong sense of nature."

P3 "It was really nice to be alone for a while."

The Tent with The Sand and The Artist in Red

P1 "Here I felt that I really needed to trust the performer".

P2 "I was very calm and ready for anything — I just followed the lead of the performer".

P3 "We closed our eyes and I felt a bit out of my body — like fighting, like a relief to throw the sand."

The Last Station: The Hut with a View Over a Bay and Towards a Mountain

P3 "I just watched the beautiful landscape and read what was written on the walls. I felt small and I felt that the nature was big. Small part of a wondrous world."

What impact did the whole experience have on you?

P1 "I think it changed me, I do not think I will be the same. I got more introspective. I totally forgot myself. Could not have been any better. It was perfect. I felt great sense of peace and I was astonished how the performers were able to make their instant impression on me. I need to let go. I have not been able to do so before. I need to trust more. It is not embarrassing."

P2 "I felt my consciousness changed and it was an emotional roller-coaster, I felt afraid, happiness, I was laughing, irritated, very angry ... I felt a little embarrassed but all the performers were able to pull me into an adventure. Reality, could have happened, they were not acting. Now I feel very good. I am going to leave my past here and face my future ... the past does not matter, anything can happen tomorrow."

P3 "Now I am a bit confused, want to think about it all. I am both struggling and happy. Difficult past experiences came to me in the dark. The experience is therapeutic. It brings out emotions."

P4 No comment.

P5 I felt I was very much in the here and now, the further I went into the experience. The senses became more alive. It is difficult to define but it was all so good. The salt and the touching was very physical experience. Psychological to sit in front of another person. I had to trust and tolerate the intimacy. The whole journey was a spiritual experience. It was great to let go of the typical restrictions. I felt I was like staying with the breath similar to being in a meditation. I enjoyed more and more to walk between the different experiences."

Any message to the artists?

P1 "I am usually not very keen on artistic performances. This was not a play, and neither a reality. You forget about yourself."

P2 "No comment."

P3 "I don't know ..."

P4 "no comment."

P5 "I want to thank them, I will spread the good news. This was a very pure experience. I am much more open now to my surroundings."

Results 3: Interviews with the performers after the performance.

The Phoenix experience enables the participant to travel between artistic experience on his or her self. This enables the participant to experience both the subtleties of being alone and experience both inner sensations and external surroundings. The encounters with the performers.

The Phoenix experience is in many was a sacred or a magical encounter with the primordial. Participants describe that they feel danger that makes them fear, for instance when entering the Car with the container. There are also explorations with regards to intimacy, touch, masculinity and femininity. One essential function in the experiment is the timing, or rather the fact that the participant is not in charge of time. This creates an unconventional feel for time, pace and sense, and enables the participant to slow down and become more aware of what is happening and become more self-reflective. The participant is then enabled and gently encouraged to co-create an experience in safe space. The performance raises various questions regarding symbolic manifestations and their impact on the audience. It is an experiment in defining boundaries and borders in human encounters. It is also, especially from the performers point of view an experiment in how the creative gets somewhat charged/or discharging form one participants from another and also in the long run.

Ragnar (male, in his late 30ies, the funny red-bearded guy). "I tried to play both with the imagination and emotions. My aim was to let people realize more about their own emotions,

remind them of the fact that they have all kinds of emotions, help them to have more peace with their emotions. You need to stay in the role. My role is playing with laugh and joy. One man wanted to be in control and wanted to be more than me. It turned into a competition. He wanted to show me that he was the stronger one.”

Sarah (female, in her late 30ies, the woman in black in the hut with fire) “I try to approach and make the participant experience different kinds of energies than they usually experience in their everyday life. I try to encounter them from a deep point within myself and touch a deep point within them. Approach them with other conversational communication through their senses and put myself into the inner state of being. I use my inner energy to create an open space. Many participants drain you. Some give a lot and then I experience a lot of openness and readiness. I kind of put them into a more existential mode, but not through thinking, but through a more primordial way and through the senses, not through the head but through the heart. Once they leave they will probably think, but we are trying to work with the body. It sticks more that way.”

Sigrid (female, in her late 20ies, woman in white in the boat). “I am playing with the symbolic and reverie. I try to carve out some kind of a space that has awareness and that calls out a certain resonance; images, myths, and story. Something that is both universal and very particular. I am trying to search for this eternality. It is me, the story, the environment and the participants awareness that create the experience. I believe we are at the same time reaching both within and also far out by being deeply within. It is the poetry ties it all together, I become the bird, the grass, or whatever the participant associates with. I often feel a lot of thankfulness. It is fascinating being able to see people experience this. Sometimes it moves me, I get emotional and I even shiver. If I am not connected with the person I try a little harder. Then, if I am not getting through, I see it as a need to open up more, the search is my responsibility. Is it my insecurity speaking, I just have to trust? I have no idea what is going on in the other person, keep looking, keep being curious, and not expecting to receive anything. It is all about trust and a non-judgmental attitude. The only thing to project is trust. It can, however, also be a great experience, even when people cannot trust.””

Mette (female, in her start 40ies, woman in the orange tent) “I am very interested in the state of mind of the performer and the participant and also of the body awareness and how this can be contagious. I work with the deep roots and the sacred at the same time. The deep root is sensation of my spine continuing into the Earth and energy coming up, and I take that with me into the meeting with the participant. I listen to the other and try to be initiating, keeping my energies vivid and meet the other ... sometimes it works better than other times ... sometimes other things influence ... The reason for picking the harbor was, besides being a very beautiful place, to create an association with water, or as I write “a fluent state of mind, dissolving, widening, surrendering, melting ... because water heals what fire burned. Because water cleans us. Because it brings us into our unconscious. The sea was chosen because of the longing for the bigger view – something bigger in life. The Harbor - because it is the beginning or a part of a journey, a movement in our life. The ship – because of the openness, the possibilities of going anywhere in life.

The performers in general said that they can feel very different energies from the participant and they also pick up on their abilities with regards to body awareness and experimental participation. This shows in comment like:

“For instance, I felt yesterday, wow this this person must be a dancer.”

“One person had very aggressive energy and was very controlling I reined to follow. Can be inspiring. In such cases I need to check my intentions, be persistent, and consider how far can I go. I try to keep it open, permeable and present. However, if to permeable on needs to let the energy pass but be with them.”

This experience raised question with regards to boundaries that they performers say can change and vary from on participant to another.

“The boundaries depend on the connections, some give more, other not. It is, therefore, a question of trust and if there is a trust then it becomes a conversation. If there is a lack of respect and trust than non-verbal conversation is one way, kindly diverting is another.”

Results 4: Answers from an online survey sent out to participants 4 days after the performance.

The discussion will be broken into four subchapters, each discussing each of the dimension in the following sequence: The overall aim of the research was to try out a new framework for investigating the subjective human experience from four different angles: (1) the interpersonal dimension (the human environment), (2) the intrapersonal dimension (the experience of self), (3) the supra-personal dimension, and (4) the transpersonal dimension (the universal). The primary research questions aim is both to account for the experience as such and to answer the posed research question: Can this model be used to assess artistic experience?

QUESTIONS ON THE INTER-PERSONAL DIM

It is apparent that the participants associate well with being asked about the interpersonal aspect of the experience. It is obvious that the performer was all able to accomplish their aims: to have an impact on the participant. Overall this was a mission accomplished, even though it was not without ambiguity as can see in survey comments on the survey statement “**I felt deeply connected to the performer**” (Q1) the answers were along the following lines:

“I felt the funny guy demanded too much from me, like I had to pretend to be in a mood I was not so I would not hurt his feelings. I was feeling relaxed and at peace and I felt he demanded me to give more of myself than I was willing and to be in a different mood than I was.

“Each performer had a unique way to engage the audience through their own device, or use of the space.

“In the boat with the salt I connected more with the story than the performer.”

“Maybe part of it was a progression for me, becoming more comfortable as I understood better. I questioned myself and my actions too much in the hut and the black box. I engaged with the performers in the boatyard and the red tent.

In the hut, I didn't know what to expect. So, I was really nervous. In the car, I was little bit less

nervous. But after that I was able to relax and enjoy.

All of them drew me completely in to the experience, and it felt far more complex than a "performance." I felt like I was taking part in a major event of my life.

Along these lines were also comments regarding Q2 **"I felt appreciated by the performer"** where:

In all of the experiences I felt like the performers worked within what they felt was my comfort zone, not pushing but working around it and helping me along in the experience.

Maybe it was the amount of eye-contact, maybe the way they looked at me, but definitely believed myself recognized throughout the entire experience.

When asked about if they felt a **"deep sense of love and compassion coming from the performer"** (Q3) and if they felt **"something contagious was coming from the performers"** they responded:

"In the hut with the fire I felt very afraid of the performer."

"Maybe not a "deep" sense, but I could see that each performer was taking care of me and was genuine in caring how I was experiencing each moment.

"Most of all with the funny guy. The fact that he kept laughing made me want to make him laugh"

In the car, I gave the performer my worst fears and to the funny guy I gave my deepest joy.

Each performer was "spreading" their emotions and experience, putting their energy into the scene and making it accessible for me/participants to pick it up and reciprocate.

I don't know where these people came from, but they seemed to know something about life that reassured me in a way that I haven't felt since I was a child.

If it was anything, I felt a sense of joy. Not "happiness," exactly, because there was a recognition of sadness, of despair, of fear, and certainly of loneliness. Joy--I feel the word contains all of those things--is the only way I can sum it up. Also, maybe a respect for the richness and mystery of being trapped inside of mortality.

I didn't like the thing on my face in the tent. I thought it was gross.

In Q5/Q6 the survey participants were asked if they felt they were **"co-creating something meaningful with the performer"** and if they felt they **"gave the performer something"**.

"That's particularly true in the more interactive pieces (funny guy, red tent) where the interaction relied more on an exchange."

"Box, boat yard, and red tent - I felt like I would get out of the experience as much as I put in, and that together with the performer we could create something larger. In the hut, I was still thinking too much and put a distance between the performer and myself. In the boat with the salt, I took a step back and became observer, not participant."

"Especially in the red tent and with "the funny guy." The other three experiences felt more like I was being prepared for the creation that I then participated in."

"I was following, not creating."

"In the car, I gave the performer my worst fears and to the funny guy I gave my deepest joy."

"That's particularly true in the more interactive pieces (funny guy, red tent) where the interaction relied more on an exchange."

Box — trust. Boat — attention. Boat yard - playfulness and openness. Tent - connection, myself. In the hut — I was waiting to understand; still closed.

"Again, because I felt so strongly accepted by each of the performers, I couldn't help but become vulnerable with them. It didn't matter that I knew they were actors, or that I knew they did the same thing with the people before me and the people after me. During my experience, it was unique and so goddamn human. How could I not give something when I so much was being laid out before me?"

"By going along. I just didn't like the salt lady that much because I felt like I had to do something and I didn't get it. I also didn't feel like talking."

QUESTIONS ON INTRA-PERSONAL DIMENSION

The approach to ask specifically about the intrapersonal aspect of the phoenix experience was also well received by the participants who replied to the survey. Question 7 asked if the experience got the participant "really in touch" with him/her self. Overall participant said that the experience had done this. The comments were as follows:

"This work allowed me to engage and exchange in a unique way."

"I felt deeply for the world and myself in it I felt both happy and extremely sad I cried I felt the bird I was the bird and the world Yes, because I fell beauty intensely."

"The sound track brought a new awareness but also allowed me to subtract myself from the world. The aftermath brought me a sense of introspection. Being called upon to improvise in a dance piece was a good way to get in touch with my body. The work touches upon a wide range of emotions. The impact was more emotional than physical for me. I did, but each experience brought different feelings, so there's no time to process or let an emotion linger. Doubt, joy, sadness, elation, curiosity... It's been very inspiring"

"I had to confront my fear of absolute darkness and my fear of heights and I came out feeling much calmer from remembering that I was safe. During some of the performances I felt very strong things, but I am a strong feeler to begin with, I am very sensitive, so this was."

"Again, in the physical sense of confronting my basic fears. So much."

"My inner life and outside worries were nonexistent. I felt very present within the immediate experience of the performance."

"Sometimes, like when looking for where to go next. I passed by a boat with a 'for sale' sign and thought about buying it (I wish.) I didn't think about my feelings, I just felt them."

"I instinctually attributed certain symbolism or metaphor to some of the experiences, like the lights on the plastic wires in the boat with a bed. I imagined that is how it looks inside my brain. Didn't think about it."

"It made me stop to be aware of myself, what I like and don't and gave me time to dig a bit deeper than usual."

"I was able to let go of hesitations and take chances."

"I often find myself disconnected with the people around me, unable to remember that they have interiors that I am unable to fathom. This experiment--as you call it--brought forward both the inward lives of others and the visibility of my own inward life. I mean, I was reminded that others could see me, and that they could hold me in ways I am not always willing to accept."

"I was expecting something like this and I loved it. So, I felt kind of just very good."

"I did, but it could have been the relaxation heightened by a hangover ;)"

"Even though Phoenix was highly emotional for me, I still felt solidly within my body. I suspect this is due to wandering through the port and the fields and running between dry-docked boats. But it also had to do with the physical contact I had with the performers. Maybe it comes from being an American, but physical contact is not something I experience on a day-to-day basis, and certainly not in such a gentle and loving manner. The touch I received was comforting, accepting, and made me feel surrounded by people who deeply loved me."

"I felt more relaxed"

"Specifically, in being able to look at the ways in which I often seal myself off from those around me, and how I don't often take a frank look at my own loneliness, my own fear of dying, my own straining towards a perpetually vanishing childhood when everything around me was simple and the world rested on the impossibly broad shoulders of adults."

"No different than otherwise."

Comment on question (Q7) on if the experience **had enabled participants to pay attention to their body, inner life, their thoughts and feelings** — and if they **felt emotional** where these:

"Whereas an emotional experience of this sort will usually take place when my body is not concerned (in a dark movie theater, reading a book, etc.), the constant walking and the physical touch rooted me within my physical being."

"How could I not? All the thoughts and emotions surging through me made my "inner life" resonate and scream."

"I think that maybe I think too much sometimes. During Phoenix, I tried to let my thoughts go in favor of something else. Or maybe my thoughts were wrenched from me. Instead, I felt. Later, when the event was over, I could think about it, but while it was going on I just wanted to be there, feeling, living, being taken places I'd never gone before."

"There was no other way."

"The experience touched me. It brought me face to face with things I haven't looked at in a while, some things that I've never looked at with another person present."

The last part of Question 7 asked if the experiment had **"sparked" the "imagination" and "touched the soul"**:

"I consider myself a creator (I write, and sometimes people pay me for it!), and the nourishment that I received from Phoenix is impossible to calculate."

"I felt that my soul was touched in the experiment."

"Soul?"

"Absolutely. I feel like I've probably already given enough information to answer this question."

"That's too much of dolphins for me, touching souls is something religious."

QUESTIONS ON SUPRA-HUMAN DIMENSION (NON-HUMAN ENVIRONMENT)

Question 8 asked about the **perception and impact of the non-human environment** in the Phoenix performance. The comments were:

"Being new to the city, it was a great way to discover a rare part of Reykjavik."

"Things were very much framed in a specific way. The soundtrack prevented from connecting with the sound, though I do remember the sound of birds. I did in the fire hut. It didn't feel like much of an exploration, because the path is very determined."

"Everything became so interesting I have been there many times but paid attention to different things now. I followed the birds."

"I looked at the surroundings differently than if it were just any other day. I was really congested. Being surrounded by boats and industry kept me in touch with humanity. I really liked that area. I'd never been there before and it was very cool."

"Reykjavik already is otherworldly, and being at a harbor, surrounded by ships and small boats made it all the more fantastic. Also, the juxtaposition of concrete and tall grass, the built environment with the natural one, was striking and, I think, reflected well the duality of my physical and psychological investment with the experience."

"I really liked the environment. I had never been there before and liked "discovering" a new place in Reykjavik that I can imagine coming to again, alone or with friends and family."

"Especially because my audio did not work for 75% of the experience."

"Enjoyed the walk, the birds, the surroundings."

"Human connection, urban landscapes, abandoned vehicles, darkness, salt, dirt. Everything felt infused with magic, and nothing felt dangerous or unacceptable. Having my feet covered in soil (or was it ash?), for instance. Usually, I don't like to be "dirty," but Phoenix took me beyond that."

"Taking the time to really be in a setting, not going anywhere special. just being."

"I really liked the sounds in the headphones and how it mixed with the environment".

"Part of it was the soundtrack (which piped in natural sounds of wind and rustling grasses), and part of it were the moments when the audio track cut out, and I was left with the sound of me feet tamping down reeds and twigs, crunching over gravel, and causing boards to creak."

"I loved the soundscape, didn't get anything of the story though."

"I paid attention to the smell of the non-human environment."

"I loved how smell was used in the experience: rubber, fish nets, canvas, etc."

"Loved the smell in the first little boat!"

"I felt that I was exploring the non-human environment."

"Especially with such limited contact with other humans."

"I haven't felt that far down the rabbit hole since I was 10 years old."

"You take a differed path than you would have chosen yourself."

"I felt connected to the non-human environment."

"I was at ease with the non-human environment."

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SACRED

The participants struggled somewhat with the questions framed in the context if the sacred and sublime, such as can be seen in answers to **Q9: In the experiment, I felt I got in touch with something sublime/sacred?**

On participant strongly disagreed with all the questions in this section, beside the one on love and compassion where s/he strongly agreed.

"I wouldn't go as far as saying I had a spiritual experience in the sense of sublime/sacred, but I did have an intense human experience. It could have been a lot darker. A sense of spontaneity."

"The experience provided the opportunity to come away from regular life, come away from myself, and explore deeper within myself and within new territories."

"I was expecting this, so I was just loving it! Does it have to be sublime? Or sacred? Or soul-touching? Can't it just be wonderful? It was immensely soothing."

"The story of the phoenix touched me intensely."

"I think that the experiment in the tent was a part of that. There I wandered if the meaning was to get in touch with the earth, that we all unite with the earth someday (hope this makes sense)."

When asked if the participants had encountered something dark within, they relied:

"I felt bad for disliking the funny guy :/ "

"In the van, I really had to cross my fears... I'm not really afraid of the dark, but the moment I realized that there was someone in there was not pleasant."

"Not so much dark as complete. I encountered my fears on death and emptiness, but I simultaneously encountered compassion and understanding. At no point did I feel overwhelmed by the darkness."

"Could have been much darker."

"Inside the car there was a fear that changed into a peaceful tension kind of thing."

"NO usually I have loads of stones in my mind, but here I felt and saw air and life".

Along these lines when asked if they had faced with something demonic, they replied:

"The performers prevented this from ever becoming a factor. The "demons" that were raised from within me were held and soothed."

"NO, I only saw light shades."

Further along existential lines the answers where:

"Trusting, taking and giving"

"Fear of death and dying; fear of loneliness; the feeling that none of this (my life, or anyone's life) means anything or has a purpose beyond furthering the petty gains of Capitalism."

"I am a very open person with close connection with feelings. This rather nourished them."

"I was able to explore deep within myself, but I dislike the use of the word "soul."

"I was surprised to discover how this affected me as a person. It made me think about my values and priorities in life."

Regarding **feeling oneness with all, harmony, beauty, love and compassion:**

"I felt oneness with all."

"I definitely felt a connection to the environment and those beings and things that encountered within the experience."

"I don't really even know what this concept means. To me, the idea of "oneness with all" seems like lazy universalism, which has been used over and over again to justify (or at least pacify those who have experienced) disenfranchisement, colonialism, and exploitation. What I felt was the potential for the human experience to contain, via openness and interpersonal vulnerability, its own antidote for feelings of despair and futility. However, part of me wonders if these antidotes only exist on the existential level and therefore an experience such as I had with Phoenix is only the first step in a larger path; one where I take what I learned or felt and bring it to bear on my engagement in class struggle."

"I felt that everyone gave their best with me. I felt that I was the only one that mattered and therefore I felt oneness with them. Which came as a surprise to me because I would never have guessed that I could let "myself go" in that way."

"[I felt oneness] with the air the water the fire and the earth."

"I felt that I was the one that mattered and we were making something special together."

Discussion and CONCLUSION

As can be seen from above, the Phoenix Experiment of Wunderland and the Reykjavik Art Festival 2016 was able to touch and influence the receptive audience at many levels; if the participant engaged and was willing and able to go with the flow it the experience was struck deep. If the participant was not willing or able to open up to the experience, it could give him/her the opportunity to explore inner restrictions and blocks. It is true, that an experiment like this is not necessarily suited for all. I believe, however, knowing the level of artists' integrity in the contribution to simultaneously challenge and nourish the audience, that it should suit all; meaning that all hesitations, fears, and resistance in the participant might point to internal issues worth exploring. Put in perspective, why the fear of the earth, the archaic and a safe dark figure (the hut with the fire), why the fear of darkness and mutual breathing (the truck)

why the fear fun (the joyful read bearded guy), why fearing looking in the eyes and listening to a story (the boat and woman in white), and why fearing playful dancing (red tent)? Should this not be at least fine, ok, bearably, fun, even a breath-taking or amazing for a psychologically healthy.

In my own town experience of the Phoenix Project I felt that the brief encounters in the small wonder-worlds created in the experiment opened me up to the meaning and beauty of the life and the world at large. Something of a similar experience was shared with other people who took part in the . of the participants in the Phoenix Experience said when asked to recall her experience of the Phoenix Experiment:

“My most favorite memory is the sentence: I am going back to where I came from but I am not the same. I was certainly not the same after this experience, only better”.

This statement sums up the core of the Phoenix artistic experiment. The questions that Mette Aakjer set out to answer were:

- How can artistic experience be made as to enable the participant (audience) face his/her personal fears (or in other terms to meet his/her shadow)?
- How to make an artistic experience that makes the participants feel truly alert and alive?
- What kind of challenges and opportunities does this raise for further development of the experiment?

The short answer to these questions is: By continuing with experimenting with artistic investigations like the Phoenix Project and use them to expand and explore and depths of the human condition.

This report described the Phoenix project, the method used to learn from it, **results** from interviews with artists and participants as well as from an online survey that was sent out to participants few days after they had gone through the experiment, a discussion and the main conclusions. The main findings are that the Phoenix experience had a significant to a profound impact on participants' self-experience on all the four different dimensions of human experience under investigation (1) the interpersonal dimension (the human environment), (2) the intrapersonal dimension (the experience of self), (3) the supra-personal dimension (the experience of non-human phenomena), and (4) the transpersonal dimension (the universal/existential). The study also indicated that a framework based on these four different, however, inter-related dimension is well suited as to study the artistic experience.

THANKS