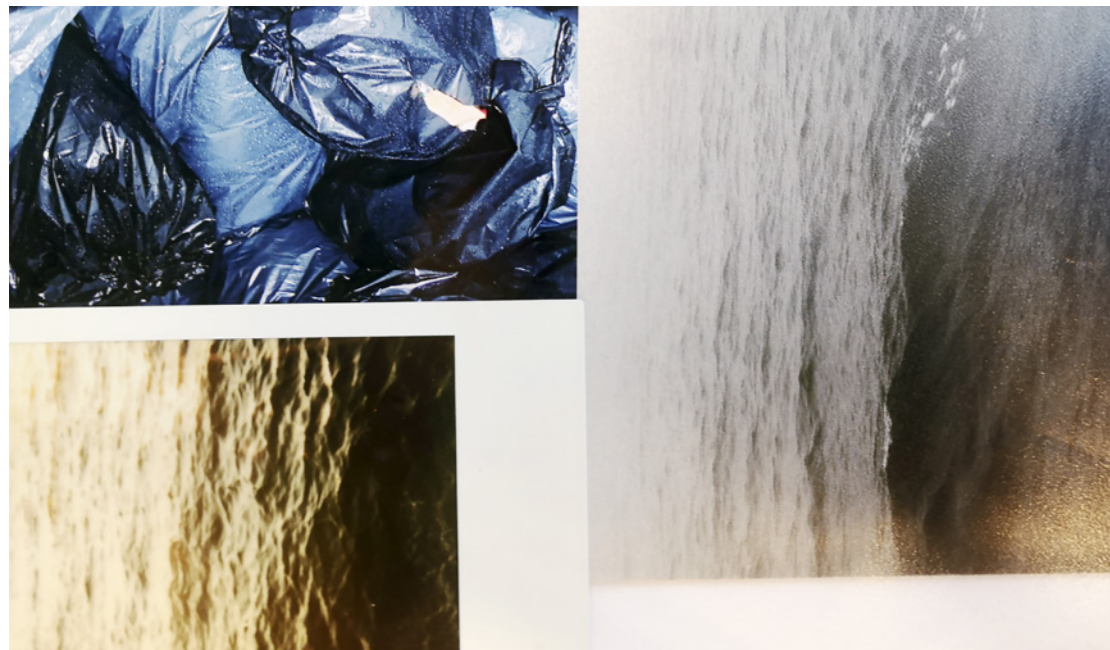


To be Continued — Writing With Water

An odyssey



More than half of your body consists of water. From the softness of your eyes, lubricated by each blink you make, to the tenderness of your fingertips turning each page. It is a molecular fact, a material fact. It is one, or maybe the reason why we are alive. Water is still puzzling today's scientists; it is one of the most peculiar substances found on earth, swiftly changing shape and state, still so common, inside and outside of us.

We are all bodies of water

These are the words of phenomenologist and gender scholar Astrida Neimanis, pointing to how we as human beings are interconnected as liquid entities to the oceans around us. To the water we drink, to the water we pollute, from the water surrounding the islands of Stockholm to the heavy monsoon rains in India, from the Missouri river to the ice cubes in your latest cocktail. Through waters' circulation across bodies, species, lands and materialities, everything is connected. 'To be Continued' places both you, the reader, and me Pontus, the writer, somewhere on a line, not as a beginning (nor end).

Water is a conduit and mode of connection

Water has always been present in my artistic and choreographic work. One could even argue that water is the main maker of my work, the master architect – changing the perspective, what if we want to rethink our human conditions, not as one solid entity, but as many; bacteria, language, genealogy etc, all makes me, thus makes me move?

Complex and shared cycles

My interest in water as a choreographic material and concept began in 2018, starting with an invitation by British curator Hannah Zafiropoulos, where I was asked to give a performative answer to Russian Marxist and feminist Alexandra Kollontai and her ideas of love. Through that process, Hannah and I ended up in the text "Hydrofeminism; Or, becoming a body of water" by Astrida Neimanis. From this text I started working on a water practice as well as the choreographic installation that would be shown in the Spanish artist's Dora Garcia's exhibition *RED LOVE* at Tensta konsthall in the spring of 2018. I created the choreographic installation "Bodies of Water", consisting of a group of 9, both non-dancers and professionals. The choreography lasted for 3 hours in a kind of loop where each new bullet of choreography was influenced by the previous, while the dancers were simultaneously practicing becoming water. Doing "The Water practice" – a practice meant to create choreographic openings and give up one's own directives for movements (so perhaps the water inside our bodies would take over) or through performative and physical attributes, emphasize watery qualities. Through this embodiment a different kind of relationality could emerge.

Water aphorisms, how to use: choose an aphorism of your liking, or whichever speaks to you at this moment. Cut the aphorisms out from the paper, wrap around your wrist and secure it with a piece of tape. Wear until it falls off. For exact origin, please get in contact.

Thinking with matter

Through the work of "Bodies of Water" and "The Water Practice," it became clear, water has been there all along. You find it in the meaning of my name, Pontus (pontus) meaning the sea in ancient Greek. All the different fountains I have made. Watery words in my poetry and liquid instructions in my scores (choreographic instructions). Thus creating a larger frame of reference and embodiedments, the research project "All Departures Are Waves" emerged.

"All Departures Are Waves" is a choreographic research project that brings forward the material, ecological, performative, political, economic, poetical, and ethical qualities that water can entail, as a material fact. How the water inside and outside of our bodies choreographs our movement, and have since the beginning of time. When we (humans) are more or less made of 70% water, what would happen if we let this molecular majority have agency out of our movement? How is this mysterious substance, in so many ways, a locus for movement, yet present and cleverly hidden in us. Tales hidden in our blood, sweat and tears.

In this larger piece of work Swedish choreographer and artist Pontus Pettersson wants to exercise a becoming, a moving thinking, (try and understand), or; rethinking/rebuilding the world, and our contribution to it. In relation to ethics and politics, as beings, socially and economically water is also in us. This becomes the grounds for the becoming body, the water body. Pontus and his invited collaborators have to relate, somehow. To the Amazons, to rain dances, to tears, to the Mediterranean Sea – to put oneself into the concept, the research, the choreography, not outside. To submerge. To dance?

From potentiality to actuality

What happens when you have these more general and larger themes in your work like I do, cats, poetry, eggs, water etc.? The work becomes more permeable (it seems). There is an opening, or a door one can enter. Take the "cat door," or take the "water door" by all means. The dramaturgy (organization) makes the work more accessible and gives it a compelling invitation. It allows for a numerous amount of information to flow my way, and becomes a platform for discourse and exchange in many layers, and departing from different kinds of experiences and histories. Within these transactions' choreography happens, and becomes the language I use; Sail the 'sees', if you want.

You cannot step into the same river twice

"All Departures Are Waves" has six sub-projects, where my ambition is to create a base of imperatives, questions and statements. When you look at the vast area of water and where to find it, geographically, in art, in the body, in science, in culture etc, it becomes drowning. With rapid speed it bleeds and leaks (this is of course one quality I am interested in). When I try to articulate the different aspects, I however have to establish some lines, some kind of difference between the things I am witnessing. The original five different sub-projects are called "Hydra", "Bodies of Water", "OMNI", "SS20", and "Delta". Recently I initiated a sixth one, "Writing With Water", which you are now a part of. These projects are thought of, and practiced as containers for research, where different projects will create different narratives and insight into the multiple and complex thing(s) that is water. The projects are not necessarily made to answer, but perhaps contain answers.

You are because of others

In November 2015, I was working as a dancer on tour with the piece "Seven Pleasures" by Danish choreographer Mette Ingvarsten. Entering the city of Paris I found myself and my colleagues in the aftermath of what is now known as the Paris attacks, just one day after the attack. The city was in severe distress and this left a profound mark in me. It has made me question my actions. But foremost it has made me consider lived experience as knowledge, very different from the knowledge we can achieve through reading the news, or seeing something on screens. I believe it is even differently located in the brain.

This has made me believe that it is through the living (water as life) that we have to search. Our lived experience dictates our choices, therefore creates the grounds for our thinking, and maybe even empathy. If we want to understand concepts and other ways of living, we must follow these lines, and not observe them from a distance. Here artistic research and dance draw a line once again regarding the question of life, and the conditions of a bearable life (Butler). It also points to artistic research not as a unifying truth (universality) but as a document of singularities.

The source is never an end.

What if the water in me is the same water as in you?

There is never a neutral space. Every space contains something, it might belong to someone, a person, an idea, purpose, an institution etc. Humans are conditioned and choreographed, we uphold social codes and behaviors.

I use the concept of hospitality in relation to life and what movement is possible, because it puts choreography and dance in the crack between life and art. I want to emphasize the work I have done as the experience from which I can talk, walk, swim, flow, and float, but also as the imperative stand I want to take in this research. The personal is both political and potential (not to be misled by individualism). Water doesn't only connect us in beauty and utopian ideals, it also connects us in pollution and deforestation, in colonialism and white supremacy.

Watering this experience

Since a few years back I have worked with the idea that hospitality is a key concept in choreography for dance to emerge. I'm excited to understand and work with the idea of how to share and make spaces together, in art and in life. If water can be seen as shared material, as a thing that is part of us and also governs us in life, how can we govern the furthering of life? This becomes part of a bigger scope, understanding ethics, politics and sustainable futures.

What is closer than your own skin?

With almost all my work, I am the host of the event. I might be the maker of the dance, or the circumstances for a dance to come. Live art is part of, and creates temporal spaces that not only redirect the concepts of hospitality itself but also reinforce the dilemmas of the "Derridean" concept of hospitality. Scores and practice-based choreographies have been a way for me to be able to invite other people into my world and the dances I desire. It is not necessary that I choreograph set material on dancers. Rather I choose to develop concepts and practices together with the people I work with. It seems to me that the bodies become more three-dimensional and closer to their core (singularity), where singularities are heard/felt, thus closer to life (ecology?). If it is by the lived experience that we make choices, and the current world has organized us to be separate and segregate, I want to understand dance as a sign of both singularities and multitudes of joy and creations. But can dance be the sign of both water as carrier of life (hydrofeminism) and the specific spatial dimensions where we find the means of hospitality? No ownership? – The full blast of Buddha, full circle, back to some kind of communism (Alexandra Kollontai would agree?).

An irritation: A pearl-making activity

This puts choreography in the proximity of ecology not necessarily as a study of nature as something we have “left,” but as a study of relations. I believe that in what happens in any social space, there is a tone, a culture, the ways people talk, think and act; a continuous movement of entanglement (Barad). By putting myself in a different space, my actions and thinking would slowly alter and clutch onto new surfaces. Me as a singular being unfolds and expands differently depending on context. How I commit and make myself permeable to this space, with all its knowledge, desires and histories, is a choreographic practice.

I see I sea I eye I si I sea

As mythological and material, spiritual and bodily – water moves through difference. It asks of us to submerge into the queer, the unknown, as the sign of dance, as that emerging and disappearing act, dance is definitely liquid. How does one write if both pen and paper are liquid?

Wear your coat of many colors

“The Water Practice” is a physical practice made simply to become water, or let water have its way with you. What would happen if we let this 70% of our bodies that constitute us, that is actually water, and therefore in majority one could argue, what would happen if we give full mandate over our movement (body)? Yet also, the same water in me, is the same water in you. Through this embodiment or becoming (dance?), a different kind of relationality and sociality could emerge.

Being the material and the mediator

“The Water Practice” / “Hydrologics”

In “The Water Practice” I use what I have called “Hydrologics” (water aphorisms) as means to become water. By inhabiting, embodying the short directives (language makes bodies) that these aphorisms offer, I try to let it move me into an aqueous embodiment. Derived from texts by Astrida Neimanis, Sara Ahmed, Rosi Braidotti, and Fred Moten, as well as from Herakleitos’ ever-changing river, the African concept of Ubuntu, and more common quotes where water plays a metaphoric role. These aphorisms govern and guide not only my water practice, but also the entire research of “All Departures Are Waves”. They are sometimes direct quotations, sometimes bastardizations or mutated versions, as well as my own writing. In this text you have already read them as passages between my writing. I encourage you to use them:

Water aphorisms, how to use: choose an aphorism of your liking, or whichever speaks to you at this moment. Cut out the aphorism, wrap it around your wrist and secure it with a piece of tape. Wear it until it falls off.

Flow indiscriminately

Water has strong cohesive qualities, the molecules tend to stick to each other. This is the explanation of water surface tension as well as the capillary systems found in plants and trees, and in our own bloodstreams. Water as mass, as a Deleuzian understanding of singularity and multiplicity emerges. My interest is to proliferate (dilute) to entangle (omni-present), align (follow) to be questioned (speculative) and further develop (life bearing) into something else than the structure (male, white etc.) that the world has given me, as I am intrigued by Hydrofeminism I also see it as a calling, and as a utopian ideal, a star from which I navigate on open waters?

Our bodies take the shape of the contact they have with others

Before I started working on Hydrofeminism and water, I had already a hang-up on fountains. Because not only do they create sites for listening and tranquility, they are also places for lovers, for casting spells and dreams. Fountains are portals.

Keeping with the problem is to be entangled

When I graduated from at Konstfack I made the fountain “Axels tårar”. I was given the space, which was then still referred to as “The White Sea” (Vita Havet). (*The name of this space The White Sea/Vita Havet became a main focus of discussion, as it was later to create a stormy public debate in Sweden about white privilege and institutional racism, inside and outside of Swedish art schools*). The space already had an established choreography, i.e., exhibiting students’ work. The many layers of choreography (movements of desire, education, needs, necessity, everyday life etc.) makes the space also a transitional space.

“Axels tårar” aimed at being both a choreographic work and at the same time displaying the objects I had been making during my education. It was set in three unofficial installation acts, the opening being the third act and exhibition period being the results of these acts. I installed the objects during night-time so that students, teachers and guests were greeted every morning with a ‘new’ exhibition.

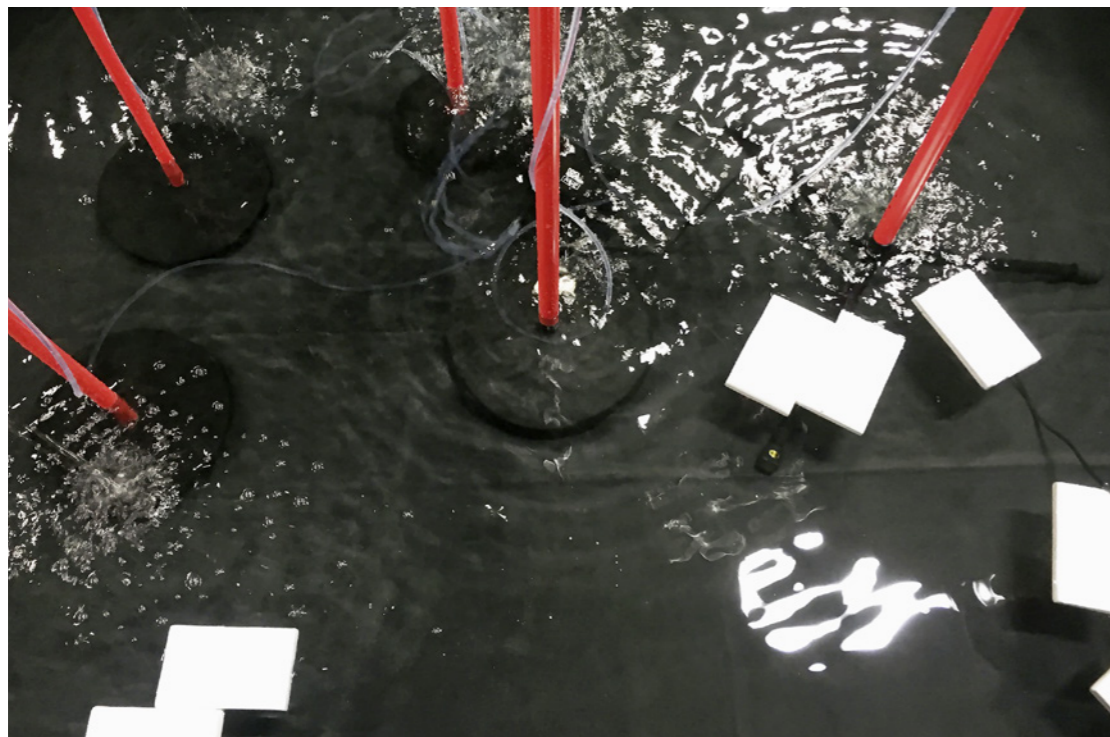
Embodied & Embedded

“Axels tårar” begun in 2017 when I was working in the school during summer break and noticed that they were rebuilding the cafeteria (which is just next to the space where I was to show the exhibition a few months later). But they were not only rebuilding the cafeteria into a fancy ‘green and healthy’ lunch restaurant, they had also taken down the large cloud-ish looking installation/sculpture that used to be situated on one of the pillars of the cafe. I was quite shocked to see that, since the installation for many was a symbol of Konstfack.

The half ball shaped objects made out of plaster had been taken apart and were laying in a dumpster. It was clear to me that I had to use them in some way, and that this action could not be left without some kind of comment. I found out that the installation was made as a degree project by interior architect student Axel Kårfors and that it was titled “Stucco Boom”.

I used the half balls and made them into ‘flower eyes.’ From the eyes water was led to drip and flow, as if they were crying. In the pool of the fountain, nine large chewing gum looking objects were floating around. On the backside, glass was glued to make small pocket-sized whiteboards, on which the guests were invited to write notes, poems, and wishes, and then to put them back in the pool.

Draw upon our own bodies as a well



Remain in the break

Through consciously choreographing our daily patterns, or/and swiftly changing our point of departure, we can create new possibilities of input and through that also create new patterning of thought.

Unfolding both backwards and forwards, changing the possibilities of change, thinking with matter, thinking with and through water. As water we are never thinking alone. (Please, remain open, attentive, and curious).

Find another relationship to nature. What are you giving back? With every gift what is the action returned? The body is multiple, maybe our mind can only comprehend one site at the time. But what moves under the water and in the approaching clouds?

This text is a bastard

Delta . . .

Delta is a coming together . . .

Delta is passionate about choreography as a tool and expression to navigate this world

Delta is a publication . . .

Delta is an assemblage of a temporal sort . . .

Delta organizes through liquid ways, becoming waves

Delta is an exit and entry, an ocean call . . .

“Delta” is the continuation of “Poetic Procedures” from 2016. The project borrowed the frame of an evening dance class for social meetings and as a space to share choreographic inquiries and procedures. So far, I and co-curator Izabella Borzecka have produced six different gatherings and zines, where we have invited different choreographers and artists to share their practices. For the class/occasion anyone can come, with or without professional dance training. Then corona came and we changed our format. We wanted to create a bigger zine or publication, and from that create further occasions and classes, inviting artists to relate and answer to the publication itself. Delta – An Ocean Call was created.

Amor fati

Choreography has for the last ten or maybe even twenty years moved into formats one might not first think of as dance. There has been a movement of separation – dance & choreography into what now is maybe a leaning towards each other again. Myself and many others have been busy with the theory, practice and politics which choreography is given if one looks outside of the institutions of dance. Such lingering has produced the term “expanded choreography,” where this text is as much choreography as your reading of it – how you sit, cross legged or not, the production of the tea you drink, and the journey it took on sea to end up in your local food-store and later in your cup.

Webs of physical intimacy and fluid exchange

Delta (Swedish verb): to participate.

Delta (phenomenon): lowlands and islands, occurring at or outside the mouth of some rivers, so-called river deltas.

Delta: a collection for choreographic and performative work to be shared and exercised. A platform and publication for participating projects, dance, knowledge exchange and choreographic inquiries.

Delta: the fourth letter in the Greek alphabet, meaning “change” in mathematics.

Ethics has to do with creative becomings

Where are we now? From this point in time (and space) after years of futile globalism, as well as the neo-liberal market (universalism) we are slowly moving away from the dualistic doctrine of the individual versus the collective, a seemingly decentralizing activity in which you might see the beginning of what Astrida calls Hydrofeminism.

If we think of ourselves as embedded in everything, then everything is connected. Your four limbs can no longer be called four or limbs. It is no longer about what you can call yours. It is more about distance and time. At this moment, what is closer? Maybe we begin there.

A nature-culture continuum

The Canadian process philosopher Brian Massumi introduced the idea of the nature-culture continuum in 2002. To provoke us to move away from the human/nature divide. With this claim he wants us to think about ourselves as moving, sensing beings within a surrounding nature directly present as flowing matter-flux. Later and/or before, among many others the term "Posthuman" appeared. One can also see the line where Hydrofeminism joins, as humans are merely regarded as one form of life among many (in the sense of besides, below, or with others), and human action is embedded in relationship to further modes of agency.

Provide the conditions for an unpredictable plurality to flourish

What lives through generations always has a life of its own, if that is trauma, wealth or poverty, it is not yours to wield or survive on your own. With age, I can see both the past and the future a bit more clearly. Clearly my parents will have a different point of view than me, as well as my brother's kids will have when they reach my current age. Not from an ideological point of view but from a material based one. This is such a decisive matter, language fails to order this in the same line, it is impossible. What is made, makes us. We are utterly material.

Water as the medium of material sociality par excellence

Since the beginning of the pandemic, I started gardening. A slow and caring activity where activity where I cannot be the master of events. I simply have to wait, and care, slightly pushing things in different directions. I am not center stage. Choreography can be seen as a study of movement, implying that it can never be alone. One movement is both the witness of and the movement itself.

MORE and LESS than ONE

Alexandra Kollontai claimed that for Marxism to really work, to unite all, it had to be practiced at all levels of society: family, friends, lovers etc. Through the making of "The Water Practice" a dance started to emerge. It was not intended as a dance, but looked very dancy. Maybe to no surprise, water and dance does seem kindred. "The water in me is the same water as in you". Water could be both a communal source of movement, and the

disappearance of individualism (not the individual).

Digging my hand down in the dirt, staying there long enough for my fingers to become roots.

Close your eyes. Breath. This is your Ocean call

Breath is central to dance, not as a technique to master (we simply cannot), but maybe to understand your state of mind and to influence (?). We know that the human brain still operates on mechanisms dating back maybe even before we stood on two legs. What happens when we go into flight or fight mode is that we lose many other capacities, I believe one of them is dance. This does not say that we cannot be influenced by stress (stage-fright and the release of it), which can be a full enactment of dance. We can choreograph, create, make situations more dire for dance, rather than dissolve any digge into a flat long line without momentum or groove.

Go water go

I have had the great honor to work for some of the most iconic choreographers of contemporary dance such as Deborah Hay and Ohad Naharin, and both stress this point in dance. "Lighten up baby!" (Deborah) and "Enjoy your dancing, connect to your pleasure and will to move", "find the ability to laugh at yourself" (Ohad) – this is brain making, brain making space for dance. Could we think of the hospitality of dance?

Water is never equally returned

In "Poetic Procedures" in 2016 I was working with poetry and how dance and choreography have similar ways of being in the world. This also included the connective tissue as the organ I wanted to use for the physical investigations and activations. As a fairly new discovery, at least in most of western medicine, the connective tissue has been disregarded as without purpose, but today scientists know much more.

All responsible witnessing engages a poetic experience of language

"Poetic Procedures" was both a community project and a safe place for healing. Thus the connective tissue was an important organ to be with, as some practitioners claim it has the properties needed for us to heal. I found an interesting resemblance in Gaga (the movement language of Ohad Naharin) and Butoh dance. In both the body works as one (not as separate body parts) and simultaneously as a listening apparatus. Connective tissue does not only make the body connect, but when engaging with and through it, the experience of limbs alters as well as of time and resilience. Here the connective tissue makes the link to both Hydrofeminism and objects. Through the connective tissue it seems that the body's ability to register the objects becomes almost "being the object". I am interested in language and the performative since language has the power to move us and to give us access to other terrains. When a word or a terminology doesn't exist, as was the case with connective tissue, we find ourselves in dissolution and are incapable of any articulation. Could our bodies' possibilities to selfheal have been neglected just because of the lack of a word(s)? As all my queer siblings know, language is power.

We study our seaborne variance

As I am continuously writing, becoming, one, some/several with this text, I am constantly shifting my inner gaze to follow and accommodate the moment already active. I find, *finding out* is part of the process.

As this is as much me to you, as

m to e

and t to o

not to forget y to o, together with o to u

I am a singular, dynamic whorl dissolving in a complex, fluid circulation

OMNI

OMNI is the singularity that is me in the research.

OMNI it is the solo version of the work, a singularity.

“OMNI” as in everything, as an anagram for MNIO, “My Name Is Ocean” (my homepage). It is also the recurring phrase with which I built the whole rhyming structure of the performance lecture “MOPA – I disappear in darkness”, in 2013:

“Hello. My name is Pontus, it means the sea. I see, I saw, I saw a sea, I saw this, made this, so let me reformulate, to re-figurate, sea also known as ocean, I’ll smooth your gaze like lotion... I’ll put your heart beat in another motion. Emotions, circulating the old towers of MOPA preparing for battle. The first project with six solos was made and now down to settle. This is the start of the second part, MOPA – I disappear in darkness... My bones and bruises, sailing off in multiple cruises. Yes, I said it, my name is ocean, dip your toe in me, your reflection on lucid waves, skipping a heartbeat and this week sales....”

“OMNI” is thought of as the digital/fleshy body of knowledge that formulates the research. As a white male identified subject, it is paramount I do not only consider the position and privilege, the progress and result of this study in relation to feminist discourse but also in relation to decolonizing perspectives. Even if my work in many ways has been busy with grief and care, my image is yet to be resolved (can it ever?). Here I find the speculative and futuristic aspect of water a good ally to my own development as a person which is the interconnectedness water has, and does to us. Separations and distinctions in itself are perspectives I have to deal with. To undo the injustice marked also in my body, as well as the bigger picture, the sea, to see. An arching common that could be the first waves of the waterbody I am to become? OMNI will lead us to a male figure, yet, like wet paint it moves with gravity, becoming material, far from an image. At night, when the shadows dance in the absence of the sun – sounds like vibrations, a wavy sphere is created from which the calling of the ocean is imagined, conjuring the past to move forward.

Water as facilitating bodies into being

Endurance, I want to write about endurance. Maybe it is about the sensing, a tantric being in the world, as to choreograph time, we change our perspective and welcome death, but not today.

Faith holds the key to the act of speech itself

Doing the water practice I am methodically de-centralizing my body, becoming more liquid, softer in tension and faster in speed. My neurological pathway alters into a navigational system that seems to be activating a gravitational listening as well as my sense of energy and the care of it, (caring as acknowledging). I find myself busy with vibrations which become healing. Tapping into my mirror neurons gives me joy, which in itself enlarges my vision and wish to communicate. I am alive.



To be continued...