Tim Burke: Do you have other sort of fancies that you permit yourself occasionally? Or other people in theater or in performance or in writing where you look at them and you say "That's what I want to be?"

Nell Bang-Jensen: Yeah. I think I ideally would really love to be the artistic director of theater that prioritizes the values and art making I believe in. For me that is a balance of having an experimental sort of pig iron aesthetic, but making work that is not insular and that's working with people who are actually in that community and do not identify as artists. I think of my goals is sort of like Oscar uses the public, which is in some ways with some of their work trying to break down the binary we've created in this country of who's an artist and who's not.

Really actually using theater as a way of creating stronger bonds between the people who make up the city or a place.

Burke: So your vision of success and of art is sort of so relentlessly outward driven. You're really thinking carefully about how to connect with audiences and communities. How to do service and work to them. Is there a part of when you think about your aspirations that you sort of ... It's for you? It's kind of in the sense selfish that would you say "Okay this is for me. This is what rewards me and I gotta have that."

Bang-Jensen: I think I wouldn't really be happy doing one or the other in terms of the balance of making art and also thinking big picture about what it is that I'm doing. I've been in both of those situations where I've been in a rehearsal room and going gig to gig and making the peace and I love that, but there's a point where I want to be working towards something larger. I don't want to go gig to gig. I want to be part of an organization that I believe in and that will give me a certain kind of autonomy.

Then I've also done the opposite where I've been more of an administrator for a larger regional theater and I really missed the art making part. It was great talking about mission and what our theater was trying to do, but I missed the sense of little community that you form when you're making a piece together and getting to share it with the world.

I think that would be hard for me to have to choose one or the other, and I think the kind of dreamy thing about being an artistic director along with the many other less dreamy things about it, but the dreamy thing is that you do get a balance of creating these tiny communities in a rehearsal room that leads to an encounter. Then also being able to think big picture about "Okay what are we doing here? And who are we doing it for?"

I think sort of my path in theater so far has been craving more and more authorship over what I'm doing. I started out as a performer then learned that oh I can be a performer in devised work where I'm actually helping to write and shape the piece. Then I started doing dramaturgy, which is really looking at the research and structure of a play. Then from that I started ... I craved more authorship and started craving directing. It's sort of gone further and further into a place of having a greater sense of authorship over what I'm doing.

Burke: These seem to be some of the central ... We're talking about media skills when people talk about the gig economy, and the kinds of economic lives that recent graduates are living. This is sort of that skill that seems important is to not plan too far ahead, and to be willing to jump at things as they present themselves.

Is there a jump you have already vowed to yourself you would never take? Would you write television if television is where it's at? At there artistic jumps you won't take? Are there career jumps you're sure you won't do? Are there places you're certain you would never live?

Bang-Jensen: That's such a good question. I think about that a lot. I am not ruling out t.v. there's a lot of not ruling out yet even if it would be selling out. Just more because I'm curious. There's a lot I would be open to. I'm curious what that's like. The things I wouldn't do are more things that I have experienced and know I don't want to. So I know for example it's really frustrating for me to be in a purely administrative position at a big place, because then I'm like "Why am I in theater?" I could be using these skills somewhere else and making more money.

I have also just realized and this is part of the professional development I've been doing on this artistic leadership grant I'm on now, we talk a lot about values clarification, which has been immensely helpful to me. I feel like it was a very hot in the 80's kind of thing, but I love it. I'm a big believe in values clarification, and it's just becoming increasingly clear to me that I want to either be heading an organization where I can shape it around my own values or be working in the service of someone who's values are aligned with mine.

It's really frustrating not to be and I've been in that position before. So being able to articulate what my values are and what kind of theater I want to be in has been really helpful for me saying "Actually that theater doesn't seem like a good fit. Or working with that leader doesn't seem like a good fit." Being able to say no to that with the confidence that I'm doing it for the right reasons has been really helpful.