

## Two days - a beginning

*A reflection and re-cap of the TRAINART HotSpot-session in Gothenburg.  
Written by Rasmus Klamas*

The plan was to meet in Gothenburg. Teater Nu would welcome the participants in the Trainart project to our home base, Gamlestaden's factories, and get to meet, socialize, discuss and be inspired by each other. Then the pandemic came and changed the plans, the meeting went digital. But it didn't stop us! 21 people, from 4 different countries, sat in front of their computer on the 6th and 7th of October 2020. The theme for the two day session was *Performing Arts and the Shape of Cities*, about performing artists' role in site development processes and what it is to work site specific. Many of the participants had extensive experience of working with a specific place and in addition to being able to delve into that theme, the participants longed to finally network and get to know each other.

After the initial group discussions, where the participants got to introduce themselves, it was time for three lectures by three experts in performing arts applied to specific places in some way. First out we had Johan Rödström, from the performing arts collective MOLD, who presented their performative work which is site-specific and interactive. The lecture gave rise to many thoughts, including the financing of site-specific works. Both Rödström and the Trainart participants experienced that these processes take a long time and therefore require significant and proper funding to be successful. Rödström says, among other things, that they worked for 1.5 years with the latest show *Love Walks*. In addition, it can be difficult to formulate and plan a site-specific project before you have started it, so there are difficulties in application processes where the project must be described in detail. This led to a discussion about other ways of securing funding that are outside the usual application templates, such as lobbying that may contribute to a more long-term funding.

Rödström's lecture also led to discussions that went somewhat out of the subject. It was mainly about the interactive elements of the performances. The audience in MOLD's performances is always participating and is often both dressed in a certain way and instructed about what to do. Rödström said that they always want to treat the participants with kindness and respect and let them set the limit for what they want to do. The important thing for MOLD is that the performance can give each person in the audience their own experience. Given the prevailing pandemic, the discussion also went on to how to handle audiences to avoid infection. Rödström says that they have had to take away a large part of the tactile parts in the performances that they will play this autumn. How a performing artist can work with audience contact in this pandemic was something that came up continuously during the two days and seems to be something that all participants are thinking about right now. This is something to discuss further, where we together can brainstorm about possible solutions and ideas.

After the lecture and the conversation with MOLD, the artist Lisa Torell came and told us about her work *Figure 2224* which was performed in Istanbul in 2016. There, Lisa took the role as a street sweeper in the public space. By being in the space, and taking part in the reactions of those around her, she got a glimpse of what Turkish society looks like. She said that Istanbul and Turkey were a completely different place when she was there to do the work, unlike just a few years earlier. She experienced very clearly how the place and politics had changed. This experience is also something that can be useful in site-specific work in general. Torell says that her experience is that it isn't possible to know anything about a place for real until one is there and working with it. This is an interesting idea that also goes into the discussion about financing and longer processes that were discussed earlier in the day. That the place is unknown to you before you as an artist have started working with it.

Finally, we were visited by Emilio da Cruz Brandao, who works as an architect and artistic director of the master's program *Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability*. He has, together with his students, worked with innovative site development in the million program areas in Gothenburg.

They work a lot with collaboration between different organizations and try to build long-term relationships that can lead to a more long time development of the sites. The fact that they create informal contacts to collaborate with throughout the process, both in planning, design and evaluation, is an idea that many of the participants took with them. Trying to collaborate with people and organizations outside the cultural world. On the subject of how performing artists could contribute to site development, Brandao testified that it was difficult to get meetings and collaborations with art schools in Gothenburg. The participants reflected on this and suggested that it may be due to the fact that it has not been possible to get the right anchoring and that the university environment may not be so permissive for interdisciplinary collaborations. Other thoughts were that there are risks as an artist to be part of a project that is led by a bigger institution or organization, and where many wills must coexist. That there is a risk that you lose yourself and that the cooperation is not equal, that you feel exploited. This shows the importance of building long-term contacts where you can build trust between the parties. How to work and expand your network of contacts is something that the participants together could develop methods for.

Day 2 began with a sound walk by MOLD, created especially for the Trainart project. There, the participants had to go for a 40-minute walk with instructions in their headphones. There were many interesting thoughts that came up, both personal but also thoughts about how MOLD's method can be used in site development projects. On a personal level, some felt that they were very lonely while others could feel part of a group because we did the same thing in different places. Since the work consisted of you, in your own environment, following instructions, the result was completely different and each person had to, in a way, fill the work with content. Many experienced that they saw completely new things in an environment that they see every day. So both MOLD's method and their work can be interesting to have as a starting point in a site development project. Their way of working in the production of a performance, where they do a lot of try outs and have reference audiences, can also be used in such projects. It can be a way to have a natural relationship with those who work or live at the site.

The participants took these thoughts with them when they focused on their own projects after lunch. It could be site-specific projects that they are working on now or projects that they dream of implementing. The participants saw both positive and negative sides to working site-specific. On the positive side, they described how a place is full of opportunities and that it can provide great inspiration for the work. The negative can be how a place can have restrictions to what you can do, especially since many of the participants had project ideas that took place in places you aren't usually in, such as abandoned houses or an airplane. But even here, the pandemic is something that gives the participants greater challenges in the realization of a project. Partly logistically, how to handle your audience and, for example, transport them to the place. We also talked about the need to find new ways to connect with your audience, both now during the pandemic and afterwards. To be able to connect physically, but also digitally. One idea was to create cyber specific performances, which was specially designed for the digital platforms.

This was a first meeting, a common start. Together, we must try to find new ways to communicate, network and inspire each other digitally, until we can network and meet physically. Teater Nu wants to say thank you, and see you again! We look forward to continuing the discussions, next time in Novi Sad.