

Meeting, Courage, Process – We get to do with each other

M E E T I N G

Take the place

The rain is pouring down over Praça Roosevelt and Sao Paulo, really pouring down. Roads are flooding rapidly, and some have not been able to get to school today. I am taking part in an evaluation discussion of a longer workshop that I have led with my colleagues from the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts. The place is Sao Paulo Escola de Teatro, SPedT, in Brazil and the participants come from different fields of the performing arts: lighting and sound design, theatre techniques, directing, stage design, dramaturgy and acting. We have worked with the square Praça Roosevelt. This was previously one of Sao Paulo's most dangerous areas, which in recent years has undergone a transformation and change. Now it is a relatively safe place, among others attended by skaters, dog owners and families.

The work we have done is named “Wish and act for the future - transformation and change for Praça Roosevelt”. The place is the starting point, both as it is now, with its history, but also with its possible future. In various exercises, performing artists have explored Praça Roosevelt and gathered information and material. They have interacted with people they've met and interviewed them. The starting point for this work is that the place is not only the land, the buildings, the trees, the view, but also the people - those who are there now, those who have been there and those who will come in the future - and that the landscape is made up of its people.

I am listening to the performing artists in our discussion. They are talking about how easily many of them found it to invite people in the square, to make contact with them. It surprises them: "We asked them and they wanted to participate. They were there all the time, waiting for us, but we did not know." The students continue their reflections to the sound of the downpour.

Now several of them speak about a “before” and an “after” our work together on Praça Roosevelt. Now they feel free to go out to the square and create without asking anyone. They

have the tools and they can start now - without asking for permission. What they have tasted and experienced is also about the discovery of the public space, a room for everyone. They can take the initiative for artistic meetings, artistic creation and meeting places. They can invite instead of waiting to be invited (or without asking for permission). "Let's stop waiting for someone to give us a place - we can take it", one of the artists sums up his experience of having access to the public space.

The meeting place

Working in Praça Roosevelt, I investigated alongside performing artists how the site can be the starting point for artistic events and how people can be invited and become participants, co-creators. What happens if we stop considering the landscape as a backdrop for a site-specific performance and instead include the entire site, with its people, in an artistic event? The focus of the work was to create a meeting place rather than a stage, creating actions and events rather than performances, and to invite people to participate, become participants, not only to be the audience.

We examined playing as a form for the event and the game. We tested to create events where the audience become co-creators. Performing artists worked in groups and each group was given the task to create a wish for Praça Roosevelt, manifested by an act, an event where all were to be co-creators and participants in some way. These desires and actions then formed a whole that we implemented as a common happening in Praça Roosevelt.

The exchange between groups and within groups was an important part of the longer workshop. In order to meet the site and its landscape, the landscape and its people, and to create a greater understanding together, we needed to exchange experiences and knowledge. Stage artists understood Praça Roosevelt and its history by interacting with and interviewing the people there. One group interviewed an elderly couple who ran their barber shop already during the dictatorship. Another group interviewed the artistic director of a theatre, Os Satyros, who moved here just during the decadent, most dangerous period. A third group found out that there originally was a rainforest with the Indians before a princess from Portugal came with her ships, cut down the trees, killed or drove off the Indians and took over

the place. The stage artists explored the site together and shared their findings and reflections in the larger group, in order to then make new experiences to share.

The meeting point

*"At the meeting point there are neither entirely ignorant nor absolutely wise people; there are just people who together try to learn more than they already know."*¹

In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Paulo Freire describes the dialogue as a meeting between people who name the world. This meeting requires humility, Freire means: "How can I discuss if I always see the ignorance of the others and never realize my own ignorance?" and he continues: "The one who cannot recognize himself as mortal as anyone else has a long way to the meeting point" .²

The meeting point is the intersection where our experiences, our knowledge and our curiosity meet. The meeting point, the meeting where people together try to learn more than they already know. Perhaps this is what I try to *accomplish* in the cross-disciplinary meeting with the performing artists and the teachers at Escola de Teatro at Praça Roosevelt in Sao Paulo.³

Paulo Freire was born in Brazil in 1921, and during his childhood, due to the prevailing economic crises, he shared the experience of hunger and oppression with many Brazilians. He received his doctorate in pedagogy and decided early that he wanted to serve the poor and then carried out literacy work in Brazil. When the military dictatorship took over the government of Brazil in the middle of the 1960s, Freire was imprisoned. He was released but was banished from the country by the right-wing regime. Freire fled to Chile, where he worked a number of years, and then he moved to the USA and then to Geneva, Switzerland. One must understand his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" of 1968 in this context. There was a dictatorship in his homeland. People were imprisoned, they were tortured and killed. The regime set examples to scare into submission. Freire wanted change and liberation, he wanted to create a society different from the current one. He observed a power perspective

¹ Freire, Paulo (1972), *Pedagogik för förtryckta*, p. 92, Gummessons, Stockholm

² Ibid. p. 92, Gummessons, Stockholm

³ SP Escola de Teatro, website: <http://www.spescoladeteatro.org.br/english/index.php>

between the teacher and the student by considering the teacher as one who possesses all knowledge and the student as one who is "empty", needing to be filled with the teacher's knowledge. If only the teacher's perception of reality and only the teacher's experience are allowed to guide the process of knowledge, how can change be achieved, and oppression abolished? In the discussion of these conditions, Freire turned the perspective; what if we instead have a joint project to learn more than we already know, whether you are a teacher or a student. And - what can the teacher learn from the students?

In the inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary workshops and courses that I conduct together with my colleagues in the field of performing arts meeting landscape architecture, we need each other's knowledge and experience to move forward in our exploratory work and in our learning. The specific knowledge and experience of a sound design student, for example, is needed and cannot be replaced by my experience and knowledge as a director. A landscape architect student is a specialist in his/her field and has much to teach the performing artists, both students and teachers. We are all experts in our field and at the same time we need each other's knowledge and experience to understand and learn more.

So my main approach when I lead these workshops is to create conditions for cooperation, curiosity, and exploring something together. I believe that everyone has something specific to contribute with, something to teach and something to learn. But when do I as a teacher have a long way to the meeting in humility that Freire describes, when is it difficult for me to see or to expose my own ignorance? Maybe it's when I'm not prepared to change myself or to change my approach? Or when I am not *really* listening, just listening for the sake of it? Perhaps it happens when I receive criticism but do not let it affect my teaching, when I'm not prepared to try something that is new for me. And perhaps I have then, without really reflecting on it, used my power by starting my teaching with only my experience and perception of reality.

Dialogue

In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire discusses the relation between teacher and student and emphasizes how easy it gets an intermediary character. There is a mediating subject, the teacher, and a patiently listening object, the pupil, and then the pupils turn into "containers,"

"storages", to be filled by the teacher. Freire describes how the content can easily become lifeless and petrified in this mediation process, where the teacher talks about reality as if it was motionless, static, discrete and possible to predict, or makes statements about a topic that is completely extraneous to the student's existential experience. What is missing in this system is creativity, change and knowledge.⁴ "For without self-examination, without practice, one cannot be truly human", Freire says and continues: "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the constant, impatient, continuing, hopeful exploration people make in the world and with each other."⁵

Against this system, Freire sets liberating teaching and problem-posing teaching that consist of knowledge action, not of conveying information. Here arises instead a mutual learning situation where the contradiction teacher-student disappears. Freire believes that through dialogue, the students' teacher and the teacher's students stop to exist and instead arises a new concept: a student teacher and a teacher student. Here the teacher is no longer only the one who is teaching but is also taught himself in dialogue with the students. And the students on their part teach while they are taught. "They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow."⁶

We are jointly responsible for a process in which we all grow. This joint process postulates a dialogue, a real meeting. Such meeting requires a belief in the human being and mutual trust. To meet is also to expose yourself to each other and to share experiences is also to dare to highlight the skills you lack. Perhaps it is easier to do if we have formulated a common knowledge project, if we have defined a problem we should highlight and try to solve together. Then the task requires that we contribute with knowledge and experience and that we dare to expose the knowledge that we need to get from somebody else. From this kind of meeting, real knowledge can arise, new problems can be formulated and new areas be mapped.

In "Universitetspedagogik " by Maja Elmgren and Anne-Sofie Henriksson, the authors

⁴ Freire, Paulo (1972), *Pedagogik för förtryckta*, p. 70-71, Gummessons, Stockholm

⁵ Ibid., p. 71, Gummessons, Stockholm

⁶ Freire, Paulo (1972), *Pedagogik för förtryckta*, p. 79-80, Gummessons, Stockholm

discuss models for teachers' development. They emphasize dialogue and exchange with others as crucial for progress. You need to be willing to change or shift your perspective for a while to increase your understanding. To accomplish that, you need to create a dialogical conversation without defending your own perspectives. Whether the exchange takes place with colleagues, students or others, a constructive dialogue is built on humility, curiosity and generosity.⁷

Also I as a teacher must dare to expose myself; also I need the others' knowledge to be able to go into the common process. I cannot know before I know; I am not an expert in all areas, but I can form a team together with other experts where we guide each other through the process. Perhaps it is only when we can trust each other and have confidence that we have the courage to become student teachers and teacher students, facing each other.

C O U R A G E

Confidence

In our evaluation discussion, one of the students at the school in Sao Paulo begins to speak. He says that he is a student of theatre technology and continues: "No one asked for my professional role during the workshop, it was not the focus of the exercises. I could contribute with all my knowledge, with all of me, without being limited to 'the one who studies theatre technology'. You never asked what we studied when we made the exercises, when we presented or when we discussed, it was liberating", he concluded.

Categorizations can obstruct. If you are seen as occupying a certain role, it is easy to be expected to speak and act only in that role and experience, and to believe that you don't have access to other areas. A theatre technician is not expected to develop the content and the concepts in a more traditional working process at an institutional theatre, for example. But when performing arts meet landscape, we have no traditional working process to lean on or to live up to, we have to create something new. Then we need both the expected knowledge and the unknown solutions and ideas.

⁷ Elmgren, Maja /Henriksson, Anne-Sofie (2016), *Universitetspedagogik*, p. 294, Studentlitteratur, Lund

Therefore, I am not focusing on the professional function in these workshops. I try to make sure that different functions are represented in the groups as far as possible. It will be particularly important as we work inter-disciplinary with landscape architects. Just having their knowledge and approach represented in the team affects the process of the work and the outcome.

So I try to ensure that different professional functions, both cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary, are represented in the teams that work together. In this way, everybody shares and uses each other's knowledge in the joint exercises. I also include other experiences when I make the teams for the workshops. There can for example be a landscape architect who has experience in dance or a sound designer who has an interest in garden design, all to get different knowledge and experiences represented in each team. When I work with international courses, I try to ensure equal distribution of countries in the groups, also the cultural experience is a valuable knowledge to share.

But it has also happened that this approach has created disappointment among the students and a feeling of not fulfilling their potential. An actor in one of our courses did not want to develop the concept in a team. She mainly wanted to act for an audience. She experienced that she was not seen and that her specific skills were not used in the workshop. On the one hand, our way of doing was set by the format of the course. We had the goal that all the students should practice and develop their ability to develop concepts for site-specific art in landscape regardless of professional function. We did not communicate this goal clearly enough in the call and in the description of the course and did not take it sufficiently into account during our application process. On the other hand, it was about the group's work and the ability or inability to let each other and each other's ideas come through. Out of this evolved a discussion in the group and also between us teachers during the course. How do we create confidence and trust in the teamwork and during the course? One student feels liberated by not having to relate to her profession all the time, another student feels insecure and lost about not being able to relate to her profession in the first place.

To approach the field of performing arts meeting landscape architecture, we need to create a learning environment where we dare to consider and reconsider. We need the courage to test the untested, to do what we have never done before. To achieve this, we need to build

confidence, trust and safety. As long as we feel safe, we dare to ask the "dumb questions", and we dare to question the "obvious answers". As long as we are curious about each other and the problems and tasks we are facing, there is a good base for dialogue, for confidence, and therefore for creativity, to grow, to evolve and expand.

Change and the future

When I led a course with master's students from the performing arts area and the landscape architecture area, we had several interesting discussions and conflicts about what is the front and what is the back in a landscape. As long as we were in a landscape, we could agree that there is no "backstage" in a landscape, that one can approach a landscape from many ways. The back of the landscape becomes the front side through a motion. Experiencing a landscape is to approach, enter, occupy and leave, and to approach the next site, view or room. This happens through movements.

But when we were working indoors in studios, we were not as consistent. Students from the performing arts knew how it worked in a theatre, and there arose discussions if the wall behind the back-drop existed or not, with the argument that what is not seen on a stage does not exist. The landscape architects meant that everything that is there is there, whether it is hidden or if you want to create the illusion of something else. When the performing artists could see this as a way to approach the studio, the stage or the auditorium, many interesting and unexpected proposals for how to use a room and meet an audience evolved.

Soon, a meeting between landscape architects and performing artists was created, where the traditional use of the stage was questioned through the ignorance and the knowledge in combination with the common experience of the landscape. Now the stage was explored from a different starting point. How do we create space in this room? And the audience's freedom to move freely? And how do we become co-creators in an event? These issues surrounded their work. They created a new site by using it in a different way. But the basic function was there - they invited an audience, shaping a piece of music and text, using light and sound effects and worked with rehearsed movements. Yet the use of the room was different from what one used to do and see in it.

Freire believes that controlling thinking and action leads to adaptation. Against this, he sets creativity and change of the world.⁸ And I think, if we shall dare to create something new, we must dare the change. This also applies to our teaching in the field. Do we want to teach performing artists to adapt to reality, for example, our institutions and how they are controlled and operated, or do we want to teach in order to change the future, to create new opportunities, new venues and contexts? Do we want to teach for the meeting places of the future or our current stages? Daring something new takes courage. To be brave requires belief, confidence and trust.

P R O C E S S

Experts in team

Maja Elmgren and Anne-Sofie Henriksson discuss environments for creative learning in "University Education" and say that creative environments provide support for innovation and renewal. Teaching skills are emphasized in these environments, and teaching is seen as a shared responsibility, where students are involved in the development work. Meanwhile, differences in opinion are appreciated as they bring multiple perspectives.⁹

In the teaching situation between performing artists and landscape architects, both outdoors in the landscape and in the studio, we are depending on everyone's contribution to issues, explorations and reflections. Here, the composition of the group is important, that all contribute with their skills and experiences, that we complement each other rather than compete. We are experts in various areas that contribute to a shared process. It is demanding for me as teacher to lead this process, to involve the students and colleagues and to highlight the different opinions, the different perspectives.

The inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary process and the knowledge exchange is in focus. It becomes more important how the process takes the place: how the student has come up with a result, rather than the actual result. Can we all be co-creators, can we all be responsible and in control of the learning situation and the understanding process? Is it only then that we can be creative, innovative and renewing? I think it is easier when we meet each other, when we

⁸ Freire, Paulo (1972), *Pedagogik för förtryckta*, p. 76, Gummessons, Stockholm

⁹ Elmgren, Maja /Henriksson, Anne-Sofie (2016), *Universitetspedagogik*, Studentlitteratur, Lund

dare to be brave and have faith in each other in a common task. When we dare to highlight our differences and expose our lack of knowledge and experiences.

The University of Trondheim has a vocational study subject called “Experts in Team” Here, students at Master’s level develop their skills in team work by reflecting on and learning from actual cooperation situations.¹⁰ It is also about developing a new perspective on their own knowledge by communicating and using it and being able to collaborate with people from other disciplines, to develop and deploy cross-disciplinary skills.¹¹ The study work contains both a personal reflection and a group reflection. The final result to be reported is both a project report and a process report.

The work on the process report by "Experts in Team" is based on Kolb's considerations about the learning process and starts from an actual experience in which the student is open and engaged in the project collaboration. Then the student starts an individual reflection in relation to the work of the group. After this, the student, together with the group, describes the group behaviour patterns in a relevant way, now with support from theory. This is the group reflection part in the learning process. In the fourth phase, the student tries new ways to enhance cooperation in the project.¹² With new concrete experience, the cyclic learning process can restart.

"Experts in Team"¹³ was introduced in teaching when the need to develop the collaborative capabilities of the students was observed, and to make the students themselves responsible for this process. From this teaching, opportunities also arose to create concrete solutions to problems in society through cooperation. With a broad range of students from both natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, technical and artistic areas, an expertise and a process evolved out of this project-oriented teaching that has created great interest, spreading around the world.

¹⁰ *Eksperter i team 2015, Gjennomføring av landsbyen*, redaktör Bjorn Sortland, NTNU, Trondheim

¹¹ *Ibid.*, NTNU, Trondheim

¹² *Eksperter i team 2015, Gjennomføring av landsbyen*, redaktör Bjorn Sortland, p. 77, NTNU, Trondheim

¹³ *Ibid.*, NTNU, Trondheim

I think that here lies the advantage of being a team working for a common goal, rather complementing each other in the team than competing with each other. As a part of the teaching, concrete results are created, solutions to real needs and problems in society.

Reflection

Freire believes that students in a problem-posing teaching model are no longer docile listeners, but critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.¹⁴ Freire emphasizes the need for the students to face problems that are related to themselves, in the world and with the world. Then the challenge is associated with other problems within a united whole, not a theoretical question. The student's response to the challenge creates new challenges, followed by new understanding.¹⁵

The students become co-investigator; the audience become co-creators. Maybe if we, in the field of performing arts meeting landscape architecture, examine how the audience, the spectators, can become participants and co-creators of an artistic event, the teaching situation requires a correspondence of this in teaching. We must consider and treat each other as co-creators. This is true between students and between teachers, and also between teachers and students. We are all co-investigators, co-creators of a learning situation, in a joint exploratory process. The dialogue becomes an action and a reflection towards a changing world. I refer to the audience and the performing artists, and the authoritarian relationship that we, the performing artists, sometimes build with our audience. We would love to have a dialogue, we say that it is important for us, and at the same time, we fear it. But if we make the audience co-creators, and invite them, our relationship changes. And we will all be co-investigators and co-responsible - in a shared process.

What does it mean for the educational work? How will my relationship as a teacher change if the student really becomes a critical co-investigator and co-responsible? Can and should I give away my responsibility as a teacher and the power that comes with my responsibilities?

In our workshops, we create meeting places rather than stages. Freire speaks about the learning situation and the dialogue as a meeting point. We speak about co-creators rather than

¹⁴ Freire, Paulo (1972), *Pedagogik för förtryckta*, p. 81, Gummessons, Stockholm

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81, Gummessons, Stockholm

spectators and audience. Freire discusses the student teacher and the teacher student, to emphasize the mutual exchange with each other, an exchange where both parties are active co-explorers in a learning process. We are talking about events and actions rather than performances. Freire emphasizes the action of knowledge, a knowledge situation that must be practiced, not only theorized.

To do with each other

The rain has stopped and the damp square fumes as the sun gently rises and warms the place. Our evaluation discussion is ended; my work is done for this time. The students discuss new possible projects to create, to which they've got ideas. I am no longer needed; our meeting is over for this time. I feel both fortunate and leftover at the same time.

The philosopher Martin Buber writes about the meeting in his book "I and Thou". Here he distinguishes the object, it, and the relation to something. He describes that he can consider a tree and see it as an image or a movement. Or that he, by overcoming the tree's presence and shape in the present, can only perceive it as an expression of law. "In all this, the tree remains my object", Buber writes and continues: "But it may also happen, by will and mercy at the same time, that while considering the tree, I become enclosed in relation to it, and the tree is now no longer an It. The power of enclosure and exclusion has seized me."¹⁶ To be enclosed in relation to a tree. Is this what happens to us on Praça Roosevelt? To be enclosed in relation to a place, a landscape.

I think that we should not ask what we can do to a place, but ask what the place can do to us, and what we can then give back - in a meeting. What happens if we start from the place and its people in a meeting, a dialogue, a relationship? The place - it can be a pasture in a Swedish cultural landscape or a square in Brazil. At both places, there is a weave of events and people, a weave of what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. How can we create an artistic event based on these events and in relation to these meetings? And must we not all become co-creators and participants when we take part in a common process?

In "Traktat vom dialogischen Leben", Buber describes what an encounter with a human being could mean, a meeting that "tells me something, addresses me, speaks to me right into my

¹⁶ Buber, Martin (2001) publ. 1923 *Jag och Du*, p. 12, Dualis, Falun

own life,"¹⁷ and in contrast to watching or observing, this means "getting involved". A "dialogical life" is not about having a lot to do with other people, but really getting to do with the people you are interacting with, Buber says.¹⁸ "This person is not my object; I got to do with her" Buber writes, and continues: "Maybe it's something I must accomplish in connection with her. Or maybe I just have something to learn."¹⁹

To get to do with you. Is this what happens when we meet each other in a common process of understanding, when the dialogue takes over and we together try to learn more than we already know. We get to do with each other.

¹⁷ Buber, Martin (1993) publ. 1932, *Dialogens väsen*, p. 32-33, Dualis, Falun

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62, Dualis, Falun

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32-33, Dualis, Falun

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Sara Erlingsdotter has developed and lead the artistic project *Meeting Place – Music, Theatre, Landscape* that includes both exploring performances and research activities in collaboration with Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts, SADA; the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SUAS; and Malmö Academy of Music. The project has also developed joint master courses where Sara Erlingsdotter has lectured, and international exchanges have taken place with ESMAE, Polytechnic Institute of Porto, Portugal; the University of Winchester, UW UK; and Sao Paulo, Brazil.

She is leading the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership *Meeting place – Performing Arts and Landscape* carried out in cooperation between SADA, ESMAE, UW and the Department of Landscape Architecture at SUAS. She is also developing an international network involving South America in connection to this with Escola Superior Celia Helena, Sao Paulo, Brazil and the University of Sao Paulo. The international cooperation has resulted in international courses on advanced level.