

Transformative Encounters Intro

Welcome to Transformative Encounters, a podcast about performative encounters as a tool and vehicle in performance practice.

You are listening to Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir sitting in a studio at the Theatre Academy in Malmö Sweden. I am a theatre maker working with participatory and, what I call, relation specific performance. I am a white woman in my fifties that has worked within the field of theatre and performance in the Nordic region for a long time. Over thirty years ago I started as a physical performer, then I went on to directing and writing, to become an artistic leader in my own theatre, gradually replacing theatrical commodities with moments of exchange and transformative interactions. Today, I am an artistic researcher.

In the podcast series I intend to explore and unpack the affordances of performative encounters - a term that I am using in my artistic research *How Little is Enough?* where I am developing sustainable methods of performance through relation specific performance. I am interested in the potency of theatre and performance for social change, taking departure in how performance can affect the individual and their value system.

The project has led me into different directions, generating experiences around format, process, intentions, and ethics. In this podcast series, I will be focusing on what I call performative encounter which lies at the core of my practice where it plays a key role as a tool of transformation. The dramaturgical frame I am using is what I call porous and embracing dramaturgy, a performance structure that relies on guest participation and interaction with an environment and its agents, human and more than human. I scale down the production and pay attention to sustainability on all levels of the creation, placing existential sustainability as a core value to the work. The porous and embracing dramaturgy is the ground for multiple encounters to take place.

When I use the term Performative Encounters, I am referring to a meeting between two or more agents that takes place in a staged setting during a performance. The encounter can be between humans or between humans and the more-than-human; people, animals, things, landscapes, temporalities (geological time, the future...) and phenomena like values, paradigms, or forces like the weather.

These encounters are performative in the moment they are labelled and understood as a part of, or related to a performance or heightened moment of religious or social ritual. Performative Encounter is an exchange between two or more entities that has the potential to create new meanings, understandings, and relations or strengthen knowledges or relations that already exist. These encounters can either be tailor made or they can occur organically within a performance.

In my work, the aim is to create situations of genuine exchange, that allows the participants to render their own experiences, ideas and values into the performance, creating a tender and precarious condition for transformation to take place.

As an example, from my last work within the research project, *Pleased to Meet You*, a performative Encounter with the More-the-Human, I invited guests to encounter a more-than-human entity such as a pond or a lamp. As a guest you will have a performative encounter with your more-than-human host, that is guided by me as an artist. That encounter with the entity and its surroundings I have planned and prepared, by choosing the site and suggested actions, but what I have not arranged is the encounters the guest and the entity have with significant entities in the surroundings, like other humans, the weather, animals, insects, ideas, memories, values, histories and so on.

While I aim for encounters that are potentially transformational, I am using performative encounters as a tool.

Transformation is a complex term and comes in different degrees and scales, ranging from shifting energies into paradigm changes, and its duration can vary. As a vehicle for insights into transformation we will be focusing on the term performative encounters.

To unpack the term further I have arranged a series of performative encounters with artists and scholars that are working with performative encounters in their practice.

Applying my own method of asking how little is enough (a method that encourages me to look at what there is at hand and use the resources that are in place), I have invited artists and scholars that are in my vicinity and were visiting my campus in Malmö in spring 2023 when these recordings took place, and asked them to think with me through this term to investigate its affordances.

Through these encounters I expect to gain an understanding of how the term performative encounters can be understood as an instrument for performance, to pave the way for social change through performative, and potentially transformative, encounters.