

**THEATRE
ACADEMY**

**✕ UNIVERSITY OF
THE ARTS HELSINKI**

UNDER THE SKY OF CHERRY ORCHARD

- REPORT FROM 'BOOT CAMP' IN KARESUANDO, JULY 2016
written by Juhana von Bagh

Mentoring artist: Kristian Smeds

Other teachers: Hanna Rajakangas, Juhana von Bagh and Jere Lokio

Participating students: Marija Berzina (Latvian Academy of Culture), Hannah Boer (Toonelacademie Maastricht), Marie Jensen (The University Mozarteum Salzburg), Barbara Krzoska (Theaterakademie August Everding München), Eetu Kähkönen (Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki), Åshild Løvvig (Westerdals Oslo ACT), Julia Łukowiak (The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw) and Valentina Toth (Royal Institute for Theatre, Cinema and Sound Brussels)

INTRODUCTION: 'Our cherry orchard is a trip to Lapland and back'

This text consists of notes from the course and observations I made of the teaching. I also reflect on how well I felt the stated goals of the teaching and the camp were met. The text contains a liberal sprinkling of quotes by Kristian Smeds, who, as the camp leader, verbalized and framed the context, background and aims of our work. Smeds was the camp leader, but responsibility was also shared with the voice teacher of the camp, Hanna Rajakangas. The text also includes excerpts from reflections written by students after the course.

To summarize, we could say that Lapland was "a large oven" to the campers; an oven that was always on. "The work has started already. And you do it all the time. Either with your body or with your mind."

The original travel plan was to go to Lapland, discover there our own strength, bring it to Helsinki and transform it into music under the leadership of a professional Finnish musician.

The basic idea and aim of the camp was to take students to the last free river in Europe and ask them if it could be their own cherry garden, and could they find a relationship to it and a love for its nature. The question was huge: to find something to believe in, in a wireless and rootless Europe: something for which to stand and make art. In the world of fiction this became comparable to the situation in which main character Ljuba Andrejevna finds herself in the Cherry Orchard; returning from Paris to their home, the wonderful and "eternal" Cherry Orchard of their childhood, which, during the play, is sold at executive auction and torn down.

Acting is the art of being present, and in contrast to the prevailing "presence-light" in society, the camp was looking for "hard presence" where the actor really is present: Aristotelian-like, in a single place and time without social media or other kinds of distractions. The camp had no technical recording devices whatsoever and I think that this was really radical for everyone, especially actors born in the 1990s. It was very interesting to witness the mild complaints during the camp when "there isn't even a radio", and how nature and silence began to have their effect, raising in everyone a completely new and powerful kind of concentrated presence that also brought personal issues to the surface.

Afterwards we can conclude that Lapland gave us an inner strength that was much deeper and stronger than we could have dared to hope for. The Helsinki share: three days, not enough for a new perspective and mentality to take hold in a completely new way of working although text work and making music together was always present. Instruments were omitted from the Helsinki share and we focused on retrieving, reflecting on and reconstructing our experiences from Lapland. This, and the joint singing and vocal soundscape together gave rise to the "final demo" of Monday night.

GENERAL BEGINNINGS

Kristian set two theme words and requirements for the camp. "Respect and Honesty".

The core and basic division of the work became clear already in the letter the students received prior to the camp, which included the following:

'My main idea behind this non-digital being is really simple. That is: we all are really present there, and only there. We all block the "virtual stages" - the real ones and the mental ones - away for a while. This principle is very clear in actors' work on the theatre stage in general.

We will simply just be there. Together. And we will work. Simple and demanding. And challenging - in these virtual times - of course.

Work will be focused on two aspects:

Solo work and Ensemble work.

Solo work:

You'll work alone a lot.

You'll be in nature alone a lot.

You'll have an opportunity to meet and be with yourself.

Ensemble work:

We are together.

We do things together.

And we create together.

Simple and difficult - this theatre work - as a combination of the solo and the ensemble aspects. Both are very much needed.

I'm very happy to have this opportunity to invite you here to work. The North - it's a special place. Find it, discover it, and create your own relation to it and finally: take it with you when you leave. From this perspective the workshop will be a very short one; like a baby step.

One fictional layer of your bus journey from Oulu up north to Tornio is of course from the Cherry Orchard. Ranjevskaja and others travelling and finally arriving from Paris at the Cherry Orchard.'

At the camp itself, the pedagogy was voiced right away: "We'll have a calm start, and not do anything really revved up otherwise either, more like soft power – the power of water." The idea was not to teach many skills but tenacious, passionate, inventive work from the artist's own core. The aim was to find out where that leads, and also, how great our own resources really can be.

From a theatrical-philosophical standpoint, the core message of Smeds was finding truth in fiction. The core assignment of the actor was to discover a real relationship with the text. Concerning the Cherry Orchard, this meant creating a relationship to the Tornio River that flowed right by the cottage, and fueling a really passionate relationship with surrounding nature. The Cherry Orchard is a play that Chekhov wrote knowing that he would die soon. However, it also depicts the birth of something new. Our aim was to get a firm grasp of the themes behind the text.

We also looked for truth by often making the assignments and setups very simple. Kristian and Hanna met with students one on one: once right at the beginning and then more or less (also depending on individual need) regularly on a daily basis. It says something about this 24-7 pedagogy that once after a long, joint evening rehearsal, Kristian and Hanna left, at eleven in the evening, to spend time at a stage in the forest with a student that needed help in bringing the solo work forward. This was natural also since it never got dark in Lapland, and dusk lasted for only about an hour in the morning hours. Meetings between teachers sometimes ended at three in the morning. The Lapland sun shone and gave strength.

The direction of Kristian and Hanna, and their way of speaking, often linked students to a larger context: to landscape and tradition. For example, part of one assignment was for students to clear themselves a space. Kristian taught them mowing, but not just the right technique but also the background and history: “old men were always the best at this in the village, beating the muscular youth like it was nothing...”

The teachers’ take was such that while they followed individual assignments, it was as if the student was carrying out a life-changing act. In this sense, intensity was ethical. For someone coming from the outside this could have appeared comical – the assignments themselves were often very simplified physically – but perhaps the focus and strength partly came from this teacher example. Eight students seemed pretty ideal, in a way also like a maximum number since teachers strived to hold a daily one-on-one with each student.

BASIC AIMS OF THE WORK

Sensitivity: Came not just from removing the information overload but from the rugged Lappish nature and silence. There was also comprehensive work done with the body: physical work, sauna, swimming, clean food, as well as Kristian and Hanna’s way of tuning in and listening no doubt had an effect.

Strength: Rose from concentration, as the external distractions were all removed. It also rose from everyone finding their own place and elements, from recognizing and confessing oneself. For this, the almost desert-like landscape of Lapland was excellent.

Students also looked for strength through finding their own place: it happened in contact with representatives of other cultures but equally in relation to the continuum of their own life, their artistry and existence. Concrete searching happened e.g. in finding their own stage in nature or their “own spot” during work by the river.

Community: Each of the students arrived alone from their own country. In Lapland, students stayed by themselves in a large house, and in Helsinki, too, they were together (in a 100-year-old wooden, Chekhov-esque villa by a sea inlet).

They were barred from entering their normal social networks: mobiles were handed in for safekeeping already at the airport en route to Oulu. And surprisingly, when they were returned after the final demo, no one put theirs on and many planned to stay “dis-connected” for a long time. Kristian had a clear vision of dramaturgical community in mind when it came to constructing the ensemble. From this perspective, the biggest event was probably the scene “Rehearsal of Grisha’s funeral”, created together the day after the trip to the Arctic Ocean. After this rehearsal Kristian commented: ‘In an ensemble you can enjoy yourself in other people. It is the only possibility for you to enjoy seeing yourself on stage as somebody very different. But it is you.’

Following the “funeral” Kristian divided the actors into pairs. ‘You are connected now.’ The dynamics of the pairs varied: one pair e.g. consisted of two actors who both did the role of the mother in *The Cherry Orchard*, while another pair were fictitious siblings or shared the same mother tongue.

Before that day the shape of the circle had not really been used, as everyone always sat at one long table. Following "Grisha's funeral" the joint meetings took place in the circle so that everyone had a possible line of sight to everyone else. The community began taking shared responsibility. "Find the way to deal and work. Blaming or quitting are no options." In the last few days for example, heating the sauna and thoroughly cleaning the house at the end was the shared responsibility of the ensemble, at the initiative of the organizers.

THE PEDAGOGY OF KRISTIAN SMEDS AND HANNA RAJAKANGAS

I would say that concreteness formed the cornerstone of the pedagogy. The role, and the world of the play, were worked out using very concrete and physical assignments.

One student later wrote: "I realized how much I can find out by doing physical work. I think I can follow and trust my instincts more now, and not put pressure on "finding" ...something...There is always something I will find, it doesn't matter if it's good or bad. I will try more, and fail more and do more simple physical work."

Kristian spoke some on how intelligent thinking is just one way of receiving things. The person, and particularly the artist, receives and collects things also by their heart and their stomach. In one of his teachings he gave three examples of significant (contemporary) acting, according to himself: 1) Ozzy Osbourne staggering around in various forms of acting with his family in his own reality TV series.

2) Mr. Lupin in Harry Potter, who becomes a werewolf at night and eats people.

3) The concept 'Follow the white rabbit!' that comes from Alice in Wonderland but which, during our work in Lapland, became connected to fearlessness in following the impulses of our subconscious, the courage to listen to our own intuition in working together.

In the words of Hanna: 'Let's forget about exercising the brain and try to find a concrete, physical way of showing things.' This work was presented as a method that anyone can adapt for use in their own work later on, not as an absolute method. 'This is one way to create depth in your work.'

Directing and proceeding took a soft approach: gently and step by step. The significance of sleep and rest was stressed from time to time. 'Your work has already started: you work either with your body or with your mind.'

Hanna's pedagogy was focused on two basic elements: the sauna and singing. These were used as a means of finding pathways into the subconscious and our emotions.

Hanna's background in cupping can be seen in how she processes the Sauna as a comprehensive tool, much as how Kristian does with the 'Stage'. Here, too, the pedagogy was soft and proceeded stage by stage. Hanna introduced the students to the history and meanings of the sauna – you could say, to a holistic, deeply Finnish philosophy of the body and nature. How fire is lit with one stick, without paper, what is lit, what it means that the logs can't be too far nor too near, etc.

One student reflection: 'The most important for me is the appreciation of nature I experienced there. To really experience water, the wood, the air, the stones, the sauna, the food, the people. I felt like a child again. I remember I appreciated nature very much as a child and lost connection to it over the years. In Lapland, I reconnected with nature again!!! In my acting studies I connected very much with my body, and now I gained the nature aspect back as well. So I really take the connection to my body and nature with me.'

I can't write as extensively about Hanna's voice work since it most often took place one on one with a student. At the river, the work consisted of connecting with your own subconscious through song, body resonance and singing long vowels. We first went to the river with our own folk songs but the following time, the assignment grew and changed. We first learned to listen to the sound/voice of the river.

Another student reflection: 'My two times at the rapid were both really valuable. I used to do is kind of voice work (giving voice and follow your voice) at my academy too but that was always just in the classroom. It is a totally different experience to sing with the rapid, in an area where you have so much space as a person to 'exist' (to me, making voice is also to kind of allow yourself to exist, to take space). It was so special to feel how my voice opened up my emotions.... I never experienced so much space, so much nature forces, so much silence and so much emotion in a landscape ...The nature as theatre, as sound design, as fellow actor.'

Zen director Ari Tikka writes about Eugen Herrigel's book "Zen in the Art of Archery":

'How does the teacher's experience and skill show in practice? At the first meeting the teacher is not in a hurry. He stops the students and shows them his own love of the great old tradition. What it looks like, sounds and feels like. He prepares the mind of the beginner to feel curious and ready. He creates safety and allows for idealizing commitment while also keeping feet firmly on the ground. But what does he not speak of? Of competition, gain, commerce, plans, achievement.'

So what does this have to do with the Lapland camp? I find the reference to Zen in e.g. studying archery relevant in the sense that also in the pedagogy of Rajakangas and Smeds, the aim to develop inner intuition and listening skills through physical work. Rather than learning a thousand different skills, we exercised our core practice through clear, fairly simple physical assignments. Kristian often emphasized that there was not necessarily anything mystical about how we worked, although it could be interpreted that way.

One student writes: 'Making the circle of stones for the fire: I wanted to make it perfect right away. But it was messed up. It was too small and not a real circle. After washing the stones, getting to know them, arranging them by size, and putting them on the ground one by one, the circle made itself. My focus/goal was not on the circle any more but on the stones themselves - and THAT made the circle!!! Another learning moment was when I was chopping wood. Every time I was not in the moment but somewhere else with my thoughts, I messed up the cut. I had to be focused and in the moment to have the right energy to get through. I need both the power of the mind and body to cut through the wood. This was an important lesson. And the activity itself was very powerful, therapeutic and gave me a lot of pleasure...'

Hanna and Kristian constantly tailored individual assignments together that would help a student reach the core of their own work. Voice work was not separate to this, but all of the work sort of looked for "the human voice" (writer's own expression). For some, the assignment stayed more or less the same for a week, whereas others received new assignments daily. In one way or another, everyone worked with one basic theme. Some were more clearly connected to a character from *The Cherry Orchard* and that text, others again did not receive any text at all. The starting point for everything was what the student needed in order to advance further on his or her own artistic path.

The pedagogy of two more teachers was more small-scale and hidden, but impacted the whole nonetheless. Jere Lokio ran the kitchen and maintenance. The students were Jere's assistants in his gentle but demanding style. Jere also went fishing with the students. One student rowed for Jere when he laid the nets in the evening, and again the following morning when it was time to empty them. Students also learned to kill and prepare their fish. Jere was very specific about the details of his cooking, which was art indeed. The kitchen as hosted by Jere also became a free zone for general joking around. Jere nurtured a lot of liberating, positively speaking "silly" humour. This way you could say that the camp had one organizer,

two actual teachers and two assistant teachers. In total four pairs of eyes and hands that worked together for shared pedagogic goals. Each of them met the students in slightly different situations and contexts and thus all four teachers had unique observations of the students that together promoted the pedagogy, the forming of student assignments and general caretaking as the camp progressed.

MORE DETAILED DRAMATURGY OF THE CAMP DAYS

- and more details about some aspects

TUESDAY 19th of July - "RETURN FROM PARIS"

Flight Helsinki-Oulu

First meeting with Hanna and Juhana at Oulu airport and bus journey from Oulu

Lunch in Tornio

Songs: everyone presented a song of their own choosing of their own country and in their own language, and shared why they had chosen that particular song

Arrival at the camp site. First meeting with Kristian and Jere.

Dinner

Sauna

WEDNESDAY 20th of July - "DEATH"

Initial briefing: "Opening an external stage"

3-hour walk: together and then alone

- We walked together into the wilderness for about 7 km. This also served as an introduction to the roughness of the surrounding nature. Kristian encouraged everyone to pay particular attention to the colours as they walked, while Hanna encouraged us to focus on the breathing. A long joint walk was, in a way, a gradual way of moving away from the noise of our city selves towards a different way of being in the wilderness.

Joint Cherry Orchard discussion:

- This was the only "classically analytical" text processing that took place during the camp. Kristian asked primarily for students' views on 'What bothered them about the Cherry Orchard'?

Lunch

Break: nap time

Hanna: The sauna: "Opening the inner stage"

"Rules and possibilities of the sauna": chopping wood: reasons for wood, making birch whisks, decorating the sauna, your own flowers: what has to die, lighting the sauna, heating it and going in

Silent sauna

In "The sauna of death" run by Hanna we all covered ourselves in peat: "now you die, you transform into matter alongside other elements

20 min – "Burning the past in the sauna" – swimming

-The thematic of the camp was crystallized already on the first full day: there is no life without death. "The sauna of death" gave everyone a chance to order the things they wish to leave behind in their lives. Additionally the elements: the peat that covers every part of the naked body, the hot sauna, cold river, flowers gathered by hand, the sun shining even in the early morning hours etc. were in themselves fairly strong "talismans" (writer's term) on the way towards finding the new.

Free discussion

One-on-one meetings began: Eetu

Briefing: "thank you"!

THURSDAY 21st of July - "RAPID"

Name day singing

Interviewing Julia about the Polish theatre

-At the breakfast table we had a longer discussion where we reviewed the history of the Polish theatre, the impact of various iconic characters, the special characteristics of Polish theatre, current movements in teaching etc. This was not done for any other country and was probably not needed either, since each transposed the questions in relation to thinking about their own roots.

Energy work (led by Juhana) and work in pairs

-Students had hoped for "body care akin to yoga" and an answer to this came in the form of Juhana von Bagh's dance class that was done collectively. Afterwards we continued to work in pairs with physical energization.

Working with the text (each had a one-on-one meeting with Kristian)

First time to the river (Hanna)

- We didn't try to pump ourselves up to reach a creative space, but to do so through voice.

Sauna

FRIDAY 22nd of July - 'WORK HARDER'

We slept an hour longer in the morning. Then the pace was picked up: everyone had a scheduled one-on-one in both the morning and the evening.

Kristian: 'Work hard. Don't lay down and think. It's better to walk. Things will come when you ask sincerely.'

Jere Lokio's set: themes Violence/Conflict (Jere has decades of experience of martial arts and theatre).

Initially a discussion about defense, your own boundaries and violence, the manufacture of personal mouth guards from plastic, balancing exercises and martial arts exercises together and in small groups.

In the evening, sing-along in the tepee: singing together from the traditions of different countries. Then a scene from The Cherry Orchard and continued processing of the scene in the sauna afterwards.

SATURDAY 24th of July - "ANOTHER SILENT WORKING DAY"

Everyone had a one-on-one with Kristian.

Sauna a little earlier in the evening, and a meal together. Evening off.

SUNDAY 25th of July - "ARCTIC OCEAN"

Leaving for Norway

Stopping on the Finnish side for some shopping

Visiting a gas station and meeting Norwegian locals

Lunch in the hills

Swim in the Arctic

Supper

Saunas

MONDAY 26th of July - "BATTERY DAY"

Return

9:30 Kristian's brief

10:00 Rapid II. First a joint "training session" to find a joint resonance. Each given a separate assignment for Hanna. Writing.

- *Hanna had us first do all kinds of breathing, speaking and gymnastics exercises, by which we sought to find a voice from the entire body. We learned to direct our voice, even projecting it far away. The actual main assignment was to sing to the rapid. This was done in a place of everyone's own choosing and that, too, started from listening to the strength of the rapid. Many of the exercises of the day were done in a shared circle; we saw each other's faces. So far we had focused strongly on our own process and these processes had not been shared. This had made maximum concentration possible without needing to take responsibility for the group, or struggling with jealousy.*

14:00 Silent lunch

15:00 Rest and work

16:30 Shared start

17:00 Rehearsing the funeral

18:30 Discussion: "We are creating ensemble now".

Saunas

Some worked on their own projects until past midnight

TUESDAY 26th of July - "PERFORMANCES"

9:00 Breakfast

10:00 Juhana: Dance exercise + second physical "calling" in pairs

11:00 Rehearsing the Anja and Varja scene, others watching

12:00 Pause, doing dishes

13:00 Discussion about the morning's energy work and professionalism

17:30 Eetu's performance on his stage by the swamp in a thunderstorm, "Trofimov"

Hanna's performance that shifted into a joint rapid song

Food, saunas

Debrief

WEDNESDAY 27th of July - "FAREWELL"

10:00 Breakfast

11:30 Valentina's magic tricks

12:00 Eetu reflecting on what he had seen, discussion

13:00 Finding a thing/object to bury in the ground together

14:30 "Funeral"

Ensemble cleaning

The women preparing the Sauna of birth: honey

24:00 Bonfire and Barbara's solo by the fire

THURSDAY 28th of July - "TRANSITION"

8:00 Breakfast

9:00 Departure

Stopping near Kemi

Saying goodbye to Hanna who stayed in Oulu

Helsinki

Linnunlaulu

In Helsinki the students were met by Professor Elina Knihtilä and producer Johanna Autio, who had arranged the course. Students reviewed the events in Lapland with them and shared what they had learned. They also received the basic coordinates for getting around Helsinki and their own paper (!) maps.

FRIDAY 29th of July - "THEATRES"

17:00 The National Theatre: Kristian's office, Willensauna, the green room, Main stage, discussion about Finnish theatre

- The students had enjoyed a day off in Helsinki. Most of them had visited Suomenlinna. The group met up at the National Theatre at five; this is where Smeds works as an artist-in-residence. Many were impressed with the tour of the National Theatre.

19:00 New space for demos at the Theatre Academy

Disco

21:00 Debrief by the sea in Merihaka

SATURDAY 30th of July - "PARIS"

Picking up costumes

Changing locations

Long improvisation where the camp was reviewed

SUNDAY 31st of July - "REFLECTIONS"

12:00 Elina Knihtilä and Kristian shared their backgrounds and the challenges of the work

13:30 Juhana's warm-up: the ring and shadowing

Joint improvised reflection of the camp's first days was completed

Dinner

18:00 Rapids, discussion

20-24 Sauna at Linnunlaulu

MONDAY 1st of August - "COMING OUT"

12:00 Warm-up

12:15 – 15:00 Polishing the first part

15:30-20:45 Making the end

21:00 Performance for an international audience

23:00 Joint discussion with spectators and school representatives

02:00 Tea

A COLLECTION OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES

ON COMMUNITY

"I haven't felt the true feeling of ensemble in a while. Or maybe ever? But I felt some strange safety with the others in this workshop, and it felt really "true" to be on stage with them, because we all knew what was going on. We had our little secret that nobody else knew."

"For me the ensemble/community part was so beautiful. To discover that I sometimes really miss a certain tribe feeling. A culture that is bigger than my individual. Singing songs together in the sauna, feeling feminine, feeling the connection to the others, feeling free.....it was really special to me. So was the discovery that I, of course, also have a line of ancestors. That I'm in that sense also part of something bigger than me. Well, there are so many things that will continue to pop up in my mind. But I think that's the great part of this: the learning will not stop now. Things will keep reminding me of what we did there. And I will continue to make discoveries that I don't understand yet..."

'I learned that speaking English frees me from some of the communication manners.'

'I appreciate the idea of asking the whole group to keep silent while working. The atmosphere of concentration and being in a process was noticeable. Personally, I loved that time - it was a special kind of silence - dense and intense.'

"I realized that my fear of not being part of a group is bigger than I thought. So this was a bigger gift for me."

'When people ask me now 'how it was?' my answer is: never before has anyone at school asked me at the very beginning of work (and during the process as well) a very simple but such a necessary question: How are you? How do you feel here? Is there anything that you're afraid of? You can't imagine how important that was for me.'

'We spent two weeks together and only together, so we talked a lot about theatre and acting and our academics and life and philosophy and psychology and emotions and experience and culture. Life is a very valuable thing for an actor. I think that you have to experience and broaden your horizon and check your perspectives and that's what happened. Also, acting and improvising in your own language with someone who's doing it in her own language forces you to concentrate on listening and body language and being

present. And of course we saw each other's acts and singing all the time, so we saw a lot of talent and different ways of doing things. I think being an actor and to advance is a lot about opening up and finding the things inside of you and that's what happened, I saw that in others and felt it myself, I observed and I did it myself."

'I met a wonderful group of people who were willing to talk about many crucial issues: who weren't afraid to face even existential problems. It built not only an atmosphere of trust between us but also unusual connection to the material and characters we've been working on. '

"I feel the songs were some kind of 'key' to our backgrounds and souls."

WORKING

"My inner assumption has been confirmed - there does exist a theatre based on 'heart'. Moreover, a human's being and soul are the main components of art.'

'How was the solo work with Kristian?

Very simple and uncomplicated ... I felt satisfied that I didn't have to go into some hidden darkness in me and "feel all the feels". Theatre is so emotional anyway and I don't want to drag myself into some kind of emotional hole.'

'I've been thinking a lot about what was so special for me in the acting method we used - because it definitely was. Why it wasn't a problem to evoke emotions and feel authentic, acting my character. Well, we were given an opportunity to really tell like them and 'be' them. I felt a strong connection between my solo job and my character. I had time and peace to really think of my heroes and the entire peace problems. It was a great idea to let us construct the situations first to get familiar with the whole background and atmosphere around. Then the psychological motivations naturally came. That process led us to the point where our scenes weren't 'acted' but just 'lived'.'

"What did I find? A better connection to myself. Both terrible and beautiful images that are still helping me to understand many issues."

"I have met this method in my life before, several times but it has never been led both so professionally and emotionally deeply as in Lapland."

"The existential issues have always concerned and worried me. It was really special that the teachers weren't afraid to face them. I'm proud that I let myself start the process of 'renewing'. I was given a chance to try to bury the problems that are destroying me. What is more, I was thinking of Cherry Orchard itself in the category of life and death."

My task in the beginning was to create a holy clown and a dance floor. That task changed me a little bit during the week. First, I searched for a place to make my dance floor. I searched for a long time, and then I found my place – I knew this place was it. I started working alone there at first. I wanted to create my holy clown. I wanted to create a dance that everyone could do (this never happened, but it was a nice starting point). Then Hanna came with me to visit my place. After talking, she gave me a few exercises and thoughts I could work on – things we already did in a group before and some other breathing exercises. After explaining everything, she left me alone so I could work. The impact of those exercises were bigger than I could have imagined. I know the voice/the breathing is very close to your inner world and feelings, but it amazed me, how close it was. When Kristian visited my place, he made me go on and on - I didn't want to, but I wanted to at the same time. Later on, Hanna and Kristian came to visit my place together. I tried to let my creature come out, they were just watching. Then Kristian gave me all kinds of tasks I had to do on the spot. They were just watching. I didn't know why I was doing those things (like fighting him out of my place, in many different ways). I didn't feel like I could do it. I got very mad, I got hopeless again, but in the end it felt very rewarding. I didn't feel like I really had to do things I didn't want, it was in a good way. I felt very valuable, but at the same time I went through many different stages of being a person/a creature /in nature."

MULTICULTURAL ASPECT

'All in all, the songs from the other countries I will ever forget. Some songs I looked up on YouTube, but it's not the same. I really noticed that I'm also a musician. That made me happy.'

I guess the rebirth of the rapid was a big gift for the audience. Because it was there. And that's what I want to see in theatre. Realness. I have to say that the three weeks I was in Finland were like 3 months. It's still affecting me and I still think about it a lot.'

'I learned of different mindsets of cultures, that Polish culture can be more direct and with more action than Norwegian culture, and also that the Latvian and Polish cultures has a stronger connection to Russian culture. I heard many languages, and learned the similarities and differences.'

'I really do believe in a European theatre, even more after this project and after talking to the other participants and discovering that we have the same European background in our education, as well as interesting differences. I really do see my fellow students as colleagues and I'm so glad I got in contact with them.'

'That we were the same age, arguing about the same questions. It was helpful that I could see that all over Europe there are kind of the same questions.'

CRITICISM

"I would have liked to have worked longer. The place where we ended could be the place where we started to rehearse with Chekhov, for example.

'To improve this concept and to give a note from PLETA's point of view, namely focusing on the search for cultural co-creation, I would suggest to think of more ways to work together. My first impression of the European platform was also that cooperation was its main goal. It's of course up to the teachers to think whether this fits into the specific concept of the boot camp or not, but I would have been really curious to rehearse more scenes together, since I was really eager to finally work with actors from other theatre cultures. I must say I already learned a lot by talking together about our cultures, but it would have been a different experience to actually rehearse a Chekhov scene together. Again: since the concept of his boot camp was focusing on specific elements, it's up to the teachers to judge whether this would be possible or whether this would have done shortage to our individual experiences (which I would not have wanted to miss!!!!)'

WHAT I LEARNED

"I learned that I like to be alone. That I can do more than I thought. That I need to let my past die. To face my tears. To be more simple. To not be in a hurry with my questions and answers, to be patient. That I'm too heavy in my head. Self-confidence. To let the things come to me. I have learned to be more curious about myself to the others. I've learned how to play my childhood games again. I've connected to my inner child. I've learned how to take responsibilities I should I have. I have learned how to be strong by being weak. I've learned that I always want to be ahead and compare myself to others and that I need to stop it. That I don't like mosquitos. That I don't need to play, I need to be, because playing is acting. I'm learning that if you desperately want something and you can't get it - let it go, it will come if needed. I'm learning how to balance myself. That controlling things blocks my heart and body. That you need to stop to understand what's going on with you. That developing a sense of humour towards myself is the task of my

whole life. That I need to be gentle to myself and take more care of my feminine side. That I can save myself from every situation. That I need to water my plant and take care of it. Not to waste my energy for everybody. How to disconnect. How not to block my life energy. How not to take things too personally. That less is more.”

There is space in your head to think of everything - it is important, because I want to know myself I have to be able to let my thoughts come to me. I realized that often when I need to think or when I need to feel big things, I tend to go to my laptop and phone and just distract myself. In Lapland that wasn't possible, which made me feel free.’

‘Teaching about self-defense is still affecting me.’

‘This way of working is unknown to me, but it gives me input on a totally new level. It also gave me a certain sense of fun in doing things that felt stupid, because the ‘unknown' is actually a fun area to be in (and in the end it will pay off).’

‘I learned that power or force or strength isn't aggression or being tough, it's about calmness and peace and being certain or confident.’

‘I would really like to thank you for the outstanding support that was given to me. It was the best gift I could dream of for the beginning of my 'adult life.’

FINAL SUMMARY

Central to the students was the formation of an ensemble: mutual trust and appreciation. Appreciation is also connected to accepting one another's differences and uniqueness. The dynamics of the camp were probably affected by the fact that seven of the participants were women, with just one man (also from Finland). This was not at all a bad thing, as each person played their own part in the whole and I don't think there was any negative competition going on.

Some of the students would have wanted to have a more in-depth study of Chekov's lines. On the other hand, everyone seemed to accept that "silent" work was the most important way of entering the world of the play.

The original plans for the section taking place in the south changed during the trip. Initially the plan was to approach Chekov's text musically with the help of a professional musician in Helsinki, and to make more scenes from that. On the other hand I see that the organizers showed not just a good pedagogic eye but also genuine commitment to the ensemble in how they sensitively listened to the energy of the group, letting the process grow organically in the direction that each participant needed. The jump from working in Lapland to entering the text of The Cherry Orchard play felt obviously unpleasant and was not carried out.

With the benefit of hindsight we pondered that the ideal situation would have been an even longer debrief in Helsinki. The students would have stayed together for e.g. five more days and debriefed the authentic material they themselves built in Lapland, and Kristian would direct some more Chekov in the mix.

Presumably the Lapland experience would have been more comprehensively and collectively debriefed that way, and the students' ability to paste their own reflection material and internal world onto Chekov's texts would have increased.

What are the students then left with after the course?

They themselves think: a lot. The capacity of the course to leave an impact is exceptionally large. The teaching flowed from the core of teachers Smeds and Rajakangas, but at the same time from the core of Finnish culture. The austere Northern border region with its nature, the strong removal of all external stimuli, the sauna. Students in the bosom of nature, isolated from the rest of society but on the other hand under 24H care - for many the camp was a return to childhood: to a shared horizon, to simplicity, unhurriedness, complete presence and (in a way) a closed, safe world and hermeneutic circle.

In their feedback the actors wrote especially about a new feel for themselves and facing themselves in a different way than perhaps ever before. They also wrote about a new way and courage to approach the actor's work: more physical, simpler, more subconscious, more tenacious and more listening.