

**2018 S.A.T.B. MARSEILLE PARTNERSHIP MEETING & WORKSHOPS
TESTIMONY FROM CARO SMART: COORDINATOR FOR TRUE NORTH
HEALTH; LONDON**

How strong/intense was your SATB Edition Marseille experience on a scale of 1 to 10

7

Please explain more about that?

I would not use the words strong or intense about the Marseilles experience. For me it was interesting, fun and challenging.

What happened for you that was unexpected?

The immersive theatre experience about scapegoating. It was surreal. And musical, which was totally unexpected. It allowed me a way to “know” people from an unrational perspective ...Understanding people on a non verbal yet integral and authentic way through their songs and voices. Being squeezed into a small car between two large women and having two different songs sung in each ear at the same time was a unique and beautiful experience for me.

I loved listening to people I know and love being “interviewed” in the little interview box after being sense disorientated and being quirky and funny and unguarded.

That also enriched my knowledge of those people.

It was unexpected that the Bel de Mai area felt very comfortable and safe after reading about how unsafe it was it on tourist online posts.

It was unexpected that we had such a fun and lovely evening with Khadi and Reubens from the theatre company in Khadi’s flat, and that we had many points of interest and reference.

It was unexpected that there is such a thriving alternative political subculture in Marseilles with vibrant and interesting people and so much art in the city on the streets.

What was not good (merde)?

Much was good. The food sharing and food availability for us all in the communal space was great.

It was merde to constantly navigate being in spaces which people were used to being smoking places.

Sometimes it was hard to breathe when people were smoking around me like at the music gig in the space. I was prepared for this as I have friends in other parts of France and am always shocked to be reminded how much smoking cigarettes is still some-how an embedded part of social french culture. It did though impact on the amount of sociality, hanging and communication that could happen that included everyone.

C’etait un peu la merde that we didn’t all get to check in with each other and talk more as a collective group like at the short workshop Blandine facilitated.

There was also some practical stress regarding access to our airbnb hosts - both before during and after our trip, as we hadn’t made the booking.

How to make better the "not good (merde)"?

What we have learnt from Marseilles and to some degree Berlin is for the next 5 day visit to have more coherency and daily talking and check in with all participants.

We are looking forward to facilitating that here in London when our European partners visit here in the Autumn.

It would have been great to have had a group discussion and consensus and mutual agreement on smoking spaces. This will not be so relevant here.

What could you use from this experience in your daily life at home or work?

My take home from this experience was that the Marseilles experience really made me reflect and think about activist spaces and how to make them accessible to everyone.

That maybe many European (and I include the UK in this) activist subcultures and activist spaces are born from feelings of alienation and anger, which means we/they are the perfect allies for helping marginalised people who also often feel alienated and angry. Yet so much of this activist punk subculture is defined by images of death, skulls and like angry penises as weapons on posters or graffiti, or death and nihilism as recurring themes as a response to an understanding of the colonial patriarchal organisation of the "civilised" West.

I was wondering that if you have escaped from a war zone, from the ugliness and stench of death and genocide and rape how welcoming or comfortable a western autonomous social space run by subcultural activists with this kind of art work would be, especially if you were a woman, despite the best intentions of the people involved. It made me think that that probably contributed to the ongoing gender imbalance in many aspects of cultural production in autonomous spaces, how women from migrant communities would be more likely to be uncomfortable visiting environments that consolidate and replicate in many ways "universal" cultural signifiers of male dominance., that are used to silence or shame women even if they are not directed at those women in these circumstances: male anger, references to death and sex cultural producing generated by a male experience.... even yes smoking whilst preparing food. This gender imbalance manifesting in a lack of the confidence to create culturally.

Yet how to change that while still keeping the heart and soul of resistance, subversion and anger at the murderous injustices committed by those in power that create and fuel these also wonderful autonomous spaces.

Extra Comments (including comments about the questions themselves?)

My extra comments are really a follow through to thinking about the TNH London visit.

As a start up organisation with its roots in women only spaces it will be interesting to see how we share our work with our European partners.

Women's projects and groups tend to be less universally supported, take more dedication and energy and are also more transient/vulnerable than mixed gender projects and spaces. It is a strength and a weakness.

Due to the therapeutic nature of TNH we also have to be more mindful in terms of ethics and confidentiality because of who we work with.

London is larger and more fragmented than Berlin and Marseilles and we do not have a physical base, coming together when needed for projects, so the 5 day London experience will have a different flavour but will also mean that our coherency and continuity will be less in bricks and mortar and more in consciously creating meetings everyday.

So thank you Team Marseilles for all your wonderful hard work and efforts to make this experience enriching and provocative.

We are looking forward to hosting you all in the autumn