

EDN Atelier: HOLDING_TOGETHER

Report written by Katarzyna Słoboda

Dancing at the edge of the world

The EDN Atelier HOLDING_TOGETHER was organized by Art Stations Foundation by Grażyna Kulczyk in relation to the Grand Re Union monthly gathering. 17th of October 2020, the second day of our zoom meeting was also a celebration of the last performance (Koda / A Tribute by Janusz Orlik and Joanna Leśniewska) at Studio Słodownia +3 in Stary Browar Nowy Taniec/Old Brewery New Dance, the space dedicated to experimental choreography since 2004. Art Stations Foundation by Grażyna Kulczyk supported and is generously supporting a whole new generation of ambitious and talented choreographers, dancers and performers with the production of new works and collaborations, in depth educational and training programs, residencies, scholarships, building local as well as international partnerships. As we've said farewell to the place on the map (right in the centre of Poznań, Poland), we've welcomed new possibilities for the futures of contemporary dance and choreography in Poland. The facts are clear: without Art Stations Foundation by Grażyna Kulczyk's support there will be hardly any. The questions revolving around unforeseeable future, togetherness, (shared) hopes and desires for diversity, inclusivity, equality, safety, care, justice and freedom are the driving forces behind Grand Re Union project.

Grand Re Union going digital

Grand Re Union was originally designed as a 10 days in-person gathering in June 2020 in Poznań that would have been a chance to meet and discuss choreographic urgencies while slowing down the pace of the festival season. The change was in the air already and the project from its beginning was aiming at going against the grain of the overwhelming speed of overproduction. The lack of opportunities to simply meet and reflect on motivations, intentions, purposes of artistic, curatorial and discursive practices revolving around dance and choreography in the broader socio-political and environmental context was overwhelming. Then in February/March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has spread and paralyzed the performing arts sector. The Grand Re Union co-organised by Art Stations Foundation by Grażyna Kulczyk and Counterpulse was due to happen online as intergenerational, transcontinental monthly online events (mostly workshops) for broader public and gatherings of artists, curators, writers, scholars as well as curated materials on the website experimenting with the online content (written as well as audio and audiovisual material open for contribution and discussion).

Holding together while staying apart

Since March we all got used to meet online, to invite people (sometimes strangers) via computer cameras into our homes. During all of the Grand Re Union gatherings I deeply felt welcomed to share my feelings, thoughts and questions, more than expertise, opinions and statements. During first two hours of this Atelier we were not only introduced into the process of developing Grand Re Union but also learned about

the challenges, doubts and ambiguities that instigators of the project discussed when faced not only with the health crisis due to covid-19 but also social dissent regarding racism and police killings in the US, dictatorship in Bielarus, as well as LGBTQ+ rights in Poland (to name just those three, keeping in mind the complexities of all the fights for social justice around the globe). Joanna Leśnierowska, curator of Stary Browar Nowy Taniec/Old Brewery New Dance introduced Peter Pleyer, Marta Keil, Julie Phelps, and Rivca Rubin - the team of artists and curators crossing the fields and roles in their everyday activities to support and initiate the artistic processes. The driving force behind the initial idea was love: How to bring and share love from within our bodies out into the world? By touching this issue Peter Pleyer introduced us to a few exercises that could help us be more bodily present and aware during the online meetings. Which related much to the improvisation as not only artistic but everyday practice that can help us deal with crisis („way of listening out but also listening in”) which was discussed by Julie Phelps (Counterpulse) - asking that while we know that dance as a practice can help to reduce harm in the world the question is how can one share that with the broader but most of all diverse public? How to turn challenges into opportunity was an issue raised by Rivca Rubin, who specializes in facilitating communication during diverse group processes. Meanwhile Marta Keil as a researcher and curator contributed with the reflections revolving around the notion of documentation of such complex artistic and creative process that again one wants to share with the broader public (hence the variety of media with which the project operates - all the experiments will be translated into the publication in 2021). How to „go into process and let go of the product” while having something to share with the others, stay inclusive and respond to the urgent social issues with solidarity and care?

How to be connected while being with words, objects, images, movements and emotions?

The second half of our gathering on Friday (October 16th) was composed of two workshops. First one was led by Rivca Rubin on her upwording practice which helped me to rethink and reshape the way we speak to each other. „As much of the way we speak is habitual, it goes largely unnoticed that through our current use of language, we are inadvertently upholding systems many of us are seeking to dismantle. The practice of upwording starts with raising awareness of the underpinning concepts, intentions, and positions taken, implied in habitual words and phrases, and from here make active language choices to align our language with our intentions. This is crucial if our desire is for fresh thinking to create and support lasting change” as she has said in her Grand Re Union podcast. Her methodology reveals not only how we miscommunicate with people around us but also how we misinterpret our own feelings and attitudes when we transmit them into cliches. It was a chance to reflect on the daily choices - what I want and like to do might happen to coincide with what I am willing to and/or am prepared to do. It all resonated with the way in which we might organize our daily routines and basically the environment of the artistic research practices.

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The second workshop proposed by Peter Pleyer was a five object game adapted from in-person group exercise into an online compositional and communication tool. Peter introduced us to the sources of the game that was instigated by Susan Rethorst (choreographer, teacher, author of the book *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings*) who got inspired by Simone Forti (the story of the game was investigated by Melinda Buckwalter in her article *5 Degrees of Inspiration*). We went into the smaller (3-4 people) groups and started to compose and dialogue with 2-3 objects and a mirror that we were asked to prepare beforehand. The way in which the simple instruction created an opportunity to be together without verbal communication was fascinating. We observed and responded to movements and images created with the object animated by our hands which reorganized the frame in which we as individuals present ourselves in those digitally embodied entities. The game was also partly used in online version of *Moving Mirror* performance project initiated by Peter Pleyer (performed by him as well as artists based in or travelling between Berlin and Poland) which was the online commission for *The Kick Off Issue* of the *Grand re Union Magazine*. I've found the continuation of those workshops in the *Grand Re Union* open LIVE event in the afternoon of October 17th. Lea Kieffer proposed an intense *Sci Fi Anatomy* session as the embodied adventure into the imagined relations of our bodies and the environment. Within the *Reading Station* prepared by Agnes Benoit from books on the move and Peter Pleyer we've dug deeper into the choreographies of words found in the text written by thinkers and artists such as Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, Jeroen Peters, Doran George, Chris Gosden, Fred Moten and Wu Tsang among others.

The second day of the EDN Atelier *HOLDING_TOGETHER* was devoted to emotions. Karolina Wigura, a sociologist, historian of ideas, and journalist guided us through the history and philosophical theories of emotions. How can we know what other people feel? How can we respond to other people's emotions as well as find ourselves in the emotional turmoil of social and political crisis? What is maybe obvious to dance practitioners but maybe not so much to the society at large is that emotions connect our body with our mind. The mind/body split in dance history as well as the state of today's local and global politics and societies was the main topic of a discussion that we've had before and after Karolina Wigura's lecture. How to bring more diversity, care and empathy into the politics as well as the arts? How can we transform fear and anger into action that could be a basis for hope and social change? It all finalized for us in the questions regarding our responses and responsibilities facing the capitalist driven mass extinction of species, climate change and the probable annihilation of the conditions for living on this planet. But we've managed to end the discussion with the hope for change that can only happen with collective and multiplied micro-gestures of resistance and healing. I do believe that *Grand Re Union* is a laboratory where we can test and discuss those micropolitical gestures.

Slow down and listen

„All of us know that art making is not just about creating a product, a dance, or an event. It is a process through which we discover and understand ourselves and the world around us. But it is also a process where we transform concepts into embodied experiences that our audiences can feel and empathize with. This moment of exchange and shared experience with others, with an (intentional) assembled community, has the potential to shift personal and collective perspectives and create change, lasting change”. Those words by Joanna Haingood summarize perfectly the idea, intentions and realizations within the Grand Re Union project which is an open invitation to reimagine, redesign and rethink our future as artists, thinkers, curators, facilitators and human beings amongst other beings. Radical sociability as poetically and politically discussed by Lou Drago is possible when „we have something to share not something to prove”. Slow down, listen and speak up.

About the author of report

Katarzyna Słoboda is a curator, researcher, writer. Works at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland and finalizing her Ph.D (on attention in contemporary dance practices) in the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. She has edited several publications on dance, choreography and contemporary art. Recipient of Grażyna Kulczyk fellowship in the field of contemporary choreography (2018) and Młoda Polska (2018).