

EDN Conference: Creating Space for Solidarity / Wake Up! **Report written by Annette van Zwoll**

There is a flow of energy circulating through the former administrative centre that since 2004 has been the home of Centre National de la Danse in Paris. It's bouncing back from the huge, grey, concrete staircase in the middle of the building, into the open studios and bending towards the outside terrace and the square in front of the building. It's CAMPING, an international choreography platform lasting for two weeks, where dance & choreography students from all over the world participate in workshops, performances, talks and researches. Even only in the two days that I'm sharing the same building the bustling drive, curiosity, ambition, but also urgency and care for the future are tangible.

It's hard to hold on to this sense of positive urgency during the Forum Wake Up!, that aims to take a global look to understand the realities of countries in danger and to conceive a space for solidarity. In the middle of the space, a big table is placed on which about thirty people are seated. The other participants surround the table. To say something, the ones on the second row can tap the shoulder of someone sitting at the table and they swap places. But the exchange of seats only happens after we hear the personal and political statements from artists from Brazil, Europe and South-Africa. And the harsh reality of what they are saying hits hard.

'The war is narrative'

After the election of the right-wing president Bolsonaro in Brazil, the Ministry of Culture has been diminished and arts and artists are threatened in their survival. But already before that, art was under threat by right-wing parties.

One of the most impressive stories is the one of the Brazilian choreographer and writer Wagner Schwartz, whose feet were touched by a four-year-old (the child of a friend) while he was performing his show *La Bête* (the Beast) naked in Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo. The encounter was filmed, got viral and he got accused of pedophilia and the museum of facilitating that. Serious death threats came his way.

It's an example of how actual and truthful information, incidents, ideas and statements are twisted and molded till they can be distributed in support of a political ideology, a power play or/and commercial interests. 'The war is narrative' as moderator Nayse López accurately states. She describes how a flow of (online) information is used as mass manipulation to control the people. How Bolsonaro was voted for based on falsified information, in line with the voting for Trump and in Europe, for Brexit. In many so-called democratic countries human rights, journalism, legal systems and independent art are under huge threat and this threat is supported by narratives that are deliberately mis-informative.

'We have to look at the back stage', López continues her statement. Because who is funding the flow of mis-information? And with what political ideology and, very often, financial gain? It's done so sophisticated and so refined but this 'back stage' needs to be made visible in the forefront, in order to make people believe the truth again.

We have power

A wake up call it is. South-African choreographer Robyn Orlin draws a parallel between current Brazil and Apartheid in South-Africa, but also reminds the West-Europeans in the room not to be smug and comfortable: her daughter, a young woman of colour, encounters as much racism in South-Africa as she does in Berlin. No false narrative on the liberty and tolerance in Western-Europe should be created either.

Through history, what is shared in many of these oppressive narratives is the contempt for art. 'Why do they (the people in government) hate art? Why do they hate artists?' asks Brazilian actress and stage director Fernanda Silva in an emotional and poetic statement on her contradictory feelings towards Brazil. She answers the question herself: 'Because we have power'.

'It takes a lot of strength to be optimistic, but it's also necessary'

After all the stories, there is a heaviness in the room. As López concludes; 'It takes a lot of strength to be optimistic, but it's also necessary.' It also takes a lot of bravery. To fight 'the way the government is sucking out our imagination and subjectivity and make us feel afraid' choreographer Marcelo Evelin implemented an artistic residency space in his little home town in the north-eastern part of Brazil, which is an inclusive space where, among others, women, transgenders and people of colour find safety. Although there is a continuous threat of having to close down the space, he insists on creating a place where imagination can suspend beyond the realm of what is possible. It is his way of creating new narratives.