





apap – advancing performing arts project is an international network of 11 cultural organisations from all over Europe.

The project, apap-Performing Europe 2020, is supported by the *Creative Europe Programme* of the EU, it is implemented throughout a four-years period (1st of June 2016-30th of May 2020).

apap – Performing Europe 2020 is dedicated to the sustainable support of contemporary dance and performance in Europe and abroad, including a special cooperation with *Maqamat/Beit El Raqs* in Lebanon, as well as a strong focus on enlarging audiences and a knowledge-transfer between cultural organizations.

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

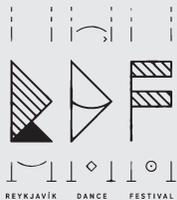
Cover photo by Tomasz Wiech documents *Polish Mothers on Tree Stumps* action that took place on 03.03.2017 in Kraków, Poland.

Polish Mothers on Tree Stumps is an informal civic movement which arose as a reaction to the mass felling of trees in Poland. The campaign begun with Cecylia Malik's protest, during which, for a month, she breast-fed her 6-month-old son (Ignacy) at different Kraków logging sites. She posted photographs of her performances on Facebook, in an effort to show the scale of the massacre of trees. Other mothers joined the campaign, and Anna Grajewska became a co-organiser. The first group performance took place on March 3, 2017 in Kraków. As the event went viral, mothers with small children went to logging sites all over Poland to point out the scale of destruction.

a collective that initiated the campaign
Cecylia Malik, Anna Grajewska,
Agata Bargiel, Agnieszka Miłogrodzka,
Daria Gosek-Popiołek

concept
Cecylia Malik

Photographic documentation:
Tomasz Wiech



We are in a cave under the ground. People come here when they need to talk without being watched/heard. It's a place for connecting, out of network-reach. Outside, above the earth's surface, it's very hot. Inside it's cool and dark. There are no faces, only voices. The voices are Agastache, Chamerion, Buddleia, Dryas.

19

Buddleia How is the forecast?

Agastache Not promising. The change seems to be pretty violent; the wind is coming unexpectedly fast. There might be not enough time to protect one's space.

B One's space?

Dryas Our space?

B Who is "us"?

D Definitely not the entire field. Let the powerful ones have their power for they are interested in power for its own sake. We are interested in people's power, the power of people together.

B Without the powerful ones the space we have to protect is already a little less crowded.

D Let's define our space- I actually prefer "our place". Think of strategies how to protect it, and root it.

B We should learn from different root-systems in different places.

D I would like to learn from you, Agastache, from what happened, which actions you undertook or should have undertaken and did not. We need to learn from you, because it's happening to us and we cannot afford to make the same mistakes everywhere. We should focus on our interconnectedness and get the information from your roots. So: what could you have done differently?

A I am not so sure I have any survival kit *laughs*. We live and survive, but we're often not able to continue our practice. The hectic pace out there is caused partly by the sudden changes we witness and have to adapt to – this is a quite efficient strategy to stop one from thinking. No way to act, you can only react.

B It's interesting to think about pace. One could say, in a forgiving, benevolent instance, that the current xenophobia, discrimination on all levels, is because the pace with

which things change is too high for almost everyone, on a somatic level. The acceleration in the speed with which we can travel through space and time, the complex realities merging through globalisation, the accumulation of information and data... the body is overwhelmed and goes into survival modus: stop thinking, stop feeling. My species – what I recognize, what I know – should survive at any cost. Hence leaders with simple messages get elected, who defend what is “ours” and “proper”.

A Besides the relentless pace there is also a lack of safety on a very basic, material, even physical level: anger and tension on the streets, aggressive car drivers, people being beaten because they look gay, because they speak different languages, some of the cities being declared as “free from LGBT”; the juridical system being destroyed, economic and direct censorship, teachers being humiliated; women being even more objectified than before; etc. I kind of lost the ground. And in order to continue, I need to think of re-rooting.

Chamerion I need to feel empowered and encouraged.

A I need not to be alone.

C I need time and conditions....

A ... material conditions to survive.

C I need to stop fearing something might happen to my friends who refuse to follow the normative rules.

B This is so much focused on yourself, because you feel endangered.

A Because I am desperate and exhausted of proving constantly everybody how strong I am. I need a right to refuse.

C You need a safe place.

D You need to get rid of the obsession with your own country.

A If my practice is not grounded at the moment, it is not because I don't know the ground. The reason is: it was cut off from its own soil. This cutting off happened in two steps. First there was a change in the surroundings: a sudden change of the ecosystem that became quite hostile. There was no way to develop the roots further on, they got blocked: as if they did not belong there anymore. But I guess it was my fault not to see the symptoms. And then the water streams have been

21

redirected and as a result could not reach my place anymore. I had to move. I am not sure where will I be able to root again.

B Could you think of any good place?

A Not really. But I also decided to change strategy – I am afraid of building my place in one location, I'd rather like to move it from one to another. It doesn't mean more mobility or a kind of nomadic life. I'm rather searching for roots with a horizontal direction, not necessarily a vertical one. I do not trust the roots immersing in a particular history, nationality or identity, but rather in the ears of my neighbors or friends. Or more than for roots maybe, I'm searching for common ground, a ground that would enable us to hear and inform each other and thus to strengthen our values, work, choices and practices. And I don't know how this common ground looks like yet, maybe it never gets its final shape exactly because it is a common effort. Perhaps it has to always stay in the process of constituting itself – I think the strongest political potential of an institution is situated in the very process of instituting, in the moment when its conditions and rules are still being negotiated and thus able to change.

C The place in a constant mode of becoming itself can become a shelter.

I need safety the most. I need to stop fearing something might happen to me as a woman, because I smiled to someone, because I dare to speak, because I don't know how I will pay my rent, because I don't accept sexist remarks on the street etc.

A And we need to hurry up. The symptoms seem to be unforeseeable and difficult to grasp. But the changes are happening right here, in front of our very eyes, yet invisible and inaudible to the forecast machines and algorithms. We could have seen, smelled and heard it – if only we had stopped talking on the forecast for a while.

B So, let's close our eyes and listen with our inner ears to our deeper hearts. We don't need to see the proclaimed catastrophes confirmed again and again on our screens, for that's a tactics to distract us from what we want to do, who we want to be, how we want to live.

C But being silent and attentive to what is going on is not necessarily welcomed today in the field,

which requires more and more witty statements, elaborated articles, new and glamorous products.

D Has it not always done that? That need for competition, hierarchy, kills all real connections. We have been living and working this way for so long, the institutionalized tra field is deeply patriarchal.

A I keep thinking of two pees I saw recently – both created by young women, both tackling the topic of climate change, both very well done and thought, but what struck me was that they were both audacious because they were vulnerable, because they rather invited us for an experience instead of talking about it. It is such a contrast to the other pee I saw in Chirzu, which was the new Besogny proposal – an unbelievably misogynic and sexist one, in which Dick is kind of aggressively defending his own position by simultaneously pretending to be open and humble. He remained me of these rightwing male politicians who keep attacking female activists and denying the climate change. Violent and desperate.

A,B,C,D *outburst of laughter*

D We are too polite sometimes. Look at Jo Tumb. You know, the whole alt-right and right find those dangerous clowns great- I'm being unfair to the clowns here, clowns are very sensitive people. Anyway, what do we do on the left? Getting worried and trying to understand why half of the population finds them great. I want to stop worrying, I don't want to try to understand anymore. I want to laugh out loud and then move on. We do ourselves a favor by not giving any of our energy to those idiots.

A Oh, that would be such a relief!

B I'm trying to learn from indigenous people. About the importance of turning inwards: to care for your own community, your values, your stories, your people. It does not mean that we don't tune into what is happening around us. But if our mayor point of focus is not ourselves and care for ourselves and our others, we will be really lost. I'm aware that some of my words here resemble right-wing discourse about own values first. The big difference is that the

23

“turning inwards” I envision is something positive, it is in the first place turning towards something, not turning away from something else or other people.

A But this is exactly it! My experience of the one born in 1983 is that since the socialist system collapsed in 1989, we have been almost blindly running to follow you, in the West. Leaving our stories, local relationships and people aside and adapting to the western patterns. It was a colonization, obviously, and at the same time an efficient strategy to keep us in the periphery. The one running after the ideal and fighting for being promoted to an upper class and better world will never revolt or speak up. They will be too weak, too ashamed. And I definitely don't want to say here we lost something like identity, whatever that could be. This is rather to say we were kind of deprived of our political subjectivity and agency. For instance, the beautiful ideas of Solidarity, developed in the 80s, were quickly forgotten, the notion of the common ridiculed. We developed our faith in the capitalist democracy so much that we created what Bojana Kunst called “a strange neoliberal utopia”: we seemed to be...

C and still are

A ... more radical in our beliefs in neoliberalism than the Western Europe.

C On top of that, were absolutely convinced we need to learn everything from the scratch: how to live together, how to reorganize our work and house settings, what to choose. We learned new behaviours, new lifestyle, new tastes, even the way of moving on the streets! Being too warm was a sign of naivety, smiling meant weakness or could risk an unwanted flirt. One needed to learn how to put on a cold face expression, passing by quickly the others on the street and not noticing them. In a way our country became an ambitious periphery that wanted to be seen by the center as its best pupil.

D I remember that is how your country got described in our media! “The best pupil amongst the newcomers in Europe!” That always means: the one who assimilates best, is ready to quickly give up one's own values, language, beliefs.

A And in order to do it we needed to work as hell, to always iron our shirts, to show off the – individual! –

success. In such circumstances there is no way to let go, the tension is only rising.

By the way, did you know we would never call ourselves Eastern Europe? We proudly say we are Central Europe!

laughs

C We have to perform European. And since for so many years traveling abroad was banned or extremely complicated, it is still being perceived as a privilege – and staying in the local field seems a trap or a failure.

D For us as well: being international is a status-symbol.

A I love so much your observation, Buddleia, that wherever you travel with your work, you meet more or less the same audience – and this is exactly the reason why we are so fucked up at the moment.

B On the one hand I realized no work can ever have a real impact if everything is that volatile, short-lived, punctual. That's not engagement, that's only the gesture of engagement. On the other hand, I also just did not want that life anymore: always on the go, having "friends" everywhere, who are actually only acquaintances. No possibility to really connect to my own local reality because my schedule is so irregular. At some point I realized the field speaks so much about the loss of community and commons, whereas we are the most detached, fragmented individuals. We are not good at making community. We are supreme examples of flex-workers. I had no roots; I did not know my ground.

D I realized that the networks I was part of, were all similar structures with similar audiences. We like to think that it's progressive but in fact it's mostly upper-class bourgeois. What's the use of bringing my work to always the same kind of people only one thousand km further? I don't categorically turn down all kinds of elitism – elitism is useful and needed at times – but one cannot call this mode of operation progressive.

C I hear from colleagues that often they have to make those kind of travels for only twenty people attending. That seems to be a public secret.

25

D True, but now we are speaking under the ground.

B I'm still travelling, I need it to survive according to the dominant model in which you need to be "successful" in touring your work internationally, to get your funding. And of course, there are great people, inspiring meetings, everywhere. But I want to spend more time working locally. My being-an-artist, being-a-citizen, being-a-human, being-a-mother, being-a-friend are connected. Before, I thought I was a person who had no green hands, I did not have a single plant at home. Now I do, I try to understand their needs. Nothing special, just what every plant-owner does. I exchange sprouts with friends and my neighbors water my plants when I'm gone. It's simple, very unspectacular, and I'm really late discovering it, that's kind of poor. I remember the mother of Chantal Ackerman – who survived Auschwitz – saying something like: "The worst is to have no one anymore to care for" or maybe she said: "you only die when you have no one any more to care for".

D Here, this is Leanne Simpson speaking: "If I look at how my ancestors even 200 years ago, they didn't spend a lot of time banking capital, they didn't rely on material wealth for their well-being and economic stability. They put energy into meaningful and authentic relationships. So their food security and economic security was based on how good and how resilient their relationships were – their relationships with clans that lived nearby, with communities that lived nearby, so that in hard times they would rely on people, not the money they saved in the bank. I think that extended to how they found meaning in life. It was the quality of those relationships – not how much they had, not how much they consumed – that was the basis of their happiness. So I think that that's very oppositional to colonial society and settler society and how we're taught to live in that"¹.

1 www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson

A This is really beautiful.

D Maybe the biggest weapon against totalitarianism is care. When you care, you really engage with each other. With time, attention, empathy. When there's no more care, a real alarm should go off in the entire society.

C And what do you do if the ground you are based on repulses you? If the conditions become less bearable every day?

A In order to care you need safe conditions of being together.

silence

A Once, I was confronted with an opinion that I do not know how to promote myself and my choices – because I dared to publicly ask questions and share my doubts.

D That's exactly how you promote yourself: by publicly asking questions and sharing your doubts.

A Most institutions I know and worked for are obsessively checking the forecasts, are looking for new tools and machines that allow them to foresee better, to position themselves better in the new circumstances.

B I feel like I'm one of those tools or machines that would "allow them to foresee better and to position themselves in the new circumstances".

A Oh, definitely: you are being used by them.

C But what about us then? We were so busy articulating our own perspective that we did not notice that nobody was interested in our proposals anymore. And when the major shift happened, burning most of the regions, we found ourselves vulnerable and weak. The solidarity has been quickly and efficiently replaced by competitive run for what remained from the funds.

B I think there is anyway no real solidarity between the big ones and the small ones. The big ones want to become bigger – to have the biggest – and the small ones fight to survive, while serving as a tool or machine helping the big ones to position themselves better.

C We became helpless because we remained singular, because we haven't listened to the diverse voices around. We were so busy in mansplaining

27

the world from the stages that we did not notice the audience was empty.

D What's with this "we", Chamerion, why do you keep saying "we"? Here you are describing Dick, not yourself. What have you got to do with him?

C I meant "us" as a community of makers and thinkers here that considered ourselves as critical or political ones. My observation is we on the so-called left side...

D the former left

C ... we have not paid attention enough to whom we are actually speaking to. I had a particularly strong experience in one of the Tees out there: we'd invited the local traists and audience to consult the changes we planned in the program. When one of the guests opposed our ideas, the Tees intendant asked him to leave the space *laughs*. Even if we created somehow a nice program with some beautiful events and encounters, it was a failure, as we did not manage to shift the scope from the program to the institutional practices. We left ourselves alone.

silence

C We have to think carefully not only about the reason why we gather people around the institution but also how we gather them. But to have time and space to reflect we need for instance to reset the operation mode of the institution we are responsible for or work with. This could be an alternative: to transform it from a patriarchal model to a feminist one. To shift the focus: from the figure of master to the common effort...

D and pleasure!

C ... of the team; from event to process, from product to the way how it is being produced, from effect to care.

B Is that not what Sadleria and Tagetes want to try to do with Kaia?

C Also Trastiv is working on it.

D And I feel like there are underground networks everywhere now and they are growing. They fight under their own conditions.

I think they should stay underground. I think we don't have to explicit them.

A Agree. The way to protect them is to let them grow where they are, hidden from day light and from the appropriation.

B Rooting, growing, through relations. Interconnected.

C Sharing the soil with others, not only form the tra field. It would then mean not expressing, presenting and promoting all the time one's knowledge and skills, but using them in order to open conditions for the others to speak, to be.

D I think that could happen inside a shell.

C But staying inside a shell we will be even more isolated. Look at the roots of plants: they grow deep in the soil but also run in different directions in order to grasp the others.

B Yes.

C They build their strength on the basis of nutritious soil but also on the basis of information received from the plants around. Rooting one's practice might mean also to root it in the network of care and solidarity.

A Yes.

D To stay connected. To be part of.

B I keep thinking about this old man who goes out at night and secretly plants seeds. It's the seeds of "pioneer" plants, the ones who anyway survive, and prepare the grounds for others. They are the ones who really have the power.

C I also remember a story of some trees that close their cones in case of fire and throw them as far as they can, so the seeds are protected and can wait safely until the fire is over.

A How does a rooted institution deal with time? How does it transform its perception and how does it expand the given space? How can institution offer us a crack in time or a shelter in time?

C I thought that, you, Buddleia, you are creating a sort of shelter in space, but also in time. Like a hole in sense of the space, but also a crack in time, where one can hide from this flow that does not let stops us from to thinking.

B To claim place, to claim a space. To claim roots, to be community, to belong, to be part of, the share the same soil. That's the opposite of how alt-right populism tries to unite people

29

behind the false case which is mostly against each-other. To turn inwards does not mean "against others". It means to be critical about patriarchal systems of dominations, imperialism, capitalism, globalizations that have been imposed on us. To feed our soil; that is connected to soil everywhere. To feed our soil: to emancipate ourselves, to feel free from all routines we are told we should fulfill. Whether it's routines as private consumers or public clients of the state. It's to do what is good for us, for others, for our soil. To know what we know and what we don't know. The rise of nationalist identitarian sentimentalism plays with the loss of connectedness between people and the loss of the feeling of belonging, in order to create more fragmentarization and install more powerful top-down structures. People are afraid to think, afraid to feel, they are afraid of themselves, hence they follow the leader.

A So the shelter would be based on a feeling of being many. Its users will speak in a language that does not need a dictionary.

B We can speak without quoting.

D We claim our rights.

A We strengthen each other.

C We listen.

A It will shift the focus from the next deadline to the present.

C It will be constantly negotiated.

B It's where taking care is as important as producing.

D And the soil is being take care of.

A It's where we "shout out the emperor is naked. And burst into liberating laughter"².

D It's where we find power through empowerment instead of authority through hierarchy.

C But how can we establish this place physically? What material will we use to build it up?

A Maybe I'll have to leave when I feel there is no more space for us all.

D What are you saying, honey?

B Our space holds all of us. If it doesn't, we'll change it.

2 Petra Van Brabant, Jan Fabre's Old and New Clothes, www.rektoverso.be/artikel/jan-fabres-old-and-new-clothes?fbclid=IwAR2-vdi5M71fdGM9pPb6nQpNCeYF1TvLB7Sj0TaWAavPF-SNQ0LW5IIB0JQ

Marta Keil performing arts curator, researcher and writer, based in Warsaw, Poland. Since 2019 she co-runs Performing Arts Institute in Warsaw. She often works in a curatorial tandem Reskeil with Grzegorz Reske. They curated *Konfrontacje Teatralne* – international performing arts festival in Lublin from 2013 to 2017. In 2020 together with Tim Etchells they curate *Common Ground*, a season at Komuna Warszawa (2020). Keil worked as curator and dramaturg with i.e. Agnieszka Jakimiak, Lina Majdalanie, Rabih Mroué, She She Pop, Agata Siniarska, Ana Vujanović. She initiated the East European Performing Arts Platform (EEPAP), that she collaborated with until 2019. Together with Agata Adamiecka-Sitek and Igor Stokfiszewski she has been working on the research project *The Agreement* at Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw (2018-2019), that aimed at feminisation of public theatre institution. Since 2019 she cooperates as a facilitator with the Reshape program. Between 2014 and 2016 she worked as curator and dramaturg at Teatr Polski in Bydgoszcz. She teaches curatorial practice and institutional critique at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków and SWPS University, Warsaw. Editor of the books: *Choreography: Autonomies* (2019), *Choreography: Politicality* (2018), *Reclaiming the Obvious: on the Institution of Festival* (2017), *Dance, Process, Artistic Research. Contemporary Dance in the Political, Economic and Social Context of "Former East" of Europe* (2015).

Sarah Vanhee artist, performer and author. Her interdisciplinary work travels in between civil space and institutional art field. She worked in open fields, prisons, private living rooms, theatres, on public canvases, in corporate meeting rooms, etc. Recent works include amongst others: *undercurrents* (intervention), *collected screams* (lecture-performance), *Unforetold* (stage performance), *The Making of Justice* (film), *Oblivion* (stage performance), *Untitled* (meetings in private houses), *Lecture For Every One* (series of intrusions). While strongly embedded locally, Vanhee's work has been presented widely internationally in diverse contexts such as Wiener Festwochen (AT), Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid), Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Brussels), FTA (Montreal), Festival Actoral (Marseille), PuSh Festival (Vancouver), Jihlavava IDFF, Van Abbe Museum (Eindhoven), Centre Pompidou (Metz), Short Theatre (Rome), iDans (Istanbul), Printemps de Septembre (Toulouse), Forum Alpbach, Noorderzon (Groningen) etc. She published a book on *Lecture For Every One*, co-published *Untranslatables* and wrote *The Miraculous Life of Claire C* and *TT*, as well as other texts. She is founding member of Manyone vzw and a long term resident at Kunstencentrum CAMPO. For the period 2017-2021 Sarah Vanhee is supported by Buda Art Centre. 2018-2022 on, she's a PHD researcher at the Antwerp School of Arts, in collaboration with the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts.

A Late Summer Soil Talk
Marta Keil, Sarah Vanhee

part of
Into the City, Onto the Stage: Unlikely
Collaborations in the Performing Arts

edited by
Ásgerður G. Gunnarsdóttir,
Alexander Roberts

graphic design
bruno, Venezia

publication © 2020 bruno
text © 2020 Marta Keil
and Sarah Vanhee

first published by bruno
Dorsoduro 2729 — 30123 Venezia
ISBN: 978-88-99058-29-6
www.b-r-u-n-o.it

printed by Grafiche Veneziane, Venezia,
in May 2020 for Untitled Snc (bruno)

All rights reserved. No part of this
publication may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system, or transmitted
in any form or by any means without
the prior permission of the publisher.
Any breach of copyright and intellectual
property laws shall be persecuted in
accordance with the law.

A Note from the Editors

We, curators Alexander Roberts and Ásgerður G. Gunnarsdóttir, have been working on a curatorial research under the title *Into the City, Onto the Stage* since 2014. The central point of enquiry has been to ask how we as curators – based in Reykjavík, Iceland – working as Artistic Directors of Reykjavík Dance Festival – can create a platform, with the performing arts at its centre, where the basic assumptions about who the performing arts are for can be fundamentally challenged and transformed. Who in our city gets to watch it, make it and have opinions on it? How to cultivate and shape an institution that gathers publics through engagements with the performing arts on terms that are ardently anti-racist, pro-queer, inter-species, anti-ableist, feminist, pro-worker and decolonising? How to foster a platform that is constituted by a porous and intersectional community of listeners and learners committed to amplifying the voices, bodies, experiences and urgencies among them that are otherwise often under represented, lesser seen and lesser heard?

We have never seen these questions as a side project on the periphery of the “real” curatorial work we are doing, we have always seen these questions as the main work. This has meant devising strategies towards challenging and changing who is in the audience, who performs on the stages, who attends the parties, participates in the talks and conversations, and equally who gets to curate.

We conceived of this book as a space to learn from others that have also been busy devising artistic and curatorial strategies relevant to these questions. Formulated as an open-ended non-exhaustive series of chapters, with each chapter bound in its own cover, the book is thought of as an ever-growing platform for holding and collecting together articulations from different artists and curators whose work we feel offers important and urgent responses to these questions outlined above – in ways that are nevertheless particular to their work and working context.

With deep gratitude to all that have contributed and all those we have worked with on the making of this book.

Alexander Roberts,
Ásgerður G. Gunnarsdóttir
Editors

