

# EDN Atelier 'Meeting Grounds'

Report by Christian Guerematchi

On July 5th and 6th, 2021 I took part in the online conference EDN Atelier 'Meeting Grounds'. The conferences were about:

- online conference by Raw Material with Fatima Bintou Rassoul Sy.
- Sustainability, visibility, adaptability - Panel presented by Raw Material (Dulcie Abrahams Altass) with Dulcie Abrahams Altass, Bruno Leitao, Gabriel Panaibra, Fattou Cissé, Nadia Beugré and Salim M'ze Hamadi and Roberto Casarotto. Moderator Bàrbara Raubert.
- Gathering, community, animism - Panel presented by Qudus Onikeku with Qudus Onikeku, Aïda Colmenero Díaz, Nelisiwe Xaba, Christian Etongo, Albert Ibokwe Khoza and Elisabetta Bisaro. Moderator Clàudia Brufau.
- Trauma, memory, recovery, identity - Panel presented by Trixie Munyama with Trixie Munyama, Ana Pi, António Tavares, Moya Michael and Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja. Moderator Bàrbara Raubert.

## Report day one:

I was very excited to have had the opportunity to take part in this gathering about contemporary performing arts - thinking in/out Africa. As a contemporary dance maker of African decent I was thrilled to be witnessing an artistic/cultural discussion between makers of color. In my experience such chances are not a given and I believe that it is important to have a space where makers of color can share their artistic vision and their philosophical concepts.

Fatima Bintou Rassoul gave a presentation about the residency space: Raw Material Company in Dakar, Senegal. Fatima brought a strong case for the residency and has pointed out the international character of the residency and different possibilities of artistic participation. She also pointed out the long history of Senegal with international artistic collaborations. It was inspiring to hear about the history in the arts and culture of Senegal. And also encouraging to get to know such an inspirational residency place.

The second part of the first day was a discussion on Sustainability, visibility, adaptability. This is a subject that I myself am interested in and I was curious what other artists visions on this topic would be. The members of the panel took a very sensitive approach towards sustainability. They let their experiences in the field and the differences between Europe and Africa in terms of theater infrastructure be the guide. An overall moto was: Sustainability = Adaptability = Change. I was positively surprised to see that the focus was put on their own, already sustainable artistic practices. Practices that take into account public spaces as cultural meeting points, the artist's body as a measure of fair usage of public resources and establishing a new connection with the audience. There was a lot of talk about the 'gathering' as a formula for sustainability. One profound question stayed with me: 'What is to be sustained?'. I believe that such questions rather than preconceived answers are the path to create a sustainable theatre.

The last conference of the day was about Gathering, community, animism. In this part a lot of previously discussed subjects came together. The discussion was revolving around the necessity of art becoming something more, rather than art itself. Animism has been presented as a practice

but also as an artistic and cultural expression. The premiss of Animism as an aesthetics of the gathering itself was presented. This led to questions like: What is the original future? More and more ideas came up that strengthened the notion that theatre should reflect on its simplicity, which is based in the act of gathering. This set a strong premiss of theater being in itself sustainable.

### **Report day two:**

On day two I joined the conference on: Trauma, memory, recovery, identity. This was a profound discussion on different kinds of collective pains. I was inspired and surprised to listen to the artists tracing the pain of trauma from their own bodies (for example the bones), to a collective body (the earth or humanity). It gave a sense that even though those artists of the African diaspora might be addressing a specific time and place in history, they still managed to connect it to the happenings of today. Covid19 for example came up and made the discussion alive, real and current. I myself collected a lot of insides about decolonising art and culture and about the body as an archive. Also a very interesting replacement for the word urban came up by Ana Pi. She referred to urban dances as peripheral dances. The idea being that the center belongs to the dominant/ the colonial and the periphery to the art and dances that appear in the shadows of it. Still the periphery seems to be actually taking over the center.

One of the memorable things of the Atelier meeting Grounds, in my opinion, happened when the artists towards the end of the conference took agency into their own hands. There was a certain critique coming from the side of Antonio Tavares, which triggered an emotion of trauma with the artists. As black artists we find ourselves being put into a limited space because topics of the black body are not considered universal by the dominant/white culture. Even though the Atelier succeeded in giving a platform to black art and black artists. It still reminded us that too often black artists are not being given the integrity that white artists receive naturally. Such a state of mind also provides feeding ground for black artists to rebel against it and sometimes to take criticism too personally. I would like to give credit to the organizers that they have given the chance to the whole panel to balance this differences out and to give each member the respect they deserve.