

TOGETHER ELSEWHERE

Review after twelve online editions of a distributed performance series

Initiated by Pavana Reid and Gisela Hochuli, TOGETHER ELSEWHERE brings together two artists from the two networks PAB (PERFORMANCE ART BERGEN) and PANCH (PERFORMANCE ART NETWORK SWITZERLAND), once a month, for a distributed online performance. The geographical distance of the performers, the venues and to the audience is bridged by the video circuit, which exists in real time at the internet. Conceived as live events, the recordings are nevertheless subsequently stored at the digital archive of the Media Library of the Academy of Art and Design FHNW Basel. Here they stay permanently accessible.



Nicole Boillat: Together Elsewhere Banner (2021)

Ok, one might think. But is there something special about it?

As simple as the formal settings may appear (see below), as diverse are the results. From an art sociological point of view, TOGETHER ELSEWHERE might look like a typical articulation of the post-pandemic era, translated into artistic means: the experience of distanced, self-reliant, socially isolated art practices is continued and people come together to perform virtually even after the so-called lockdowns have ended. As in earlier times, performance art appropriates formats that seem socially and timely urgent. As opposed to existing video formats, which have been used for documentation purposes for many years, the current practice of web-based real-time circuit contain something of this (desperate) need for communication, the lack of real-world communication, of physical, and bodily exchange that have been popularized globally, especially since the spring of 2020 by the Corona pandemic.

Aesthetically interesting would also be to carefully investigate the different ways of appropriation, the modes of artistic exploration, always balancing limits and potentials, chances and challenges of the digital format and restrictions. In this context, the many references on visual instruments such as laptops, cell phone cameras, mobile devices, but also magnifying glasses, mirrors, mirrored surfaces, framing, etc. gain relevance. Same with viewing procedures, watching, observing, locking back, trying to find or compile glimpses alone, together, virtually amplifying. Other aspects point the viewer towards mediatized gazing, in terms of a situational self-

awareness, expressing the desire for togetherness and participation: being together in the mode of seeing, doing things together – at a calculated distance. Iconographically, there are many links to the history of video art as well as performance art. Material used, venues, performative gestures, practices, dedicated subjects and so many other elements are waiting to be recognized. In addition, the setting immediately recalls art lessons, where the double projection is used methodologically for image comparison.

Even beyond the concrete forms of implementation this approach seems extremely exciting. For hardly any other art form has been working, partly toiling with audio-visual media as intensively as performance art. Performance art has always questioned and acted with/against media. There is an intrinsic tension between a) the situational, presence, physicality, materiality, (audience) resonance, transience and b) the forms of recording, documentation, relics, retrospective mediation. As a legacy of loss, the various types of traces - in space, in the medium, in the document, in the relic – not only form the basis of historiography, but also of body-based memories und/or body-to-body transmission, (re)activating, re-using, writing former gestures. Together Elsewhere - possibly also an outcry for togetherness in times of individualization.

So much for the theory. But does the concept really work? Are a) a video conferencing software that is nowadays virtually freely accessible, and b) a channel for real-time transmission really enough to make a video-chat a work of art?

As an art historian, I would like to say: yes and no. Yes, because video-based real-time communication has become, not least due to the Corona pandemic, so accessible in the Western and Central European context, that they are ready for being appropriated through artistic actions, like paint and paper, scrap and porcelain, concrete, ice and even air.¹ And no, it is not sufficient. It needs a little bit more, a clear concept for example, and, especially this case, agreements, rules, and framing. This is required for both sides, the artists as well as the audience to become perceivable as artistic action. And with TOGETHER ELSEWHERE formal aspects happen on different levels: individually as well as dialogically between the artists, institutionally with PAB and PANCH, as well as technically with the Media Library, and often also idealistically.

Taking a closer look, a whole range of things make TOGETHER ELSEWHERE work: First of all, there are the two artists Pavana Reid and Gisela Hochuli. Both are experienced performance artists and networkers. They have been working, organizing, curating, collaborating, cooperating for years and decided in 2020, at the networking event "Partout - Platform for International Performance Art"² (PANCH – Eurovision³), to bring artists from the two networks PAB and PANCH perform dedicated works together. While PAB and PANCH act in the background, announcing for example the performances, the selection of participants varies. Pavana Reid invites the PAB artists directly, activating her personal artistic network, reaching out for new figures to occur. The Swiss selection rather follows the principle of seasoning or relays: The current artists requests a following performer for the next TOGETHER ELSEWHERE. In addition, there is the temporal framing (30 minutes), the agreement on a specific (type of) performance venues as well as task to use six common objects within the performance. And for sure the artists start communication as soon as the selection is set. Even though within the differences of the two settings and procedures, the spontaneity and contingency, that artistic individuality happens and artistic qualities

¹ The project INFRAMING - PARTIZIPATION AND PERFORMANCE IN THE AGE OF ZOOM CONFERENCES (March/April 2021 online: <https://paersche.org/portfolio/infracraming/>) of the Cologne-based performance network PAErsch could be mentioned as other ZOOM-based performance format.

² <https://partout.panch.li/de>

³ <https://panch.li/panch-activities/eurovision/>

start unfolding, the framing influenced the whole piece of art. This is also the case, if a duo would decide to ignore all of it.

Last but not least, to think about continuation before the production, sustainability and archiving, seems natural today. Since questions of accessibility and reuse are clarified before the production, all recordings are placed under the free license CC BY 4.0.⁴ Furthermore the works are provided with persistent identifiers (handles) that ensure permanent, public access. Commenting on licenses in this context seems meaningful, since open licensing literally cries out for active forms of usage, remembering, afterlife, (re)activating, etc. The audience is invited to continue thinking, be inspired and use the works or excerpts without having to make a special request, except mentioning the former artists as authors. Here, once again, a characteristic of performance art becomes apparent, which it has preserved despite its popularity and the current tendency towards commercialization: sharing, being friendly with each other in the modus of exchange, knowing and naming each other, participating physically and virtually - or simply sharing some time and interests together in an artistic way: Together Elsewhere!

Tabea Lurk, August 2022

Online Access:

<https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/event/togetherelsewhere>

Past Events

Together Elsewhere I

Pavana Reid and Gisela Hochuli

Friday, 23 July 2021, 8 p.m.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6134>

Together Elsewhere II

Anette Friedrich Johannessen and Judith Huber

Thursday, 5 August 2021, 5 p.m.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6173>

Together Elsewhere III

Hans Christian van Nijkerk and Ursula Scherrer

Wednesday, 29 September 2021, 5 p.m.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6125>

Together Elsewhere IV

Linnea Langfjord Kristensen and Lilian Frei

Thursday, 21 October 2021, 5 p.m.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6174>

Together Elsewhere V

Agnes Btffn and Sandra Del Los Santos

Thursday, 18 November 2021, 6 p.m.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6156>

Together Elsewhere VI

Jan-Egil Finne and Markus Goessi

Sunday, 23 January 2022, 5 p.m.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6904>

⁴ <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en>

Together Elsewhere VII
Frauke Materlik and Daniel Häller
Tuesday, 22 February 2022, 5 p.m.
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6908>

Together Elsewhere VIII
Lizlot Frydenlund and Karyna Herrera
Friday, 25 March 2022, 5 p.m.
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6907>

Together Elsewhere IX
Bjørn Venø and Zoë Dowlen/Darling
Friday, 22 April 2022, 4 p.m.
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6954>

Together Elsewhere X
Mahla Rashidian and Salome Egger
Sunday, 15 May 2022, 5 p.m.
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/6953>

Together Elsewhere XI
Mari Norddahl and Joëlle Valterio
Tuesday, 21 June 2022, 6 p.m.
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/8648>

Together XII
livi Meltaus and Sara Koller
Tuesday, 19 July 2022, 5 p.m.
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11806/med/8649>